

**The Mysticism of Human Communion:
The Theological Writings of Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891-1945)**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DPhil to
the Board of the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford

By
James Roberts

Harris Manchester College, University of Oxford

Michaelmas 2022-2023

Short Abstract: ‘The Mysticism of Human Communion’: The Theological writings of Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891-1945). (A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DPhil to the Board of the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford by James Roberts, Harris Manchester College, Michaelmas 2022-2023).

This thesis will provide a critical exposition of the theological writings of Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891-1945). It will highlight two over-arching themes in her work. The first is a focus on the human in her theological vision. Secondly, and related to this, is a desire to maintain ‘wholeness’; to strive towards a unity between the divine and the human principles, and to balance various dualities such as the individual and community, or the church and the world. This thesis will suggest that the key to understanding these themes is a recognition of the place of sacrifice in Skobtsova’s work. In order to do this, Chapter 1 will provide important biographical context for this understudied figure, contextualising some of her key theological essays against her biography. Chapter 2 will highlight the place of Russia in Skobtsova’s thought. It will explore the impact of Russian religious thought on Skobtsova’s theology (especially Aleksei Khomiakov and Vladimir Soloviev), the notion of Russia as the ‘third Rome’, and key concepts such as *Godmanhood* and *sobornost*. It will also highlight the impact of emigration on Skobtsova’s thought. The Chapter 3 will focus on one of Skobtsova’s earliest theological works, entitled ‘*Zhatva Dukha* [Harvest of the Spirit]’. Chapter 4 will look at Skobtsova’s ascetic theology and highlight her understanding of ‘the world’ in ascetic literature. Chapter 5 will note the centrality of the ‘mysticism of human communion’ for Skobtsova’s theological system, and her understanding of the ascetical practice of human encounter. Chapter 6 will look at her

writings on social theory and politics, thinking especially about how she judges social theory against her desire to love the neighbour and strive towards ideological synthesis. The conclusion of this thesis will gather together these themes and draw out the place of sacrifice in Skobtsova's theology.

Long Abstract: ‘The Mysticism of Human Communion’: The Theological writings of Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891-1945). (A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DPhil to the Board of the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford by James Roberts, Harris Manchester College, Michaelmas 2022-2023).

This thesis explores the theological writings of Mother Maria Skobtsova. Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891-1945) was an extraordinary figure, whose theological work has received relatively little critical attention. She is renowned as a radical monastic, who was dedicated to social action in the Russian émigré community in Paris, and as an active member of the Resistance in the Second World War (for which she was killed at Ravensbrück Concentration Camp in 1945). Her theological writings, however, are relatively under-studied. This thesis will therefore explore the theology of this unusual 20th Century figure. In order to do this, this thesis identifies two broad themes within Skobtsova’s work. Firstly, the place of the human is highlighted (especially within Skobtsova’s desire to maintain a balance between loving God and the neighbour) and secondly, this thesis suggests that Skobtsova’s desire to maintain ‘wholeness’ is central to her theological work. I suggest that at the heart of these themes (and the way in which Skobtsova believes a balanced love between God and the neighbour can be realised, and one can strive towards synthesis) is sacrifice. The introduction will therefore sketch Skobtsova’s desire to maintain a balance between loving God and the neighbour, and her striving for ‘wholeness’. The introduction includes details about how Skobtsova writes theology (her methodology and style), and it highlights key primary sources and secondary literature for this thesis, in addition to noting my own methodology, focus and structure.

Chapter 1 focuses on the biography of Mother Maria Skobtsova. Skobtsova has an extraordinary biography. She was one of Russia's first female mayors, a published poet, an artist, monastic, social activist, mother, and martyr. Skobtsova's extraordinary biography can easily overshadow engagement with her intellectual output. In contrast, this thesis seeks to balance theological exposition with biographical detail. This chapter therefore highlights her biography, with particular reference to her theological development (with reference to notable publications and to her formal and informal education). It also highlights some key areas for consideration for the relationship between biography and theology in Skobtsova's work. This includes the place of death and loss in her life, and key relationships such as her childhood friendship with Konstantin Pobedonostsev. Regarding the relationship between theology and biography in Skobtsova's work, this chapter suggests that Skobtsova has a 'situational' methodology, where she seeks to engage with contemporary issues in and through her theological writings.

Chapter 2 is entitled 'The Russian Idea', and it highlights the influences on Skobtsova's theology from the Russian tradition. Russia is at the heart of Skobtsova's theology. This is evident in Skobtsova's writing about the ideological position of Russia within theology. She considers the place of Russia in world history; its specific vocation and the history of the epithet, 'the third Rome', which is where this chapter begins. This chapter then moves to look at particular influences on Skobtsova's thought from the Russian tradition. Firstly, the theology of Alexsei Khomiakov and secondly the philosophy of Vladimir Soloviev. It suggests that these two thinkers have a central influence on Skobtsova's theological system, especially in Skobtsova's use of their terms *Godmanhood* and *sobornost*'. This chapter also continues exploring biographical details for Skobtsova, especially in relation to the Symbolist movement

(which is also a strong influence on her thought) and her frustration with the intellectual circles of St Petersburg, which shapes her desire for an active spiritual practice. The complexities of Skobtsova's attachment to Russia, and the country's place in her thought, are highlighted through a discussion of emigration in her writings and the loss of her homeland. This chapter suggests that in emigration Skobtsova wishes to practically implement the ideals of the 'Russian Religious Renaissance', transposing them into the new key of the Russian Orthodox Church abroad, with an emphasis on active service towards the neighbour and striving towards *Godmanhood* and *sobornost*'.

Chapter 3 turns to some of Skobtsova's earliest theological writings, which can be found in the collection '*Zhatva Dukha* [Harvest of the Spirit]'. This two-volume work is a collection of lives of the Saints. This chapter suggests that these stylised, hagiographical tales which are written by Skobtsova, are foundational for Skobtsova's theology and are a blueprint for her own model of asceticism and monasticism. In this work, this chapter argues, Skobtsova is providing an Orthodox foundation for her own socially engaged monasticism by turning to Saints from the early church. She has selected Saints who demonstrate a strong ascetic spiritual practice, but who also go to the world, sharing their spiritual insights, tending to the poor, and providing spiritual counsel. In light of this, this chapter provides a thematic overview of these *Lives*. This chapter also suggests that sacrifice is a central theme throughout this collection, which again informs Skobtsova's later work. Sacrifice can be found in the themes of ascetic renunciation, material non-possession, a kenotic spirituality, and a willingness to accept the burdens of others. This chapter also explores the central place of holy folly in these *Lives*, and emphasises the problem of egoism.

Chapter 4 builds on the themes which have been uncovered in ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’ and deepens our understanding of Skobtsova’s theological writing on asceticism. This chapter highlights the way in which Skobtsova builds an ascetic theology which allows for a ‘turn to the world’, and a spirituality where loving the neighbour (as well as God) is central. This chapter provides a critical exposition of Skobtsova’s engagement with the work of Konstantin Leontiev and Vasily Rozanov, noting how she critiques their understanding of asceticism and the world, and providing an alternative vision through her reading of Isaac the Syrian. This chapter notes how Skobtsova develops a theology which allows for immersion in the world whilst maintaining a distinct spirituality (to be ‘in the world’ but not ‘of the world’). This chapter engages with Skobtsova’s article entitled ‘Holy Earth’ to demonstrate how Skobtsova develops her own ascetic theology. Here it is suggested that Skobtsova wishes to focus on transformation, rather than renunciation, and that this transformation is not a solitary task, but a shared endeavour between persons.

Chapter 5 explores the ascetical practice of human encounter in Skobtsova’s work. This chapter highlights Skobtsova’s understanding of asceticism as a shared practice, which is directed at uncovering the *imago dei* in the other, as well as in the self. It suggests that the ‘mysticism of human communion’ is a central point in Skobtsova’s work which affirms the possibility of encountering God through communion with the human. This chapter places this notion in dialogue with Skobtsova’s Mariology and monasticism. In terms of Mariology, this chapter suggests that Skobtsova’s understanding of authentic human communion is based on an imitation of Christ and Mary; a duality which reflects Skobtsova’s concern for wholeness and synthesis. This chapter finally highlights Skobtsova’s monastic theology, arguing that Skobtsova’s innovation of the monastic tradition has sacrifice

at its heart, in its emphasis on monastic non-possession, poverty and a sacrifice of the will. Once again, this chapter suggests that this monastic sacrifice is aimed at turning to the world, loving God and the neighbour, and thus reflecting the ‘wholeness’ which Skobtsova strives towards. It suggests that the task of a shared ascetic practice, rooted in the monastic tradition, is understood by Skobtsova as a creative act.

Chapter 6 notes how this thesis has primarily focused on how Skobtsova strives towards synthesis by bringing the human element into the life of the Church, and so this chapter turns to the opposite perspective in Skobtsova’s work; how the Church underpins human creativity, particularly in relation to social theory and politics. This chapter, therefore, reflects on Skobtsova’s critiques of political and social theories of governance, especially her reflections on totalitarianism and democracy. Skobtsova’s belief that utopian theories which are lacking any spiritual foundation fail to reflect the fullness of human existence, by undermining the divine foundation of existence, but also failing to appreciate the fullness of the human person. In this light, this chapter highlights Skobtsova’s emphasis on the freedom of the human person, and her engagement with Herzen and Dostoevsky’s ‘Grand Inquisitor’. It notes how Skobtsova grapples with how (and if) Christianity may be compatible with communism. This chapter suggests that Skobtsova’s response to social theories can be found in her practical action with the group ‘Orthodox Action’, which is grounded in her theology of wholeness, love of God and the neighbour, and a strident apocalypticism.

The conclusion of this thesis draws together the themes which I have suggested are at the heart of Skobtsova’s theological vision. These are, firstly, an emphasis on the human (in loving both God and the neighbour) and secondly a desire to maintain ‘wholeness’ in thought and practice. The conclusion also highlights how

sacrifice can be seen as a lens through which to understand these themes in Skobtsova's theological writings. It suggests that sacrifice (in the various forms which have been identified throughout Skobtsova's theological writings) is central to Skobtsova's sense of incarnating the wholeness to which she strives. In order to strive towards *Godmanhood, sobornost'*, and an authentic love of both God and the neighbour, sacrifice is necessary. The conclusion will also note some concerns with this approach, principally in relation to suffering and sacrifice. Overall, this thesis provides a critical exposition of the theological writings of Mother Maria Skobtsova; a remarkable theologian whose intellectual output deserves greater scholarly attention.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is submitted with sincere thanks to all who have supported and encouraged its completion. I am deeply grateful to Prof. Johannes Zachhuber for supervising this project – for his continuing encouragement, support, and valuable insights. I am also grateful to have received funding for this project, firstly from the Farmington Institute and the Crewsdon Trust at Harris Manchester College, and latterly the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Thanks also to Vanya Hackel for allowing me access to the archive of Sergei Hackel, and for his hospitality. My research has been aided by helpful correspondence with numerous individuals, with particular thanks to Natalia Likvinsteva. Special thanks to Dr Thea Gomelauri for her gracious Russian language tuition and guidance, which has been invaluable for this project.

Contents

Short Abstract	i
Long Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	ix
Contents	x
Introduction	1
1. Loving the Neighbour	6
2. A Theology of Wholeness	13
3. Writing Style	23
4. Methodology and Focus	25
5. Collections of Primary Texts	27
6. Secondary Literature	29
7. Structure of Thesis	34
Chapter 1: Biography	44
1. Biography and Theology in Skobtsova's Work	45
2. Early Life	50
3. Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev	51
4. Death of Elizaveta's Father	55
5. St Petersburg	57
6. Return to Anapa and Political Involvement	60
7. Emigration	62
8. Tonsuring and Monasticism	73
9. Resistance and Death	79
10. Conclusion	80
Chapter 2: The Russian Idea	81
1. The Historical Process of Russia	84
2. Third Rome and Russian Messianism	88
3. The Slavophiles	91
4. Alexsei Khomiakov	94
5. Khomiakov's Thought	96
6. Khomiakov and Skobtsova: Pilgrimage and Roots	102
7. Vladimir Soloviev	106
8. The Meaning of Love	111
9. Symbolism	114
10. Disillusionment with the Russian Intelligentsia	123
11. Skobtsova's Desire for Action	125
12. Emigration and Freedom	126
13. Conclusion	131
Chapter 3: 'Zhatva Dukha'	133

1. 'Zhatva Dukha'	135
2. 'Ioannikii the Great'	139
3. Ioannikii is sent out to the world	142
4. 'Vitalii the Monk'	146
5. The Refusal to be cut off from sinners	150
6. 'Serapion the Sindonite' and Holy Folly	153
7. 'Peter the tax collector'	161
8. Conclusion	165
 Chapter 4: Asceticism and the World	 167
1. Skobtsova's understanding of asceticism	169
2. The ascetic type	171
3. The humanistic path of renewal	175
4. Konstantin Leontiev and Vasily Rozanov	177
5. Isaac the Syrian	186
6. The worldly person	190
7. Asceticism, Transformation and the Other	193
8. Conclusion	201
 Chapter 5: The Ascetical Practice of Human Encounter	 203
1. The Mysticism of Human Communion	204
2. On the Imitation of the Mother of God	210
3. Monasticism	219
4. Asceticism and Creativity	228
 Chapter 6: Orthodox Action: Skobtsova and Social Engagement	 235
1. Utopias	237
2. Populism	242
3. 'Four Portraits'	247
4. Democracy	251
5. Freedom: Herzen and Individual Liberty	254
6. The Grand Inquisitor	257
7. The Cross and the Hammer-and-Sickle	260
8. Apocalypticism	263
9. Orthodox Action	270
10. Conclusion	273
 Conclusion: God, the Human, Wholeness, and Sacrifice	 275
1. Creativity and Culture	294
2. Suffering and Sacrifice	295
 Bibliography	 299

Introduction

‘У человека двойственен состав, —
Двух разных он миров пересечение, —
Небесной вечности и праха сплав.’¹

‘The human has a dual composition, -
Two different worlds he intersects, -
The fusion of heavenly eternity with ashes.’

Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891-1945) lived a full and extraordinary life. She was a monastic, who took the veil in 1932. She was an intellectual, as well as a creative artist, who published poetry throughout her lifetime alongside a considerable output of watercolours, embroideries, and sketches. As one of the first female mayors in Russia, she was a politician who was active in the Russian Revolution and a member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. She was an émigré, fleeing Russia during the civil war and eventually settling in Paris, and she was also a mother to three children, who was married twice. Throughout her life, Mother Maria had an all-consuming dedication to the service of the poor which she expressed in service to the homeless, ill, and needy. It was due to her tireless service that she became a victim of persecution. She was murdered in Ravensbrück concentration camp because she assisted the Jews in escaping the Nazis in occupied France. Mother Maria Skobtsova is now a Saint in the Orthodox Church and remembered as one of the Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem. Mother Maria Skobtsova’s expansive range of interests, concerns, and experiences (which are reflected in her extraordinary biography), are rooted in her desire to love the neighbour; a worldview and a theology which highlights the centrality of the human in the religious life.

¹ Мать Мария (Скобцова), *Стихотворения, Поэмы, Мистерии, Воспоминания об аресте и лагере в Равенсбрюк* (Paris: La Presse Française et Étrangère, 1947), 22.

Mother Maria Skobtsova is perhaps most well-known for her dedication to social action in Paris. Her understanding of a new monasticism, especially, is characterised by a commitment to service in response to human need. She established canteens to feed the hungry, she visited the mentally ill in hospitals, housed the homeless and cared for the elderly. These actions were carried out with an eccentricity that is particular to Skobtsova. One of the most enduring images of Mother Maria Skobtsova is of the nun collecting food at the markets of Les Halles, gathering over-ripe food and taking it back to her convent in a large sack on her shoulder to use in soups to feed the homeless.² At the heart of this unconventional monastic social action is Skobtsova's desire to show love to the neighbour, without limit. In this light, her life can be understood as faithful service to her neighbour and to human needs.

Skobtsova's solidarity and commitment to her neighbour shows how she is a remarkably human saint.³ In order to reach those in need, she immersed herself in the everyday reality of life in Paris. She vehemently resisted any cloistered form of monasticism which she regarded as being disconnected from the world, and thus the neighbour. Skobtsova's immersion in the world is paired, in recollections of her life, with a colourful personality. She is rarely viewed as an unachievable vision of saintliness, but through her immersion in the world and her 'everyday' behaviour which included drinking and smoking, she presents a vision of sanctity which embraces the gritty fullness of human experience. It is this characterisation which leads Olivier Clément to remark: 'If we love and venerate Mother Maria, it is not in spite of her disorder, her strange views, and her passions. It is precisely these qualities

² See Sergei Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price: The Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova 1891-1945* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), 37-8.

³ Throughout this thesis I shall refer to Mother Maria Skobtsova as 'Skobtsova', unless it is anachronistic to do so in the time period being discussed.

that make her extraordinarily alive among so many bland and pious saints.

Unattractive and dirty, strong, thick, and sturdy, yes, she was truly alive in her suffering, her compassion, her passion.⁴ It is her humanity which adds colour to her sanctity, and it is the human neighbour whom she sought to serve.

Skobtsova's unwavering dedication to loving and serving the neighbour is evident in her remarkable biography. It is also at the forefront of her theological writings. In addition to her monasticism and social action, Skobtsova was an essayist, writing short articles through the 1920s until her death in 1945. However, Skobtsova's legacy as a theologian has, for a considerable amount of time, been overlooked and often over-shadowed by her extraordinary biography. However, Skobtsova's essays reveal the astute and creative theological mind of this noteworthy thinker. The majority of these essays deal with theological and philosophical themes.

Appropriately for such a 'human' Saint, Skobtsova's essays frequently explore what it means to be human, but they also reveal her thinking on a variety of topics, from asceticism and monasticism to creativity and politics.

Secondary literature on Skobtsova's theological legacy is beginning to emerge. Thinkers such as Rowan Williams, Paul Ladouceur and Andrew Louth have highlighted her role as a theologian, while Katerina Bauerova has expanded engagement with Skobtsova's intellectual output through creative comparison with thinkers such as Julia Kristeva.⁵ However, more work needs to be done to uncover the

⁴ Olivier Clément, "Preface" in *Mother Maria Skobtsova: Essential Writings*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 12.

⁵ See; Rowan Williams *Looking East in Winter: Contemporary Thought and the Eastern Christian Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021); Andrew Louth *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the present* (London: SPCK, 2015); Paul Ladouceur *Modern Orthodox Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2019); Katerina Bauerova, "The Play of the Semiotic and the Symbolic: The Authenticity of the Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova," *Feminist Theology* 22, no. 3 (2014): 290-301.

uniqueness of Skobtsova's theological vision. This thesis presents a systematic overview of Skobtsova's work. In order to appreciate the importance of Skobtsova's theology, we need to understand how she 'does theology'. This is what this thesis wishes to add to the growing body of secondary literature on Skobtsova's theological writings. At the heart of this is Skobtsova's concern to balance love between God and love of the neighbour. This is characteristic of Skobtsova's approach to theological writing more broadly, and her 'search for synthesis' in a theology of wholeness. This thesis uses the place of sacrifice as a lens through which to read Skobtsova's work, arguing that an appreciation of self-denial, and material and spiritual *ascesis* is necessary for a balanced and full understanding of her theology. Also considered here is her theological style, particularly the relationship between biography and theology in her work, a methodology which offers theological correctives for contemporary spirituality, often within the *publitsistika* writing style and genre. The theological writings of Mother Maria Skobtsova are spiritual writings for a sick world (as she perceives it), offering critiques of social, spiritual, ecclesial, monastic trends and phenomena in her epoch. These critiques remain as prescient and lively as ever.

This systematic overview will begin by highlighting the way in which Skobtsova does theology. This will start, by way of introduction, with a brief exposition of two broad, over-arching and inter-related concerns in Skobtsova's theological writings. Firstly, the importance of the human in Skobtsova's theology. Secondly, her emphasis on a theology of wholeness, or synthesis which lies behind her desire to maintain a balance between loving God and the neighbour. Appreciating these two primary concerns for Skobtsova will begin to give shape and form to her theological writings more broadly. Furthermore, a recognition of Skobtsova's striving

for wholeness (in thought and in practice) will help to nuance and balance Skobtsova's often unrelenting, sacrificial, self-giving ethic, and apocalyptic tone.

Overall, this thesis seeks to build upon existing secondary literature on Skobtsova's theological writings by providing an analytical exposition of Skobtsova's body of theological work. In doing so, this thesis will suggest a way of reading Skobtsova's theology; how she may be characterised as a theologian, her main concerns, methodology and conclusions. Across Skobtsova's theological essays, this thesis will highlight the importance of wholeness. It will explore not only how Skobtsova seeks to maintain a balance principally between the love of God and the neighbour (as demonstrated in her notion of the 'mysticism of human communion'), alongside various other dualities, but it will also begin to note Skobtsova's uniqueness; how she takes the 'Russian idea' and transposes it into the freedom of emigration, or how she revolutionises monasticism into a social ethic, and asceticism into a mutual spiritual journey as a synthesis of the emulation of Christ and Mary, creativity which is rooted in God, politics which reflects *Godmanhood*. Overall, this thesis will seek to reveal the pragmatic theology which is rooted in the love of God and neighbour, found in the theological essays of Mother Maria Skobtsova.

This thesis suggests that at the heart of what it means to be human for Skobtsova, and how a human achieves the sense of 'wholeness' which she promotes, is sacrifice. An understanding of sacrifice in Skobtsova's work is essential to understanding her theology. It is only through sacrifice that wholeness can be found and maintained. It will soon become evident in this thesis that 'sacrifice' covers a wide variety of actions and attitudes within Skobtsova's system and is used loosely as an all-encompassing term. Sacrifice, in Skobtsova's thought, is centred around the desire to maintain a wholeness between loving both God and the neighbour. Much of

the sacrificial actions which she promotes, therefore, revolve around unravelling the sin of egocentrism; of opening up the individual to communion with both God and the neighbour. In this sense, sacrifice is about renouncing one's exclusivity and sacrificing the will to both God and the other. However, there are plenty of material sacrifices in Skobtsova's thought too, from ascetic limitations to monastic poverty and non-possession, and even a willingness to accept martyrdom. There are also surprising instances where particular forms of loss (and occasionally more broadly conceived forms of suffering) are inverted through Skobtsova's interpretation into a spiritually positive form of sacrifice. The 'loss of the self' in emigration being a notable example of this phenomenon. Similarly, her notion of spiritual poverty goes so far as to suggest that a person must be willing to sever their connection to Christ for the good of the other. This thesis will highlight the breadth of sacrificial attitudes and actions which are present in Skobtsova's work and will seek to show their centrality both for Skobtsova's understanding of what it means to be human, and how to strive towards wholeness.

1. Loving the Neighbour

This introduction will begin by highlighting Skobtsova's emphasis on the human in her theological writings, before turning to the second theme of wholeness. An exploration of the place of the human in Skobtsova's work must revolve around the heart of Skobtsova's theological system, which is a desire to maintain a balance between loving God and loving the neighbour. For Skobtsova, the truth of this command is found in its dual nature, and one must emphasise and articulate love towards both God and the neighbour in the spiritual life. She notes: 'Christ gave us two commandments: to love God and to love our fellow man. Everything else, even the commandments contained in the Beatitudes, is merely an elaboration of these two

commandments, which contain within themselves the totality of Christ's "Good News."⁶ Not only do these commandments contain the fullness of the Gospel message, but they create truth; 'These two commandments are two aspects of a single truth. Destroy either one of them and you destroy truth as a whole.'⁷ Skobtsova's theology, therefore, not only promotes a close engagement with our neighbour in order to love them, but it also highlights more broadly what it means, theologically, to be human.

The inspiration for this emphasis is wide-ranging. Skobtsova's theological writings draw on a rich Orthodox and Russian understanding of human nature. From the Orthodox perspective, a strongly ascetic theology is developed from a close attention to human nature; a refining and transforming of the 'passions' which necessitates a close self-awareness, an appreciation of the fallenness and fallibility of human nature as well as its potential for refinement and deification. There is a keen awareness throughout her work of the failings of human nature, the person's propensity to sin, particularly in the form of egoism and an individualistic attitude towards spirituality. This is countered by an emphasis on selflessness within Skobtsova's thought.

In relation to acknowledging the human propensity to sin, the varieties of human suffering are tangibly present in Skobtsova's theological essays, which itself reflects a particularly Russian interest with the place of suffering, as Dostoevsky artfully portrays throughout his novels.⁸ The breadth of human personalities and their

⁶ Maria Skobtsova "Types of Religious Life" in *Mother Maria Skobtsova: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 175. From here, 'Essential Writings' will be referred to as *EW*, but the essay titles will be noted throughout.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁸ In 'Dostoevsky, as Artist and Psychologist', Skobtsova claims that Dostoevsky is 'one of the greatest seers of the human soul' (41). In his novels, Skobtsova writes that Dostoevsky's 'ultimate concept' is the human soul: 'Intimately and attentively he leads us along the mysterious and tangled paths of

burdens are present in Skobtsova's works, not least her hagiographical tales of sin and redemption as found in her two-volume collection entitled '*Zhatva Dukha [Harvest of the Spirit]*'.⁹ A Christological background to this can be found in Skobtsova's understanding of actively bearing another's cross and taking their suffering upon oneself. This is mirrored by Skobtsova's Mariology (which is itself a very human, maternal reflection on the Mother of God) which centres around 'passive' suffering and relationality.

Throughout Skobtsova's theological essays, there is a deep concern with selflessness, particularly with regards to how persons act within communities. An emphasis on selflessness is at the heart of Skobtsova's understanding of the religious underpinnings of the nature of society and the Church. In the essays which draw on this theme, there is often a strong sense of *kenosis* which builds on her aversion to individualism and egotism. G. P. Fedotov, a friend and contemporary of Skobtsova, writes that *Kenosis* means, 'evacuation, self-emptying, or self-stripping. Coming down to earth, the Heavenly Christ strips off his divine glory to be invested with the "poor garb" of humanity.'¹⁰ *Kenosis*, Fedotov asserts, is a part of every Christian ethical system yet 'nowhere, perhaps, in such degree as in Russia, did it become the leading trend of the national religious mind; not the unique, but the most significant and dominating spiritually.'¹¹ This is keenly felt in Skobtsova's theological system, where her theological anthropology is highly influenced by a kenotic understanding of human communion. She builds an understanding of human communion which rests

mankind' (44). E. Skobtsova (Mother Maria), "Dostoevsky, as Artist and Psychologist," in *The Crucible of Doubts*, trans. Fr S. Janos (Mohrsville, PA: FRSJ Publications, 2016), 41, 44.

⁹ See: Э. Ю. Скобцова (Мать Мария), *Жатва Духа: композиция, предисловие, примечание. Vol. 1-2*, ed. A. N. Shustov (Томск: Водолей, 1994).

¹⁰ G. P. Fedotov, "The Religious Sources of Russian Populism," *The Russian Review* 1, no. 2 (Apr. 1942): 35.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

on a mutual self-giving and selflessness, as persons take up the crosses of the neighbours, and enter into the 'inner life' of the other. *Kenosis* is also central to Skobtsova's understanding and practice of monasticism which revolves around a dedication to material and spiritual non-possession within community. The place of *kenosis* within the forming of community is an important aspect of Skobtsova's understanding of relationality, which picks up on the Russian kenoticism which Fedotov outlines, especially its social character.

Indeed, much of Skobtsova's work is directed at critiquing spiritual interpretations which isolate Christianity from the world and from active service to the neighbour; focusing solely on heavenly eternity to the detriment of the earthly dust with which we are made. The human is therefore at the heart of Skobtsova's theological system, but her vision of humanity is often counter-cultural. She draws on the case of holy fools, for example. Skobtsova presents an understanding of the human individual, and human communities, which is based on a radical self-giving, self-loss and non-possession, much like the holy fool. Skobtsova's theology is intimately connected to her own exceptional life which demonstrates the breadth and colour of human experience and an unwavering dedication to love of the neighbour.

However, in addition to the rooted, earthly, reflection which is offered in Skobtsova's work, there is also an emphasis on the eternal, the apocalyptic, and the mystical within human experience. Skobtsova repeatedly pushes back against any 'humanistic' interpretation of the spiritual life. On the contrary, her thought is shot through with a fascination with the eternal and the apocalyptic, reflecting the transitoriness of the human and the fullness of the Divine. Alongside emphasising the importance of loving humanity, throughout Skobtsova's theological essays there is a recognition of the temporality and futility of the human condition. She writes that,

‘Human nature, fallen, permeated with sin and its consequences, is a heavy thing.’¹²

The natural condition which humanity finds itself in is imbued with a flat emptiness, in light of this fallenness temporality. On occasion Skobtsova describes this with an almost hyperbolic pessimism:

‘The old, sad, dusty earth races through the empty sky into eternal emptiness. Death-bound mankind rejoices over small successes and weeps over small failures, renouncing its election, painstakingly and assiduously pulling the coffin lid over its head.’¹³

The ‘death-bound’ nature of humanity, however, reflects its fallenness and not its election. For Skobtsova, the everyday reality of human existence needs to be understood in light of the eternal, in order for its authenticity as a divine creation to be perceived.

A sense of the eternal needs to break through into this fallenness in order for a person to perceive of anything beyond the temporal and ‘death-bound’. Skobtsova writes that what she calls a ‘personal apocalypse’ is required:

‘The gates of eternity are opened to us by way of a personal apocalypse; personal eschatology abolishes time, in which we are used to living, and space, by which we are used to measuring everything. And by somehow accepting these other laws, man is able to keep himself in eternity. The fall back into everyday life and a peaceful occupation with everyday things is by no means inevitable. Let them take their own course: eternity can be seen through them, if man is not afraid, if he does not run away from himself, does not renounce his awesome, not only human but divine-human, destiny. That is, his personal Golgotha, his personal bearing of the cross, accepted by his own free will.’¹⁴

Humanity is ‘kept in eternity’ through a personal apocalypse which abolishes the mundane reality of everyday life. Human destiny, for Skobtsova, is not merely human but ‘divine-human’.¹⁵ She continues to elaborate on this: ‘To put it more simply: a man’s whole life will seem dull, worthless, meaningless to him, if it is not pierced

¹² Skobtsova, “Insight in Wartime,” EW, 128.

¹³ Ibid., 139.

¹⁴ Ibid., 128.

¹⁵ The importance of this term will be explored further in the course of this thesis.

through with the flame of eternity.’¹⁶ This is manifest in an awareness of the eternal, and an ascetic striving beyond the laws of the everyday into a recognition of what is beyond the temporal. This is, however, no simple task. Skobtsova describes this in characteristically vivid rhetoric as she describes the nature of Christianity and its effect on the person: ‘Christianity, like red-hot steel, pierces the heart and incinerates it. And then the person cries: “Ready is my heart, ready!”’¹⁷ Skobtsova characterises this striving for eternity within the temporal as a struggle, it is a person’s ‘bearing of the cross’, their own ‘personal Golgotha’. It is this struggle between the fallen and the eternal which provides the foundation for much of her ascetic and monastic theology.

This struggle is experienced in the very make-up of the human person, according to Skobtsova’s theological anthropology. Skobtsova’s theological system is rooted in a recognition of the image of God in the person. Understanding what it means to be human also necessitates an acknowledgement that humanity is made *imago dei*, which is confirmed in the person of Christ: ‘Each man, manifested to us from the moment of the first Old Testament revelations as the image of God, in Christ discloses still more strongly and concretely his connection with God. He is indeed the image of God, the image of Christ, the icon of Christ. Who, after that, can differentiate the worldly from the heavenly in the human soul, who can tell where the image of God ends and the heaviness of human flesh begins!’¹⁸ Skobtsova balances any emphasis of the fallenness of the person, with this recognition of the heavenly within humanity. Skobtsova’s spirituality, which can be sensed in her approach to asceticism and monasticism, is oriented around a striving to recognise and recover

¹⁶ Skobtsova, “Insight in Wartime,” EW, 128.

¹⁷ ‘Христианство, как раскалённая сталь, вонзается в сердце и испепеляет его. И тогда человек вопит: «Готово моё сердце, готово!»’ Мать Мария (Скобцова) ‘ХРИСТИАНСТВО (эссе)’ accessed August 4, 2022, <http://mere-marie.com/creation/hristianstvo/>

¹⁸ Skobtsova, “The Mysticism of Human Communion,” EW, 79.

this image. It is through engaging with the *imago dei* in the other, than one can begin to also commune with God in what Skobtsova describes as the ‘mysticism of human communion.’

It is appropriate that Skobtsova’s autobiographical poem, ‘The Spirit’s Day’, opens with a reflection on the dual composition of the person; as heavenly and earthly, divine and human, eternal and transient.¹⁹ Skobtsova’s theology works out how a practical, pragmatic love of the neighbour which is exemplified in non-possessing, selfless service, can also be ‘pierced through with the flame of eternity’²⁰; how it can be divine, eternal, revealing the transcendence of God who she understands to be the source of all creativity. In order to understand Skobtsova’s theological project as a whole, it is necessary to appreciate her desire to balance these elements in her thought, as well as in practice.

This also touches on an over-arching and primary point of interest in Skobtsova’s theological work, which may be termed as her search for wholeness. As this thesis highlights the theological writings of Skobtsova, uncovering their uniqueness and breadth, and promoting engagement with her theological system, this search for wholeness will become apparent. At the heart of Skobtsova’s theological essays is a desire to hold together extremes or dualities in a theology of wholeness; to balance not only the divine with the human, and the eternal and temporal (as we have already begun to explore and will continue to highlight in the course of this thesis), but also spirituality with service, creativity and contemplation, the church and the world. In relation to this, there is an intimate connection in her writings between

¹⁹ Мать Мария (Скобцова), *Стихотворения, Поэмы, Мистерии, Воспоминания об аресте и лагере в Равенсбрюк* (Paris: La Presse Française et Étrangère, 1947), 22.

²⁰ Skobtsova, “Insight in Wartime,” EW, 128.

thought and practice, and a strong emphasis on pragmatic applicability. This is evident in her writings on monasticism, for example, which apply key elements of the monastic profession to a socially engaged, ascetic spirituality. In these theological areas, Skobtsova has novel and perceptive insights to offer contemporary scholarship. By way of introduction, this theme will now be explored.

2. A Theology of Wholeness

Skobtsova's desire to maintain a balance between loving God and loving the neighbour is indicative of a broader motivation in her thought to hold together dualities. Reference has already been made to Skobtsova's system as a 'theology of wholeness.' In part, this characterisation is taken from Skobtsova's own essay, entitled 'In Search of Synthesis.'²¹ In this text, Skobtsova provides a short history of what she perceives as the rupture between the life of the church and the fullness of human creativity. She laments this separation and promotes a striving for the affirmation of 'Godmanhood'²² which balances the divine principle with the human principle. In this light, Skobtsova calls for the sanctification of all human attempts at creativity (science, art, society, state-building and the 'building up of societal life') and a 'synthesis of culture, a struggle for the wholeness of culture'.²³ Equally, she condemns 'godless humanism' which she characterises as a hopeless attempt to create utopias which lack any spiritual framework. In this essay, Skobtsova calls for a synthesis between the divine and the human principles, a holding together of this duality. This is indicative of her wider theological system, and the term may be

²¹ E. Skobtsova (Mother Maria), "In Search of Synthesis," in *The Crucible of Doubts*, trans. Fr S. Janos (Mohrsville, PA: FRSJ Publications, 2016), pp. 123-142. This essay was originally published in the journal *Put'*, no. 16 (May 1929): 49-68. Throughout this thesis from here, 'The Crucible of Doubts' will be referred to as *Crucible*.

²² The fullness of this term will be explored in 'The Russian Idea' chapter.

²³ Skobtsova, "In Search of Synthesis," *Crucible*, 141.

applied more broadly to her theological essays. In this area, Skobtsova is building upon a foundational movement within Russian religious thought; an emphasis on ‘all-unity’, which will be explored further in the course of this thesis, alongside ‘*Godmanhood*’ and ‘*sobornost*’. By way of introduction, here the notion of wholeness will be briefly contextualised, and several key areas of importance noted for Skobtsova’s theological writings.

The philosophical and theological framework in which Skobtsova is operating here is shaped by Russian religious thought. The full extent of this Russian inheritance will be explored in the course of this thesis, especially in relation to Aleksei Khomiakov and Vladimir Soloviev, but at this stage it is helpful to raise the Russian concern for unity in relation to the argument. There are several key Russian terms which fall under the category of ‘wholeness’. These are *tsel’nost*’ (цельность) and *vseedinstvo* (всеединство), as well as terms which exemplify such wholeness, which include *Godmanhood* (богочеловечество) and *sobornost*’ (соборность). Skobtsova occasionally uses the word ‘fullness’ (полнота) in a similar way.²⁴

A striving for ‘unity’ in some form has deep roots in the Russian philosophical and theological tradition, primarily in the 19th Century. This is present as early as in the writings of Peter Chaadaev (1794-1856),²⁵ Ivan Kireevsky (1806-1856), and Alexsei Khomiakov (1804-1860). Although this term has origins in much earlier traditions, as Teresa Obolevitch has persuasively suggested.²⁶ For Skobtsova,

²⁴ See, for example, ‘Наша Эпоха [Our Epoch]’ where Skobtsova describes the ‘полного всеединства [fullness of all-unity]’; Мать Мария (Скобцова), “Наша Эпоха [Our Epoch],” *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 9.

²⁵ For a discussion of Chaadaev’s works and the place of all-unity in them, see; G. M. Hamburg, “Petr Chaadaev and the Slavophile-Westernizer Debate” in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Caryl Emerson, George Pattison and Randall A. Poole (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 111-132.

²⁶ Teresa Obolevitch, "All-Unity According to V. Soloviev and S. Frank: A Comparative Analysis," *Forum Philosophicum* 15, no. 2 (2010): 413-25.

however, the flourishing of Russian thought in this area can be found in the work of the Slavophiles, with whom she is closely associated.²⁷ An assessment of Skobtsova's work in light of Slavophile thought will be forthcoming in this thesis, but here is it worth noting the broad place of 'wholeness' in this context.

The Slavophiles identified what they believed to be a disintegration of European culture through the influence of rationalism. Rationalism, they believed, destroyed the unity of an individual's personality, as explained by Andrzej Walicki:

'Natural reason, or the capacity for abstract thought, is only one of the mental powers and by no means the highest: its one-sided development impoverishes man's perceptive faculties by weakening his capacity for immediate intuitive understanding of the truth. The cult of reason is responsible for breaking up the psyche into a number of separate and unconnected faculties, each of which lays claim to autonomy. The resulting inner conflict corresponds to the conflict between different kinds of sectional party interests in societies founded on rationalistic principles.'²⁸

The splintering of a person's perceptive faculties is reflected in society in the corresponding, wider separation of interests. There is a link, therefore, between the splintering of a person's inner life, under the influence of rationalism, with the breaking up of areas of society (leading to its disintegration).

In contrast to this perceived splintering, in their thought the Slavophiles promoted an organic, intuitive form of knowledge, which was shaped around their understanding of the person, freedom and community. Although Slavophile thought was developed in reaction to many Western ideas, the influence of Western thought

²⁷ As chapter two will explore, the Slavophiles were part of a movement in the 19th Century which sought to highlight Russia's uniqueness, in distinction to the West. Thinkers within this intellectual movement (which was broad and by no means homogenous) were covering themes such as the nature of the person, community, and the church.

²⁸ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 100.

(especially German Idealism) has been noted on the movement.²⁹ For different thinkers within this movement, this is manifested in different ways. Wholeness is present in Ivan Kireevsky's notion of 'integral knowledge', which is foundational for subsequent Russian thought within the Slavophile movement. Although Kireevsky did not actually use this term, it is indicative of a central thread within his philosophical perspective. Kireevsky proposes an anthropology where a person's capacities are balanced, correlated to one another, and appropriately subordinated to higher powers. He proposes a correlation between the heart and reason to create one harmonious being in the person: 'The point of concentration is the heart, where one becomes conscious of God and achieves a light that illumines all the lower spheres. Reason uses this light to see and know the world, while the rationalistic understanding orders the world and makes sense of it. Severed from the heart, Western philosophy has restricted itself to these lower, subordinate powers, resulting in the ascendancy of blind understanding and distorted reason.'³⁰ The heart and the mind are united in integral reason.

For another key Slavophile thinker, Alexsei Khomiakov, the emphasis falls on community. As this thesis will outline, Khomiakov worked within a similar

²⁹ Although much of the Slavophile consciousness was formed in opposition to Western ideas, there were notable Western influences on Slavophile thought, such as the work of Schelling. Indeed, certain post-Enlightenment thinkers, as Rowan Williams notes, 'understand knowledge as bound up with the discovery or recognition of the self as constituted in a web of communally constructed relations across both time and space.' Rowan Williams, *Looking East in Winter: Contemporary Thought and the Eastern Christian Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 161. Andrzej Walicki notes, in contrast, however, that '...neither Schelling nor any other theoretical critic of rationalism satisfied the Slavophile philosophers; the guarantee and essential prerequisite of true faith, they insisted, was a life guided by tradition and participation in a supra-individual community – the type of community that had disintegrated in Western Europe.' (Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: history of a conservative utopia in nineteenth-century Russian thought*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 317. Although Western thinkers helped to shape the direction and thought of the Slavophile movement, the nature of community which the Slavophiles highlighted was special to Russia.

³⁰ Robert Bird "General Introduction" in *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, trans. and ed. Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 21.

framework to Kireevsky, and was deeply concerned with ecclesiology and the nature of society. His notion of *sobornost'* reflects a desire for wholeness in community, where individuals are recognised as persons possessing freedom, but who are united in an organic whole with the other.

The influence of the Slavophiles can be felt in later Russian intellectual history. In addition to Kireevsky and Khomiakov, one of the greatest proponents of wholeness in Russian thought is Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900), whose thought is foundational for Skobtsova. Soloviev coined the term 'all-unity' (всеединство) and Skobtsova characterises much of his thought as a striving for this all-unity. At the heart of Soloviev's thought regarding all-unity is the notion of Sophia. Paul Ladouceur notes the difficulty in defining Sophia and Sophiology, writing that, 'Sophia resists straightforward exposition; it is an ethereal, even evanescent concept, assuming different forms depending on the writer or even the particular stage in the evolution of the thinking of certain writers.'³¹ Rowan Williams defines Soloviev's understanding of Sophia as follows: 'For Soloviev, the Absolute exists both as being and becoming, as a transcendent unity and as the totality of modes in which that unity can express itself and relate to itself, and this latter form of the Absolute, insofar as it always preserves a movement toward unity, is an organic whole. This is "Sophia" – fragmented in the empirical universe, but still at one in God.'³² Sophia is an understanding of unity for Soloviev, which reconciles Divine unity with the multiplicity and *disunity* of the created world. The Incarnation acts as a reintegration between the Divine and the created order, which is continued in the life of the Church.

³¹ Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2019), 199.

³² Rowan Williams, "Eastern Orthodox Theology" in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, ed. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 573-4.

It is this context which helps to explain Soloviev's notion of *Godmanhood*, as a unity between the divine and the human. The terms *Godmanhood*, 'all-unity' and *sobornost'* are found across Soloviev's work, and have a deep impact upon the theological world of Skobtsova.

As in Skobtsova's case, Soloviev's writings had a profound effect on subsequent Russian religious thought, including Skobtsova's interlocutors Bulgakov and Berdyaev. However, in Skobtsova's essays, Sophia is rarely addressed directly, and certainly not in a doctrinal way, as may be found in the work of her contemporaries.³³ What is present, however, in Skobtsova's work is a sense that Sophia represents the kind of all-unity of which Soloviev writes, and that this unity underpins the temporality of earthly existence. An important aspect of Sophiology which has been raised in criticism of Skobtsova's work is the feminine aspect of Divine Wisdom. In Skobtsova's work, Sophia is related to Divine Wisdom, and is in a sense gendered, through a close connection to feminine Wisdom and the Mother of God (as has been helpfully explored by Natalia Ermolaev).³⁴ However, this thesis suggests that what is of primary importance for Skobtsova is all-unity and wholeness. In the case of motherhood, it is the unity between mother and son which is of the utmost importance and whilst a discussion of gender in this area is illuminating, it will not be the primary focus of this investigation.

As a theology of wholeness, inspired by the philosophical foundations of the Russian religious renaissance, Skobtsova's theology does several things. Firstly,

³³ Skobtsova does note the place of Sophia in relation to wholeness in Bulgakov's work in 'Our Epoch', where she praises his work. See; Мать Мария (Скобцова), "Наша Эпоха [Our Epoch]," *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992).

³⁴ Natalia Ermolaev, "Modernism, Motherhood and Mariology: The Poetry and Theology of Elizaveta Skobtsova (Mother Maria)" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2010).

Skobtsova's theological work intersects with various other disciplines. Her theological writing speaks to politics, art, and literature, in addition to history, philosophy, and theology. In this way, there is a strong sense of synthesis between disciplines. Secondly, there is an epistemological angle to this depiction as Skobtsova builds a theological system which seeks to balance an understanding of who God is with an understanding of what it means to be human. Finally, this characterisation covers a methodological concern for Skobtsova as she emphasises the need to show love to both God and the neighbour in Christian thought and practice. It is important to note that synthesis does not mean a negation of difference in this instance – it's not an elision of two parts into one different entity, but more often than not, it is a holding together of difference.

Skobtsova writes essays on a variety of disciplines and subjects. This is, perhaps, unsurprising given the breadth of her own skills and experiences as a poet, a politician, an artist, a social worker, and a monastic. In addition to a breadth of topics and subjects, many of these essays cross disciplines, yet they are bound together by her theological worldview. Across Skobtsova's work, particularly during her emigration period, the subjects which she explores are primarily assessed through a theological lens. For Skobtsova, theology needs to speak to broader culture, including politics, history, literature, art, and creativity. Her political writings, for example, critique various approaches to governance in her age from a theological perspective. In the aforementioned essay, 'In Search of Synthesis', Skobtsova critiques Bolshevism from a theological perspective; a theme which is continued in other essays such as 'Four Portraits' where she also provides theological commentary to

political systems such as nationalism and totalitarianism.³⁵ Similarly, her essay on Dostoevsky entitled, ‘Dostoevsky and the Present’³⁶ highlights the relationship between theology and Dostoevsky’s literary works, especially in relation to his understanding of Christ. However, the main cross-disciplinary theme which emerges in Skobtsova’s theological essays relate to social issues.

In the introduction to Antoine Arjakovsky’s ‘The Way’, Rowan Williams notes the way in which theology was an integral element to all manner of philosophical, political, and social questions within the émigré community. Thinkers such as Berdyaev, and his fellow contributors to ‘The Way’, ‘...shared the view that fundamental issues of value, judgment, and virtue could not be intelligently pursued without reference to theology. They rightly saw the direct relevance of theology to all of the most basic issues around the definition of the human and, whatever their personal commitment to the Church, they were prepared to involve theology in these discussions and to take it with complete seriousness.’³⁷ This is keenly felt in the writings of Skobtsova as she seeks to engage with a wide range of disciplines and issues within a theological framework, and resonates with the Slavophile desire to avoid a rationalistic disintegration between intellectual spheres.

In addition to a wholeness across intellectual disciplines, within Skobtsova’s work there is a desire to hold together the divine and the human in human creativity. For her, there is an intimate and inseparable communion which exists between God and the human (which has already been highlighted here in her emphasis on the *imago*

³⁵ Мать Мария (Скобцова) “Четыре портрета [Four Portraits]” in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 1 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 296-311.

³⁶ English translation: E. Skobtsova (Mother Maria), “Dostoevsky and the Present” in *The Crucible of Doubts*, trans. Fr S. Janos (Mohrsville, PA: FRSJ Publications, 2016), 39-88.

³⁷ Rowan Williams ‘Foreword’ in Antoine Arjakovsky, *The Way: Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in Paris and Their Journal, 1925-1940* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), vii-viii.

dei). This is strongly based on Skobtsova's understanding of the relationship between the divine and the human found in the person of Christ, particularly the way in which the incarnation sanctified human efforts. An example of this can be found in language:

'By not loving, by not having contact with humanity we condemn ourselves to a kind of deaf-mute blindness with respect to the divine as well. In this sense, not only did the Logos-Word-Son of God assume human nature to complete His work of redemption and by this sanctified it once and for all, destining it for deification, but the Word of God, as the "Good News," as the Gospel, as revelation and enlightenment likewise needed to become incarnate in the flesh of insignificant human words. For it is with words that people express their feelings, their doubts, their thoughts, their good deeds, and their sins. And in this way human speech, which is the symbol of man's inner life, was likewise sanctified and filled with grace – and through it the whole of man's inner life.'³⁸

Christ's incarnation sanctifies human language, and thus 'the whole of man's inner life', once again making a distinction between the divine and the human harder to separate. The image of God in humanity is central to Skobtsova's system and an understanding of how human creations and constructs relate to God. The example of language being sanctified shows the sanctification of such human constructs – that there is an 'image of God' in human language, in and through Christ's incarnation which suggests that human speech, in areas beyond theology, has the potential to reflect the divine image which has transfigured it.

In Skobtsova's theology, the epistemological insistence on unity (particularly a unity between the divine and the human) has a methodological impact. In thought and in practice, Skobtsova is critical of theological methods which highlight either the divine or the human over and against each other. She rarely writes of God, for example, without reference to humanity and our human experience. Her writings on the topics of asceticism, monasticism, or Mariology, for example, all place a heavy

³⁸ Skobtsova, "Types of Religious Life," EW, 176.

weight on discussion of the human. Indeed, across Skobtsova's theological essays, there is also a sense of wholeness as she frequently seeks to balance dualities or dichotomies. Some dichotomies which she works with (seeking some form of balance) which this thesis will explore include the relation between individuals and communities, the church and the world, Christology and Mariology, and Russia and the West. On occasion, Skobtsova seeks to address what she perceives as an imbalance in theological thought and practice between these dualities. For example, she is critical of any individualised spirituality, and in the relationship between the individual and the community, she promotes a stronger emphasis on community. Similarly, she laments the separation between the Church and the world and emphasises more heavily a theological approach of engagement with the world. In other areas, she reflects on the differences which each aspect of a pairing may display, such as the differing characteristics that are discernible between Christ and Mary (specifically in the typology of motherhood and sonship).

A recognition of Skobtsova's striving for wholeness is vital to understand how Skobtsova does theology. This is particularly important when Skobtsova's essayistic style is considered, as some of these nuanced dualities can only be held together when a wide selection of her essays are consulted and compared. Furthermore, this theology of wholeness proves interesting for areas of theology which are on occasion isolated from a wider context, such as asceticism and monasticism. When assessing particular aspects of Skobtsova's thought, such as the place of the human, for example, it is important to situate the analysis within this broader concern. Throughout Skobtsova's work the human, temporal and earthly is imbued with a strong sense of suffering (with imagery that speaks of reduction to ashes, of destruction and fire). There is a keen sense of Kenotic spirituality, self-giving, sacrificial, service. As the Second

World War loomed, an apocalyptic element intensifies in Skobtsova's writings in relation to these themes. When read in isolation to her wider work, this theological anthropology may present an issue – one of suffering and destruction. It is important, therefore, to balance Skobtsova's language of self-annihilation with the fullness of *Godmanhood, sobornost'*, all-unity and Sophia, which underlies her wider theological vision.

3. Writing style

Skobtsova is not a systematic theologian. Due to a failure to recognise this, perhaps, Xenia Krivochéine extends an evaluation of Skobtsova's artistic work as that of a dilettante to her theological writings:

‘Ses essais théologiques pèchent par inachèvement de la pensée, de trop longues notes, des digressions, bien que dans leur ensemble, ils reflètent l'époque et posent les questions auxquelles la pensée philosophique russe cherchait des réponses.’³⁹

In order to see beyond Skobtsova's theological essays as the work of a dilettante, it is important to consider her style of writing theology. Skobtsova's essays are closely rooted in current events and her own personal experiences, and in them she is responding to the intellectual contexts in which she finds herself. She was publishing short articles and essays in journals and newspapers, rather than extended works of theological reflection on doctrine. As a genre, some of Skobtsova's essays may fall into the *publitsistika* style of writing.

Antoine Arjakovsky draws attention to Skobtsova's writing style in his assessment of her place within the journey *Put'*. Importantly, Arjakovsky identifies Skobtsova's essays within the 'publitsistika' genre:

³⁹ Xenia Krivochéine, *La Beauté Salvatrice Mère Maria (Skobtsov) : Peintures, Dessins, Broderies* (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 2012), 29.

‘Elizabeth Skobtsova, a poet prior to the Russian Revolution, interested herself in the 1920s in the philosophy of Khomiakov, Solovyov, and Dostoevsky, but she only published articles of the *publitsistika* genre in *The Way*, that is, essays concerning philosophical and theological themes to issues of everyday life. In “The Holy Land” and in “The Search for Synthesis,” she reflected on the possibility of encounter between the principles of maternity and childhood, of birth and creation, of divinity and humanity.’⁴⁰

Arjakovsky’s definition of *publitsistika* here as, ‘essays concerning philosophical and theological themes to issues of everyday life’, appears to fit with the genre of many of Skobtsova’s essays, even those not published in *Put*. This also resonates with the relationship between biography and theology which the following chapter will explore. The relationship between everyday life and theological reflection is an important one in Skobtsova’s work, and this is reflected in the genre of her essays, as Arjakovsky notes. *Publitsistika*, however, is a relatively amorphous term which broadly covers writings on socio-political themes.

In her unpublished thesis on *Publitsistika* in the writings of Vladimir Soloviev, Pauline Schrooyen notes that the Russian encyclopaedia ‘Brokgauz-Efron’ gives a definition of *publitsistika* as, ‘discussion, in print, on the pressing problems of social-political life’.⁴¹ Schrooyen continues, however, to expand upon this definition by defining *publitsistika* as, ‘...a written form of critical public discourse appearing in (non-specialized) journals and newspapers regarding current affairs of national interest. It is a critical public discourse that is accessible to the average member of educated society, has no preconceived biases restricting it to particular disciplines or world views, and is intended to create national awareness, to shape public opinion

⁴⁰ Antoine Arjakovsky, *The Way: Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in Paris and Their Journal, 1925-1940* trans. Jerry Ryan, edited by John A. Jillions and Michael Plekon (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 30.

⁴¹ [obsuzhdenie v pechati nasushchnykh voprosov obshchestvenno-politicheskoi zhizni.] Entry ‘Publitsistika’ by Ar. G. in: Arsen’ev, K. (ed.) *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ T. XXVa* (SPB, 1898) 746. Cited in Pauline Wilhelmine Schrooyen, “Vladimir Solov’ev in the Rising Public Sphere: A Reconstruction and Analysis of the Concept of Christian Politics in the *Publitsistika* of Vladimir Solov’ev” (PhD diss., Radboud University, 2006), 7.

and, preferably, to exert an influence on politics.’⁴² It is therefore a genre which allows for individual reflection and commentary on contemporary social and political events. Claire Whitehead notes the historical importance of this genre, and the opportunity it presents for individuals to write and publish polemics on socio-political issues, in her article exploring the impact of *publitsistika* on crime fiction in Russia.⁴³ The genre had a particular importance during the Great Reforms of Russia around the 1860s, with *publitsistika* holding an important place in public discourse as a vehicle for commentary from the late 1850s on proposed social changes.

In Skobtsova’s case, a recognition of the genre of many of Skobtsova’s essays as *publitsistika* begins to nuance an assessment of her work beyond an ‘incompleteness of thought’, to an understanding of her essays as highly contextual reflections on socio-political issues. When this is combined with an appreciation of the multi-disciplinary nature of Skobtsova’s essays, we may further appreciate the underlying recourse to spirituality within these socio-political reflections and commentaries.

4. Methodology and Focus

This thesis will focus on Skobtsova’s theological writings. This immediately raises the question of what can be classed as theological writings. It could be argued, for example, that Skobtsova’s poetry and short stories are part of her theological work. Indeed, the collection ‘Ruth’, and the mystery play ‘Anna’, for example, are notable

⁴² Pauline Wilhelmine Schrooyen, “Vladimir Solov’ëv in the Rising Public Sphere: A Reconstruction and Analysis of the Concept of Christian Politics in the *Publitsistika* of Vladimir Solov’ëv” (PhD diss., Radboud University, 2006), 7-8.

⁴³ Claire Whitehead “Debating Detectives: The Influence of *Publitsistika* on Nineteenth-Century Russian Crime Fiction,” *The Modern Language Review* 107, no. 1 (January 2012): 230-258.

for their relationship to Skobtsova's spirituality and monasticism.⁴⁴ Furthermore, this thesis has already begun to highlight the way in which Skobtsova's thought crosses disciplines and more broadly recognises the divine inspiration within many aspects of human creativity. The line of argument in this thesis does not wish to undermine what has already been affirmed in this area. However, methodologically for this thesis, there is limited space to analyse Skobtsova's poetry in full, whilst incorporating literary and theological criticism. Natalia Ermolaev's thesis begins to bridge this gap by exploring Skobtsova's poetry and its connection to her Mariology.⁴⁵ However, this limits the breadth of Ermolaev's exposition of Skobtsova's wider theological *oeuvre*. Therefore, this thesis wishes to focus on Skobtsova's theological essays whilst acknowledging the place of Skobtsova's creative writing and fine art in this system when it provides helpful contextual information. These essays are primarily from Skobtsova's emigration period, during the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's.

The second limitation for this thesis is archival work, translations, and availability of primary sources. A proposed trip to the Bakhmeteff Archive at Columbia University was cancelled because of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the time of writing, Skobtsova's completed works are being published in Russia. It is highly possible, therefore, that the theological material presented in this thesis is not an exhaustive list of Skobtsova's work. But this close analysis of what is currently available does give us a picture of Skobtsova's work as a whole. Nevertheless, this thesis expands commentary on Skobtsova's work by including texts which have not yet received critical attention such as '*Zhatva Dukha*'.

⁴⁴ For 'Ruth', see: Е. Кузьмина-Караваева, *Руфь* (Петроград, 1916). For the mystery play 'Anna', see: Мать Мария (Скобцова), *Стихотворения, Поэмы, Мистерии, Воспоминания об аресте и лагере в Равенсбрюк* (Paris: La Presse Française et Étrangère, 1947), 41-78.

⁴⁵ Natalia Ermolaev, "Modernism, Motherhood and Mariology: The Poetry and Theology of Elizaveta Skobtsova (Mother Maria)" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2010).

The primary focus of this thesis is solely on the theological writing of Mother Maria Skobtsova. In emigration, Skobtsova was in close contact with notable thinkers such as Bulgakov and Berdyaev. Whilst an in-depth comparison between Skobtsova and these thinkers would be illuminating (and a fruitful venture for further exploration), for the purposes of this thesis the confines will be limited as much as possible to Skobtsova's own work. This is to highlight Skobtsova's own thought, and to uncover the intellectual system of this woman theologian whose thought has been neglected (in contrast to her male contemporaries) for too long.⁴⁶

5. Collections of Primary Texts

Since Skobtsova's death in 1945, several collections of her writings have been compiled. The majority of these collections include a mixture of poetry, plays and essays. In 1947, 'Стихотворения, поэмы, мистерии воспоминания об аресте и лагере в равенсбрюк' was published.⁴⁷ This edition was collated by D. E. Skobtsov (Maria's second husband), with assistance from S. B. Pilenko (Mother Maria's own mother) who wrote out by hand many of the essays which are included in the collection. The foreword is by D. Skobtsov and included in the publication are memoirs by S. Pilenko. This collection has two articles which had not been published in Skobtsova's lifetime, they were 'Рождение в Смерти [Birth in Death]' and 'Прозрение в Войне [Insights in wartime]'. In 1991, a collection entitled 'Избранное [Favourites/Selected]', was published. This also includes verses and poems, essays, letters, and recollections of Skobtsova's life, with an introduction by

⁴⁶ There is much scope for a future study between the writings of Sergei Bulgakov (Skobtsova's spiritual father) and Skobtsova. Natalia Ermolaev has laid important groundwork for this exploration in her thesis.

⁴⁷ *Мать Мария, Стихотворения, поэмы, мистерии воспоминания об аресте и лагере в равенсбрюк* (Paris: La Presse Française et Etrangère, 1947).

N. Osmakov.⁴⁸ Similarly, in 1992 an important collection of work was assembled and published in Paris under the title ‘Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки [Recollections, Articles, Essays]’.⁴⁹ This two-volume publication includes several articles which were published for the first time. In 2004 a newer version of this edition was published in St Petersburg: ‘Жатва Духа: Религиозно-философские Сочинения [Harvest of the spirit: religious-philosophical writings]’ and edited by A. N. Shustov.⁵⁰ This thesis will rely primarily on the 1992 YMCA two-volume edition of Skobtsova’s writings.⁵¹ When quoting from Skobtsova’s articles and essays which have not been translated into English, I shall include my own translations in the body of this thesis, and the Russian original in the footnotes for reference. Where an English translation is readily available (and of suitable quality), this will be used in the first instance without the Russian original in the footnotes.

In recent years, some primary sources of Skobtsova’s articles have been translated into French and English, accompanied by biographical details for Skobtsova. In English, Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky translated the collection entitled ‘Mother Maria Skobtsova: Essential Writings’, which includes an introduction by Jim Forest and a preface by Olivier Clément, published in 2003.⁵² Most of the material available in French is thanks to Hélène Arjakovsky-Klépinine; a relation of Dmitri Klépinine who was a close friend of Mother Maria’s. Arjakovsky-Klépinine, along with Françoise Lhoest and Claire Vajou, translated and compiled ‘*Le*

⁴⁸ Е. Ю. Кузьмина-Караваева, *Избранное* (Москва: Советская Россия, 1991).

⁴⁹ Мать Мария (Скобцова), *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 1-2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992).

⁵⁰ Мать Мария (Елизавета Кузьмина-Караваева), *Жатва Духа: Религиозно-философские Сочинения* (Санкт-Петербург: Искусство, 2004).

⁵¹ This collection is also used as the primary source for the English translations in *Mother Maria Skobtsova: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), with the exception of ‘Types of Religious Life’.

⁵² Mother Maria Skobtsova, *Mother Maria Skobtsova: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003).

Sacrement du frère’ which was published in 2001 by Cerf.⁵³ Similarly, ‘*Le Jour du Saint-Esprit*’ was edited by Paul Ladouceur, and translated by Hélène Arjakovsky-Klépinine, Françoise Lhoest, Bertrand Jeuffrain, Alexandre Nicolsky, Nikita Struve and Jérôme Lefert in 2011 in Paris.⁵⁴

Several unpublished articles and essays have been collated and published online by Xenia Krivochéine. These include some essays which are kept at the Bakhmeteff Archive of Russian and East European Culture at Columbia University Libraries. Alongside essays, Krivochéine has published images of poetry and artworks from Skobtsova on this site, in addition to secondary literature about her works.⁵⁵ The Grebnevsky Church of the Odintsovo Deanery of the Moscow Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church also has a page dedicated to works by Skobtsova on their online reference library of Russian philosophical and theological writings.⁵⁶

6. Secondary Literature

Interest in Mother Maria Skobtsova’s life and work has been growing steadily in the English-speaking world following the publication of Sergei Hackel’s biography entitled, ‘*Pearl of Great Price: The Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova 1891-1945*’, which was first published in 1965.⁵⁷ Hackel’s study draws on archive material which he personally collected with the assistance of Mother Elizaveta Medvedeva and Fedor Timofeevich Pianov, including oral testimonies from contemporaries of Skobtsova,

⁵³ Mère Marie Skobtsov, *Le sacrement du frère*, trans. Hélène Arjakovsky-Klépinine, Françoise Lhoest and Claire Vajou (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001).

⁵⁴ Sainte Marie de Paris (Mère Marie Skobtsov, 1891-1945), *Le jour du Saint-Esprit*, ed. Paul Ladouceur, trans. Hélène Arjakovsky-Klépinine, Françoise Lhoest, Bertrand Jeuffrain, Alexandre Nicolsky, Nikita Struve and Jérôme Lefert (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 2011).

⁵⁵ “Мать Мария,” accessed January 5, 2023, <http://mere-marie.com/about/>.

⁵⁶ “Мария (Скобцова) монахиня, преподобномученица,” accessed January 5, 2023, <http://www.odinblago.ru/>.

⁵⁷ The most recent edition is, Sergei Hackel *Pearl of Great Price: The Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova 1891-1945* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982).

amongst them survivors from Ravensbrück concentration camp. Hackel's biography also draws on material published elsewhere, such as recollections of Mother Maria Skobtsova by K. Mochul'skii and T. Manukhina.⁵⁸ Around the same time, a similar biography was published by Timothy Stratton-Smith, entitled 'The Rebel Nun'.⁵⁹ This biography is not as rigorous as Hackel's and embellishes Skobtsova's biography with imagined narratives (such as particular conversations) alongside factual biographical details. The artistic license which is employed in 'The Rebel Nun' undermines the historical credibility of the study. 'Pearl of Great Price', therefore, has been established as the authoritative English language biography on Mother Maria Skobtsova and has precipitated a number of articles on Skobtsova's life and legacy.

The most sustained engagement with Skobtsova's work can be found in the PhD thesis by Natalia Ermolaev entitled 'Modernism, Motherhood and Mariology: The Poetry and Theology of Elizaveta Skobtsova (Mother Maria)',⁶⁰ which significantly opens up some of the territory of Skobtsova's thought. In her exploration of Mariology, motherhood, and modernism in Skobtsova's writings, Ermolaev draws attention to several key theological articles written by Skobtsova, in addition to a selection of her poetry. Ermolaev's thesis is significant for making available primary sources of Skobtsova's work which were previously unpublished. Through her work at the Bakhmeteff Archive at Columbia, Ermolaev transcribes and translates a previously unpublished article entitled 'The Judgement of Solomon' by Skobtsova. Furthermore, Ermolaev's work is notable for mapping the place of Mariology in Skobtsova's work, particularly in relation to Sophiology (for which 'The Judgement

⁵⁸ See K. Mochul'skii, 'Monakhinia Mariia Skobtsova', *Tretii Chas*, no. 1 (1946): 64-73; T. Manukhina, 'Monakhinia Mariia', *Novyi zhurnal*, vol. 41 (1955), 137-57.

⁵⁹ T. Stratton Smith, *The Rebel Nun: The Moving Story of Mother Maria of Paris* (London: Souvenir Press, 1965).

⁶⁰ Natalia Ermolaev, "Modernism, Motherhood and Mariology: The Poetry and Theology of Elizaveta Skobtsova (Mother Maria)" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2010).

of Solomon' provides fertile material). The thesis is limited, however, by its methodological scope. As it is assessing Skobtsova's poetry in addition to certain key theological writings, it does not have the space to delve into Skobtsova's wider theological system. As a result, its theological analysis, on occasion, could benefit from a closer exposition and analysis, which the scope of the project does not allow. Nevertheless, Ermolaev's insight into the place of Mariology in Skobtsova's work is important. At this stage in scholarship on Skobtsova's writings, it can be expanded. This thesis, therefore, seeks to progress Ermolaev's work into a broader exposition of Skobtsova's theological writings. It aims to show how a search for unity and synthesis is a guiding principle for Skobtsova's theology which will shed some new insights and nuance to Ermolaev's conclusions.

Following Ermolaev's thesis, there have been several articles which highlight Skobtsova's theological writings and her importance as a theologian within the Paris School of Orthodox theology. Andrew Louth has reflected on the biography and some key insights into Skobtsova's thought in his chapter in 'Modern Orthodox Thinkers'.⁶¹ Placing Skobtsova within this collection is itself a significant recognition of the increasing interest around her life and engagement with her work in an English language context. Similarly, Antoine Arjakovsky places Skobtsova within the intellectual context of the journal *Put'* in his seminal study of the émigré journal.⁶² Paul Ladouceur references Skobtsova as an important theologian and thinker within the émigré community in 'Modern Orthodox Theology'.⁶³

⁶¹ Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present* (London: SPCK, 2015), 111-126.

⁶² Antoine Arjakovsky, *The Way: Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in Paris and Their Journal, 1925-1940* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2013).

⁶³ Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2019).

