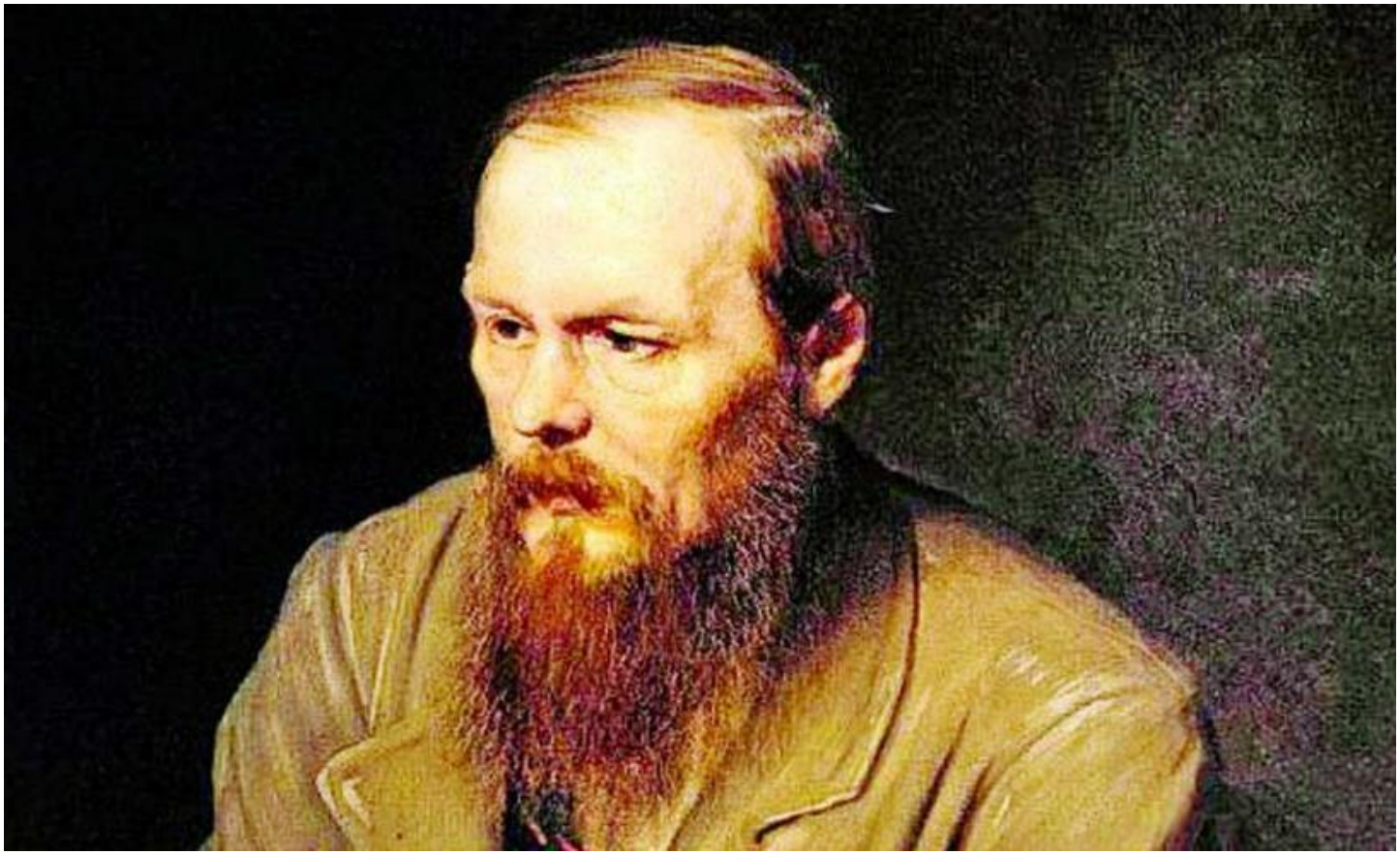
Dostoevsky and the Gospel



A lecture by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, rector of the Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies, president of the Scientific and Educational Theological Association, delivered at the National Research University "Moscow Power Engineering Institute"

"I am a child of this age, a child of unfaith and doubt, up to this day and even…to the coffin lid… And yet God gives me sometimes moments of perfect peace; at such moments I feel that I love and believe, that I am loved by others; and during such moments I formulated a creed of my own wherein all is clear and holy to me. This creed is as simple as this: I believe that there is nothing and no one more beautiful, deeper, more sympathetic and more reasonable, courageous and more perfect than Christ…"

