

The Book Nook Review

By Kristen Michaelis

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About a year and a half ago, I was privileged to participate in a small class taught by my priest in Oregon in which we studied Bishop Ware's book, *The Orthodox Way*. In that study, I noticed that Bishop Ware seemed to quote one person more than any other -- Mother Maria of Paris. Who was this woman who dared to say, "At the Last Judgement I shall not be asked if I was successful in my ascetic exercises or how many prostrations I made in the course of my prayers. I shall be asked, did I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoners: that is all I shall be asked."?

Recently, I was scanning the shelves of Christ The Lightgiver Bookstore, and I saw her face smiling back at me. I picked up the book, titled *Mother Maria Skobtsova: Essential Writings*, and I have not regretted it. In his introduction, Jim Forest compiles one of the most complete lives of Mother Maria -- now Saint Maria Skobtsova -- available in the English language. The book contains numerous essays written by the recently canonized saint, who was a poet, political activist and writer long before she converted from atheism back to Orthodoxy. Her writings are full of calls to action -- calls to love God by loving our neighbors. To me, she sounds a lot like an Orthodox version of the American Catholic Dorothy Day.

Slightly on the intellectual side, yet very accessible to the average reader, her works are as compelling and provocative as she was. A modern-day "fool for Christ," she did not hesitate to do things like interrupt liturgy to answer the doorbell of her hospitality house, or go to the market puffing a cigarette and begging scraps for the poor. When the Nazis occupied Paris, her hospitality house turned into a gateway for smuggling Jews to safety. And, when sent to the concentration camps, Saint Maria's optimism and faith was an encouragement to all those around her. Reportedly, as the allied troops were on their way to liberate the camp, Saint Maria sacrificed her life by going to the last lineup of gas chamber executions in place of a younger Jewish woman.

If you like reading the lives of contemporary saints, want to be stirred to a more active love, or desire to be challenged to see Christ in everyone around you, this is the book for you. So, pay Christ the Lightgiver Bookstore a visit today and pick up your copy of *Mother Maria Skobtsova: Essential Writings*.