Natalia Likvintseva's article entitled 'Overcoming the Gap between Religion and Culture: The Life and Works of Mother Maria (Skobtsova)'⁶⁴ begins to make some important links between the biography of Skobtsova and some of her original thought, especially in relation to creativity and culture. Likvintseva highlights Skobtsova's synthesis between church culture and broader creativity, focusing on the relationship between her thought (in essays such as 'In Search of Synthesis' and 'The Sources of Creativity') with the association 'Orthodox Action'. Skobtsova's article 'The Source of Creativity' has received little secondary attention, therefore this is significant within Skobtsova studies. Likvintseva suggests that the house at *Rue du Lourmel* was a practical expression of the ideological synthesis between church life and human creativity which Skobtsova proposes in her theological articles. Likvintseva's article is an important beginning, although more can be done to further unpick the uniqueness of Skobtsova's theological vision, plumbing deeper into the details of the system and its wider implications.

This task is furthered, in part, by another important commentator on Skobtsova's theological work; Katerina Bauerova. Bauerova's engagement with Skobtsova, as a thinker, is highly significant. Throughout Bauerova's work, Skobtsova is placed in conversation with other thinkers including some of her own contemporaries such as Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdyaev, in addition to voices from different disciplines and contexts, such as Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, and the fields of psychoanalysis, literary criticism and creative writing.⁶⁵ Bauerova

⁶⁴ Natalia Likvintseva, "Overcoming the Gap between Religion and Culture: The Life and Works of Mother Maria (Skobtsova)," in *Apology of Culture: Religion and Culture in Russian Thought* ed. by Artur Mrówczyński-Van Allen, Teresa Obolevitch, and Paweł Rojek (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 79-86.

⁶⁵ Katerina Bauerova, "The Play of the Semiotic and the Symbolic: The Authenticity of the Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova," *Feminist Theology* 22, no. 3 (2014): 290-301; Katerina Bauerova, "Motherhood as a Space for the Other: A Dialogue between Mother Maria Skobtsova and Hélène Cixous," *Feminist theology* 26, no. 2 (2018-01): 133-146; Katerina Bauerova, "Emigration as Taking

weaves Skobtsova's biography and legacy into an exposition of some important aspects of her thought on topics including motherhood, emigration, spirituality, and anthropology. Placing Skobtsova into these dialogues helpfully expands the field of engagement with her work and legacy. In 'The Play of the Semiotic and the Symbolic: The Authenticity of the Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova', Katerina Bauerova explores Skobtsova's life and places it in conversation with the thought of Julia Kristeva. Bauerova places some of Skobtsova's own thought into this article, but it is primarily a reflection on her life and biography, in a psychoanalytic framework. Bauerova similarly gives a primacy to biography in her article entitled 'Emigration as Taking Roots and Giving Wings: Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdyaev and Mother Maria Skobtsova.' Bauerova's third article on Mother Maria Skobtsova explores motherhood; 'Motherhood as a Space for the Other: A Dialogue between Mother Maria Skobtsova and Hélène Cixous'. Once again, Skobtsova's biography is an important consideration for Bauerova, as she maps Skobtsova's thought as well as experiences around motherhood. In this article Bauerova also incorporates Skobtsova's iconography, her poetry, and her writings. Bauerova's exposition of Skobtsova's own work is accurate, the comparisons, however, leave relatively little space for extensive critical engagement with Skobtsova's system. More work can be done, therefore, to provide a well-developed exposition of Skobtsova's wider oeuvre to further these creative engagements which balances Skobtsova's biography with her theology.

Most recently, Rowan Williams has made a significant contribution to secondary literature on Skobtsova's thought in his book 'Looking East in Winter' in a

Roots and Giving Wings: Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdyaev and Mother Maria Skobtsova," *Communio Viatorum* 54, no. 2, (2012): 184-202.

chapter entitled ‘The Body of Christ and the Ministry of Mary’.⁶⁶ Williams engages with a breadth of primary sources as well as secondary literature by offering an ‘interim report on some of her more original insights.’⁶⁷ Williams draws on some contemporary scholarship, including Natalia Ermolaev’s PhD thesis and the work of Katerina Bauerova. This immediately advances the field of engagement with Skobtsova’s theological writings and provides a helpful insight into her wider system, pulling out points of particular interest such as the ‘terrible’ aspect of the command to love the neighbour, and the ‘unchosen’ solidarity with the other which is found in the Body of Christ.⁶⁸ In this light, Williams clearly recognises the importance of selflessness in Skobtsova’s work, noting that for Skobtsova, ‘...sin becomes a refusal to be touched by the pain of others.’⁶⁹ Williams highlights this aspect of Skobtsova’s thought from the perspective of her Mariology and the solidarity which is found in the Body of Christ. This thesis seeks to develop these observations by providing an exposition of additional texts which Williams does not engage with, including Skobtsova’s early hagiographical works and her writings on creativity. I suggest that an appreciation of the place of sacrifice in these works adds another level to the nature of solidarity and unity which Skobtsova promotes. This echoes the overall argument of this thesis which highlights the theme of sacrifice as a key interpretative lens through which to read Skobtsova’s theological works; to suggest what it means to be truly human (to sacrifice the self) and to ‘create’ authentically by loving God and the neighbour. Sacrifice will be shown as the means by which to maintain wholeness.

7. Structure of thesis

⁶⁶ Rowan Williams, *Looking East in Winter: Contemporary Thought and the Eastern Christian Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2021), 216-240.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁶⁸ See especially, *Ibid.*, 228-232.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

The first chapter of this thesis will provide a short biography for Skobtsova. Biographical details will be highlighted throughout this thesis, but a biographical sketch will be helpful to begin this exploration and to place each later scene into a wider context. This biography will reference key points in Skobtsova's life in relation to her theological development. This includes events in her own life which impacted her intellectual development, such as her encounters with her most influential interlocutors. It will also highlight the personal events which formed and shaped her monastic vocation and personal faith. Finally, Skobtsova's education will be noted, with particular reference to formal and informal theological learning in Russia and Paris. Skobtsova's publications will be noted alongside these events in order to see the progression of theological thought in her essays within the context of her wider biography. This chapter will also highlight the relationship between theology and biography in Skobtsova's work, building on some of the observations from the introduction to this thesis about Skobtsova's writing style and methodology. Furthermore, it will suggest that a careful analysis of the relationship between theology and biography is required to accurately assess Skobtsova's life and legacy, which has been lacking in some secondary literature on Skobtsova's thought.

The second chapter of this thesis will explore Skobtsova's Russian influences, the philosophical and theological themes which she uses that are characteristically Russian, the 'Russian Idea', symbolising not only Russia and its place in the world and history, but also the philosophical and theological legacy of Russian thinkers, and how this relates to their native land. Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948) characterised Skobtsova as a 'revolutionary Slavophile'.⁷⁰ Similarly, although far more negatively,

⁷⁰ An English translation of this is available at: N. A. Berdyaev, "In Memory of Mother Maria" in E. Skobtsova (Mother Maria), *The Crucible of Doubts*, trans. Fr S. Janos (Mohrsville, PA: FRSJ Publications, 2016), i-ii.

Myrrha Lot-Borodine heavily criticised (what she perceived as) Skobtsova's nationalism towards Russia and her longing for the past:

'...it was painful to listen to the epigones of Russian messianism, claiming to be 'the incarnation of Christ by the new Israel', as Mother Maria put it. – she is a remarkable person of her kind, but an eternally dilettantish improviser with an all too narrow Slavophile outlook. I myself broke with my old homeland too long ago to have a say in this difficult and burning issue.'⁷¹

In light of these assessments by Lot-Borodine and Berdyaev, this chapter will unveil the complexity of Skobtsova's relationship with Russia.

A central concern for this chapter will be the concept of the 'third Rome'. For Centuries, Russian theology and philosophy has grappled with the notion that Moscow is the 'third Rome'. Following the fall of the Byzantine Empire, some Russian thinkers identified Moscow as the third and final primary seat of Christian power. This is connected to the notion of Russian messianism; the idea that Russia has a particular Christian vocation, which it inherits from Israel. Ideologically, therefore, there is a significant precedent for the primacy of Russia on the world stage, which is reflected in Russian thought. Skobtsova engages extensively with this tradition and, as I will suggest in this chapter, modifies this 'Russian idea' for her own context and theological milieu. In this chapter, we shall explore how Skobtsova engages with this Russian legacy, and its importance for her own thought. We shall also explore, more broadly, the Russian influences on Skobtsova's life and work.

The three main Russian influences throughout Skobtsova's work are Vladimir Soloviev, Alexsei Khomiakov, and Feodor Dostoevsky. Skobtsova is especially

⁷¹ '...было тягостно слушать эпигонов русского мессианизма, претендующего на «воплощение Христа новым Израилем», как выразилась мать Мария. — Человек она замечательный в своем роде, только вечный дилетант-импровизатор со слишком узким славянофильским кругозором. Сама я слишком давно порвала со старой родиной, чтобы иметь право голоса в этом сложном и жгучем вопросе.' Письмо М. И. Лот-Бородиной к Н. А. Бердяеву от 2 ноября 1933 г. // РГАЛИ. Ф. 1496. Оп. 1. Ед. хр. 588. Cited in Тереза Оболевич, *Миrrha Лот-Бородина Историк, Литератор, Философ, Богослов* (Санкт-Петербург: Нестор-История, 2020), 153.

influenced by the Slavophiles, as this selection suggests. The term ‘Slavophile’ refers to thinkers in the 19th Century who held a particular view of Russia. This again relates to the idea of Russia as a ‘third Rome’. Several of these thinkers were concerned with the particularities of Slavic culture, in contradistinction to Western tradition and ideals. Skobtsova also engages with Russian thinkers such as Alexander Herzen, Vasily Rozanov, and Konstantin Leontiev. The principal ideas which she uses from the Russian Silver Age are the concepts of *sobornost’*, *Godmanhood* and all-unity. In addition to the Slavophiles, the Symbolists have an important impact on Skobtsova’s work. Although the Symbolist movement was primarily literary (in poetry, prose, drama etc.), this is a world which Skobtsova inhabited in St Petersburg and, as I suggest, has an impact on her later theological legacy as well as her poetry.

Skobtsova reflects on emigration heavily throughout her writings. She notes the spiritual benefits of being in a new kind of freedom. She describes this as a loss of ‘weightiness [весомость]’ and a becoming ‘unbound.’⁷² In the course of this chapter, we shall explore Skobtsova’s reflections on emigration and freedom in relation to spiritual life. I shall suggest that the loss of Skobtsova’s homeland is a form of self-loss which is akin to her emphasis on non-possession and a kenotic understanding of the human person.

Despite writing of the spiritual benefits of emigration, Skobtsova is not tempted by the West, and ideologically remains extremely Russian. There are extremely few Western thinkers with whom Skobtsova engages directly in her

⁷² ‘It is as though we have lost our weightiness, lost our corporeality, acquired an enormous mobility and lightness, become unbound.’ Skobtsova, “Under the Sign of our Time,” EW, 109. What Pevear and Volokhonsky translate here as ‘unbound’ is the reflexive form of *расковывать/расковать* which means to unshackle: ‘Мы как бы теряем весомость, теряем телесность, приобретает огромную удобоподвижность, легкость, расковываемся’. Мать Мария (Скобцова), “Под знаком нашего времени,” in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 253.

writings. This does not mean that she was not impacted by Western thinking, rather it shows how Russo-centric her thought remained even in emigration. Theologically, she elevates Russian *thought* to the place of the third Rome or the new Israel. It is the concepts of Russian theology, I suggest, which she wishes to promote. The concepts of *Godmanhood* and *sobornost* are the things which Russia gives to the world, and which the world must respond to. This is how she maintains her Russian ideology with the freedom of exile. It is the nature of the Russian thought on which she relies which allows her own thought to avoid a narrow nationalism. In her reflections on the future of the Russian church, she is concerned about a decline in antinomian thinking, for duality and nuance. In the later chapter on culture and creativity, we shall see how her treatment of politics is also critical of nationalist tendencies and exclusive or totalitarian worldviews.

The third chapter in this thesis focuses on a two-volume hagiographical work written by Skobtsova in 1927 entitled '*Zhatva Dukha* [The Harvest of the Spirit]'. This work consists of stylised retellings of the lives of eight saints in the Orthodox Church. This interest in the lives of the Saints of the early Church is not uncommon in the Russian emigre community in Paris. Skobtsova's colleague G. Fedotov writes extensively on this theme, as do several other theologians and historians in Skobtsova's immediate circle. The Saints which Skobtsova writes about lived between the 3rd Century and the 8th Century. In this chapter I suggest that this collection, which is some of the earliest theological writings by Skobtsova, represents a foundational insight into her theology. In a work of hagiography, I suggest, the author is present in the narrative alongside the protagonist whose life it retells. Skobtsova is present in these works not only by the way in which she retells the tales (which episodes she chooses to emphasise), but also in her use of language, theme and

in the very selection of which Saints she has written about. Therefore, it is possible to get a sense of Skobtsova's early theology by assessing how she is retelling these lives. A theme which emerges strongly from this collection is sacrifice which is expressed in various forms; in martyrdom, asceticism, non-possession, poverty, and humility. These forms of sacrifice seek to maintain a balance between loving God and the neighbour and, I suggest, act as a foundation for Skobtsova's own theology.

This notion is supported by Sergei Hackel who, in 'Pearl of Great Price', reflects on the notion of 'instrumentality' in 'Harvest of the Spirit'.⁷³ He recollects in Mochulsky's reminiscence that Skobtsova said to a friend in 1934, 'God has made me into an instrument for others to flourish with my help.'⁷⁴ Hackel continues; 'In the brief anthology of saints' lives which she published in 1927 she went out of her way to stress the importance of such 'instrumentality'...Her narratives were stylized versions of ancient and already stylized tales. But she was taking stock of herself in their light.'⁷⁵ From these lives, certain key themes emerge. These include a focus on personal and shared asceticism, monasticism and a movement into the world, non-possession, sacrifice, martyrdom and spiritual guidance (including the role of *starets*). The way in which Skobtsova incorporates these themes proves informative for her later theological essays. I also suggest that in this work Skobtsova is seeking an Orthodox, early-Church basis and precedent for her own theological interpretations in the areas of asceticism, monasticism, and human communion especially. The main theme to emerge is a personal asceticism which overflows into a spiritual communion

⁷³ Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 15.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

with the other that manifests in acts of service, a commitment to non-possession, sacrifice and, on occasion, martyrdom.

Continuing the themes which are explored in '*Zhatva Dukha*', in the fourth chapter we shall turn to Skobtsova's theological essays and the place of asceticism in her work. In a similar way to the suggestions in '*Zhatva Dukha*', in Skobtsova's more constructive theological essays, she also frames asceticism in the context of engagement with society. We have already noted Skobtsova's desire to discuss asceticism in the context of 'going to the world'. However, this poses a problem for the ascetic tradition of the Orthodox church, on which Skobtsova seeks to build. In much ascetic literature, 'the world' is not something to be embraced or something to be assimilated into. Rather, 'the world', is often referenced in negative rhetoric; as something to be renounced, from which the ascetic must remove herself. A central core of Skobtsova's essays turn to the tradition of the Fathers and the Philokalia, searching for a precedent for her own theological notions. This understanding of the world, therefore, poses a problem. This chapter will explore how Skobtsova grapples with this issue, highlighting her treatment of the theology of St Isaac the Syrian. It is Isaac's understanding of 'the world' which Skobtsova uses in order to reinterpret much of the ascetic tradition, and to establish an ascetic theology which does not renounce the neighbour, but encourages (and indeed, demands), a movement into society and engagement with the other in prayerful service.

Once Skobtsova has established this understanding of the world, she proposes the notion of 'the mysticism of human communion'. This is the heart of Skobtsova's theology. Skobtsova's thought in this area wishes to provide a 'going to the world', an active love of the neighbour, with a mystical and spiritual foundation. This will be explored in the fifth chapter, on the ascetical practice of human encounter. Skobtsova

does not want the love of the neighbour to be an after-thought, or an appendix to a systematic theological structure. Rather, the love of God and the love of the neighbour must be inseparable. Skobtsova's 'mysticism of human communion' holds this duality together by suggesting that within human encounter there is an encounter with Christ in the *imago dei* of the person. Understanding Skobtsova's asceticism deepens this notion and opens up the possibility of a shared ascetic practice. This approach to asceticism and a 'going to the world' also inform her monasticism as she seeks to reinterpret core monastic values (chastity, obedience, and non-possession) into a system of 'churching the world'.

This chapter will explore the themes in Skobtsova's essay 'Holy Earth'. In 'Holy Earth', Skobtsova develops an asceticism which focuses on transformation rather than renunciation. Skobtsova maintains that everything on the earth can and must be transformed. Nothing should be renounced, but everything needs to be transformed. This juxtaposes the 'world', which is renounced by some forms of asceticism, and what Skobtsova proposes herself; a transformation of the earth. A person's ascetic task, their *podvig*, is to transform themselves and the earth. On the one hand, this develops a positive theology of the earth. On the other hand, we shall see how this discussion highlights the ideas of sacrifice, co-suffering, and the interconnectivity of ascetic paths between persons, through Skobtsova's emphasis on the transformation of the other. Here an appreciation of Skobtsova's Mariology is highly illuminating to place the notion of co-suffering into a wider theological context.

I argue that this transformative form of asceticism is understood by Skobtsova as a form of creativity. This is alluded to in 'Asceticism' where Skobtsova claims that prayer is the highest form of creativity. In 'Sources of Creativity' Skobtsova outlines

her concept of creativity, which is to be understood as work, action, and labour. We shall explore the way in which she identifies ‘good’ and ‘bad’ creativity and the effect this has on a person’s ascetic task.

I will show the importance of the ascetic and creative task for Skobtsova’s concept of the ‘mysticism of human communion’ where a person wrestles with the *imago dei* in the other. I suggest that in order to understand the significance of the mysticism of human communion, it is vital to appreciate the place of asceticism, transformation, and creativity in Skobtsova’s *oeuvre* as she seeks to maintain the fullness of love towards God and the neighbour.

The sixth and final chapter in this thesis will explore politics and religion in Skobtsova’s thought. This chapter will highlight Skobtsova’s reflections on various political ideologies and her critique of these systems from a theological perspective. This will draw together Skobtsova’s understanding of the creation of culture, and place this in the context of her thought concerning creativity, *sobornost’* and *Godmanhood*. This chapter will suggest that Skobtsova sought to implement this understanding of culture in the group ‘Orthodox Action’. Orthodox Action was formed on the understanding of the wholeness of culture. It reflects a synthesis between the church and broader culture, including political society. This group reflects the theological worldview of Mother Maria Skobtsova and can be appreciated in light of the previous exposition of her spirituality, asceticism, monasticism, theological anthropology, and Mariology.

The conclusion of this thesis will draw together these themes by highlighting the place of sacrifice in Skobtsova’s thought. I shall suggest that Skobtsova sees sacrifice as the key to attaining the sort of wholeness and unity which she promotes.

Here some clarifications will be made about Skobtsova's notion of sacrifice, suggesting that sacrifice is not a glorification of suffering, but an unchosen element within authentic human communion. In doing so, this thesis seeks to provide an exposition of Skobtsova's theological writings, uncovering the uniqueness and creativity of this remarkable modern Orthodox theologian.

Chapter 1: Biography

Mother Maria Skobtsova's extraordinary biography has already been noted in this thesis. Here, a fuller exploration of her life will be undertaken, noting key points in Skobtsova's life in relation to her theological development. This chapter will highlight the events in Skobtsova's life which impacted both her intellectual and spiritual advancement as a theologian and monastic. In addition, Skobtsova's education will be noted, with particular reference to her formal and informal theological education in both Russia and Paris. Alongside this, the journals in which she published her work will be explored, highlighting their own angles and methodologies and how this informs the style and content of particular essays. This is important when assessing the tone and style of Skobtsova's essays. As well as these journals, there are a number of notable friendships and relationships to highlight in Skobtsova's biography which impact her thought. These include Konstantin Pobedonostsev (1827-1907), Aleksandr Blok (1880-1921), Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948), Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944), Metropolitan Evlogy (Georgiyevsky, 1868-1946), Georgi Fedotov (1886-1951), and others. This biographical sketch, which references Skobtsova's major life events, education, publications, and relationships, will help to give shape to the theological context of Mother Maria Skobtsova.

This chapter will place Skobtsova's essays in the context of her biographical timeline.⁷⁶ However, not all of Skobtsova's key theological essays are dated, with some only being published posthumously. Nevertheless, this chapter will seek to place the majority of dated texts in a chronological context. It is worth noting at this stage the variety of names under which Skobtsova published throughout her lifetime.

⁷⁶ As the publication of Skobtsova's collected writings develops, this will undoubtedly expand and open up new areas of exploration.

We have poetry, articles, and essays under several different names and even one pseudonym. Her early poetry was published under the name Elizaveta Kuz'mina-Karavaeva and for several years in the 1920s, Skobtsova published under the pseudonym Iurii Danilov. Following her marriage to Daniil Skobtsov, essays are published under the name Elizaveta Skobtsova and after her monastic tonsuring this is alternated with Mother Maria Skobtsova or *Monakhinia Mariia* (Maria the Nun).

This chapter will also explore the relationship between biography and theology in Skobtsova's work. There is a close connection between the events of Skobtsova's life and her theological writing, often because the one informs the other, and vice versa, as she writes with a desire for practical, spiritual, everyday applicability. Her desire to show love towards the neighbour is apparent in a theological system which reflects on the everyday, and which in turn informs human interactions within a spiritual framework. However, there is a tendency in scholarship on Skobtsova's work to place a greater weight on her biography, over and against her theology. There is a danger that her biography can be used to explain away her theology, rather than allowing her theology to speak 'to itself' from within its own intellectual context. This is why a reflection on the relationship between biography is important at the beginning of an engagement with Skobtsova's theological work. In the case of sacrifice, a careful exploration of the relationship between loss (principally in the death of her loved ones) in Skobtsova's life, and its impact on her spirituality, monasticism, and theology, is helpful for evaluating certain pieces of secondary literature on Skobtsova's thought; an exploration which will be undertaken here.

1. Biography and Theology in Skobtsova's Work

In order to further understand how Skobtsova does theology, in addition to noting some primary concerns such as an emphasis on the human and a theology of wholeness, it is also helpful to parse out the relationship between biography and theology in her theological writings. The relationship between biography and theology is an important one in Skobtsova's work for several reasons. Firstly, the diversity of Skobtsova's life presents us with several clearly delineated periods to consider, most notably the Russian period and the emigration period. It is important to note the particularities of these epochs within Skobtsova's biography and what impact they had on her thought. This will prove important when we begin to assess her relationship with Russia and its intellectual legacy. Secondly, and in relation to this, it is possible to see a relationship between these periods and the style, form, and content of Skobtsova's work. Highlighting these particularities allows us to get an insight also in Skobtsova's methodology, which provides an important contextual lens through which to analyse her essays and assess the secondary literature on her work. The relationship between biography and theology in Skobtsova's work raises thematic and methodological questions about how Skobtsova does theology; how she responds to and critiques contemporary events and her own life experiences in her essays. This exploration will assist in elaborating on my own criticisms of secondary literature on Skobtsova's theological writings which give primacy to biography to the detriment of theological analysis.

Firstly, it is helpful to highlight the periods of Skobtsova's biography. Broadly, there are two periods which are clearly marked in her life: the Russian period and the emigration period in Paris. In the Russian period, Skobtsova's creative output was centred around poetry, philosophy, and prose. In the Parisian period, however, there is a strong emphasis on theological writings. This is noted by Sergei

Hackel who writes that, ‘from 1927 her publications were to be almost entirely devoted to social and theological questions, mostly with a practical application. And it was in this sphere that she was to find her vocation.’⁷⁷ Similarly, Paul Ladouceur marks this turn in Skobtsova’s interests and publications following her arrival in Paris; ‘Si la poésie d’inspiration symboliste domine la création littéraire de la future moniale dans les années précédant son exil, ses écrits prennent une toute autre direction après son arrivée à Paris en 1924.’⁷⁸

The majority of the primary texts which this thesis on her theological writings will engage with come from the Parisian period. However, it is important to avoid binary opposition in these periods or to compartmentalise Skobtsova’s intellectual output in light of her biography. It is possible to see the Parisian period as the monastic, Christian period of service, and the preceding Russian period as the artistic and agnostic. However, these periods in Skobtsova’s life are by no means hermetically sealed. Skobtsova does not cease being a poet when she becomes a nun. Similarly, a brief overview of Skobtsova’s poetic corpus from these St Petersburg years reveals an interest, albeit perhaps a nascent one, in religious themes. The obvious biblical themes in ‘Ruth’ serve as a standout example.⁷⁹ While there are clearly defined periods in Skobtsova’s biography which appear radically opposed to one another (the poet, the politician, the nun), each stage is by no means uninfluenced by, or completely detached from, the other. This is reflected somewhat by Xenia Krivochéine, who recalls Skobtsova recognising art as prayer:

⁷⁷ Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 10.

⁷⁸ Paul Ladouceur, “Avant-Propos et Remerciement” in *Le Jour du Saint-Esprit*, ed. Paul Ladouceur, trans. Hélène Arjakovsky-Klépinine, Françoise Lhoest, Bertran Jeuffrain, Alexandre Nicolsky, Nikita Struve and Jérôme Lefert (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 2011), 11.

⁷⁹ ‘Ruth’ was a collection of 97 poems written by Skobtsova and published in 1916, centred around the biblical character.

‘De 1911 à 1921, ce fut la période russe, remplie de poésie, des premières expositions, des premiers essais philosophiques. Elle était alors imprégnée par l’esprit et la créativité d’Alexandre Blok, de Viatcheslav Ivanov, Nicolas Goumilév, Nathalie Gontcharova, Maximilien Volochine. Mais la future Mère Marie cherchait déjà le chemin de la connaissance de Dieu. Peu à peu, elle délaisse le modernisme et trouve définitivement sa voie dans la poésie et la peinture philosophico-religieuses et symbolistes. Un jour, très jeune encore et sans soupçonner sa vocation, elle avait déclaré : « Mon art est comme une prière ».⁸⁰

Skobtsova’s engagement with philosophical-religious themes can be gradually traced in her early work, as Krivochéine notes here. Any delineation of periods in Skobtsova’s biography, therefore, needs to be balanced with a recognition of continuities throughout her life and a developing progression of theological thought and engagement. Within the Russian period and the emigration period, there are further notable stages in Skobtsova’s life which need to be considered when assessing her creative output. These fall into several categories including the historical situation (world events which impacted Skobtsova’s life and work), the varying intellectual contexts in which she participated, and finally, personal life events such as marriage, births, and deaths.

The tumultuous historical period of the early 20th Century is embodied, in many ways, in the biography of Skobtsova, who lived through some of the most remarkable and rapidly changing events in the period. The Russia of Skobtsova’s childhood, for example, is markedly different to the revolutionary atmosphere of her adolescence in St Petersburg. Skobtsova lived through the First World War, the Russian Revolution, the Russian Civil War (which she experienced in Anapa), and the political realities which followed in Soviet Russia. As an émigré in Paris, she experienced the reality of life for many Russians abroad during the interwar years, and she died in one of the darkest moments of human history – in the Holocaust, at

⁸⁰ Xenia Krivochéine, *La Beauté Salvatrice*, 26.

Ravensbrück Concentration Camp. These historical events not only externally impact Skobtsova's life and work (such as uprooting her from her homeland) they also have an internal significance as she engages ideologically, philosophically, and theologically with current events, in and through her writings.

In this light, and alongside this wide variety of historical events, Skobtsova lived through a series of notable intellectual currents and schools of thought which can be placed against particular periods in her life. Her adolescence and early adulthood in St Petersburg were marked by the Symbolist movement of that time, which shapes not only her poetry but also impacts her theological work (something which will be explored in 'The Russian Idea' chapter in this thesis). Similarly, her political work in Anapa is defined by the struggles between populism, socialism, and Bolshevism; political struggles which develop and take new forms in the context of 1940's France, and which are reflected in her essays. Theologically, the Parisian school of Orthodox theology is a particular movement in which Skobtsova was very active and which is characterised by several distinct intellectual trends.

Alongside these historical moments and ideological currents, there are notable events in Skobtsova's personal life which have a profound effect not only on her life but also her work. These include the death of her father and, several years later, the death of her youngest daughter. Commentators on Skobtsova's life and work have repeatedly noted the impact of these deaths on Skobtsova's theological development and her evolving religious commitments (something which will be returned to in due course). Similarly, the experience of emigration deeply impacts Skobtsova's life and thought, as does the decision to take monastic vows and become committed to a life of service. The personal experience which has been most noted in Skobtsova's life is her role as a mother to three children. Indeed, there is a clear connection between her

theological reflections in areas such as Mariology and theological anthropology with her own experience as a mother.

The close relationship between biography and theology in Skobtsova's legacy within English-language scholarship can be traced back to Sergei Hackel's seminal biography, 'Pearl of Great Price'. Hackel's biography weaves subtle theological analysis into the biographical picture of Skobtsova. For example, he attributes Skobtsova's loss of faith in her adolescence with the death of her father, and conversely her decision to become a nun with the death of her daughter. We see Hackel's influence throughout the vast majority of scholarship on Skobtsova. In light of this, when assessing secondary literature on Skobtsova's thought, it is important to assess how biographical exposition is balanced with critical, sustained engagement with her intellectual output.

2. Early Life

Mother Maria Skobtsova was born as Elizaveta Pilenko in Riga on 8th December 1891. Elizaveta was born into a reasonably wealthy and intellectual family. Her parents were Sophia Borissovna Pilenko (1893-1962) and Youri Dimitrievitch Pilenko (1857-1906)⁸¹, who married at the beginning of 1891 and had two children: Elizaveta and Dimitri (Mitia), who was born in 1893. Despite being born in Riga (where Elizaveta's maternal grandparents lived), the family estate (on her Father's side) was in Anapa, a town in the South of Russia on the coast of the Black Sea. After the death of Elizaveta's maternal grandparents, the family moved to Anapa in 1895.

⁸¹ Sophia Pilenko came from an aristocratic line of the Dmitriev-Mamonov family (on her mother's side). Sophia's maiden name was de Launay and she was descended on her father's side from a French doctor who remained in Russia after the Napoleonic campaign. Mother Maria's father, Youri Dimitrievitch Pilenko, was from Cossack nobility.

Elizaveta grew up in Anapa and attended the local schools where she showed academic promise from an early age, alongside an interest in spirituality and faith. Elizaveta was born as the ‘Golden Age’ of Russian literature was drawing to a close, and the ‘Silver Age’ was emerging, which is reflected in her childhood interests. As a child, she often cited lines by Constantin Balmont (1867-1942) and as a teen she was interested in the poetry of Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841) and Aleksandr Blok (1880-1921).⁸² Elizaveta was taught by a governess until the age of eleven when she was admitted to the lycée at Novorossiysk. In addition to academic ability, the young Elizaveta showed an interest in religion. She saved up money as a child to contribute towards a mural of her patron saint in the local church.⁸³ She also had an aspiration to become a nun from an early age, as well as a pilgrim, as Sergei Hackel recounts; ‘The restless nun of future years can also be perceived in the seven-year-old who came to ask her mother whether she might leave home for a convent. Her mother’s refusal did not deflect her from such plans. Within a year she was back with a request (also to be refused) for an internal passport: she wished to trek with pilgrims from monastery to monastery, from holy place to holy place.’⁸⁴ In Elizaveta’s childhood, we see an early awareness of poetry and literature, alongside an emerging interest in faith, pilgrimage, service, and even monasticism.

3. Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev

As a child, a friendship formed between the young Elizaveta Pilenko and Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev (1827-1907). Pobedonostsev’s views, and his associated

⁸² Sophie Pilenko, *Le Jour du Saint-Esprit*, 37. Hélène Arjakovsky-Klépinine notes that Elizaveta learned by heart the words of Lermontov’s ‘*mtsyri*’ which is a poem about a monastic novice. See: Mère Marie Skobtsov, *Le sacrement du frère*, trans. Hélène Arjakovsky-Klépinine, Françoise Lhoest and Claire Vajou (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 17.

⁸³ Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 75.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

political career within the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, are markedly different to the revolutionary thought and actions of the future Mother Maria Skobtsova. However, as a child Elizaveta Pilenko was, somewhat surprisingly, a close friend of Pobedonostsev. Skobtsova reflects on their relationship and the way in which it develops and changes in her article entitled, 'Friend of my Childhood'.⁸⁵ This short childhood memoir reveals not only the revolutionary sympathies which emerged in Skobtsova's childhood, but also the dedication to 'the people' and a commitment to the neighbour which informs her later theological thought.

Pobedonostsev held the most senior administrative position in the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church from 1880-1905. This position granted him immense power not only over religious matters but also over education, domestic policy, and censorship. Pobedonostsev advocated for the absolutism of the Monarchy, and he promoted a strongly authoritarian and anti-Western rhetoric. Prior to his position in the Holy Synod, he had served as a private tutor and adviser to Alexander III. Robert F Byrnes notes that Pobedonostsev, 'denounced the 18th-century Enlightenment view of the perfectibility of man and of society and therefore strongly supported paternalistic and authoritarian government. He looked upon each nation as being based on the land, the family, and the national church, and he regarded the maintenance of stability as the principal purpose of government.'⁸⁶ It is unsurprising, therefore, that he was perceived as the enemy of revolutionaries at the turn of the 20th Century. Byrnes suggests that Pobedonostsev's influence has been exaggerated, 'largely because his personality, appearance, and known views superbly qualified him

⁸⁵ Мать Мария (Скобцова), "Друг Моего Детства [Friend of my Childhood]," *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 1 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 11-23.

⁸⁶ Robert F. Byrnes "Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev" in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, May 17, 2020: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Konstantin-Petrovich-Pobedonostsev>. Accessed November 23, 2020. See also Robert F. Byrnes *Pobedonostsev: His Life and Thought* (Bloomington and London 1968).

as the symbol of a system of government deeply unpopular among many educated Russians and among all liberals and radicals.’⁸⁷

Andrzej Walicki makes a similar assessment of Pobedonostsev’s importance in Russian history, describing him as, ‘neither an original nor an interesting thinker.’ Walicki continues to note that his place in Russian intellectual history, if he has one, is, ‘mainly as a typical and influential representative of reactionary thought during the crisis of Russian absolutism.’⁸⁸ As Byrnes notes, Walicki confirms the centrality of absolutism in Pobedonostsev’s thought, and observes his negative reaction to Western European thought of the innate goodness of humanity. Pobedonostsev’s absolutism which is found in the Monarchy and in the family-structure was necessary for him in order to stabilise and conserve social harmony in the face of a humanity which is not inherently good. This is one area where his thought differs to the Slavophiles, as Walicki notes; ‘In contrast to the Slavophiles, Pobedonostsev did not believe in the fellowship of *sobornost*’, since he could not have reconciled such a belief with his deep conviction that man’s weak and indeed wicked nature required strong discipline imposed from without.’⁸⁹

Pobedonostsev was a friend and close neighbour of Elizaveta’s great-aunt, E. A. Iafimovich. From the age of five until she was thirteen, Elizaveta would visit Pobedonostsev when she was staying with her great-aunt.⁹⁰ An unlikely friendship formed between the young girl and the old man. Due to their closeness, Elizaveta did

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 297.

⁸⁹ Walicki, *History of Russian Thought*, 299.

⁹⁰ Skobtsova’s great-aunt was an aristocrat in St Petersburg. In ‘Friend of My Childhood’, Skobtsova notes that she treated all people equally, despite her elevated social status: See: Мать Мария (Скобцова), “Друг Моего Детства [Friend of my Childhood],” *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 1 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 14.

not perceive Pobedonostsev as a statesman or a politician, but as a friend.⁹¹ It was not until Elizaveta grew older that she became aware of social criticisms of Pobedonostsev. Elizaveta became largely sympathetic to the cause of the 1905 revolution and was influenced by the culture and discussions around her father's place of work in Yalta.⁹² However, Elizaveta remained loyal to her friend Pobedonostsev and saw criticisms of his character as a personal betrayal. Nevertheless, disturbed by this conflict of loyalties, in 1906 she confronted Pobedonostsev with a question. This was Pilate's question, 'what is truth?' To this, Pobedonostsev replied:

'My dear friend, Lizanka! The truth is in love, of course. But many people think that the truth is in love for those who are far away. Love for those who are far away is not love. If everyone loved their own neighbour, those who are close to them, those who are really near to them, then love for those who are far away would not be necessary.'⁹³

This answer did not satisfy Elizaveta, and her correspondence with Pobedonostsev gradually ceased after this meeting. In light of Skobtsova's future theological and political engagement, it is appropriate and revealing that it was a question about the neighbour and the nature of love which prompted the final dissolution of the friendship between Elizaveta and Pobedonostsev. It was a concern for 'the people' which characterises much of Skobtsova's early political engagement. In later years, we see how this unfolds in her role as Mayor of the town of Anapa and her affiliation with the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, which will be explored further in the course of this thesis.

⁹¹ '...воспринимала я Победоносцева не как государственного деятеля, не как идеолога реакции царствования Александра III, а исключительно как человека, как старика, повышенно нежно относящегося к детям.' Skobtsova, "Friend of my Childhood," 11.

⁹² See Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 77-78.

⁹³ 'Милый мой друг, Лизанька! Истина в любви, конечно. Но многие думают, что истина в любви к дальнему. Любовь к дальнему — не любовь. Если бы каждый любил своего ближнего, настоящего ближнего, находящегося действительно около него, то любовь к дальнему не была бы нужна.' Skobtsova, "Friend of My Childhood," 22-3.

4. Death of Elizaveta's Father

In addition to Elizaveta's childhood friendship with Pobedonostsev, her relationship with her father was formative for her later life. Tragically, on 17th July 1906, Elizaveta's father, Youri, died. This had a profound effect on Elizaveta, as Sophia Pilenko notes, 'Ce fut un événement très pénible pour nous tous et un premier choc dans la vie de Lisa. Il lui sembla que Dieu était injuste d'avoir permis que meure un homme encore jeune, actif et honnête, et son âme fut bouleversée par une pénible lutte pour ne pas perdre la foi.'⁹⁴ Sophia notes how the death of her father seemed unjust to Elizaveta and, to a certain extent, destabilised her childhood faith. Elizaveta reflects herself on this struggle thirty years later, in 1936:

'My father was dead. And the thought in my head was a simple one: "This death is needed by no one. It is an injustice. That means there is no justice. And if there is no justice there is no just God. Yet if there is no just God, that means that there is no God at all."

No doubts, no arguments to counter such a deduction. Poor world, in which there is no God, in which death has dominion, poor people, poor me, who has suddenly grown adult since I have uncovered the adults' secret that there is no God, and that the world is ridden with grief, evil and injustice. So ended childhood.'⁹⁵

The destabilizing event of her father's death impacts Elizaveta's spiritual development. Indeed, this death is often noted as an important moment in her theological development. Sergei Hackel notes this biographical detail as a watershed moment; something which is taken up in numerous summaries of Mother Maria's early life and incorporated into theological understandings of her work. Hackel links the death of Skobtsova's father with her move towards 'the people' and away from established religion.⁹⁶ Other commentators define this moment as Elizaveta's loss of

⁹⁴ Sophie Pilenko, *Le Jour du Saint-Esprit*, 44.

⁹⁵ Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 76.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

faith, which she regains in Paris. Jim Forest in his introduction to the ‘Essential Writings’ of Skobtsova writes; ‘When she was fourteen, her father died, an event that seemed to her meaningless and unjust and led her to atheism.’⁹⁷

While the death of her father undoubtedly had a profound effect on Skobtsova’s personal theological development, this experience needs to be understood and nuanced through Skobtsova’s own autobiographical reflections. Skobtsova’s recollections of her father’s death, as noted in ‘Encounters with Blok’, are described in the context of depression. The death of her father precipitated a period of melancholy during the family’s stay in St Petersburg, which Skobtsova describes in vivid and colourful prose, highlighting the nihilistic attitude she had towards life in this adolescent period. Skobtsova notes, however, how a cousin helped her out of this period of melancholy (which Skobtsova herself describes as ‘pathetic melancholy’ and a decadent ‘belief in nonsense’).⁹⁸ This adds a contextual nuance to her cry of rebellion against God (which must also be understood in the context of intense grief), which is often interpreted in more absolute terms in biographical sketches, as in the case of Forest.

A more nuanced approach to death in Skobtsova’s life and writings, however, can be found in Paul Ladouceur’s article in *Sobornost*.⁹⁹ Ladouceur places Skobtsova’s recollections on her father’s death in the context of a battle with faith (picking up Sophia Pilenko’s observation about Elizaveta’s struggle), rather than a total loss of faith. Ladouceur, commenting on Skobtsova’s struggle with God,

⁹⁷ Jim Forest, “Introduction: Mother Maria of Paris”, in *Essential Writings*, 14.

⁹⁸ ‘Родные решили выбить меня из колеи патетической тоски и веры в бессмыслицу.’ Мать Мария (Скобцова), “Встречи с Блоком [Encounters with Blok],” *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 1 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 26.

⁹⁹ Paul Ladouceur, “The experience and understanding of death in Saint Maria of Paris,” *Sobornost* 28, no. 1 (2006): 21-40.

remarks: ‘It was a struggle in which, while recognizing the existence of God - Lisa never completely ‘lost her faith’ - she sought to escape Him, to live her life and fulfil herself without God.’¹⁰⁰ Ladouceur’s observations provide a more nuanced depiction of the development of faith in a young person’s life who has faced grief and loss.

Elizaveta Pilenko’s childhood and early adolescence is characterised by a shifting and, in many ways, destabilizing period in her own life. This is evident in Elizaveta’s early struggles with faith as she was faced with death and suffering, and her notion of God was called into question. This is mirrored by the setting of a tumultuous period in Russian history. The landscape of nobility into which she was born, and the political outlook of her upbringing were both to dramatically change in the first decade of the 20th Century. Elizaveta Pilenko experiences her own shifts as both her political and spiritual sensibilities develop and transition through adolescence. These transitions and developments deepen as she moves to St Petersburg and is surrounded by the cultural milieu of the intelligentsia.

5. St Petersburg

As we have already noted, following the death of her Father, Elizaveta moved with her family to St Petersburg in 1906. Elizaveta’s years in St Petersburg were shaped by the intellectual environment of the city; its artists, poets, and thinkers. She entered St Petersburg at a fruitful and productive time for intellectual discussion. The year after Elizaveta’s arrival in 1907, for example, the meetings of the St Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Society began which included Dmitry Merezhkovsky (1866-1941), Zinaida Gippius (1869-1945), and Vasily Rozanov (1856-1919). The intellectual environment had been shaped and influenced (constructively and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 23.

reactionarily) by the creativity of the Silver Age; of Dostoevsky, Soloviev, Herzen and others.

In St Petersburg, Elizaveta attended the Tagantsev and Stoiunin Gymnasiums. Following this, she was a student of the Bestuzhev Courses for Women, which was the first institution in Russia for women's education at a higher level, founded in 1878. Elizaveta enrolled on this programme in September 1909, in the history and philosophy department, but did not continue beyond the first year. She focused on philosophy, but also took courses in law with Professor Leon Petrażycki. On this course, Larissa Ageeva notes that Elizaveta would have heard the lectures of S. Frank and N. Lossky.¹⁰¹

In 1910 Elizaveta married Dmitry Kuz'min-Karavaev (1885-1959). Dmitry was a young revolutionary who came from an intellectual and well-connected family. His father had been Deputy to the State Duma and was a professor of law, and the family knew Vladimir Soloviev. Kuz'min-Karavaev himself was an Old Bolshevik. He joined the Bolshevik Party in 1905 and even spent a short time in prison for his political activity in 1907. However, Hackel notes that by the time of his marriage to Elizaveta, his interests and social context were beginning to change; 'He had gravitated towards the intellectual and artistic circles of the capital; he delighted in his new reputation as decadent and aesthete.'¹⁰² Elizaveta was also at the centre of this world and, along with Dmitry, they attended Vyacheslav Ivanov's 'Tower'¹⁰³, and various artistic and philosophical salons in St Petersburg. Here Elizaveta's poetic work developed. In November 1911, Elizaveta reads her poetry at The Tower, in the

¹⁰¹ See Лариса Агеева, *Петербург Меня Победил: Документальное Повествование о Жизни Э. Ю. Кузьминой-Караваевой, Матери Марии* (Санкт-Петербург: Журнал Нева, 2003), 135.

¹⁰² Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 79.

¹⁰³ The home of Ivanov, known as 'the tower', where salons were held.

presence of Aleksandr Blok. Elizaveta had first met Blok (who was around ten years her senior) when she was fifteen years old, in February 1908, and this first meeting was the beginning of a long and creatively fruitful friendship. In the following years, from 1912-1916, Elizaveta has correspondence with Blok¹⁰⁴ and was publishing her own poetry. In 1912 she published ‘Scythian Shards [Скифские черепки]’ which was a collection of 34 poems, and ‘The Road [Дорога]’ was written between 1912-13.¹⁰⁵

In addition to an education at Bestuzhev, Elizaveta also had a connection with the St Petersburg Theological Academy. She wished to attend the courses there, but this opportunity was not available for women, even to audit the course. In a meeting with the Rector of the Academy, however, an agreement was made that Liza could receive the readings, study them on her own, and her work would be reviewed by the professors. The reaction of the professors, however, reflects the attitude to women’s education at the time:

‘Elle alla un jour à la Laure Saint-Alexandre-Nevski voir le recteur de l’Académie de théologie. Il lui dit qu’il ne pouvait pas l’accepter comme auditrice, car seuls les hommes étaient admis aux cours, mais qu’il lui enverrait le texte des cours, et qu’après s’être préparée, elle pourrait aller passer les examens de chaque matière chez les professeurs à leur domicile. C’est ce qu’elle fit, mais deux professeurs ne la reçurent pas, l’un était, semblait-il, malade, et l’autre déclara : « Pas question de la recevoir ! Et si c’était une terroriste ? Où a-t-on vu qu’une femme suivre des cours de théologie ? » Les autres professeurs lui décernèrent des mentions « très satisfaisant ».’¹⁰⁶

Unfortunately, there are no records of Elizaveta’s attendance at the Academy beyond this biographical reflection. Nevertheless, this note of Elizaveta’s auditing of the course, and the observation that her formally unrecognised work was ‘very

¹⁰⁴ Skobtsova’s friendship with Blok will be explored in greater detail in ‘The Russian Idea’ chapter of this thesis.

¹⁰⁵ Е. Кузьмина-Караваева, *Скифские черепки* (СПб.: Цех поэтов, 1912).

¹⁰⁶ Sophie Pilenko, *Le Jour du Saint-Esprit*, 49.

satisfying’, is a significant part of her biography and her theological development in itself.

In the winter of 1912 until the summer of 1913, Elizaveta resides in Anapa after returning there from St Petersburg. Around this time, Elizaveta appears to be drifting apart from Dmitry. Indeed, Elizaveta separates from Kuz’min-Karavaev in the summer of 1913. Following her separation from Kuz’min-Karavaev and her departure from St Petersburg, Elizaveta fell in love with a man whose identity remains unknown. She had a child with this man, whom she named Gaiana; the earthly one.¹⁰⁷ During this period, Elizaveta continues to write poetry and short stories. In 1915, Elizaveta wrote ‘Yurali’ which is a prose poem about a young man who is a singer, a storyteller, and a wise teacher.¹⁰⁸ ‘Ruth’ was published in 1916 and consisted of 97 poems about the life of the biblical character, with reference to the approach of the First World War.¹⁰⁹ The long poem inspired by the Symbolists, ‘Melmoth the Wanderer’, was finished in 1917.¹¹⁰

6. Return to Anapa and Political Involvement

Once Elizaveta had moved back to Anapa, she became involved in politics. She was an active member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party (Партия социалистов-революционеров), which was formed in 1902. The party supported democratic processes, held socialist beliefs, sought to overthrow the Tsar and distribute land to the peasantry. The party had a large following in Anapa in the years leading up to the Revolution and Elizaveta attended their annual party conference in 1917.¹¹¹ The

¹⁰⁷ Gaiana was born on 18th October 1913.

¹⁰⁸ Е. Кузьмина-Караваева. *Юрали* (Петроград, 1915).

¹⁰⁹ Е. Кузьмина-Караваева, *Руфь* (Петроград, 1916).

¹¹⁰ Later in her life, *Stikhi* was published (Berlin: Petropolis, 1937). This is a sizeable collection of poems; the original copy was illustrated with 48 pen and ink drawings. Another collection of poems entitled *Stikhi* was published after her death (Paris, 1949).

¹¹¹ Skobtsova’s involvement in politics will be explored further in chapter three of this thesis.

following year, in February 1918, Elizaveta was elected as Anapa's deputy mayor. Soon after her election, the mayor stood down and so Elizaveta became the acting mayor. This was a dangerous time to be involved in politics and she received threats from the Bolsheviks. She spent one summer away from Anapa and, on her return, she was imprisoned and placed on trial for suspected anti-Bolshevik activity. She was assisted in her trial by Daniil Skobtsov (1884-1968), whom Hackel describes as a moderate member of the anti-Bolshevik government of the Kuban.¹¹² Skobtsov intervened in Elizaveta's trial and helped to reduce her sentence to two months imprisonment, which were later suspended altogether. Following this, they developed a romantic relationship and Elizaveta married Daniil, becoming Elizaveta Skobtsova, in Autumn 1919.

Elizaveta, Daniil and Gaiana left Russia in 1920, in the context of civil war. At this time, there was an exodus of intellectuals from Russia. In April of this year, Skobtsova's brother, D. Pilenko, died from typhus in April 1920. Elizaveta left separately to her husband by steamer and was accompanied by her mother and Gaiana, firstly to Georgia, where her son Iura was born. A few months later Elizaveta and Daniil were reunited in Constantinople before they all moved on, once again, finally arriving in Paris in 1923 after three years of travelling. Between 1922-1923, many of Russia's leading thinkers were exiled from Russia, following Lenin's decree in 1922 of forced expulsion of 'reactionaries' who presented a perceived challenge to the Bolshevik worldview. The first ships which carried away these intellectuals in 1922 were dubbed the 'philosophy steamers.' The Skobtsovs, therefore, were not alone in their exile from Russia. Paris, especially, had become a centre for Russian

¹¹² Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 9.

émigrés who brought their creativity and culture with them, creating a productive artistic environment in France.

7. Emigration

The emigration period of Skobtsova's life will be the primary focus of this study, as this is where she wrote the majority of her theological works, where she became a monastic, and where her social work flourished. Her life in emigration is shaped by hardship (as a refugee, and through personal loss), but also by theological exploration, social action, and monasticism. Life in Paris was difficult for Skobtsova and her family. As political refugees, they did not have much money or security. Skobtsova used her needlework skills to make money through embroidery and her husband became a taxi driver. This situation was very common for Russian émigrés. In the early 1920's, France were relatively forthcoming in supplying work permits for Russians following a deficiency in labour as a result of the First World War. Marc Raeff notes, however, this openness did not cover 'liberal professions' such as doctors, teachers, and lawyers, for which the level of requirements required restricted accessibility for Russian émigrés.¹¹³ Nevertheless, Paris became the 'capital' of Russia abroad.

Against the backdrop of an already difficult environment, the family situation worsened for the Skobtsovs when their daughter, Anastasia, died on March 7th 1926 from meningitis. Hackel highlights the impact that this tragic event had on Skobtsova's spiritual development, as she seeks to make sense of death. Skobtsova herself wrote:

¹¹³ Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 37-8.

‘At Nastia’s side I feel that my soul has meandered down back alleys all my life. And now I want an authentic and a purified road, not out of faith in life, but in order to justify, understand and accept death [...]. No amount of thought will ever result in any greater formulation than the three words, ‘Love one another’, so long as it is [love] to the end and without exceptions. And then the whole of life is illumined, which is otherwise an abomination and a burden.’¹¹⁴

Hackel notes that concern for their daughter had kept the Skobtsovs together in Paris but following her death they grew further apart. ‘In the cold, prosaic daylight of the emigration, the considerable differences between them - social, emotional and intellectual - began to manifest themselves ever more painfully.’¹¹⁵ Elizaveta and Daniil separated in 1927. Daniil moved out of their home at the time and took their son, Iura, with him.

Despite the difficulties of emigration and exile, Skobtsova continued with creative work. She was a friend of the iconographer Sister Joanna Reitlinger, with whom she collaborated on artistic endeavours. Elisabeth Roberts, in a recollection entitled, ‘A True Theologian: The Icon Painter Sister Joanna’¹¹⁶, notes that Sr Joanna attended the atelier of Maurice Denis in Paris named ‘Ateliers d’Art Sacré’ which Sr Julia joined in 1925. Skobtsova attended the embroidery classes here and Reitlinger collaborated on works in this class with Skobtsova. Sr Joanna drew the outline of figures which Skobtsova embroidered around, adding jewels. This Atelier required the participants to see a connection between their art and their faith; something which was extremely important for Reitlinger (who was also a spiritual child of Sergei Bulgakov) and has been noted in Skobtsova’s work. Xenia Krivochéine observes that, ‘L’on considère généralement que chaque poète et peintre chrétien développe trois grands thèmes : la vie, la mort et Dieu. Or, Mère Marie – tant dans sa vie que dans son art – a

¹¹⁴ Copy made by S. B. Pilenko and cited in Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 4.

¹¹⁵ Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 9.

¹¹⁶ “A True Theologian --The Icon Painter Sister Joanna by Elizabeth Roberts,” last modified November 19, 2007, <https://alexandermen.livejournal.com/20012.html>.

tout consacré au « thème » Dieu. Tout le reste y était contenu.’¹¹⁷ Krivochéine observes that all Skobtsova’s art was consecrated in one form or another to God. While this thesis does not explore Skobtsova’s fine art, this recollection is notable to map both the development of Skobtsova’s spirituality, but also to note the connection between her art and her faith more broadly which is indicative of the sense of wholeness across disciplines which Skobtsova promotes.

Alongside continuing artistic endeavours, Skobtsova became increasingly involved in theological circles in Paris. An important context for this was her involvement with the St Sergius Theological Institute in Paris. The Institute was established in 1925, and Fr Sergei Bulgakov joined the staff that same year. Whilst in Russia, Skobtsova had not been able to audit the courses at the theological institute in St Petersburg, but in Paris this was not the case. She attended lectures as an auditor at St Sergius. Xenia Krivochéine notes the impact of this engagement:

‘Élisabeth Yourievna devint une auditrice libre de l’Institut de théologie. L’atmosphère dans laquelle elle s’était plongée la transforma complètement, et nombre de ses questions trouvèrent des réponses ; des sympathisants des mêmes idées que les siennes apparurent ; elle commença pour ainsi dire une nouvelle vie, sous la houlette du père Serge Boulgakov, devenu son maître et son père spirituel.’¹¹⁸

In addition to the academic and spiritual impact of involvement at the Institute, Krivochéine importantly notes the personal relationships which Skobtsova formed there, most notably with Sergei Bulgakov (whose role as Skobtsova’s spiritual father was influential) and Metropolitan Evlogy (1868-1946), who was a significant figure for Skobtsova’s spiritual and monastic development. It was under Evlogy’s guidance and care that Skobtsova took her monastic vow.

¹¹⁷ Krivochéine, *La Beauté Salvatrice*, 33.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

The Parisian theological environment, and her association with the new St Sergius Theological Institute, provide a fruitful context for Skobtsova's own theological development. This is manifest in Skobtsova's theological publications, which primarily appear in this Parisian period of her life. Skobtsova was involved with the important journal, *Put'*, 'The Way'. This Russian language journal was edited by N. Berdyaev and was one of the largest forums for discussion for émigrés in Paris from 1925 until the beginning of the Second World War. One of the recurring themes in the journal *Put'*, as noted by Antoine Arjakovsky and which is pertinent to Skobtsova's early work, is a return to the sources, a *ressourcement*, the neo-patristic synthesis, and an interest in hesychasm, the lives of the saints and church tradition. Between 1925-1929, the journal published a number of articles on the lives of the saints. In 1926, *Put'* (No. 5) published Bulgakov's 'St Peter and St John' and, 'The Legacy of St. Sergius to Russian Theology'. Between 1925-27, Fr Chetverikov completed a study of the life of St. Paisius Velichkovsky. Arjakovsky notes the publication of extracts from Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Simeon the New Theologian and others, in addition to lives of the Saints written by Florovsky and Smolitsch.¹¹⁹ It was in this theological context (although not in the journal *Put'*) that Skobtsova published '*Zhatva Dukha*' in 1927. This publication was a two-volume collection of the lives of the saints. They are stylised retellings of the lives of eight saints which, as I will suggest, Skobtsova uses as a foundation for her own monastic innovations and wider theological focus.

Another important journal in the émigré community was run by the Russian Student Christian Movement (RSCM) which published a monthly journal called 'Vestnik', the 'Messenger' (*Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo studencheskogo*

¹¹⁹ Arjakovsky, *The Way*, 61-2.

dvizheniia).¹²⁰ Skobtsova was heavily involved with the activities of RSCM and their journal. RSCM had been founded in 1923 and existed to bring together Russian émigrés, sustaining, and promoting Russian religious culture in exile. Contents of this journal included ‘articles of didactic-homiletic’ nature, information on group activities and meetings of the organisation and details of their campaigns.¹²¹ Marc Raeff notes the distinctiveness of this journal; ‘Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, the *Messenger* was the more “popular” and “democratic” (intellectually speaking) version of the major religious-philosophical journal, *Put’*.’¹²²

‘As the statement of the purpose of the movement repeated in every issue of the *Messenger*, the goal was to “Christianize the life” of the emigration, in the hope and expectation that it would eventually be brought home to a free Russia. The patriotic as well as Orthodox intent of the movement cannot be gainsaid. But at the same time the *Messenger* expressed the young emigration’s awareness of the social, political, and economic problems confronting the world, in particular Europe, in the early 1930s. In reporting on select facets of the intellectual scene in France, Germany, and England, the *Messenger* contributed to a reflection on contemporary issues that eschewed the usual narrow, ghettolike émigré perspective.’¹²³

From around the time of 1926 to 1927, Skobtsova becomes heavily involved with the activities of RSCM. Ulyana Goutner argues that it was during Skobtsova’s involvement with the work of the RSCM, between the years 1927-1930 especially, that her theological and spiritual development flourished.¹²⁴

In early 1927, a discussion group (a ‘circle’) in RSCM was formed on the topic of Russia. Skobtsova was an active member of this circle, as were Fedotov and Berdyaev. This was one of the most fruitful and engaged circles in RSCM, and Gutner

¹²⁰ This journal was briefly renamed *Vestnik: Organ Tserkovno-Obshchestvennoi Zhizni*, and Skobtsova published an article with this newly named journal in 1937. However, the name was soon changed back to its original form.

¹²¹ Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad*, 137.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹²⁴ Ulyana Goutner, ‘Mother Maria (Skobtsova) in RSCM: Her Way to Monastic Ministry’ *Вестник Свято-Филаретовского института*, 17 (2016): 96-119.

convincingly suggests that the work of Skobtsova, Fedotov and Berdyaev around this time was inspired by these discussions. Indeed, the past and future of Russia for these émigrés was a central point of intellectual discussion. It was the theme of the RSCM in France’s fourth congress, which took place in July 1927 at Clermont en Argonne. There were presentations about the extremely difficult spiritual situation of Russia at the time, yet there was also optimism about the possibility of a religious renaissance in the region. Arjakovsky notes some of the contributions to the debates: ‘Berdyaev encouraged the members of the congress to redouble their efforts and to prepare themselves intellectually in order to be able to struggle, in a near future, for the church and against atheism. Elizabeth Skobtsova announced, in a prophetic tone, that the twelfth hour, the moment of the return to Russia, was at hand. “Something is happening in the world; the axle of the spiritual life is beginning to turn again.”’¹²⁵ Skobtsova’s words here are reflected in the article ‘The Twelfth Hour’.¹²⁶ The theme of this conference reflects a wider concern amongst the émigré community about the future of Russia.

In particular, Russian theology in the emigration grapples with Russia’s theological heritage. In Russian thought, there is a strong notion of Russia having a ‘messianic vocation’ in the world. The country has been described as the ‘Third Rome’, and this particularity and importance permeates Russian theology. Russian theology also has unique characteristics which distinguishes it from other traditions. In emigration, theologians grapple with this inheritance and it is transposed into a new key given their estrangement from the country. Antoine Arjakovsky notes the place of

¹²⁵ Arjakovsky, *The Way*, 109.

¹²⁶ Мать Мария (Скобцова), “12-й Час [The 12th Hour],” *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 274-278.

memory in these discussions, as Russian theologians in exile seek to work within their tradition outside of their homeland. In his assessment of Skobtsova's work, the characterisation of her work is rather negative; '...Vasilii Zenkovsky, Nikolai Lossky, Fedotov, or Mother Maria Skobtsova – these authors resumed on their own the legend of a great tradition of interrupted national thought, of which they were the last blooms. Attempting to raise memory to the level of the sacred, they were unable to free it of many very prosaic details.'¹²⁷ Nevertheless, Arjakovsky does note the distinctiveness of Skobtsova's theological work, in contrast to her Russian inheritance. Arjakovsky suggests that certain contributors to the émigré journal *Put'* were neo-Slavophiles, who were adding something to the history of Soloviev and Khomiakov by focusing on the Kingdom of God:

'...the emigration of Berdyaev's and Bulgakov's generation, but also that of George Fedotov and Mother Maria (Skobtsova), while remaining aloof from the Communist intelligentsia, powerfully vindicates its intellectual identity by markedly affirming its connection in memory to the tradition of Alexei Khomiakov and Vladimir Solovyov and by correcting the ideological interpretation of the Kingdom of God on earth. In the history of Russian thought, it symbolized the reconciliation of a stream of formerly alienated intelligentsia [sic.] with the Orthodox Church.'¹²⁸

For some commentators, Skobtsova's writings in emigration rely too heavily on the memory of Russia and the theological inheritance of her homeland. However, Skobtsova's own writings on emigration provide a challenge to this interpretation and, when linked to her innovations in asceticism and monasticism, Skobtsova's uniqueness from her Russian forebears can be perceived. Nevertheless, the place of Russian memory in emigration is unquestionably at the forefront of Skobtsova's theological work, as Arjakovsky suggests.

¹²⁷ Arjakovsky, *The Way*, 12.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

In contrast to the characterisation of a regressive strain of Russian thought, for the ‘Paris School’ of Russian theologians, emigration provided the context for innovation and exploration in theological thinking. This was not always well received by the wider Orthodox community. In 1927, the Holy Synod of the Russian Emigré Church, for example, accuses the Russian Theological Seminary in Paris of ‘modernism’ and ‘freemasonry’.¹²⁹ One of the most contentious issues which arose in the émigré community, and which received much criticism, was Sophiology. Whilst Sophia is not explored in great length in Skobtsova’s theological writings, the influence of Sophiology can be sensed in Skobtsova’s insistence of wholeness and unity. In 1927, Skobtsova’s essay ‘Holy Earth’ was published in *Put*.¹³⁰ There are sophiological undertones to this work, particularly the notion of a feminine earth and the sense of all-unity which it represents.

Aside from the themes of Russia and Sophia, the breadth of Skobtsova’s interests and the diversity of her publications are notable in this time period. Skobtsova’s essay ‘To the Sources’ is largely a reflection on populism, although she does include a spiritual reflection too, showing the connection between these disciplines. ‘To the Sources’ was published in 1929 in *Sovremennye zapiski*.¹³¹ In 1929, Skobtsova publishes four important essays, ‘A. Khomyakov’, ‘Dostoevsky and the Present’, ‘The World-Concept of Vl. Solov’ev’ and ‘In Search of Synthesis’.¹³²

¹²⁹ Christopher Bamford, “Foreword” in Sergei Bulgakov, *Sophia the Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, trans. Patrick Thompson, O. Fielding Clarke and Xenia Braikevitch (*place of publication undetermined*: Lindisfarne Press, 1993), xix.

¹³⁰ E. Скобцова, “Святая земля” in *Путь*, no. 6 (1927): 95-101.

¹³¹ E. Скобцова, “К истокам.,” *Современные записки* no. 38 (1929): 488-500. *Sovremennye zapiski* was a literary journal (a ‘thick’ journal) with political interests formed by supporters of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party. It was based in France but published the poetry, fiction, and articles of Russian émigrés. The journal became more interested in religious matters during the 1930s. One of the editors was Ilya Fondaminskii, a close friend of Skobtsova. See Marc Raeff, “The Swan Song of an Emigre Journal” in *The Russian Review* 43, no. 3 (1984): 277–83.

¹³² The essays ‘A. Khomyakov’, ‘Dostoevsky and the Present’ and ‘The World-Concept of Vl. Solov’ev’ were all published by YMCA Press (E. Скобцова, *А. Хомяков* (Париж: YMCA-Press, 1929); E. Скобцова, *Достоевский и современность* (Париж: YMCA-Press, 1929); E. Скобцова,

These essays will be explored in the second chapter of this thesis, and generally highlight her Russian inspirations. The following year, Skobtsova publishes 'Fools in Christ' was published in 1930¹³³ and in 1931 Skobtsova publishes 'Birth and Creation'.¹³⁴

From autumn 1929 until 1932, Skobtsova worked as a secretary for provincial affairs with the RSCM, travelling around France meeting Russian émigrés. While much of RSCM's mission centred around education (in the form of publications such as the journal *Vestnik*, lectures and study groups or circles), Skobtsova found herself also involved in philanthropic responses to the destitution which she encountered on these travels within the Russian émigré community. Skobtsova travelled around France in this capacity, lecturing but also getting involved in social work and being exposed to the difficult reality of émigré life in France for Russians.¹³⁵ Following the First World War, France had a labour shortage, and Russian émigrés were used to fill those gaps. Raeff notes how French agents for manufacturing businesses facilitated the arrival of Russians into France. Single men were often housed near their factories, across France, where they ate in the canteens. They lived in harsh conditions, laboured intensively, and were severely hit by the Depression.¹³⁶

Skobtsova wrote of her impressions on these travels in various short newspaper articles remarking on the high levels of poverty, alcoholism, and suicide

Мирозерцание Владимира Соловьева (Париж: YMCA-Press, 1929). 'In Search of Synthesis' was published in *Put'*: E. Скобцова, "В поисках синтеза," *Путь* no 16 (1929): 49-68. For an English translation of all these essays see: E. Skobtsova (Mother Maria), *The Crucible of Doubts: Khomyakov, Dostoevsky, Solov'ev, In Search of Synthesis Four 1927 Works*, trans. Fr S Janos (Mohrsville, PA: FRSJ Publications, 2016).

¹³³ E. Скобцова, "О юродивых," *Вестник Русского Студенческого Христианского Движения*, no. 8-9, (1930): 3-13.

¹³⁴ Interestingly, Berdyaev publishes 'Destiny of Man' with its anti-procreative strain in the same year. It is on these issues that Skobtsova and Berdyaev diverge in their opinions. See: Ermolaev, *Modernism, Motherhood and Mariology*, 117-131.

¹³⁵ See Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 10-11.

¹³⁶ Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad*, 33.

rates.¹³⁷ In this social work, before she was tonsured as a nun, we see Skobtsova's reflections on the importance of the human person:

'Are they degraded? [she asked]. Degraded indeed.
'Decayed?' Decaying alive.
'Drunk, debauched, dishonest, thieving?' Yes and yes again.
'Are they people?' Utterly and undeniably, miserable and abandoned people, whom a human word can [yet] reclaim, so that no trace remains of debauchery or lies.'¹³⁸

This period in Skobtsova's life is extremely important for her theological and spiritual development. We see Skobtsova's personal engagement with 'the world', with real destitution and the fullness of human suffering and existence. Tatiana Manukhina recounts this period, in Skobtsova's words:

'Les gens souhaitaient s'exprimer, me confier quelque peine affreuse qu'ils avaient sur le cœur depuis des années, ou bien des remords de conscience qui les étouffaient. Dans ces taudis, parler de la foi en Dieu, du Christ, de l'Eglise est inutile, car les gens ont besoin non de prédication, mais de quelque chose de bien plus simple : de compassion.'¹³⁹

Skobtsova listens to the burdens and sufferings of the émigrés that she encounters. She notes herself that her role became like that of a confessor, with streams of people queuing at her door to tell their story and their suffering. Whilst Skobtsova notes the importance of considering when to speak of Christ and the Church in these contexts (and ensuring that compassion is at the forefront of these encounters, rather than spiritual discourse), Gutner still suggests that it is here that Skobtsova finds her vocation.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, the description of Skobtsova's encounters and her pastoral

¹³⁷ Skobtsova wrote 'The Russian Geography of France' in *Posledniia Novosti*, the émigré newspaper. It was reprinted in: Е. Ю. Кузьмина-Караваева, *Избранное*, ed. by Н. В. Осмакова (Москва: Советская Россия, 1991), 349-358.