That was what in February 1854 Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky said in his letter to Natalia Dmitrievna Fonvizina, the wife of a Decembrist, who had followed her husband to Siberia. Four years earlier, when Dostoevsky, convicted to penal servitude, shackled, arrived at the Tobolsk prison, she had got permission to see him and other convicted Petrashevtsy. She handed each of them a copy of the

Gospel, the only book that the inmates of the penal colony were allowed to have and read. So, writing his letter four years afterwards, having served his sentence of penal servitude and while waiting for the departure to Semipalatinsk for the military service as a common soldier, Dostoevsky was telling Fonvizina about his “creed,” that was not just a read-out fr om her gift-book, but an outcome of his horrible experience gained through suffering.

The copy presented to Dostoevsky by Fonvizina was the first edition of the Russian translation of the Gospel done under the leadership of Archbishop Philaret (Drozdov) later to become the Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna. The translation came out in 1823, during Emperor Alexander I’s reign, two years before the Decembrists uprising. Before the appearance of the Russian translation, the Gospel had been available only in Slavonic, while the educated class had been using the French version.

Dostoevsky never parted with this book – either during the years of his penal servitude or afterwards. It was not just a handbook for him; it was a book of his whole life. All his works after the years in the penal colony are interspersed with quotations fr om the New Testament and with allusions on the texts fr om the Holy Scripture. Many Gospel images underlie his philosophic views; many pronouncements of Christ serve as a starting point for the discourses of his novels’ characters. It is impossible to understand Dostoevsky without realizing that exceptional role which the Gospel had been playing in his life and work.

Dostoevsky was brought up in the Orthodox faith. His father was the son of a priest; he was a doctor at the Moscow hospital for the poor. His mother was known as a woman of deep Christian piety. On Sundays and feast days, the whole family in which there were seven children would go to the hospital church.

By the decision of his father, who, evidently, was a man of a stern and despotic temper, Fyodor entered St. Petersburg Military Engineering School. He had no interest in the studies and would spend all his free time reading. The idea of becoming a professional novelist, of exploring and describing the characters of people was little by little ripening in his mind.

When Dostoevsky was eighteen, he lost his father, who met his tragic death in their family estate of Darovoe: he was killed by local peasants; and for two days his body was lying in open field.

The father’s death became a turning point in Fyodor’s life. He was deeply grieving the loss. According to the writer’s daughter, it was then that the first symptoms of epilepsy appeared. According to another witness, almost overnight an easy-going frolic boy turned into an unsociable pensive young man.

In 1844 Dostoevsky retired fr om the military engineering service, and in 1845 completed his first novel,

“Poor Folk”. The work on this novel had been a very tedious experience making Dostoyevsky doubt that it would be any success. He was even pondering a suicide if he failed with it. As he wrote to his brother, “I probably would hang myself if this affair of mine does not work out, ,…or, probably, go downright into the Neva, if I find no place for the novel.”

But contrary to the author’s fears, the novel was a loud success to the effect that Dostoevsky started to be spoken of as a new phenomenon in Russian literature. Nekrasov, having read the novel overnight, rushed to see Dostoevsky at four in the morning to express his admiration. Then, with the words, “A new Gogol has appeared!” he handed over the manuscript to Belinsky. The latter also read the novel without tearing himself away fr om the text. He wanted to meet the author and asked Nekrasov: “Please bring him over right away!”

Belinsky made a striking impression on young Dostoevsky. Many years later, the writer himself admitted so, saying, “I found him to be an ardent socialist; the first subject he met me with was atheism…As a socialist he was to begin with deposing Christianity; he knew that revolution had to begin with atheism… But there remained the radiant person of Christ, who was extremely difficult to fight with. However, with his incessant, unquenchable enthusiasm, Belinsky would not be stopped even by this insurmountable obstacle…”

Under the influence of Belinsky Dostoevsky got interested in the ideas of socialism. He began to attend meetings of young freethinkers on Fridays at the house of Petrashevsky, an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A widely mixed public attended those meetings – from the utopian dreamers to the radical revolutionaries with a mind on a coup d’état and overthrow of the monarchy.

At one of such meetings Dostoevsky read out the ill-fated Belinsky’s letter to Gogol, in which Belinsky was denouncing the great writer for defending religion and the Orthodox Church. This episode became one of the main points of the accusation put forward against Dostoevsky when he, together with other members of the group, was arrested and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress.

The trial of the Petrashevtsy case lasted for eight months and ended with an accusatory verdict depriving the defendants of all the rights of a civil status and convicting them to an eight-year penal servitude in exile.

