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Toward the Endless Day: The Life of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel

Olga Lossky

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Elisabeth Behr-Sigel (1907-2005) was one of the most important Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century. For seventy years she helped her church, dispersed and uprooted from its cultural heritage, adapt to a new world. Born in Alsace, France, to a Protestant father and a Jewish mother, Behr-Sigel received a master's degree in theology from the Protestant Faculty of Theology at Strasbourg and began a pastoral ministry. It lasted only a year. Already attracted by the beauty of its liturgy and by its characteristic spirituality, Behr-Sigel officially embraced the Orthodox faith at age twenty-four.

During World War II her family (husband Andre Behr and their three children) lived in Nancy, France, where Behr-Sigel taught in the public school system. She later referred to this time as her real apprenticeship in ecumenism, when people of different traditions came together in opposition to Nazism, hiding Jews and providing escape routes.

After the war she took advantage of courses at St. Sergius Theological Institute in Paris, where she later joined the faculty. Behr-Sigel also taught at the Catholic Institute of Paris, the Dominican College of Ottowa, and the Ecumenical Institute of Tantur near Jerusalem. She wrote and published books in Orthodox theology, spirituality, and the role of women in the Orthodox Church. In her retirement she continued to work on behalf of women and of the ecumenical movement.

Published in 2007 in France as *Vers le jour sans declin*, this biography by the Orthodox writer Olga Lossky will bring to English-speaking readers of all religious persuasions the life and career of a remarkable and admirable woman of faith. Behr-Sigel fully cooperated with this biography, meeting with Lossky weekly during the last year of her life and giving Lossky access to her journal and personal letters.

"Elisabeth Behr-Sigel was a remarkable woman who lived in remarkable times. In a new century and in a changed world, we need her story desperately. Olga Lossky provides the window to a life that challenges us more with every passing day. We can be grateful to Jerry Ryan and Michael Plekon for bringing this book to the English-speaking readership." --**Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Brown University**

"Behr-Sigel had to reconcile a series of antinomies in her own life--Orthodox and Protestant, woman and theologian, eastern and Parisian, Jewish and Christian, married and ascetic, western in culture and imbued with Russian spirituality--and by her accomplishment she is a witness to us. It makes for fascinating reading to watch her accomplish this *sobornicity* in person, and Olga Lossky's careful biography makes that possible." --**David Fagerberg, University of Notre Dame**

". . . a thorough, readable, and deeply sympathetic study of one of the most outstanding modern Western interpreters of orthodoxy. For anyone who imagines that this tradition is marginal to the cultural history of twentieth-century Europe, this biography of a Protestant woman of Jewish family, balancing work, parenthood (single parenthood for a lot of the time), and scholarly and creative writing ought to produce some second thoughts." --**Rowan Williams, *Times Literary Supplement***

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