¹³⁸ *Posledniia Novosti* (Paris), 18 June 1932. Cited (and trans.) in Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 10-11.

¹³⁹ Tatiana Manukhina "Une âme livrée entièrement et pour toujours à Dieu" in *Le Jour du Saint-Esprit*, 54.

¹⁴⁰ Ulyana Goutner, "Mother Maria (Skobtsova) in RSCM: Her Way to Monastic Ministry," *Вестник Свято-Филаретовского института* 17 (2016): 111.

support strongly resonates with the stories that she includes in ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’, where saints minister to the poor and suffering.¹⁴¹

Against the backdrop of pronounced suffering and difficulty amongst the Russian émigrés, Skobtsova was continuing to deal with personal tragedy. In 1931, Nastia’s body is exhumed and moved to a different cemetery. This has a profound impact on Skobtsova who has to relive the trauma of losing her daughter once again.

‘ « C’est ainsi que j’ai revu ma fille... On a soulevé son corps, on l’a posé, on l’a de nouveau enfermé et on l’a emporté. Or, justement, pendant que je marchais derrière le cercueil au cimetière, cela m’est arrivé – j’ai tout à coup découvert une autre maternité, toute particulière, immensément vaste, englobant tout... Je suis rentrée du cimetière toute autre... J’ai vu devant moi une nouvelle voie et un nouveau sens à ma vie : être une mère pour tous, tous ceux qui ont besoin d’un support maternel, d’une protection, d’une défense... Le reste est secondaire. J’en ai parlé à mon père spirituel, à la famille, et puis, je suis allée chez le métropolite... »¹⁴²

There is a sense in Skobtsova’s biography of interpreting traumatic events.

Skobtsova appears to frequently seek spiritual meaning in events, especially those which are painful. After the previous experiences of grief in Skobtsova’s life (her Father and then her brother in 1920), Paul Ladouceur notes; ‘Death was familiar to her, she was not afraid of it, but sought above all to find meaning in death, whether for the ‘revolution’ or for humanity in general: to do her duty in the face of death, to give herself for something she believed in, or for those she believed in, whatever the cost.’¹⁴³ However, Ladouceur suggests that the previous experiences of death for Skobtsova had not been in the context of a relation to Christ, nor a commitment to Him. This changes after the death of Anastasia. The loss which she re-

¹⁴¹ ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’ will be explored in chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹⁴² Tatiana Manukhina, “Une âme livrée entièrement et pour toujours à Dieu,” in *Le Jour du Saint-Esprit*, 60.

¹⁴³ Paul Ladouceur, “The experience and understanding of death in Saint Maria of Paris,” *Sobornost* 28, no. 1 (2006): 26.

experiences at the exhumation of Anastasia prompts her commitment to a monastic vocation.

8. Tonsuring and Monasticism

In 1932 the religious vocation of Skobtsova was expressed formally through her monastic tonsuring in Paris. However, in order for Skobtsova to take the veil, she needed to divorce Daniil. So, Elizaveta and Daniil sought an ecclesiastical divorce which was finalised on 7 March 1932. Elizaveta prepared for her monastic profession under the guidance of Fr Sergei Bulgakov and Metropolitan Evlogii (1868-1946) and she was professed as a nun later in the same month of March 1932. She took the monastic name Maria after St Mary of Egypt.¹⁴⁴

Tatiana Manukhina notes that Skobtsova's tonsuring was met with surprise and bewilderment by the émigré community.¹⁴⁵ This decision to take the veil was not only unusual for her personal story, but it did not match the state of monasticism at the time either. Marc Raeff notes that monasticism was not flourishing in emigration:

'New monastic congregations arose in countries of exile, especially in the Balkans and in France. They, too, were small and on the whole condemned to slow death due to natural attrition of their membership. However, they often served as locales for émigré church conferences or summer camps. On the whole, monastic establishments played little part in the cultural life and everyday consciousness of the emigration.'¹⁴⁶

Indeed, this is something which Skobtsova observed herself. Skobtsova reflects on the state of monasticism in emigration and in Russia during this period. She refers to the state of monasticism as a form of 'homelessness' as in Russia the monasteries had

¹⁴⁴ Katerina Bauerova notes the similarities between Skobtsova and Mother Mary of Egypt in relation to maternity and virginity; 'She felt close to her destiny: a twice married woman desiring to become a nun, desiring to cross the Jordan as Mother Maria of Egypt did.' Katerina Bauerova, "The Play of the Semiotic and the Symbolic: The Authenticity of the Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova," *Feminist Theology* 22, no. 3 (2014): 297.

¹⁴⁵ Manukhina, "Une âme livrée entièrement et pour toujours à Dieu," in *Le Jour du Saint-Esprit*, 58.

¹⁴⁶ Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad*, 125.

been taken away, and in emigration they never existed.¹⁴⁷ Her own entering into monasticism was unusual, therefore, for own biography and for the contemporary reality of the church.

Skobtsova's publications around this time reveal her theological interests and motivations around the early period of her monasticism. 'To business' was published in the year of Mother Maria's tonsuring, 1932, in *Novyi Grad*, no. 5, Paris.¹⁴⁸ In this article, Mother Maria dreams of establishing a convent of 'active monasticism', where the concerns of the monastics cover local economic issues, and the fullness of social life. Similarly, 'Question sociale et réalité sociale' (in French in, '*Le Jour du Saint-Esprit*') was published in *Novyi Grad*, no. 4 Paris, 1932.¹⁴⁹ The 'social question' was an important association with her tonsuring. This is evident in some of the criticisms which Skobtsova voiced towards the monasticism of her time.

After her tonsuring, Skobtsova travelled to Estonia and Latvia as part of her work with the Russian Student Christian Movement. Here she visited Orthodox monasteries including the Dormition convent at Piukhtitsa and the Trinity convent in Riga. She was critical of these communities for their lack of fire, their apparent complacency, and absence of zeal. This tallies with a general historical observation, such as that by Marc Raeff, which notes that monastic communities in places which were formerly the Russian Empire continued their existence, but experienced little

¹⁴⁷ Skobtsova, "Toward a New Monasticism I", EW, 93.

¹⁴⁸ Монахиня Мария (Скобцова), "К делу," *Новый Град*, no. 5 (1932). *Novyi Grad* was an émigré journal, the first edition was published the year before this article, in 1931. The three leading intellectuals behind 'New City' were G. P. Fedotov, Ilya Fondaminskii (Bunakov) and F. A. Stepun.

¹⁴⁹ Originally published as: Монахиня Мария (Скобцова), "Социальный вопрос и социальная реальность," *Новый Град* № 4 (1932). French translation available at: Sainte Marie de Paris (Mère Marie Skobtsov, 1891-1945), *Le jour du Saint-Esprit*, ed. Paul Ladouceur, trans. Hélène Arjakovsky-Klépinine, Françoise Lhoest, Bertrand Jeuffrain, Alexandre Nicolsky, Nikita Struve and Jérôme Lefert (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2011), .

growth.¹⁵⁰ In contrast to the communities which she visited in Estonia and Latvia, Skobtsova desired to implement an ‘active’ monasticism. Unlike previous generations, contemporary monasticism for Skobtsova’s age did not find itself ‘behind strong monastery walls, within defined, ossified traditions, but on all the roads and crossroads of the world’.¹⁵¹ As a result of this, Skobtsova observes the context of monasticism as one which is oriented toward the world; ‘an immersion in the very depths of the secular element, to the point of earning one’s crust of bread among secular people, in the same ways they do.’¹⁵² As a result of this, Skobtsova calls for monastic innovation; ‘today’s monasticism must fight for its very core, for its very soul, disregarding all external forms, creating new forms.’¹⁵³ For Skobtsova, this was to be found through an engagement with the world.

The first house which Mother Maria secured to be used as a convent was at 9 villa de Saxe, Paris VIIe, situated in an affluent area of the city. Skobtsova remained here for several years, welcoming guests (fellow émigrés who were in need of a place to stay, mostly young, unemployed Russian women), organising talks and lectures, as well as services in the chapel. Villa de Saxe became too small for these activities, and Skobtsova moved in September 1934 to 77 Rue de Lourmel. Lourmel was the heart of Skobtsova’s monastic and philanthropic activity. Here she housed a large number of people (Hackel notes that by 1937 three dozen residents were living in the house), and separately opened a canteen where cheap food was served (for free to those who could not receive benefits).¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad*, 125.

¹⁵¹ Skobtsova, “Toward a New Monasticism I,” EW, 94.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 93-4.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁵⁴ Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 36.

Skobtsova was joined at Villa de Saxe by Mother Evdokia Meshcherakov (1895-1977), who lived and worked alongside Skobtsova for six years. Mother Evdokia moved with Mother Maria to Lourmel, where she was joined by Mother Dorofeia Courtin (Mother Evdokia's sister), and a newly professed nun, Mother Blandina Obolenskaia. The relationship between Mother Maria and Mother Evdokia was strained. While Mother Evdokia largely supported the philanthropic activities of Lourmel, her monasticism found expression in a more regular pattern of prayer and a more traditional form of cloistered life. Skobtsova, on the other hand, believed that the emigration provided the opportunity for a free exploration of monastic frameworks, redrawn into an active model of service in society. The ideological and personal differences between the two nuns was never resolved. Similarly, Skobtsova had a fraught relationship with Archimandrite Kiprian Kern (1889-1960); a priest who was stationed at Lourmel. Fr Kiprian's ideas of monasticism were similarly at odds with Skobtsova's, and the relationship was not successful. In 1938, Skobtsova asked the members of the community to leave.

Skobtsova's monasticism was not conventional. In many ways, and in memory, Skobtsova is perceived as a figure in the tradition of holy folly. Olivier Clément notes that many people viewed Skobtsova's life as a scandal¹⁵⁵; an epitaph which Metropolitan Evlogii's recollection of her drinking beer in Parisian cafés whilst wearing a monastic habit has immortalised. Skobtsova did not live the life of a traditional nun; she smoked heavily, often missed the liturgy, befriended ex-convicts and the homeless, and was well-known at Les Halles where she would collect cheap or free perishable food items in order to feed the homeless and destitute. This

¹⁵⁵ Olivier Clément, 'Preface' in *Mother Maria Skobtsova: Essential Writings* trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 7.

eccentric and occasionally shocking approach to the Christian life, and monasticism in particular, has been well documented in biographies of Skobtsova's life.¹⁵⁶ This has led some commentators to compare Skobtsova's eccentric behaviour with the tradition of the holy fool.¹⁵⁷ Skobtsova admired the lives of several holy fools, particularly Basil the Blessed whose feast day was observed with solemnity at Rue de Lourmel.¹⁵⁸

Along with several key supporters, the organisation 'Orthodox Action' (*Pravoslavnoe Delo*) was established on 27 September 1935, following a Liturgy celebrated by Fr Sergei Bulgakov. Mother Maria Skobtsova was elected as the chair of this group and the centre of activity was at the house on Lourmel. The other members included Konstantin Mochul'skii as the vice-chairman, Fr Mikhail Chertkov as treasurer, and Fedor Pianov as secretary. Metropolitan Evlogii was the honorary president. Ilya Fondaminsky had a role in its establishment. The group sought to provide social assistance to those who were in need based on their understanding of Orthodox thought, practice, and culture. This not only took the form of social engagement, but also included academic discussion and publication.

Skobtsova continues to write and publish philosophical, theological, and political writings during her monastic period. In fact, this is a fruitful time for her publications. 'Sources of Creativity' was published in *Put'* in 1934 and explores human creative acts through a theological lens.¹⁵⁹ 'The Cross and the Hammer-and-Sickle', which is a reflection on Christianity and communism, was first published in

¹⁵⁶ See especially, T. Stratton Smith, *The Rebel Nun* (London: The Souvenir Press, 1965) and Sergei Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price: The Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova 1891-1945* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982),

¹⁵⁷ For example, see Katerina Bauerova "The Play of the Semiotic and the Symbolic: The Authenticity of the Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova," *Feminist Theology* 22, no. 3 (2014): 290-301.

¹⁵⁸ Sergei Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 71.

¹⁵⁹ Монахиня Мария, "Истоки творчества," *Путь* no. 43 (1934): 35-48.

Novy Grad (“New City”) in 1933.¹⁶⁰ In addition, during this time period Skobtsova writes several key essays which relate to the Church and monasticism. These include, ‘Present and Future of the Church’ which was written in 1936.¹⁶¹ ‘The Mysticism of Human Communion’ which was first published in the almanac *Krug* (The Circle), no. 1, Paris, 1937.¹⁶² ‘Types of Religious Life’ was written in 1937 but was only recently discovered and published.¹⁶³ ‘What is ‘churchliness’ was written in 1937.¹⁶⁴

Three articles were published in 1938, reflecting perhaps the political turmoil of the approaching War, and the turbulence of Skobtsova’s religious community: ‘Under the Sign of Our Time’¹⁶⁵ ‘Under the Sign of Destruction,’¹⁶⁶ and ‘A Justification of Pharisaism.’¹⁶⁷ Interestingly, ‘A Justification of Pharisaism’ speaks of the need for preservation over revolution (a timely reminder of this as the Second World War approached). Similarly, ‘Racism and Religion’ was published in 1938 and in 1939 ‘Four Portraits’ was published in *Novyi Grad*.¹⁶⁸ Both of these articles are critical of social and political systems at the time of writing which lacked spiritual depth, or which denied the fullness of the human experience, particularly totalitarianisms. In the same year, Skobtsova was writing on Mariology and published, ‘On the Imitation of the Mother of God’ in *Put*.¹⁶⁹ Also published in 1939 was the one journal of the ‘Orthodox Action’ group, which included the essay ‘The

¹⁶⁰ Монахиня Мария (Скобцова), “Крест и серп с молотом,” *Новый Град*, no. 6 (1933): 78-81.

¹⁶¹ This was republished in 1992, see: Мать Мария (Скобцова), “Настоящее и будущее церкви,” in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (УМСА Press: Paris, 1992), 239-249.

¹⁶² Монахиня Мария, “Мистика человекообщения,” *Круг* no. 1 (1936): 152-8. A section of this essay has been translated and included in *EW* under the title ‘Toward a New Monasticism 1’.

¹⁶³ An English translation is available in *EW*, 140-186.

¹⁶⁴ “Что такое церковность?” Мать Мария, accessed January 5, 2023, <http://mere-marie.com/fate/chto-takoe-tserkovnost/>.

¹⁶⁵ Монахиня Мария, “Под знаменем нашего времени,” *Новый Град* no. 12 (1937): 115-122.

¹⁶⁶ Монахиня Мария, “Под знаком гибели,” *Новый Град* no. 13 (1938): 145-152.

¹⁶⁷ Монахиня Мария, “Оправдание фарисейства,” *Путь* no. 56 (1938): 37-46.

¹⁶⁸ Монахиня Мария, “Расизм и религия,” *Русские Записки* no. 11 (1938): 150-157; “Четыре портрета,” *Новый Град* no. 14 (1939): 26-40.

¹⁶⁹ Монахиня Мария, “О подражании Богоматери,” *Путь* no. 59 (1939): 19-30.

Second Gospel Commandment'.¹⁷⁰ These were some of Skobtsova's final essays, published in her lifetime, as the outbreak of the Second World War transformed her life and work.

9. Resistance and Death

Mother Maria Skobtsova's solidarity with the neighbour, manifested in her monastic system of social engagement, took on a particular form during the Second World War as she sought to aid and assist the Jews in Paris. Skobtsova and her associates in Paris sheltered Jews in the convent, forged baptismal certificates and added Jewish names to the parish electoral roll in order to protect them from Nazi persecution. Even in her poetry, Skobtsova suggested that Christians should stand in solidarity with the Jews by wearing a yellow star. Most famously, Skobtsova assisted in rescuing Jewish children from the *Vélodrome d'Hiver* by organising refuse collectors to smuggle the children out in empty bins.¹⁷¹

It was for resistance activities such as these that Skobtsova was arrested. Mother Maria was first taken to the internment camp at Compiègne and was then transferred to Ravensbrück concentration camp via cattle truck trains in 1943. She was prisoner number 19,263. Skobtsova's time in the camp was marked by the same dedication to service of the neighbour as her monastic life in Paris had been. She organised discussion groups, offered spiritual guidance, friendship, and care, and even continued embroidery. Testimony from the camps was collected by Sergei Hackel and published in 'Pearl of Great Price', and these original recollections have been

¹⁷⁰ Монахиня Мария, "Вторая Евангельская заповедь," in *Православное дело* (Париж, 1939), 27-44.

¹⁷¹ For details of this, see Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 114-115.

published in 'Le Jour du Saint Esprit'.¹⁷² Mother Maria was taken to the gas chamber on 31 March 1945, where she was killed. Mother Maria Skobtsova was canonised as a Saint in the Orthodox Church, under the ecumenical patriarchate, in 2004. She is also remembered as a Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem.

10. Conclusion

The relationship between biography and theology in Skobtsova's work and legacy is a complex but important issue to assess her own theological writings and secondary literature on Skobtsova's work. In order to understand how Skobtsova does theology, it is important to note the various epochs through which Skobtsova lived, and their impact on the style and content of her intellectual output. It is also necessary to bear in mind Skobtsova's writing style; that she was not a systematic theologian, but someone who produced short essays, often in the *publitsistika* genre, which relate theology and philosophy to issues of the everyday. Nevertheless, there are threads which run throughout her writings which unite to form a theological worldview, which this thesis seeks to highlight. Skobtsova's theology is not only informed by contemporary events and culture, but her personal biography can also be felt in her theological focuses as she seeks to interpret events in her own life within her theological worldview. It is important to note, however, that a recognition of this phenomenon in Skobtsova's writing should not necessitate an over-reliance on biographical detail when assessing her theological writings. A balanced approach must be taken, where her thought and her biography are considered.

¹⁷² In 'Le Jour du Saint Esprit' we have recollections from Inna Webster, Jeanette Verdier, Jacqueline Péry d'Alincourt, Geneviève de Gaulle, Rosane Lascroux and Sophie Nossovitch about Skobtsova in detention. See *Le Jour du Saint Esprit*, 116-151.

Chapter 2: The Russian Idea

In the introduction, we have noted the idea that Mother Maria Skobtsova's theology is motivated by a persistent striving for synthesis and wholeness. Throughout this thesis, I am suggesting that Skobtsova seeks to promote and maintain a balance in her theological methodology between the divine and the human, the church and the world, thought and practice, and numerous other dualities or even antinomies. This emphasis on synthesis and wholeness is by no means unique to Skobtsova's work but is characteristic of a great deal of Russian theology and philosophy, as the introduction to this thesis has begun to outline. Indeed, the search for synthesis is not only emblematic of Skobtsova's work, but of much of the Russian religious tradition in general. In order to understand Skobtsova's contribution to this field, therefore, it is necessary to contextualise her writings within this Russian tradition. Skobtsova's theological thought is characteristically Russian, as this chapter seeks to demonstrate.

To a certain extent, Skobtsova highlights this herself through her historical essays. In 'Our Epoch', Skobtsova suggests that the concept of wholeness (цельность) or 'all-unity' (всеединство), as expressed in the concept of *Godmanhood*, underpins the majority of Russian thought from the 19th Century onwards.¹⁷³ To demonstrate this, Skobtsova draws attention to the work of Alexsei Khomiakov (1804-1860) and Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) alongside key ideological and artistic movements in Russian thought such as Symbolism. Skobtsova suggests, however, that the concept of wholeness found in *Godmanhood* is not simply an incidental characteristic of Russian thought, rather it is integral to Russia's place in

¹⁷³ Мать Мария (Скобцова), "Наша Эпоха," in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 9-32.

history. The notion of Russia as the ‘Third Rome’, she proposes, imbued the nation with a messianic vocation. This messianic vocation was to create a culture which reflects the synthesis of divine revelation and human creativity; to realise *Godmanhood*. Skobtsova reads the intellectual history of Russia as a reaction to this vocation, both positively and negatively responding to its calling. Her analysis of Russian religious thought is helpful to place her own thought within a particular context and tradition, and it also highlights her understanding of the nature of history as an oscillation between ideological polarities.

It is also important to consider Skobtsova’s own historical situation here. The Russia of Skobtsova’s youth was markedly different to that of the 19th Century, where many of her sources originate. The experience of revolution, the ensuing political upheaval, war, and a changing religious landscape undoubtedly affected Skobtsova’s theological concerns. The context in which Skobtsova was writing has a clear effect on the way she works Russian sources into her own constructive theology. She is conscious of nationalism, racism and political questions surrounding socialism and democracy which feature in the Russian consciousness prior to the 20th Century, of course, but take on another significance after the revolution. This builds on the biographical sketch which has already been offered on Skobtsova’s life.

Writing about Skobtsova, Nikolai Berdyaev remarked that, ‘Her world-view could be termed that of a revolutionary Slavophil.’¹⁷⁴ Skobtsova is a Slavophile in as much as she draws on the intellectual history of Russian philosophy and theology and incorporates key concepts from the 19th Century into her own thought. The

¹⁷⁴ Nikolai Berdyaev ‘In Memory of Mother Maria,’ in E. Skobtsova, *The Crucible of Doubts: Khomyakov, Dostoevsky, Solov’ev, In Search of Synthesis Four 1929 Works* trans. Fr S. Janos (Mohrsville, PA: FRSJ Publications, 2016), i.

revolutionary element is apparent in her application of these principles. This is apparent in three ways. Firstly, Skobtsova is strongly motivated by practical action, and her writing is permeated by a desire to combine thought and praxis. Disturbed by an inactive intelligentsia, Skobtsova promoted a system of radical and revolutionary action, rooted in monastic service to the other. She developed a system of the ‘everyday’, where the concepts of *Godmanhood* and *sobornost*’ permeated the ‘little things’ of life.¹⁷⁵ Secondly, Skobtsova’s Slavophile inheritance is revolutionary in its universality. She is careful to avoid any nationalism, or indeed racism, in her writings. Rather, her system seeks to emphasise the Body of Christ, following Khomiakov’s ecclesiology. There is a distinct particularity, however, to the Orthodox tradition. Thirdly, Skobtsova’s work is marked by an apocalypticism. For any ‘utopia’ to be authentic, it not only needs to be rooted in a divine-human synthesis, but it also needs to point towards the eternal. This infuses her thought and practice with an ‘in the world’ but not ‘of the world’ character, a mysticism which is rooted in the material whilst transcending it. Skobtsova maintains that any creation of the Third Rome will have to stand before the throne of judgment.

Mother Maria Skobtsova was a distinctly Russian thinker. Despite composing the majority of her theological articles in Paris, Skobtsova’s debt to the Russian philosophical and theological tradition is clearly present in her writing. In addition to the sources which she uses (which are overwhelmingly Russian), the conceptual concerns which direct her writing are particularly Russian in character. However, the place of sacrifice in Skobtsova’s thought adds an interesting dimension to this discussion. In light of Skobtsova’s tendency to hold to many characteristically

¹⁷⁵ Е. Ю. Кузьмина-Караваева, “Православное Дело,” in *Избранное*, ed. Н. В. Осьмакова (Москва: Советская Россия, 1991), 362.

Russian theological perspectives, one might imagine that her emigration would be felt as a great loss for Skobtsova. On the contrary, however, in several key theological essays, Skobtsova writes about the spiritual positives which may be gained from emigration. She writes of the unbinding of worldviews which the freedom of emigration can precipitate.¹⁷⁶ There is an interesting tension, therefore, in Skobtsova's theology between maintaining a Russian character in her thought and promoting the freedom of freeing oneself from national identities.

In this chapter, we shall explore Skobtsova's complex identity as a Russian thinker, highlighting the way in which she engages with Russian intellectual history, and how her own thought can be placed within this tradition. Yet, we shall also see how the originality of this revolutionary figure stands out from her Russian forebears. This chapter will therefore provide vital context for Skobtsova's thought and begin to highlight her originality within a defined tradition.

1. The Historical Process of Russia

As the previous chapter has explored, Mother Maria Skobtsova's theological writings may be described as highly situational. Her theology is moulded and shaped to a notable degree by her situation and context. This context is, at times, her personal situation (such as her experiences of motherhood, vocation, or personal loss) and at other times it is the political landscape (reflections on governance, the Church, or social need). There is very little abstract philosophy or theology in Skobtsova's work which is not connected to context and experience. In several of her essays, she seeks to address particular issues which she identifies in modernity. For example, in 'Under the Sign of Our Time' Skobtsova explores the context of being an émigré, in 'The

¹⁷⁶ Skobtsova, "Under the Sign of our Time," EW, 109.

Cross and the Hammer-and-Sickle’ she discusses communism and Christianity, and in ‘Insights in Wartime’ she reflects on grief in warfare.¹⁷⁷ Even Skobtsova’s more conceptual essays such as ‘Holy Earth’ or ‘Birth and Creativity’ are rooted in application and experience.¹⁷⁸ Skobtsova’s theological method, therefore, is closely connected to the context in which it was written.

As a result of this contextual methodology, history plays an important role in Skobtsova’s theological works by seeking to place an immediate context into a broader historical narrative. In several essays, such as ‘Scroll’, ‘Our Epoch’ and ‘Khomiakov’, Skobtsova begins to develop her own understanding of history.¹⁷⁹ Here, she not only highlights the particularities of her own epoch but seeks to show its connection to preceding periods of history. In doing so, she reveals the way in which she understands the historical process. It is important to note that Skobtsova specifically focuses on Russian history. She is looking at Russian history because she wishes to understand her own context and, despite being in emigration, this is still a remarkably Russian context. Therefore, her desire to engage theologically in her own epoch necessitates an historical search to contextualise this thought.

Skobtsova sees in the historical process a striving for synthesis, which is rarely realised. She notes epochs in history which have accentuated one philosophy or aspect of created life to the detriment of its opposite and have thus denied the fulfilment of ideological unity. For example, Skobtsova is critical of the Church, throughout

¹⁷⁷ ‘Insights in Wartime [Прозрение в войне]’ was published posthumously in: *Мать Мария (Скобцова), Стихотворения, Поэмы, Мистерии, Воспоминания об аресте и лагере в Равенсбрюк* (Paris: La Presse Française et Étrangère, 1947), 134-148.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Holy Earth’ draws on motherhood, sonship, and the earth whilst ‘Birth and Creativity’ explores the relationship between birth and the person.

¹⁷⁹ Skobtsova’s reflections on the historical process are rather nascent and lacking in detailed development. However, there are insights which can be drawn from her reflections which help to give shape to her thought more widely, as will be discussed here.

history, for forgetting the human element of the Body of Christ. She argues that there have been notable periods in the Church's history which have accentuated love of God over and against the love of the neighbour. She notes, however, that these polarities often oscillate throughout history. The extreme of one epoch may be countered by the opposite extreme in the following epoch. To demonstrate this (in a rather simplistic analysis, perhaps), Skobtsova frequently characterises the Byzantine era as accentuating the divine principle to the detriment of the human principle. This was countered, she suggests, by the Renaissance and the rise of humanism in the following era (although this, in turn, went too far in the other direction). In this sense, Skobtsova notes that no age exists in isolation; each epoch is part of the progression of history and is, in this sense, one link in a larger chain, which is striving for synthesis.¹⁸⁰ For example, even though the tumultuous events in Russia during the 20th Century dramatically changed the course of Russian history, they did not sever the links with the past. In terms of religious and philosophical issues, this means that the revolution did not destroy preceding Russian thought.

The common denominator in a nation's history, which unites these varying expressions and characteristics, is its people. Skobtsova suggests that it is the 'inner life' of the people which directs a nation's course. Yet the human element, in its fallibility, repeatedly fails to realise the fullness of unity. This unity may be found, however, in the divine plan at the heart of the historical process which is rooted in Christ. Christ altered the meaning of history: 'Indeed: the incarnation of Christ once and for all drew the creaturely world close to the divine plan for it; Christ was on the earth in the course of the historical process [of the divine plan], by this it was as if he

¹⁸⁰ Мать Мария (Скобцова), "Наша Эпоха [Our Epoch]," in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 10.

sanctified human history, he founded the becoming and residing church in history, - and if this is so, then it is impossible to consider historical phenomenon as things occurring outside of the divine plan for them, alongside random and unexplained flow of circumstances, out of which nothing will remain for history, for the harvest of the final times.¹⁸¹ For Skobtsova, the Incarnation suggests that there is a divine plan at the heart of the historical process. The diversity and disunity of historical epochs, therefore, requires a level of judgement to assess their compatibility with this divine plan. Epochs may be spiritually judged, identifying what they are positively bringing forth, and what they are denying. For Skobtsova, this is specifically focused on the life of a nation. This process is directed at establishing the religious direction of a nation, its authentic calling in the world. Skobtsova is concerned with identifying this principle in Russian history; ‘the discourse is about revealing the fundamental and principal historical significance of Russian events, about finding that religious and meta-historical basis, which is the only one capable to place all events in their given historical place and to give them a fair evaluation.’¹⁸² Skobtsova suggests that there is an authentic, unique Russian path within the historical process.

In ‘Our Epoch’ Skobtsova notes the progression of theological thought in the Greek Patristic tradition, which had an impact on Russian history. The development of Trinitarian and Christological doctrines in the Patristic period can be categorised

¹⁸¹ ‘В самом деле: воплощение Христово раз навсегда приблизило тварный мир к божественному замыслу о нем; Христос был на земле в течение ее исторического процесса, этим самым Он как бы освятил человеческую историю, основал в истории становящуюся и пребывающую церковь, - и если это так, то невозможно считать исторические явления протекающими вне божественного замысла о них, рядом случайных и ничем неоправданных стечений обстоятельств, от которых ничего не останется для истории, для жатвы последних времен.’ Skobtsova, “Our Epoch,” 13.

¹⁸² ‘Тут речь идет об раскрытии основного и принципиального исторического смысла русских событий, о нахождении того религиозного и метаисторического базиса, который один способен поставить все события на их должное историческое место и дать им правильную оценку.’ Skobtsova, “Our Epoch,” 9.

into clearly delineated epochs. She notes from the 2nd to the 4th Centuries, Greek thought focused on Trinitarian issues, developing an understanding of essence, from Athanasius to the Cappadocians. However, in the 5th and 6th Centuries, this focus shifted towards Christological issues, and the way in which the two natures of Christ combine in His single person. Skobtsova identifies this as the ‘messianic’ vocation of Greece, as it develops doctrine. Importantly, and significantly, she claims that Russia inherited these developments from Greece. In her writings on Russian thought, Skobtsova asks what Russia did with this inheritance, whether it built upon it or not, and whether it recognised the meta-historical, spiritual vocation which it inherited, which underlies the fluctuations of human constructs in society.

For Skobtsova, the course of a country throughout history is directed by its people. Throughout the historical process, the people bring forth what is closest to themselves in any given epoch, addressing contemporary issues, responding, and seeking to balance or counter the actions of the past. Underneath these human efforts, however, sits a meta-historical, religious basis for each nation. It is only by engaging with this meta-historical vocation that these fluctuations and oscillations can be understood (and judged) within a broader framework. Skobtsova is particularly concerned with the historical vocation of Russia, and how the Russian people have moved towards or away from this calling throughout history.

2. Third Rome and Russian Messianism

In ‘The Russian Messianic Vocation’ Skobtsova makes a distinction between a country’s messianism (мессианизм) and its mission (миссионизм; ‘missionism’) which, she insists, are not synonymous.¹⁸³ Whilst every country has its own historical

¹⁸³ Мать Мария (Скобцова), “Российское мессианское призвание [The Russian Messianic Vocation],” in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 106.

mission not every nation can be characterised as a messianic nation. Messianism is defined by Skobtsova as the intersection of the divine and created plan; as the incarnation (воплощение) of the divine principle in the created world.¹⁸⁴

Skobtsova suggests that the Russian national identity is closely bound together with the concept of the Third Rome. She argues that there is a strong historical tradition of Russia identifying as the ‘new Rome’. After the fall of the Roman Empire and the Byzantine Empire it identified itself as the new religious state power. Russia saw itself, therefore, as a messianic nation; a chosen nation with a specific calling, which is manifest in the title of ‘Third Rome’. Skobtsova argues that this is a central concept which must be understood in order to appreciate Russian self-consciousness and Russia’s task in history. Skobtsova’s concern with this concept, however, is the way in which it has affected Russian thought and, conversely, how Russian thinkers have interpreted this idea. Russian messianism, the idea of the Third Rome, is not important to Skobtsova for its national or State implications, rather she is concerned with the theological principles behind it.

In the article ‘Scroll’ (Перечень)¹⁸⁵, Skobtsova draws attention to the historical basis of the concept of Russia as the Third Rome. Here, Skobtsova is responding to an article written by Zinaida Nikolayevna Gippius (1869-1945).¹⁸⁶

Gippius is highly critical of Russian messianism, writing,

¹⁸⁴ ‘Мессиянство определяет собой пересечение двух планов - божественного и тварного, момент воплощения божественного начала в тварном мире.’ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ This article is in the Bakhmeteff Archive at Columbia and has recently been published for the first time: Мать Мария (Скобцова), Е. Ю. Кузьмина-Караваева, “Перечень,” in *Россия и Эмиграция*, ed. Т.В. Викторова, Л.В. Крошкина, Н.В. Ликвинцева, Е.Л. Майданович, Н.А. Струве, А.И. Шмаина-Великанова (Русский Путь; YMCA Press: Москва; Париж, 2019), 243 – 246.

¹⁸⁶ Gippius was a poet, writer and religious philosopher. She was married to Merezhkovsky and was active in the Russian Symbolist movement. This article referred to here was entitled «Какой социализм? Какая религия?» (What Socialism? What religion?) on 12th June 1928 in the

‘...the sad characteristic of the Russians – their special illness – is the idea of messianism. Messianism – this...is the affirmation of the special, exclusively high calling of one’s nation, one’s country...That which is created by this nation is more significant, higher than that which is created by others. Such is our Church, the State in our country. Even its most undoubted historical downfalls are interpreted as necessary for its proceeding immeasurable ascents.’¹⁸⁷

For Gippius and her supporters, Russian messianism is a disillusioned ‘illness’ which has misled the people, Church, and State. In ‘Scroll’, Skobtsova does not wish to make a firm judgment on the validity of Russian messianism in this article. She does, however, wish to show the genealogy of the idea, highlighting its established roots in Russian history and laying the groundwork for a critique of Gippius’s firm dismissal.

Skobtsova begins this historical survey in the 15th Century, with the Hieromonk Simeon of Suzdal, claiming that Simeon wrote of the spiritual importance placed on Russia in, ‘The Tale of the Council of Florence’. It was not until the 16th Century, however, that the concept of the Third Rome took definitive shape. The monk named Philotheus of Pskov famously wrote in 1510; ‘All Christian Empires are fallen and in their stead stands alone the Empire of our ruler in accordance with the Prophetic books. Two Romes have fallen, but the third stands and a fourth there will not be.’¹⁸⁸ This thought developed in the 17th Century, but Peter the Great’s reforms and secularisation of culture immediately reduced the impact of the preceding centuries. The critical century for the concept’s development, however, was the 19th

Vozrozhdenie newspaper. Gippius’ article was reviewed by V. V. Sukhomlina; «Когда г-жа Гиппиус бывает права...» (‘When Mrs Gippius happens to be right...’) Дни. 1928. 13 July.

¹⁸⁷ ‘...печальное свойство русских — специальная их болезнь — идея мессианства. Мессианство — это... утверждение особого, исключительно высокого призвания своей нации, своей страны... Созданное этой нацией значительнее, выше создаваемого другими. Такова наша церковь, государство в нашей стране. Даже самые несомненные исторические падения ее истолковываются как необходимость для следующего за ними безмерного взлета.’ Cited in: Мать Мария (Скобцова), Е. Ю. Кузьмина-Караваева, “Перечень,” in *Россия и Эмиграция*, ed. Т.В. Викторова, Л.В. Крошкина, Н.В. Ликвинцева, Е.Л. Майданович, Н.А. Струве, А.И. Шмайна-Великанова (Русский Путь; YMCA Press: Москва; Париж, 2019), 243.

¹⁸⁸ Cited in: Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1973), 113.

Century, where the debate surrounding Russian messianism flourished. For Skobtsova, the 19th Century is the key period for assessing the place of Russian messianism.

There are particular key terms which emerge in the 19th Century which are foundational for Skobtsova's engagement with the notion of the Third Rome. Skobtsova notes how the notion of Russia as the Third Rome has not always been a dynamic concept, because it was a received tradition from Byzantium. There have been times when it became an ossified characteristic of state mentality, fuelling nationalism and sectarianism.¹⁸⁹ However, Skobtsova also sees a metaphysical and religious quality to the idea of the Third Rome in the concept of *Godmanhood*. This is more important than any nationalist interpretations. The concept of the Third Rome reveals Russian thought which highlights all-unity and an organic synthesis between the divine and human principles. The particularity of Russia, its special place in history, is not related to its imperial or state power, but the theology and philosophy of unity, *Godmanhood*, and *sobornost'* which it reveals. This means that for the Russian people, the task is perhaps easier to comprehend as they have greater familiarity with these concepts. These concepts have their foundation in the Slavophile movement, to which we shall now turn.

3. The Slavophiles

The Slavophile movement sought to highlight the particularity of Russia's place in the world. In part, this vocation functions as a critical response to trends in Western

¹⁸⁹ This is noted by Berdyaev in 'The Russian Idea': 'The messianic and eschatological element in Philotheus the Monk, was weakened by solicitude for the realization of an earthly Rome. The spiritual pit into which the idea of Moscow the Third Rome falls, is due precisely to the fact that the Third Rome presented itself to their minds as a manifestation of sovereign power, as the might of the State.' Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 9.

thought. The particularity and uniqueness of Russia's vocation on the world-stage, according to some Slavophiles, involves providing an alternative to the perceived Western system of individualism and rationalism. Skobtsova characterises the epoch of the Slavophiles as one which experienced various tensions in an attempt to establish Russian national consciousness, noting the mixture of influences. The 18th Century had seen a flourishing of Western ideas in Russia; the 'splendid century of Catherine' which brought to Russia 'the laws of Montesquieu and the Western free-thinking of Diderot'¹⁹⁰, and later the, 'radical ideas of the Decembrists, a nurturing of the philosophies of revolutionary France, but also the mysticism of a Bible society, of the Quakers, and of French-masonry [*sic.*], and Baroness Krudener, -- all the vivid colour of German romanticism, arisen upon Protestant fermentations.'¹⁹¹ By the 19th Century and the reign of Nicholas I, 'Russian thought was not only imbued with Western ideas, -- it was drenched in them.'¹⁹² An authentic Russian culture, therefore, had become 'ossified, gelled in its own cold lustre, contorted in an uniform, gasping in splendid parades.'¹⁹³

This ossification is reflected in the harsh pronouncement of Pyotr Chaadaev (1794-1856), that Russia had not contributed anything meaningful to world history. In his 'Philosophical Letters', which were published in 1836, Chaadaev appears to lament Russian history because it had failed to internally develop and was inferior to its European neighbours. Chaadaev comments:

'We grow but we do not mature; we advance but in an oblique line, i.e., in a line which does not lead to any goal... Alone in the world, we have given nothing to the world, taken nothing from the world, bestowed not even a single idea upon

¹⁹⁰ Skobtsova, "Khomiakov," *Crucible*, 7.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 8. 'French-masonry' in this quotation is a mistranslation of 'франкмасонов', 'freemasonry'.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

the fund of human ideas...nothing from the first moment of our social existence has emanated from us for man's common good.'¹⁹⁴

For some of his supporters, Chaadaev's words were a welcome announcement, in the sense that they were a wake-up call for Russia. Alexander Herzen remarked; "It was a shot that rang out in the dark night; whether it was something foundering that proclaimed its own wreck, whether it was a signal, a cry for help, whether it was news of the dawn or news that there would not be one - it was all the same: one had to wake up".¹⁹⁵ Skobtsova makes a similar judgment on the place of Chaadaev. Whilst his pronouncement is indeed severe, Skobtsova highlights an interest in his work because his words act as a summoning; 'The very basis, that is heard in them – this is a summoning. They are by no means an answer. They are only the boundlessly sharpened question, -- the question about the Russian destiny.'¹⁹⁶

Following Chaadaev's 'shot in the dark', Skobtsova characterises the 19th Century as Russia's 'torment...about its own Russian destiny, a thirst to guess at its mysterious signs, to discern the pointing out of its way, to comprehend itself.'¹⁹⁷ In this sense, the possibility arose of something great coming from the wilderness. The striving for an authentic, independent Russian principle, Skobtsova believes, can be found in the work of the Slavophiles. The Slavophiles, she claims, commented on the fundamental questions of their age in Russia and the psychology of the Russian

¹⁹⁴ Peter Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters Addressed to a Lady," in *Philosophical Works of Peter Chaadaev*, ed. Raymond T. McNally and Richard Tempest (Dordrecht: Springer, 1991), 22, 25. Cited in Andrzej Walicki, "Peter Chaadaev: Prolegomena to the Philosophy of Russia as a Peripheral Empire" in *Peter Chaadaev: Between the Love of Fatherland and the Love of Truth*, ed. by Artur Mrowczynski-Van Allen, Teresa Obolevitch, Pawel Rojek (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2018), 6.

¹⁹⁵ Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts vol. 2*, trans. Constance Garnett (London: Chatto and Windus, 1927), 261. Cited in Janusz Dobieszewski, "Peter Chaadaev: The Founding Myth of Russian Philosophy," in *Peter Chaadaev: Between the Love of Fatherland and the Love of Truth*, ed. by Artur Mrowczynski-Van Allen, Teresa Obolevitch, Pawel Rojek (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2018) 153.

¹⁹⁶ Skobtsova, "Khomiakov," *Crucible*, 12.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

people. For Skobtsova, the ‘chief and indisputable service’ of the Slavophile movement was that ‘they concentrated the basic attention of their investigation at the centre of Russian spiritual life, -- on Orthodoxy.’¹⁹⁸ This is also noted and confirmed by Paul Ladouceur: ‘The Slavophile response to what they perceived as unbridled and selfish individualism was the affirmation of communal values based on Christian love; in this, they argued, lay true and unique Russian culture. Against the exaltation of reason and rationalism of the Westernizers, the Slavophiles posited the validity of intuitive, non-rational knowledge, experience and testimony, and they centred their thinking of the Orthodoxy tradition as the key to the Russian soul and future.’¹⁹⁹ One of the key figures of the Slavophile movement was Alexsei Khomiakov, to whom we shall now turn, before highlighting the work of the later philosopher, Vladimir Soloviev.²⁰⁰

4. Alexsei Khomiakov

Throughout her theological writings, Skobtsova is concerned with the Body of Christ; how to understand the Church and human community. In ‘The Second Gospel Commandment’, Skobtsova characterises the Orthodox Church as *sobornost*.²⁰¹ This is a key term throughout Skobtsova’s work and in Russian Orthodox thought more generally, which has already been referenced in this thesis and which requires further elaboration. *Sobornost*’ is occasionally translated as ‘catholicity’ or ‘conciliarity’, although it has no direct translation in English. The term is related to the Russian

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 17.

¹⁹⁹ Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*, 45

²⁰⁰ Skobtsova places Soloviev within the same intellectual trajectory of the Slavophile movement (in terms of how he interprets the ‘Russian idea’). Therefore, although he may not be classed as a Slavophile *per se*, his thought follows from Khomiakov’s in Skobtsova’s assessment.

²⁰¹ ‘The Orthodox Church is not a solitary standing before God, but *sobornost*’, which binds everyone with the bonds of Christ’s love and the love for one another.’ Skobtsova, “The Second Gospel Commandment”, *EW*, 47.

word for Cathedral or ‘assembly’ (собор), and it represents an organic unity of persons. The term is often attributed to the Slavophile Movement, especially the work of Alexsei Khomiakov and Ivan Kireevsky (1806-1856). Khomiakov and the Slavophiles were very influential for Skobtsova’s theological development, and here we shall explore her engagement with Khomiakov. Not only is Khomiakov’s influence felt in Skobtsova’s work through her frequent use of the term *sobornost*’ and its associated ideology, but Skobtsova also reflected on his thought in various articles, most notably the 1929 essay, ‘Khomiakov’.²⁰²

In order to understand Khomiakov’s influence on Skobtsova several things are necessary. Firstly, it is important to understand Khomiakov’s context, particularly within the thought of the Slavophiles. Secondly, we shall look at the way in which Skobtsova characterises Khomiakov’s thought and his place in Russian intellectual history. The important things to note here are the people, the people or nation as an organism, faith as the personality of this organism (and Khomiakov’s distinction between ‘Kushite’ and ‘Iranian’), the centrality of love, and the Church as a manifestation of social harmony.

Skobtsova’s thought is very closely aligned with Khomiakov’s in several ways, such as the emphasis on *sobornal* harmony, an understanding of the Church, and an anti-individualistic ideology. However, the main difference between Skobtsova and Khomiakov can be found in Berdyaev’s criticism of Khomiakov’s ‘rooted’ notion of Russian identity. Berdyaev characterises Khomiakov’s thought as a ‘rooted’ theology by suggesting that it is not prophetic and does not resemble the

²⁰² See also ‘Our Epoch’ and ‘The Russian Messianic Vocation’ where Skobtsova recounts Khomiakov’s thought. Мать Мария (Скобцова). *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 9-32; 106-116.

pilgrim quality of the Russian soul. Skobtsova's theology, however, is less reliant on a static vision of Russia. Skobtsova has a more fluid approach, perhaps, to the path of Orthodoxy, to Church reform (in monasticism, for example), and in new situations in emigration. This reflects the core, obvious, biographical distinction between the two thinkers, that Skobtsova was writing in exile. Skobtsova's thought is as Russo-centric as Khomiakov's, yet her reflections about Russia will naturally be different considering her separation from her homeland. However, there are also ideological points of divergence here, which move beyond the biographical context.

Theologically, Skobtsova has a strong apocalypticism that is conjoined with a sense of pilgrimage, non-possession, and folly. These qualities contrast with Berdyaev's depiction of the 'rooted' quality in Khomiakov's thought. These characteristics, therefore, are points of divergence for Skobtsova from the legacy of the Slavophiles.

5. Khomiakov's Thought

Alexsei Stepanovich Khomiakov was born in Moscow into a wealthy, Russian family in 1804. His education was broad. He received a degree in Mathematics from Moscow University, he learned English and French to high level, he wrote poetry and even invented a steam engine. He also had a strong interest in theology. He did not, however, hold an academic position in his lifetime, nor was he ever ordained into the priesthood. Nevertheless, Khomiakov's ecclesiology has been highly influential for Orthodox thought.²⁰³ Kallistos Ware refers to Khomiakov as the 'first real ecclesiologist in Orthodox history'.²⁰⁴ Skobtsova holds Khomiakov in similarly high

²⁰³ One of Khomiakov's most important and influential pieces of writing is the essay which has come to be known as 'The Church is One'. This is available in English, along with a selection of other writings by Khomiakov at: Aleksei Khomiakov "The Church is One," in *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, trans. Robert Bird and ed. Boris Jakim (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 31-54.

²⁰⁴ Kallistos Ware, "Sobornost and eucharistic ecclesiology: Aleksei Khomiakov and his successors," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 2-3 (2011): 218.

regard, claiming that his ecclesiology was as important for the Orthodox Church as the notion of the infallibility of the Pope was for Roman Catholicism.²⁰⁵ Skobtsova wrote an essay on Khomiakov in 1929, which will be a primary point of contact here as we explore Khomiakov's work in relation to Skobtsova's theology. Khomiakov's influence can be felt in Skobtsova's work, particularly in relation to the emphasis placed upon the centrality of 'the people' in understanding community (whether that is a state or the Church). In this area, Skobtsova frequently refers to *sobornost'* which is a term attributed to Khomiakov. Therefore, expanding upon this term in Khomiakov's thought is helpful at this stage to contextualise Skobtsova's employment of the word. This will be done by highlighting Skobtsova's own characterisation of Khomiakov's thought in her 1929 essay.²⁰⁶

Orthodoxy was key to the Slavophile understanding of the Russian soul, and this is emphatically the case for Khomiakov, who highlights the particular understanding of Christianity which is found in Russia and that is distinct from the West. Indeed, Khomiakov highlights the problems with trends in Western Christianity. The concept of spiritual wholeness has been divided, he claims, by Protestantism through its focus on the individual and creed-confession (inspired by German idealists). The Western emphasis on the individual person has been to the detriment of an understanding of community. This misconception is rooted in the intellectual history of the West which is not shared by Russia. Khomiakov claimed that the Russians, or the Slavic world, did not inherit Roman law, as Western Christianity did. Western Christianity inherited three areas, which were Hebrew, Greek, and Roman, but Russia only inherited two (Hebrew and Greek). Andrew

²⁰⁵ Skobtsova, "Khomiakov," *Crucible*, 5.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-38.

Louth notes, therefore, that in Khomiakov's understanding, Slavs, '...had no real grasp of the individual, which Khomiakov saw as embedded in Roman law.'²⁰⁷ For Khomiakov, it was this emphasis on the individual, in separation from organic community and unity, which caused many of the problems which the West encountered.

Understanding Khomiakov's notion of community as manifest in society is important to place his critique of individualism. The subject, actor, and creator of society is the people, who are a living organism. There is an important distinction between 'the people' and the state. The state is the object of creativity and, in a sense, acts as the 'casing' of society, its shell. For Khomiakov, as Skobtsova observes, the state, '...is a dead mechanism, covering the living social organism of the people. And where there is the mechanism, there is always necessity. Only for an organism is there an attributive freedom.'²⁰⁸ Russia, as an organism and not a state, is made up of its people and has freedom as an organism. Khomiakov frames this, according to Skobtsova, in language of family. 'It would be correct to say, that the vocation of the Russian people is not state-political, but familial-existential.'²⁰⁹ For Khomiakov, the familial structure of society is manifest in rural, peasant communities such as the 'mir' village-commune, which served as a form of local government and social cooperative. For the Slavophiles, the *obshchina* or *mir* '...was an ancient, pre-bourgeois and unique institution which distinguished Russia from other countries.'²¹⁰ It is these small village communities which Khomiakov believes manifest an

²⁰⁷ Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers*, 7.

²⁰⁸ Skobtsova, "Khomiakov," *Crucible*, 19.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²¹⁰ Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*, 47.

authentic, Russian understanding of community, which recognises the freedom of individuals within an organic organism.

A key term in this light is *sobornost*. This term is used to describe the type of community which Khomiakov wishes to promote, where persons are held together. As we have already noted, it is a term which loosely translates as ‘catholicity’ (relating to ‘*sobor*’, cathedral). Importantly, however, for Khomiakov catholicity must be qualitative, not quantitative, as Rowan Williams notes: ‘The central sense of the Greek word is *kath’holon*, ‘according to the whole’, and so it refers to the *quality* of shared life, in each and every local Christian community. Every local church is ‘catholic’; the adjective does not apply to the ensemble of diverse churches gathered under some centralized authority.’²¹¹ *Sobornost*’ does not just refer to a collection of individuals, but the quality of shared life in one whole. Khomiakov writes that this unity stems from the unity of God: ‘The unity of the Church follows necessarily from the unity of God, for the Church is not a multiplicity of persons in their personal separateness, but the unity of God’s grace, living in the multitude of rational creatures who submit themselves to grace.’²¹²

For Khomiakov, this understanding of community has an impact on perception. It is not possible, according to Khomiakov, for an individual consciousness to comprehend existence in its fullness; only a partial, subjective perception of being is possible. Authentic perception is, however, possible for the ‘soborno-collective consciousness of people.’²¹³ This is not simply a gathering together of individuals, but an organic consciousness. For Khomiakov, this

²¹¹ Williams, *Looking East in Winter*, 165.

²¹² Khomiakov, “The Church is One,” 31.

²¹³ Skobtsova, “Khomiakov,” *Crucible*, 25.

consciousness is manifest in the Church. Indeed, in the Church – the Body of Christ – this collective is found, where *sobornost'* is manifest. Khomiakov's vision (as described by Skobtsova) is thus a fundamentally Christian, theological, understanding of community. Revealing this is Russia's vocation:

'The task of the Russian people, its universal and religious mission, the meaning of its vocation, - is contained within the creative integrity of life, in realised community, in the imbuing with the religious principle, in the annulling of that secular world-concept, which corrupts the contemporary culture of Europe.'²¹⁴

It was in the Russian, organic, intuitive, Orthodox understanding of community that Khomiakov highlighted a unique vocation.

We have already noted some of Khomiakov's criticism of non-Orthodox Christian denominations, principally in the perceived individualism of Western Protestantism. In a similar way, for Khomiakov, the ideal of the Church as *sobornost'* is a particularly Orthodox perspective. Yuri Samarin (who was Khomiakov's biographer and friend) writes: 'The church is not a doctrine, not a system, and not an institution. The church is a living organism, an organism of truth and love, or more precisely: *truth and love as an organism*.'²¹⁵ Khomiakov carefully and frequently notes the 'failings' of non-Orthodox denominations in maintaining this ideal. The wholeness and *sobornost'* of the Body of Christ is maintained by love. Schisms have occurred historically when this love has been ruptured and when matters regarding doctrine have been decided independently of the whole Church body.

Furthermore, Khomiakov identifies different approaches to the understanding of love within the Church. He defines Roman Catholicism by obedience,

²¹⁴ Ibid., 24.

²¹⁵ Yuri Samarin, "Introduction to the Theological Writings of Aleksei Khomiakov (excerpts)" in *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, trans. and ed. by Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 171.

Protestantism by individual decision, but the Orthodox Church is characterised by Khomiakov as the command; ‘let us love one another so that with oneness of mind we may confess, -- Father and Son and Holy Spirit.’²¹⁶ Love defines *sobornost*’ and is ‘unrealisable in individual seclusion and renunciation.’²¹⁷ In contrast to Khomiakov’s characterisation of Roman Catholicism, the love which is found in the Orthodox vision of *sobornost*’ is rooted in freedom. It is not motivated by obedience or ego, but by the intuitive relationality of the community. In this sense, Skobtsova notes that for Khomiakov, the Church is described as ‘freedom in love.’²¹⁸ Khomiakov himself writes that, ‘Love is the crown and glory of the Church.’²¹⁹

Freedom, as ‘freedom in love’, is central to this vision of the Church. Skobtsova identifies two major delineations within Khomiakov’s thought in relation to the characterisation of a people’s faith and the relationship between freedom and necessity. These were termed by Khomiakov as ‘Kushitism’ and ‘Iranism’. These terms correspond to two conflicting principles - freedom and necessity, or spirit and matter. A people’s faith response to these two principles can be termed, according to Khomiakov, as Kushite or Iranian. A Kushite religion is, ‘the religion of necessity. It determines by itself the power and force of matter over the free creative spirit.’²²⁰ An Iranian religion, on the other hand, is ‘a religion of freedom, a religion of the creative spirit, of a conquering the stagnation of matter, of overcoming necessity.’²²¹ The Kushite religion, Khomiakov argues, is characterised by Buddhism which expounds subservience to materiality, and an ‘enslaved spirit’. In Khomiakov’s own time this was reflected, he suggested, in philosophical systems such as the work of Hegel, in

²¹⁶ Skobtsova, “Khomiakov,” *Crucible*, 30.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Khomiakov, “The Church is One,” 34.

²²⁰ Skobtsova, “Khomiakov,” *Crucible*, 18.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

the Germanic spirit, and in various strands of Catholicism. Judaism, however, was the first historical example of the Iranian principle and this same free spirit can be found in the Russian nation. Skobtsova recounts this: ‘And perhaps nowhere in the world is there expressed so powerfully the genuine Iranian principle, as in the fundamental character of all the Slavs in general, -- bearers of the Iranian spirit’.²²² The Russian people possess the qualities of peaceful agriculturalists, not the spirit of conquerors, which is rooted in the familial relations of small communities and characterised by freedom in love.

6. Khomiakov and Skobtsova: Pilgrimage and Roots

In ‘The Russian Idea’, Berdyaev comments on certain characteristics which are overlooked by the Slavophile’s portrait of Russian culture, in which Khomiakov’s system is placed. Berdyaev highlights the pilgrim nature of the Russian Christian sensibility, which he notes the Slavophiles do not appreciate and, in some senses, ignore. The pilgrim quality of the Russian character reflects the people’s propensity to rebellion and holy folly. It is also intimately connected with a strong eschatological, chiliastic strain in Russian spirituality. This is at odds, however, with what he identifies as the ‘rooted’ quality of the Slavophile worldview which Khomiakov represents. This is a pertinent observation in relation to Skobtsova’s theological system. Skobtsova’s thought is highly influenced by the Slavophiles, yet her thought is shaped by these factors (a strong eschatological bent, an emphasis on pilgrimage and holy folly) which Berdyaev highlights as lacking in the Slavophile system. Making this connection, through Berdyaev, is helpful to recognise the way in which

²²² Ibid., 19.

Skobtsova's system is unique to the inheritance of Khomiakov. It also further substantiates Berdyaev's recognition of Skobtsova as a revolutionary Slavophile.

Berdyaev notes that an eschatological worldview is part of the fabric of the Russian soul. This manifests in a discontent with what exists, and a striving for another world.

'Pilgrimage is a very characteristic Russian thing, to a degree unknown in the West. A pilgrim walks about the immense Russian land but never settles down or attaches himself to anything. A pilgrim is in search of the truth, in search of the Kingdom of God. He struggles into the distance; the pilgrim has no abiding city upon earth, he moves eagerly towards the city that is to be. The masses of the people have always produced pilgrims from their ranks, but in spirit the most creative representatives of Russian culture were pilgrims; Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Soloviev and the whole of the revolutionary Intelligentsia were pilgrims. Not only physical but spiritual pilgrimage exists; it is the impossibility of finding rest and peace in anything finite, it is the striving towards infinity.'²²³

Berdyaev links this eschatological sensibility and pilgrim quality of the Russian soul with revolt and rebelliousness. There are similarities here with the notion of holy folly, and the typology of the Holy Fool comes to mind in Berdyaev's description of Russian pilgrimage:

'The Slavophiles did not express all the traits of the Russian and Slavic character. For example, Russian and Slavic revolt and rebelliousness – very profound religious, national traits – are virtually absent in Slavophilism. But revolt and rebelliousness are not less characteristic of Russians than humility and subservience. Russians do not have their city; they seek the Coming City; the nature of the Russian nation is characterized by an everlasting pilgrimage. Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Solovyov, and Tolstoy are pilgrims. The type of the pilgrim is the beloved type of the Russian people. The search for the City is powerfully expressed in the figure of the pilgrim. In the Slavophiles, the spirit of Russian rootedness predominated over the spirit of Russian pilgrimage. Pilgrims walk upon the earth, but the element of air is more powerful in them than the element of earth. Khomiakov was not a pilgrim.'²²⁴

²²³ Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, 197.

²²⁴ Nikolai Berdyaev, "Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov," in *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, trans. and ed. by Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 347.

Berdyayev recognises that there was a striving for something more in the Slavophile system, a desire to move towards the City of God. However, this striving was manifest in a solidifying and grounding of the people: ‘Of course, the Slavophiles, too, thirsted for Christ’s truth about the earth, for Christ’s City; but for the triumph of this truth they demanded not so much pilgrimage and airy flight as rootedness in the earth.’²²⁵ A recognition of the ‘elemental’ in Russia (the past, the foundation and source of its history and being) is indeed important in Russia. However, Berdyayev claims that this is woven together with an eschatological spirit in Russia, which is not sufficiently recognised by the Slavophiles.²²⁶

Skobtsova’s thought, on the other hand, is heavily influenced by the tradition of pilgrimage. We have already noted Skobtsova’s personal, biographical interest in pilgrimage from a young age. This interest permeates her constructive theological work as well. In the course of this thesis, we shall see how Skobtsova highlights hagiographical tales of pilgrims that are coupled with an advocating for an ascetic renunciation of comfort, security and even tradition, to go out into the world in the style of a pilgrim. In this chapter, we shall also see how Skobtsova reimagines the loss of one’s homeland in emigration into a spiritually beneficial situation that emphasises non-possession and a liberating emancipation and unbinding from restrictive nationalist worldviews. Both Skobtsova’s emphasis on pilgrimage and her reflections on ascetic non-possession are permeated with an eschatological worldview, and a belief that Christianity (in its eternal reality) breaks through and disrupts the everyday, earthly, and mundane. Skobtsova’s fiery, apocalyptic imagery of unbinding

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Berdyayev, *The Russian Idea*, 197-8.

stands in contrast to the agrarian, rooted, pastoral image which can characterise the Slavophile vision.

This appears to be the principal diversion from Khomiakov's thought which Skobtsova takes. However, there remain notable similarities between her thought and that of Khomiakov. The place of *sobornost'*, which has been outlined here and which incorporates a vision of shared society, is the most apparent inspiration. Additionally, in a similar way to Khomiakov, Skobtsova also criticises Protestantism (with her 'Protestant mysticism'), and her critical typology of spiritualities in 'Types of Religious Life' could easily be applied to denominations, although she does not make this explicit. In Skobtsova's article entitled 'Churchliness', written in 1937, she resists such an approach, and notes that her critiques are not about the distinction between Orthodox or Christian, but in the differences and shades of the individual believer. Indeed, she notes that there are many rooms in the Lord's house.²²⁷ This is however, a passing remark and its brevity does not altogether resolve the issues around denominational diversity and critique in her work.

Overall, Khomiakov's insistence that Russia has a unique vocation and mission on the world-stage to reveal a theology, ecclesiology and an ethic which challenges the individualism of certain Western ideals, provides a fertile ground for Skobtsova's thought and practice. Skobtsova's distaste for individualism and her perception of the Church (the Body of Christ as *sobornost'*) is undeniably informed by the work of Khomiakov. Her uniqueness lies in her extraordinary context, as a

²²⁷ 'Мы предостерегаем, от подмены понятий православный или христианин. Здесь вопрос не в принципиальном различии, а в ударении и в оттенке, в личной одарённости верующего и его души. А поэтому путей много и обителей в доме Отца нашего много.' Мать Мария (Скобцова), "Что такое церковность?" accessed January 5, 2023, <http://mere-marie.com/fate/chto-takoe-tserkovnost/>

Russian in exile seeking to put into practice the uniqueness of the Russian religious renaissance.

7. Vladimir Soloviev

In addition to Khomiakov, another principal influence on Skobtsova is Vladimir Sergeyeich Soloviev (1853-1900), whose importance for modern Russian thought cannot be understated. Semyon Frank claims that, ‘Solovyov is unquestionably the greatest of Russian philosophers and systematic religious thinkers’²²⁸; a sentiment echoed by Berdyaev, and others.²²⁹ Soloviev had a widespread influence on Russian philosophy, theology, and culture. The second wave of Symbolist poets turned to Soloviev for inspiration, and his Sophiology had a deep impact on Orthodox thought in the 20th Century, especially in the work of Bulgakov and Berdyaev. However, his influence to a certain extent divided modern Orthodox thought, as Rowan Williams notes: ‘The history of Russian theology in the twentieth century is largely one of debate between those who have, broadly speaking, felt comfortable with the legacy of Soloviev and those who have repudiated it in favor of a more consciously traditional and church-focused style’.²³⁰ Skobtsova’s interest in Soloviev and her adoption of some of his key ideas places her work within a particular tradition in modern Russian thought which is sympathetic to Soloviev’s legacy, and his influence can be clearly perceived in her writings.

²²⁸ S. L. Frank, “Introduction” in Vladimir Sergeyeich Solovyov, *A Solovyov Anthology*, ed. S. L. Frank and trans. Natalie Duddington (London: SCM Press, 1950), 9.

²²⁹ Rowan Williams, for example, claims that he is, ‘without doubt the single most influential Russian religious writer of the age’: Rowan Williams “Eastern Orthodox Theology” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, 3rd edition, ed. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers (Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 574.

²³⁰ Rowan Williams “Eastern Orthodox Theology” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, 3rd edition, ed. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers (Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 574.

In 1929 Skobtsova wrote the article ‘The World-Concept of Vladimir Solov’ev’²³¹ which outlines what she considers to be his main concerns, what his philosophy ‘strives after’, and how it applies this to the ‘real facts of human history.’²³² We see in this article the importance of ‘all-unity’ (всеединство) in Soloviev’s work, and its relation to the concept of *Godmanhood* (Богочеловечество); two themes which permeate Skobtsova’s own writings. Soloviev’s principal influence on Skobtsova is this sense of striving towards unity, to *Godmanhood* and *sobornost’*. As Soloviev is such a key figure in the history of Russian thought, it is helpful here to outline some of his key ideas, how they have impacted Skobtsova’s own theology and what she is doing differently. Skobtsova’s article will be the foundation for this analysis.

Vladimir Sergeyevich Soloviev was born on 16th June 1853 in Moscow. His father, Sergey Soloviev, was an eminent historian, and his grandfather was a priest. When he was eight years old, Vladimir was dedicated by his grandfather for a life of service to the Church. However, Soloviev’s adolescence was marked by an interest in atheism and materialism. He began studying at the University of Moscow in 1869, initially studying mathematics and physics and, at some point during his early adulthood, Soloviev returned to the faith of his youth. He also changed to studying history and philosophy, whilst simultaneously taking courses at the Moscow Spiritual Academy, which was an unusual decision for a lay person at the time. In 1874 he became a Fellow in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Moscow. The following year he travelled to England to undertake research on Indian and Gnostic

²³¹ This article was translated by Fr Stephen J. Janos: E. Skobtsova, “The World-Concept of Vl. Solov’ev,” in *The Crucible of Doubts: Khomyakov, Dostoevsky, Solov’ev, In Search of Synthesis, Four 1929 Works*, trans. Fr. S Janos (Mohrsville, PA: FRSJ Publications, 2016), 89-122.

²³² Skobtsova, *Solov’ev*, 92.

philosophies at the British Museum, where he had the first vision of the ethereal female figure which he regarded as Sophia, divine Wisdom.

In Western thought, Soloviev identified what Skobtsova calls, ‘a crisis of the general world-apprehension, a sensation of a primordial crumbling, fragmentation and disassociation of the world.’²³³ He resisted the type of analytic rationalism which guided some of the natural sciences in the nineteenth century into a fragmented understanding of the world. In contrast, Soloviev builds a system which is oriented towards unity, which highlights the centrality of the person (something which can be forgotten in a scientific, rationalist worldview) and the guiding unity of Sophia. Skobtsova recognises these concerns in Soloviev’s writings. Despite noting that his work is hard to categorise due to the variety of topics and styles which he employs (a problem which, incidentally, could also be applied to Skobtsova), Skobtsova believes that Soloviev’s work has one primary concern and that is to seek unity (something which is affirmed by Semyon Frank²³⁴). Skobtsova writes; ‘But a fundamental attribute of the creative genius of Solov’ev was an aspiration towards the idea of wholeness of life [стремление к идеалу цельности жизни], an aspiration towards the overcoming of the disintegration of the world.’²³⁵ It is this striving towards the ‘wholeness of life’ which appears to be the principal point of contact between Soloviev’s work and his influence on Skobtsova’s theological writings.

This concern is apparent in Soloviev’s, ‘The Lectures on Godmanhood’ which Skobtsova considered to be perhaps the most characteristic of all Soloviev’s work.²³⁶ The lectures were delivered between 1877-1884 at the University of St Petersburg and

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Frank, “Introduction,” *A Solovyov Anthology*, 13.

²³⁵ Skobtsova, “Solov’ev,” *Crucible*, 92.