A little later there came out a resolution by Nicholas I commuting the sentence to four years of penal servitude to be followed by four years of military service as common soldiers. But at the same time the Emperor wanted the “ritual” of the show execution to be duly performed over all the conspirators. Evidently the idea was to teach them a lesson and to warn liberally-minded public activists about what awaited them if they did not give up nurturing revolutionary plots.

All the details of the execution ceremony were scrupulously thought out personally by the Emperor. On a frosty December morning, the convicts were brought to the Semenovsky Platz, and the sentence of death penalty was read out to them. Three of them were seized, robed in white shirts and tied to stakes. Dostoevsky was among the next three in the line thinking that no more than ten minutes were left for him to live. A priest approached the convicts with a cross; all Petrashevtsy kissed it. But after each of them had mentally said a final good-bye to life, there came an announcement surprising the convicts with the Emperor's great mercy: the capital punishment was commuted to penal servitude.

The four years of the hard labour found reflection in "The House of the Dead". At the age of eighteen Dostoevsky dreamed of studying the characters of different people, and fate provided him with an opportunity to realize this dream. Such opportunity was not available to any other Russian writer of the 19th century. They all, with a rare exception, belonged to the gentry class, and in their books depicted different kinds of the "nests of gentlefolk" in which the storms of gentry's passions were waging. And even if they happened to cast an occasional glance in the direction of common people, it was a kind of an outside condescending glance.

Dostoevsky was destined to "go to the people," not how other writers did or how the revolutionaries were making their "going to the people:" with the purpose of contaminating them with their ideas. Dostoevsky, unlike them, happened to find himself at the very bottom of the social pyramid, among the insulted and injured, the humiliated and defamed, who were overcrowding prison cells.

It was there, confined within the penal colony, that Dostoevsky came to know the abyss that may open wide in man's soul and lead him to terrible, monstrous crimes. Many characters of his novels commit crimes or nurture criminal designs. Dostoevsky knew well such abyss of human heart, wh ere "…God and devil are fighting there, and the battlefield is the heart of man," as one of his characters says.

But the penal servitude had neither broken, nor embittered Dostoevsky, though at times his sufferings there were unbearable. He even said, remembering those four years, that it had been the time when he felt as if he were buried alive in a closed coffin…

What helped him endure the sufferings, pain and humiliation? What was the source of hope for him? The New Testament received from Natalia Fonvizina was not the least of what was supporting him then. For the long four years it had been kept under his pillow as his only piece of reading. He had studied this book inside and out and committed to memory many words of Christ. Christ's radiant image that had survived the imminent danger of being obliterated under the influence of Belinsky, was shining again in the heart of the writer never to fade away thereafter.

This is precisely what Dostoevsky meant to say in the letter to Fonvizina which opened my lecture. By the way, in “A Writer’s Diary”, Dostoevsky wrote, “Don’t tell me that I have no knowledge of people! I know them: it was from them that I received and accepted Christ back into my heart, whom I had come to know as a child living with my parents and whom I almost lost once, because of turning into a ‘European liberal.’”

Mind please that Dostoevsky does not write on the teaching about Christ, but about Christ Himself. The Gospel is not a book of ethics or a collection of ethical norms and instructions. It is a book about Christ, his person, his life, death and resurrection. Christianity as a whole is not built around the Teaching but around the Person. It is very important to remember this when reading the Gospel and when reading Dostoevsky. All throughout the years after the penal servitude, he had been exploring the event of Christ trying to solve the enigma of His wonderful personality.

Meanwhile, the world of criminals and murderers, which he got to know when serving the sentence in the penal colony, continued to live in the writer’s heart. So, when staying abroad, he began thinking over a novel. This is how he presented the plot of the novel in a letter to publisher Katkov: “This is the psychological account of a crime… A young man, expelled from the student body of the university, of a low class origin and living in utter poverty through thoughtlessness, yielding to those strange ‘incomplete’ ideas yet floating about in the air, has decided to break out of his loathsome situation in one stroke. He has decided to kill an old woman, the widow of a titular counselor, who lends out money at interest… But unsolvable questions arise before the murderer; unsuspected and unexpected feelings are tormenting his heart. God’s truth and earthly law compel him to denounce his crime. He chooses to confess to the murder, so that, even under the threat of possible death during penal servitude, to be able to come back to people… By his free will the criminal decides to suffer to get redemption for what he has done.”

