Skobtsova, Elizaveta (Mother Maria)

(1891--1945), Nun in France who helped Jews during the Holocaust. Skobtsova was born in Latvia. Before World War II, she organized welfare activities for Russians who had immigrated to France; her aide was Father Dimitri Klepinin, another Russian refugee. When the Nazis began persecuting Jews in France, Mother Maria decided that as a devoted Christian, she was required to do whatever she could to help the Jews. First, she opened the church's free kitchen to needy Jews; she then arranged temporary housing for them. Father Klepinin issued forged baptismal certificates for Jews who needed new identities. They were shocked when, in 1942, the Nazis decreed that all Jews must wear the yellow Jewish badge (see also Badge, Jewish).

In July 1942 the Nazis rounded up thousands of Jews for deportation. Mother Maria managed to enter the stadium where they were being held, and with the help of garbage collectors, smuggled out several children in garbage bins. The Nazis soon warned her to stop helping Jews, but she did not listen.

Mother Maria and Father Klepinin were arrested in February1943 and sent to concentration camps, where they both perished. Both were designated as Righteous among the Nations by Yad Vashem.