²³⁶ Ibid., 95.

at the Institute of the Higher Courses of Studies for Women. They were extremely popular, with notable figures in attendance such as Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy. The main concern of this work is Soloviev's doctrine of *Godmanhood* (Богочеловечество; sometimes translated as 'divine humanity'). Semyon Frank understands this doctrine as an attempt to raise the Chalcedonian understanding of Christ's two natures 'to the level of a philosophical principle embracing the whole of existence.'²³⁷ The term Godmanhood has been used before in Russian thought (by Bukharev, for example), but Paul Valliere claims that *Lectures* 'played the decisive role in establishing *bogochelovechestvo* as the central theological idea of philosophic Orthodoxy.'²³⁸ Godmanhood reflects a unity between the divine and the human, rooted in Christ who is the Godman. All-unity (всеединство) is central to this doctrine as the synthesis of the distinction between the divine and the human in existence.²³⁹

Soloviev, according to Skobtsova, always seeks after integral truth, not partial truth. This refers to a unity between contrasting philosophical trends and disciplines, such as between the traditions of the East and the West, and more fundamental differences, such as between the empirical and the mystical. A unity should be found between these polarities: 'There should be found an organic synthesis of the empirical world, of its rationalistic comprehension, and of the mystical or religious significance of the comprehended.'²⁴⁰ Skobtsova characterises Soloviev's thought, in its striving for unity, as an organic synthesis between the empirical and the mystical. Skobtsova continues, 'It would be properly correct to say, that the entire philosophy of Solov'ev

²³⁷ Frank, "Introduction", *A Solovyov Anthology*, 16.

²³⁸ Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 144.

²³⁹ See the introduction for this thesis for further reflections on all-unity, and the 'integral unity' in Soloviev's work.

²⁴⁰ Skobtsova, "Solov'ev," *Crucible*, 94.

strives to situate fundamental knowledge and the core of being in a divine origin, and in this divine principle to consolidate all the side and all the views and the manifestations of worldly life, to think about everything as a single worldly Divine-human process, encompassing within itself all the universe in all its manifestations.’²⁴¹ This establishes a profound connection between humanity (and the fullness of worldly existence) and the Divine (the Absolute, in Soloviev’s language), in which all worldly processes have their origin.²⁴²

As part of this recognition of synthesis, Soloviev highlights the need for a balance between faith in the Church, and faith in humanity. Soloviev advocates for a balancing between the positive affirmations of faith in humanity, with faith in God:

‘The old traditional form of religion has issued forth from the faith in God, but it has failed to carry out this faith to the end. The modern extra-religious civilization proceeds from the faith in man, but it, too, remains inconsistent – does not carry its faith to its [logical] end. But when both of these faiths, the faith in God and the faith in man are carried out consistently and realized in full, they meet in the unique, complete, and integral truth of Godmanhood.’²⁴³

This kind of unity is found especially in Christianity. Skobtsova recounts Soloviev’s understanding of the partial truths found in other religions, and how Christianity represents the fullness of this truth: ‘Christianity summoned mankind to a co-operative Divine creativity. It drew mankind nearer to the Divine intent concerning the world. Having manifest [*sic.*] as the religion of God-manhood, Christianity

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² The influence of this aspect of Soloviev’s thought will become apparent in Skobtsova’s work when we address the ‘mysticism of human communion’ in her writing. Here Skobtsova emphasises the potential for communion with the Divine, in and through communion with humanity. This resonates therefore with Soloviev’s striving for unity between the empirical and the mystical, as Skobtsova seeks to situate an encounter with the Divine in everyday, human encounter. Soloviev recognises that humanity is not simply a natural phenomenon, and equally not a spirit in a machine. A person is ‘spiritual-corporeal, a natural being’ (Skobtsova, “Solov’ev,” *Crucible*, 103). Skobtsova affirms this principle and notes the divine origin of nature: ‘Nature, like everything genuinely-existing, -- is rooted in God, -- so that it has a supra-temporal and eternal subsistence. Humanity, as an integral universal and individual organism, is world soul. And this world soul, humanity, re-united through Christ with the divine principle, is the Church.’ (Skobtsova, “Solov’ev,” *Crucible*, 103).

²⁴³ Vladimir Solovyov, *Lectures on Godmanhood*, (San Rafael, CA: Semantron, 2007), 85.

indicated the furthest path of development of religious world-apperception.²⁴⁴ At the heart of this is the person of Christ. Catherine Evtuhov, writing about the *Lectures* in the Oxford Handbook to Russian Theology, says that the main articulation of Soloviev's vision is quite straightforward. She writes; 'The essence of Christianity is Christ himself, and the interaction between Christ and humanity takes the form of an incessant creative *process*, as the fallen world works to recreate the lost, perfect union with the Divine.'²⁴⁵ The task of this creative process and the human striving towards unity involves, for Soloviev, a selfless form of love.

8. The Meaning of Love

In 'The Meaning of Love', Soloviev explores the nature of love and, in so doing, highlights the relationship between God, humanity, and unity. He begins by defining God as one who is the 'fulness of being', and how this is in contrast to the human:

'God *is* all, i.e., he possesses in one absolute act all positive content, the whole fulness of being. A human being (in general and every individual being in particular), being in fact only *this* and not *another*, may *become* all, only by doing away, in his consciousness and life, with that internal boundary which separates him from another. "This" may become the "all" only *together with others*; only together with others can an individual realize his absolute significance – become an inseparable and irreplaceable part of the universal whole, an independent, living and original organ of the absolute life.'²⁴⁶

In contrast to God who possesses all positive content, a human being is a separate entity; each individual person is a singular being, and distinct from other individuals. Yet, this human has the potential to overcome this separation, and be united into a living whole with others. The capacity for wholeness in the human reflects the image of God in them. A human being possesses an 'ideal nature which binds him with

²⁴⁴ Skobtsova, "Solov'ev," *Crucible*, 99.

²⁴⁵ Catherine Evtuhov, "Vladimir Soloviev as a Religious Philosopher," in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Caryl Emerson, George Pattison and Randall A. Poole (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 206.

²⁴⁶ Vladimir Solovyov, *The Meaning of Love*, ed. and trans. by Thomas R. Beyer, Jr. (Lindisfarne Press, 1985), 43-44.

absolute truth or with God. Besides the material or empirical content of his life, each human comprises in himself the image of God, i.e., a special form of the absolute content.’²⁴⁷

However, egoism undermines any such unity between persons. It is egoism which reduces the absolute significance of the whole to the relative significance of the solitary ego, to the detriment of others:

‘The basic falsehood and evil of egoism lie not in this absolute self-consciousness and self-evaluation of the subject, but in the fact that, ascribing to himself in all justice an absolute significance, he unjustly refuses to others this same significance. Recognizing himself as a center of life (which is a matter of fact he is), he relegates others to the circumference of his own being and leaves them only an external and relative value.’²⁴⁸

Soloviev wants to resist egoism, but not individuality. In this affirmation, he wants to maintain the distinct, profound worth of each human individual (recognising the image of God in them), whilst also proclaiming that this cannot be exclusive to our own sense of self. Recognising one’s own significance necessitates a recognition of the worth of all persons. Therefore, affirming an individual’s worth actually requires an affirmation of all people.

Egoism undermines this. In order to love authentically, therefore, a sacrifice of egoism is required. ‘The meaning of human love, speaking generally, is *the justification and salvation of individuality through the sacrifice of egoism.*’²⁴⁹ In order for the value of individuality to be recognised, egoism must be sacrificed. For Soloviev, the power of love is able to overcome egoism primarily in the form of sexual love.

‘Recognizing in love the truth of another, not abstractly, but essentially, transferring in deed the center of our life beyond the limits of our empirical

²⁴⁷ Soloviev, *The Meaning of Love*, 60.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

personality, we by so doing reveal and realize our own real truth, our own absolute significance, which consists just in our capacity to transcend the borders of our factual phenomenal being, in our capacity to live not only in ourselves, but also in another.²⁵⁰

The highest form of love which releases individuality from egoism, and which joins a self to another, is sexual love. Sexual love is the form of union which recognises the worth of oneself and another, in reciprocity and communion, which permeates the whole of our being and existence. It is sexual love, for Soloviev, which is the closest approximation to the form of unity which humanity strives towards. This system has strong resonances with Skobtsova's own thought. However, Skobtsova does not elevate sexual love to the heights which Soloviev does. Instead, Skobtsova translates this framework into a monastic system, where the role of chastity in the classical monastic tradition is not questioned.

Soloviev sought to overcome the disintegration of the world. His system, particularly in 'Lectures on Godmanhood', suggest a synthesis between the empirical and the mystical in the concept of Godmanhood. In 'The Meaning of Love', he recognises humanity's root in the Absolute and unconditional content of the Divine, and how the tragedy of egoism undermines this unity. He characterises a type of love which redeems individualism within community and overcomes egoism. Throughout her theological writings, Skobtsova is influenced by the thought of Soloviev in this area. She too perceives a disintegration in the world, a gap between the achievements of humanism and the life of the Church, between the Divine principle and the creative life of humanity, and she strives towards synthesis in thought and practice. Her understanding of the 'mysticism of human communion' (to which this thesis will return), reflects a similar synthesis between the empirical and the mystical. At the

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 45.

heart of Skobtsova's theological writings is a desire to practically implement these concepts, and the type of unity which Soloviev outlines. This is not lacking in Soloviev's thought; indeed, he writes of the necessity of active faith and creative love:

'The psycho-physical process of the restoration of the Divine image in material humanity has no means to perfect itself by itself, apart from us. Its origin, like that of everything better in this world, arises from the realm of unconscious processes and relations obscure to us; there lie the germ and root of the tree of life, but we must foster it with our conscious activity. For the beginning passive receptivity of feeling suffices, but subsequently active faith is necessary, with moral effort and hard work, to keep for oneself, to strengthen and develop this gift of luminous and creative love, in order through it to incarnate in oneself and in another the image of God, and to create out of two infinite and perishable natures one absolute and immortal individuality.'²⁵¹

For Skobtsova, the 'conscious activity' of striving to realise *Godmanhood* is situated within a different framework to that of Soloviev. Skobtsova proposes a creative love which seeks to also 'incarnate in oneself and in another the image of God', but through a monastic and ascetic framework. Skobtsova interprets the notion of *Godmanhood* (and Khomiakov's *sobornost'*) through a monastic lens. The particular context of emigration provides new challenges for such an embodiment, which give a new and distinct perspective to the legacy of *Godmanhood* which Soloviev set in motion.

9. Symbolism

Although Skobtsova's poetry is not being analysed in this thesis, it is important to consider Skobtsova's poetic career in any discussion of her context and influences.²⁵² Skobtsova's involvement in the artistic scene in Russia, prior to the Revolution, proved formative not only for her poetry but for her entire worldview and intellectual output. It was her poetic and artistic interests which led her into the world of the

²⁵¹ Ibid., 61.

²⁵² However, this thesis will focus primarily on her theological writings rather than her poetry. Ermolaev's thesis, *Motherhood, Modernism & Mariology*, explores Skobtsova's poetry.

intelligentsia in St Petersburg.²⁵³ This milieu had a deep influence on the young Skobtsova (who was Elizaveta Kuzmina-Karavaeva at the time), even if this was not always a positive influence. Indeed, Skobtsova's disenchantment with the poetic circles of St Petersburg are key for her theological development. This is most notable in her reaction to Russian Symbolism and her engagement with second generation Symbolists such as Vyacheslav Ivanov, Andrei Bely and, most notably, Alexander Blok.

Following her father's death in 1906, the young Skobtsova (then Elizaveta Pilenko) moved from Anapa to a flat in St Petersburg. This was a difficult move for Elizaveta, who hated the city. The first winter there was marked by mourning, fog and unhappiness, whilst her former home on the Black Sea had been characterised by wind, warmth and freedom; 'The lid of the sky had completely come over this city-coffin, and beyond it – emptiness.'²⁵⁴ However, Elizaveta's engagement with this coffin-city began to change when she first encountered Alexander Blok at a poetry reading. Skobtsova would recount this (the first of many meetings) in her article 'Encounters with Blok', written in Paris in 1936. The young Elizaveta was inspired by Blok and his work, even recognising something of herself in his poetry. She became infatuated with Blok, and he is an important figure to consider in Skobtsova's intellectual development in her St Petersburg period.²⁵⁵ It is also important to note the important place that poetry held in Elizaveta's life, from a very early age. Her first

²⁵³ As well as her marriage to Dmitrii Kuz'min-Karavaev.

²⁵⁴ 'Крышка неба совсем надвинулась на этот город-гроб, а за ней - пустота.' Мать Мария (Скобцова), 'Встречи с Блоком [Encounters with Blok],' in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 1 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 25.

²⁵⁵ Skobtsova's relationship with Blok has been expounded in various biographies of her life, including Hackel and Stratton-Smith. Our concern here is to map the influences on Skobtsova's intellectual work, thus we shall not dwell too heavily on her biographical association with Blok, but we shall place Blok within the Symbolist movement and the broader intellectual context which Skobtsova found herself in.

encounter with Blok was when she was a young teenager (around the age of 15), yet even at this stage Elizaveta could recognise a similarity between her work and Blok's.

Russian Symbolism was a literary movement at the turn of the 20th Century, spanning the years between 1890-1910. Poetry was the primary genre of this movement. Russian Symbolist writing was originally influenced and inspired by the Symbolist movement in Europe, especially in France and Belgium. However, Russian Symbolism had its own character and individuality. One notable distinction in Russia is that many of the Symbolists were concerned with the place of Russia in history, which is reflected in an interest with Russian art and literature. Ronald E. Peterson notes the similarities between French, Belgian and Russian Symbolists, such as 'the notions of correspondences between mundane images and metaphysical concepts and the importance of music in literature.'²⁵⁶ However, Peterson sees a particular approach in the Russian movement which seeks to become a world-view, not just a literary movement; 'where the French were somewhat limited in their view of Symbolism, seeing it mostly as one approach to writing, some Russian Symbolists wanted to make their Symbolist concepts into a whole philosophical system, a world view that could encompass all thought.'²⁵⁷ Indeed, Skobtsova places the Symbolist movement into the trajectory which she traces in 'Our Epoch', outlining the importance of the Russian striving for 'all-unity.'²⁵⁸ The Symbolist movement in Russia, therefore, has an importance not only for Skobtsova's personal context, but

²⁵⁶ As Ronald E. Peterson notes: Ronald E. Peterson, *A History of Russian Symbolism: Linguistic & Literary Studies in Eastern Europe*, Vol. 29 (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1993), 4.

²⁵⁷ Peterson, *Russian Symbolism*, 6. This perhaps applies more to the second wave of Symbolists than the first.

²⁵⁸ See especially: Мать Мария (Скобцова), "Наша Эпоха," in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 21-22.

also for her reading of intellectual history in Russia; as a notable link in Russia's development.

The Russian Symbolist movement can be broadly delineated into two generations. The first generation of Symbolists included Zinaida Gippius, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Fyodor Sologub, Valery Bryusov and Konstantin Balmont. This first wave of Symbolism is often characterised as being reasonably close to the French Symbolists.²⁵⁹ The second generation of Russian Symbolists consisted principally of Vyacheslav Ivanov, Andrey Bely and Alexander Blok, who were active in the first decade of the 20th Century. The second wave had some notable differences to the first. Ivanov, Bely and Blok had a stronger interest, generally, in the place of mysticism, religion and art, than the preceding Symbolists. This may be, in part, due to their interest with the poetry and philosophy of Vladimir Soloviev. These thinkers had a stronger desire than their predecessors to apply the precepts of Symbolist to all life, not just to art. Skobtsova mostly interacted with the second wave of Symbolists, thus they will be our focus here.

The Symbolist movement believed that symbols in the everyday world point to higher realities. According to Skobtsova, the Symbolists suggested that authentic human creativity or culture only has significance when it reveals these divine symbols in the world. In this way, Skobtsova comments that according to the Symbolists; 'Human creativity (culture) is an eternal process of building which links relativity with non-relativity, temporality with eternity.'²⁶⁰ Therefore, the artist, and especially the poet, has an important function in the creative process, linking temporality with

²⁵⁹ Peterson, *Russian Symbolism*, 9.

²⁶⁰ 'Человеческое творчество (культура) есть вечное создание связи между относительностью и безотносительностью, временным и вечным.' Skobtsova, "Our Epoch," 21.

eternity through the use of symbols. In this sense, there is a mysticism and theurgy to the creative process. There is a clear link here with the thought of Soloviev, who considered the function of a poet as touching the divine world through mental contemplation:

‘In particular, this positive although incomplete knowledge of, or penetration into, the reality of the divine world is open to creation in poetry. Every true poet must necessarily penetrate into the ‘fatherland of the flame and the word’ in order to gather from there the prototypes of his creations as well as inner enlightenment, which is called inspiration, and by means of which our natural reality finds sounds and colours for the embodiment of the ideal types’.²⁶¹

The second wave of Symbolists believed that this process was more than just the creation of an artwork; it was about the synthesis and integrity of all life. As such, creativity had great potential beyond its immediate environs. The second wave of Symbolists suggested that art had the potential to unify the artist and ‘the people’, addressing a disunity which had become apparent in their context at the turn of the century. Vyacheslav Ivanov saw the potential of poetry to bring together this disunited society, but also to incarnate a sense of unity between the temporal and the infinite, as Avril Pyman notes;

‘Only in poetry, Ivanov believed, where music could come to the aid of words, where the unsaid and unsayable could be sensed in the rhythm of the line, the orchestration of sound, the pregnant image, the significant pause, was there any hope of reuniting the people and the artist, the soul and the intelligent will, the earth and the treetops: meanwhile, true, universal ‘culture’ was impossible in the present state of ‘separation’.²⁶²

This unifying process is particularly evident in Ivanov’s dramatic theory, which relies heavily on the concept of *sobornost*. In ‘Our Epoch’, Skobtsova draws attention to Ivanov’s notion of ‘collective creativity’ which is evident in his views on the function of drama. Skobtsova notes that the religious-philosophical aspect of much Symbolist

²⁶¹ Soloviev, *Lectures on Godmanhood*, 157.

²⁶² Avril Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 195.

thought had been largely over-looked and draws attention to this aspect of Ivanov's thought.²⁶³

Ivanov imagined the theatre as a way in which to unite the artist and the people through the creation of myths which could act as symbols. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal notes the way in which Ivanov viewed the role of the symbolist poet as a creator of myth who could unite the poet and the crowd; 'he was to evoke the symbols around which the people can unite and work them into mythic stories, thereby reconciling the "poet and the crowd in a great all national art." The first step in the genesis of this new art was for the poet to end his isolation, to reject aloofness and introspection and merge with the folk soul. Only then could he reassume his ancient sacerdotal and prophetic role, become a creator of myth, the formulator of an "all-national art," the progenitor of a new culture.'²⁶⁴ In this sense, the theatre would act as a temple, unifying all who participated within it into a *sobornal* harmony based on national symbols and myth. The religious tone of this notion of theatre was rather abstract and could be termed 'religious-philosophical' rather than pertaining to any religion or faith. However, there were strong influences from Greek culture, the theatre and cult of Dionysus especially.

The particular role and function of the poet is also apparent in Blok's work. In 'Ante Lucem', Blok writes of the poet's striving towards the Ideal; images which clearly evoke the thought of Soloviev;

'Fate itself ordained that I
Shine my dim torch with
Holy veneration
At the very threshold of the Ideal.
And as soon as evening comes, towards the Good

²⁶³ Soltsova, "Our Epoch," 21—22.

²⁶⁴ Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, "Theatre As Church: The Vision of the Mystical Anarchists," *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 4, no. 2 (1977): 128.

I strive with my earthly mind
And full of unearthly fear
I burn with Poetry's fire.'²⁶⁵

The poet is able to approach the Ideal, to transcend the earthly in a religiously inspired mysticism; 'holy veneration' towards 'the Good'. There is a sense of the importance of mental contemplation here, alluding again to Soloviev's notion of the poet as the person who can mediate between the absolute and the temporal.

'Though as before the singer
Of strange far-away songs of life
Wears his lyrical wreath
In dark and obscure verses –
The poet, on the other hand, approaches his goal,
Strives towards it, drawn by truth,
And suddenly sees a new world,
Beyond distances previously unfamiliar.'²⁶⁶

The poet's ability to see 'a new world' elevates their status to a mystical height and develops the function of a poet as a prophetic figure. This mysticism infuses much of Blok's poetry from this period and is especially evident in his writing about Sophia. Building upon the philosophical thought and poetry of Soloviev, Sophia is a central image in Blok's poetry. She is represented as the 'eternal feminine', the 'Beautiful Lady' and is addressed with the capitalised pronoun 'You'. Boris Jakim notes the connection between the co-creating of the Symbolists and the figure of Sophia;

'Russian symbolism was a way for artists to be co-creators of the world with God. The symbolists would reach into the cosmos and into the human-soul, and find bridges between eternity and humanity. The poem, painting, or musical composition becomes an act that creates a new heaven and a new earth. Sophia, the eternal mother and bride, is such bridge. The sky is Her symbol and falling stars connect Her and earth.'²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Alexander Blok, *Poems of Sophia*, trans. and ed. by Boris Jakim (Kettering, OH: Semantron Press, 2014), 14.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁶⁷ Boris Jakim, "Translator's Introduction," in Alexander Blok, *Poems of Sophia*, trans. and ed. by Boris Jakim (Kettering, OH: Semantron Press, 2014), 4.

Despite the religious themes in the second wave, and a searching for an all-encompassing worldview, Pyman charts the gradual disenchantment of the younger symbolists with their own belief that their creativity could change society as a whole. ‘The Symbolist Utopia, the idea of ‘theurgy’, the notion that art could actually alter life, was eventually to become - to a greater or lesser degree - suspect to them all.’²⁶⁸ Skobtsova perhaps alludes to this in her suggestion that the striving for the eternal is never fully achievable in temporality; ‘By the power of its God-image, i.e. original symbolism, the human spirit breaks through into eternity and opens up the path to eternity, - truly, this path is not completely passable, the path, on which it is only possible to eternally travel, and never to arrive.’²⁶⁹ Blok appeared to be aware of the futility and decline of this world when he first met Elizaveta, when she was fifteen years old. He wrote her a poem which included the line, ‘If it is not too late, then flee from us who are dying.’²⁷⁰

Nevertheless, despite a gradual decline in Symbolist thought (and the rise of other literary forms such as Acmeism and Futurism), Skobtsova notes the importance of this movement in relation to Russian messianism. ‘In general, symbolism rests on the necessity to affirm the mutual relationship of two different planes of being, culture in its understanding should reflect the religious task of the world, the relative is justified, otherwise it loses all value. Thus, the ways of the messianic vocation of the Russian nation, seeking the absolute in the relative, seeking divine being in created existence, the incarnation of the divine origin in the world, - the incarnation of

²⁶⁸ Pyman, *History of Russian Symbolism*, 185.

²⁶⁹ ‘Силою своей богообразности, т.е. изначальной символичности, человеческий дух прорывается в вечность и открывает путь к вечности, - правда, до конца не проходимой, путь, на котором только возможно вечное приближение, и никогда - достижение.’ Skobtsova, “Our Epoch,” 21.

²⁷⁰ ‘Если не поздно, то бегите от нас умирающих’. Skobtsova, “Encounters with Blok,” 29.

Godmanhood, religious culture, the revelation of divine Wisdom, are once again opened up by the Russian Symbolists.²⁷¹

We have noted the biographical importance of the Russian Symbolist movement for Skobtsova. Skobtsova's period in St Petersburg from 1906 places her within a very particular historical context. Her marriage to Dmitrii Kuz'min-Karavaev and her friendship with Blok were extremely formative for her own life and writings, and her own poetic career is a notable aspect of her intellectual and creative work. This influence, however, is more than biographical. Skobtsova herself (in the essays written in emigration which we have considered) notes the significance of this literary movement within the wider context of Russian intellectual history. Skobtsova draws a clear line from the thought of Khomiakov and Soloviev to the Symbolist movement (especially the later Symbolists) and highlights the often neglected religious-philosophical aspect of Symbolism. Central to the movement, especially in its second wave, are the beliefs that the artist acts as a co-creator with God, embodying divine wisdom and seeking unity between the eternal and the temporal. These beliefs precipitate movements to reform society, through attempts to connect the artist and the people and to establish authentic national symbols. These concerns are fundamentally similar to Skobtsova's own constructive theological work. The sources which inspired the Symbolists also informed Skobtsova's writing, and the themes of *Godmanhood, sobornost'*, all-unity and wisdom appear throughout her theological writings. However, there are distinct differences between the work of Skobtsova and this intellectual milieu of St Petersburg. These differences become apparent as

²⁷¹ 'Таким образом, в русских символистах еще раз открываются пути мессианского служения русского народа, ищущего абсолютного в относительном, божественного бытия в тварном бытии, воплощения божественного начала в мире, - воплощения Богочеловечества, религиозной культуры, раскрытия Божественной Премудрости.' Skobtsova, "Our Epoch," 22.

Skobtsova becomes disillusioned with the salons of St Petersburg, and as she seeks to find a tangible approach to a new utopia.

10. Disillusionment with the Russian Intelligentsia

In ‘Encounters with Blok’, Skobtsova describes the intellectual milieu of the community in which she participated, characterising the environment as cosmopolitan and well-read, yet suggesting that this was a disconnected community facing its end:

‘We lived in the middle of a vast country as if on an uninhabited island. Russia was illiterate, whereas in our milieu was concentrated all the culture of the world: the Greeks were quoted by heart, we welcomed the French symbolists, we thought of Scandinavian literature as our own, we were familiar with the philosophy, theology, poetry and history of the whole wide world, in this sense we were citizens of the universe, keepers of mankind’s cultural museum. This was Rome in the time of its decline [...]’²⁷²

Whilst initially being entranced by this environment as a young poet and intellectual herself, Elizaveta soon became disenchanted with this world. Writing in 1924, she remarked that the intelligentsia could be perceived as the ‘last Romans’, a culture and society on the brink of destruction. This branding is particularly interesting in the context of the search for the ‘third Rome’, which Skobtsova outlines in ‘Our Epoch’. The onset of war and revolution threatened the existence of their intellectual environment. Yet perhaps even more damaging than this was the propensity within the intelligentsia, as Skobtsova observed, for speech and debate which was disconnected from action and practice. Elizaveta felt this keenly in the context of revolutionary discourse, following the beginnings of change in the events of 1905.²⁷³

‘So everybody stood for revolution; the most responsible utterances were made on the subject. Yet they left me more disenchanted with ourselves than ever before. For no one, positively no one was prepared to die for it. Moreover, if they were to learn that people do die for it, they would have evaluated this too somehow, they would have approved or disapproved, they would have

²⁷² Skobtsova, *Encounters with Blok*, quoted in Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 80.

²⁷³ Following Russia’s defeat in the Russo-Japanese war in the preceding year, there were mass protests and revolution in Russia during 1905 which had a later influence on the Revolution of 1917.

understood it at its highest level and discussed it at the top of their voices – until the breakfast-time fried eggs were served. And they would completely fail to understand that to die for the revolution means to feel a real rope round your neck, to leave life behind for good on just such a grey and drowsy morning, physically and in actual fact to accept death. And I pitied the revolutionaries because they die, whereas we can only discuss their deaths eruditely and on a lofty plane.²⁷⁴

In ‘The Last Romans’, Elizaveta also notes the emergence of ‘barbarians’; new cultural movements which threatened the stability of established literary and artistic structures. She observes a balance between inviting the barbarians to participate in the culture of the Romans, and a reticence to accept new ways of thinking. This reticence for accepting new forms of creativity further signalled the end of a particular epoch.²⁷⁵

Elizaveta recounts the gap between the world of the intelligentsia with the everyday reality of ‘the people’ of Russia.

‘We played out the last act of the tragedy concerned with the rift between the intelligentsia and the people. Beyond us stretched out the Russian Empire’s snowy desert, a country in fetters: it was as ignorant of our delights as of our anguish, while its own delights and anguish had no effect on us.’²⁷⁶

Skobtsova suggests that, in fact, ‘the people’ may have a clearer understanding of some of the concepts being dissected by the intelligentsia. One such area was faith:

‘...it always seemed as if mention of Sophia the Wisdom of God, references to Solov’ev, belief in God-Manhood might be one thing, while the values of church life itself were considerably more comprehensible and more accessible to any old beggar woman, hard at her Sunday prostrations in church. The main thing for this kind of life was lost: ‘Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter it.’ There was nothing childlike there, nor could there be, there was only the wisdom of old people who had mastered everything and for whom everything had grown cold. And church life had joined the ranks of cultural values. It was carefully studied and stored away in the common treasury of cultural values. Thus there was everything except faith, faith in anything whatsoever: there was only a firm will to acquire faith.’

²⁷⁴ Skobtsova, “Encounters with Blok,” quoted in Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 81.

²⁷⁵ ‘The Last Romans’ was published under a pseudonym, Yuri Danilov: Юрий Данилов (Е. Ю. Скобцова), “Последние Римляне,” *Воля России* 1924, no. 18-19.

²⁷⁶ Skobtsova, “Encounters with Blok,” quoted in Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 80-81.

Skobtsova's frustration with the inaction of the intellectual circles of St Petersburg informs her own theological work and practical social engagement. Her desire for action leads her to translate the inheritance of the Russian religious renaissance into a new key, which is rooted in practical love of the neighbour.

11. Skobtsova's Desire for Action

Skobtsova's desire for action, and an implementation of the principles of Russian thought which she affirms, is grounded in the dual commandment. Skobtsova's theology centres around the Gospel commandment to love God and one's neighbour, as outlined in Mark 12:29-31.²⁷⁷ She claims that without this commandment, Khomiakov would not have been able to speak of *sobornost*: 'His theology shows clearly that the universal Church itself is, first of all, the incarnation not only of the commandment of the love of God, but also of love for one's neighbour, and is as unthinkable without the second as without the first.'²⁷⁸ In fact, she believes that the double commandment was at the heart of the Slavophile world-view, including Soloviev's understanding of *Godmanhood*, and without the double commandment we could not comprehend Dostoyevsky's words about 'each of us being guilty for all, and each of us being answerable for each other's sins.'²⁷⁹ In 'The Second Gospel Commandment', she asserts that 'the main theme of nineteenth-century Russian thought had to do with the second commandment, with its dogmatic, moral, philosophical, social and other aspects.'²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.'" (RSV translation).

²⁷⁸ Skobtsova, "The Second Gospel Commandment", EW, 58-9.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

However, in ‘The Second Gospel Commandment’, she calls on Orthodox Christians to practically realise the concepts of the Russian religious renaissance in their lives: ‘we must turn these theoretical presuppositions, these philosophical systems, these theological theories, these words *sobornost*’ and *Godmanhood*, which have recently become sacred, into so many practical landmarks both for our personal spiritual paths, the most cherished, most inward ones, and for any of our external endeavours.’²⁸¹ Here Skobtsova is doing several things. She is incorporating the thought of the Slavophiles into her own thought and promoting their ideas. She is also calling for a reinterpretation of their work which is focused on practical action. Thirdly, she is opposing this thought to trends which she identifies in society around her and in Europe at the time: ‘We are called to embody in life the principles of *sobornost*’ and *Godmanhood*...we are called to oppose the mystery of authentic human communion to all false relations among people...To all forms of mystical totalitarianism we oppose only one thing: the person, the image of God in man. And to all forms of passively collectivist mentality in democracy we oppose *sobornost*’.²⁸² Skobtsova is reinterpreting the concepts of the Russian religious renaissance to challenge the worldviews of her own time. Her reinterpretation is focused on action, which finds its expression in authentic Christian love and labour.

12. Emigration and Freedom

However, one of the challenges which Skobtsova faces for the practical realisation of the incarnation of *Godmanhood*, *sobornost*’ and the inheritance of the Russian tradition, is the loss of her homeland. As the biography chapter of this thesis noted, following the Russian Revolution, Skobtsova left Russia with her family and, after

²⁸¹ Ibid., 59-60.

²⁸² Ibid., 60.

travelling for several years, eventually settled in Paris in 1922. Life in Paris was difficult for Russian émigrés, with high levels of poverty, unemployment, and ill-health.²⁸³ The situation was no different for Skobtsova and her family.²⁸⁴ One might assume that this loss would present an obstacle for Skobtsova's intellectual system, which relies so heavily on the notion of Russia's messianic vocation in the world. However, Skobtsova regards this context as a spiritual opportunity for freedom and creativity in the implementation of the principles which germinated in the Russian intellectual tradition. In her theological engagement with this issue, once again we see Skobtsova reflecting on the nature of loss.

Skobtsova recognises that emigrating from one's homeland results in a form of loss. A person is no longer surrounded by familiar law, tradition, language and their associated securities and expectations. Skobtsova poetically describes this as a physical, bodily loss; of losing 'weightiness' and 'corporality'. She continues to describe this as a 'disincarnation'. The loss which is experienced is not purely mental or psychological, but also bodily and physical. In this new milieu, as strangers to the French people and estranged from their homeland, they were almost invisible; 'We are almost like shadows.'²⁸⁵ Rather than lamenting the difficulties of this environment, in her writings Skobtsova questions what this historical situation can teach a person about the spiritual life; 'What, then, does our special, abnormal life call us to? What has this total absence of inertia, this disincarnation [развоплощенность] this boundless freedom [безграничная свобода] from all external coercion already brought to us?'²⁸⁶ Skobtsova suggests that, despite the extreme hardships which the

²⁸³ For further details about Russian life in emigration see: Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

²⁸⁴ See Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 3.

²⁸⁵ Skobtsova, "Under the Sign of our Time", EW, 109.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

émigré community were enduring, there are spiritual benefits to this context of loss.

Loss can result in freedom:

‘Now we’ve become émigrés. What does that mean? First of all it means freedom. It means a sort of absolute falling out of the rule of law, a sort of ultimate deliverance from all external responsibility, an extremely painful and at the same time blissful sense of being beyond the influence of power, public opinion, tradition, everyday life, and the history of our country. It is as though we have lost our weightiness, lost our corporeality, acquired an enormous mobility and lightness, become unbound.’²⁸⁷

This response, however, was not always reflected in the lived experience of the Church. In the Church milieu, Skobtsova observes two responses to the ‘boundless freedom’ which emigration has brought. Firstly, there was a sorrowful attitude of remembrance for the Russian state; ‘there is a vast group of people in the Church who understand Orthodoxy as some attribute of their belonging to the old Russian state, as some sort of non-existent life, as a testimony of political loyalty and political rightmindedness.’²⁸⁸ The other approach is represented by an Orthodox attitude which relies on Church canons and convention to stamp out heresy. This approach does not seek to reach out to contemporary life; ‘Any allusion to freedom is foreign to it.’²⁸⁹ Unlike the first approach, the second does not lament the loss of the state, but the order of Church conventions. Both of these approaches are rooted in convention and tradition. Skobtsova does not see any creativity in them which arises from the émigré context. She notes that if these were the only approaches to Orthodoxy in emigration, then there would be no hope for the future of the émigré church. What does the emigration need then, she asks, for it to have its own inner and spiritual significance?

For emigration to be spiritually formative, it needs to be perceived as a form of freedom. However, physical emigration itself does not always result in this

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 109.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 111.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

freedom. An émigré may be free of the state which they have left, but they are not always free from their own created worldviews; ‘If we are free of the influence of the state and power, are we sufficiently liberated from the canon of convictions, customs, and rules that we ourselves create?’²⁹⁰ People create worldviews for themselves. These are often built upon past experiences, and do not always correspond to the present moment with its particular needs and challenges. When this happens, a person can become trapped in their worldview, consequently they can no longer be truly free:

‘He continues to act not according to his inner need, but according to his unquestioning trust in his own past worldview. Everything is so well set up, so habitual, has acquired such solid, even aesthetic, forms, that oftentimes one cannot even lift a finger to disturb this settled picture of inner peace. We are tightly buttoned up in our worldview, we are well-dressed, we are simply swaddled in it.’²⁹¹

It is necessary, therefore, for a person to release themselves from these solidified worldviews, customs and traditions; to emigrate from inner constraints: ‘In this sense, we must also emigrate out of this well-being, we must open our souls to all the drafts and winds of absolute inner freedom. Such, it seems to me, are our inner paths.’²⁹²

Here, Skobtsova reflects on the positive spiritual traits of emigration and presents the loss which can be experienced in emigration as freedom. If this internal emigration does not take place, then religion becomes ossified and frozen. ‘We cannot stylize everything as some sweet ringing of Moscow bells – religion dies of stylization. We cannot cultivate dead customs – only authentic spiritual fire has weight in religious life. We cannot freeze a living soul with rules and orders – once, in their own time, they were the expression of other living souls, but new souls demand a corresponding expression.’²⁹³

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 112.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid., 113.

²⁹³ Ibid., 115.

Whilst the émigrés have lost their homeland, Skobtsova notes that they have not lost the Church.

‘...we must first of all understand the mysterious meaning of the fact that, while we have lost our earthly motherland, we have not lost our heavenly motherland, that the Church is with us, in our midst – the whole Orthodox Church in her entirety, not divided into any sub-churches. She is whole in Russia, and she is whole in the emigration, and she is whole in every parish. And this is the only place where we can still realize ourselves, and the only work which, despite all, can succeed.’²⁹⁴

Skobtsova calls, therefore, for the émigré community to use their freedom for activity within the Church: ‘Freedom calls us, contrary to the whole world, contrary not only to the pagans but to many who style themselves Christians, to undertake the Church’s work in what is precisely the most difficult way.’²⁹⁵ It is here that the émigrés may find themselves again, in the midst of the unbinding, disincarnating, situation of emigration. In giving oneself to the activity of the Church in emigration, an element of self-giving is involved. Not only in dedicating one’s life and activity to the Church, but also in sacrificing the past, its visions, comforts, and traditions:

‘Freedom obliges, freedom calls for sacrificial self-giving, freedom determines one’s honesty and strictness with oneself and one’s path. And if we want to be strict and honest, worthy of the freedom given us, we must first of all test our own attitude toward our spiritual world. We have no right to wax tender-hearted over all our past indiscriminately – much of that past is far loftier and purer than we are, but much of it is sinful and criminal.’²⁹⁶

Freedom calls for the sacrifice of comforting worldviews, of nostalgia and traditions. It calls for involvement in the life of the Church, which remains whole.

Skobtsova’s implementation of the ideals of the Russian intellectual heritage within which she operates is therefore not necessarily disrupted by emigration and a

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 113.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 115.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 114.

loss of Russia. In fact, the freedom which emigration warrants allows for an unhindered exploration of how to incarnate these principles in everyday life. A continuation of the 'Russian idea' in exile does not mean lamenting the loss of the Russian state, or unthinkingly repeating dead customs, but being open to the creativity of freedom, within a defined tradition. For Skobtsova, this meant reassessing the inheritance of the Russian tradition, and reinterpreting it for her contemporary context. In the setting of RSCM, and her social assistance among the émigré community, for Skobtsova this revolved around the dual command to love God and the neighbour. The inaction of the intelligentsia of St Petersburg, which she lamented, is therefore corrected by her active engagement with the émigré community in France. This activity is underlined by involvement in the Church, which remains the one constant and whole entity in this tumultuous context.

13. Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the complexity of Skobtsova's identity as a Russian thinker. Her thought is strongly influenced by the Slavophiles, particularly in the notions of *sobornost'* and *Godmanhood*, and her writings reflect a striving for unity and wholeness which is indicative of the Slavophile project. However, Skobtsova seeks to translate this tradition into her own context of emigration. In emigration, the 'Russian idea' is reassessed. For Skobtsova, Russia's uniqueness and importance in the world is to share and embody the principles of *sobornost'* and *Godmanhood*, not to promote a Russian nationalistic superiority. At the heart of the translation of these Russian concepts into the émigré context is an opposition to individualism. In this light, emigration is seen as a loss of the self, of identity, and an unbinding of worldviews, which allows for the freedom of non-possession to create authentic Christian community. Skobtsova may be described as a revolutionary Slavophile. She

is a Slavophile who promotes unbinding from culture and tradition, whilst maintaining much of the Russian theological inheritance in which she operates.

Chapter 3: *Zhatva Dukha*

In the previous chapter, Skobtsova's Russian influences were highlighted, paying particular attention to her engagement with Vladimir Soloviev, Alexsei Khomiakov, and the Symbolist movement. This chapter noted the importance of unity for Skobtsova, inspired by these thinkers and intellectual currents, the concepts of *Godmanhood*, *sobornost'*, and a particular understanding of love as a striving against the ego for the furtherment of unity. However, we have also identified Skobtsova's frustration with an inactive intelligentsia within this intellectual heritage and a gap between the people of Russia and the salons of St Petersburg. Coupled with this, we highlighted the lightness with which Skobtsova held her Russian tradition and her advocacy for 'unbinding' from ossified or static worldviews. In the new setting of emigration, therefore, Skobtsova wishes to express the inheritance of her Russian intellectual forebears in a different way. She wishes to do this by *practically* implementing the notions of *sobornost'* and *Godmanhood* in the everyday, not simply recognising these principles as intellectual systems, but active realities which need to be incarnated in society.

From her theological writings in the emigration period, we see how Skobtsova proposes such a practical implementation. It is significant that one of Skobtsova's first theological works in this period is a collection of *Lives of the Saints* (entitled '*Zhatva Dukha*'). This chapter suggests that in this work Skobtsova is searching for the beginnings of her own practical expression of these desires. She turns to what she perceives as the 'backbone' (хребет) of Orthodoxy (the ascetics, monastics, and saints of the desert) for a new vision of unity for the contemporary world, and the

implementation of *Godmanhood* and *sobornost*'.²⁹⁷ The salons of St Petersburg may seem far removed from the *Lives of the Saints* and ascetics of the early church.

However, through her retellings, Skobtsova's *Lives* resonate with the theological and philosophical tradition of wholeness and synthesis which she has identified as the essence of the 'Russian idea'. The main corrective which she seeks to provide is to promote a practical engagement with society, rather than a romantic, but disconnected, understanding of 'the people'.

An overarching exploration within these tales is how to be 'in the world' but not 'of the world'. This tension provides the blueprint for Skobtsova's socially engaged asceticism and monasticism. This encompasses behaviour which is regarded as folly by wider society (by challenging orthopraxis and social norms), but which points towards an alternative, Christian vision of community. The biography chapter of this thesis has already suggested that holy folly has an important theological place in Skobtsova's system, not just in her own eccentric life, and this will be further explored here. Sacrifice is central to this notion of folly (sacrifice of the ego, ascetic renunciation, non-possession, fasting, and martyrdom), thus we also see how sacrifice is key for Skobtsova in the implementation of the unified, wholistic social vision which she presents. This chapter will suggest that Skobtsova is providing a justification for her own radical work 'in the world' here by highlighting these *Lives* as the 'backbone' of Orthodoxy. By associating her own monasticism with these lives, she is suggesting that the holy folly of a socially engaged monasticism and asceticism is not a heterodox, radical diversion from tradition, but rather a return to the source of the essence of Orthodoxy (and thus, for Skobtsova, the 'Russian idea').

²⁹⁷ мать мария (Скобцова) "Аскетизм" in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 1 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 164.

1. 'Zhatva Dukha'

'Zhatva Dukha' (The Harvest of the Spirit) was published in 1927 by YMCA Press and is one of Skobtsova's earliest published theological works.²⁹⁸ 'Zhatva Dukha' is a collection of eight stylized tales of saints, monastic, and ascetics, which was originally published in two volumes.²⁹⁹ In it, Skobtsova retells the stories of early Christians from the deserts of the Middle East in a distinctive style, using various sources (known and unknown). The biography chapter in this thesis has already highlighted the contextual interest in hagiography in the Parisian emigration, with *Lives of the Saints* appearing in émigré journals alongside a broader desire to 'return to the sources', a *ressourcement* and the neo-patristic synthesis. Some of Skobtsova's stories were translated and republished as single articles in the first editions of 'The Journal of the Fellowship of St Alban & St Sergius' in 1928, which later became 'Sobornost', and in 1994 the collection was republished with an introduction by A. N. Shestov.³⁰⁰ The *Lives* cover a range of geographical locations and time periods including the figures of Ioanikii, who was a Byzantine Saint from Asia-minor in the 8th Century, the 7th Century Vitalii of Gaza, the 4th Century Egyptian monastic Serapion the Sindonite, the African tax collector Peter who lived during the reign of Justinian in the 6th Century, and the martyr Nicephorus of Syrian Antioch who lived in the 3rd Century.

²⁹⁸ The article "Holy Earth", which this thesis highlights, was also published in 1927.

²⁹⁹ The 1994 reprint also includes an introduction by A. N. Shestov and several poems from a later date – these poems will not be the focus on my study.

³⁰⁰ Skobtsova wrote additional *Lives of the Saints*, which remained unpublished. A selection of these can be found at [Жатва духа \(новонайденные жития\) \(mere-marie.com\)](http://mere-marie.com). These additional, unpublished tales describe the lives of Abba Leontius the healer, Saint Spyridon Bishop of Trimythous, Saint Leo of Catania, Marina the Monk, Philaret the Merciful of Amnia, Saints Martinian, Zoe and Photina of Caesarea, and a tale entitled 'The Vision of the Theban Elder'. To focus our study, we will consider the material from the two-volume collection which was published in Skobtsova's lifetime.

As stylised retellings of lives of the Saints, Skobtsova's '*Zhatva Dukha*' is a work of hagiography. The form and style of hagiography throughout the Christian tradition is broad and varied. This diversity has led some scholars, such as Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, to highlight the difficulty of defining hagiography as a genre. Hennessey Olsen calls hagiography a 'curiously amorphous genre' which can only be identified by its subject-matter, not by form or style.³⁰¹ Similarly, Alice-Mary Talbot is reticent in defining hagiography, particularly in the Byzantine Period, as a 'genre'. Rather, she maintains that a 'functional definition of hagiography' is more appropriate, '...which would include all kinds of literary works promoting the veneration of saints, such as acts of martyrs (*passiones*), *vitae* (lives), encomia, accounts of translations of relics and miracles, and even hymnography.'³⁰² As the subject-matter of '*Zhatva Dukha*' is the lives of eight Saints we can regard the work as hagiography, according to Hennessey Olsen and Talbot's definition. However, the particularities of its form and style are also worth noting, as these highlight Skobtsova's methodology and aims when writing in this genre, in distinction to other writers of this period.

Russian hagiography reflects the diversity in form and style of the wider tradition. Margaret Ziolkowski has noted the frequent use of *Lives of the Saints* in modern Russian literature, and the various ways artists have manipulated and communicated hagiographic material in their works.³⁰³ G. P. Fedotov refers to this diversity in his review of '*Zhatva Dukha*'. Fedotov's observations help us to identify

³⁰¹ Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, "'De Historiis Sanctorum': A Generic Study of Hagiography," *Genre* 13 (1980): 410.

³⁰² Alice-Mary Talbot "Hagiography" in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* ed. Robin Cormack, John F. Haldon and Elizabeth Jeffreys (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 862.

³⁰³ For an illuminating examination of hagiography and its use in the modern period in Russia, see Margaret Ziolkowski, *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

the particularities of Skobtsova's style and form. Comparing Skobtsova's *Lives* to those of Nikolai Leskov (1831-1895), Aleksey Remizov (1877-1957), and Mikhail Kuzmin (1872-1936), Fedotov claims that these other names, 'speak of the dangers threatening the modern teller of legends'.³⁰⁴ Fedotov argues that Leskov's writing lacks style, Kuzmin taints his tales with 'sweet and spicy fruit' and Remizov sacrifices an interesting plot for his own self-promotion.³⁰⁵ Fedotov believes that Skobtsova, on the other hand, is modest. He believes that the success of '*Zhatva Dukha*' lies in Skobtsova's honest yet stylized approach. Fedotov claims that in the *Lives* of these saints, Skobtsova is not, 'searching for historical truth, but for religiously and artistically important legend, which can speak to the contemporary soul.'³⁰⁶ Fedotov notes, however, that she does not flavour the retelling of these *Lives* with unnecessary artistic goals; she maintains a directness in the retelling, despite not being immediately concerned with their historical value. Fundamentally, Fedotov argues, Skobtsova is looking for morally and religiously important legend which would resonate with readers in the 20th Century. This is an important observation to establish this collection as a confessing work of hagiography, marking Skobtsova's movement from poet to theologian.³⁰⁷

Fedotov is correct to observe that Skobtsova is not seeking to produce historically accurate accounts, neither does she seek a purely artistic endeavour which is tangential to the original hagiographic material. There is indeed a simplicity to her

³⁰⁴ G. Fedotov, "Review of *Zhatva Dukha*" in *Sovremenniya Zapiski*, 35, (1928): 554.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ However, this does not mean to say that her poetry and theology are exclusive. She continued to write poetry after her tonsuring (perhaps somewhat unusually) and published *Stikhi* in 1937. Sergei Hackel notes (in an article in *Sobornost* in 2000) that Skobtsova dedicates this work to Berdyaev with the epitaph that monastics can write verse, perhaps alluding to some difficulties or criticism. See Sergei Hackel, "'Called to be Free': Mother Maria and Berdyaev" *Sobornost* ' 22, vol. 2, (2000): 30-43, especially p. 31.

style, which highlights certain moral and religious themes within the legends. Despite Fedotov's observation of her modest approach, however, it would be a misjudgement to claim that there is no argument or interpretation in these writings. This can be found in the themes which Skobtsova is emphasising within the narrative structure. In his introduction to the 1994 reprint of '*Zhatva Dukha*', A. N. Shestov claims that it was a turn to the ethical and moral character of Christianity following the death of her daughter which prompted Skobtsova to write these *Lives of the Saints*, which coincided with her increasing social engagement. Indeed, as Shestov notes, the overarching themes in this collection is the moral and ethical concern for the neighbour (and the centrality of the command to 'love one another').³⁰⁸

Skobtsova's choice of Saints, the way in which she retells the stories, and the details of the lives which she includes, all emphasise a relationship between the spiritual life and loving the neighbour. Asceticism can often be perceived as an individualistic spiritual exercise, but in these tales Skobtsova is not only making a strong link between personal ascetic practise, but also communal ascetic endeavours. In addition to asceticism, the characters from this collection repeatedly mediate the spiritual transformation of their neighbour, highlighting once again the communal nature of Skobtsova's spirituality. Behind this, there is an exploration of how monastics and ascetics can be 'in the world' but not 'of the world'. A thematic survey of this work will function as a foundation for an analysis of Skobtsova's own constructive theology on asceticism and monasticism as we can see the themes of this theology already emerging through her retelling of these *Lives*.

³⁰⁸ А. Н. Сустова, "Широкий Путь Духа," in Скобцова, Э. Ю. (Мать Мария), *Жатва Духа: композиция, предисловие, примечание* vol. 1-2, ed. A. N. Shustov (Томск: Водолей, 1994), 3-8.

This will begin by exploring the relationship in these *Lives* between retreating from the world and returning to the world. Skobtsova is keen to emphasise the place of solitary asceticism as a retreat from the world, but often balances this with a sharing of spiritual ‘fruits’ by the ascetic in periods of returning to social life. This movement and balance are evident in Skobtsova’s tale of Ioannikii the Great, where this exploration shall begin.

2. ‘Ioannikii the Great’: Solitary Asceticism and Retreat from the World

Asceticism plays a central role in ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’. Throughout the collection there are stories of individuals dedicating themselves to prayer and working towards a spiritual transformation, controlling their passions, reading the Scriptures and the Fathers, weeping, fasting, and denying themselves luxuries and worldly goods. In several of the tales, the location of this spiritual transformation is in the desert or the wilderness, following a withdrawal from the world and society, and a dedication to a solitary existence. These solitary characters (hermits and wanderers) demonstrate a particular form of asceticism which Skobtsova is outlining. An example of such a tale is Skobtsova’s retelling of the story of Ioannikii the Great, where the theme of personal and solitary asceticism is particularly strong. The tales, therefore, begin with an ascetic who retreats from the world for their spiritual benefit.

As a young man, Ioannikii the Great repeatedly abandons his duties as a shepherd to seek solitude to pray. He would make the sign of the cross over his sheep and leave them, knowing that the sign would protect them from wild animals in his absence. In doing so he is released from the burdens of the world so that he can abide in prayer; ‘The lad himself, with this sign of the cross, freed himself from the burdens

of the world and could abide in prayer.’³⁰⁹ From his youth, Ioannikii sees worldly burdens as an obstacle to a spiritual life and identifies a solitary existence as more conducive to prayer. Therefore, Skobtsova recalls how Ioannikii leaves his village to live in solitude. He leads an eremitic life in the wilderness where his activities include praying, reading the Scriptures and the Fathers, and composing hymns. Alongside this activity, his life is marked by severe renunciation and a denial of any ‘vain benefits’. Ioannikii even identifies the work of a monk in terms of renunciation; ‘According to me, one who exercises coercion upon himself in everything; this is the monk.’³¹⁰ A central part of this work of renunciation, for Ioannikii, is the salvation of his soul. Following an incident with another monk (where Ioannikii believes that he himself has sinned), he ventures further into the desert to atone for his misdeeds in prayer. He goes to the furthest limit of the desert to continue the hard work of salvation. Here Skobtsova describes how he humbly and meekly weeps, falling down before Christ and asking Him to let go of his human sin.

In the story of Ioannikii, and similarly in tales throughout ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’, ascetic endeavours appear to be for the purpose of controlling, destroying, or overcoming earthly passions and desires. There is a link between these passions and sin, although they are not conflated. Skobtsova employs imagery of candles and fire to describe this effect in Ioannikii’s prayer; ‘Ioannikii’s flaming prayer withstood all human passions and its flames scorched all the passions of humankind.’³¹¹ His dedication to prayer resulted in his ‘human passions’ being ‘scorched’. There is a

³⁰⁹ ‘Сам же отрок этим знаменем крестным освобождал себя от тягости мирского дела и мог пребывать в молитве.’ Э. Ю. Скобцова (Мать Мария), *Жатва Духа: композиция, предисловие, примечание*, Vol. 1-2, ed. A. N. Shustov (Томск: Водолей, 1994), 10. From here this will be referenced as *Zhatva Dukha*.

³¹⁰ ‘По мне, кто делает себе во всем принуждение, тот монах.’ Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 10.

³¹¹ ‘Молитва Иоанникия пламенем своим противостояла всем страстям человеческим и пламенем своим пополяла все страсти человеческие.’ Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 12.

suggestion here that ‘passions’ are equated with sinful desires; something which should be thoroughly destroyed through prayer, as Skobtsova continues to describe how he transcended his body and sin; ‘So he became in his body as one without flesh, and in a sinful nature as one without sin.’³¹² As a result of Ioannikii’s renunciation he is transformed in his body as well as his soul and spirit.³¹³

Destroying human passions is a common theme throughout ascetic literature. The importance of this effort and the place of solitude is highlighted, for example, in the *Philokalia* by St John Cassian, whose work Skobtsova highlights elsewhere in her article ‘The Second Gospel Commandment’,

‘Self-reform and peace are not achieved through the patience which others show us, but through our own long-suffering towards our neighbour. When we try to escape the struggle for long-suffering by retreating into solitude, those unhealed passions we take there with us are merely hidden, not erased; for unless our passions are first purged, solitude and withdrawal from the world not only foster them but also keep them concealed, no longer allowing us to perceive what passion it is that enslaves us. On the contrary, they impose on us an illusion of virtue and persuade us to believe that we have achieved long-suffering and humility, because there is no one present to provoke and test us.’³¹⁴

Cassian recognises a need to purge human passions before withdrawal from the world and a life of solitude in order for the person to be truly changed by their situation.

Alongside renunciation and withdrawal, he advocates for a transformation of the human condition by the destruction of passions. Cassian’s understanding of solitary

³¹² ‘Так что стал он во плоти как бы бесплотен, и в греховной природе как бы безгрешен.’ Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 12.

³¹³ A similar theme is expressed in the description of the *ascesis* of Vitalii the Monk; ‘And thus having attained to a great age and having risen to a great height in his knowledge of God, he became, as it were, quite devoid of earthly passions. With the fire of prayer he burned away the tares in his soul; with fasting he chained his sinful flesh; by a contemplation of heavenly things he became blind to all contemplation of earthly goods.’ In Russian: ‘Достигнув же преклонной старости и поднявшись на большую высоту богопознания, был совсем лишен страстей земных. Огнем молитвы попалил плевелы душевные, постом сковал грешную плоть, созерцанием небесного ослепил себя к созерцанью земных благ.’ Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 28. Translation from “*Live of the Saints: Vitalius the Monk*” in *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban & St. Sergius*, no. 1 (June 1928), 4.

³¹⁴ St John Cassian, “On the Eight Vices,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume One*, trans. and ed. by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware (New York: Farrar, Straus and Girous, 1983), 85.

retreat is a common refrain throughout much ascetic literature, and within the Orthodox monastic tradition, and which is present in Skobtsova's life of Ioannikii.

In Skobtsova's retelling of the life of Ioannikii, the aim of renunciation is a personal transformation where human passions and desires are destroyed. However, the focus on personal asceticism in Skobtsova's collection of *Lives* is often only the beginning of the story. An ascetic's retreat from the world, in her retellings, often precedes a return to the world. This does not negate the importance of ascetic transformation which these figures encounter in solitary isolation, yet it contextualises such spirituality within a broader narrative of engagement with others, and an active incarnation of a purified form of love.

3. Ioannikii is sent out to the world

After many years spent in solitude and prayer, God calls the hermit Ioannikii to 'go to the world' to share his spiritual wealth:

'God did not want to keep this vessel intact, and God decided to give what Ioannikii had acquired as food for people, so that the hungry could be somewhat filled in spirit. And He bid His servant to go to the world, to comfort and to ease the sufferings of the world, to fight with human passions and to pray for peace among people. And so Ioannikii being old, even ancient, left the desert and carried his invaluable gold [*treasure*] to the impoverished and hungry world.'³¹⁵

Ioannikii wanders around villages and cities acting as a spiritual guide to people he meets. He prays for people and meets them face to face. Ioannikii does not keep the 'spiritual fruits' which he has developed to himself. Rather, he goes into the world to act as a spiritual guide and sharing his wisdom. As he shares these spiritual gifts, we

³¹⁵ 'Когда же совершилось так, не захотел Господь беречь сосуд этот нерасплеканным, и решил дать приобретенное Иоанникием в пищу людям, дабы и голодные несколько насытились духом. И повелел Он рабу Своему идти в мир, утешить и облегчить скорбь мирские, бороться со страстями человеческими и молиться о покое людей. Так, древним старцем покинул Иоанникий пустыню и понес многоценное золото свое обнищавшему и голодному миру.' Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 12.

see a particular example of voluntary, personal sacrifice. Skobtsova writes that when meeting with people in need, Ioannikii helps them to exchange their earthly burdens for the easy yoke of Christ: ‘And it seemed also to the people, that after this meeting in exchange of their unbalanced burdens of earthly cares and doubts, they received the easy yoke of Christ.’³¹⁶ In exchanging his ‘spiritual fruits’, Ioannikii takes upon himself the burdens of others, sacrificing his own ‘treasure’ for the good of others, and in so doing risks his own spiritual welfare.

Skobtsova describes such an occasion when Ioannikii is asked to assist someone battling with demonic possession. On his travels Ioannikii meets a nun who had been the most diligent and obedient member of her community but is now possessed by a demon. She is overcome with the spirit of despair, anger, adultery, and pride. This possession even has a physical impact on the nun as blood drips from her eyes, her mouth foams, she experiences terrible fits and her character changes as she loudly blasphemes against God. Ioannikii reaches this convent, and the Abbess appeals to him to assist the possessed nun. Ioannikii agrees and lays his hands on the nun, saying;

‘By the will and by the power of the living God, I the worthless servant of God Ioannikii, take upon myself your sin (if you have sinned), and your burden (if a burden was sent to you for testing). Because my shoulders are stronger than your shoulders. Because to me, who has been tempted, it is easier to make war with the enemy. Because in the name of love I want to accept the difficulties of your path. And let you, in your humility, be free from temptation.’³¹⁷

Ioannikii identifies himself as a ‘worthless servant of God’. It is this humility which prompts Ioannikii to offer to accept the burdens and sin of the possessed nun upon

³¹⁶ ‘И казалось даже людям, что после этих встреч получали они взамен своего непомерного груза земных забот и сомнений, - легкое иго Христово.’ Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 12.

³¹⁷ ‘Волею и силою Бога живого, беру я, недостойный раб божий Иоанникий, на себя грех твой, - если ты согрешила, и тяжесть твою, - если послана тебе в испытание тяжесть. Потому что сильнее мой плечи твоих плеч. Потому что мне, искушенному, легче воевать с врагом. Потому что во имя любви хочу я принять труд твоего пути. И да будешь ты в смирении своим свободна от искушения.’ Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 13.

himself. He believes that he has the spiritual strength to battle with her sin and temptation because of the ascetic work which he performed in the desert, where he fought and overcame passions, temptations, and demons. Another motivating factor, however, is love ('in the name of love I want to accept the difficulties of your path'). Ioannikii wants to accept her difficulties so that she can be free. Here, therefore, we see how the spiritual heights which Ioannikii achieves combine in action with his dedication to humility and the love which he shows to the neighbour. Alongside the other nuns of the community, Ioannikii's prayers are answered; the demon leaves the nun, enters Ioannikii and the nun dies peacefully.

However, when Ioannikii leaves the monastery, he feels the full effect of this burden. Skobtsova describes how the sun appears as if it is full of blood, the earth dries up, plants fill with poison and the birds stop singing: 'The fruitful and blooming earth became a sour desert, and corruption and death covered it.'³¹⁸ For Ioannikii, the world becomes devoid of God; he is entirely on his own. Then he becomes overwhelmed by sinful thoughts and despair takes hold of him. He is so overcome by despair and sin that it seems as if he had not led an ascetic life in the desert at all; 'His heart became the home of the devil, his mind became clouded, a sound mind and power departed him.'³¹⁹ It appears that Ioannikii is unable to fight with this burden. However, Skobtsova writes, 'At the very bottom of his soul flickered only one fiery point – memory.'³²⁰ The memory appears to be of his former life of asceticism, where he defeated demons and temptation. This memory, as he experiences God-forsakenness, is also of God (who he describes as his hope, refuge, and protection).

³¹⁸ 'Стала плодородная и цветущая земля горькой пустыней, и объяли ее тление и смерть.' Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 13.

³¹⁹ 'Стало его сердце местом жительства лукавого, затуманился разум, отошло трезвление и силы упали.' Ibid.

³²⁰ 'И только на самом дне души пылала одна огненная точка, - память.' Ibid.

Ioannikii realises that this task is too difficult for his ‘weak human powers’. He despairs, can no longer pray, or fight with the enemy, and falls to the ground.

The conclusion of this tale is perhaps the most allegorical and opaque section of the narrative. When he is on the ground Ioannikii sees a snake. He feels despair so strongly that he wishes to be poisoned by the snake and die, rather than continuing to live a wretched life. However, after making eye contact with the snake, it convulses and dies. At the death of the snake creation is once again restored; the sun shines, the sky is blue, ‘the earth became the footstool for God’s feet, and the blue sky – the throne of the Almighty.’³²¹ Following this, ‘the weight fell from Ioannikii’s shoulders, sinful thoughts fell to his feet like an old corrupted garment, and the enemy lay in the dust, defeated.’³²² Unlike the preceding narrative, this defeat was not dependent on Ioannikii’s spiritual strength. In fact, Ioannikii’s deliverance appears surprising given that he had fallen into despair and could no longer pray. There is a suggestion, therefore, that the ascetic heights which a person can achieve are limited and remain subject to grace. Ioannikii realises that some burdens are beyond human endurance. This draws a distinction between a figure such as Ioannikii and Christ. Ioannikii, when deserted by God, was dependent on the miraculous when confronted with despair and sin. This is reinforced by Ioannikii’s repeated prayer; ‘The Father is my hope, the Son is my refuge, the Holy Spirit is my protection, Holy Trinity glory to you.’³²³ In a collection which focuses so often on human endeavour, this is an

³²¹ ‘и стала земля подножием ног Божьих, и синева небесная - престолом Вседержителя.’ Ibid., 14.

³²² ‘Тяжесть упала с плеч Иоанникия, греховные помыслы, как ветхая истлевшая одежда, скатились к ногам его, - враг лежал во прахе, посрамленный.’ Ibid.

³²³ ‘- Упование мое, - Отец, прибежище мое, - Сын, покров мой, - Дух Святой, - Троица святая, слава Тебе.’ Ibid.

important boundary to draw in a discussion of asceticism as Skobtsova is, perhaps, highlighting the necessity of divine assistance in any ascetic work.

In the *Life* of Ioannikii, as told by Skobtsova, an importance is placed on humble sacrifice. Ioannikii is not only willing to share his spiritual wisdom and to accompany the sinners whom he meets, he is also willing to accept their sin, burdens, and demons upon himself. This reveals an insight into the nature of love in Skobtsova's tales. This thesis has already noted the influence of Soloviev's 'The Meaning of Love' on Skobtsova, with its emphasis on suspending one's egoism in order to unite with another and to recognise one's own authentic individuality. In Skobtsova's *Lives* we have a similar insistence on the suspension of egoism, but a more pronounced emphasis on sacrifice. Love is what compels Ioannikii to sacrifice his own personal safety for the life of another, even risking death. In this action we see a mirroring with the work of Christ's salvific work. Indeed, in a not dissimilar way to Christ, Ioannikii submits his will to God, as a 'slave of God', recognising that he can achieve nothing without the power and grace of the one to whom he submits. This notion can also be identified in Skobtsova's own understanding of creativity, to which this thesis will return.

4. 'Vitalii the Monk'

A similar progression to the narrative of Ioannikii's life is mapped by Skobtsova in her tale, 'Vitalii the Monk'. In this *Life*, we see the movement from solitary ascetic to a spiritually 'in the world'. Vitalii's engagement with others in the cities in which he travels resonates with the sacrificial form of love which has already been noted in the *Life* of Ioannikii. In this *Life*, we have a developed sense of the relationship between suffering and love, as well as an indication of Skobtsova's understanding of sin.

For Vitalii, loving the neighbour means being involved in their battle with sin.

In a similar way to Ioannikii, this compulsion emerges for Vitalii following a life of severe asceticism:

‘And when he attained to a perfect love of the Lord, his heart became pierced by a compassionate love of his neighbour – the man in sorrow. But he thought less of those who follow the great and burdensome path of struggle for God’s sake, for always before his spiritual eyes he could see those who knew not of the possibility of such a struggle but who are swept along by the fettered way of sin. He felt the heavy flesh of the world and his heart became sick with a wounding sorrow for the depth of the fall of man.’³²⁴

Once Vitalii had reached a ‘perfect love of the Lord’, he was ‘pierced’ by a love of his neighbour. Vitalii’s story begins with a solitary, isolated path of asceticism which is directed towards developing his love of God. It is only when his love towards God has been perfected through an ascetic life that he then becomes concerned for the neighbour. Skobtsova describes this concern for the neighbour with vivid and distinctly physical imagery. His heart was ‘pierced’ and, ‘became sick with a wounding sorrow’. This is not a form of love which is duty-bound or dispassionate; it is an uncomfortable pain, similar to a deep wound, because his love is manifested in a concern for the neighbour’s sins. This description has clear Marian undertones, with the reference of a heart pierced by sorrow.³²⁵ The physicality of Vitalii’s love for the neighbour is similar to the bodily effect of this sin in the neighbour. Their sin is described as ‘heavy flesh’. The imagery used to describe the embodied lives of the

³²⁴ ‘И когда достиг он совершенной любви к Господу, то было сердце его пронзено жалостливой любовью к ближнему своему, - скорбящему человеку. Но меньше он думал о тех, кто идет великим и трудным путем подвига, потому что всегда престоляли его духовному яко те, кто подвига не знает, а влечется несвободным путем греха. Почувствовал он тяжелую плоть мира, и заболело сердце его мукою уязвляющей об человеческом падении.’ Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 28. Translation from: “*Live of the Saints: Vitalius the Monk*” in *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban & St. Sergius*, no. 1 (June 1928): 4.

³²⁵ Indeed, Mary’s involvement in the suffering of her Son (her co-suffering) is extremely important for Skobtsova’s understanding of human love and communion. This theme will be returned to in this thesis.

neighbours and Vitalii focuses on suffering in both instances; some as a result of sin, and the other from love.

This episode also shows Skobtsova's acknowledgement of the reality of sin. This is expanded upon in her essays such as 'Concerning the Anti-Christ' ('Об Антихристе') where she notes the presence of original sin; 'The fate of humankind is tied to original sin, with the fall not only of Adam but also Eve. The two of them begin the path of the human race, the image of God is opened in the two of them, the gift of freedom was revealed in both of them and both of them were defeated by the ancient serpent.'³²⁶ The inheritance of Adam and Eve for all people, according to Skobtsova, is both the reality of original sin but also the image of God and the gift of freedom. Here in the tale of Vitalii we see how he struggles with this human path as he seeks to use his freedom to unearth the image of God in people and over-come the inheritance of original sin.