God’s truth is the key phrase here. This truth prevails over the criminal, making itself evident in the pangs of his conscience, in his mental anguish and dilemmas. It is also heard in the words of detective Porfiry who has nothing to hook the criminal with, except his conscience. Slowly but surely he begins to persuade Raskolnikov to confess, appealing to the same God’s truth.

Talking with the detective, Raskolnikov presents the main idea of his theory, according to which all people are divided into two categories – “ordinary and extraordinary.” “The first preserve the world and people it; the second move the world and lead it to its goal.” The first are just “material that serves only to reproduce its kind.” “Ordinary men have to live in submission”… and be “law-abiding.” An “extraordinary man” for the sake of noble goals, “has the right to decide in his own conscience to overstep… certain obstacles.” What does he have the right to overstep? He may even step “over a corpse or wade through blood,” according to Raskolnikov. He is sure that “the legislators and leaders of

men… beginning from the most ancient, were all criminals without exception."

Detective Porfiry is Raskolnikov's antipode. In his opinion, belief in God, in immortality and in eternal life and in the miracles performed by Jesus Christ is incompatible with the theory according to which the end justifies the means. These are two different, opposite in principle, and therefore incompatible positions from which to approach moral values.

Multiple socialist and revolutionary theories which attracted young Dostoevsky and which were heard at the meetings of the Petrashevsky Circle not only found the assumption of the end justifying the means acceptable, but even acknowledged it as the indispensable means for the achievement of universal happiness. The socialists used to proclaim that universal happiness was possible through a just redistribution of capital: the excess of the riches should be taken from the rich and given to the poor. But the expropriation of capital is impossible without violent actions against its owners.

Christianity stands on absolutely different positions. Christianity does not recognize the right of people to achieve any goal, however good it may be, by immoral and criminal means. Moreover, Christ was not a social reformer; he never called for a change of public order. He saw happiness of people in their spiritual life, not in their material well-being. True, the Kingdom of God is impossible to build on earth but everyone can acquire it in his own heart.

The turning point of the novel comes about while Sonya Marmeladova is reading to Raskolnikov the story from the Gospel according to John about the resurrection of Lazarus. This episode is very scrupulously written out by Dostoevsky, and the story from the Gospel is included in the novel in full.

From that moment on, Raskolnikov's awareness of the gravity of his crime gradually starts to grow, opening for him the way to repentance and spiritual regeneration. But he is not ready to take this way and confess to the committed murder right away. His way to the confession is long and agonizing. He wavers and hesitates: he is torn between the growing wish to admit his guilt and the fear of the consequences of the confession, between belief and unbelief.

Even after admitting to the committed crime and being exiled to the penal colony, his inner anxiety does not cease. Getting rid of the theory that had led him to murder is very hard for him. Sonya helps him in this effort; she helps him not by words, but by her silent presence and by her unconditional and boundless loyalty.

The novel ends with an epilogue in which the Gospel appears again. Dostoevsky does not quote from it, but simply points to its presence in the life of his hero: "Under his pillow lay the New Testament. He took it up mechanically. The book belonged to Sonya; it was the one from which she had read the raising of

Lazarus to him. At first he was afraid that she would worry him about religion, would talk about the gospel and pester him with books. But to his great surprise she had not once approached the subject and had not even offered him the Testament. He had asked her for it himself not long before his illness and she brought him the book without a word. Till now he had not opened it. He did not open it now, but one thought passed through his mind: 'Can her convictions not be mine now? Her feelings, her aspirations at least…' But that is the beginning of a new story – the story of gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new unknown life."

Such ending of the novel is deeply symbolic. Raskolnikov does not even open the Gospel, but this is it what sets up the vector for the process to which Dostoevsky refers as renewal and regeneration.

All Dostoevsky's novels are in this or that degree autobiographic. His life experience, life episodes, his views and the views of his ideological opponents – all are distributed among the characters of his novels. The story with the Gospel under the pillow is certainly autobiographic. Dostoevsky, unlike Raskolnikov, did not commit the crime of murder. But in his youth he was also carried away by the theories like the one which occupied Raskolnikov's mind. That was the composition of his [Dostoevsky's] crime, and he endured his punishment for it as a deserved one, seeing in it a possibility for regeneration and purification. On this way, the Gospel was his guide-book, and the radiant image of Christ – the guiding star.

"Crime and Punishment" has become the first novel of the "Great Pentateuch" that brought Dostoevsky world-wide fame and recognition. In the other four novels he will develop and deepen further the topics outlined in "Crime and Punishment." And each of the five novels is one of the chapters from his own Testament – to unveil the image of Christ and great Christian truths to his readers.