Prompted by the pain which he felt for the sin of his neighbour, Vitalii decided to leave the desert and enter the world; 'And because of sin he had such compassion towards the world, that he no longer could remain in the wilderness abiding in prayer; for if he remained in the desert he was the only satisfied one among many hungry ones which meant a turning away from the sorrow of the world.'³²⁷ Skobtsova describes the compassion which he feels as ripe fruit; 'And when this loving compassion was ripe in his heart and he had not the strength to bear in himself its ripe

³²⁶ 'Судьба человечества связана с первородным грехом, с грехопадением не одного только Адама, но и Евы. Ими двумя начат путь человеческого рода, в них двоих открыт был образ божий, в них обоих явлен дар свободы и оба они были побеждены древним змеем.' Мать Мария (Скобцова) "'Об Антихристе'" в *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 167.

³²⁷ 'И по причине греха имел он к миру такую жалость, что не мог уже оставаться в пустыне на молитве. Пребывая в пустыне, был он единственным сытым среди многих голодных, - и это было небрежением мирскою скорбью.' *Zhatva Dukha*, 28. 'Vitalius the Monk', *Fellowship* translation, 4.

fruit, he decided to seek for an incarnation of his love and a way for applying his compassion.³²⁸ Therefore, Vitalii leaves the wilderness and travels to Alexandria to seek to apply the love, that love which has pierced him, to the sinful people of the city. The comparison to fruit reinforces the suggestion that Vitalii's love has been grown and developed through his ascetic practice, and these benefits (which have ripened) can now be shared with others. This agricultural image is similar to an allusion Skobtsova makes to harvest; 'Thus a reaper leaves his house and, taking his sickle, sets off to the harvest.'³²⁹ Vitalii is not only someone who grows and develops spiritual 'fruit' to share, he is also a harvester, looking to cut down any sin which he encounters. This relates to this work's title, the 'harvest of the spirit', as it seeks to portray characters who are concerned for the inner lives of the neighbour. This concern is not a dispassionate affiliation, but a form of work, much like an agricultural worker tending the field of another person's spirit.

In Alexandria, Vitalii visits 'dens' and meets with prostitutes, with whom he prays and discusses their problems. Vitalii expresses a deep concern for their welfare, and he becomes a spiritual guide to many women across the city. At his death, the women whom he had helped remark on his influence over their lives;

'...in great love the women told how in prayer and singing of psalms and in tears he passed his nights with them, by these means taking on himself the heavy labour and immeasurable struggle, and teaching them to shed tears, pray and repent. And they said there existed no price for his compassion and there existed no measure for his love.'³³⁰

³²⁸ 'И когда созрела в сердце его эта любовная жалость и стало ему не по силам носить в себе зрелый плод ее, то решил он искать воплощения любви и применения жалости.' Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 28. 'Vitalius the Monk', *Fellowship*, 4.

³²⁹ 'Так оставляет жнец дом свой и, взяв серп, выходит на жатву.' Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 28. 'Vitalius the Monk', *Fellowship*, 5.

³³⁰ 'в великой любви поведали женщины, как в молитве и псалмопении, и в слезах, проводил он у них ночи свои, тем самым подымая на себя тяжелый труд и непомерный подвиг, а их уча слезам, и молитве, и покаянию.' Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 31. 'Vitalius the Monk', *Fellowship*, 7.

Vitalii not only teaches the women about the spiritual path, and certain traits of ascetic expression such as the shedding of tears, but he takes their burdens upon himself in limitless love and compassion, understood as a co-suffering.

In the retelling of the life of Vitalii, Skobtsova once again narrates the movement of a hermit who dedicates himself to asceticism in solitary isolation into a person who enters the world to share his spiritual wisdom. Like Ioannikii, Vitalii is deeply concerned with the spiritual welfare of other people; in the story of Vitalii this is marked more strongly in terms of the ‘neighbour’ than in the life of Ioannikii. Not only does Vitalii express concern for his neighbour, but he also acts as their spiritual guide. Most interestingly, perhaps, he takes their burdens upon himself. He is personally involved in the spiritual life of his neighbour by a form of compassion which captivates his whole being. Vitalii refuses to be cut off from sinners and this is motivated by a form of love which makes him vulnerable to receive the pain and suffering of others. Here we see a development of the understanding of love (as identified in the *Life* of Ioannikii) which places compassion (understood as co-suffering) at the heart of active love. For Skobtsova, such an approach will be foundational for her own theological understanding of the ‘mysticism of human communion’, and a Marian form of compassionate involvement with the life of another.

5. The Refusal to be cut off from sinners

The *Lives* of Ioannikii and Vitalii, as retold by Skobtsova, often follow a progression of retreating from the world to overcome the passions, to returning to the world to share this spirituality with others. Ioannikii was sent to the world to comfort and ease its suffering, as he was overflowing with spiritual ‘treasure’. Vitalii, similarly, felt

compassion for the ‘heavy flesh’ of the world and travelled to the city to battle with the sin of others. In both these tales, and across the collection, Skobtsova promotes an engagement with others and presents a model of ascetic life where the spiritually ‘wise’ individual shows active love to their neighbours by engaging with their sin and seeking to transform them.

Within ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’ this is furthered through Skobtsova’s emphasis on the dangers of ‘cutting off’ sinners. In the tale entitled ‘The Path to Human Souls’, Skobtsova highlights the dangers of being cut off (отсекать, отсечь) from sinners. In this tale we hear of ascetics who desire to not be separated from sinners, but to build bridges to them for the good of their transformation. The protagonist of this tale, Akhille, remarks; ‘It must be remembered, that different medicines are given for different illnesses. And therefore, one should never cut off sinners [отсекать грешников], but search for a means by which they might be healed.’³³¹ Achille does the will of a sinner so that he might form a productive bond with him: ‘if I did not do to him [the sinner] as he asked, then he would think that I, having heard about his sins, did not want to fulfil his request because of them. And by doing so, I would have cut him off from myself, and he would have become bitter.’³³² Rather than removing himself from the sinner, Akhille promotes a deeper involvement with the life of that person. Renouncing the sinner, and cutting them off, would thwart the aim of transfiguration.

³³¹ ‘Надо помнить, что различные лекарства бывают против различных болезней. А потому никогда нельзя отсекаать грешников, но искать, какими средствами можно их исцелить.’ Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 44.

³³² ‘если ему не сделать желаемого, то он подумает, что я, услышав о его грехах, по их причине не хотел исполнить его просьбу. И так отсек бы я его от себя и ожесточил.’ *Ibid.*, 42.

The desire to not be cut off from sinner resonates with Skobtsova's later theology, especially in 'The Second Gospel Commandment'. Skobtsova maintains that one's attitude toward another person's inner world should be as follows:

'One should be able literally "to put oneself in the place" of the other person, try to evaluate and experience what he feels in himself, to be everyone for everyone. Even another man's passions should be judged, not from outside, but by entering the inner atmosphere of the one who experiences them. We must have the strength not to define generally what a given man should or should not do, but to define him from within his own inner state, to seek to free him from his passions and emotions not by cutting them off maximally [в максимальном отсечении], but by a conscious and profound overcoming, shifting, transfiguring of them.'³³³

The word for 'cutting off' is the same here in Skobtsova's own constructive theology as in her tale 'The Path to Human Souls', which reinforces Skobtsova's own place in this narrative and her insistence on unity between persons, regardless of the presence or absence of sin. In Skobtsova's later constructive theology, we see how she suggests that self-isolation from others is actually a form of sin, as Rowan Williams has articulated.³³⁴ Within '*Zhatva Dukha*', we can see how Skobtsova warns against cutting off sinners, in favour of a conscious engagement with them in limitless solidarity and compassion.

Whilst Skobtsova warns against cutting off sinners, in these tales she also highlights the positive ideal of unity between persons. The concept of *sobornost'*, in particular, is evident in Skobtsova's retelling of the life of the martyr Nikifor and his friend Sapriki. These two friends begin the tale with a close platonic bond, as Skobtsova writes:

'In Syrian Antioch lived a certain presbyter named Sapriki. And he had a friend Nikifor, with whom from youth he shared every joy and sorrow, and they were

³³³ Skobtsova, "The Second Gospel Commandment," EW, 56. For the Russian text, see: Мать Мария (Скобцова), "Вторая Евангельская Заповедь [The Second Gospel Commandment]," in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 1 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 225.

³³⁴ Rowan Williams, *Looking East in Winter*, 221.

of one mind and in harmony about everything, as if united in one spirit but dwelling in two bodies.’³³⁵

The harmony between the two friends is so strong that they appear to be of ‘one spirit’, whilst in two separate bodies. There is a sense here of mystical togetherness between the two characters which alludes to *sobornost*. This is manifested in a particular episode where Nikifor and Sapriki pretend to argue over the ownership of a random object (a brick) just to experience a quarrel, and to resemble the vast majority of people who do not experience this depth of unity. In Skobtsova’s retelling this brotherly unity is interrupted, however, by the machinations of a demon. The devil promotes jealousy between the two friends, which escalates into hatred and strife. Sapriki becomes particularly embittered towards Nikifor and the bond of brotherly unity is thoroughly broken. Despite Nikifor’s best efforts to reconcile with his friend, Sapriki obstinately refuses to engage with him. This highlights the danger of sin, as represented by the demon, and the very human consequences of division, and another example of being cut off from the other.

6. ‘Serapion the Sindonite’ and Holy Folly

By refusing to be cut off from sinners, we have seen the development of an understanding of love in ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’ which willingly risks sacrifice for the other. This is even a form of love which prompts a person to accept the sins of another onto themselves. The character of Vitalii, inspired by such love, was pierced with grief by the sin and suffering of others which precipitated a limitless engagement with the other. Fedotov, in his review of ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’ identifies this form of sacrificial love as ‘foolish’. Indeed, the notion of holy folly adds another dimension to the exploration

³³⁵ ‘В Антиохии Сирийской жил некий пресвитер именем Сапрыкии. И имел друга Никифора, с которым от юного возраста делился всеми радостями и печальями, и были они единомыслены и согласны во всем, как бы единым духом в двух телах обитая.’ Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 20.

within '*Zhatva Dukha*' of individuals being 'in the world' but not 'of the world'.

These *Lives* tell the story of ascetics who are actively engaged in society, but whose actions are not recognised as conventional or wise by normative standards. Thus, they are 'in the world', but demonstrating behaviour which sets them apart from the society around them. Elements of the holy folly tradition can be identified in the *Life* of Serapion the Sindonite which will be explored here.

Holy fools (юродивый) are an unusual phenomenon, characterised by eccentric and erratic conduct. Holy fools demonstrated behaviour which would have been socially unacceptable or challenging. This may take the form of nakedness, rudeness, committing crimes and sometimes an apparently liberal attitude to sin. These actions are performed, however, with the intention of unsettling orthopraxis and in so doing revealing an aspect of the Gospel. In this way, Jesse Perillo notes that holy fools challenge accepted social and religious practices; 'Ultimately, the holy fool acts so as to question the boundary between what is sacred and what is profane and to question whether common secular or religious conventions are truly sane practices.'³³⁶ In addition, holy fools were also recognised for their humility. In this instance, folly was used as a deliberate mask to hide the person's sanctity and protect them from pride, as Sergey Ivanov notes: 'The Orthodox Church holds that the holy fool voluntarily takes upon himself the mask of insanity in order that he may thereby conceal his own perfection from the world and hence avoid the vanity of worldly praise.'³³⁷ The holy fool is therefore someone who disrupts conventions, challenges communities and possesses profound levels of humility and an absence of egoism.

³³⁶ Jesse Perillo, "The Prophetic without Power and Disruption without Direction: The Witness of Holy Fools" in *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36, no. 1 (2016): 148.

³³⁷ Sergey A. Ivanov, "Introduction" in *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.

For Skobtsova, the roots of holy folly lie in the example of the cross of Christ. In particular, holy folly imitates the kenotic quality of Christ's salvific work. *Kenosis* refers to the free self-emptying and condescension of Christ involved in the Incarnation. G. P. Fedotov describes kenosis as an, 'evacuation, self-emptying, or self-stripping. Coming down to earth, the Heavenly Christ strips off his divine glory to be invested with the "poor garb" of humanity.'³³⁸ The cross, in addition to the Incarnation itself, is part of this kenotic movement, as Christ continued to endure the 'poor garb' of humanity, even to the point of death. Christ emptied himself on the cross, stripping himself of his divine glory and freely lowering himself to a state of helplessness. In doing so, he endured the humiliation of abuse, ridicule, and powerlessness.

As Christ gave himself for the world, this self-giving always involves the other whom it saves. It has an intrinsically social character, as observed by Fedotov.³³⁹ However, the world does not fully understand Christ's self-giving, and often regards it as foolishness. St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians outlines the dialectic between the 'wisdom' of the world and the 'folly' of Christ's salvific work which the world cannot understand. Skobtsova cites 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 in her article 'Holy Fools'³⁴⁰; 'But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.' There is a juxtaposition between the

³³⁸ G. P. Fedotov, "The Religious Sources of Russian Populism," *The Russian Review* 1, no. 2 (Apr., 1942): 35.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ In French: Elizaveta Skobtsova "Les fols-en-Christ", trans. A. Nicolsky and H. Arjakovsky-Klépinine in *Le Jour du Saint Esprit*, 395-413. In Russian, see: Мать Мария (Скобцова), Е. Ю. Кузьмина-Караваева, "О Юродивых [About the Holy Fools]," in *Россия и Эмиграция*, ed. Т.В. Викторова, Л.В. Крошкина, Н.В. Ликвинцева, Е.Л. Майданович, Н.А. Струве, А.И. Шмаина-Великанова (Русский Путь, YMCA Press: Москва, Париж, 2019), 88-99.

wisdom of God and the ‘spirit of the world’ (1 Corinthians 2:12). Therefore, despite Christ’s actions being for the world, the world’s inability to appreciate God’s wisdom creates a tension between the ‘spirit of the world’ and the ‘wisdom of God.’ Authentic wisdom, therefore, is perceived as folly by the world.

The holy fool imitates Christ in his humiliation on the cross, as H. Murav has noted; ‘not Jesus enthroned but the sufferings of “the word made flesh.” [...] The holy fool [...] takes on the form of a fool, thereby inviting the mockery and abuse that are symbolised by the cross.’ Furthermore, ‘...the holy fool, as he is represented by the hagiography, seems to be an emblem of both the incarnate God and the most fallen man’.³⁴¹ Similarly, in ‘The Religious Sources of Russian Populism’, Fedotov notes the self-effacing quality of Holy Fools; ‘In them [the holy fools] self-emptying ascetic poverty reached its limits, they stripped themselves of their human reason and of moral decency.’³⁴² Holy fools emulate Christ by stripping themselves of dignity, status, and power. In so doing, the world perceives them as foolish and, as a result, they suffer a similar form of mockery and abuse which Christ endured on the cross.

In ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’ there are several characteristics of holy folly. These include nakedness, erratic behaviour, and a radical commitment to non-possession. But primarily in ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’, holy folly is present in the ascetics’ selflessness and willingness to sacrifice. It is these qualities which marks the ascetics out from society as different. The self-effacing behaviour, combined with a lack of personal interest, concern or safety, distinguishes this selflessness as foolish. For the holy fool, this selfless movement towards the world serves two important purposes, according to

³⁴¹ H. Murav, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky’s Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1992) 27-8, 26.

³⁴² Fedotov, “The Religious Sources of Russian Populism,” 35.

Skobtsova. Firstly, the selflessness of folly protects the ascetic from the sin of pride. Therefore, folly can be a useful spiritual practice against egoism. Secondly, an ascetic who turns to the world in folly may be more approachable for those seeking spiritual assistance, as Skobtsova outlines,

‘In this way, in holy folly two needs collide: the need of the most foolish ascetic not to tempt the world with his personality and the need of the world to see in the ascetic addressing the world not someone distant and alien, but “everything for everyone” - before whom it is not worth being proud of one’s small virtues, before whom one could expose one’s innermost wretchedness, one’s own spiritual weaknesses without the feeling of embarrassment - he, one’s own brother, will understand, will not condemn, will not reproach with his pharisaic perfection.’³⁴³

The holy fool, for Skobtsova, therefore has a strong pastoral impact. Olivier Clément recognised these traits in the tradition of the Holy Fools, and placed Skobtsova within that tradition as well:

‘The lives of the Desert Fathers often show Christ himself sending the purest ascetics to learn from a laborer or a mother or a thief who, living as human beings among other human beings, would know how to truly love their neighbor. Humility, freedom, and the wild spontaneity of love that refuses any form of hypocrisy – these are the trademarks of the “foolishness of Christ.”’³⁴⁴

In going to the world, the holy fool may assist in the spiritual development of the other. In ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’ this is particularly notable in the *Life* of Serapion. In the story of Serapion, we see an interplay between foolishness and (spiritual) wisdom alongside a desire to be ‘everything for everyone’ in an overwhelming concern for the spiritual welfare of others. Serapion the Sindonite, like Ioannikii and Vitalii, is

³⁴³ Таким образом, в юродстве сталкиваются две потребности: потребность самого юродствующего подвижника не соблазнять мир своею личностью и потребность мира — видеть в обратившемся к нему подвижнике не нечто далекое и чуждое, а «для всех все», — перед которым и погордиться не стоит своими маленькими добродетелями, перед которым можно не стесняясь обнажить свое внутреннее убожество, свои духовные немощи, — он, мол, свой брат, поймет, не осудит, не укорит своим фарисейским совершенством.’ Мать Мария (Скобцова), Е. Ю. Кузьмина-Караваева, “О Юродивых [About the Holy Fools],” in *Россия и Эмиграция*, ed. Т.В. Викторова, Л.В. Крошкина, Н.В. Ликвинцева, Е.Л. Майданович, Н.А. Струве, А.И. Шмаина-Великанова (Русский Путь, YMCA Press: Москва, Париж, 2019), 98.

³⁴⁴ Olivier Clément, “Preface,” to *Essential Writings*, 9.

another figure in *'Zhatva Dukha'* who moves from being a solitary wanderer into an active member of society. In a similar way to Ioannikii and Vitalii, Serapion is concerned with the spiritual well-being of his neighbours, specifically their propensity to sin. In fact, this theme is stronger in this tale than in the Lives of Ioannikii and Vitalii. In particular, in Skobtsova's retelling of the *Life* of Serapion, we see a development of the theme of spiritual direction, and a personal involvement of the instructor with the inner life of his subject, alongside behaviour which can be characterised as foolish.

Serapion begins as a solitary ascetic who gives away his clothes and all his possessions. At the beginning of Skobtsova's retelling of his life, he only possesses a sindon³⁴⁵ and a copy of the Gospels. However, he gives both of these possessions away when he encounters individuals in need with little regard for his own nakedness. When questioned why he sold his copy of the Gospels in order to give the proceeds to the poor, he responds: 'I sold the word that taught me: Sell your property and give it to the poor. So, I sold my only possession in order to give to the poor.'³⁴⁶ Serapion's nakedness and commitment to giving away his possessions without regard for his own wellbeing marks his behaviour out as within the holy fool tradition.

In addition to his life of non-possession, Serapion engages with pastoral support of others. He encounters a family of 'buffoons.' This family earn their money by dressing up in bright clothes and performing tricks in the street as a form of street entertainment. Each member of the family – which consists of two parents and two children – have a particular role in the performance. The father acts as the 'buffoon'

³⁴⁵ A sindon is a thin cloth.

³⁴⁶ 'Я продал слово, которое научило меня: продай имение свое и раздай нищим. Итак, единственное имение свое я продал, чтобы дать неимущему.' Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 37.

(a clown, or a jester), the mother sings, the daughter dances, and the son plays a flute. The family receive money, food and drink from passers-by as payment for their entertainment. The father, however, appears to be an alcoholic and is unable to protect his family from abuse from drunken revellers, which is principally directed at his daughter.

Serapion observes this family's way of life from a distance and becomes concerned about their spiritual wellbeing, commenting; 'it is very difficult to understand God and the way of the Lord, when one wanders around dens of the night and when one earns one's bread from revellers and drunks. It is necessary to be tirelessly mindful and to keep watching one's soul so that it does not stumble.'³⁴⁷ Serapion notes that the family are not being mindful of their souls, and they have no one to support them on a spiritual path. Therefore, he offers himself as a servant to the family to assist them and alleviate some of their pressures. So, Serapion becomes the slave of a fool. Serapion's actions here clearly sit within the holy fool tradition as he sacrifices his own freedom in order to serve a foolish person. Yet this also highlights the distinction between spiritual wisdom (present in Serapion's actions) which is perceived as foolish, and what Skobtsova identifies as authentic foolishness in the form of waywardness.

Gradually the family become very fond of Serapion and Skobtsova notes that, 'their hearts were strengthened by this love'.³⁴⁸ In turn, Serapion begins to teach the family about Christianity: 'Serapion began to tell them thoughts about God, and about service to the Lord, and about voluntarily taking burdens upon oneself, and about how

³⁴⁷ 'очень трудно помнить Бога и путь Господен, бродя по ночным притонам и зарабатывая хлеб свой от гуляк и пьяниц.' Skobtsova, *Zhatva Dukha*, 40.

³⁴⁸ 'укрепились их сердца в такой любви'. *Ibid.*, 41.

the redeemer suffered for the sins of the world, and about all the true words of Christianity.³⁴⁹ It is important to note here the elements which Serapion highlights are service, taking burdens upon oneself, and Christ's suffering for the world. He is teaching the family a model of the Christian path which is rooted in humility, service, and the acceptance of suffering on behalf of the other. These are all elements which we have seen in the *Lives* so far, and which prove foundational for Skobtsova's own theology and monastic practice.

Whilst instructing the family about Christianity, Serapion starts to restrain the father from over-indulging in wine and he teaches the daughter to reject the unwanted advances of the revellers. As a result, 'Serapion gradually became their spiritual father, and the leader of the family of clowns and he brought them out onto the wide path of the spirit.'³⁵⁰ As a result of this position, the father of the family gradually begins to shun the world of drunkenness and revelry in which he worked, instead he is imbued with a 'true love of wisdom [истиным любомудрием] and piety [богоугождением].'³⁵¹ Once the family reach this spiritual awareness, Serapion leaves their service.

Holy folly is present in the *Life* of Serapion through an unconventional dedication to service and humility. Serapion's humility is unstinting, which effects a radical form of solidarity with the other. It is through this humility (which Fedotov identifies as kenotic) that the family of 'buffoons' are spiritually transformed, without fear of judgment. According to Skobtsova's understanding of holy folly, this would

³⁴⁹ 'начал исподволь Серапион им о божьем промысле говорит, и о служении Господу, и о добровольно взятых на себя тяжестях, и о том, как страдал Искупитель за грехи мира, и о всем, что является истинным словом христианским.' Ibid.

³⁵⁰ 'постепенно стал Серапион духовным отцом и руководителем семьи скомороха и вывел ее на широкий путь духа.' Ibid.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

have been possible because of Serapion's non-conventional behaviour, which did not stem from hypocrisy or warrant a feeling of judgment for the family. This adds another important layer to an understanding of being 'in the world' but not 'of the world' in Skobtsova's *Lives*, as Serapion's task of imparting spiritual wisdom to the family of 'buffoons' is within a context that the world would judge as foolish. The elements of holy folly which have been identified in Serapion's tale are foundational for Skobtsova's own theological writings, looking forward to her innovations in monasticism and a sense of the shared ascetic task within her notion of the 'mysticism of human communion', to which this thesis will return.

7. 'Peter the tax collector': Non-Possession & Identification of the Poor with Christ

Skobtsova's retelling of the story of Peter the Tax Collector recalls a figure who, unlike the majority of the other characters in this collection, begins the tale as a sinful person who is not seeking to deepen his spiritual life. Peter has a *metanoia* moment, however, where his worldview is transformed. Faced with a vision of his eternal judgment, Peter reforms his avaricious and miserly values which, when he encounters a vision of Christ, he transforms into the positive traits of humility and mercy. In this tale Skobtsova is highlighting the importance of the monastic practice of non-possession, as well as the transformative power of humility. It is also note-worthy that Peter's giving away of his possessions benefits his neighbours. This firmly roots this tale, once again, in the system of loving God and neighbour and pre-figures Skobtsova's own writings on monastic non-possession.

Peter was a tax collector who loved material wealth, even more than the salvation of his soul; 'He measured all goods in heaven and earth according to gold

and he worshiped only gold, as an idol of human hands.³⁵² In this way, money and wealth are an idol for Peter at the beginning of this tale, which has an impact upon his behaviour, particularly towards the poor; ‘He measured the souls of humans, like everything, only by material wealth.’³⁵³ Peter only sees goods in relation to material wealth and so, as a result, he cannot see any value in the poor. Consequently, Peter does not show mercy to them: ‘Their debt he recovered without any mercy, thinking that if people are not able to save wealth, then they are not worthy of compassion.’³⁵⁴ In refusing to recognise the worth of the poor, because of their lack of possessions, he is not willing to show them any compassion in his demands as a tax collector.

Peter’s approach is challenged in a series of dreams. In the first dream he has a vision of his judgment in heaven, where angelic figures are weighing out his deeds – both positive and negative – to determine his eternal fate. The scales are unbalanced, with far more bad deeds out-weighing just one good deed. After this first dream Peter believes he faces judgment from God; ‘He understood that he approached great danger, and that a little time has been granted to him for the difficult and lengthy task of saving his soul.’³⁵⁵ He is motivated, largely by fear, to reform his character and to save his soul. Indeed, Peter does reform his behaviour towards the poor. However, when he believes that his charity has been rejected, he remains fearful that God will still punish him.

Following this, Peter has a second dream where he sees the person of Christ, who says to him, ‘Understand, Peter, that in giving to one of these little ones, you give

³⁵² ‘Все блага земные и небесные мерил он на золото и золото одному, как рукотворному идолу, поклонялся.’ Ibid., 32.

³⁵³ ‘Души людские мерил он, как и все, только богатством человеческим.’ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ ‘Долг их он взыскивал без всякой пощады, полагая, что человек, не умеющий скопить богатства, не достоин сострадания.’ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ ‘Понял он, что приблизился к великой опасности и что мало ему времени даровано для трудного и длительного дела спасения души.’ Ibid., 34.

to me, because the poor and needy are in essence highly esteemed by me, and they are my confidantes, whom I have brought closer to myself.³⁵⁶ This changes Peter's value system. Whilst the first dream changes Peter's views and behaviour, he is still concerned about his own judgment, and this appears to be his motivation for doing good deeds. The second dream, however, transforms his worldview. After the second dream: 'In the morning, examining all his thoughts, Peter recognised that he could no longer live as he did before the dream. Rejoicing and weeping about his new birth, he decided to devote all his remaining day to being merciful and humble.'³⁵⁷ For Skobtsova's retellings of the tales, this brief episode is an important theological development for her portrayal of loving the neighbour. The figure of Christ in the dream not only elevates the position of the poor, but also – by recalling Matthew 25.31-46 – associates Christ himself with the poor. The suggestion here, therefore, is that an interaction with the poor is directly linked with an interaction with Christ, who not only esteems the poor, but is associated with them. Peter's 'rebirth' following this revelation prompts him to dedicate his life to humility and mercy. This is a transformative moment for Peter, which not only has personal ramifications for him, but also has a positive effect on the people around him. As Peter no longer judges people by their material wealth, but sees them in relation to Christ, he becomes more compassionate and loving towards his neighbours which suggests that humility and mercy are an appropriate response to the recognition of Christ in the poor.

Following his commitment to mercy and humility, Peter sells all of his possessions, and he releases his slaves into freedom. The proceeds which he gains

³⁵⁶ 'Знай, Петр, что дающий одному из малых сих, Мне дает, потому что нищие и убогие суть вельможи Мои, и доверенные Мои, которых Я к Себе приблизил.' Ibid.

³⁵⁷ 'Наутро же, проверив все свои помыслы, узнал Петр, что больше он не может жить так, как жил до этого сна. Радуюсь и плача о новом рождении своем, решил он все дальнейшие дни посвятить милосердию и смирению.' Ibid.

from the sales he gives to the poor. Finally, he even sells himself into slavery, becoming the servant of a wealthy merchant. His work as a slave is a marked contrast from the esteemed position he formerly held, as he clears the pigsty and performs all the menial household tasks. However, Peter performs his duties so well, and his prayers bring so many blessings to the house, that his master, Zoil, wishes to release him. Yet Peter refuses: ‘But Peter refused this kindness and continued his work (*podvig*), voluntarily cutting off his will.’³⁵⁸ Peter is committed to service, which involves cutting off his own will and humbly submitting to Zoil. Peter combines this with a rigorous commitment to non-possession.

Skobtsova’s narrative of the life of Peter and his reformed character has similarities with Fedotov’s notion of ‘kenotic humility’. Fedotov makes a distinction between humility, asceticism and *Kenosis*.

‘Moral and religious Kenoticism must not be confused with other types of asceticism, not even with humility; or if it is humility then of a particular kind. Kenoticism is not like asceticism a means of purification but an end in itself. It is a downward movement of love, a descending, self-humiliating love, which finds its joy in being with the rejected.’³⁵⁹

In the reformed life of Peter, we have an example of someone who humbles themselves to an extreme extent, firstly through non-possession and then by selling himself into slavery. Peter strips himself of his titles, position, country, possessions, and freedom. Unlike Vitalii, Ioannikii, and Serapion, he does not become a spiritual guide. Peter’s service and commitment to keeping his identity secret appear to be a kenotic movement which acts as an end in itself. His example is one of humility as he becomes a servant without possessions, changing from an avaricious character into a

³⁵⁸ ‘Но Петр отказывался от этой милости и продолжал свои подвиг добровольного отсечения воли.’ Ibid., 36.

³⁵⁹ G. P. Fedotov “The Religious Sources of Russian Populism” in *The Russian Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Apr., 1942), 35.

poor person himself. His commitment to non-possession even includes a denial of his own will and a submission to others. Through associating the poor with Christ, this submission to the poor is also submission to Christ (and this is understood as a *podvig* – a spiritual task).

8. Conclusion

The hagiographical work '*Zhatva Dukha*' recounts the lives of Saints, chosen by Skobtsova, who have been recognised by the Church as holy for their faith and actions. In Skobtsova's selection, the vast majority of these figures are portrayed as socially engaged. In addition to leading exemplary lives of prayer, these figures show active love to their neighbours, curing illnesses, acting as spiritual guides, and dedicating their lives to the service of others. Skobtsova does not place this in competition with a life dedicated to God. On the contrary, Skobtsova is suggesting that by drawing near to God in prayer and asceticism, a person then possesses a refined desire to show active love towards the neighbour. There is not, therefore, a division between someone who commits themselves to knowing God and someone who wishes to serve their neighbour.

However, a compassionate concern for the other, and a desire to united with the neighbour rather than cut off from them, can be perceived as foolish by the world. This is because such a relationship requires kenotic humility. It requires the sacrificing of one's ego in order to step into the inner life of another, for the good of their transformation. It may require the sharing of another's burdens, and thus risk one's own personal safety and wellbeing. We have seen how this has been demonstrated by Ioannikii's willingness to take the sin of another upon himself, in Vitalii's piercing compassion for the other which prompts him to leave a life of

solitude, in Serapion's decision to become a slave of a fool, and in Peter's commitment to a life of poverty and non-possession. Authentic, divine wisdom appears to be foolish to the self-preserving wisdom of the world, and this tension is present across the collection of '*Zhatva Dukha*'. Skobtsova is therefore highlighting the unified relationship between loving both God and the neighbour in this work and she is advocating for a movement into the world in order to transform it. This emerges from Skobtsova's frustration at the gap between the philosophical and theological worlds of the intelligentsia and the everyday reality of the Russian people. She is also beginning to suggest that in a going to the world, as we see in these *Lives*, reveals some of the practical characteristics of the theological notions which form the basis of the 'Russian idea', particularly in the notion of *sobornost*'. Skobtsova will elaborate on these nascent ideas in her theological essays, to which this thesis will now turn.

As we shall see, '*Zhatva Dukha*' provides the foundation for Skobtsova's own socially engaged monasticism, and many of the themes which have been highlighted here will be deepened in her essays. By beginning her theological writing with these examples from the early church, she is outlining a blueprint for her own asceticism and monasticism which is 'in the world' but not 'of the world'. This will be explored further in the following chapter, as we turn to Skobtsova's own writing on asceticism and monasticism.

Chapter 4: Asceticism and the World

The theological project of Mother Maria Skobtsova seeks to maintain an equal balance between the love of God and the love of the neighbour which reflects a broader concern for wholeness, fullness, and synthesis. We have already seen in this thesis how this emphasis has emerged under the influence of the Russian Religious Renaissance, particularly in relation to the thought of Vladimir Sergeevich Soloviev (1853-1900) and Alexsei Stepanovich Khomiakov (1804-1860). We have also seen the influence of hagiography in *'Zhatva Dukha'* and how Skobtsova uses these tales to provide a foundation for a socially engaged spirituality with sacrifice and non-possession at its heart. In light of this, the following section will continue to explore Skobtsova's asceticism, beyond that which appears in her hagiographical tales. In order to do this, I will assess several key essays including 'Types of Religious Life', 'Asceticism', 'Holy Earth', 'Sources of Creativity' and 'The Mysticism of Human Communion'. I shall systematise Skobtsova's approach to asceticism, in relation to the command to love God and the neighbour, which is vital for an understanding of her monasticism and Mariology. This chapter will focus on Skobtsova's understanding of the world.

Throughout ascetic literature there is a repeated emphasis on renunciation of the world. This materialises in commands to abandon one's family, to no longer be 'of the world', to retreat into a life of solitude and private contemplation.³⁶⁰ In this light, Skobtsova recounts a story told by St. Isaac the Syrian; "“Stop, Father”, - said one monk – “for the sake of God I hurry to you.” And then he answered: “But I, for the

³⁶⁰ For a broad overview of several of retreat in asceticism see Kallistos Ware, "The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?" in *Asceticism* ed. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3-15. For an introduction to its impact on the development of monasticism see; Benedicta Ward "Introduction" in *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), vii-xxv.

sake of God, run from you.”³⁶¹ In order for the Father to maintain his close proximity to God, he must flee from the brother who seeks him. This presents a problem for Skobtsova, who insists throughout her theological essays on a balance between loving the neighbour as well as God. The question for Skobtsova, then, is how does a Christian love the neighbour, if asceticism teaches that we must renounce the world? In her writings, Skobtsova argues that this question has been incorrectly addressed throughout history by the Church as well as the Church’s opponent, humanism. This has resulted in forms of piety which observe an inauthentic expression of asceticism. This builds upon her work in *‘Zhatva Dukha’* where the protagonists repeatedly go to the world, whilst remaining distinct from it, and is incorporated in Skobtsova’s own constructive theological system.

In order to explore the connection between the ascetic individual and the neighbour, I shall begin by exploring Skobtsova’s understanding of the relationship between the individual and ‘the world’ in ascetic piety. Within the Orthodox tradition, Skobtsova notes a strong history of renouncing the world in the name of Christianity. In order to maintain the fullness of loving both God and the neighbour, Skobtsova wants to create a system which ensures that, along with ‘the world’, the neighbour is not renounced. Skobtsova elaborates on the dangers of renunciation in ‘Types of Religious Life’ and the associated problems of an individualised and egocentric Christianity.

In ‘Asceticism’ Skobtsova continues exploring a world-denying form of asceticism. In addition, however, she turns to the antithesis of this problem; a

³⁶¹ ‘<<Остановись, отец, - сказал один монах, - ради Бога спешу за тобою>>. И тот ответил: <<А я ради Бога бегу от тебя>>.’ Мать Мария (Скобцова) “Аскетизм” в *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 1 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 173.

humanistic philosophy which renounces God. She highlights the failings of an ethical system which rejects the transcendent. In response, a rigorous asceticism which can still be 'in the world' and demonstrate love towards the neighbour is proposed. To do this, she critiques the work of Konstantin Nikolaevich Leontiev (1831-1891) and Vasily Vasilievich Rozanov (1856-1919).³⁶² For correction, Skobtsova turns to St. Isaac the Syrian (c.613-c.700). Following Isaac, she suggests that 'the world' should be understood as the passions. Therefore, any destruction of 'the world' does not necessarily entail a renunciation of society or engagement with the neighbour, merely the passions of a fallen human nature.

Skobtsova develops her own understanding of asceticism in an article entitled 'Holy Earth'. Here she begins to propose an asceticism which focuses on transformation rather than renunciation. Skobtsova maintains that everything on the earth can and must be transformed. Nothing should be renounced, but everything needs to be transformed. This juxtaposes the 'world', which is renounced by some forms of asceticism, and what Skobtsova proposes herself; a transformation of the earth. A person's ascetic task, their *podvig*, is to transform themselves and the earth. This provides a foundation for Skobtsova to develop her 'mysticism of human communion' and provides an important context for this thesis to consider her Mariology and monasticism.

1. Skobtsova's understanding of Asceticism

It is appropriate to begin this chapter by exploring Skobtsova's understanding and definition of asceticism. In 'The Asceticism of Human Communion'³⁶³, Skobtsova

³⁶² For a discussion of Skobtsova's work in relation to Rozanov see, Alexander Medvedev. "Mother Maria (Skobtsova) and the Religious-Philosophical Renaissance of the Early XX Century: A Dialogue with V.V. Rozanov." *Вестник Свято-Филаретовского института*, no. 24 (2017): 101-23.

³⁶³ Мать Мария (Скобцова) "Аскетика Человекообщения," *Вестник* no. 36 (1955): 7-12.

offers her understanding of the purpose of ascetic deeds which, in turn, helps us to develop an understanding of how she defines asceticism. Skobtsova begins this article by noting the difficulty of implementing an ascetic practice in the modern world, particularly in deciding what form this practice might take and the motivations for it. She questions what these ascetic practices might be, and where the modern person can find ‘the desert’, the place and situation for ascetic renunciation and transformation.

Skobtsova asks what the purpose of asceticism is; whether it is for the training of the will (and thus as a good in itself) or whether it facilitates the development of associated virtues as a means to a greater end: ‘It seems to me, that ascetic rules are rules of human conduct, ensuring the most spiritual, authentic and deep relationship with God, the world and with oneself.’³⁶⁴ For Skobtsova, asceticism provides rules to define a way of life (human conduct) which strengthens the relationship between the ascetic, God and the world. Ascetic practice is not an isolated and solely personal endeavour, rather it is intimately connected with what is beyond the self.

There is a close connection, therefore, between asceticism as an interiorised form of ‘human conduct’ and the individual’s external relationship with God and the neighbour:

‘Asceticism makes prayer easier, asceticism gives wings to love of the neighbour, asceticism humbles the spirit, asceticism gives power in the fight with the devil. And in the first place, asceticism directs man to an authentic perception of his own nothingness before the greatness of God and God’s work in the world. Man, stepping on the path of asceticism, should seek to obtain

This short article, published posthumously, mostly duplicates material which is included in ‘The Second Gospel Commandment.’ However, pp. 7-9 are only published here. For the English translation of ‘The Second Gospel Commandment’ see Maria Skobtsova, ‘The Second Gospel Commandment’, in *Mother Maria Skobtsova: Essential Writings*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 2003), 45-60.

³⁶⁴ ‘Мне кажется, что аскетические правила являются правилами человеческого поведения, наиболее обеспечивающего максимально духовное, подлинное и глубокое отношение к Богу, к миру, к самому себе.’ Скобцова, “Аскетика Человекообщения,” 8.

exactly this. He must strive to become more useful for God's work on earth, more spiritual, more connected with God and over-flowing with divine love.'³⁶⁵

This emphasis is apparent in Skobtsova's own ascetic practices. Following the birth of her daughter Gaiana in 1913 and the outbreak of the First World War, Skobtsova (then Kuz'mina-Karavaeva) began wearing a belt of lead, as recalled by her mother, Sophia Pilenko; 'I buy a thick lead pipe, quite a heavy one. I flatten it with a hammer and sew it into a rag. All this in order to acquire Christ.'³⁶⁶ However, her focus was not just to 'acquire Christ', but also to pray for Russia. Her asceticism, from a relatively early point in her adult life, was focused on intercession for others. This is expressed in her prayers during the First World War; 'And my war effort is limited to [the reading of] saints' lives, to the lead pipe, to persistent, intense, if fruitless prayer on the cold floor. This is necessary for something, for the war, for Russia, for my beloved people.'³⁶⁷ Skobtsova's understanding of asceticism, therefore, is a form of human conduct and spiritual practice which unites a person not only with God, but also with their neighbour. It is a form of human conduct which humbles the individual so that they can become more 'useful' to God and connected with the neighbour and the world.

2. The Ascetic Type

Throughout her theological writings, Skobtsova engages with contemporary forms of Christianity and their expression in popular piety. In 'Types of Religious Life', written in 1937 and published posthumously, Skobtsova is highly critical of a

³⁶⁵ 'Аскетика облегчает молитву, аскетика окрыляет любовь к ближнему, аскетика смиряет дух, аскетика дает силы в борьбе с дьяволом. И в первую очередь аскетика направляет человека к правильному восприятию своего ничтожества перед величием Бога и Божьего дела в мире. Человек, вступая на аскетический путь, именно этого должен добиваться. Он должен стремиться стать наиболее пригодным для Божьего дела на земле, наиболее духовным, наиболее связанным с Богом и преисполненным Божественной любви.' Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 85.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 85-6.

particular form of asceticism. In this article, she identifies several key characteristics of piety in general. She categorises these features into broad types which include the synodal, ritualist, aesthetic, and ascetic. Highlighting the associated issues with these types, Skobtsova contrasts them with the ‘evangelical type’ which she considers to be the most authentic expression of a Christ-like, Gospel-based religion. In contrast to the gospel type, Skobtsova’s reflections on the ‘ascetic type’ reveal the form of piety which she seeks to address throughout her writing on asceticism. It is appropriate, therefore, to begin an exploration of her asceticism by highlighting her concerns regarding the ‘ascetic type.’

Skobtsova observes that asceticism is not unique to Christianity. There are ascetic elements in all world religions, including Hinduism, Islam and paganism. This reflects, Skobtsova suggests, the nature of all religious life, since ‘religious life demands of man sacrifice in the name of higher spiritual values, it is always ascetic.’³⁶⁸ She understands asceticism as a form of sacrificial submission to a higher value, beyond the individual. Indeed, this is not unique to religious movements. Creative life is a way of asceticism, ‘since it also demands total sacrifice in the name of higher creative values.’³⁶⁹ Therefore ascetic traits can be recognised in non-religious movements as well as in religious piety. Yet, Skobtsova argues that the authentic Christian ascetic path is distinct from these other forms of asceticism. The multiplicity of approaches towards asceticism, however, has clouded the authentic Christian path. Skobtsova wishes to extract an authentic Christian asceticism from this broad category.

³⁶⁸ Skobtsova, “Types of Religious Life,” EW, 163.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

Skobtsova highlights three areas which she considers to be inauthentic expressions of the Christian way of asceticism. All three areas are concerned with incorrect motivation to perform ascetic feats. Firstly, Skobtsova argues that the asceticism of the yogis of Hinduism (which had an influence upon theosophy and anthroposophy) aims for the ‘acquisition of spiritual power.’³⁷⁰ As a gymnast trains their muscles, or a musician practises scales, here the ascetic seeks to modify their own behaviour with the intention of subjecting their body to their will. Through these psychophysical exercises, the ascetic may acquire and develop specific virtues. This endeavour is not concerned with the transcendent, but with developing natural abilities. Skobtsova comments; ‘For an occult asceticism of this kind there exists no unlimited or inexhaustible source of power, and thus its task is to accumulate, consolidate, preserve, expand, and utilize all natural possibilities.’³⁷¹ Similarly, the second characteristic which Skobtsova identifies is when asceticism is seen as a challenge in and of itself. A person may practise asceticism simply to overcome an obstacle and to submit themselves to disciplinary tests. Skobtsova regards these two approaches to asceticism as distortions of the true path of authentic Christian piety.

However, Skobtsova maintains that the most fundamental issue which faces asceticism concerns a person’s attitude towards their own salvation. This becomes particularly problematic when a person’s ascetic feats are performed purely in relation to the salvation of their soul; as a means to an end in a merit-based system of piety. In this system, obedience is observed for the purpose of salvation, and this orientates any ascetic deeds: ‘If obedience demands that I clean out stables, dig for potatoes, look after leprous persons, collect alms for the Church, or preach the teaching of Christ – I

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 164.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 165.

must do all these things with the same conscientious and attentive effort...because all these things are tasks and exercises of my readiness to curb my will, a difficult and rocky road for the soul seeking salvation.³⁷² Ascetic deeds are performed here as a form of practising virtue, for the benefit of salvation. This fundamentally changes the nature of love. In this merit-based ascetic system, love becomes another virtue which may be developed on the whetstone of the world: ‘while I love I must remember at all times that the fundamental objective of the human soul is to be saved: to the extent that love assists me in my salvation, to that extent it is beneficial for me.’³⁷³ This produces a strongly egocentric asceticism: ‘One thing alone is important: my standing obediently before God, my relationship with God, my turning toward the contemplation of God’s eternal goodness.’³⁷⁴ The individual on this ascetic path may, therefore, ‘shake the world’s dust from their feet’³⁷⁵ as they rise to the height of salvation; creating a separation in their spiritual life between the world (and consequently, the neighbour) and themselves.

An individualistic asceticism - one which focuses on personal salvation - separates an individual from the world. The world becomes the whetstone for virtue, and the neighbour becomes an object through which salvation may be possible, a means to an end. For Skobtsova this is a perversion of authentic asceticism; ‘Spiritual egocentrism replaces the goal of true asceticism. It cuts off such a person from the universe and makes him into a spiritual miser.’³⁷⁶ The individualistic, merit-based asceticism which Skobtsova renounces highlights a key issue within her *oeuvre*. This issue is the relationship between Christianity and the world. Skobtsova condemns a

³⁷² Ibid., 167-8.

³⁷³ Ibid., 168.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 170.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 172-3.

person who, following an egocentric and individualistic asceticism, seeks to ‘shake the world’s dust from their feet’. This world-renouncing form of asceticism has deep roots in the Christian tradition, according to Skobtsova, which she seeks to highlight in her article entitled ‘Asceticism’. Here she traces the trajectory of thought which culminated in the inauthentic ‘ascetic type’ which she identifies in ‘Types of Religious Life.’ By highlighting the lacuna between humanistic philosophy and world-renouncing ascetic Christianity, Skobtsova seeks to trace the roots of the ‘ascetic type’. As a corrective to this history, she returns to the work of Isaac the Syrian, and explores what she considers to be an authentic understanding of the world in relation to asceticism which maintains the fullness of equally loving God and the neighbour.

3. The Humanistic Path of Renewal

In ‘Types of Religious Life’ Skobtsova observes ascetic types of piety which have renounced the world and the neighbour. In ‘Asceticism’, she draws attention to the opposite problem; those who have renounced God in favour of humanity. Skobtsova attributes the genesis of humanism as a response, in part, to a Christianity which neglected the world and the fullness of human life; precisely the ‘type’ which she denounces in ‘Types of Religious Life’. In response to this form of Christianity, ‘the external world rose up against ascetics’³⁷⁷, believing that they had renounced their fellow man. Consequently, ‘human life was taken out of the monastic enclosures, from the desert and monastic cells, perhaps even entirely from under the Church cupola onto the wide path of humanistic renewal.’³⁷⁸ In response to a Christian piety

³⁷⁷ ‘...этот внешний мир восстал на аскетов’. Скобцова, “Аскетизм,” 164.

³⁷⁸ ‘И тогда человеческая жизнь была выведена из монастырской ограды, из пустыни и киновий, даже, может быть, вообще из-под церковного купола на широкий путь гуманистического возрождения.’ Ibid.

which rejected the world and humanity, humanism emerged as an attempt to address a system of thought which neglected the reality of humanity, over and against a relationship with God.

The humanism which emerged, Skobtsova argues, measures all things according to the human image; the value of mankind, human history, and creativity. Humanism favours the love of humanity but, in doing so, it betrays the love of God. As a result, creation is elevated to the place of the Creator, bestowing upon humanity an immense power. This is what Skobtsova means when she uses the term ‘humanism’, which she employs rather loosely. Skobtsova suggests that the height of the humanistic ideal is found in the spirit of the Renaissance. This is a time period which was, ‘enchanted by the pathos of human self-affirmation’.³⁷⁹ The Renaissance rejoiced too much in its self-affirmation and it did not feel the need to limit itself as it elevated the place of humanity.³⁸⁰ Skobtsova claims, however, that in this joyful self-affirmation, the Renaissance did not recognise the inner world of a person. Because it did not limit itself, it was not able to develop spiritual muscles. As a result of this, Skobtsova claims that authentic asceticism ceased to exist following the Renaissance.

Despite her insistence on loving the neighbour, throughout her writings Skobtsova is critical of humanistic ethics. It is important for Skobtsova to state her criticism of humanism so that she maintains the love of God in her desire to maintain a balance in *Godmanhood*. Nevertheless, her engagement with humanism is rarely penetrating, specific or expansive. One of Skobtsova’s most sustained engagements with the issues around the human in contrast to the divine, however, is in

³⁷⁹ ‘...зачарованный пафосом человеческого самоутверждения.’ Ibid., 166.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

‘Asceticism’; firstly, through her critique of Konstantin Leontiev, and secondly in the work of Vasily Rozanov.

4. Konstantin Leontiev and Vasily Rozanov

Skobtsova suggests that asceticism was resurrected in Russia following the Renaissance, and no more so than in the writings of Konstantin Nikolayevich Leontiev (1831-1891). Leontiev was an essayist and a writer who had a medical background as a military surgeon in the Crimean War, before he joined the consular service. Towards the end of his life, Leontiev took monastic vows and attached himself to the Optina Pustyn Monastery. Skobtsova claims that Leontiev was the first person in Russia to resurrect asceticism. Leontiev developed his asceticism primarily in opposition to the utilitarian, humanist ethics which he believed had dominated the Russian philosophical discourse of his age. However, despite Leontiev’s resurrection of asceticism, Skobtsova is highly critical of his approach, arguing that he has an incorrect understanding of ancient asceticism and its relationship to the world. Skobtsova’s criticisms of Leontiev are highly similar to those of Berdyaev, largely because they both approach Leontiev’s work with a concern for the concept of *Godmanhood*.³⁸¹

In order to substantiate Skobtsova’s treatment of Leontiev’s work, it is important to understand some of the key concepts of this philosopher’s system. One of these key notions concerns the historical process and the development of society. Leontiev compares the development of a society to the natural, organic processes which any organism passes through. In the development of any organism, Leontiev

³⁸¹ See: Nikolai Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, trans. George Reavey (Orono, Me.: Academic International, 1968).

identified a formulaic progression with notable stages: he defined this development as:

‘A gradual ascent from the simple to the complex, a gradual individualization, an isolation from the environing world on the one hand, and from analogous and related organisms, from all analogous and related phenomena, on the other. A gradual movement from colourless simplicity towards original complexity. A growing complexity in the component parts, an enrichment of the inner content and, at the same time, a gradual strengthening of the unity. Thus it appears that the maximum point of development, not only in organic bodies but also generally in organic phenomena, is the maximum stage of complexity, consolidated by a certain inner despotic unity.’³⁸²

As an organism develops it becomes isolated from its surroundings and possesses a unique complexity. This process of organic development in an organism is followed by a process of decay and decline, as the organism dies. In this period the organism simplifies; its inner structure becomes less complex, and it appears to unify with its surroundings and disintegrate. It becomes less unique, like when ice melts into water or a decomposing organism separates into its elemental parts. Leontiev believes that this process of the development of an organic organism also applies to societies. Each society goes through stages: firstly, there is a primary simplicity, then a flowering complexity and finally a secondary and confused simplicity. It is possible to trace the development of a society according to its simplicity or complexity, and to foretell its decay.

In direct contrast to Skobtsova, who views the Renaissance as a period suffering from the ‘pathos’ of ‘human self-affirmation’, Leontiev views the Renaissance positively, as the height of ‘complex flowering’. Berdyaev summarises Leontiev’s view on this period in the following way: ‘A period of ‘complex flowering’ presupposed a complex, differentiated, heterogeneous and varied social structure, an inequality of conditions and classes, the existence of an aristocracy, of a

³⁸² Nikolai Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, trans. George Reavey (Orono, Me.: Academic International, 1968), 81.

strong political sense, of great men towering above the mass, of geniuses and saints.’³⁸³ Leontiev recognised the importance of strong individuals who emerge from society. He believed that inequality has an important place with the harmony of a complex existence. This inequality is even God-ordained as forces of darkness are balanced with forces of light to create a form of unity and harmony. Therefore, these strong individuals are contrasted with the poor and the lesser able. These ‘strong men’ (who are generally associated with the aristocratic class) command and coerce the masses, and the masses must obey them. There is an emphasis, therefore, on the rise of strong individuals, but not on the autonomy of each person. By juxtaposing the goodness of individual, strong, men with the ‘mass’ of society, Leontiev fails to recognise any innate or universal good in humanity as a whole. Berdyaev was highly critical of this position regarding the nature of humanity. Berdyaev notes that Leontiev ‘was inclined to forget that Christianity affirmed the absolute value of every human personality.’³⁸⁴ Therefore, he failed ‘...to understand the dignity of every human personality as an image and likeness of God’.³⁸⁵

Leontiev’s individualism, with which Skobtsova takes issue, becomes apparent in Leontiev’s notion of ‘secondary simplification’. For Leontiev, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the process of decay and a return to simplification; the ‘secondary simplification’. A social result of this was the levelling of humanity. Leontiev despised egalitarian and democratic principles. He believed that these systems create average, utilitarian mediocrities. Rather than allowing the emergence of particularly strong individuals, this time period sought out the universal good of humanity. In doing so, Leontiev argues that the whole of humanity is reduced

³⁸³ Ibid., 83.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 99.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., ix.

to a simplified bourgeois mass. According to Berdyaev, Leontiev suggested that ‘the powerful development of the personality postulated a differentiated and complex social structure. The process of ‘simplified confusion’ brought the personality’s flowering to an end and left it exhausted. The levelling process in society killed both social and personal originality.’³⁸⁶ As a result of this, Leontiev ardently opposed humanist ethics. Humanism denied the complexity which Leontiev sought, once again reducing society to simplified confusion.

Leontiev’s focus on individualism is also apparent in his soteriology. Leontiev was deeply concerned with his own salvation and the threat of damnation. This concern for *individual* salvation he termed ‘transcendental egoism’. At the root of ‘transcendental egoism’ was the fear of God. For Leontiev, fear of God leads to wisdom, and the result of this wisdom is love. Therefore, love is not the foundation of relationship with God, the only root is fear. Leontiev’s focus on individual salvation means, ‘He had no thirst for universal salvation, for the salvation of mankind and the world, which is so characteristic of many Russians.’³⁸⁷ Leontiev expresses these sentiments in ‘Four Letters from Athos’ which relates his system directly to asceticism:

‘Some say goodness, forgiveness, and charity are the essence of Christianity. Did they forget asceticism and severity? Did they not dwell upon God’s angry and austere words? Do they not know that John the Baptist was a monk in the highest degree? Do they not think of Christ’s 40-day fast in the desert? They are silent about the dogma of the sin of the first born, the spirit of darkness, the dogma of the Christian Trinity. This is all in the gospels and apostolic letters. One cannot, taking the holiness of the gospel and the divinity of Christ, repudiate one part of the book and choose another according to taste. Accept everything soft, sweet, pleasant, lightening life and reject everything threatening, austere, and painful. There is a religion of forgiveness, yes! But

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 98.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 195.

also a religion of self-torture, a religion not only of inexorable severity of self but also of reasonable severity toward others.³⁸⁸

Leontiev resents 'rosy' forms of Christianity which forget the ascetic tradition. For Leontiev, Christianity demands 'self-torture' and a severe ascetic piety in response to God's 'angry and austere words.' This severity even extends beyond the self, to the other. Leontiev's asceticism, therefore, is based on a rigorous denial of the world. This is highlighted by Sidney Monas: 'For Leontiev, the purpose of religion was to kill earthly hopes, to separate in a dualistic, Manichean manner the kingdom of the flesh from the kingdom of heaven – not to sublimate, or transfigure, or subsume the hum, and buzz, and blaze, and smell of sensual reality. Sometimes conceived as the counterpoint of his aestheticism, Leontiev's religion was its bankruptcy and suppression. Carrying an enormous weight of fear, guilt, and neurosis, it belonged to the kingdom of death.'³⁸⁹

In response to Leontiev's thought, Skobtsova writes that, 'Leontiev says the most decisive and unconditional 'yes' to renunciation of the world in the name of love for God.'³⁹⁰ Because Leontiev fails to affirm the importance of humanity as a whole then his faith is reduced to his relationship with God – the neighbour is not important for salvation. For Leontiev, according to Skobtsova, any love of God leads to the cursing of man. This is the truth of Orthodoxy, and any 'rosy' forms of Christianity need to be emphatically renounced and removed. Whilst Leontiev does create a space for mercy towards the neighbour, the fundamental motivations throughout his work

³⁸⁸ Konstantin Leontiev, "Chetyre pisma s Afona" *Bogoslovskii Vestnik*, (February 1912), 475-476. Cited in Dale Lawrence Nelson, "Konstantin Leontiev and the Orthodox East" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1975), 93-94.

³⁸⁹ Sidney Monas, "Leontiev: A Meditation" in *The Journal of Modern History* 43, no. 3 (Sep. 1971): 492.

³⁹⁰ 'Леонтьев говорит самое решительное и безоговорочное <<да>> отречению от мира во имя любви к богу.' Скобцова, "Аскетизм," 167.

are for the furtherance of beauty, a dislike of ‘levelling’, a focus on individual salvation, and a rejection of the innate worth and freedom of humankind.³⁹¹

Berdyaev attributes Leontiev’s failure as a philosopher to his rejection of humanity: ‘We may ask what was the cause of his religious failure? He rejected humanism, and he had a certain justification for that. But he also rejected man, religiously rejected him, and therein lay his mistake.’³⁹² For Skobtsova, Leontiev’s desire to address the problems of humanism also rejected the fullness of the dual command to love God and the neighbour. Despite Leontiev’s rejection of humanism, Skobtsova claims that Leontiev’s system of thought falls into exactly the same problem as that of humanism. They both believe that the asceticism of Byzantium and the Church Fathers promoted a renunciation from the world, and a denial of the love of the neighbour. On this supposition, humanism rejected Christianity, whilst Leontiev believed this was the only acceptable reading of early Christianity, so Leontiev rejected the world. Despite perhaps sympathising with Leontiev’s attempt to elevate the prominence of asceticism in Russia, Skobtsova claims that as a result of his misinformed opinion on asceticism Leontiev closed the concept, for many people, of an authentic Orthodox asceticism.

Skobtsova contrasts the writing of Leontiev with the Russian philosopher Vasily Vasilievich Rozanov (1856-1919). Rozanov agreed with Leontiev that Christianity is not a ‘rosy’ religion. Like Leontiev, Rozanov identifies an austere asceticism within the Christian tradition which highlights self-denial, renunciation and

³⁹¹ Beauty was the guiding principle for the majority of Leontiev’s work. In ‘Types of Religious Life’ Skobtsova describes Leontiev as an Orthodox aesthete, ‘...for whom beauty contained within it the measure of truth and who, having rejected the religiously empty bourgeois world because it was monstrous, reached out to Orthodox because in it there was beauty.’ Skobtsova, “Types of Religious Life,” EW, 156.

³⁹² Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, 228.

suffering. Leontiev believed that this self-effacing and severe asceticism was the only authentic expression of Christianity piety. Rozanov agrees that this is indeed authentic Christianity; a world-renouncing, sorrowful religion. However, unlike Leontiev, Rozanov rejects Christianity because of this affirmation.³⁹³ Skobtsova observes that the two thinkers affirm the same principle, yet they respond to it in contrasting ways. Skobtsova highlights Rozanov's views on asceticism and the world as an example of the trajectory of humanist thought in Russia.

Rozanov's greatest indictment of Christianity can be found in 'The Dark Face' ('Темный Лик'). Within this work there is an essay entitled 'Sweetest Jesus and the bitter fruits of the earth' ('О Сладчайшем Иисусе и горьких плодах мира') where Rozanov focuses his criticism onto the person of Christ.³⁹⁴ Rozanov is reacting against a paper given by Merezhkovsky at the Religious-Philosophical Society which claimed that all culture is Christian. Rozanov disagreed, arguing that there are examples of culture – such as Gogol's 'Dead Souls' – which would be totally incongruous if they were inserted into the Gospels. Whilst this particular example may be reducing the argument to absurdity, it does point to a larger concern for Rozanov; that there is a sharp distinction between Christianity and culture.

Rozanov's objections to Christianity centre around the person of Christ. Christ's birth introduces the 'radiance of the gospel'³⁹⁵ to the world. Skobtsova notes

³⁹³ In Skobtsova's characterisation, Rozanov rejects Christianity on these grounds. However, Alexander Medvedev suggests that Skobtsova is being too absolute here, and does not consider Rozanov's Christian death, for example (Medvedev, p. 103). Medvedev also claims that Skobtsova was influenced by rumours about Rozanov's life, rather than factual information (103). See: Alexander Medvedev, "Mother Maria (Skobtsova) and the Religious-Philosophical Renaissance of the Early XX Century: A Dialogue with V. V. Rozanov," *Вестник Свято-Филаретовского института* 2658-7599 (2017): 103.

³⁹⁴ В. В. Розанов, "О Сладчайшем Иисусе и горьких плодах мира" *Темный Лик* accessed February 17, 2020, http://www.odinblago.ru/rozanov_temn_luch/18. This article was presented in November 1907 to the Religious-Philosophical Society.

³⁹⁵ Розанов, "О Сладчайшем Иисусе."

that Rozanov regards Christ as ‘infinite beauty.’³⁹⁶ This radiant, infinite beauty, however, reduces the benefits of the world to comparative mediocrity. The ‘fruits of the earth’ become bitter in comparison; ‘Who, after pineapples, grabs potatoes?’³⁹⁷ Once a person encounters Christ, then all other benefits of this world (human efforts such as art and literature) become dull, flat, and meaningless. ‘Christians are called to only *one* thing - love of Christ.’³⁹⁸ Christians are called to love the ‘mono-flower’ of Christ. Earthly pleasures cannot be enjoyed in comparison to Christ. Therefore, a Christian can say: “I walk, eat, sleep, eat: but I enjoy only Jesus.”³⁹⁹ The result of this is a separation between the world and Christianity – just as Skobtsova has traced. Rozanov believes that this sentiment is even present in the Gospels. In the Gospels, Christ does not laugh and there are no romantic relationships. For Rozanov, this shows that the Gospels are not ‘earthly’ works.

For Christians, the gap between Christianity and culture demands a total transformation of the self. It is in this light that Rozanov interprets the narrative of Saul: ‘Saul did not re-educate himself to Paul, but was *transformed* into Paul...the relationship in it is precisely *Saul and Paul*: mutually devouring each other’s “I”.’⁴⁰⁰ Once Saul was transformed into Paul he would not live as before – he would not go to the theatre, Rozanov argues. The new Paul destroys Saul, just as Christianity destroys any pre-existing culture. For Rozanov, this creates a distinction between the Church and society: ‘The Church has always considered Christ as God, and *eo ipso* is forced to consider the whole world, our being, our very birth, not to mention science and art,

³⁹⁶ ‘лицо бесконечной красоты’. Скобцова, “Аскетизм,” 168.

³⁹⁷ Розанов, “О Сладчайшем Иисусе.”

³⁹⁸ ‘Призваны-то христиане только к *одному* — любви ко Христу.’ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ ‘«Я хожу, ем, сплю, вкушаю: но наслаждаюсь только Иисусом»,— может сказать о себе всякий подлинный христианин.’ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ ‘Савл не довоспитался до Павла, но преобразился в Павла... Отношение в нем есть именно Савла и Павла: взаимно пожирающих друг друга «я».’ Ibid.

as demonic, "lying in evil." So, it did. But this is not in the sense that something needs to be improved, but simply that everything needs to be destroyed.⁴⁰¹

Skobtsova sees the structures and ideals of communism as a progression of a humanist rejection of Christ's 'sombre face', as found in the thought of Rozanov, for a 'rosy' picture of the world and humanity. She seeks to re-evaluate this supposition by asking whether the 'face of Christian *podvig*' is really so dark, and whether non-Christian culture is that radiant.

'People make a choice between the sorrowful face of Christ and the joy of life. He who rejects the sorrowful face of Christ in the name of the joys of life believes in those joys, but tragedy is born at the moment when he discovers that those joys are not joyful. Forced, mechanized labor gives us no joy; entertainment, more or less monotonous, differing only in the degree to which it exhausts our nerves, gives us no joy; the whole of this bitter life gives us no joy. Without Christ the world attains the maximum of bitterness, because it attains the maximum of meaninglessness.'⁴⁰²

Skobtsova notes that asceticism lived on in humanistic culture, but in a godless and anti-Christian world. Paradoxically, she identifies a form of asceticism in humanist soil; throughout Europe and (she implies) in the Soviet Union. So, counter-intuitively, the renunciation of Christ and of God saw a rise in a particular form of asceticism. Each 'faithful' was required to renounce their own father and mother, being inspired by a severe class morality. 'In the name of work/the cause, in the name of creation of purpose he should renounce everything, including the renunciation of the human face.'⁴⁰³ All people fell under the faceless law of the collective. So, the world is once again drowned in tears, but this time they are not Christian tears, but tears of the austere collective. 'Truly the antichrist must be a great ascetic and wear sackcloth

⁴⁰¹ 'Церковь всегда считала Христа — Богом, и ео ipso принуждается считать весь мир, бытие наше, самое рождение, не говоря о науках и искусствах, — демоническими, «во зле лежащими». Так она и поступала. Но это не в смысле, что чему-то надо улучшаться, а просто — что всему надо уничтожиться.' Ibid.

⁴⁰² Skobtsova, "The Mysticism of Human Communion," EW, 83.

⁴⁰³ 'Во имя дела, во имя торжества целого он должен был отречься от всего, включая отречение от своего лица человеческого.' Скобцова, "Аскетизм," 169.

because that is what conquers and captivates the world, which sleeps softly and dresses in splendour, eating and drinking.’⁴⁰⁴

Due to the limitations of the essay form which Skobtsova employs, her criticism of Leontiev and Rozanov can appear, at times, rather shallow. However, it is possible to suggest that Skobtsova’s engagement with their thought in ‘Asceticism’ is intended to highlight the trajectory of ascetic discourse, rather than rigorously grapple with the particularities of their philosophical and theological systems, which can otherwise be found in the work of Berdyaev. Skobtsova’s primary concern is that, in the history of asceticism and its manifestations, there have frequently been divisions between the practise of asceticism and love for the neighbour. Skobtsova seeks to address this throughout her work, but in ‘Asceticism’ she turns to the particular example of St. Isaac the Syrian, to show the way in which balance can be maintained between asceticism and loving the neighbour.

5. Isaac the Syrian

In response to the ‘dark image’ of Christ which Rozanov forsakes, and the renunciation of the world in Leontiev’s rejection of ‘rosy Christianity’, in ‘Asceticism’ Skobtsova turns to the writing of Isaac the Syrian in search of an authentic Christian attitude towards the world. Skobtsova begins this exploration by highlighting the variety of ways in which Isaac uses the term ‘the world’. She highlights several texts where ‘the world’ is treated with derision, as something which needs to be destroyed or renounced (in a system not dissimilar to that of Leontiev). For example, Isaac describes the world as, ‘a harlot...a sycophant and a fraud.’⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ ‘Воистину, антихрист должен быть великим аскетом и носит власяницу, потому что это то, что покоряет и пленяет мир, спящий мягко и одевающийся пышно, и пьющий, и ядущий.’
Скобцова, “Аскетизм,” 170.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 173.

Skobtsova's concern, as always, is when love towards the neighbour is negated by a spiritual rejection of the world. There is a suggestion of this in some key texts in Isaac's writing, which Skobtsova draws attention to: 'Do you want, according to the law of the Gospel, to acquire in your spirit love towards the neighbour? Remove yourself from him, and then the fire of love for him will kindle in you, and you will rejoice upon seeing him, as if seeing a shining angel.'⁴⁰⁶ There are moments in Isaac's writings where he seems to support a renunciation of the world, which includes a rejection of the neighbour. However, Skobtsova believes that the key to understanding Isaac's work is in the correct interpretation of his use of 'the world' where a rejection of the world does not entail a denial of love towards the neighbour.