Dostoevsky's novel "The Idiot" is the author's first attempt to come closer to the person of Christ through the image of a Christ-like character. In a letter to his niece he says that the main idea of his novel was to portray a positive and wonderful man, and that "there is nothing more difficult, especially now….In the world there is only one perfectly beautiful person – Christ – so that the appearance of this immeasurably, infinitely beautiful person is, of course, already an infinite miracle. The entire Gospel of John is about this: he finds all miraculous things joined in one incarnation, in one appearance of beauty."

The central figure in "The Idiot" is Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin, a descendant of an old line of nobility, suffering from a severe disease – epilepsy. Dostoevsky himself was suffering from it.

But Dostoevsky's hero is not just an epileptic. Both the title of the novel and its text refer to him as an

“idiot.” This word is introduced by the prince himself in a conversation with General Epanchin; after that it is frequently used by others around him. At a certain moment the prince finds it offending to be called idiot.

All in all, the term “idiot” together with its derivatives is used in the novel about sixty times. But the more Prince Myshkin is referred to with it, the more grows awareness of the reader that this epithet describing him does not fit him, as his words and actions witness to his exceptional intelligence and nobleness. He is always ready to help; he is never accusing, but always showing examples of a high moral ideals. He stands out among other novel’s characters spiritually and intellectually much higher, and they, each in his or her own way, are aware of his superiority. But all the same, he remains an idiot, a fool, a man “not of this world” for them. “You come out as a holy fool, Prince,” Rogozhin says to him, “and God loves your kind!”

When working on the image of Prince Myshkin, Dostoevsky took inspiration from several other literary heroes, among whom he placed Don Quixote first.

Above all else, Dostoevsky was seeking the “radiant image of Christ” in each of the positive heroes. The Gospel’s image of Christ was for him that explicit moral way-mark to which he tried to come closer via the person of Prince Myshkin. In his draft notes he even called his hero “Prince Christ.”

Parallels between Christ and Prince Myshkin are many. The prince’s way of life, his frame of mind and actions put him at a sharp contrast to all other people around him. He is not from this world and he does not live by worldly rules; he is following the Gospel’s laws of love and all-forgiveness. He is a non-possessor: money and material goods mean nothing to him. He does not see ill features in other people, but in each person he tries to see only what is good. He is full of love for people. He is ready to forgive all even before they ask him to.

As Christ made his unexpected appearance in the life of people of His time, Prince Myshkin likewise appears unexpected by other novel’s heroes, breaking into their long-established habitual life and becoming the central figure in it. Just like under the bright light not only beautiful but ugly things too become evident, so also in the presence of Prince Myshkin, not only good and pleasant qualities of people, but also their shortcomings and vices become seen. In this sense, Prince Myshkin’s coming to the world of the novel’s heroes brings up an image of some sort of a “court of justice” before which all novel’s characters are to stand and justify their doings.

The tragedy of the “idiot” is in that he lives according to his rules in a world, wh ere people live by other rules, different from his. This is what the earthly tragedy of Jesus Christ is about. He came with his moral norms into the world that had long been living by different laws. By generally accepted human

standards, His preaching on earth was a complete failure. He was accused and died a horrible, agonizing death. After the resurrection and ascension to heaven, He returned wh ere he had come from.

Prince Myshkin came from distant Switzerland wh ere he had lived a life of an “idiot” taking treatment at the hospital of Dr. Schneider, and he returned there in the end. Having lost his mind after the murder of Nastasya Filippovna by Rogozhin, he returns to the realm he has come from. The reader understands that the prince has left this world never to return.

“The Idiot” is a novel-parable with a deep religious subtext. Finishing it up, Dostoevsky was already thinking of a new “huge” novel, “Atheism.” Its main character was to be a Russian man who lost belief in God. The author’s next grandiose project was to be a novel titled as “The Life of a Great Sinner.” Neither would be written.

But written will be “The Possessed”, a novel in which Dostoyevsky challenged the revolutionary, socialist and communist ideology and for long decades has got himself a name of a retrograde, monarchist and unprogressive antagonist of enlightenment.

The story is based on a real event – the murder of a student named Ivanov by a group of revolutionaries called “People’s Vengeance” led by Sergey Nechayev. Ivanov, a member of the group, was against the planned action to post leaflets at the Petrovskaya Agricultural Academy on the occasion of unrest among students at Moscow University. Nechayev felt a menace to his sole role in the group and decided to kill Ivanov thus sealing members of the group with blood. Nechayev shot Ivanov in the park of the academy; the body was drowned in a pond. Yet, the investigation bodies have quickly found trail of the criminals, and four of them were arrested and sentenced to hard labour. Nechayev managed to flee to Switzerland.