Skobtsova argues that Isaac's use of 'the world' refers to the human passions; 'The word *world* is a collective term, embracing the so-called passions.'⁴⁰⁷ 'The World', therefore, is a composite name for all of the passions, which does not refer to the neighbour; 'When we actually want to name the passions, we call them the world; but when we want to differentiate them according to their different names, we call them passions.'⁴⁰⁸ The passions have a variety of meanings in ascetic literature.⁴⁰⁹ According to Skobtsova, Isaac understands the passions as devotion to wealth in order to possess things, bodily pleasure, passion for carnal desiring, desire for honour, envy

⁴⁰⁶ 'Хочешь ли по евангельской заповеди приобрести в душе своей любовь к ближнему? Удались от него, и тогда возгорится в тебе пламень любви к нему, и радоваться будешь при лицезрении его, как при видении светлого ангела.' Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ 'Слово мир есть имя собирательное, обнимающее собою так называемые страсти.' Ibid., 174. (Emphasis Skobtsova's).

⁴⁰⁸ 'Когда вообще хотим наименовать страсти, называем их миром; а когда хотим различать их по различию наименований их, называем их страстями.' Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ In 'The Way of the Ascetics', Kallistos Ware notes that some theologians saw passions as contrary to nature, following the example of Philo. These theologians included Clement of Alexandria, Nemesius of Emesa, Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius of Pontus, and John Climacus. Ware also notes that there are other theologians who believe that passions can be transformed, such as Isaias of Scetis, Theodoret, St Maximus the Confessor and St Gregory Palamas. See: Kallistos Ware, "The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?" in *Asceticism* ed. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12.

and the desire to be in charge, arrogance in power, the desire to dress up and be admired, human glory, vindictiveness, and fear for the body. These passions represent the wisdom of the flesh, therefore Skobtsova notes that Isaac claims; ‘the world is living in the flesh, in the wisdom of the flesh.’⁴¹⁰ For Skobtsova the identification of ‘the world’ as passions of the flesh is sufficient to explain the presence of a renunciation of the world in Isaac’s thought, which does not include rejection of the neighbour.

This interpretation presents the possibility for an asceticism which is not ‘worldly’ – in that there is a rejection and transformation of the passions - but which maintains a love for the neighbour.⁴¹¹ Indeed, Skobtsova draws attention to a number of passages in Isaac’s writing which deal with love towards the neighbour.

“What is a merciful heart? A man’s heart burns for creation, people, birds, animals, for demons and every creature. When remembering them and looking at them, a person’s eyes exude tears from the great and strong pity that encompasses the heart.”⁴¹²

‘For love of creatures God sent His own Son to the cross to die not because he could not redeem by another way, but in order to teach us of his over-whelming love...But if he had something more precious he would give it to us in order to acquire us as his family. And he was not well disposed to restrict our freedom, but he was well disposed so that the love of our own hearts brings us closer to

⁴¹⁰ ‘...мир есть плотское житие в мудровании плоти.’ Скобцова, “Аскетизм,” 175.

⁴¹¹ A different interpretation of Isaac’s work is taken by Vladimir Lossky in ‘The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church.’ Here, Lossky also notes Isaac’s definition of the world as passions, however Lossky’s conclusions from this are drastically different to Skobtsova’s. Rather than an entering into the world, Lossky suggests the way to overcome passions is by retreating into oneself: “‘The world’ signifies here a dispersion, the soul’s wandering outside itself, a treason against its real nature. For the soul is not in itself subject to passions, but becomes so when it leaves its interior simplicity and exteriorizes itself. Renunciation of the world is thus a re-entering of the soul into itself, a concentration, a reintegration of the spiritual being in its return to communion with God...Monasticism is simply the highest degree of this attitude of will.’ Vladimir Lossky, ‘The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church’, translated by members of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius (Cambridge, London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd.), 200.

⁴¹² ‘<<Что такое сердце милующее?>> - И сказал: <<Возгорение сердца у человека о творении, о человеках, о птицах, о животных, о демонах и о всякой твари. При воспоминании о них и при воззрении на них очи у человека источают слезы, от великой и сильной жалости, объемлющей сердце.’ Скобцова, “Аскетизм,” 176.

Him...And the saints of this sign press to become like God in the perfection of love towards the neighbour.'⁴¹³

Skobtsova contends that humanism could find nothing wrong with Isaac's statements, not being able to find a higher measure of love for the brother in another place.

Similarly, Isaac does not reject the reality of God thus Skobtsova believes that Isaac's system of asceticism allows for a form of worldly renunciation which does not negate a love of the neighbour. For Skobtsova, this presents a middle ground between Leontiev and Rozanov. It is not about 'rosy Christianity' or the 'dark image' of Christ, but about the fullness of Christianity, as expressed by St. Isaac the Syrian. By returning to a Patristic source, Skobtsova's aim, in this instance, is to provide a precedent for a form of asceticism which maintains love of God and of the neighbour within the Orthodox tradition. She argues both Leontiev and Rozanov have incorrectly interpreted the asceticism of the Patristic period, which has led to their misinformed opinions.

However, Skobtsova does not satisfactorily address the multiple nuances of Isaac's theology. Patrick Hagman, in his extensive survey of asceticism in Isaac's theology, observes a greater variety to the use of 'the world' in Isaac's thought than Skobtsova acknowledges.⁴¹⁴ Hagman argues that 'the world' in Isaac's thought not only refers to the passions but, amongst many other nuances, includes the world as human relationships; an observation which becomes highly problematic for Skobtsova's reading. Once again, this highlights a methodological issue within Skobtsova's work, as she does not substantiate the interpretations which inform her

⁴¹³ '« По любви к твари Сына Своего предал Бог на крестную смерть не потому, что не мог искупить нас иным образом, но чтобы научить нас тем преизобилующей любви Своей...А если бы у Него было что более драгоценное и то дал бы нам, чтобы сим приобрести себе род наш. И не благоволил стеснить свободу нашу, но благоволил, чтобы любовью собственного нашего сердца приблизились мы к Нему... И домогаются святые сего признака - уподобляться Богу совершенством любви к ближнему>>.' Ibid., (Skobtsova's ellipsis) 177.

⁴¹⁴ Patrick Hagman, *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

own constructive thought. Furthermore, despite the careful identification of ‘the world’ as passions in ‘Asceticism’, Skobtsova’s own use of ‘the world’ is highly variable throughout her other essays, therefore an investigation into Skobtsova’s own employment of the word will help to build a better understanding of her own constructive thought.

6. The Worldly Person

In ‘The Mysticism of Human Communion’, we see the influence of Isaac’s thought on Skobtsova’s own reflections on the world. In this article, Skobtsova distinguishes between a ‘worldly attitude’ and the world as reality. A ‘worldly attitude’ is associated with the passion of egoism. However, an authentic world also exists, which demands an authentic attitude towards it. An authentic attitude to the world is about communion and sacrifice. These qualities are modelled on Christ who was the founder of authentic ‘worldly endeavour’. In a similar way to Isaac’s thought, therefore, ‘the world’ is a complex term in Skobtsova’s own theology with inauthentic and authentic attitudes towards it.

We shall turn, firstly, to the way in which Skobtsova incorporates an understanding of ‘the world’ as a passion into her own thought. The specific passion which Skobtsova associates with the world is egotism, establishing a person’s ‘I’ in opposition to the world; ‘On the one hand, worldly people are essentially separated from the world by an impenetrable wall. However much they give themselves to the joys of the world, whatever bustle they live in, there is always an impassable abyss in their consciousness: “I” and the world, which serves me, amuses me, grieves me, wearies me, and so on.’⁴¹⁵ Here Skobtsova reveals a contradiction in people who are

⁴¹⁵ Skobtsova, “The Mysticism of Human Communion”, EW, 76.

‘worldly’; they are, in fact, separated from the world. A ‘worldly person’ only sees the world in relation to their self, and how it serves them. In this way, Skobtsova associates a ‘worldly person’ with egoism and selfishness. Similarly to Isaac, therefore, Skobtsova is discussing ‘the world’ in relation to the passions: ‘The more egoistic a man is, that is, the more he belongs to the world, the more alienated he is from the authentic life of the world, the more the world is some sort of inanimate comfort for him, or some sort of inanimate torture, to which his uniquely animate “I” is opposed.’⁴¹⁶ A worldly person is disconnected from the authentic life of the world, meaning that being ‘worldly’ is an inauthentic expression of human life which isolates the “I” from the other. Skobtsova is discussing, therefore, an attitude which is influenced by the passions, specifically egoism. ‘If he [the worldly man] loves the world, science, art, nature, family, friends, politics, it is with what may be called lustful love – “my family,” “my art,” “my nature,” “my politics.” All this reveals, embodies, reflects, realizes a single excessive “I.”’ In a slightly different way to Isaac, Skobtsova associates the passions with a worldly attitude, rather than ‘the world.’

Skobtsova identifies a similar separation from the world in certain incarnations of Christian spirituality. Like the ‘worldly person’, a Christian may also separate their ‘I’ from the world by focusing solely on their relationship with God. If this is the case, then their interaction with the world becomes a form of obedience; a task, or job relating to their duty towards God, not their love of the neighbour. The Christian often regards the love of God as ‘the chief and only thing’, as a result, ‘man has his own monastery – in his spirit, behind high white walls.’⁴¹⁷ Like the ‘worldly person’, a Christian following this form of piety separates their ‘I’ from the world. Ironically,

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 77.

then, some Christians fall into the same trap as ‘worldly people’ by inauthentically engaging with the world, by opposing their ‘I’ to it; ‘And the world either simply lies in evil, or is the field where we exercise our virtues – in any case, it is outside the “I.” Separation from the world occurs on different principles here than with worldly people, but it is no less complete for all that. In this isolation of the “I” from the world, opposites meet.’⁴¹⁸

Skobtsova proposes an engagement with the world which stands in opposition both to ‘worldly people’ and also to Christian spirituality which opposes its ‘I’ to the world. She argues: ‘The more we go out into the world, the more we give ourselves to the world, the less we are off the world, because what is of the world does not give itself to the world.’⁴¹⁹ To be ‘of the world’ is to view the world in relation to how it serves the self, whereas to be ‘unworldly’, paradoxically, means to give oneself to the world. This is modelled on the example of Christ who was the ‘founder of worldly endeavor.’⁴²⁰ Skobtsova identifies Christ’s *kenosis* as the quintessence of authentic engagement with the world: ‘The great and only first founder of worldly endeavor was Christ, the Son of God, who descended into the world, became incarnate in the world, totally, entirely, without holding any reserve, as it were, for His Divinity...In His worldly obedience He emptied Himself, and His emptying is the only example for our path.’⁴²¹ Christ’s kenotic self-giving to the world is not only present in the incarnation but also his earthly ministry and ultimately in the cross.

Skobtsova suggests that humanity is united with and participates in Christ’s kenotic self-giving through the Eucharist. ‘In the sacrament of the eucharist, Christ

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

gave Himself, His God-man's Body, to the world, or rather, He united the world with Himself in the communion with his God-man's Body. He made it into Godmanhood.⁴²² In the sacrament of the Eucharist, Christ continues to give himself to the world which, in turn, unites the world with God. The Body of Christ, therefore, is based upon a sacrificial giving.

The world is worthy of such sacrificial self-giving because the 'world' consists of people who are icons of Christ. People are censed in the Divine Liturgy, and they should be venerated as icons. '...the churching of life is the sense of the whole world as one church, adorned with icons that should be venerated, that should be honored and loved, because these icons are true images of God that have the holiness of the Living God upon them.'⁴²³ Skobtsova highlights the paradox of the sin of being a 'worldly person' with the 'unworldly' act of sacrificially giving oneself to the world, mirroring the kenotic ministry of Christ, so that the world is authentically recognised as consisting of persons (icons of Christ).

7. Asceticism, Transformation and the Other

Throughout Skobtsova's writings on spirituality and asceticism there is a repeated theme of transformation. Her asceticism is orientated towards transformation of the person, over and above renunciation. We have already seen the importance of personal transformation in '*Zhatva Dukha*', and Skobtsova's aversion to renunciation of the world in 'Asceticism,' particularly when this renunciation impedes loving the neighbour. In several key essays including 'Holy Earth', 'The Source of Creativity' and 'The Mysticism of Human Communion', Skobtsova translates this ascetic transformation into a discussion of a person's spiritual relationship with their

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid., 81.

neighbour. In contrast to the ascetic renunciation of the world which Skobtsova dismisses, she is proposing a system of the 'holy earth.' The earth is something which can and must be transformed; not a 'world' to be renounced. At the heart of this transformation is an inter-connected system of personal, spiritual paths. On these paths a person works towards transformation, along with others whose paths are connected to theirs.

Skobtsova begins the article entitled 'Holy Earth' by highlighting her understanding of renunciation and evil. She writes: 'All renunciation is a lie. By renouncing, we affirm the genuine reality of what we consider to be evil, and thus we incarnate evil in its essence by all our renunciations.'⁴²⁴ Within ascetic piety, Skobtsova does not advocate renunciation. She believes that this acknowledges the presence of evil, substantiating and embodying it. If evil is to be renounced, then it follows that evil exists and the person has merely removed themselves from it: '...evil is reality as much as we recognize it as reality, and by doing so, even renouncing it, we embody (incarnate) it as one of the possible ways.'⁴²⁵ Instead of renunciation, Skobtsova claims that everything must seek to be transformed:

'In order to find authenticity, a person needs to be able transform, not to renounce. Everything that exists can and must be transformed. And only in comprehending the possibility of transformation, we completely renounce and destroy evil.'⁴²⁶

In ascetic terms, this means that sin and passions should be transformed through the person's spiritual *podvig*. Skobtsova is following one tradition within the writings of

⁴²⁴ 'Всякое отречение есть ложь. Отрекаясь, мы утверждаем подлинную реальность того, что почитаем злом, и, таким образом, воплощаем зло в сущие всяким своим отречением.' Мать Мария (Скобцова), "Святая Земля [Holy Earth]" in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки*, Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 181.

⁴²⁵ 'Таким образом, зло является реальностью, поскольку мы его опознаем как реальность, и этим самым, даже отрекаясь от него, воплощаем его, как один из возможных путей.' Ibid.

⁴²⁶ 'Для того - чтобы найти подлинное, человеку надо уметь не отречься, а преобразовать. Все, что сущее, может и должно быть преобразовано. И только постигая возможность преобразования, мы до конца отрицаем и уничтожаем зло.' Ibid.

the Church Fathers, therefore, which believes that passions should be transformed, rather than destroyed. This transformation must take precedence over a renunciation of familial ties, community, possessions, and other factors which the ascetic life demands. She insists that all things can be transformed, including the earth itself. Like a person, the earth begins in darkness and can be transformed, just like everything else which exists: 'At the starting point the earth is darkness. In approaching God, the earth becomes the Holy Earth, transformed flesh. In this sense the earth is not an exception, but, as everything which exists authentically, it can and should be transformed.'⁴²⁷

Skobtsova sees this transformation as a path (путь), a gradual process of transfiguration and renewal. Each person's path will be different according to their natural talents and inclinations. However, the *telos* of each path is always God. On these individual paths - which are journeying towards God - the person moves through stages (степень) of transformation. Skobtsova emphasises that this progressive transformation is a free act: 'a person can, by the effort of free will and free *podvig*, transform their path up to the limit of holiness.'⁴²⁸ Therefore, a person may be transformed through their *podvig*, becoming more holy and destroying - not just renouncing - evil.

Skobtsova identifies several stages of the transformation of the person. One notable stage of transformation is the organic merging of free paths into a united whole. Skobtsova makes a distinction between an untransformed realisation of unity, where individuals are mechanical and unfree members of a 'collective', in contrast

⁴²⁷ 'В исходной точке, земля - это мрак. В приближении к Богу, земля - святая земля, преображенная плоть. В этом смысле она не исключение, а, как все подлинно сущее, она может и должна быть преображена.' Ibid., 183.

⁴²⁸ 'человек может усилиями свободной воли, свободного подвига преобразить его до предела святости.' Ibid., 182.

with the transformed version of this stage, where individual paths freely and organically merge into one whole. Where individual paths are freely merged, there a person takes something upon themselves from outside of themselves; ‘...in this kind of addition, in this growth, they no longer remain (equal to) themselves, but they acquire from this addition, this growth, something else which was not included within them, something which, in essence, is more than them, which transforms and redefines them.’⁴²⁹ There is a sense here that transformation comes from outside the person; that redefinition is an addition and a growth from outside the self. This taking of something external upon oneself stands in contrast with the preceding stages of transformation which are highly individualised and interiorised. Skobtsova is suggesting that the higher stages of transformation move towards community, and a free merging of individual paths. Transformation progresses from an individualised effort into a communal gathering, which materialises in society.

Within this organic unity, Skobtsova identifies different types of ‘paths.’ There are solitary paths, and then there are paths which are defined by *another* path. Skobtsova defines these as roads of mutual interconnectivity; ‘there are roads which seem to mutually condition their existence, which are necessary mainly by their own mutual interconnectedness, because of an eternal mutual process of giving and receiving.’⁴³⁰ Rather than being a solitary path, such a path is conditioned by the paths of others. Central to this system of mutual interconnectivity is a process of giving and receiving, where the transformation of one path is conditioned and determined by another. As we have already observed, Skobtsova claims that the earth has its own

⁴²⁹ ‘[А слагаясь, сращаясь, они не остаются равными себе,] но приобретают от факта сложения, сращения еще нечто, что в них не заключено, нечто, что по существу больше их, что преобразует и вновь определяет их.’ Ibid., 185.

⁴³⁰ ‘... есть дороги, как бы взаимно обуславливающие свое бытие, необходимые главным образом по своей взаимной связанности, по вечным взаимным отдачам и получаниям.’ Ibid., 182-3.

path, moving towards transformation. Skobtsova identifies the earth's path as one of interconnectivity. Furthermore, Skobtsova suggests, it seems, that paths which are on the earth (under its 'sign') also fall under this category of interconnectivity; 'But a path, standing under the sign of the Earth, is always connected to another path, it entirely defines the other, opposite path and is itself entirely defined by it.'⁴³¹ This would suggest, therefore, that all human paths on the earth are mutually connected. This resonates with the earlier discussion in this thesis around Soloviev's 'The Meaning of Love'.⁴³²

However, not all paths are the same. Skobtsova identifies two broad types of spiritual path, where both are able to be transformed. These two groups are the maternal and the filial. The maternal path is defined by its relationship to the path of the son. Skobtsova writes that in motherhood the following takes place:

'A part of oneself becomes another life but remains joined with the original life by blood. In motherhood there is an embodied existence in oneself and in the other, - in another, separate from oneself. The mother, remaining in the son, gives him to all roads of the earth, to all the fields of the earth, to all sufferings and temptations. The mother is no longer at liberty in the fate of the son, and at the same time is inseparably connected with him on all his paths.'⁴³³

The path of the mother is, firstly, a path of interconnectivity. The mother is intimately connected with the fate of her son; she exists within her son and is linked to him by blood. Skobtsova sees in this an expression of love: 'In motherhood is the greatest

⁴³¹ 'Но путь, стоящий под знаком земли, всегда связан с другим путем, он целиком определяет другой, противоположный путь и целиком определяется им.' Ibid., 183.

⁴³² Soloviev writes: 'God is all, i.e., he possesses in one absolute act all positive content, the whole fullness of being. A human being (in general and every individual being in particular), being in fact only *this* and not *another*, may *become* all, only by doing away, in his consciousness and life, with that internal boundary which separates him from another. "This" may become the "all" only *together with others*; only together with others can an individual realize his absolute significance – become an inseparable and irreplaceable part of the universal whole, an independent, living and original organ of the absolute life.' Soloviev, *The Meaning of Love*, 44.

⁴³³ 'Часть себя становится иной жизнью и остается кровно слитой с начальной жизнью. В материнстве есть воплощенное существование в себе и в другом, - в другом, отдельном от себя. Мать, оставаясь в сыне, отдает его всем дорогам земным, всем полям земным, всем страданиям и соблазнам. Мать уже не вольна в судьбе сына, и вместе с тем неразрывно связана во всех его путях с ним.' Skobtsova, "Holy Earth," 186.

love, because it exists at a distance and, without the possibility of changing anything, it pursues the path of the son, and it co-exists with the path of the son in their separation.⁴³⁴ A mother is involved in the life of the son, but passively and often at a distance. However, there is a sense of the tragic in this relationship, because despite being embodied in the life of her son, a mother is largely powerless to determine his course. Skobtsova defines this motherhood in terms of suffering, claiming that ‘it [motherhood] suffers from freely chosen suffering which is not one’s own and for it this suffering is not freely chosen, but only inevitably accepted.’⁴³⁵ The mother gives her son to the world, and in so doing she is connected to him in a bond of love, co-suffering with him and inevitably accepting anything which he experiences in herself. The path of motherhood therefore is defined by accompaniment.

In the article ‘Birth in Creation’, Skobtsova continues exploring the relationship between the mother and the son by highlighting the nature of birth. She describes the mother’s continuing involvement in the life of the son (as she has raised in ‘Holy Earth’) in theological language of ‘essence’ and ‘hypostasis.’ In birth-giving, Skobtsova suggests, a mother creates from her own essence. The child is of the same essence as the mother, being of flesh and blood. However, this child has a different hypostasis; they have their own personality and with it their own freedom and identity. This is how Skobtsova furthers her notion of the mother being bound up in the life of their child. They are, in a sense, of the same ‘essence’, but a different hypostasis; connected to the life of the child in their being, but powerless to change

⁴³⁴ ‘В материнстве самая великая любовь, потому что оно издали и без возможности что-либо изменить влечется за сыновним путем и как бы со-живет в своей раздельности с этим сыновним путем.’ Ibid., 187.

⁴³⁵ ‘Оно страдает чужим, вольно избранным страданием, и для него это страдание не вольно избрано, а только неизбежно принято.’ Ibid.

the course of their child's independent, free hypostasis or personality.⁴³⁶ Rowan Williams notes the implications of this for an understanding of community and human relationality: '...the event of birth issues in another exemplar of the same essence, humanity; yet it also issues in a radical otherness, 'hypostatic' otherness, which means that the mother and the child have a history of relation to fashion and negotiate.'⁴³⁷ Like the mother and the child, humanity is, in a sense, of one essence (and with this the individual is part of an unchosen community), yet the hypostatic individuality of persons means that relationship must be formed and explored.

A further analogy to assess in this area of Skobtsova's work is her identification of the path of the mother with the earth. Within 'Holy Earth', the earth brings forth its son, humanity. The maternal path, therefore, is the path of the earth and the filial path is that of humanity. The path of the son is also defined by its relationship to the mother. It is primarily characterised by sacrifice which is performed on behalf of their mother. The son needs the mother for his *podvig*.

'And here it is clear, that their highest rise in stages of transformation do not exclude, but on the contrary predetermine minutes of powerlessness, minutes of wild howling, minutes when they fall to the ground and cannot do anything, and they only wish that someone's, even anyone's hand may be able to touch them, so that by touching [their] mother they realise that they are not alone, that

⁴³⁶ Here Skobtsova is critically engaging with the work of her contemporary, Nikolai Berdyaev. For Berdyaev, birth is an unfree creative process. In 'The Meaning of the Creative Act', Berdyaev argues that eros is truly creative, but sex (and birth-giving generation) squanders creativity and reflects natural necessity. He writes: 'Creative energy is fettered by the chain of birth-giving. And sex-life with its begetting is the chief obstacle to the dawn of the creative world-epoch. The human race, remaining in the element of the old Adam and the old Eve, is powerless to create, since it spends its creative energy on the continuation and ordering of the race, on obedience to the results of sin.' (Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, trans. Donald A. Lowrie (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 201). Skobtsova argues that natural birth is indeed an 'unfree' process, as it is bound to natural necessity. However, it produces a free personality in the child. Therefore, whilst the process may be unfree, the product is free. In contrast, she suggests that human creativity outside of birth (in art, literature, etc.) can only ever be made from a different essence, but will ultimately always reflect the personality (the hypostasis) of its creator. In this sense, this creation is not free. Therefore, birth has a unique place in creating from the same essence, and producing a free creation. This creative analysis from Skobtsova is well documented (and critically engaged with) in Natalia Ermolaev's thesis, *Modernism, Motherhood and Mariology*, pp. 112-119 especially.

⁴³⁷ Williams, *Looking East in Winter*, 223.

nothing which changes their connection to the bowels [of the earth] gives rest, new strength.’⁴³⁸

Skobtsova is developing a strong image here of humanity falling to its mother earth to sustain its life. According to Ermolaev, in ‘Holy Earth’ Skobtsova is developing a theology of nature which corresponds to Dostoevsky’s positive approach to the earth. This provides a fitting contrast to the world-renunciation which Skobtsova wishes to denounce. It gives a positivity to the world and avoids a dualistic distinction between the earthly and the heavenly, the human and the divine. However, there appears to be a wider picture here as well. This essay is dealing with the human condition and ascetic transformation, using an image of nature and the earth, rather than primarily developing a theology of nature. The key for our understanding at this point, from ‘Holy Earth’, is the interconnectivity of the human paths as they move towards transformation and union with God. This highlights Skobtsova’s understanding that paths do not exist in solitary isolation, and that transformation is – in part – a shared endeavour, and points towards the task of fashioning and negotiating relationships which Williams has highlighted.

In ‘Insights in Wartime’ Skobtsova notes the importance of eschatology in relation to these human ‘paths.’ Skobtsova ends ‘Insights in Wartime’ by noting the effect of a heart which welcomes God’s visitation to earth, when the world accepts this visit and says ‘ready, ready is my heart’. When this happens ‘in an instant our temporary and fallen life will unite with the depths of eternity, then our human cross will become the likeness of the God-man’s cross, then within our deathly affliction

⁴³⁸ ‘И вот тут ясно, что самый высокий подъем их в степенях преображенности не исключает, а наоборот предрешает минуты бессилия, минуты звериного воя, минуты такие, когда они падают на землю и ничего не могут, и хотя только, чтобы чья-то, тоже ничего не могущая изменить рука прикоснулась к ним, чтобы путем прикосновения к матери они осознали, что они не до конца одиноки, что ничего не меняющая связь их с недрами дает передышку, наполняет новыми силами.’ Skobtsova, “Holy Earth,” 188.

itself we will see the white garments of the angel who will announce to us: “He who was dead is no longer in the tomb.” Then mankind will enter into the paschal joy of the Resurrection.⁴³⁹ However, if the world does not accept God’s revelation, then the earth will not have found the path to transformation. If that is the case, then Skobtsova predicts the following: ‘The old, sad, dusty earth races through the empty sky into eternal emptiness. Death-bound mankind rejoices over small successes and weeps over small failures, renouncing its election, painstakingly and assiduously pulling the coffin lid over its head.’⁴⁴⁰ The path to transfiguration requires divine revelation and assistance. Skobtsova maintains that the fullness of transfiguration is not only an eschatological phenomenon, but a *Godmanly* event. Each human path, therefore, needs to ‘unite with the depths of eternity’, to perceive and respond to God’s revelation in addition to navigating the relation between other human paths. Loving God and loving the neighbour requires an openness to what is beyond the self, recognising that the self does not exist in isolation, but in relationship.

8. Conclusion

Skobtsova understands asceticism as a set of rules to guide human conduct into the fullest, deepest relationship possible between God, the world and oneself. An understanding of the world, therefore, is vital for any realisation of the ascetic task. In a negative sense, the world represents the human passions. These passions must be destroyed by transformation of human failings, in order for them to be completely over-come. Positively, the world represents a community of persons who are icons of Christ. Asceticism, therefore, should not deny the world or focus only on individual salvation (as Leontiev suggests). At the same time, a person should not promote an

⁴³⁹ Skobtsova, “Insights in Wartime,” EW, 139.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

antagonistic relationship between the Church and the world, where transformation of the self leads to an unbridgeable gap between the joys of the earth and the joy found in Christ (as Rozanov claims). Rather, the correct ascetic attitude is one which resists the passions of being a worldly person governed by egoism, and instead works towards giving oneself to the world, in sacrificial service and love. This system recognises that a person's spiritual path is intimately connected with the path of their neighbour. Like a mother is bound up in the fate of her son, so too human paths are joined in their essence, but they face the task of navigating the individuality which a free human personality gives in relationship. Asceticism for Skobtsova, therefore, is not a solitary, isolated, spiritual practice. Neither is it a world-denying belief. It is a process of transformation, where the ascetic path moves towards deeper communion with both God and the neighbour.

Chapter 5: The Ascetical Practice of Human Encounter: The Mysticism of Human
Communion, Mariology and Monasticism

Once Skobtsova has established a system which allows for love of the neighbour and a turn to the world, she begins to develop an understanding of the mystical basis of human encounters. Building on her affirmation that the world can and must be transformed, she wishes to present an understanding of human engagement which has spiritual weight. In ‘The Second Gospel Commandment’ Skobtsova uses texts from the *Philokalia* to support her argument for a theologically informed system of showing love to the neighbour. After criticising forms of individualistic ascetic spirituality, she shows how asceticism is an important part of communal spirituality. She highlights the shared nature of ascetic endeavour in the context of a person’s relationship with the other in their tripartite composition of body, soul, and spirit. Whilst asceticism is important for individuals, the ultimate ascetic task, Skobtsova believes, is the uncovering of the *imago dei* in the other, which has been clouded by sin. This places her asceticism firmly in the context of the dual command to love God and the neighbour, and a searching for *sobornal* unity. Skobtsova wishes to develop an ascetic Christianity which engages with the neighbour in love, which turns to the world and its needs (building on the examples she has drawn in ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’ and the affirmations which she established in ‘Asceticism’). She does this by arguing that loving the neighbour is an ascetic task, which possesses potential for encountering God. To describe this, Skobtsova uses the term ‘mysticism of human communion.’ We shall unpick this central concept for Skobtsova’s work in the course of this chapter by firstly looking at her article ‘The Second Gospel Commandment.’

This chapter will also explore Mariology. Skobtsova’s Mariology holds an important place in her understanding of authentic human encounter. It is important to

place this discussion within her picture of asceticism and human communion. In searching for the mystical and theological depths to substantiate an active love of the neighbour, Skobtsova turns to the example of Mary. Mary, she claims, is as worthy of imitation as Christ. Emulation of Mary consists in a willingness to bear the crosses of another, for a person's heart to be pierced by the sword of grief, following the example of the mother who suffered alongside her son at the crucifixion. This expands on the maternal path which has been highlighted in 'Holy Earth', to build a Marian model of human community. This is balanced with an imitation of Christ (and is not set up in opposition to this, but in compliment to it) and thus once again Skobtsova seeks to balance a duality in the spiritual life. Sacrifice is at the heart of both an emulation of Christ and of Mary through a willing suspension of the will, and an opening up of the self to the other.

The third aspect of Skobtsova's thought which this chapter will explore is monasticism. Skobtsova is an innovator of the monastic tradition. She seeks to reimagine the monastic vows of tonsuring to most authentically engage with the context of emigration in which she finds herself. Her reinterpretation of the vows of obedience and non-possession reveal yet another emphasis on sacrifice, as the monastic sacrifices their will to both God and the neighbour. Finally, this chapter will suggest that Skobtsova regards asceticism as a creative act. Building upon her understanding of asceticism as transformation, and the monastic system of turning to the world, she outlines a system of shared transformation which is itself a creative process.

1. The Mysticism of Human Communion

Skobtsova wants to imbue love towards the neighbour with theological significance. In ‘The Mysticism of Human Communion’, she laments the secondary character of Christianity which is ‘turned to the world’ or what is referred to as ‘social Christianity’. Skobtsova observes that social Christianity is generally ‘based on a certain rationalistic humanism’ where people ‘apply Christian morality to “this world,” and do not seek a spiritual and mystical basis for their constructions.’⁴⁴¹ Skobtsova argues that in order to make social Christianity truly Christian, rather than Christian-like, it must have a theological basis; ‘it is necessary to find one more dimension for it, to bring it out of flat soulfulness and two-dimensional moralism into the depths of multi-dimensional spirituality. To substantiate it mystically and spiritually.’⁴⁴²

Therefore, in ‘The Second Gospel Commandment’, Skobtsova develops a system of ascetic engagement with the other, based on the tripartite composition of the human person; body, soul, and spirit. Skobtsova is focusing firstly on the impact of ascetic practice on a person’s own body, soul, and spirit. However, she is also interested in one person’s relationship with the whole being of the other. Skobtsova develops a system which is concerned with the shared experience of asceticism. This is what Olivier Clément has called the ‘ascetical practice of human encounter.’⁴⁴³ She explores the way in which a person practising asceticism has an impact on their own body, soul and spirit, as well as the triune make-up of the *other*. In doing so, Skobtsova is seeking to build ‘an authentically religious attitude toward man.’⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴¹ Skobtsova, “The Mysticism of Human Communion,” EW, 75-6.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 76.

⁴⁴³ Olivier Clément “Preface,” EW, 10.

⁴⁴⁴ Skobtsova, “The Second Gospel Commandment,” EW, 56.

In discussing a person's relationship to the physical world (in their body), Skobtsova draws attention to the importance of work and labour. Work has a central role in asceticism, it 'stands at the center of modern ascetic endeavor in the area of man's relation to his physical existence.'⁴⁴⁵ In defining work, Skobtsova claims that it must not be reduced 'to working with one's hands, a menial task; it calls for responsibility, inspiration, and love. It should always be work in the fields of the Lord.'⁴⁴⁶ For Skobtsova, physical, bodily work is about participating in divine economy; 'Work is not only an unavoidable evil, the curse of Adam; it is also a participation in the work of divine economy; it can be transfigured and sanctified.'⁴⁴⁷ Therefore, physical labour has an important function in asceticism, for Skobtsova, as a means of attuning one's body to the divine will, which then enables the person to show responsibility, inspiration and love in their work.

The physical endeavour of work and labour has a direct impact on the bodily existence of the other. Skobtsova makes this claim based on Christ's physical association with the poor and needy in the Gospels; 'when Christ says to those who stood on His right hand that they visited Him in prison, and in the hospital, fed Him when He was hungry, clothed Him when He was naked.'⁴⁴⁸ This is the way in which a person works in responsibility and love. For Skobtsova, this passage suggests that in communing with the poor, the naked, or those in prison, a person is also physically communing with Christ, through His association with them: 'Thus, in the dull, laborious, often humdrum ascetic rules concerning our attitude toward the material needs of our neighbor, there already lies the pledge of a possible relation to God, their

⁴⁴⁵ Skobtsova, "The Second Gospel Commandment," EW, 54.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid. (This phrase resonates with the agricultural imagery of '*Zhatva Dukha*' which was highlighted in the section on Vitalii in this thesis).

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 55.

spirit-bearing nature.⁴⁴⁹ Thus, in a person's physical interactions with another (through work and labour), one has the potential of experiencing Christ. This is a very important observation for Skobtsova's system of ascetical human encounter. Christ says that whatever is done to the poor is done to him. From this, Skobtsova believes that an encounter with the other is a form of encountering Christ.⁴⁵⁰

Skobtsova continues to substantiate this in an ascetic's attitude to their own interior life. This refers specifically to the soul which, in Skobtsova's system, refers to emotions and passions. Skobtsova maintains, as we have seen throughout her work already, that asceticism must not be an interiorised practise which cuts out the world: 'An inwardness that fences man off from the outside world and limits him to the sphere of his own feelings, that concentrates him on following attentively the slightest impulses of his own soul – is the wrong kind of inwardness.'⁴⁵¹ Here Skobtsova is not using the definition of the 'world' which she highlights in Isaac's theology, but in relation to the neighbour. Instead of an inwardness (an attentiveness to one's soul) which cuts out the world, a person should develop a soul which, 'allows man to approach the other more closely and with greater attentiveness, that opens to him the inner causes and motives of behavior of another soul, that creates a bridge between man and his neighbor, that teaches him to love his neighbor'. Skobtsova claims that creating an incorrect inwardness, which creates a cult of the self, encourages the passions. The passions are the realm of the soul; the emotions and feelings. A person, 'should not destroy his inwardness, but transform it entirely into an instrument of love for the other.'⁴⁵² It is important to note that 'inwardness' here is the word for the soul,

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ This resonates with the story of Peter the tax collector in '*Zhatva Dukha*'.

⁴⁵¹ Skobtsova, "The Second Gospel Commandment," EW, 55.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 56.

in an adjectival form; душевный. This means that Skobtsova is saying a person's inner feelings, passions and emotions should not be self-serving, but should open out into love of the neighbour.

Skobtsova elaborates on this by considering a person's relationship with the inner (soulful) life of another. She claims that a person must be attentive to another's soul, not just externally, but by attempting to enter into their inner life; 'We must have the strength not to define generally what a given man should or should not do, but to define him from within his own inner state, to seek to free him from his passions and emotions not by cutting them off maximally, but by a conscious and profound overcoming, shifting, transfiguring of them.'⁴⁵³ The ascetic task of transfiguring the passions is, in Skobtsova's system, a shared and mutual endeavour where one enters into the other, assisting them in the task of transfiguring their passions. This builds upon her understanding of transformation and the shared path leading towards it in 'Holy Earth'.

In the realm of the spirit (that part of a person which pertains to God), Skobtsova highlights the importance of a sacrificial limiting of oneself; 'Spiritual asceticism here consists in the most open, unequivocal, and conscious renunciation of oneself, in a readiness always to follow the will of God, in a desire to become the fulfiller of God's design in the world, a tool in His hands, a means and not an end.'⁴⁵⁴ The ascetic demand on the spirit of a person is to submit to God, in order to become 'a tool in His hands.'⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ We shall explore how this relates to creativity later in this chapter.

The greatest ascetic ascent of human encounter is confronting the *imago dei* in the spirit of another.

‘In turning his spiritual world toward the spiritual world of another, a man encounters the terrible, inspiring mystery of the authentic knowledge of God, because what he encounters is not flesh and blood, not feelings and moods, but the authentic image of God in man, the very incarnate icon of God in the world, a glimmer of the mystery of the Incarnation and Godmanhood.’⁴⁵⁶

By engaging with the other, a person not only encounters the people with whom Christ identifies, but also the image of God in man. Whilst this supersedes the body and the soul (emotions and passions), this spiritual encounter does not eliminate the human element. It purely reveals the ‘mystery of the Incarnation’; of *Godmanhood* which combines both the divine and the human. This encounter is obscured, however, by the presence of sin. A person ‘will see how this image of God is obscured, distorted by an evil power. He will see the human heart, where the devil wages a ceaseless struggle with God.’⁴⁵⁷ Therefore, human encounter in the realm of the spirit requires the greatest ascetic effort. A person must grapple with the *imago dei* in the other, fighting against the devil. The impact of this assertion is noted by Olivier Clément:

‘Mother Maria knew well that impartial love of neighbor may uncover the image not only of God but also of the devil. For that reason she was aware that an authentic encounter was not the same as a true “sacrament of fellowship”; for that, the powerful exorcism of the Church and the most difficult spiritual struggle were necessary. This is why an ascetical practice of human encounter, as she sketched it as part of her study of the second commandment, is a significant resource for Christian thought today.’⁴⁵⁸

This ascetic struggle is only possible when the subject submits to God; ‘He will be able to do it if all his hope is in God and not in himself; he will be able to do it if he

⁴⁵⁶ Skobtsova, “The Second Gospel Commandment,” EW, 57.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Olivier Clément, “Preface,” EW, 10.

has not a single subtle or mercenary desire; if he lays down his armor like David and with nothing but the name of God rushes to do battle with Goliath.⁴⁵⁹

Here we are beginning to sense the way in which asceticism is a shared endeavour for Skobtsova. In addition to the interconnectivity of ascetic tasks, we are starting to sense the way that Skobtsova combines both the human and divine principles in her suggestion that an encounter with the neighbour holds the potential to serve as an encounter with the divine; ‘the possibility of attaining to “lofty and divine contemplation” through the love of one’s neighbor’.⁴⁶⁰ Indeed, Skobtsova maintains that in this is found ‘the whole key to the mystery of human communion as a religious path.’⁴⁶¹ Therefore, in rooting her asceticism in the dual command to love God and the neighbour, Skobtsova is not just denouncing humanism or a world-denying and individualistic Christian piety, rather she is developing a sense of communion with God, through the neighbour. At the heart of this ascetic practice is a suspension of the individual’s will, and a sacrificial limiting of oneself in order to build this community, following the example of Christ. Alongside this imitation of Christ, Skobtsova powerfully highlights the role of Mary in this ascetic work as a model of human solidarity.

2. On the Imitation of the Mother of God

The interconnectivity of paths which is raised in ‘Holy Earth’ in 1927 is a theme which continues through Skobtsova’s theological work. Of particular interest is the maternal path, which has already been noted and which is exemplified for Skobtsova by Mary the Mother of God. Skobtsova’s Mariology offers some of her most creative

⁴⁵⁹ Skobtsova, “The Second Gospel Commandment,” EW, 57.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

theological thinking, which has been highlighted and well-documented by several scholars.⁴⁶² It is important to place this thinking into Skobtsova's broader project and to link the 'maternal path' with her insights into asceticism, spirituality, and wider concerns. Skobtsova's essays on Mariology expand on the place of Mary in her theology, and the way in which a Christian should emulate her example through a sacrifice of the will, and a willingness to suffer with the other. This thesis will now turn to several key articles for Skobtsova's Mariology, including 'Veneration of the Mother of God' and 'On the Imitation of the Mother of God'.

Skobtsova's 'The Veneration of the Mother of God' outlines what she perceives as an Orthodox, theological understanding of the person of Mary.⁴⁶³ Skobtsova identifies this as not only an Orthodox understanding, but as a particularly Russian perspective. The Mother of God has been adopted by the Russian people, she suggests, so that her character is felt in the national sensibilities of Orthodoxy in Russia. She goes so far as to say that Orthodoxy would be incomprehensible without an understanding of the Mother of God. Despite the scarcity of formal and comprehensive dogmatic definitions of the Mother of God within the Orthodox tradition, Skobtsova draws attention to the important place of the veneration of Mary in the Church through liturgy and in the writings of the Fathers. It is in the veneration of Mary, through the writings of the Fathers and in the Liturgy of the Orthodox Church (particularly in Russia), that the centrality of the Mother of God is revealed. From these sources, Skobtsova identifies several key affirmations of who Mary is, and for what reasons she is venerated. Natalia Ermolaev has helpfully mapped the

⁴⁶² Including Rowan Williams, Natalia Ermolaev, and Katerina Bauerova (see secondary literature in the introduction to this thesis).

⁴⁶³ Мать Мария (Скобцова) "Почитание Богоматери" в *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 1 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 93-108. English translation available by Fr Janos at: http://www.berdyaev.com/skobtsova/veneratio_Bogomater.html

comparisons and divergences in this article between Skobtsova's thought and Bulgakov's 'The Burning Bush'.⁴⁶⁴

Skobtsova affirms Mary as without personal sin. Although Mary is still in the state of original sin, she is without personal sin. As a human, Mary shares with the rest of the humanity the infirmity which is inherited by original sin and the mortality of the human condition. However, in and through her freedom she remained without personal sin. It is only through the work of Christ (His passion and resurrection) and in the power of the Holy Spirit that the Mother of God receives freedom from the curse of Adam, at Pentecost. In her Dormition and Assumption into Heaven, the Virgin-Mother is glorified and reaches *theosis*; 'The Mother of God in Her resurrected and glorified Body is already the perfected glory of the world, its resurrection. She is an all perfected creation ultimately deified in theosis, -- God-begetting, God-bearing, God-receiving, -- and therefore She is a spiritual focal point for all mankind, for all creation.'⁴⁶⁵ The Mother of God, therefore, as a person who reached *theosis* is an archetype for the human path, on the road towards transformation. In her glorified, heavenly state, Mary intercedes for the world as the Queen of Heaven. She exalts humanity and all of creation to God, praying for them at the Day of Judgement.

Based on the affirmations of Mary's role on earth, and in heaven, Skobtsova proposes a system of emulation for the spiritual life, based on Mary's example. 'On the Imitation of the Mother of God' begins by critiquing 'protestant mysticism' and a solitary bearing of one's own cross. A person's bearing of their cross is a freely

⁴⁶⁴ Ermolaev discusses 'The Veneration of the Mother of God' in relation to a theology of the earth. This is an important aspect of Skobtsova's thought to highlight but moves the discussion away from some of the core themes of this work. See: Ermolaev, *Modernism, Motherhood and Mariology*, 132-164.

⁴⁶⁵ Skobtsova, 'Veneration', trans. Fr Janos, accessed: http://www.berdyaev.com/skobtsova/veneratio_Bogomater.html

chosen crucifixion of their sins. Skobtsova recognises that this spiritual path can all too easily be in isolation from our neighbours. It can become ‘infected’ by an ‘isolating and individualistic Protestant mysticism.’⁴⁶⁶ In this instance, a person’s struggle with their own sins, and their movement towards Christ, need not have any connection to the Church, the principle of *sobornost*, or the God-manly process. Everything aside from salvation for this person is a ‘humanistic afterthought’, and a form of ‘christianification’ which is ‘deprived of all true mystical roots’.⁴⁶⁷ This is Skobtsova’s repeated refrain, which we have identified throughout her writings, warning against individualism on the Christian path.

We have already explored how the ‘mysticism of human communion’ seeks to provide a spiritual foundation for love of the neighbour to counter such an individualism. Skobtsova’s Mariology furthers this discussion and continues to add theological depth to an outward-facing spirituality of neighbourly love. An important aspect of the mystical foundation of human communion is an emulation of Mary the Mother of God. Importantly, Skobtsova draws attention to the human life of Mary as a model of veneration, not her glorified state as the Queen of Heaven (for more on the glorified state see Skobtsova’s ‘Veneration of the Mother of God’). In imitating Mary’s earthly, maternal path, we come closer to what Skobtsova perceives as authentic human communion; ‘It is precisely on this path of God-motherhood that we must seek the justification and substantiation of our hopes, and find the religious and mystical meaning of true human communion, which otherwise somehow escapes us.’⁴⁶⁸ At the heart of this imitation is a willingness to bear the crosses of the *other*.

⁴⁶⁶ Skobtsova, “On the Imitation of the Mother of God,” EW, 65.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 67.

The cross of Christ acts as a focus for Skobtsova's discussion. Mary's involvement at Golgotha is marked by a compassionate, co-suffering with her Son. Whilst Christ went to the cross voluntarily and his subsequent suffering is therefore active, Mary did not choose this fate for her Son, thus her suffering is involuntary and passive: 'He bears the sins of the world – she *collaborates* with him, she *co-participates*, she *co-feels*, *co-experiences*. His flesh is crucified – she is *co-crucified*.'⁴⁶⁹ Mary's role at the crucifixion is one of accompaniment, as she feels the pain of her son. She is, however, powerless to do anything about it or reduce his suffering. As a result, Mary's soul was pierced by the sword of grief, and this is what marks her co-crucifixion. This resonates with the 'maternal path' which Skobtsova outlined in 'Holy Earth', as a mother is bound up in the inner life of another through the act of birth; she feels the impact of her child's fate, but is powerless to change its course.

In Mary's earthly example, Skobtsova sees a model for compassionate human interaction. Christians are not only called to emulate Christ's active taking up of the cross, but also Mary's passive involvement with the life and fate of another: 'The human heart should also be pierced by the two-edged swords, the soul-cutting weapons, of other people's crosses. Our neighbor's cross should be a sword that pierces our soul. Our soul should co-participate in its neighbor's destiny, co-feel, co-suffer.'⁴⁷⁰ A person's life must be bound up with the fate of the neighbour so that their sufferings are felt as keenly as one's own. Only when there is this form of compassionate indwelling in the inner life of another (as expressed in the mysticism

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 71.

of human communion) can there be authentic love of the neighbour: ‘This is the measure of love; this is the limit to which the human soul should aspire.’⁴⁷¹

This presents a radical form of solidarity with the other which allows no room for pride, individualism, or self-preservation. The willingness to enter into suffering alongside the neighbour is a sacrificial form of love. We have already seen the inspiration for such a love in ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’, with the examples of Ioannikii, who willingly took on another person’s demon, or more strikingly, the life of Vitalii the Monk whose ascetic life of prayer led to a piercing form of love and compassion for his neighbours.

This imitation of the Mother of God is grounded upon an assertion that persons reflect the image of Mary, as well as the image of Christ:

‘Every man is not only the image of God, the icon of Divinity, not only a brother in the flesh of the God-man, deified by Him, and honored by His cross, and in this sense a son of the Mother of God. Every man is also the image of the Mother of God, who bears Christ in herself through the Holy Spirit. In this sense, every man deep inside is this bi-une icon of the Mother of God with the Child, the revelation of this bi-une mystery of Godmanhood.’⁴⁷²

We have already seen how Skobtsova uses the *imago dei* as a motivating factor for her mysticism of human communion. Here, this is expanded to include humanity’s reflection of the Mother of God. Importantly, this reflection is found in the two-fold image of mother and child.

Bauerova helpfully notes the broader symbolic motivation behind Skobtsova’s use of maternal and filial images, observing how Skobtsova uses ‘the unity of mother and child’ as a ‘living metaphor for expressing the original unity of the world.’⁴⁷³ In this light, Bauerova accurately highlights the balance in Skobtsova’s thought between

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 72.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 69.

⁴⁷³ Bauerova, “Motherhood as a Space for the Other,” 135.

the maternal and the filial paths: 'To live out of the filial essence of one's soul means to carry one's own cross, while the mother in us helps others to carry their crosses and allows her heart to be pierced by the sword of pain.'⁴⁷⁴ There is a balance between emulation of both of these principles:

'The masculine (fatherly, filial) and the feminine (motherly, daughterly) thus co-exist in a single soul and body, and in each of their parts, where they create a harmony. This means preserving within ourselves both voices, represented either by the voice of the mother and the son or by the voice of female and male in the space of our own being, and so means continually disturbing the domination of a single voice that would forget the other. Only then, from the topos of our spiritual body, can the ethics of respect for the other in the wider body of our surroundings arise.'⁴⁷⁵

The maternal path of suffering with or for the other should therefore harmonise with an active taking up of one's own cross. Bauerova places this in the context of Soloviev's 'androgyné', emphasising the masculine and the feminine elements of the divine image in humanity, and in God (Sophia). However, it is important to note that the maternal and filial paths in Skobtsova's work are not necessarily reflections on gender, but on roles. Therefore, caution needs to be expressed in the implications of equating the two.⁴⁷⁶

Rowan Williams describes the Marian path of co-suffering as an 'unchosen' solidarity between Mary and Christ which should be emulated by members of the Body of Christ. Williams turns to Mary's maternal embodiment in the life of her son, as described by Skobtsova, to make this assertion. Members of the Body of Christ are called to accept their cross, and to 'bear the consequences of human solidarity, beyond anything that could be chosen or understood, predicted or contained.'⁴⁷⁷ This

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 144.

⁴⁷⁶ Further work can be done here to unpick the implications of the maternal, filial (and indeed paternal) paths for an understanding of gender in Skobtsova's work.

⁴⁷⁷ Williams, *Looking East in Winter*, 220.

presents a powerful understanding of what it means to be the Body of Christ and the solidarity which it entails: ‘Love of neighbour, rather than being a chosen policy of personal behaviour, is grounded in the ‘necessary’ exposure of the baptized believer to human pain; we are unavoidably ‘co-sufferers.’⁴⁷⁸ Williams is emphasising here Skobtsova’s aversion to any form of solidarity which is born out of duty, or a compulsion which is ultimately self-serving. What Mary’s maternal involvement in the fate of her son shows is a form of unchosen, unavoidable solidarity. It is also important to note, aside from this maternal compulsion, that Mary’s desire to continually be the handmaid of the Lord allows for such an attitude: ‘Always – His will be done – the handmaid of God is open to His fate, to His piercing cross.’⁴⁷⁹ I would suggest, therefore, that there is another paradox to be found here. Mary’s co-crucifixion is indeed an example of an unchosen form of solidarity, as she did not choose this fate for her son. However, there is activity in suspending one’s will in order to become the handmaid of the Lord. This is an active, ascetic movement of limiting oneself, submitting one’s will to God in order to do His work. In Mary’s case, the relationship between freedom and her personal sinlessness is a complex one, but for persons emulating Mary, in order to become like her as a handmaid, our sinful exclusivity and individualism must be overcome through *chosen* ascetic effort. This active choice precedes the state of interconnectivity which allows for a given solidarity with the other.

In this light, it is important to note that motherhood does not necessarily or inherently possess this quality by its nature. In fact, Skobtsova notes that motherhood can be, paradoxically, a selfish phenomenon:

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Skobtsova, “On the Imitation of the Mother of God,” EW, 69.

‘A mother can often forget herself, sacrifice herself for her children. Yet this does not as yet warrant recognition as Christian love for her children. One needs to ask the question: What is it that she loves in them? She may love her own reflection, her second youth, an expansion of her own “I” into the other “I”s which become separated from the rest of the world as “we.” She may love in them her own flesh that she sees in them, the traits of her own character, the reflections of her own tastes, the continuation of her family. Then it becomes unclear where the fundamental difference lies between an egotistical love of self and a seemingly sacrificial love of one’s children, between “I” and “we.” All this amounts to a lustful love of what is one’s own, which blinds one’s vision, forcing one to ignore the rest of the world – what is not one’s own.’⁴⁸⁰

When motherhood furthers egoism, then it too can mirror the typology of a ‘worldly person’. The *imago dei* in a person needs to be uncovered through ascetic, spiritual struggle for Skobtsova. Although Skobtsova does not make this explicit, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the same applies to the image of Mary in humanity. Authentic motherhood, which allows for a person’s fate to be bound up in the inner life of another, requires an ascetic limiting of the self, and a sacrifice of the will, to avoid the sin of selfish individualism. There are complex layers here, therefore, between what is passive and active, or chosen and unchosen.

In this system, a balance is shown through an equal measure of sacrifice; both in the filial and the maternal realms. The two aspects are characterised by sacrifice and at their core this is found in a sacrifice of the will:

‘The Son of God, the eternal archetype of every human soul, prayed to His Father: “Thy will be done.” And the words of the Mother spoke of the same thing: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord.” And we also find that in the innermost depths of our human hearts, God-like and maternal in their spiritual essence.’⁴⁸¹

In order for a person to achieve the wholeness of reflecting the bi-une icon of mother and child, Mary and Christ, they must emulate their sacrificial offering of themselves to God and to the neighbour. The fullness of this sacrifice creates the sort of

⁴⁸⁰ Skobtsova, “Types of Religious Life,” EW, 177.

⁴⁸¹ Skobtsova, “On the Imitation of the Mother of God,” EW, 74.

community which Skobtsova envisages, one with *sobornost*’ at its heart which seeks to incarnate *Godmanhood* in the world.

Bauerova, however, expresses caution around Skobtsova’s use of sacrifice in relation to motherhood:

‘Motherly love which accepts the other means the broadening of the space of one’s own self, and at the same time, paradoxically, the diminishing of that same space. Expressing herself through the language of theology, Mother Maria is not afraid to use the word ‘sacrifice’. Although such an expression radicalizes the mother’s ‘diminishing’, she manages to maintain her emphasis on the salvific function of the mother-child dyad, thus retaining both ideas.’⁴⁸²

Bauerova is concerned that the mother may disappear from the dyad, through Skobtsova’s emphasis on sacrifice. This is a valid concern, although Skobtsova makes little attempt to quell such an objection. In fact, as we have already seen, Skobtsova’s commitment to a total, sacrificial sensibility is unwavering. Within her Mariology, as with her Christology, she emphasises the boundless love which coincides with a total giving of the self to the other. It is only when one turns to Skobtsova’s writing on non-possession that we get a sense of a balance between sacrifice and return. This is found in her writing on monasticism, to which this thesis shall now turn its attention.

3. Monasticism

Skobtsova’s interpretation of monasticism builds on her thought in relation to asceticism, her notion of the mysticism of human communion, and her understanding of Mariology. It is rooted in a ‘turn to the world’, which emphasises loving the neighbour in sacrificial service. In this sense, Skobtsova is presenting her own alternative vision of monastic thought and practice. However, Skobtsova is keen to establish that she is not presenting a ‘new’ monasticism as such, but rather an

⁴⁸² Bauerova, “Motherhood as Space for the Other,” 142-3.

innovation which is responding to the situation of emigration in which she was placed. Skobtsova's innovation is found in a re-evaluation of the monastic vows of tonsuring, and an interpretation of obedience and non-possession which appropriately and carefully reflects her contemporary context. This approach is indicative of Skobtsova's wider theological method, as this thesis has already highlighted, of considering a 'situational' or contextual approach to spirituality. At the heart of this re-evaluation is an emphasis on sacrifice, particularly a sacrifice of the will. The interpretation which Skobtsova puts forward for an innovated monasticism is one which focuses on the Church's task of transfiguring the world. Monasticism is the Church's 'strong army' for this task.⁴⁸³

Skobtsova carefully outlines how her understanding of monasticism represents an innovation, rather than anything radically new. The key to innovation, she suggests, is a recognition of the demands of context. Innovations emerge out of tradition, not sweeping that foundation away, but adjusting it in accordance with situation and time. For example, the Russian tradition of using pussy willow branches on Palm Sunday, instead of palm leaves, emerged as an innovation which responded to the very practical reality that palm branches are not readily available in Russia. A new tradition thus emerges to meet the needs of the time: 'There is thus a "new" that is not invented by the idle human mind, but that follows inevitably from the conditions of life.'⁴⁸⁴ Innovation is required when preserving the past is not possible, but the opportunity arises to, 'organically create a new life and a new tradition'.⁴⁸⁵ In

⁴⁸³ Skobtsova, "Toward a New Monasticism I," EW, 95.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 92.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 93.

contrast, traditionalists who have no chance of holding onto tradition do not create anything.

Skobtsova's context in emigration is markedly different to the monastic traditions of Russia. This thesis has already highlighted Skobtsova's own reflections on the deep impact of losing one's homeland on a person's sense of tradition and rootedness. This is also the case for monasticism. The monasticism of Russian tradition could not be continued in emigration, for a host of practical reasons. The stability of monastic institutional frameworks, buildings, finances, community, and a shared cultural foundation, were not present for Russian émigrés in France. This necessitates a turning to the world for the Russian monastic in France, as Skobtsova describes:

'We can put it like this: innovation is determined by the fact that the modern monk, *whether he likes it or not*, finds himself not behind strong monastery walls, within defined, ossified traditions, but on all the roads and crossroads of the world, with no opportunity of orienting himself by old traditions, with no hint of new traditions. And woe to him who dislikes these worldly roads and crossroads: he will neither preserve the old, nor create the new. In other words: today's monasticism must fight for its very core, for its very soul, disregarding all external forms, creating new forms.'⁴⁸⁶

The reality for the monastic in Skobtsova's context of emigration is that the traditional form of Russian monasticism cannot be replicated in the conditions of Parisian life. Furthermore, they are thrust into the world by necessity, in very practical terms such as housing provision or financial support. Innovation is therefore a requirement. For Skobtsova, this means an embracing of the world: 'Today there is only one monastery for a monk – the whole world.'⁴⁸⁷ For Skobtsova, this is the basis

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

for contemporary monasticism. A monk needs to be in the world, but not of the world, a distinction which we have already explored in her thought.

Monastic innovation for Skobtsova means a returning to the core of monastic life, the vows of tonsuring. Despite the historical variations of monasticism, the vows have remained central. The three vows are chastity, obedience, and non-possession. Skobtsova looks afresh at these vows and explores how monasticism in emigration can be innovated by unapologetically turning to the world, whilst remaining true to the promises of tonsuring. She does this by assessing what the demands of life in emigration present to these vows, and how they might authentically respond to these demands.

The first vow of chastity remains unchanged. The commitment to chastity is not challenged by emigration, therefore this requires little discussion in Skobtsova's system.⁴⁸⁸ She focuses her attention instead on obedience and non-possession. The main change which Skobtsova identifies for the traditional practice of monastic obedience is the loss of the *starchestvo*. A *starets* functioned as an elder in monastic communities, offering spiritual guidance and direction to the monks. A monk needed to profess obedience to their *starets*. The level of obedience here is not superficial, it is a profound submission of the will of the monastic to the *starets*, 'One thing is required of the monk: not only that he have no will of his own, but that he have no reasoning, no evaluation, no choice of his own.'⁴⁸⁹ All of this is handed over to the spiritual guide. In addition to a monk who is able to submit their will in such complete

⁴⁸⁸ There is a distinction here between the thought of Skobtsova and the writings of Soloviev, as this thesis has explored in 'The Russian Idea' chapter. Skobtsova's understanding of love is very similar to that of Soloviev. However, where Soloviev highlights the importance of sexual love for communion and union between persons, Skobtsova's monastic foundation for her own constructive thought relies on a commitment to chastity. Thus, she highlights the union between persons in different ways.

⁴⁸⁹ Skobtsova, "Toward a New Monasticism II," EW, 98. (This resonates with Ioannikii's definition of a monk).

obedience, this system requires a *starets* who is suitably spiritually mature, and capable of bearing such a sizeable responsibility. In the emigration community of Skobtosva's time, it was difficult to find such people with exceptionally mature spiritual gifts, given the small number of monastics, and the geographical spread of the communities in France. Skobtsova believes that this provides grounds for innovation in the area of obedience.

Rather than obedience to a *starets*, Skobtsova suggests that a monastic should consider their obedience as directed towards the Church. This requires the same obedient sacrifice of the will, 'A monk should be obedient to the work of the Church to which he is assigned; he should give his will and all his creative powers entirely to this work. Obedience becomes service.'⁴⁹⁰ In this innovation, the monk now needs to take responsibility for himself, rather than handing over responsibility to the *starets*. The monk himself, '...takes the measure of his conscientiousness, his sacrificial self-giving.'⁴⁹¹ The Church also has an important function here, in replacing the role of the *starets*; 'The Church herself becomes his *starets*, and also judges him, while the obedience requested is the responsible fulfilment of what the Church has charged him to do.'⁴⁹²

This small innovation has a subtle but significant impact on the nature of a monastic's obedience. Obedience towards the Church rather than a *starets* means that the monastic has a greater personal responsibility, and thus more agency. Now that a monastic is responsible for their own sacrificial self-giving, it becomes more active, rather than in the passive system of the *starchestvo*. There is a balance in this

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 100.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

instance, therefore, between the passive appearance of submitting the will to the Church, with an active taking-up of responsibility for this self-giving. Furthermore, the monk's obedience becomes directed towards work. In this sense, it is a creative form of service which produces fruit for the Church. When paired with the foundational affirmation that a modern monk should turn to the world, Skobtsova is beginning to propose a system here of active, creative, service in society which is rooted in sacrificial obedience to the Church. This begins to add another level of an understanding of sacrificing the will in Skobtsova's thought, in addition to what has already been proposed in her Mariology.

The third vow of tonsuring to which Skobtsova turns is non-possession. Traditionally, this vow has resulted in a monastic renunciation of material possessions and personal property. This is not something which Skobtsova wishes to challenge, as this is still required for the contemporary monastic. However, for a Russian émigré in Paris, poverty was a reality and material possessions were scarce for the majority of the community. A monastic renunciation of these things, therefore, was not too dissimilar to the unchosen reality of everyday life. This is the first aspect of Skobtsova's assessment of the reality of émigré life during her time, to which the vow of non-possession needs to respond. The second is what she describes as, 'the disease of our time', egocentrism. She notes that even someone who does not have a wealth of material possessions can still be 'possessive' of their own self and its exclusivity. This has devastating consequences. The path of egoism and wellbeing, a person's care for their own 'spiritual peace', turns their sight in upon themselves: 'People's care for their spiritual peace, their locking themselves away, leads before our eyes to self-poisoning, demoralization, loss of joy; they become unbearable to themselves, turn

neurasthenic.⁴⁹³ It is in the realm of spiritual non-possession that Skobtsova therefore presents an innovation for contemporary monasticism, one which she believes is of the utmost important for her times.

Non-possession for Skobtsova is linked with poverty. Rather than an accumulation and a gain of possessions, it is a voluntary letting go and sacrificing of ownership, to the point of being without something (whether material or spiritual). This is inspired by the Gospel text that the poor in spirit are blessed, and to them belongs the Kingdom of Heaven, as well as the affirmation that the greatest example of love is the giving of one's life for their friends. For Skobtsova, these texts mirror the non-possessing nature of the monastic vow in a willingness to accept poverty, and a sacrificing of possessions (including one's own life) in order to achieve that state. Spiritual non-possession is about renouncing one's own exclusivity and giving one's self to the other. Skobtsova uses the phrase 'poverty of spirit' to elaborate upon this notion of spiritual non-possession, so that non-possession means being poor in spirit.

The innovation which is therefore required for a monastic in Skobtsova's epoch is to view non-possession as a voluntary giving away of their inner life to their neighbour.⁴⁹⁴ This mirrors and elaborates upon the 'mysticism of human communion'. A person must not fence themselves off from the world or create a high wall between their own inner life and the inner life of their neighbour. They must not possess an interiority which separates them from authentic love towards another. Rather, they

⁴⁹³ Skobtsova, "The Poor in Spirit," EW, 106.

⁴⁹⁴ Skobtsova reflects on her own monastic vows in poetry. She observes her own self-giving by losing her name; no longer being Elizaveta.

'Dressed as I am in white
my inner self still bears
the name Elizaveta. Then
tomorrow I'll be simply N.'

Cited in Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 19.

must seek to enter into the inner life of the other, to actively take up this cross, and to suffer alongside them willingly and compassionately, following the example of Mary. This is how Skobtsova understands a modern interpretation of the monastic vow of non-possession.

This is rooted in sacrifice. A monk should be ‘a conductor of divine love and a co-participant in divine sacrifice.’ Skobtsova continues: ‘He should first of all sacrificially give the main thing, remembering that the Founder of his endeavor, the Saviour Himself, lifted up on the cross all His divinity and all His humanity, that in His sacrifice He gave up all of Himself, and that is precisely what He expects of those who follow in his footsteps.’ And so, a monk should strive to give all their strength to the activity of Christ ‘...not to possess but to spend it for the glory of God.’⁴⁹⁵ Although it is a paradox, Skobtsova claims when they do not give themselves for the other, a person becomes poor ‘from holding on to themselves’. They hold onto their rags of self-admiration and do not realise that in giving away what little they have, they will receive much more in return:

‘These rags are the corruptible riches of the kingdom of the world. By giving them away, by giving himself away entirely, with his whole inner world, laying down his soul, a man becomes poor in spirit, one of the blessed, because his is the Kingdom of Heaven, according to our Savior’s promise, because he becomes the owner of the incorruptible and eternal riches of that Kingdom, becomes it at once, here on earth, acquiring the joy of unmeasured, self-giving, and sacrificial love, the lightness and freedom of nonpossession.’⁴⁹⁶

Thus, spiritual non-possession means a complete giving of oneself in sacrificial love for the other. It is a laying down of one’s soul, and refusing to know any measure in love, following the example of Christ’s boundless sacrifice.

This level of self-giving is characterised by Skobtsova as holy folly:

⁴⁹⁵ Skobtsova, “Toward a New Monasticism II,” EW, 103.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

‘Spiritual nonpossession is the way of the holy fool. It is folly, foolishness in Christ. It is the opposite of the wisdom of this age. It is the blessedness of those who are poor in spirit. It is the outer limit of love, the sacrifice of one’s own soul. It is separation from Christ in the name of one’s brothers. It is the denial of oneself. And this is the true Christian path that is taught us by every word and every phrase of the Gospels.’⁴⁹⁷

The holy folly aspect comes to the fore when one considers Skobtsova’s implication of voluntarily risking separation from Christ, as a part of this form of interaction with the other. She proposes a system where a person willingly severs their relationship with Christ for the neighbour. This is the greatest level of sacrificing one’s own inner, spiritual well-being, on behalf of the neighbour.