In order to understand who Nechayev was and what kind of theories he propounded, one should read the following lines from his “Catechism of a Revolutionary.” “The revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no personal interests, no business affairs, emotions, no attachment, no property, nor even a name of his own. His entire being is devoured by one purpose, one thought, and one passion – the revolution… Our task is passionate, total, universal, and merciless destruction.”

This is certainly far from romantic theories of the Decembrists and Petrashevtsy’s socialist utopias. When Nechayev’s ideology materialized into murder, Dostoyevsky was appalled. He envisaged the abyss into which such revolutionaries could throw Russia. He knew “the wild world of robbers” not by hearsay as he met people from this world at the forced labour camp. He could imagine what might happen to Russia if it falls into their hands and decided to give a strong warning.

In 1867 Dostoyevsky visited a Congress of “The League of Peace and Freedom” held in Geneva. Bakunin was a speaker the day before. Dostoyevsky described His impressions of the Congress in a letter to his niece: “… At first they said that for the achievement of peace on earth one should wipe out Christian faith, destroy big states and make small states; do away with capital so that everything would belong to all by order, etc. All this is said without any argument; all this had been committed to memory twenty years ago and remained the same. Fire and sword are most important for them, and they think that after they destroy everything, peace will come…”

Unrest among students began in 1869, and Bakunin from Switzerland guided revolutionary agitation that Nechayev was carrying on among students. Bakunin was a theorist, while Nechayev was a practitioner. The same relationship we see between Stavrogin and Pyotr Verkhovensky in “The Possessed.” Stavrogin is a teacher, while Verkhovensky is a pupil who reduces his teacher’s ideas to extreme, squaring with practice what he has learned in theory.

Dostoyevsky loathed revolutionary underground, and it could be clearly seen in Pyotr Verkhovensky. Stavrogin is surrounded with glamour, while Verkhovensky is devoid of any appeal or beauty, even the surface beauty. He is not a devil, but a little demon. He says to Stavrogin: “Listen, first we’ll get trouble going. We’ll penetrate among the people themselves…The Russian God has already folded in the face of 'rotgut.' The people are drunk, mothers are drunk, children are drunk, the churches are empty… Oh, just let this generation grow up!.. Ah, what a pity there are no proletarians! But there will be, there will be, we're getting there..."

Dostoyevsky foresees the coming tribulations in menacing omens. Russia would hold out forty-five years before the throes of revolution would devour it, and the possessed would come to power. “The Red Terror” would sweep the country in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity. The whole classes and estates would be abolished: the nobility, the wealthy peasants (the so-called *kulaks*), the intellectuals, and the Cossacks. A goal was set up to wipe out the Church through extermination of clergy. Insanity would overtake the country on a wide-scale, and the militant atheism would be proclaimed a state ideology.

It would be erroneous to see Dostoyevsky only as a conservative engaged in the struggle with progressionists, or an antagonist of socialism and a proponent of capitalism, a person defending monarchy and denying the constitutional form of government, or a Slavophil opposing the Westernizers. Dostoyevsky's awareness grew, becoming deeper and deeper. He saw deep roots of revolutionary movement and predicted its catastrophic aftermath.

During Dostoevsky’s time there were disputes about the ways of just restructuring of society. Some

people were for the evolutionary way, the others – for the revolutionary one. Dostoevsky was the only one who perceived the demonic nature of revolutionary ideology. Neither Belinsky, nor Turgenev, neither Hertzen, nor Toslstoy saw it and therefore flirted and sympathized with the revolutionaries each in his own way, thus showing lack of foresight because they had no real religious experience. Dostoyevsky, from the depth of his own experience, perceived the nature of the coming revolution and was horrified at it.

What does Dostoyevsky set against chaos of revolution, atheism and nihilism? There is a chapter which was not accepted by the censors. It is called “At Tikhon’s” and gives a clue to Stavrogin’s suicide. Stavrogin came to the elder Tikhon to confess to his crime. Tikhon is a character through which Dostoyevsky tries to find a way for getting near the image of Christ.

Dostoyevsky had to live through the scaffold and penal servitude to shed illusions of his youth and come to believe that “An atheist cannot be Russian…A non-Orthodox cannot be Russian.” The author has funneled these words to the voice of his character. Dostoyevsky believes that the salvation of Russia and all Russians can be found in the true faith of the people, in Orthodoxy, in Christ. This is the main message of his Gospel.

And finally, an epic novel “The Brothers Karamazov” – Dostoyevsky’s *magnum opus*, summarizing his career as a writer. He introduces two more Christ-like characters – Alyosha, a novice, and Zosima, the elder. Dostoyevsky has written the novel under the impression of his trip to the monastery famous all over Russia – Optina Pustyn, wh ere he met and talked with the elder Ambrose whom the Church glorified as a saint later. Ambrose of Optina served as the prototype of the elder Zosima.

The world of Dostoyevsky is mostly the world of neurotics, hysterics, epileptics, people obsessed with an idea and for these reasons standing ready for crimes, people broken down or with a split personality, torn apart by conflicting passions. The image of Zosima stands out against this background for his integrity and otherworldliness. He is not the main character of the novel, but spiritually occupies central place in it. He is the ideal of Christ’s love set by Dostoyevsky against the surrounding world. Only one of the three brothers Karamazov – Alyosha – by his nature and mentality is approaching this ideal. Other characters of the novel stand well back from it.

As in his previous novels, Dostoyevsky’s characters are endowed with his own traits and speak out his own thoughts. Sometimes the reflection of a young Dostoyevsky could be seen in Dmitry Karamazov at a time that had ended with penal servitude, while in Ivan one could discern a period during which Dostoyevsky was engrossed in Belinsky’s ideas, but Alyosha is an ideal for which Dostoyevsky was striving after penal servitude, as he experienced “transformation of convictions” and accepted Christ by faith.

Alyosha Karamazov is one of the most radiant personalities in Russian literature. He is religiously devout, “but is not a fanatic or even a mystic.” He simply loved people and “seemed to live all his life believing in people completely.” From the first pages of the book he is revealing himself as an evangelic Christ-like ideal. A lot makes him akin to Prince Myshkin. Alyosha, unlike him, had no traits of frailty. He was neither epileptic nor ’an idiot” in the eyes of persons around him, but a strong rosy-cheeked youth glowing with health.

Had Dostoyevsky left Alyosha in the monastery, he would not be true to himself. Before his death, Zosima sent Alyosha to the world, saying: “This is not the place for you. I bless you for great service in the world. Yours will be a long pilgrimage. And you will have to take a wife, too.” Alyosha left the monastery after the elder’s death to immerse in the world of Karamazov passions, remaining undefeated at heart.

Human suffering is the key topic of Dostoyevsky's creative work. What for and why are human beings suffering affliction? What is God looking at when they suffer? Could one believe in a just God when the world is full of misfortunes and God allows it? These questions have worried Dostoyevsky throughout his life. The theme of suffering and of its meaning runs like a scarlet thread in his writings and is taken up in ”The Brothers Karamazov” with special emphasis.

Raising a theme of the suffering of children in his conversation with Alyosha, Ivan Karamazov describes a five-year-old girl whose parents subjected her to every possible torture. Alyosha does not give a direct answer to the question about the suffering of children, but ardently reacts to his brother’s words that there is no being on earth that would forgive evil done to children: “Brother, you asked just now if there is in the whole world a being who could and would have the right to forgive. But there is such a Being, and He can forgive everything, forgive all and for all, because He himself gave his innocent blood for all and for everything.”

The suffering of Christ gives a meaning to the suffering of any man. Christ is God Incarnate, He went along the way of suffering and death to redeem people and open the way to salvation for them. Anyone who suffers, being guilty or innocent, can feel His presence in suffering.

There is one figure in the novel as if remaining behind-the-scenes, but appearing front stage at a certain moment. This is Jesus Christ. It took Dostoyevsky a long time to get near this image. He even contemplated “a book about Jesus Christ” as we see in the list of the future works compiled on Christmas Eve in 1877. Dostoyevsky tries to come to the understanding of the image of Christ through the Christ-like persons, such as Prince Myshkin, Father Zosima, and Alyosha Karamazov. Dostoyevsky’s persistent years-long desire to write about Christ Himself never left him, and he included

the whole chapter into “The Brothers Karamazov” with Christ as the central figure.