Yet this cannot truly be separation from Christ, according to Skobtsova’s understanding of the mysticism of human communion. When a person gives themselves to the neighbour, they encounter Christ in them. Thus, this is a cyclical process of sacrifice and gain: ‘By absenting themselves from Christ in an act of the uttermost self-renunciation and love, they offer themselves to others. If this is indeed an act of Christian love, if this self-renunciation is genuine, then they meet Christ Himself face to face in the one to whom they offer themselves. And in communion with that person they commune with Christ Himself. That from which they absented themselves they obtain anew, in love, and in a true communion with God.’⁴⁹⁸ What appears to be folly, therefore, is actually another level of communion with God in sacrificial love to the neighbour. In addition, Skobtsova’s understanding of this form of sacrificial love links asceticism very closely to creativity. The following section will explore the way in which asceticism can be seen as a creative act in Skobtsova’s system. This further elaborates upon the relationship between loss and gain in a sacrificial understanding of love and communion.

⁴⁹⁷ Skobtsova, “Types of Religious Life,” EW, 182.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

4. Asceticism and Creativity

Skobtsova understands this transformative form of asceticism as a form of creativity. In ‘Sources of Creativity’ Skobtsova outlines her concept of creativity, which is to be understood as work, action, and labour. We shall explore the way in which she identifies ‘good’ and ‘bad’ creativity and the effect this has on a person’s ascetic task. I will show the importance of the ascetic and creative task for Skobtsova’s concept of the ‘mysticism of human communion’ where a person wrestles with the *imago dei* in the other. I suggest that in order to understand the significance of the mysticism of human communion, it is vital to appreciate the place of asceticism, transformation, and creativity, in Skobtsova’s *oeuvre* as she seeks to maintain the ‘fullness’ of love towards God and the neighbour.

In ‘Types of Religious Life’ we noted Skobtsova’s comment that asceticism is not restricted to Christian piety and any creative life has ascetic elements, ‘since it also demands total sacrifice in the name of higher creative values.’⁴⁹⁹ Skobtsova believes, therefore, that creativity has an element of the ascetic within it. The reverse of this claim can also be found in Skobtsova’s work – that there is creativity (or ‘creation’) in asceticism.

Skobtsova believes that the creative principle has been ignored in Christianity: ‘It is often said that Christianity has little interest in creativity, that there is no theory of creativity in it. And this indifference to the main, creative essence of man is blamed on Christianity. It is believed that interest in this issue arose during the Renaissance, when in general the human problem first confronted consciousness at its full

⁴⁹⁹ Skobtsova, “Types of Religious Life,” EW, 163.

height.⁵⁰⁰ Once again, Skobtsova is seeking to address a disjuncture between humanism and Christianity, as it has been traditionally received, by allowing a place for human creativity within Christianity. We shall look at how Skobtsova places this creative principle in a system of asceticism, specifically in relation to the neighbour and the interconnectivity of human paths.

Building upon the concept of interconnected paths which we have already encountered in ‘Holy Earth’, Skobtsova develops a system of shared ascetic struggle. A person not only grapples with the *imago dei* in themselves, but also in the inner life of *another* because of the symbiotic relationship of paths upon the earth. This ascetic work is seen as a creative act. It is a person’s creative task to enter into the inner life of their neighbour and assist them on their path to transformation. In order to develop this understanding, we shall substantiate the way in which Skobtsova understands creativity.

Skobtsova frequently uses the terms ‘creativity’ and ‘creation’, however their exact meaning is not always clear. Ermolaev notes that, like Berdyaev, Skobtsova uses the two words (творение and творчество) interchangeably.⁵⁰¹ This makes an exact definition harder to obtain. However, in ‘The Sources of Creativity’ (Истоки Творчества) Skobtsova makes a strong link between creativity and action, what we might call the ‘creative act’. She draws attention to the verbs ‘create’, ‘complete’,

⁵⁰⁰ ‘Часто говорят, что христианство мало интересуется вопросами творчества, что в нем нет никакой теории творчества. И это безразличное отношение к главной, творческой сущности человека вменяют в вину христианству. Считают, что интерес к этому вопросу возник в период Возрождения, когда вообще проблема человека впервые встала перед сознанием во весь свой рост.’ Мать Мария (Скобцова) “Истоки Творчества [The Sources of Creativity]” in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 139.

⁵⁰¹ Ermolaev, “*Modernism, Motherhood and Mariology*,” 116.

‘teach’, ‘speak’, ‘do’, ‘praise’ and ‘fulfil’ in the context of Christ’s creativity.⁵⁰² Here, at least, she appears to understand creativity as act and creation.

To begin an exploration of Skobtsova’s approach to creativity, it is important to note what she considers to be its root. This is developed in the article ‘The Sources of Creativity’ where Skobtsova turns to Scripture to search for a basis of human creativity. Skobtsova begins this article with examples of human creativity from the Old Testament, specifically the figures of Samson and David. She claims that both these figures have creative powers which are rooted in God. Samson’s strength was not due to his muscles and human abilities, rather its source was his hair. For Skobtsova, this shows that Samson’s strength had a divine, not a human, origin. Similarly, David goes into battle relying not on the strength of his armour (he faces Goliath after abandoning his armour) but in the strength of the Lord. This sentiment of reliance upon God for human deeds is further reflected in the Psalms. Skobtsova notes especially Psalm 117:14, ‘The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.’⁵⁰³ The key word for Skobtsova in this Psalm is ‘song’ (песнь). The Lord in the Psalms, and in the lives of Samson and David, is not just strength, but also creative effort – a song. God is the source of this creativity, and also its subject.⁵⁰⁴ God gave Samson and David the strength and ability to perform their creative acts, their battles, and their songs. In contrast to humanist principles, Skobtsova maintains that authentic creativity has its roots in God. To reinforce this,

⁵⁰² Skobtsova, “The Sources of Creativity,” 142.

⁵⁰³ ESV version (this is closest to Skobtsova’s translation – the NRSV does not include the key word ‘song’, for example).

⁵⁰⁴ ‘Пенье и битвы - творчество Давида, борьба с филистимлянами - творчество Самсона, - кто господин, кто субъект этих творческих актов? Бог воинств Израилевых и песни, Он - творческий субъект этих актов.’ Skobtsova, “The Sources of Creativity,” 139.

Skobtsova turns to the Gospel of John which she believes makes the divine roots of creativity perfectly clear.⁵⁰⁵

The highest example of creativity, which recognises its divine roots, is in the work and ministry of Christ. Skobtsova notes that throughout the Gospel of John, Christ identifies his creative acts with the Father.⁵⁰⁶ Christ is recognised as the absolute creator because his will is the same as that of the Father. The acts of the Son depend perfectly on the creative will of the Father. However, Christ is not merely an instrument in the hands of the Father. Rather, Skobtsova maintains that the Son and the Father create as one. The creative act of the Son is identical with the creative will of the Father, based on an interpenetrating love between the persons. The Father and Son create together, with the Father sending the Son, and the Son receiving the Father's commission. An inseparable unity therefore exists between the Father and Son, who are united in creative love.⁵⁰⁷ This mutual interpenetration allows Christ's acts to be unified with the creative will of the Father, as the absolute creator, as the God-man.⁵⁰⁸

In order for human endeavour to be united with their source in God, an individual's will needs to be united with the will of God. For Skobtsova, Christ is the archetypal creator because His will was *one with the Father's*. The Father and the Son create 'in the indivisible unity of creative love.'⁵⁰⁹ Human persons need to follow the example of Christ by uniting their own will with the Father's. This requirement is demonstrated for Skobtsova in John 15 and the identification of Christ with the 'true vine'. All human creative acts are to be rooted in Christ who is the true vine, in the

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 140.

⁵⁰⁶ Citing, at length: John 4:34, 5:19, 5:30, 5:36, 6:38, 7:10, 7:28, 8:26,28, 54, 12:49, 16:32, 17:4, 10.

⁵⁰⁷ Skobtsova, "The Sources of Creativity," 143-4.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 142-3.

⁵⁰⁹ 'И творят они в нераздельном единстве творческой любви.' Ibid., 144.

same way that Christ is united with the Father. Outside of this unity, nothing is possible. It is the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, which unites persons to the Divine will.

Skobtsova understands 'bad' creative acts as endeavours which do not unite with the Divine will. In fact, bad creative acts refract the divine will through human sin, distorting it and producing something different or contrary to God's plan. The divine will can be refracted at several points in the creative process. Firstly, it may be distorted in the actions of the person who does not seek to work in unity with God. Rather than uniting with the will of the Father, following the example of Christ, a person may seek to act independently. All creative acts have their ultimate source in God, Skobtsova maintains, but a person's disconnection from the Divine will may lead to the original intention for this creative act to be distorted through them. Secondly, the divine plan may also be refracted at the point of perception. If, in the first instance, a person is in fact creating in unity with the Divine will, and they produce something which represents this unity (a Rublev icon, for example), a secondary human perceiver may not recognise the divine source in it. If the perceiver is not united with the Divine will, then they also hold the potential to refract its true creative purpose by perceiving it negatively. In this instance, a perceiver may not recognise a Rublev icon as something 'good' (as something which points back towards its divine source), but as something 'bad' (something which is contrary to the Divine will).

This understanding of creative acts in Skobtsova's work assists in providing a deeper interpretation of her notion of the mysticism of human communion. At the heart of the mysticism of human communion is a recognition of all persons as being made in the image of God, as icons of Christ, created in the *imago dei*. However, the

imago dei can be obscured by an individual's sin, as well as our 'bad' perception. In order to perceive the *imago dei* in the other, one must co-participate in it, in good creativity. But it is also possible to refract it negatively, for the perceiver's disconnect from the divine will to obscure their perception of the *imago dei* in the other. The divine plan for a person can be perceived in the *imago dei*, but it can also be refracted by the individual and at the point of communion (perception). Therefore, in Skobtsova's system, in order to achieve the appropriate unity between the source of creativity (God), creative acts (human endeavour) and the correct perception of these acts as uniting the Divine and the human, asceticism is required. This is necessary both to transform our own selves so that we act in accordance with the divine will, but also to transform our perception of the other in order to see the divine image in them and their actions. Due to the possibility of refracting the divine will through human sin at the point of action and perception, it is important that our wills are united with the will of God, who is the source of all creative acts. Once again, this requires a sacrificing of the will, so that a person's will is united with God, who is the source of all creative acts, and who guides not only human actions, but also human perception.

Once again sacrifice of the will comes to the fore of Skobtsova's theological system. In this chapter, we have seen how non-possession and obedience in monasticism provide the opportunity for encountering Christ, and how asceticism is required to align a person's will with that of the Father. This provides the foundation for Skobtsova to suggest (as this thesis argues) that asceticism is required for creative acts. It is important to make these connections through Skobtsova's theological writings in order to see the links between her insistence on maintaining wholeness, her understanding of human communion, and her call for a practical, everyday expression of spirituality. Skobtsova wants to realise and incarnate the principles of

sobornost' and *Godmanhood* through her ascetic and monastic spirituality. In order to realise these things, in order to create authentically and in line with the will of the Father, a limiting of the self is required, a sacrifice of the will, and a suspension of the sin of egoism. This leads us into Skobtsova's understanding of the creation of culture – specifically the impact this practical spirituality has on political and social systems. This is where this thesis will now turn.

Chapter 6: Orthodox Action: Skobtsova and Social Engagement

The furtherment of unity between the divine and the human principle, according to the concepts of *sobornost'* and *Godmanhood*, is a primary motivation for Skobtsova's theological project. We have already explored the place of this motivation in Skobtsova's system in relation to the trajectory of Russian religious thought, particularly in the work of Khomiakov and Soloviev, and in the development of the Russian 'messianic idea'. Skobtsova believes that the Church (and society) should be striving towards fulfilling and manifesting *Godmanhood*, by synthesising a faithfulness to divine revelation, alongside allowing for the freedom of human creativity and respect for the human person. In previous chapters we have already explored how this is apparent in Skobtsova's attitude towards the Church and the world, particularly in her conception of asceticism and its role in the spiritual life. Here she promotes a balance between a spirituality which is focused on God without jeopardising love and service to the neighbour. Throughout her essays, Skobtsova makes reference to an historical division between human creativity and the life of the Church; a division which she believes accounts for the rise of humanist thought from the time of the Renaissance, and a division between the divine and the human in many worldviews. We have already explored the impact of this on asceticism, monasticism, and a spiritual retreat from the world. It is important, however, to assess the other side of this division, in the creation of human society beyond the reaches of the historical limits of the Church. In this light, we have seen how Skobtsova characterises the definition of human creativity, as something rooted in dependence and trust in the divine. It is also important to note how this is practically implemented in Skobtsova's project in the context of broader society and culture. We shall now turn, therefore, to explore political questions in Skobtsova's work. This will draw on biographical

details of Skobtsova's political involvement, whilst also highlighting her critiques of particular social systems. It is important to note that most of Skobtsova's writings here are generally critical rather than constructive. They are commenting on existing forms of social theory and governance, rather than proposing a detailed alternative. Nevertheless, these critiques do point towards the way in which she hopes to develop culture through her thought and her work in *Orthodox Action*.

This chapter will explore Skobtsova's thought in relation to questions of politics, society, and culture. It will highlight Skobtsova's own political background and social involvement (returning to some aspects of her biography which were raised earlier in this thesis), which undoubtedly impact and inform her later theological writings, and it will note Skobtsova's desire to strive towards a new utopia, which seeks to incarnate *Godmanhood* in everyday life:

'The world awaits the birth of a new utopia, likewise winged, so that in its creative recovered-sight it would reveal to people the mystery of God-manhood. Then in concrete attainments, in the historical process, it would grant the world a synthesis of all the cultural freshets, a confluence within a single image of a now shattered and chaotic nature.'⁵¹⁰

Skobtsova's desire to strive for synthesis and to heal the world's shattered nature is tempered, however, by a strongly apocalyptic tone across her writings. Skobtsova highlights the 'empirical impossibility' of *fully* realising a culture of *Godmanhood* because of the fallen nature of humanity.⁵¹¹ This is also conditioned further by a recognition of the temporality of any human creation, in light of Skobtsova's strongly apocalyptic worldview. This apocalypticism appears to strengthen in her thought as the Second World War approaches, particularly from 1938 and in the articles 'Under the Sign of Ruin' and 'Insights in Wartime'. It is important, therefore, to highlight

⁵¹⁰ Skobtsova, "In Search of Synthesis," *Crucible*, 141.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

Skobtsova's understanding of cultural creations alongside this fervent apocalyptic strain.

1. Utopias

Since the Middle Ages, according to Skobtsova, the human element of *Godmanhood* has been cut off from the life of the Church. Human society, especially in the West, has largely been disconnected from the Church, which resulted in a rigid binary between the life of the Church and human creativity. Skobtsova suggests that this separation was also present in Russia and that it was exaggerated by Peter the Great, who sought to engraft European culture onto Russian society. She notes how this 'engrafting' reflects a trope in Russian history of ideas being rapidly and forcefully thrust upon Russia from another, exterior source. For example, the Christianisation of Kievan Rus' was not a gradual process, but like a lightning flash; 'The pagan gods did not retreat slowly before the conquering cross, but rather Perun was cast down in his almightiness [...]The blow to Perun was struck without warning and straight to the head.'⁵¹² In a similar way, European ideas surrounding culture and social thought influenced Russian thought, often being engrafted onto society without warning or intellectual preparation. Thus, not only was the Church disconnected from society, but an admixture of social thought from Europe, as well as from within Russian, sought to create its own visions of culture and society in a rapidly changing environment; 'The Church is fenced off from human creativity by its own official and moribund, or by its never formerly alive (like the synod) encasings. To mankind was granted only to create utopias or become infected by foreign utopias; to appropriate their winged, hypertrophic aspect as a certain surrogate for religion.'⁵¹³

⁵¹² Ibid., 131.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 134.

Skobtsova characterises the creation of social theories, outside of the activity of the Church, as the creation of utopias. Utopianism can be understood, she notes, as ‘faith in the possibility of the Kingdom of God on earth’, although Skobtsova wishes to give it a more precise definition. A utopia, ‘manifests itself as a working hypothesis of mankind, facilitating the accounting of accumulated facts, and thus also directing its strivings of will.’⁵¹⁴ A utopian theory and its implementation respond to the social needs which are contemporaneous to it, and direct the will of the people accordingly.

In Russia, various utopias have been developed, responding to social and cultural need, and directing the will of the people. Perhaps the most famous utopia in Russia can be found in the thought of Nikolai Chernyshevsky. Chernyshevsky’s novel ‘What is to be done?’ is often characterised as a pivotal work in the development of Russian social thought.⁵¹⁵ Lauded by the revolutionaries, it precipitated a growing interest in social and cultural reform in Russia. ‘What is to be done?’ is emblematic of the searching for an ideal society in Russia; the creation of a utopia. For the populists, the Westernisers, the Slavophiles, the socialists and communists who followed, what a utopia might look like in Russia clearly varied greatly.

Skobtsova notes that there is a temporality to utopias, as social needs shift and change. Furthermore, technological and scientific advancements alter their course which means that the creation of any utopia is historically conditioned. Each utopian creation is subject to historical criticism, as a contemporary system supersedes that which went before it. Skobtsova likens this to a theoretical understanding of the

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 126.

⁵¹⁵ Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *What is to be done?* trans. Michael R. Katz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

universe; the system of the universe as understood by Ptolemy was replaced by Copernicus, and in turn this was replaced by Kepler's construct. The historical fluctuations of utopias, and their openness to criticism and change, also reflect the limitations of the human element of *Godmanhood*. Skobtsova notes that human creativity is flawed and limited and, as such, the task of incarnating *Godmanhood* has never been achieved in the human system of utopias.

Skobtsova suggests that in order to overcome the tragic temporality of godless utopias, a spiritual foundation for social thought is necessary. Only in this way can cultural and social theory reflect the wholeness of *Godmanhood*. Furthermore, in order for wholeness to be achieved, these theories cannot remain abstract, rather they must be implemented and realised. Skobtsova notes a splintering and fragmenting in society due to social theories which do not realise their thought. In an article entitled 'Orthodox Action', Skobtsova observes the tragic irony of failing to implement theory: 'It is excruciating to listen or to read any theoretical argument about the arrangement of life. From university lecterns, in heated debates at various meetings, people try to fit life into patterns and templates, to hammer life's uncontainable diversity into predetermined forms. Politicians, foreseeing what will happen in a decade, lose foresight, and get caught up in the small things of the present day; economists, knowing how to solve all conflicts and crises, do not know how to 'make ends meet' in their modest budget; philanthropists, wishing to bestow goodness on the universe, fail to notice a human being living next to them.'⁵¹⁶ Here we see

⁵¹⁶ 'Мучительно слушать или читать любые теоретические рассуждения об устройстве жизни. С университетских кафедр, в горячих спорах на различных собраниях люди стараются вместить жизнь в схемы и образцы, вколотить невместимое ее многообразие в заранее определенные формы. И политики, предвидящие, что будет через десятилетие, теряются и путаются в мелочах сегодняшнего дня; экономисты, как разрешить все конфликты и кризисы, не умеют свести концы с концами в своем скромном бюджете; человеколюбцы, желающие облагодетельствовать вселенную, не замечают рядом с ними живущего человека.' Е. Ю. Кузьмина-Караваева,

Skobtsova's insistence not only on the application of theory, but also her emphasis on the place of the person in any social theory, which we have already encountered in her interaction with the intelligentsia of St Petersburg and their reluctance to move beyond rhetoric into revolutionary action.

In addition to political questions, Skobtsova's insistence on applicability also applies to Christianity and the Church: 'Theories, opinions, sharp paradoxes, and threads of thought are emerging, with astonishing irresponsibility, from lecture halls, salons, and cafes. Today we profess principles of extreme asceticism, but tomorrow, as if something had already been acquired and experienced by this purely verbal declaration, we are searching for new impressions in the theories of comprehensive social experiments. And everywhere, in all ways, one word resonates in the universe: crisis. In essence, this very fractured and incomplete response to the questions of modernity demonstrates the main essence of the crisis – it is a crisis of the integrity of life, of its very core.'⁵¹⁷ Here, Skobtsova connects the prevalence of shallow, fleeting social theories with a crisis of wholeness, of the very core of life which results in a fragmented and ineffective social structure. She identifies the need to restore wholeness to perceptions of life, culture, and society. For Skobtsova, this is rooted in a spiritual understanding of society.

Skobtsova's observations in this area are not entirely unique. Several of Skobtsova's contemporaries recognised the need for society to have a spiritual or

"Православное Дело [Orthodox Action]," in *Избранное*, ed. Н. В. Осьмакова (Москва: Советская Россия, 1991), 359.

⁵¹⁷ 'В аудиториях, салонах, кафе с какой-то изумительной безответственностью вырастают теории, мнения, острые парадоксы, кружева мысли. Сегодня мы исповедуем принципы крайнего аскетизма, а завтра, как будто что-то уже приобретено и пережито из этого чисто словесного опыта, ищем новых впечатлений в теориях всеобъемлющего жизненного эксперимента. И повсюду на все лады звучит одно слово - кризис. По существу же, в самом этом дробном, нецелостном ответе на вопросы современности демонстрируется самое главное существо кризиса - кризис целостной жизни, самой сердцевины ее.' Ibid.

theological foundation, such as Sergei Bulgakov in his ‘Philosophy of Economy’, and Semyon Frank in ‘The Spiritual Foundation of Society’.⁵¹⁸ Nevertheless, to date Skobtsova’s contribution to this debate has not received the attention which it deserves. Furthermore, her involvement in discussions surrounding society and religion may have impacted the work of those around her, such as in the work of Sergei Bulgakov. Rowan Williams, in his introduction to Bulgakov’s essay entitled ‘The Soul of Socialism’, notes that Skobtsova may have been a factor in Bulgakov’s return to political questions in the 1930’s: ‘It is not too much to suppose that the stimulus of her work and ideals was a factor in promoting new reflections on old themes; and one notable feature of his writing in the early thirties on these matters is a clear impatience with the traditional Orthodox lack of enthusiasm for social witness. What he saw himself doing was providing some of the building blocks for a realisation of the potential in Orthodox theology for a coherent and radical social programme - though he is as vague as ever about *specific* projects.’⁵¹⁹ Williams suggests that Bulgakov’s interaction with Skobtsova in the late 1920’s and 1930’s may have prompted his return to writing about political and social issues, in relation to theology. This highlights the importance of analysing Skobtsova’s thought in relation to faith and society in order to recognise her place in modern Orthodox thought.

Skobtsova’s thought on society is present in several essays from her writings during her emigration in Paris. On the one hand, some of her writings constructively propose a system of understanding the relationship between the human and the divine

⁵¹⁸ See: Sergei Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy* trans. Catherine Evtuhov (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000); S. L. Frank, *The Spiritual Foundations of Society: An Introduction to Social Philosophy* trans. Boris Jakim (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1987).

⁵¹⁹ Rowan Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 231.

in culture and society, such as 'In Search of Synthesis'. On the other hand, she writes essays which are more critical, reflecting and critiquing political systems which she encounters, such as 'Four Portraits'. She engages with populism, democracy, fascism, and communism, providing criticisms of each. Behind these essays is Skobtsova's earnest and practical insistence on implementing her theories in action. This manifests itself not only in her monasticism, but also in the group which came to be known as *Orthodox Action*.

2. Populism

As the biography chapter within this thesis has shown, Skobtsova was actively involved in politics throughout her life; from her time as Mayor of Anapa, her involvement in the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, and her political resistance in Paris during the Second World War. Her religious writings are similarly concerned with political issues. Skobtsova's political commentaries reflect on various forms of governance and critique them from a religious perspective. Once again, we see how these critiques are rooted in a concern for unity, synthesis and *Godmanhood*.

Similarly, Skobtsova's political writings reinforce the importance which she places on the human person. In this sense, her early political career and her leanings towards populist movements have a certain contextual importance.

From her reflections on her childhood and her time as Mayor of Anapa, we see a growing interest in service to 'the people', which manifests in a dislike for conservative models of governance in her youth, and an engagement with socialist and populist movements in her early adulthood. These experiences of politics in Russia provide important contextual insights into her later political reflections in exile. During the civil war, Kuz'mina-Karavaeva witnessed the tension of conflicting

ideologies and the dangers of sectarian violence. At the end of ‘How I became Mayor’, she notes that the most terrible element of revolution and civil unrest is the dehumanising of the people; ‘And in revolution, - even more so in civil war, - the most terrible thing is that within the forest of slogans and labels we all forget how to see the trees – individual people.’⁵²⁰ The individual person held a central significance to Skobtsova’s thought which the violence and unrest of this turbulent period intensified.

The concern for ‘the people’ is reflected in Skobtsova’s interest in populism. Skobtsova was an active member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party (Партия социалистов-революционеров). The party supported democratic processes and held socialist beliefs, while supporting agrarian policy. They sought to overthrow the Tsar and distribute land to the peasantry. The party had a large following in Anapa in the years leading up to the Revolution, and Skobtsova attended their Third Congress in Moscow in the summer of 1917.⁵²¹ The Socialist-Revolutionary Party had its roots in Russian populism. Skobtsova wrote an article entitled ‘To the Sources’ which explores the Russian Revolution of 1917 after a decade had passed. In this article she explores the difference between populism and nationalism, which is enlightening to determine to what extent her political thought may be aligned with a populist ideology given her involvement in the Socialist-Revolutionary Party and her concern for ‘the people’.

Russian populism, as a movement, began in the 19th Century following the death of Tsar Nicholas I and the Crimean War. Isaiah Berlin notes that populism in

⁵²⁰ ‘А в революции, - тем более в гражданской войне, - самое страшное, что за лесом лозунгов и этикеток мы все разучаемся видеть деревья - отдельных людей.’ Мать Мария (Скобцова) “Как я была городским головой [How I became Mayor]” in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 1 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 89.

⁵²¹ Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 89.

Russia grew rapidly during the 1860s and 1870s, inspired by the works of Herzen and Belinsky in the 1830s and 1840s, and culminating with the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, after which it began to decline. Berlin carefully maintains that populism was not affiliated to one party or to one doctrine; it was a broad movement which may, however, be characterised by several features. The over-arching thrust of populism was a desire to overthrow the state and to institute a form of governance which was inspired by the *obshchina* (the peasant commune) in the collective of the *mir*. The populists generally viewed the state as corrupt and inhumane. Its overthrow, they maintained, would be an act of social justice and equality. Unlike the Slavophiles, the populists were not nationalists. Despite advocating for the merits of the *obshchina*, the populists ‘did not believe in the unique character or destiny of the Russian people. They were not mystical nationalists.’⁵²² Furthermore, the movement was not religiously motivated. The populists believed in natural morality and science, which they saw in opposition to religion.

Although the terms ‘people’ and ‘nation’ are nearly synonymous, Skobtsova notes that when these words are carried over into ‘populism’ and ‘nationalism’, they take on different and more distinct meanings. Skobtsova observes a fundamental difference between populism and nationalism, between the people and the state (народ and нация). She claims that nationalism is concerned with the state, while populism is concerned with the people. Nationalism is concerned with the imperialist concerns of the state, while populism is concerned with the social issues of the people. Each system, she argues, focuses on one to the detriment of the other: ‘Nationalism, cultivating the interests of the people, almost forgot about the very existence of the

⁵²² Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* Second Edition, ed. Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (London: Penguin Classics, 2013), 244.

people. Populism, affirming the interests of the people, almost forgot about the state which formed it.⁵²³ Skobtsova raises the question of what can be identified as the subject of a nation's historical process – the people, or the state. For Skobtsova, this difference is similar to the contrast between Israel and Rome. Throughout its history, Israel was defined by its people – even in exile or slavery the Jewish people constituted the nation of Israel, not a state.⁵²⁴ Rome, on the other hand, was defined by the state, particularly in a Byzantine context where ‘the people’ consisted of many scattered nations. In this case, ‘the people’ became a subject of ‘the state’. Skobtsova affirms the way of Israel, rather than the way of Rome, as she perceives it. For Skobtsova, the people must be at the heart of a nation's self-understanding, and the subject of its historical process. In this way, Skobtsova may be defined as a populist.

However, Skobtsova identifies several key issues with the populist understanding of society. These criticisms lie with the understanding and definition of ‘the people’ in some populist interpretations. Firstly, Skobtsova notes a tendency for populism to focus on the given epoch of a people, to the detriment of their broader history. Any one generation, however, only represents a temporary incarnation of the history of a people. Focusing solely on the present fails to recognise the inherited consciousness of a people and their intricate woven history where experiences and events have shaped their identity as one, from generation to generation. Rather than building upon previous generations, this tendency reflects the tragic temporality of the human aspect of *Godmanhood*, as Skobtsova highlights in her characterisation of utopias. Secondly, ‘the people’ must be appreciated in their individual worth, united

⁵²³ ‘Национализм, культивируя интересы народа, почти забывало об самом существовании народа. Народничество, утверждая интересы народа почти забывало об оформляющем его государстве.’ Мать Мария (Скобцова), “К Истокам [To the Sources],” in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 215.

⁵²⁴ Skobtsova is referring to the people of Israel in the Bible, as opposed to the State of Israel, which she preceded.

into a whole. The people must not be viewed as a faceless mass, or simply the sum of their parts. For Skobtsova, populism in certain incarnations has negatively identified ‘the people’ as a labouring mass, or a mechanised collective. Thirdly, for Skobtsova populism can also negatively fail to permeate all aspects of life. As emphasis on ‘the people’ cannot simply be present in political slogans. It must represent a worldview which holds together the value of the people, their corporate and historical reality.

In order to rectify these issues with populism, Skobtsova believes that a recognition of the people as the subject of the historical process must also be founded upon a religious understanding of society. To a certain extent, this is present in Slavophile thinking. While Skobtsova does not agree with all the concepts of the Slavophiles (such as Khomiakov’s monarchism), and while she acknowledges that they were in a different context to her epoch, she does praise the synthetic and *sobornal* method of thinkers such as Khomiakov who sought to see the *sobornost’* of the *mir* in governance, the historical process, and the Church. Khomiakov’s thought reflects a searching for an integral world-outlook which transcends particular and temporary political issues, situating them instead in a broader system which encompasses all of life.

Skobtsova’s concern for the people is undoubtedly informed by her desire to maintain a balance between the love of God and the love of the neighbour in Christian thought and practice. Her desire to place ‘the people’ at the heart of any social theory is guided by her understanding of what it means to be a person within community. The criticisms which she raises against certain forms of populist ideologies are continued in her other political writings, where she turns to criticism of social and political theories such as communism, fascism and democracy.

3. 'Four Portraits'

Skobtsova's political commentary is perhaps most clearly expressed in the article entitled 'Four Portraits', which was published in 1939. This essay critiques three forms of totalitarianism, all of which were present in Europe at the time of writing. These three totalitarianisms are communism, fascism, and totalitarianism of race (as exemplified in Nazi Germany). Skobtsova compares these forms of governance to a three-headed dragon, where each head represents a different form of totalitarianism. The dragon has a princess in its clutches, whom Skobtsova identifies in this analogy as democracy. The article passes judgment not only on the dragon, but also on the princess. Once again, Skobtsova's political critiques reflect her insistence on synthesis.

The first head of the beast symbolises the Soviet power which emerged in Russia following the First World War, which Skobtsova characterises as emerging from class struggle and class hatred. Skobtsova identifies this form of communism by, 'The denial of human personality, the strangling of freedom, the cult of power, the adoration of the leader, a single, obligatory outlook for all' and 'punishment for any deviation from the general party line'.⁵²⁵ This form of totalitarianism, she argues, developed into a quasi-religion. Inspired by the proclamations of the super-human leader (whom Skobtsova identifies as Dostoevsky's man-god), communism presents an integral worldview on matters of economics, history, art and all aspects of life. Skobtsova employs religious language to talk of deviation from the man-god's proclamation as 'heresy', which creates a totalitarian worldview that is intolerant of

⁵²⁵ 'Отрицание человеческой личности, удушение свободы, культ силы, преклонение перед вождем, единое обязательное для всех мирозерцание, борьба со всякими отклонениями от генеральной линии партии'. Мать Мария (Скобцова) "Четыре Портрета [Four Portraits]" in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 1 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 297.

difference. Russian communism, therefore, is fed by the absolute truth which is attributed to the worldview of the man-god. Under the authority of this man-god, the people are apparently strengthened through their participation in an absolute creative principle which has the capacity to alter the laws of nature and history. They are strengthened by religious fervour; communism ‘...lives precisely by its religious fervour, because this fervour completely changes natural human powers, natural straining of human muscles, human will and human intellect, it increases them tenfold, it informs them about a creative principle which always, like some kind of miracle, transforms the laws of nature.’⁵²⁶ Its danger lies in its creation of a totalitarian, absolute worldview which denies individual freedom; subsuming the person into the collective under the quasi-religious authority of the communist leader and the subsequent religious persecution which results from deviation from the absolute party line. Russian communism was not simply an ‘armchair’ doctrine, but it became a ‘spiritual organism’ which threatened the life of the Church, the man-god opposed *Godmanhood*.

In the essay ‘In Search of Synthesis’, Skobtsova elaborates on the religious implications of Bolshevism. On the one hand, Skobtsova notes that Bolshevism is not just godless (as much Western secular culture), but specifically anti-God. It therefore denies the divine principle and replaces religious faith with a secular fervour. On the other hand, Skobtsova suggests that Bolshevism is also anti-human. ‘All the values, achieved by humanism, all the affirmation of human creativity, emancipated labour, freedom of conscience, public opinion, the idea of governance by the people, --

⁵²⁶ 'Именно своим религиозным пафосом он жив, потому что этот пафос совершенно видоизменяет природные человеческие силы, природное напряжение человеческих мускулов, человеческой воли и человеческого разума, он их удесятерляет, он сообщает им творческое начало, которое всегда, подобно некоему чуду, преображает законы естества.' Skobtsova, “Four Portraits,” 298.

everything decisively, that was an accomplishment of the humanist period, everything to the same degree was trampled on by Communism.⁵²⁷ In this sense, Skobtsova argues that Bolshevism undermines both the divine and the human affirmations of existence.

The second head of the beast symbolises fascist totalitarianism, as demonstrated by Mussolini in Italy. Skobtsova recognises several key similarities between the fascist system in Italy and the Soviet power in Russia. Both emphasise the authority of the leader, as an infallible dictator of the fascist worldview. Similarly, in fascism Skobtsova sees, ‘the same battle against the human personality, the same cult of the collective, the hatred of freedom, the obligation of the well-known, standard worldview, the acceptance of the main principals of fascism dogmatically, without reasoning and with reverence.’⁵²⁸ The difference between communism and fascism, Skobtsova suggests, is with regards to innovation and restoration. While communism in Russia sought to create something innovative and new, Skobtsova characterises Mussolini’s creation as a form of statist ideology based upon the concept of ancient Rome. The issue here, she argues, is that the demise of the Roman Empire is testament to the fallibility of this ideology as a permanent, invincible worldview. Furthermore, Skobtsova suggests that Christianity played an integral part in the downfall of the Roman Empire, to which the Vatican continues to pay testament. Based on this analysis, Skobtsova regards fascism as a weaker form of totalitarianism than communism.

⁵²⁷ Skobtsova, “In Search of Synthesis,” *Crucible*, 137-8.

⁵²⁸ ‘Мы увидим ту же борьбу против человеческой личности, тот же культ коллектива, ненависть к свободе, обязательность известного стандартного мирозерцания, восприятие основных принципов фашизма чисто догматически, без рассуждения и с благоговением.’ Skobtsova, “Four Portraits,” 300.

The final head of the dragon symbolises racist totalitarian ideology, as exemplified by Hitler in Germany. Skobtsova claims that this ideology, by its nature, is the least widely applicable. It promotes the place of one messianic nation or chosen race, to the subjugation (or indeed destruction) of other races, which are perceived as inferior. The ideological weakness of this construction, Skobtsova argues, is that all other races must either agree to submit to the chosen race, which is unlikely, or be completely destroyed by the dominant race, which is equally unlikely. However, Skobtsova suggests that racist totalitarianism holds great power in its ‘mysticism of biology’ by rooting its ideology in biology and blood. By appealing to blood, it speaks to latent human instincts, to ‘some half-forgotten call of nature’, the depths of which can be more strongly binding than an intellectual ideology such as communism. Blood becomes the unifying force (as well as the dividing force) which supersedes personality:

‘Blood, lying at the base of everything, of course, is completely incompatible with the spiritual reality of the personality, - the personality is abolished, unless the opportunity is given for it to exist in the face of the leader, but in general it is not a personality in our understanding of the word, but it is a kind of hypostatic manifestation of the same impersonal, sacred, German blood. The personality is abolished.’⁵²⁹

In a similar way to communism and fascism, racist totalitarianism undermines the human personality and the freedom with which it is associated. Under communism, fascism, and racism, the person is subsumed under an ideology, one worldview dominates and destroys multiplicity of thought, creativity is undermined, and a battle

⁵²⁹ ‘Кровь, положенная в основу всего, конечно, совершенно несовместима с духовной реальностью личности, - личность упраздняется, разве только и дается возможность ей существовать в лице вождя, но на самом деле он не личность в нашем смысле слова, а он некое ипостасное проявление все той же безличной священной германсей крови. Личность же упраздняется.’ Skobtsova, “Four Portraits,” 303.

commences with other races, nations, and ideologies. These three heads make up the beast of totalitarianism.

4. Democracy

Skobtsova has characterised the three 'heads' of totalitarianism and offered a brief critique of their ideologies. She then turns to evaluate the place of the princess in the analogy which she offered at the beginning of this article. The princess who is caught in the grasp of the three-headed dragon symbolises modern democracy. As we have seen from her personal experience as Mayor of Anapa and her involvement in the Socialist Revolutionary Party, Skobtsova upheld democratic principles in her own political involvement. However, she remains critical of several aspects of modern democracy. The princess in her analogy is not entirely blameless and is not without fault for falling into the hands of the beast of totalitarianism. Skobtsova's critique of democracy in her epoch once again reveals an insight into her understanding of wholeness, integrity and *Godmanhood*. In opposition to the absoluteness of a totalitarian worldview, modern democracy has crumbled into relativity based on the egoism and the interests of individuals. Skobtsova suggests that this development in democracy is equally as problematic as the totalitarianisms which threaten it.

Her critique of modern democracy builds upon her analysis of the place of the man-god in contemporary politics and governance. She alludes to a history of Russian criticism regarding democracy:

'We Russians have in our literature not only predictions concerning the appearance of the modern man-god religion, - in Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor or Shigalyov, in Soloviev's Tale of the Antichrist, - but with the same penetrating clarity we are also given the appearance of modern democracy, especially powerful and ruthless in Herzen. It became now exactly the same as it was then. And it was not without reason that Herzen, a Westerniser and a

democrat, turned away in horror from it, it was not without reason that he began to speak about it with such unbounded bitterness.⁵³⁰

Herzen believed that revolutions do not always produce new systems of freedom, but can often perpetuate the same coercion and subjugation of freedom, just in another guise, as Martin Malia notes:

‘Democracy for Herzen no longer meant something so simple as a centralized republic based on universal suffrage; this was no better than the most absolute of monarchies. In such a state the people in their ignorance and slavery to past prejudices delegated their power – that is, surrendered their liberty – to an absolute assembly, which then assumed all the sovereign rights of the old monarchy. The new republic, like the monarchy, represented a body of law, a system of property rights, and a power of coercion above and outside the individual. Indeed, the political republic must be considered worse than a monarchy, because it masks its authority with such slogans as universal suffrage, liberty, equality, and fraternity. A monarchy frankly proclaims it is an authority over and above individuals; the centralized republic, with its pseudo-democratic trappings, dupes the people, and thus retards their real liberation.’⁵³¹

Skobtsova’s principal concern with modern democracy is that it lacks a wholistic, integral worldview. She perceives a division between politics and economics, for example. While a society may uphold political equality, it may also experience severe economic inequality. In a similar way, politics can be seen to be segregated from a person’s private life, so that there is a separation between public morality and private immorality and a distinction between the words and the deeds of a politician. For Skobtsova, this lack of integrity reflects the absence of an integral worldview in modern democratic systems. Skobtsova suggests that it is for this kind of reason that Herzen turned his back on democracy, despite being somewhat of a Westerniser.

⁵³⁰ ‘Мы, русские, имеем в нашей литературе не только предокказания, касающиеся облика современных человекообожеских религии, - у Достоевского в Великом Инквизиторе или Шигалева, у Соловьева в повести об Антихристе, - но с такой же прозорливой ясностью нам дан и облик современной демократии. Особенно сильно и беспощадно у Герцена. Точно она и тогда была такая, какой стала теперь. И недаром Герцен, западник и демократ, в ужасе отвернулся от нее, недаром стал говорить о ней с такой безграничной горечью.’ Skobtsova, “Four Portraits,” 305.

⁵³¹ Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism, 1812-1855* (Harvard University Press, 1961), 372.

‘Now in the democratic world-outlook, there are no roots, no centre, it is formed as if from a single subordinate clause, the main clause is lost.’⁵³² The root of the crumbling and disintegration of democracy lies in the rejection of its Christian roots, its main clause, Skobtsova argues. Democracy has forgotten the Christian culture and morality from which it arose as well as a Christian understanding of the person and freedom. The individual person in this system does not need to be governed by one integral worldview; ‘And this crumbling of the democratic appearance creates a certain type of human being, which has, firstly, no religious opinions, secondly, social work is not grounded upon any kind of profound idea, thirdly, private life exists by itself, not united either with religion, nor with a social vocation.’⁵³³ This disintegration creates a gap between religion, social work, politics, economics and private life. On a larger scale, Skobtsova suggests that this system creates a society which does not have a ‘back-bone’, whose borders become fluid, subjective and conditional depending on the interests of the situation and the desires of individuals. It is here that democracy can fall apart, be subjected to flux and conditionality, and become influenced by alternative systems: ‘Today a union is made in the interests of the day, today they preach economic equality, tomorrow they will cast their vote for the strengthening of capitalism, today they are carried away by communist totalitarianism, tomorrow by totalitarian racism.’⁵³⁴ In the absence of higher values, individuals may become concerned with their own well-being and

⁵³² ‘В демократическом миросозерцании нет никакого корня сейчас, нет никакого центра, оно образовано как бы из одних придаточных предложений, главное предложение утрачено.’ Skobtsova, “Four Portraits,” 306.

⁵³³ ‘И эта рассыпанность демократического облика создает известный тип человека, у которого, во-первых, нету никаких религиозных взглядов, во-вторых, общественная работа не базируется ни на какой общей глубокой идее, в-третьих, личная жизнь существует сама по себе, не объединенная ни с религиозным, ни с общественным призванием.’ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ ‘Сегодня заключается союз - таковы интересы сегодняшнего дня, сегодня проповедуют экономическое равенство, завтра отдадут свои голоса укрепляемому капитализму, сегодня увлекаются коммунистическим тоталитаризмом, завтра - тоталитаризмом расистским.’ Ibid.

security, reducing the organism of society into smaller parts which are too disparate to create anything or to oppose anything (such as totalitarianism). Democracy does not provide a dam against the flood of totalitarianisms, the threat of small egoisms, of disintegration: 'In the flood of mutual betrayal, in the flood of small egoisms, the world of today will crumble, scatter and disperse. Tomorrow will belong to the dragon.'⁵³⁵

Skobtsova suggests that in order to avoid this disintegration and to inaugurate a kind of authentic, integral system, society needs to return to its Christian roots. If it does not do this, Skobtsova pessimistically predicts that democracy will continue to disintegrate, and the age of the man-god and totalitarianisms will reign: 'The question remains as such – either, through repentance and refinement, godless humanity will return to the Father's house, and the epoch of authentic Christian rebirth will shine through, and it will conceive itself as *Godmanhood*, or for a long time we are doomed to the rule of the beast, the man-god, to a new and terrible idolatrous religion.'⁵³⁶

5. Freedom: Herzen and Individual Liberty

For Skobtsova, several forms of totalitarian ideologies are incompatible with the Christian message because of their denial of personal freedom and liberty. The place of freedom in Skobtsova's thought requires further assessment. One of the most prominent writers on individual freedom is Alexander Herzen. Alexander Ivanovich Herzen (1812-1870) is referenced throughout Skobtsova's work and is frequently cited as a contrary character, albeit one which she seems to hold in high esteem. A

⁵³⁵ 'В потоке взаимного предательства, в потоке маленьких эгоизмов рассыплется, равется, распылится сегодняшний мир. Завтрашний день принадлежит дракону.' Ibid., 309.

⁵³⁶ 'Вопрос стоит так - или, через покаяние и очищение, безбожное человечество вернется в Отчий дом, и засияет эпоха подлинного христианского возрождения, и оно почувствует себя Богочеловечеством, или же на долгие века мы обречены власти зверя, человекобога, новой и страшной идолопоклоннической религии.' Ibid., 311.

central element of Herzen's own philosophy is an insistence on the liberty of the individual. A brief exploration of freedom in Herzen's thought is illuminating for an assessment of Skobtsova's focus on the person in her thought.

Herzen was the illegitimate child of a Russian nobleman named Ivan Yakovlev and a German woman named Luisa Haag; an illegitimacy which is reflected in his surname. From a young age, Herzen was a revolutionary character who resisted autocracy and any deprivation of personal freedom. Herzen himself describes this as his personal obsession; 'Since the age of thirteen [...] I have served one idea, marched under one banner – war against all imposed authority – against every kind of deprivation of freedom, in the name of the absolute independence of the individual. I should like to go on with my little guerrilla war like a real Cossack, *auf eigene Faust* – as the Germans say.'⁵³⁷ Herzen's free thinking resulted in his arrest and forced exile, on two occasions, to provincial towns in Russia. He permanently left Russia in 1847, going first to Paris and then to London in 1852 where he founded the 'Free Russian Press in London'.

For Herzen, individual liberty is an absolute value. This means that individual liberty cannot become conditional or be restricted for the furtherment of another goal such as history or progress. Any form of submission which denies the freedom of the individual is an unacceptable sacrifice; 'The submission of the individual to society – to the people – to humanity – to the idea – is a continuation of human sacrifice [...] the crucifixion of the innocent for the guilty [...] The individual, who is the true, real monad of society, has always been sacrificed to some general concept, some collective noun, some banner or other. What the purpose of [...] the sacrifice was [...]

⁵³⁷ Alexander Herzen, letter to G. Mazzini, 13 September 1850, in A. I. Gertsen [Herzen], *Sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh* (Moscow, 1954-66) xxiv, 140. Cited in Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, 93.

was never so much as asked.’⁵³⁸ Individual liberty is the primary factor in society which must not be sacrificed to another ideal. A person’s liberty should not be denied for a perceived future good.

The sacrifice of freedom for progress is particularly futile, Herzen believes, because progress and the course of history are abstractions, not logically predictable certainties. The course of history is not deterministic but directionless; it has no particular structure, goal, or reason. In fact, there is a certain ridiculous quality to history, such as the ironic circularity which can be found in the persecution of the early Christians who, on freeing themselves from oppression, later turned on one another with even greater force. Therefore, subjugating the freedom of individuals for the future prosperity of others is an illusion because the future cannot be predicted, neither can the future happiness of others be assured. Instead, as Berlin notes, ‘The purpose of life is life itself, the purpose of the struggle for liberty is the liberty here, today, of living individuals, each with his own individual ends, for the sake of which they move and fight and suffer, ends which are sacred to them; to crush their freedom, stop their pursuits, to ruin their ends for the sake of some ineffable felicity of the future, is blind, because that future is always too uncertain, and vicious, because it outrages the only moral values we know, tramples on real human lives and needs, and in the name of what? Of freedom, happiness, justice – fanatical generalisations, mystical sounds, abstractions.’⁵³⁹ If the fallacious deterministic quality of history is not recognised, then a form of secular eschatology is manifested. The political implications of this are clear; a political system is invalid for Herzen if it sacrifices individual liberty for generalisations and abstractions. This applies to the Church as

⁵³⁸ Alexander Herzen, *From the Other Shore*, trans. Moura Budburg (London, 1956), 135. Cited in Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, 102.

⁵³⁹ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, 107.

well as the state, which both have the potential to subjugate the individual, coercing their freedom into submission.

6. The Grand Inquisitor

A vivid and powerful image of this coercion and submission can be found in the ‘Legend of the Grand Inquisitor’ in ‘The Brothers Karamazov’ by Dostoevsky. Here the tension between freedom, political systems and religious faith is exposed and examined, and the potentially subversive role of the Church (notably, the Roman Church) in relation to personal freedom, is highlighted and reaches a climax. Skobtsova makes reference to ‘the Grand Inquisitor’ in her writings, in relation to personal freedom and social culture.

‘The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor’ is a poem within the narrative of ‘The Brothers Karamazov’ written and delivered by Ivan Karamazov for his brother Alyosha. The tale is set in 16th Century Seville during the Inquisition, where Jesus returns to earth. The people of Seville instantly recognise this figure in the crowd as Jesus, and his identity is further confirmed by the miracles which he performs, including raising the dead and healing the sick. However, when the Grand Inquisitor – an elderly Cardinal – sees Jesus, he arrests him and accosts him in prison, threatening to burn him the following day as a heretic. The Inquisitor’s objection to Jesus’s return to earth, and the root of his resentment, concerns Jesus and freedom.

In his earthly ministry, the Cardinal argues, Christ emphasised freedom of faith:

“‘Have you the right to reveal to us one single mystery of that world from which You came?’” the old man asks Him, and answers himself. “No, You have not, so as not to add to what has already been said, and so as not to take away from mankind that liberty that You valued so highly when You were on earth. Anything further that You might say would endanger men’s freedom of faith,

for it would appear as a miracle, and freedom of faith was dearer than everything else to You then, fifteen hundred years ago. And didn't You Yourself say so often, 'I want to make you free'? Well, now You've seen them, these 'free' men," adds the man suddenly, with a knowing grin. "Yes, that business cost us dearly," he continues, looking at Him sternly, "but in the end we dealt with it in your name. For fifteen centuries we suffered from that freedom, but now it's all finished, settled once and for all. Don't You believe it's settled? You look at me so humbly, won't You even honour me with Your indignation? But let me tell You that now, at this very time, these people are more than ever convinced of their absolute freedom, and yet they themselves have brought their freedom to us and laid it submissively at our feet. But it is we who have brought this about, and is that what You wanted, that kind of freedom?"⁵⁴⁰

The Inquisitor suggests that Christ gave freedom to the people on earth, and He preached this freedom too. In Christ's temptations in the desert, the Inquisitor argues that His refusal to turn the rocks into food, or to rule over the nations, was to maintain the freedom of people. If Christ had performed these miracles, the people would have had neither the freedom to rule over themselves, to fend for themselves, nor the freedom to choose Christ. The Inquisitor suggests that Christ did this to ensure that humanity remained free in their actions and their decision to follow Christ. However, for the Inquisitor, this responsibility was too great for a humanity which struggled to manage the freedom which had been entrusted to it. If Christ had performed these miracles, he suggests, then the extent of suffering which revolves around food and nourishment would have been solved by turning the rocks into bread, and the wars which have ravaged the world would not have existed if Christ had ruled over all the nations. In fact, the people do not wish to be free, as it is much easier to submit to a higher power. Freedom leads to suffering, because it is too great a burden to bear. The Inquisitor argues that the people have finally recognised this by submitting their freedom to the Church, who governed their lives. Christ's return at that particular moment in history threatened the power the Church had over the people, and the

⁵⁴⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Karamazov Brothers*, trans. Ignat Avsey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 314-15.

delicate balance between freedom and submission which had been established. It is for this reason that the Inquisitor wishes to put Jesus to death and does not welcome His return.

Skobtsova, in ‘Dostoevsky as Artist and Psychologist’, draws upon the place of suffering in Dostoevsky’s works in relation to freedom. The Grand Inquisitor equates freedom with suffering, and submission with happiness. Skobtsova characterises this ‘happiness’ as an inferior substitute for freedom. These people, ‘...having forsworn freedom, and choice and meaning, would receive the sorrowless happiness of the ant-hill.’⁵⁴¹ They would choose this path over the voluntary, struggling path to Christ. Thus, the forced happiness of the ant-hill is in opposition with the free path of Christ, even though it is sorrowful. The path of coercion and inauthentic happiness, ‘is the way of the man-god, the way of the few chosen, the way of the faithful servants of the Antichrist, for whom it obtains to conquer natural humanity and close off afront the way to the grace of Christ.’⁵⁴² Thus, Skobtsova characterises freedom in Dostoevsky; ‘mankind in its freedom having come to self-will and not knowing how to realise proper choice, not possessing the gift of choice, exhausted by the burden of responsibility and freedom, mankind stands afront the temptation of its coercive transformation into slavery.’⁵⁴³

A similar discussion of personal freedom occurs in Dostoevsky’s novel ‘Demons’ with the character of Shigalyov. Shigalyov proposes a model of society where a portion of the populace rule over the rest. In his system, one-tenth of people are given absolute freedom and power over the remaining nine-tenths, who are bound

⁵⁴¹ Skobtsova, “Dostoevsky as Artist and Psychologist,” *Crucible*, 65.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 66.

to submit to them. The ‘boundless obedience’ of the nine-tenths results in a form of ‘primeval innocence’ for them.⁵⁴⁴ This, Shigalyov argues, would create a paradise on earth which is infinitely more appropriate for society than the propositions of Proudhon, Rousseau, Fourier who, he argues, did not understand humanity nor society. Shigalyov’s system may be seen as an extension of the Grand Inquisitor’s scheme; for a small number of people to have absolute control over the remaining population, denying their absolute freedom.

7. The Cross and the Hammer-and-Sickle

In her theological writings, Skobtsova wishes to maintain the freedom of the individual person. Although her thought as a whole is not aligned with Herzen’s, there is a point of convergence in this mutual desire, which similarly challenges the denial of freedom in the Grand Inquisitor narrative. Throughout her writings, Skobtsova places an emphasis on persons being made in the image of God. An important part of the *imago dei* is the freedom of these individual persons. In terms of social critique, for Skobtsova, this is what distinguishes Christianity from communism.

In a short article entitled ‘The Cross and the Hammer-and-Sickle’, Skobtsova boldly asks how Christianity and communism may be compatible. In some ways, her response to this is as expected. In Skobtsova’s time, the reality of communism in Soviet Russia was in no way compatible with Christianity (as it was violently destroying Christianity). In light of this, Skobtsova is clear that there cannot be a form of Christian Communism, which suggests that there is no compatibility between the two. But is there any compatibility, she asks, between what communism and Christianity both represent in their imagery of the Cross and the hammer-and-sickle?

⁵⁴⁴ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons*, trans. Michael R. Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 427-8.

Skobtsova's response to this question helps to shed further light on her affirmations of what authentic social reality should look like.

Skobtsova affirms that between the imagery of the Cross and the hammer-and-sickle there is a similarity in an emphasis on labour. The Cross represents taking up our cross (which in Skobtsova's system is activity in the world), and the hammer-and-sickle represents labour in the communist worldview. These symbols can provide certain correctives to one another. For the Church, and for the world, a robust system of labour is needed. The Church needs to respond to social inequalities, poverty, and the everyday reality of the people. In this way, the hammer-and-sickle can add something to the Church's life. However, the corrective which the Cross provides to communism is far greater. The only way that there may be any compatibility between the Cross and the hammer-and-sickle is if the Christian understanding of the human person is upheld. This means that individuals must be recognised as being made in the image of God (and an affirmation that they are equal, free, and creative). In this sense, the coercion which is manifested in communist realities is incompatible with the Christian understanding of the person. This is rooted in an understanding of the freedom of Christ, in whose image humanity is made. Secondly, creativity needs to be grounded in a metaphysical understanding of God as the source of all things. As we have already explored in Skobtsova's notion of creativity, all actions and deeds need to be rooted in God, as the source of all creativity. Labour which is done in the name of humanity only is inauthentic. The communist ideal, therefore, is lacking by its failure to allow spiritual depth to permeate all things, and a recognition of God as the true Creator.

Yet, the Cross is able to transform the hammer-and-sickle if it is modelled on the free creativity of Christ. If the perversions of communism are released from the

image of labour found in the hammer-and-sickle, then there may be some areas of compatibility. This is found in the desire to unite people into labour. For Skobtsova, this is vitally important for the Church. As we have seen repeatedly throughout her writings, she laments the Church's historical inaction for social engagement: 'no one wants to build an authentic, laboring, free, and loving Christian life. If they do build, they build something different, and if there is something that is not different, it is not in the building of life, but always in words and theories, sometimes quite remarkable, but only words and theories.'⁵⁴⁵ In contrast to this apathy, Skobtsova promotes the creation of an everyday Christian life which seeks to transform the world. This is not simply for one's interior life (as we have seen in her understanding of asceticism and monasticism), but for the benefit of the world, including all aspects of social life and culture.

Skobtsova speaks of this transfiguration as a form of free labour, where she weaves together several of her criticisms of contemporary social and political theories, into a positive vision of the Christian path:

'Free laboring – that is the basis of our path in Christ. And this basis should pervade our everyday and routine life. If it is not so, then the Grand Inquisitor is right, the general party line is right, all the violators, levelers, dictators, and slave-owners are right, and people are not the images of God but a herd.

In this free laboring, our efforts should make of every common deed a sort of monastery, a sort of spiritual organism, a sort of minor order, a sort of brotherhood. If that is not so, it means that we did not understand or accept the most basic thing that there is in the one great monastery, the one great organism, the one order, the one brotherhood that is the Church.'⁵⁴⁶

In response to political and social systems such as communism, totalitarianisms, or democracy, Skobtsova does not necessarily present a detailed social theory, other than

⁵⁴⁵ Skobtsova, "The Cross and the Hammer-and-Sickle," EW, 89.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

her understanding of the life of the Church. However, her comments do provide a specific vision for the Church. Skobtsova's response to social theory is to propose an embodiment of the principles of *Godmanhood* and *sobornost'*, to recognise the mysticism of human communion, to seek to transform and transfigure the world through everyday deeds, by submitting one's will to God who is the source of all creativity. At the heart of this, she draws attention to the intrinsic worth of the human person, which is rooted in the image of God that dwells in them. For Skobtsova, this image reveals their freedom, mirroring the absolute freedom of Christ. In addition, she proposes that this freedom is used for the kind of labouring which creates community. She advocates for people to be active in the world, in taking up their crosses and labouring in the world for the good of the other, in order to create an authentic model of *sobornal* community in the Church. In order to avoid the trappings of communism, however, this labouring must be freely chosen.

8. Apocalypticism

Skobtsova's emphasis on the everyday and a culture of transfiguring a person's quotidian tasks and deeds is tempered by a strong apocalyptic strain in her writings. Throughout her thought, temporal creations are placed in the context of the eternal. On occasion, this is a tension in her work, but ultimately Skobtsova seeks to place any notion of labour and creativity into an eschatological context. In 'Insight in Wartime', written in 1938 as the threat of the Second World War loomed, Skobtsova reflects on the spiritual insights which can be gained from a context of war. Her predominant reflection is one of apocalypticism. She explores the way in which warfare alters a person's perception of everyday reality, the presence of death, and the relationship

between this temporal world and the eternal.⁵⁴⁷ In relation to politics, Skobtsova's approach to apocalyptic thought is contextually important. It not only places politics within a broader system, but also human creativity and theodicy.

Skobtsova's apocalypticism begins with a 'personal eschatology', which she then expands into the realm of history and culture. To demonstrate this, she begins this article with an illustration of a funeral. She suggests that at a funeral it is possible to encounter two broad types of people. The first type of person is someone who was an acquaintance of the deceased, but not a close friend or relative. They attend the funeral out of politeness and general concern, and they offer their condolences. However, they are largely unaffected by the death, and they continue their everyday life following the service. In contrast, it is possible to encounter a second type of person at the funeral whose world has totally collapsed due to the death of their loved one. Their hopes and dreams have crumbled and they question the foundations of their existence: for them 'the gates have suddenly opened onto eternity, all natural life has trembled and collapsed, yesterday's laws have been abolished, desires have faded, meaning has become meaningless, and another incomprehensible Meaning has grown wings on their backs.'⁵⁴⁸ Skobtsova suggests that this moment is an apocalyptic one, where the eternal breaks into the everyday, when a new meaning 'grows wings on their backs.' On the one hand, death reveals the corruptibility and fragility of existence, and on the other hand it allows one to see the 'life-giving, fiery, all-filling, all-burning and comforting Spirit.'⁵⁴⁹ Yet this grief eventually passes, deadens, and the 'humdrum' reality of everyday existence takes over once again: 'again we live by

⁵⁴⁷ Here Skobtsova seems to be engaging with the thought of Vasily Rozanov, who was critical of Christianity's relationship between revelation and the everyday (see asceticism chapter).

⁵⁴⁸ Skobtsova, "Insight in Wartime," EW, 127.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

the joy of small successes, by the pain of small failures, again we begin to believe that nothing is stronger than our world with its three dimensions, that what is achieved is achieved, what is saved up will prove useful in old age, everything is clear as day, though a bit boring, unless we go to birthday parties, or to the movies, or gossip about our neighbors.⁵⁵⁰ The new, incomprehensible meaning which had been given in this apocalyptic moment is forgotten, and the human soul returns to the mundane and humdrum existence of the everyday.

In order to avoid this ‘deadening’, Skobtsova recognises the importance of these apocalyptic moments in a person’s spiritual life. She links them with the act of creative transfiguration, revelatory and transformative events, a *metanoia* moment of previously unimaginable significance. There is an *ascesis* involved in holding onto this apocalyptic revelation and a connection with the eternal, to avoid falling back into the humdrum nature of the everyday. Maintaining this connection to the eternal in the context of a heavy, fallen world, is a struggle, which Skobtsova identifies as a cross. The revelation of ‘the endless space of eternity’ challenges the smallness of worldly comfort, security, wealth, and companionship. ‘To put it more simply: a man’s whole life will seem dull, worthless, meaningless to him, if it is not pierced through with the flame of eternity.’⁵⁵¹

From this sense of ‘personal eschatology’, Skobtsova extends the notion of connecting the temporal and the eternal to the historical process. ‘Human history is also placed before the choice: either the triumph of the economic and political order, of humdrum philistine well-being, of three-dimensional space and time stretched out

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 127-8.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 128.

like a string; or the acceptance of eternity, of wings, the realization here of what is conceived *there*.⁵⁵² History can follow one of two paths:

‘either – pierced once and for all by the cross, having seen eternity once and for all, having been blinded once and for all to the temporary – it could become authentic Christian history, that is, eschatological in its essence, an exodus, a breakthrough, the eternal yearning of the winged, God-manly spirit; or it could fall down again, forget how the gates to eternity are open, even forget about eternity itself, begin to measure and to weigh, to rejoice over small national successes and be distressed at small national failures. To set up only material goals for itself and in the end proclaim that matter rules over spirit, whatever form the affirmation may take – either that existence determines consciousness, as in Marxism, or that blood gives rights or deprives of rights, as with Hitler, or that the free human soul should be enslaved to the state.’⁵⁵³

Here we see a connection with this apocalypticism and Skobtsova’s political critiques of totalitarianisms. She develops her critique of materialism here (which she associates with Marxism) to suggest that such systems are lacking an eternal, spiritual aspect which is required for creative transfiguration, for integral meaning and significance.

The apocalyptic beliefs of the early Christians, the millennialism around the year 1000, and the eschatology of the Old Believers all had in common the notion that this material world is not the sum total of existence. Throughout history, Christianity has expressed an eschatology: ‘the conviction that this fleshly world given to us does not constitute the whole of reality, that beyond it something else begins, governed by different laws, that the kingdom of Caesar will have to give way to the Kingdom of God, that time will vanish into eternity, that the heavy gates will be opened wide to receive all mankind, and that for the sake of this longed-for hour the whole of history has existed, for it our human creativity has existed, by it our suffering will be justified, our struggle hallowed. The hour will come and lightning will flash from one

⁵⁵² Ibid., 129.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

end of the earth to the other, and the Son of Man will come in all His glory to judge the living and the dead.’⁵⁵⁴

Despite this long history of apocalyptic thought, Skobtsova does not see evidence of this apocalypticism in her epoch which is drenched in materialism. Skobtsova turns to the Papal encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (“With Burning Concern”) to evaluate its response to the rise of Nazi power in Germany. This encyclical was written by Pope Pius XI in 1937 and it condemns an ideology of racism within Nazi Germany (without explicitly mentioning Hitler or the Nazi Party). Yet Skobtsova critiques its diplomatic and careful tone. For her, the encyclical has no revelatory insight, in it is ‘a lack of fire, the lack of a breakthrough into other worlds.’⁵⁵⁵ This text seems to Skobtsova like the acquaintance at a funeral, whose world has not been torn apart and opened towards eternity. While she does not disagree with the encyclical, she finds nothing remarkable in it.

Written in 1938, ‘Under the Sign of Destruction’ highlights Skobtsova’s emphasis on apocalyptic thought and its relationship to her own epoch. In a similar manner to her suggestions in ‘Insight in Wartime’, here Skobtsova proposes that the nihilistic, materialistic epoch in which she was living, somewhat counterintuitively, reveals the Christian mystery through its naked, apocalyptic character. Here Skobtsova combines the apocalypticism which we have seen in her political commentary into her narrative on the fundamentals of monasticism, particularly monastic non-possession. We observe here how Skobtsova’s notion of selfless creativity combines with non-possession and eschatology.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 130.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 134.

As we have already seen, Skobtsova characterised the epoch of the late 1930's as one of chaos, instability, and suffering. She notes how this contrasts sharply with the preceding epochs within modernity which were largely stable and conservative: 'But now the walls in our houses have swayed and fallen, and beyond them proved to be not the usual streets of familiar cities, but some boundless desert, over which all the winds of the world roam. Life has proven to be short, fleeting, and not of great worth. The confines of the state have warped and shifted. Laws have collapsed. A primordial chaos has surged into the human soul.'⁵⁵⁶ Alongside the prevalence of death and suffering appears the apocalyptic mood and realisations which she characterises in 'Insight in Wartime.'

Skobtsova suggests that it is this very suffering which characterises her epoch as a Christian epoch: 'An epoch, where humanity stands at the foot of the cross, where humanity breathes suffering, where in each human soul the image of God is humiliated ... spat upon, and crucified, - is this not a predominantly Christian epoch?'⁵⁵⁷ This may sound counterintuitive for a theologian whose theological anthropology rests on an affirmation of the *imago dei* in the person. However, Skobtsova is here referring to the form of non-possession which we have already seen in her innovation of monasticism. As a result of the suffering of her epoch, the non-possessing reality of humanity has been exposed. Idols fall away, including those which are easily denounced such as lust, gluttony and avarice, but also the 'cults'

⁵⁵⁶ 'Но вот в наших домах зашаталась и упали стены, а за ними оказались не привычные улицы привычных городов, но какой-то необъятный пустырь, по которому разгуливают все ветры Вселенной. Жизнь оказалась короткой, непрочной и не очень дорого стоящей. Границы государств покособились и сместились. Законы рухнули. На человеческую душу нахлынул первобытный хаос.' Мать Мария (Скобцова), "Под Знаком Гибели [Under the Sign of Destruction]," in *Стихотворения, Поэмы, Мистерии, Воспоминания об аресте и лагере в Равенсбрюк* (Paris: La Presse Française et Étrangère, 1947), 114.

⁵⁵⁷ 'Эпоха, когда человечество стоит у подножия креста, когда человечество дышит страданием, когда в каждой человеческой душе образ Божий унижен ... оплеван и распят, - это ли не по преимуществу христианская эпоха?' Ibid., 115.

which we create (the cult of the family, of individual comfort, creativity and art). In times of ruin and destruction, these things fall away like the flowers of the field, as the Psalmist notes.⁵⁵⁸

Skobtsova links this suffering and non-possession with the experience of war. In relation to apocalypticism and a ‘breaking in’ of the eternal into the temporal, Skobtsova turns to reflect on the nature of warfare. She clearly articulates the horror of war. She acknowledges the effects of war; how it destroys countless lives, that it forwards the ‘brutalisation of nations’ and the ‘lowering of the cultural level’, that it alters the psychology of an entire nation and contributes to the endless cycle of warfare and violence.⁵⁵⁹ Nevertheless, she wishes to offer a spiritual insight into war by proposing an analogy between the soldier going to war and the apocalyptic nature of Christian faith.

The soldier who is enlisted into battle must leave behind their entire life, their family, their occupation, their homeland and security. They even risk their own safety and offer their lives up to the possibility of sacrifice. Skobtsova claims that the Christian faith demands no less than this: ‘If a soldier, on being mobilized, must leave his beloved family, his habitual occupation, even his vocation, must step out of the time in which he lived, as it were, and switch over into some other time, if everything is taken from the mobilized soldier and everything is demanded of him, then our Christian mobilization should present a man with no lesser demands.’⁵⁶⁰ The call of the Christian is for total, absolute commitment in all areas of life; ‘In our time Christ and the life-giving Holy Spirit demand the whole person.’⁵⁶¹ The difference between a

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 118-119.