The chapter is called “The Grand Inquisitor.” The story is laid in the medieval Spain. Christ appears in Seville in which on the day before almost a hundred of heretics had been burnt. "He comes silently and unannounced; yet all — how strange — yea, all recognize Him, at once! The people rush towards Him as if propelled by some irresistible force; they surround Him, they flock around Him, and follow Him.... He moves silently in their midst with a gentle smile of infinite compassion. The Sun of Love burns in His heart, and the rays of Light, Wisdom and Power beam forth from His eyes, and pour down on the people, making their hearts respond with love. He extends His hands over their heads, blesses them, and from mere contact with Him, aye, even with His garments, a healing power goes forth.”

This is “the radiant image of Christ” sought by Dostoyevsky throughout his life. As Christ was entering the cathedral in Seville, he healed a blind man and raised a girl from the dead. Appearing in the scene is the ninety-year-old Cardinal the Grand Inquisitor who commands to arrest Christ. The Inquisitor’s talk to Christ reminds us of the interrogation of Christ by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate who asked Christ many questions, but Christ “gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.” The difference between Pontius and the Inquisitor is that the former was expecting Jesus’ answers, while the latter was not. He spoke as an accuser, and his words were a monologue demanding no answer.

The Grand Inquisitor is on the side of the devil in his controversy with Christ. The Inquisitor explains that Christ was wrong to reject the three temptations and that Christianity, viewed in historical perspective, would suffer a defeat.

The brunt of Dostoyevky’s criticism in “The Grand Inquisitor” is not directed at Catholicism as one might think after a cursory reading of the chapter, but at socialism premised on the possibility of bringing happiness to people without God and spiritual and moral values, on the basis of ‘bread’ alone – the material wellbeing and prosperity bought with a price of the lost freedom.

The Inquisitor believes that man has not been created for freedom: “Man has no greater anxiety in life than to find someone to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which the unfortunate creature is born.” Give a man material wellbeing and comfortable life, feed him, “and he will bow down, as nothing is more certain than the bread.”

The Inquisitor describes the principle of building an affluent society: "'Receiving bread from us, they will see clearly that we take the bread made by their hands from them, to give it to them, without any miracle.” In these words we can discern a clear reference to a socialist idea: people earn material goods with their own hands, while the task of a socialist state is to deny them access to the product of their

labour and distribute material goods at its own discretion so that people would be dependent on the authorities' nod.

Dostoyevsky was a genius. He pointed out a religious character of socialist ideology, or, more precisely, its pseudo-religious character. Socialism is a false religion. According to philosopher Nikolas Berdyaev, "[Socialism] wants to be a new religion and answer religious questions of people. Socialism does not succeed capitalism… Socialism succeeds Christianity, it wants to replace Christianity."

Christ was keeping silence all the time with the Grand Inquisitor and said nothing to him, because He has given all the answers in the Gospel. The Grand Inquisitor, having heard not a single word from Christ, opened the door and let Him out.

In the last months of his life Dostoyevsky was severely ill. He had lung emphysema and he could hardy breath. Two days before his death he suffered an excessive throat hemorrhage and even lost his conscience. When he was brought round Fyodor Mikhailovich said to his wife: 'Anya, invite a priest immediately, I want to confess and take communion!" Dostoyevsky's confession was long; he received the Holy Mysteries. There was no bleeding the next day.

In the morning of the third day his wife woke up she saw her husband staring at her."You know, Anya, said Fyodor Mikhalovich in half wisper. I have been awake for three hours deep in thought and I know for sure that I will die today. He asked his wife to give him the Gospel which Natalia Fonvizna presented to him at the Tobolsk prison. The Gospel has always been on his table. Often enough, while lost in thought or being in doubt, he opened the book at random and read from the opened page. He did the same now: opened the book himself and asked his wife to read for him. She read: "John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Your hear the word 'prevent.' It means I will die," said Dostoyevsky and closed the book.

He died the same day. His death was really Christian, painless, blameless and peaceful." He blessed his four children, and asked the Gospel presented to him at the Tobolsk prison to give to his son Fyodor. Now this book is housed in the Russian State Library.

Dostoyevsky had a dream. We can read about it in a notebook he kept in the middle of 1870s: "I believe in the Kingdom of Christ. It is difficult to foresee its coming, but it will come…. I believe in that Kingdom to come true… The universal kingdom of ideas and light will come here in Russia maybe even sooner than elsewhere."

Dostoyevsky was never destined to see his dream coming true. Whatever was happening in front of his

eyes proved the contrary. A considerable part of Russian people abandoned Christ, being infatuated with nihilistic and socialist ideas. As a true prophet, he warned and tolled an alarm bell. He tirelessly reminded people of what he perceived as the salvation of Russia: the radiant image of Christ, His luminious countenance, and His wonderful and miraculous beauty.

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