⁵⁵⁹ Skobtsova, “Insight in Wartime,” EW, 137.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 138.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

soldier being enlisted and a Christian being called is that state mobilization is not a free choice, but an obligation, while the Christian freely offers themselves.

In her particular context, as Europe descended into war, Skobtsova believed that this moment holds the possibility to open the world up to a sense of the eternal:

‘I know, I know with all my being, with all my faith, with all the spiritual force granted to the human soul, that at this moment God is visiting the world. And the world can receive that visit, open its heart – “ready, ready is my heart” – and then in an instant our temporary and fallen life will unite with the depths of eternity, then our human cross will become the likeness of the God-man’s cross, then within our deathly affliction itself we will see the white garments of the angel who will announce to us: “He who was dead is no longer in the tomb.” Then mankind will enter into the paschal joy of the Resurrection.’⁵⁶²

There is an apocalyptic element which can be felt in times of war. Skobtsova’s insight in wartime is a recognition of the way in which war opens a nation’s eyes to that which is beyond this world. It is not a promotion of war, nor suffering, but a reflection on the unsettling nature of wartime.

If the world does not respond to the eternal, to this sense of the apocalyptic, then Rozanov’s evaluation will be correct, Skobtsova suggests. If *Godmanhood* is ignored, then transfiguration is not possible: ‘The old, sad, dusty earth races through the empty sky into eternal emptiness. Death-bound mankind rejoices over small successes and weeps over small failures, renouncing its election, painstakingly and assiduously pulling the coffin lid over its head.’⁵⁶³ Political systems, culture and religion need to have a sense of the apocalyptic and the eternal. In addition to a recognition that creativity is rooted in the primacy of the Divine, authentic creativity needs to also recognise its eschatological trajectory.

9. Orthodox Action

⁵⁶² Ibid., 139.

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

Skobtsova's reflections on culture, social engagement and theology are manifested in the thought and action of the group *Orthodox Action*. *Orthodox Action* consisted of a group of people living in France who were dedicated to implementing the kind of society which Skobtsova promotes in her writings. The group wished to combine an exploration of rigorous Orthodox thought and culture with practical social action, publishing articles and hosting discussion groups, alongside aiding the poor and needy of Paris. Alongside her monasticism, it was through this group that Skobtsova sought to incarnate the ideals which she promotes in her writings, of *Godmanhood* and *sobornost'*, the mysticism of human communion, authentic creativity, and a transfiguration of the world through a socially engaged Church which points to the eternal.

Discussions about a particular group began as early as November 1934. Originally it was thought this group would be a part of the RSCM, however it ended up being an independent organisation. After initial conversations, on 27th September 1935 the group formally adopted the statutes of *Orthodox Action*. The name 'Orthodox Action' (Православное Дело) was proposed by Berdyaev. Hackel notes that, 'It was to be an expression of Orthodoxy; it was to concern itself with deeds.'⁵⁶⁴ Among its members and supporters were Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdyaev, Georgii Fedotov, Konstantin Mochul'skii and Skobtsova. Skobtsova was the chair of the committee, Mochul'skii was the vice-chair, Fr Mikhail Chertkov was the treasurer and Fedor Pianov was the secretary.

Orthodox Action signalled a new era for the émigré community. In a discussion of Skobtsova's article of the same name, Antoine Arjakovsky notes the

⁵⁶⁴ Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, 65.

motivating factor of the group and its distinctiveness compared to its predecessors: ‘This article could be considered the manifesto of Orthodox Action and a new concept of commitment on behalf of the nation: namely, service to one’s neighbor here and now. It signified a radical shift from the projects of the 1920s of the Russian Student Christian Movement, the Academy of Religious Philosophy, and the St. Sergius Institute, which had viewed the formation of the younger generation in terms of a return to Russia in the near future.’⁵⁶⁵ The émigrés were no longer discussing a great return to Russia (it was clear this would not be possible). The rhetoric shifts, therefore, to an expression of their thought in the context of émigré life. This reflects an innovation in the ‘Russian idea’, which has already been highlighted in this thesis. Skobtsova sought to incarnate the principles of the Russian religious renaissance (*Godmanhood* and *sobornost’*) in their émigré life.

The service to the neighbour which *Orthodox Action* promoted lies at the heart of a broader project to create an authentic, Orthodox culture amongst the émigrés: ‘In the middle of the enormous and alien Paris, we dream of creating a Russian, orthodox village.’⁵⁶⁶ The proposal for this ‘Orthodox village’ aligns with Skobtsova’s conception of creating a culture around the transfiguration of the everyday. At the centre of this, is a recognition of the human person. Indeed, wholeness is found in the creation of a social structure where the value and worth of the human person is foundational:

‘Do my words sound utopian and naïve? Maybe. But you may only speak about our naiveté and utopianism if you have your own precise way to overcome your little faith, indifference, and lack of wholeness, to fill the emptiness of life – and not only to fill it, but also to authentically create genuine, real wholeness. If, gazing at yourself, you feel that your soul is destitute, then come to us, in order

⁵⁶⁵ Arjakovsky, *The Way*, 418-19.

⁵⁶⁶ ‘Мы мечтаем среди огромного и чужого Парижа создать русский, православный городок.’ Е. Ю. Кузьмина-Караваева, “Православное Дело [Orthodox Action],” in *Избранное*, ed. Н. В. Осьмакова (Москва: Советская Россия, 1991), 363.

to give us the opportunity to fill it with love for the very same souls, each one of whom is the authentic and beautiful image of God.’⁵⁶⁷

Skobtsova’s social engagement, as expressed in the group *Orthodox Action* and in her criticisms of various models of social structures and governance, is rooted in a recognition that the person is made in the image of God, and in engaging with these neighbours, one strives towards implementing the kind of wholeness which pervades her whole theological system and informs her own social action on the streets of Paris.

10. Conclusion

Throughout her theological writings, Skobtsova promotes a movement from the Church to the world, for theological thought and practice to engage with the fullness of human society. In her political reflections, however, we see how Skobtsova also comments on social life outside of the standard confines of the Church, especially in political theories and social structures. Skobtsova judges social creations by the same standard of ‘wholeness’ which permeates her work. She is critical of notable forms of governance from her age, including various forms of totalitarianism, communism, fascism and even democracy. Skobtsova criticises political systems, especially, when they fail to realise the full reality of the human person; that people are made in the image of God, as free, equal, and creative. The people, as a collective, cannot be seen as a faceless mass, or simply the sum of its parts. Individuals and communities (nations, societies) must be revered and respected as reflections of Christ, through the *imago dei* within them. Like Herzen, to some extent, Skobtsova highlights the

⁵⁶⁷ ‘Утопично и наивно звучат мои слова? Может быть. Но вы можете говорить о их наивности и утопичности только в том случае, если у вас есть собственный точный способ победить свое маловерие, равнодушие, отсутствие цельности, заполнить пустоту жизни - и не только заполнить, но и подлинно создать настоящие, реальные ценности. Если же, взглядевшись в себя, вы почувствуете, что душа ваша нища, то придите к нам, чтобы дать нам возможность заполнить ее любовью к таким же душам, из которых каждая подлинный и прекрасный образ Божий.’ Ibid.

importance of the individual human freedom, and she warns of the dangers of denying such freedom (as can be seen in the legend of the Grand Inquisitor). Instead, Skobtsova proposes a system of free labouring, where Christian thought and practice is founded upon a desire to take up the cross, to be active in the world, seeking to form an organic community of persons. Unlike Herzen, who warns of the dangers of sacrificing individual liberty to a greater authority, sacrifice of the will is central to Skobtsova's social vision. Whilst Herzen warns of sacrificing liberty to generalisations and abstractions, Skobtsova affirms sacrifice as it connects a person to the source of all creativity, God. Through an ascetic practice of perceiving the eternal in the everyday, a person may hold onto this sense of the Divine source of all things, and the apocalyptic vision towards which the Church moves.

Conclusion: God, the Human, Wholeness and Sacrifice

This thesis began by highlighting the place of the human in Skobtsova's theological writings. At the heart of Skobtsova's theology is a desire to engage with the neighbour and to develop a system of thought which places love of the other at the centre of theological thought and practice. Her desire to do this is rooted in a dissatisfaction with expressions of Christianity that do not engage with the world, and conversely forms of 'social Christianity' which are lacking in theological depth. Skobtsova's desire to show love towards the neighbour is always balanced, however, with an insistence on the dual nature of the commandment to love God and the neighbour. She is insistent that love of the neighbour must be equally measured with a love of God, so that Christian spirituality and ethics do not fall into the type of godless humanism which she so strongly resists. The desire to maintain this balance is indicative of Skobtsova's broader aim to maintain 'wholeness'. This wholeness is expressed in the unity of the divine and the human principles (and inspired by the thought of the Russian religious renaissance), but it also encompasses a wider methodology which is present in her writings to hold together dualities such as the Church and the world, the divine and the human, or typologies such as mother and son. Throughout this thesis, I have begun to suggest that the key to achieving this wholeness, for Skobtsova, is found in sacrifice. Here, the centrality of sacrifice will be pieced together from what has already been expounded, noting the importance of sacrifice in order to truly love both God and the neighbour, and to implement the ideal of wholeness to which Skobtsova's thought and practice strives.

This thesis has highlighted the close connection between theology and biography in Skobtsova's work and legacy. The extraordinary life of Skobtsova has often over-shadowed the depth of theological thought which she produced, especially

in the emigration period. On occasion, in secondary literature, it is her biography which takes precedence over her intellectual output. The first chapter of this thesis sought to address this imbalance by not only highlighting key moments in her biography, but also contextualising her theological development in her writings against her life, and exploring the broader relationship between biography and theology in her work. The way in which Skobtsova's own experiences inform her theology, and vice versa, is particularly evident in the example of loss in her life; notably in the death of her father and two children. Mapping this relationship against her publications, and the journals in which she published in Paris, has helped to get a fuller picture of the context of Skobtsova's writings, as well as her methodology, style, and tone.

The relationship between experience and theology in Skobtsova's life and writings can be sensed in her reflections on emigration. Here it is possible to see the 'situational' or contextual methodology of much of Skobtsova's theological writings; how she reflects on her own situation and offers spiritual insights into that context. A theme which comes to the fore in these reflections is loss. As the second chapter of this thesis explored, the loss of Russia for Skobtsova and her fellow émigrés was keenly felt in the difficult situation of Parisian life. Yet Skobtsova draws spiritually positive conclusions from the difficulty of this loss. In doing so, she progresses from a spiritually positive insight into the loss of one's homeland to a sacrificial ethic of renouncing restrictive worldviews.

Bound up with the question of one's homeland is the notion of freedom. Skobtsova observes that citizens of a state are naturally bound by the conventions, laws, history, and customs of that society. When these elements combine in a person's identity and worldview, the result can be restrictive: 'We are tightly buttoned up in

our worldview, we are well-dressed, we are simply swaddled in it.’⁵⁶⁸ Emigration, on the other hand, allows for a greater sense of freedom, and the kind of liberty which Skobtsova notes is absent in many 20th Century forms of social theory and governance. This freedom provides the urgent opportunity for Russians fleeing civil war and religious persecution in Russia (in Skobtsova’s context) to be free of such restrictions, violence, and danger. Yet it is also an ideological freedom, not just having the freedom to speak against the state, but also the chance to renounce the opportunity to speak from the classically Russian worldview, not in the name of Soloviev, Dostoevsky or Khomiakov, but to, ‘begin to speak only in the name of his own conscience, of this or that degree of love and his knowledge of God.’⁵⁶⁹ In terms of sacrifice, this cannot be seen as an active choice. Skobtsova is making a positive conclusion from a painful experience of unchosen loss. Yet Skobtsova continues to quantify her thoughts in this area through a theological lens. Here she progresses her thought to include a sacrificial ethic of giving up the comfort of one’s worldview:

‘This is the first and main thing: not to allow cowardliness or the comfort of a certain kind of aesthetic worldview to obscure our terrible standing in the desert before God. In this sense we must also emigrate out of this well-being, we must open our souls to all the drafts and winds of absolute inner freedom. Such, it seems to me, are our inner paths.’⁵⁷⁰

To realise the sense of freedom which Skobtsova identifies in emigration, she calls for a spiritual practice of sacrificing the comfort of a particular aesthetic worldview. In the case of national identity, Skobtsova regards dependence on worldviews that are informed by a national consciousness as spiritually restrictive when they become static and prevent progression along a spiritual path. In this instance, worldviews can become swaddling and opposed to spiritual freedom: ‘Freedom obliges, freedom calls

⁵⁶⁸ Skobtsova, “Under the Sign of Our Time,” EW, 113.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

for sacrificial self-giving, freedom determines one's honesty and strictness with oneself and one's path.⁵⁷¹

The spirituality which Skobtsova promotes here is one of many different approaches which may fall under the term 'sacrifice'. Its emphasis on unbinding worldviews is an interesting and rather novel approach to our understanding of sacrifice which is rooted in challenging and losing aspects of one's own identity. The question emerges, in response to this theology, whether Skobtsova is insufficiently recognising the pain of emigration by promoting the spiritual positives of emigration. It is clear that Skobtsova herself experienced the trauma of losing her homeland, although this movement in her thought may become problematic in universal application. However, there is an important distinction between emigration and emigrating from one's worldview. Skobtsova is not promoting the suffering and loss of losing one's homeland. Skobtsova is, however, challenging an ossified, static, approach to any faith which is bound up with national identity. It is interesting in this light to reflect upon Skobtsova's own theological engagement in Paris. Despite drawing these conclusions, Skobtsova remains extremely Russian (she often speaks in the name of Soloviev, Dostoevsky and Khomiakov, for example, despite her own comment on the dangers of doing so) and her engagement with the French theological context in which she was living is minimal in her writings. However, within the 'Orthodox village'⁵⁷² which she sought to create in Paris, her thought does provide an internal challenge for the Orthodox world, particularly in the tradition of monasticism, social engagement, and a practical realisation of much Russian thought.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 114.

⁵⁷² Е. Ю. Кузьмина-Караваева, "Православное Дело [Orthodox Action]," in *Избранное*, ed. Н. В. Осьмакова (Москва: Советская Россия, 1991), 363.

Nevertheless, the heart of Skobtsova's theological system is still distinctly Russian, and this is clearly the case in the framework of wholeness within which it operates. The second chapter of this thesis explored the inheritance of Soloviev and Khomiakov in Skobtsova's theology. Khomiakov's notion of community, as found in rural peasant communities in Russia, and additionally in the Church, revolve around his notion of *sobornost'*. This is a central term for Skobtsova's understanding of community which is rooted in her understanding of the Orthodox tradition: '...what is most personal, what is most intimate in an Orthodox person's life, is thoroughly pervaded by this sense of being united with everyone, the sense of the principle of *sobornost'*, characteristic of the Orthodox Church.'⁵⁷³ Central to an understanding of *sobornost'*, for both Khomiakov and Skobtsova, is an understanding of the place of love within community. Skobtsova notes that, 'The Orthodox Church is not a solitary standing before God, but *sobornost'*, which binds everyone with the bonds of Christ's love and the love for one another.'⁵⁷⁴ The relationship between love and *sobornost'* is inseparable. For Skobtsova, the ideal of such a love within community is the person of Christ and His incarnate actions:

'There is not and there cannot be any following in the steps of Christ without taking upon ourselves a certain share, small as it may be, of participation in this sacrificial deed of love. Anyone who loves the world, anyone who lays down his soul for others, anyone who is ready, at the price of being separated from Christ, to gain salvation for his brothers – is a disciple and follower of Christ. And inversely, anyone who abides in the temptation of self-salvation alone, anyone who does not take upon himself the responsibility for the pain and sin of the world, anyone who follows the path of "egoism," be it even "holy" egoism, simply does not hear what Christ says, and does not see what His sacrifice on Golgotha was offered for.'⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷³ Skobtsova, "The Second Gospel Commandment," EW, 47.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 48-9.

In a similar way to Khomiakov, Skobtsova repeatedly warns against ‘egoism’ (even what she identifies as ‘holy egoism’) in favour of a *sobornal* vision of community and the Church. The ego, and a person’s sense of individualism and exclusivity, must therefore be sacrificed in order to realise this vision of loving community. The ‘sacrificial deed of love’ is at the heart of *sobornost*’ and Skobtsova’s understanding of human communion.

In addition to the influence of Khomiakov, this thesis has highlighted the foundational place of Vladimir Soloviev’s thought for Skobtsova’s theology. This is centred around Soloviev’s notion of all-unity or wholeness, which Skobtsova identifies as the fundamental feature of his philosophy: ‘He seeks always the absolute or All-Unity, here the authentic reality, which contains in itself all, -- truth, life, beauty. From him the ideal of perception is contained in synthesis, an unification of the whole of knowledge.’⁵⁷⁶ In this light, for Soloviev, ‘ethics ought to form the ideal of integral life, and aesthetics ought to rework the principle of wholistic creativity.’⁵⁷⁷

This thesis has highlighted, in this light, the centrality of the notion of *Godmanhood* in Skobtsova’s thought, which she has inherited from the philosophy of Soloviev. Skobtsova characterises Soloviev’s philosophy as striving to maintain a balance between the Divine and the human principles:

‘It would be properly correct to say, that the entire philosophy of Solov’ev strives to situate fundamental knowledge and the core of being in a divine origin, and in this divine principle to consolidate all the sides and all the views and the manifestations of worldly life, to think about everything as a single worldly Divine-human process, encompassing within itself all the universe in all its manifestations.’⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁶ Skobtsova, “Solov’ev,” *Crucible*, 93-4.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

For Soloviev, Russia plays an important and decisive role in the realisation of *Godmanhood*, as Skobtsova notes: ‘...the Third Rome, in contrast to the First and Second Rome, ought to be a synthesis, ought to be Divine-human Rome.’⁵⁷⁹ There are particular characteristics of the Russian nation which are conducive to such a synthesis. In Skobtsova’s characterisation of Soloviev’s thought in her 1929 article, these characteristics are once again linked to sacrifice in the form of self-renunciation. For Soloviev, according to Skobtsova, humility and self-renunciation are integral to Russia’s soul; ‘...in national self-renunciation Soloviev sees in general the primary principle of Russian history.’⁵⁸⁰ The basic principle of Russian history is, ‘Christian humility and the spirit of self-renunciation.’⁵⁸¹ Skobtsova does not critically engage with this aspect of Soloviev’s thought (her essay of Soloviev in general is largely exposition) therefore any evaluation of Soloviev’s influence on Skobtsova here rests on a degree of conjecture.

However, sacrifice is present in Skobtsova’s interpretation of the thought of Soloviev and Khomiakov. She promotes a practical realisation of the ideals of Soloviev and Khomiakov:

‘...we must turn these theoretical presuppositions, these philosophical systems, these theological theories, these words *sobornost’* and *Godmanhood*, which have recently become sacred, into so many practical landmarks both for our personal spiritual paths, the most cherished, most inward ones, and for our external endeavors.’⁵⁸²

Skobtsova recognises that the Russian soul sees the value of *sobornost’* and *Godmanhood*, and that they form the foundation of the Orthodox Church, but the task for her generation is to implement these principles in everyday life. These principles,

⁵⁷⁹ Skobtsova, “Solov’ev,” *Crucible*, 109.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸² Skobtsova, “The Second Gospel Commandment,” *EW*, 59-60.

she claims, are centred on the commandment to love God and the neighbour. Loving God and the neighbour, and being true to the Orthodox principles of *sobornost'* and *Godmanhood* requires a sacrificial form of love:

‘We simply want to live as we are taught by the second commandment of Christ, which determines everything in man’s relation to this earthly life, and we want to live in such a way that all those who are outside it can see and feel the unique, saving, unsurpassable beauty, the indisputable truth of precisely this Christian path.

We do not know whether we will be able to realize our hopes. It is basically a matter of God’s will. But apart from God’s will, God’s help and grace, each of us is faced with the demand to strain all our forces, not fearing the most difficult endeavor, in ascetic self-restraint, giving our souls for others sacrificially and lovingly, to follow in Christ’s footsteps to our appointed Golgotha.’⁵⁸³

Skobtsova’s desire to practically implement a love of God and the neighbour is centred upon a self-denying, sacrificial ethic. In order to maintain the fullness of *sobornost'* and *Godmanhood*, a person’s egoism and individualism must be replaced by a self-denying humility. The nature of the love which characterises *sobornost'* is furthermore rooted in a renunciation of the self. Whilst this is a distinctly Russian approach, informed by Russian thought, Skobtsova maintains that loving God and the neighbour cannot be confined by a rigid, ossified worldview of Russian culture. Religion cannot be stylized as ‘some sweet singing of Moscow bells.’⁵⁸⁴ Rather, this realisation of love must be motivated by the kind of freedom which is found in emigration, as she has outlined in ‘Under the Sign of our Time’. The ascetic quality of this love, and its foundation in the will of God, has formed the basis of much exploration in this thesis, to which we shall now turn once again.

Skobtsova’s treatment of asceticism can be found in the hagiographical tales which make up the collection ‘*Zhatva Dukha*’, which was explored in the third

⁵⁸³ Skobtsova, “The Second Gospel Commandment,” EW, 60.

⁵⁸⁴ Skobtsova, “Under the Sign of Our Time,” EW, 115.

chapter of this thesis. In addition to searching for an Orthodox precedent for a socially engaged spirituality, and example of ascetics from the Church tradition demonstrating active love towards the neighbour, this collection also highlights the place of sacrifice within Skobtsova's spirituality. The eight tales which are included in this collection touch on themes of suffering, co-suffering, spiritual direction, a mystical embodiment in the other, servitude and humility, kenoticism, martyrdom, and holy folly (in the forms of persecution, abuse and ostracization). Skobtsova is laying the groundwork for her own constructive theology in these tales. Furthermore, she is outlining an Orthodox tradition for a socially engaged monastic, ascetic spirituality, by providing examples of Saints who go to the world, who engage in sacrificial love towards their neighbours as well as God.

A variety of sacrificial expressions of spirituality have been identified in '*Zhatva Dukha*'. Sacrifice is recognised in terms of personal, ascetic renunciation through Skobtsova's description of fasting, poverty, and retreat from society. Here the ascetics, whose lives she retells, deny themselves certain things in order to refine the passions and work towards their own transformation. A more dramatic sense of sacrifice is identified in Skobtsova's retelling of ascetics and monastics who take upon themselves the demons of others. In the case of Ioannikii, this takes the form of receiving the demon himself of a possessed woman. In a similar way, martyrdom is described in the lives of Agr and Or, and Nikifor and Sapriki. In these cases, martyrdom is not only for their faith, but for the other, as an expression of love and solidarity. The examples of sacrifice which Skobtsova raises in these lives is continually directed at both the spiritual transformation of the self and the giving of the self to the neighbour in love, building a model of community which echoes the ideal of *sobornost*' which is foundational for Skobtsova's constructive theological

essays. These lives also broaden the representation of sacrifice in Skobtsova's writings beyond the non-physical forms of sacrifice which are found in her aversion to individualism and egocentrism, to include bodily, material forms of renunciation and loss in areas such as fasting, the acceptance of corporeal suffering, and martyrdom.

Throughout these lives of the Saints, holy folly is a recurring theme. In Skobtsova's theological essays, there is a close connection between holy folly and sacrifice. Holy folly is characterised by behaviour which questions the boundary between the sacred and the profane, which manifests in actions by an individual which are disruptive, challenging, or rude, that question orthopraxis and social norms. Holy folly is found in community, where the unorthodox actions of a fool can be perceived as foolish, against a recognised standard of behaviour. In order for this to be effective, the holy fool must sacrifice civility and social standing in a movement which is similar to Skobtsova's description of unbinding oneself from worldviews. The principal theological connection which Skobtsova makes here, however, is with the *kenosis* of Christ. Christ's kenotic, self-giving, sacrificial actions in His incarnate life may be perceived as 'folly', as noted in 1 Corinthians. The holy fool emulates Christ's self-abasement, and His humiliation.

The holy fool, therefore, is inspired by the sacrificial giving of Christ and a 'turn to the world'. They strip themselves of power, status, and riches and in return receive humiliation and abuse. In turning to the world, an ascetic encounters the inverted paradigm of wisdom and folly in Christ. While the humiliation which they endure can be perceived as folly by the world, it actually points towards the wisdom of God. Skobtsova situates sacrifice and the giving of the self at the centre of the lives of the holy fools. This sacrifice produces fruit when their engagement with the world

leads others towards a deeper understanding of the Gospel. In the lives of the Saints and the holy fools, Skobtsova finds a spirituality which combines both a love of God with an active love of the neighbour. At the heart of this expression of love is a sacrificial ethic where one renounces material possessions and spiritual exclusivity through a turning to the world that emulates the kenotic movement of Christ and the humiliation of the holy fool.

Skobtsova's hagiographical work provides a foundation for her own constructive theological work on the themes of asceticism and monasticism. This thesis has highlighted Skobtsova's asceticism and provided an exposition of her writing, noting Skobtsova's criticism of Leontiev and Rozanov, and her affinity with the theology of St Isaac the Syrian. Skobtsova's asceticism grapples with renunciation and asks *what* is being sacrificed in an ascetic spirituality. She is clear that any ascetic renunciation in a person's spiritual life should not sacrifice love towards the neighbour. Following Isaac the Syrian, Skobtsova proposes an ascetic theology which interprets renunciation of the 'world' as a renunciation of worldly passions, not necessarily a retreat from society and human community. In fact, Skobtsova's ascetic theology is highly relational, and she promotes a shared ascetic task.

In 'The Second Gospel Commandment', we have seen how Skobtsova develops an ascetic theology which is oriented towards loving the neighbour. She writes that Christian love demands social action and attention to the neighbour's material needs: 'The love of man demands one thing from us in this area: ascetic ministry to his material needs, attentive and responsible work, a sober and unsentimental awareness of our strength and of its true usefulness.'⁵⁸⁵ This forms part

⁵⁸⁵ Skobtsova, "The Second Gospel Commandment," EW, 54-5.

of a tripartite reflection from Skobtsova on asceticism which is oriented towards the other, in the fullness of our human composition as body, soul, and spirit. We must, she writes, attend to the bodily and material needs of our neighbours (providing social care, giving food, alms, healthcare etc.), but also their ‘inner world’, the emotions of their soul, and their relationship with God in their spirit. In order for an ascetic spirituality to be oriented towards the inner world of another, an entering into their interior life is required.

‘One should be able literally “to put oneself in the place” of the other person, try to evaluate and experience what he feels in himself, to be everyone for everyone... We must have the strength not to define generally what a given man should or should not do, but to define him from within his own inner state, to seek to free him from his passions and emotions not by cutting them off maximally, but by a conscious and profound overcoming, shifting, transfiguring of them.’⁵⁸⁶

In order to enter into the inner life of another, a movement out of the self is required, mirroring the kenotic movement of Christ. In turn, this necessitates a suspension of one’s ego, a limiting of one’s self in order to enter into the inner life of another.

Skobtsova frames this in terms of ‘spiritual asceticism’: ‘Spiritual asceticism here consists in the most open, unequivocal, and conscious renunciation of oneself, in a readiness always to follow the will of God, in a desire to become the fulfiller of God’s design in the world, a tool in His hands, a means and not an end.’⁵⁸⁷ Loving the neighbour requires an ascetic spirituality to unbind a person from their own self so that they can enter into the inner life of another, working towards their transformation.

An ascetic relation to people is expressed, for Skobtsova, by the model of Christ’s sacrifice for humanity: ‘He gave his flesh to be crucified, He suffered in His human soul, He gave His spirit into the hands of the Father – and He calls us to do the

⁵⁸⁶ Skobtsova, “The Second Gospel Commandment,” EW, 56.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

same. And He offered His sacrifice for the whole man, in his whole spiritual-inner-bodily composition.⁵⁸⁸ Christ's sacrifice was a total self-offering, which was given for the fullness of the human person in the human composition of body, soul, and spirit. Skobtsova suggests that an ascetic spirituality which is oriented towards the other must be equally conscious of the fullness of the human person and their needs. It requires, too, a full offering of the giver's self to mirror Christ's total self-offering. We have seen how Skobtsova's concept of the 'mysticism of human communion' builds on this notion to suggest that this kind of loving attention towards the neighbour is a vehicle for communication with God, thus linking the love of the neighbour with the love of God in an inseparable bond.

The 'mysticism of human communion' is at the heart of Skobtsova's theological thought and monastic, social practice. Konstantin Mochulsky recalls a conversation with Skobtsova, when she was drafting the article 'The Mysticism of Human Communion':

'Mère s'est enfermée dans sa chambre et tape du matin au soir son article « Mystique des relations humaines ». Elle me dit : « C'est le thème de ma vie ; pourquoi a-t-on décrit d'une façon si détaillée et précise les étapes de l'ascension spirituelle vers Dieu ? Pourquoi y a-t-il d'innombrables guides et traités sur la communion avec Dieu alors que rien n'a été écrit sur la communion entre les hommes ? Pourtant, le chemin vers Dieu passe par l'amour pour l'homme. L'homme est l'image et la ressemblance de Dieu, le Temple de l'Esprit saint, l'icône incorruptible de la Divinité. La communion entre les hommes est un grand mystère et un sacrement. Au Jugement dernier, on ne me demandera pas si j'ai pratiqué avec succès les exercices ascétiques, ni combien j'ai fait de genuflexions et de prosternations. On me demandera si j'ai nourri celui qui a faim, si j'ai vêtu celui qui est nu, si j'ai visité le malade et le prisonnier. J'ai eu faim et soif, j'ai été malade et en prison. Songez qu'il place un signe d'égalité entre chaque malheureux et lui-même. Je l'ai toujours su, mais à présent, cela m'a comme transpercée. C'est effrayant. »⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁸⁹ Constantin Mochoulsky, "Je ne l'avais jamais vue aussi touchée par l'Esprit," in *Le jour du Saint-Esprit*, ed. Paul Ladouceur, trans. Hélène Arjakovsky-Klépinine, Françoise Lhoest, Bertrand Jeuffrain, Alexandre Nicolsky, Nikita Struve and Jérôme Lefert (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 2011), 91.

Skobtsova herself recognised that the ‘mysticism of human communion’ was the theme of her life and, as such, central to her theological writings. This quotation highlights once again Skobtsova’s insistence that by communing with the neighbour, one can encounter Christ. Yet, despite her seemingly negative assessment of asceticism in this quotation, we have seen throughout this thesis how Skobtsova wished to innovate an Orthodox understanding of ascetic spirituality, rather than disregard it.

We have already noted Skobtsova’s understanding of sin, as identified by Rowan Williams, as a refusal to be touched by the life of another in the form of a strident individualism.⁵⁹⁰ A failure to practice the love of the neighbour as found in Skobtsova’s ascetic spirituality, therefore, would be framed in a narrative of sin. This goes to the heart of Skobtsova’s desire to maintain a balance between loving God and the neighbour, and a wider desire to strive towards wholeness. In a short article entitled ‘On the Antichrist’, we see how Skobtsova’s understanding of sin is placed into this approach to wholeness. Sin, for Skobtsova, is not simply an individualism and a refusal to be touched by the life of another, it is also that which undermines wholeness and creativity.

In ‘On the Antichrist’, Skobtsova claims that the ‘curse of original sin’ is found in lust and mortality. This is found in both Adam and Eve, who show the corruption of human nature, as well as the image of God, in equal measure. The redemption of the world from these two aspects of original sin was found in the work of both Mary and Christ. The Ever-Virgin Mary overcame the lustful nature of the human condition, and Christ defeated death in and through the resurrection. The

⁵⁹⁰ Williams, *Looking East in Winter*, 221.

fullness of humanity, therefore, is found in the image of unity which is portrayed by the icon of Mother and Child: ‘The Mother of God, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, and the Son of God having been incarnated of Her, -- represent a twofold fullness of the human image in the heavens, -- the plenitude of the revealed Sophia, the icon-image of Mother with ChristChild, of motherhood and Sonship. By this was broken the curse of the serpent.’⁵⁹¹ In contrast, the archetype of sin, which is found in the Antichrist, is at once both a denial of the icon of Mary, as well as the icon of Christ. The Antichrist is therefore, ‘Anti-Mother, Anti-Mary, and Anti-Child, Anti-Christ’ and in this duality is Anti-Sophia.⁵⁹² The Antichrist is the archetype of a proliferation of the two-fold aspect of the curse of original sin, undermining the redemption found in the icon of the mother-child, spreading death and lasciviousness as opposed to birth and resurrection. For Skobtsova, therefore, sin is not just a strident individualism, but an undermining of the wholeness which is found in Sophia, the life-giving quality of birth, and the transformation of resurrection. Egoism, however, undermines this wholeness and is understood as sinful within this framework. While the Antichrist is the ultimate example of such sin, Skobtsova notes that these qualities can also form a part of the general, fallen human condition.

As we have already suggested, for Skobtsova the positive vision of wholeness and Sophia is found in the image of Mother-Child; something which she inherits from her spiritual father, Bulgakov. In an unpublished essay entitled ‘On the Judgement of Solomon’, Skobtsova extensively quotes Bulgakov’s writings, especially ‘The Burning Bush’ and ‘Hypostasis and Hypostaticity’.⁵⁹³ She notes, “The world in

⁵⁹¹ Monachina Maria (Skobtsova), “Concerning the Antichrist,” trans. Fr S. Janos, accessed January 8, 2023, http://www.berdyaev.com/skobtsova/de_AntiChriste.html

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Protopresbyter Sergii Bulgakov, “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to the Unfading Light,” trans. Anastassy Brandon Gallagher and Irina Kukota, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 49, no. 1-2 (2005): 5–46.

Sophia is the Child of divine birth, and at the same time it is the Mother, the Child-Mother. In his authentic and innermost being, each person is the Child-Mother." This phrase may be the key to understanding the Judgment of Solomon.⁵⁹⁴ Skobtsova takes Bulgakov's words here and applies them to the story of the Judgement of Solomon. What is significant to recognise is that Skobtsova's vision of sophianic unity is found in the image of the mother-child. Natalia Ermolaev explores in helpful depth the similarities and divergences between Skobtsova's thought in this area, and the influence of Bulgakov.⁵⁹⁵

While Ermolaev's thesis opens up some of the content of Skobtsova's thought, especially her Mariology, this thesis as a whole has sought to develop a broader picture of Skobtsova's theology. The place of sacrifice is central to that, and interesting examples of this can be found in 'On the Judgment of Solomon'. This article contrasts the relationship between sophianic unity, as found in the mother-child image, with a sinful corruption of this ideal, similar to that of the Antichrist. This article highlights the way in which sacrifice can be negative in Skobtsova's system, in addition to some of the paradoxes which are found in authentic sacrifice. Skobtsova interprets the judgement of Solomon story (1 Kings 3:16-28) through a sophiological lens. King Solomon, acting as Judge and representing Divine Wisdom, arbitrates a dispute between two mothers who both claim that the child brought before the King belongs to them. The solution he proposes is cutting the child in half and giving each mother half of the child. One mother agrees, while the other protests and pleads that the child goes to the other woman, if it means that he lives.

⁵⁹⁴ Ermolaev, *Modernism, Motherhood and Mariology*, 270: citing Bulgakov, "Hypostasis and Hypostaticity," 36.

⁵⁹⁵ See: Ermolaev, *Modernism, Motherhood and Mariology*, 87-102.

The false mother in this narrative represents inauthentic sacrifice. She is willing to allow the death of the child as a form of appeasement, inspired by jealousy and loss. In a sense, this could be interpreted as a form of sacrifice, as the loss of the child is viewed (albeit negatively and inauthentically) as the means by which to achieve a resolution. Skobtsova characterises the false mother's actions, however, as the path to chaos, nothingness, and destruction. This stands in stark contrast to the model of wholeness, birth, and life, which is found in the archetypal image of Mother and Child, the Virgin Mother and Christ, and resonates with Skobtsova's understanding of the Antichrist as lustful and death-bearing. Similarly, the false mother here represents the severance of wholeness and Sophia. If the false mother had achieved her desire, then Skobtsova claims, '...all of the Wisdom in creation would be destroyed, the world would fall apart, and eternal chaos would be victorious.'⁵⁹⁶

The true mother also displays a particular, and at times almost paradoxical, vision of sacrifice. This form of sacrifice is diametrically opposed to that of the false mother, as a positive vision of sacrifice. However, it involves a greater level of risk. The true mother is willing to sacrifice her own unity with the child in order to save his life:

'...the True Mother begins a certain extreme, willful abandoning of her Sophianic essence to chaos. In reality this is practically self-destruction, because the Child-Mother - not the mother alone - was the single Sophianic organism (*edinnyi sofïnyi organizm*). Having given him away to the false mother, renouncing him to chaos, the true mother also stops being a mother and becomes nothing.'⁵⁹⁷

A key distinction between the sacrifice of the false mother and the sacrifice of the true mother is the willingness to offer a form of self-sacrifice. The true mother is willing to

⁵⁹⁶ Skobtsova, "On the Judgment of Solomon" in Ermolaev, *Modernism, Motherhood and Mariology*, 271.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

sever her own sophianic unity for the sake of the child: ‘Give him away - take him from me - don't split him in half, but split our wholeness [цельность]’.⁵⁹⁸ This means that she is willing to become nothing. However, this movement also risks renouncing the son to chaos. ‘The true essence of creation, the Mother-Child, is creatively-sacrificially destroyed. In the name of the child the mother gives him away, sacrifices him to chaos, and tosses him into nothingness.’⁵⁹⁹ This act is full of tragedy and contradiction. Indeed, if this were the ending of the story then the world would be thrown into chaos. However, the Judgment of Solomon ends the narrative and provides the resolution which only Wisdom can bring. Through the mother’s sacrifice and willing separation from her son, and the unity which this represents, chaos has been overcome. For Skobtsova, this mirrors the act of Mary and Christ at Golgotha: ‘...here the Mother, the God-bearing world, gives her Child to the gaping, ripped apart chaos, to be reunited with him through this sacrificial act.’⁶⁰⁰ ‘On the Judgment of Solomon’ reveals Skobtsova’s approach to sacrifice which is centred around relationship. Authentic sacrifice is that which seeks to maintain wholeness in the unity of relationship, or to honour that relationship through a willingness to enter into chaos and nothingness on behalf of the other. Inauthentic sacrifice is that which reveals a self-centred, non-relational approach.

A person must strive to emulate this mother-child relationship as, for Skobtsova, they are an icon of both Christ and Mary: ‘Every man is not only the image of God, the icon of Divinity, not only a brother in the flesh of the God-man, deified in Him, and honored by His cross, and in this sense a son of the Mother of God. Every man is also the image of the Mother of God, who bears Christ in herself

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., 272.

through the Holy Spirit. In this sense, every man deep inside is this bi-une mystery of Godmanhood.⁶⁰¹ In this sense, a person reflects the bi-une mystery of the mother-child relationship, but must also emulate the dual aspects of these two characters. Key parts of this emulation of both Christ and Mary are centred around sacrifice. An emulation of Mary is characterised by a willingness to be pierced by the sword of another's suffering. This requires a suspension of any mercenary desires on the part of the individual towards their neighbour, and a willingness to offer their own self for the other in solidarity and love.

An emulation of Christ's sacrificial nature is also important for Skobtsova, however, in order to maintain the fullness of this image.⁶⁰² "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son" [Jn 3:16], calling us too, to the same love. There is not and there cannot be any following in the steps of Christ without taking upon ourselves a certain share, small as it may be, of participation in this sacrificial deed of love.⁶⁰³ For Skobtsova, imitating Christ and Mary is part of the spiritual life, and both forms of imitation involve sacrifice. A person takes the responsibility of pain and sin of the world, following Christ, upon themselves, and is pierced by the sword of the suffering of the other, following Mary. To actively take upon oneself the pain of the other mirrors Christ's love and requires a struggle against egoism and exclusivity. Similarly, allowing oneself to be open to the inner life of another, as Mary shows in her maternal connection to her Son, also requires the kind of renunciation of egoism which allows for a self-giving, and entering into the inner life of another. In order to appreciate the dualities in Skobtsova's thinking, and her desire

⁶⁰¹ Skobtsova, "On the Imitation of the Mother of God," EW, 69.

⁶⁰² This is where Ermolaev's thesis needs nuance, with a recognition that an imitation of Christ is as important as an imitation of Mary. There is a delicate balance in her work between the unity of Godmanhood and Godmotherhood, and the two aspects are not in contradiction or competition, as Ermolaev perhaps suggests.

⁶⁰³ Skobtsova, "The Second Gospel Commandment," EW, 48-9.

to maintain balance between them, it is necessary to recognise the importance which she places on emulating both Christ and Mary in the spiritual life. Whilst Christ and Mary's suffering for the other is broadly distinguished by an active and passive approach, Skobtsova promotes an emulation of the sacrifice of egoism and exclusivity which they both display.

1. Creativity and Culture

Practical implementation is at the heart of Skobtsova's theological system. Her theological writings are informed by her social engagement, and in turn, her thought is foundational for her activity. We have seen throughout this thesis how Skobtsova promotes a movement towards the world, and an uncompromising engagement with the life of the other, by loving both God and the neighbour. Skobtsova wishes to create a culture of wholeness, across all aspects of life. The activity of the church should not be cloistered or cut off from the fullness of human creativity. We have seen how important human creativity is for Skobtsova and we may also identify the place of sacrifice in this area of her work.

We have seen Skobtsova's understanding of creativity as human acts which are rooted in a Divine source. Authentic, good creativity relies not on human powers, but on a recognition of God as the ultimate and absolute Creator (even our perception of creation needs to be aligned with God's, in order to avoid an inauthentic refraction in our perception of good creations). Like Samson and David, the strength for human creations do not originate in human powers, but in the transcendent reality. We have seen in Skobtsova's work that a sacrifice of the will is needed in order for human constructs and creation to be 'good'. Repeatedly, Skobtsova emphasises the importance of sacrificing one's will to the Father, emulating the actions of Christ,

whose will was one with the Father's. In order for human creations to be similarly authentic and rooted in God, a person must sacrifice their own egoism and engraft themselves onto God through Christ the true vine.

The activity of the Church, of the Body of Christ, and the individual, needs to flow from such an understanding of human creativity, and this form of submission to the will of God. Only from this foundation can human creations strive towards the incarnation of *Godmanhood*, reflecting a divine-human synthesis in the world. This is a social vision, as much as an ecclesial vision (the two are aligned and overlap in Skobtsova's work, as she does not wish to make a strong separation between the Church and the world).

Other social, political theories are therefore judged against the standard of wholeness by Skobtsova. This is where communism, totalitarianisms and even democracy fall short, as they fail to reflect the divine and the human elements of our existence. Furthermore, we have observed how Skobtsova frequently critiques social theories for undermining the fullness of the human person, in its freedom, equality and creativity. The forms of sacrifice which Skobtsova identifies in totalitarian systems (submission to the party line, a solitary ideology, or the absolute rule of a single leader) are misplaced, as they undermine the striving for synthesis which we have identified at the heart of Skobtsova's theology.

2. Suffering and Sacrifice

It is important to note that Skobtsova's treatment of sacrifice, as it has been outlined here, does not attribute positive value to suffering or any form of masochistic self-

abnegation. The valuation of Elina Kahla in this respect is misplaced.⁶⁰⁴ This thesis has shown how Skobtsova's ascetic theology rests on the premise that asceticism has the goal of transformation, not renunciation. Suffering holds a similar place in her thought. In a short article entitled 'Suffering and the Cross', Skobtsova makes this clear and draws a distinction between her spirituality and a particular strain of Catholic mysticism which revolves around suffering which she characterises as a 'cult of suffering'. This is pertinent for a discussion of sacrifice, as often sacrifice involves a voluntary acceptance of suffering in some form.

Skobtsova recognises that suffering is a part of the human condition. The eternal example of suffering is death. However, death has been defeated through Christ's salvific work. Skobtsova suggests that Christ's defeat of death represents the climax of Divine mercy, which always seeks to aid human suffering: 'God does not only not punish by suffering, He even ameliorates the power of suffering by His mercy. And the utmost manifestation of Divine mercy -- is the voluntary sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the world.'⁶⁰⁵ Whilst Christ vanquishes the eternal consequence of suffering and death through His sacrifice, suffering remains as part of the human condition in its temporal form. Skobtsova does not wish to give any positive meaning to the place of suffering in the world, as she makes clear in 'Birth in Death'.⁶⁰⁶ However, in 'Suffering and the Cross', Skobtsova articulates the way in which suffering should be viewed in a Christian framework. Following 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 and Matthew 26:38-39, suffering should be regarded with humility and sobriety.

⁶⁰⁴ Elina Kahla, "Russian Idea in Exile: Mother Maria Skobtsova's Apocalyptic Thought" in *Acta Byzantina Fennica* (Helsinki: Finnish Society for Byzantine Studies, 2005), pp. 167-195.

⁶⁰⁵ Skobtsova, 'Suffering and the Cross', trans. Fr S Janos, accessed: http://www.berdyaev.com/skobtsova/suffering_cross.html

⁶⁰⁶ Мать Мария (Скобцова), "Рождение в смерти," in *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 2 (YMCA Press: Paris, 1992), 155-166.

This humility recognises the potential for God's grace to transform suffering into joy, and a humble acceptance of suffering when this is not realised: 'Humility and sobriety in the acceptance of suffering and even death -- God hath granted, and God hath taken, -- this is undoubtedly a characteristic insight with Orthodox ascetics.'⁶⁰⁷

In this light, Skobtsova makes it clear that she does not advocate for the glorification of suffering: 'It is completely unacceptable to exult in one's suffering, to be boastfully proud of it.'⁶⁰⁸ She resists the relationship towards suffering which is found in certain Catholic mystics such as Angela de Foligno or St Gertrude, whose reflections Skobtsova characterises as a morbid fascination with wounds and pain: 'There exists there a cult of suffering... There they count the blows, with which Christ was smitten, they note all the implements of torture, employed by the executioners, and they ponder their refined cruelty.'⁶⁰⁹ While Skobtsova does promote a form of sacrificial love which willingly accepts the possibility of suffering on behalf of another, at no point does she wish to glorify this suffering. Rather, suffering as a part of sacrificial love must be endured with humility and sobriety, in the hope of transformation.

Mother Maria Skobtsova's theological writings present a rich theological worldview, which has been overlooked for too long. At the heart of Skobtsova's theological writings is a desire to maintain a balance between the love of God and the love of the

⁶⁰⁷ Skobtsova, 'Suffering and the Cross', trans. Fr S Janos, accessed: http://www.berdyaev.com/skobtsova/suffering_cross.html

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

neighbour. This striving for a balance between the dual commandment is situated in a wider theological concern for wholeness, as inspired by the Russian religious renaissance and particularly the notions of *sobornost* and *Godmanhood*. In order to achieve this wholeness, sacrifice is necessary. In Skobtsova's system, this sacrifice takes on a variety of forms. It is sacrifice which transforms egoism and individualism into a concern for the neighbour, and a world-focused spirituality. It is sacrifice which allows for authentic love towards God and the neighbour, and it is sacrifice which is necessary to authentically create, by giving one's will to God who is the source of all creativity. Emigration allowed Skobtsova creative freedom in exploring the connection of the Russian religious renaissance to her contemporary situation. Skobtsova's monastic and ascetic interpretation of this inheritance is creative and challenging, as she calls for innovation in the Church. Her own life is intimately connected with her theological writings, as she sought to implement the kind of social engagement which she encouraged in her Parisian context. Sacrifice was key to this, and it took on a new and total form in her willingness to go to her death in solidarity with the other at Ravensbrück concentration camp. This thesis has sought to uncover the theological writings of Mother Maria Skobtsova, and whilst there is still much engagement to be done with the intellectual legacy of the theologian, artist, monastic and Saint, it has identified the sacrificial form of love which she pursued in order to incarnate wholeness in the world, and the creative, fiery vision of this modern Orthodox theologian.

Bibliography

Skobtsova's Original Publications (cited in this thesis)

Данилов, Юрий (Pseudonym of E. Ю. Скобцова). “Последние Римляне.” *Воля России* no. 18-19 (1924).

Кузьмина-Караваева, Е. *Скифские черепки*. СПб.: Цех поэтов, 1912.

Кузьмина-Караваева, Е. *Юрали*. Петроград, 1915.

Кузьмина-Караваева, Е. *Руфь*. Петроград, 1916.

Мария (Скобцова), Монахиня. “К делу.” *Новый Град*, no. 5 (1932).

Мария (Скобцова), Монахиня. “Крест и серп с молотом.” *Новый Град*, no. 6 (1933): 78-81.

Мария, Монахиня. “Истоки творчества,” *Путь* no. 43 (1934): 35-48.

_____ “Мистика человекообщения.” *Круг* no. 1 (1936): 152-8.

_____ “Под знаменем нашего времени.” *Новый Град* no 12 (1937): 115-122.

_____ “Под знаком гибели.” *Новый Град* no. 13 (1938): 145-152.

_____ “Оправдание фарисейства.” *Путь* no. 56 (1938): 37-46.

_____ “Расизм и религия.” *Русские Записки* no. 11 (1938): 150-157; “Четыре портрета,” *Новый Град* no. 14 (1939): 26-40.

_____ “О подражании Богоматери.” *Путь* no. 59 (1939): 19-30.

_____ “Вторая Евангельская заповедь.” *Православное дело*. Париж, 1939.

_____ “Социальный вопрос и социальная реальность.” *Новый Град* № 4 (1932).

Мария, Мать (Скобцова). "Аскетика Человекообщения." *Вестник* по. 36 (1955):
7-12.

_____ *Стихи*. Berlin: Petropolis, 1937.

Скобцова, Е. "Святая земля." *Путь* по. 6 (1927): 95-101.

_____ "К истокам." *Современные записки* по. 38 (1929): 488-500.

_____ *А. Хомяков*. Париж: YMCA-Press, 1929.

_____ *Достоевский и современность*. Париж: YMCA-Press, 1929.

_____ *Миросозерцание Владимира Соловьева*. Париж: YMCA-Press, 1929.

_____ "В поисках синтеза." *Путь* по 16 (1929): 49-68.

_____ "О юродивых." *Вестник Русского Студенческого Христианского
Движения*, по. 8-9, (1930): 3-13.

_____ "О Суде Соломона и о Материнстве." *Mother Mariia Papers, Box 1,
Notebook V, 1-10*. Bakhmeteff Archive, Rare Book and Manuscript Library,
Columbia University [undated].

Collections of Skobtsova's work (Russian)

Кузьмина-Караваева, Е. Ю. *Избранное*. Edited by Н. В. Осьмакова. Москва:
Советская Россия, 1991.

Мария, Мать (Елизавета Кузьмина-Караваева). *Жатва Духа: Религиозно-
философские Сочинения*. Санкт-Петербург: Искусство, 2004.

Мария, Мать. *Стихи*. Париж: Издание общества друзей матери Марии, 1949.

Мария, Мать (Скобцова). *Стихотворения, Поэмы, Мистерии, Воспоминания об аресте и лагере в Равенсбрюк*. Paris: La Presse Française et Étrangère, 1947.

_____ *Воспоминания, Статьи, Очерки* Том 1 - 2. Paris: YMCA Press, 1992.

_____ (Е. Ю. Кузьмина-Караваева). *Россия и Эмиграция*. Edited by Т.В. Викторова, Л.В. Крошкина, Н.В. Ликвинцева, Е.Л. Майданович, Н.А. Струве, А.И. Шмаина-Великанова. Москва, Париж: Русский Путь, YMCA Press, 2019.

Скобцова, Э. Ю. (Мать Мария). *Жатва Духа: композиция, предисловие, примечание* vol. 1-2. Edited by А. Н. Шустов. Томск: Водолей, 1994.

Skobtsova's Works (and Collections) in Translation

“Lives of the Saints: Vitalius the Monk.” *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban & St. Sergius*, [translator unnamed] no. 1 (June 1928), 4-8. (This *Life* has no authorship listed, but I have identified it as the work of Skobtsova).

Skobtsova, E. (Mother Maria), *The Crucible of Doubts*. Translated by Fr S. Janos. Mohrsville, PA: FRSJ Publications, 2016.

Skobtsova, Maria. *Mother Maria Skobtsova: Essential Writings*. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.

Skobtsov, Mère Marie. *Le sacrement du frère*. Translated by Hélène Arjakovsky-Klépinine, Françoise Lhoest and Claire Vajou. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001.

Sainte Marie de Paris (Mère Marie Skobtsov, 1891-1945). *Le jour du Saint-Esprit*.

Edited by Paul Ladouceur, translated by Hélène Arjakovsky-Klépinine,
Françoise Lhoest, Bertrand Jeuffrain, Alexandre Nicolosky, Nikita Struve and
Jérôme Lefert. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2011.

Bibliography

A Monk of the Eastern Church. *Orthodox Spirituality: An Outline of the Orthodox
Ascetical and Mystical Tradition*. London: SPCK, Fellowship of SS. Alban
and Sergius, 1961.

Агеева, Лариса. *Петербург Меня Победил: Документальное Повествование о
Жизни Э. Ю. Кузьминой-Караваевой, Матери Марии*. Санкт-Петербург:
Журнал Нева, 2003.

Alfeyev, Hilarion. *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian: Cistercian Studies Series,
175*. Collegeville, Minnesota, 2008.

Arjakovsky, Antoine. *The Way: Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in
Paris and Their Journal, 1925-1940*. Translated by Jerry Ryan, edited by John
A. Jillions and Michael Plekon. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre
Dame Press, 2013.

Bauerova, Katerina. "The Play of the Semiotic and the Symbolic: The Authenticity of
the Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova." *Feminist Theology* 22, no. 3 (2014):
290-301.

- _____ “Motherhood as a Space for the Other: A Dialogue between Mother Maria Skobtsova and Hélène Cixous.” *Feminist theology* 26, no. 2 (2018-01): 133-146.
- _____ “Emigration as Taking Roots and Giving Wings: Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdyaev and Mother Maria Skobtsova.” *Communio Viatorum* 54, no. 2 (2012): 184-202.
- Behr-Sigel, Elisabeth. *The Place of the Heart: An Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality*. Translated by Fr. Stephen Bigham. Torrance, California: Oakwood Publications, 1992.
- Benevich, Gregori. "Mother Mariya (Skobtsova): A Model of Lay Service." *Religion, State & Society* 27, no. 1 (1999): 101-08.
- Berdyaev, N. A. “In Memory of Mother Maria” in E. Skobtsova (Mother Maria), *The Crucible of Doubts*. Translated by Fr S. Janos, i-ii. Mohrsville, PA: FRSJ Publications, 2016.
- _____ *The Russian Idea*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948.
- _____ *The Meaning of the Creative Act*. Translated by Donald A. Lowrie. San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009.
- _____ *Leontiev*. Translated by George Reavey. Orono, Me.: Academic International, 1968.
- _____ *The Brightest Lights of the Silver Age: Essays on Russian Religious Thinkers*. Compiled and translated by Boris Jakim. Kettering, OH: Semantron Press, 2015.

Berlin, Isaiah. *Russian Thinkers* Second Edition. Edited by Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly. London: Penguin Classics, 2013.

Bird, Robert. "General Introduction." In *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, translated and edited by Boris Jakim and Robert Bird, 7-25. Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998.

Blok, Alexander. *Poems of Sophia*. Translated and edited by Boris Jakim. Kettering, OH: Semantron Press, 2014.

Bulgakov, Sergei. *Sophia the Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*. Translated by Patrick Thompson, O. Fielding Clarke and Xenia Braikevitc. [Place of publication undetermined]: Lindisfarne Press, 1993.

_____. *Philosophy of Economy*. Translated by Catherine Evtuhov. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000.

_____. *The Friend of the Bridegroom: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Forerunner*. Translated by Boris Jakim. Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.

_____. *The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*. Translated by Thomas Allan Smith. Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009.

_____. *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*. Translated by Thomas Allan Smith. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010.

_____. *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations*. Translated by Thomas Allan Smith. Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012.

_____ “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to the Unfading Light.” Translated by Anastassy Brandon Gallagher and Irina Kukota, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 49, no. 1-2 (2005): 5–46.

_____ *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*. Edited by Rowan Williams. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.

Byrnes, Robert F. *Pobedonostsev: His Life and Thought*. Bloomington and London 1968.

Cassian, St. John. “On the Eight Vices.” In *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume One*, translated and edited by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware. New York: Farrar, Straus and Girous, 1983.

Chaadaev, Peter. “Philosophical Letters Addressed to a Lady.” In *Philosophical Works of Peter Chaadaev*, edited by Raymond T. McNally and Richard Tempest. Dordrecht: Springer, 1991.

Chernyshevsky, Nikolai. *What is to be done?* Translated by Michael R. Katz. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Coates, Ruth. *Deification in Russian Religious Thought: Between the Revolutions, 1905-1917*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Desanti, Dominique. *La sainte et l’incroyante: Rencontres avec Mere Marie*. Paris: Bayard, 2007.

Dobieszewski, Janusz. “Peter Chaadaev: The Founding Myth of Russian Philosophy.” In *Peter Chaadaev: Between the Love of Fatherland and the Love of Truth*, edited by Artur Mrowczynski-Van Allen, Teresa Obolevitch, Pawel Rojek, 151-165. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2018.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Karamazov Brothers*. Translated by Ignat Avsey. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

_____. *Demons*. Translated by Michael R. Katz. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Ermolaev, Natalia. "Modernism, Motherhood and Mariology: The Poetry and Theology of Elizaveta Skobtsova (Mother Maria)." PhD diss., Columbia University, 2010.

Evtuhov, Catherine. "Vladimir Soloviev as a Religious Philosopher." In *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, edited by Caryl Emerson, George Pattison and Randall A. Poole, 205-222. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Fedotov, George P. *The Russian Religious Mind (1): Kievan Christianity the 10th to the 13th Centuries (Vol. 3 in The Collected Works of George P. Fedotov)*. Belmont, Massachusetts: Nordland Publishing Company, 1975.

Fedotov, George P. *The Russian Religious Mind (II): The Middle Ages, the 13th to the 15th Centuries (Vol. 4 in The Collected Works of George P. Fedotov)*. Belmont, Massachusetts: Nordland Publishing Company, 1975.

Fedotov, G. P. "The Religious Sources of Russian Populism." *The Russian Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Apr., 1942), 27-39.

Федотов, Г.П. "К Жатве Духа." *Современные записки* 35 (1928): 554-555.

Frank, S. L. *The Spiritual Foundations of Society: An Introduction to Social Philosophy*. Translated by Boris Jakim. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1987.

- Гутнер, Ульяна. “Мать Мария (Скобцова) в РСХД: путь к монашескому служению.” *Вестник Свято-Филаретовского института*, 2016 (17): 96-119.
- Gorodetzky, Nadejda. *The Humiliated Christ in Modern Russian Thought*. London, New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Macmillan, 1938.
- Hackel, Sergei. *Pearl of Great Price: The Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova 1891-1945*. New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982.
- _____. “‘Called to be Free’: Mother Maria and Berdiaev” *Sobornost’* 22, vol. 2 (2000): 30-43
- _____. "What Can We Say to God?: The Poetry of Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891-1945)." *Sobornost* no. 5 (1977): 377-85.
- Hagman, Patrick. *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Hamburg, G. M. “Petr Chaadaev and the Slavophile-Westernizer Debate.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, edited by Caryl Emerson, George Pattison and Randall A. Poole, 111-132. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Hennessey Olsen, Alexandra. “‘De Historiis Sanctorum’: A Generic Study of Hagiography.” *Genre* 13 (1980): 410.
- Herzen, Alexander. *My Past and Thoughts vol. 2*. Translated by Constance Garnett. London: Chatto and Windus, 1927.
- Isaac of Nineveh. *The Ascetical Homilies of Mar Isaac of Nineveh*. Edited by Paul Bedjan. Piscataway, NJ, 2007.

- Isaac of Nineveh, St. *On Ascetical Life*. Translated by Mary Hansbury. Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989.
- Ivanov, Sergey A. *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Jakim, Boris, Robert Bird, trans. and eds. *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*. Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998.
- Jillions, John A. "Orthodox Christianity in the West: the ecumenical challenge." In *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, edited by Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff, 276-291. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Kahla, Elina. "Russian Idea in Exile: Mother Maria Skobtsova's Apocalyptic Thought." *Acta Byzantina Fennica*. Helsinki: Finnish Society for Byzantine Studies, 2005: 167-195.
- Khomiakov, Aleksei. "The Church is One." In *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, 31-53. Translated and edited by Boris Jakim and Robert Bird. Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books.
- Krivochéine, Xenia. *La Beauté Salvatrice Mère Maria (Skobtsov) : Peintures, Dessins, Broderies*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2012.
- Ladouceur, Paul. *Modern Orthodox Theology*. London: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2019.
- _____. "The experience and understanding of death in Saint Maria of Paris." *Sobornost* 28, no. 1 (2006): 21-40.

Leontiev, Konstantin. *Against the Current: Selections from the novels, essays, notes and letters of Konstantin Leontiev*. Edited with an introduction and notes by George Ivask. Translated from the Russian by George Reavey. New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969.

Likvintseva, Natalia. "Overcoming the Gap between Religion and Culture: The Life and Works of Mother Maria (Skobtsova)." In *Apology of Culture: Religion and Culture in Russian Thought*, edited by Artur Mrówczyński-Van Allen, Teresa Obolevitch, and Paweł Rojek, 79-86. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015.

Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Translated by members of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius. Cambridge, London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd.

Louth, Andrew. *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the present*. London: SPCK, 2015.

Malia, Martin. *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism, 1812-1855*. Harvard University Press, 1961.

Манухина Т. "Монахиня Мария". *Новый журнал* 41 (1955): 137-57.

Медведев, А. А. "Мать Мария (Скобцова) и религиозно-философский Ренессанс начала XX века: диалог с В. В. Розановым." *Вестник Свято-Филаретовского института* 24 (2017): 101 -123.

Michelson, Patrick Lally. *Beyond the Monastery Walls: The Ascetic Revolution in Russian Orthodox Thought 1814-1914*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2017.

- Мочульский К. “Монахиня Мария Скобцова.” *Третий час*, no. 1 (1946): 64-73.
- Monas, Sidney. “Leontiev: A Meditation.” *The Journal of Modern History* 43, no. 3 (Sep. 1971): 483-494.
- Mrowczynski-Van Allen, Artur, Teresa Obolevitch, Pawel Rojek, eds. *Peter Chaadaev: Between the Love of Fatherland and the Love of Truth*. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2018.
- Murav, H. *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique*. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1992.
- Nelson, Dale Lawrence. “Konstantin Leontiev and the Orthodox East.” PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1975.
- Obolevitch, Teresa. "All-Unity According to V. Soloviev and S. Frank: A Comparative Analysis." *Forum Philosophicum* 15, no. 2 (2010): 413-25.
- Оболевиц, Тереза. *Мирра Лот-Бородина Историк, Литератор, Философ, Богослов*. Санкт-Петербург: Нестор-История, 2020.
- Perillo, Jesse. "The Prophetic without Power and Disruption without Direction: The Witness of Holy Fools." *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36, no. 1 (2016): 145-162.
- Peterson, Ronald E. *A History of Russian Symbolism: Linguistic & Literary Studies in Eastern Europe, Vol. 29*. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1993.
- Plekon, Michael. *Living Icons: Persons of Faith in the Eastern Church*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002.

- Plekon, Michael. "The Russian Religious Revival and Its Theological Legacy." In *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, edited by Mary Cunningham, and Elizabeth Theokritoff, 203-217. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Pyman, Avril. *A History of Russian Symbolism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Raeff, Marc. *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919-1939*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Raeff, Marc. "The Swan Song of an Emigre Journal." *The Russian Review* 43, no. 3 (1984): 277–83.
- Rosenthal, Bernice Glatzer. "Theatre As Church: The Vision of the Mystical Anarchists." *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 4, no. 2 (1977): 122-141.
- Samarin, Yury. "Introduction to the Theological Writings of Aleksei Khomiakov (excerpts)." In *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, translated and edited by Boris Jakim and Robert Bird, 161-183. Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books.
- Schrooyen, Pauline Wilhelmine. "Vladimir Solov'ëv in the Rising Public Sphere: A Reconstruction and Analysis of the Concept of Christian Politics in the Publitsistika of Vladimir Solov'ëv." PhD diss., Radboud University, 2006.
- Siljak, Ana. "Nikolai Berdiaev and the Origin of Russian Messianism." In *The Journal of Modern History* 88, no. 4 (December 2016): 737-763.
- Solovyov, Vladimir Sergeyevich. *A Solovyov Anthology*. Edited by S. L. Frank and translated by Natalie Duddington. London: SCM Press, 1950.
- Solovyov, Vladimir. *Lectures on Godmanhood*. San Rafael, CA: Semantron, 2007.

- Solovyov, Vladimir. *The Meaning of Love*. Edited and translated by Thomas R. Beyer, Jr. Lindisfarne Press, 1985.
- Stratton Smith, Timothy. *The Rebel Nun: The Moving Story of Mother Maria of Paris*. London: Souvenir Press, 1965.
- Talbot, Alice-Mary. "Hagiography." In *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, edited by Robin Cormack, John F. Haldon, and Elizabeth Jeffreys, 862-871. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Valliere, Paul. *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000.
- Walicki, Andrzej. *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-century Russian Thought*. Translated by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- _____. *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*. Translated by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- _____. "Peter Chaadaev: Prolegomena to the Philosophy of Russia as a Peripheral Empire." In *Peter Chaadaev: Between the Love of Fatherland and the Love of Truth*, edited by Artur Mrowczynski-Van Allen, Teresa Obolevitch, Pawel Rojek, 3-15. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2018.
- Ward, Benedicta, ed., and trans. *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*. London: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Ware, Kallistos. "Sobornost and eucharistic ecclesiology: Aleksei Khomiakov and his successors." *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 2-3 (2011): 216-235.

Ware, Timothy. *The Orthodox Church*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1973.

Whitehead, Claire. "Debating Detectives: The Influence of *Publitsistika* on Nineteenth-Century Russian Crime Fiction." *The Modern Language Review* 107, no. 1 (January 2012): 230-258.

Williams, Rowan. *Looking East in Winter: Contemporary Thought and the Eastern Christian Tradition*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.

_____. "Eastern Orthodox Theology." In *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, edited by David F. Ford and Rachel Muers. MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 572-588.

_____. *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction*. London: Continuum, 2009.

Zernov, Nicolas. *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

_____. *Three Russian Prophets: Khomiakov, Dostoevsky, Soloviev*. London: SCM Press, 1944.

Ziolkowski, Margaret. *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature*. Princetown, NJ: Princetown University Press, 2014.

Zwahlen, Regula M. "Different concepts of personality: Nikolaj Berdjaev and Sergej Bulgakov." *Studies in East European Thought* 64, no. 3-4 (2012): 183-204.

Websites

“A True Theologian --The Icon Painter Sister Joanna by Elizabeth Roberts,” last modified November 19, 2007,

<https://alexandermen.livejournal.com/20012.html>.

Byrnes, Robert F. “Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev” in Encyclopædia Britannica, May 17, 2020: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Konstantin-Petrovich-Pobedonostsev>. Accessed November 23, 2020.

“Мать Мария,” accessed January 5, 2023, <http://mere-marie.com/about/>.

“Мария (Скобцова) монахиня, преподобномученица,” accessed January 5, 2023, <http://www.odinblago.ru/>.

Мать Мария (Скобцова) ‘ХРИСТИАНСТВО (эссе)’ accessed August 4, 2022, <http://mere-marie.com/creation/hristianstvo/>

Skobtsova, Maria, “Concerning the Antichrist,” trans. Fr S. Janos, accessed January 8, 2023, http://www.berdyaev.com/skobtsova/de_AntiChriste.html

Skobtsova, Maria, ‘Suffering and the Cross’, trans. Fr S Janos, accessed: http://www.berdyaev.com/skobtsova/suffering_cross.html

Розанов, В. В. “О Сладчайшем Иисусе и горьких плодах мира” *Темный Лук* accessed February 17, 2020, http://www.odinblago.ru/rozanov_temn_luch/18.