

## ABSTRACT

Dostoevsky's View of the Russian Soul and its Impact on the Russian Question in *The Brothers Karamazov*

Paul C. Schlaudraff

Director: Adrienne M. Harris, Ph.D

Fyodor Dostoevsky, one of Russia's most renowned novelists, profoundly affected the way that Russia would think of itself in the years following his death. One of the most important issues for Dostoevsky and other authors at the time was the reconciliation of the peasant and noble classes in the aftermath of the serf emancipation in Russia. Dostoevsky believed that the solution to this issue would come from the Russian peasantry. My research investigates Dostoevsky's view of the "Russian soul", which is the particular set of innate characteristics which distinguishes Russians from other nationalities. Furthermore, it examines how Dostoevsky's view of the Russian soul affected his answer to the question of Russia's ultimate destiny. During the 19th century, socialism was an especially popular answer to that question. Dostoevsky, however, presented an entirely different solution. Through a thorough examination of Dostoevsky's final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, my thesis demonstrates this alternative solution and its significance in light of competing Russian theory during the 19th century.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS

---

Dr. Adrienne M. Harris, Department of Modern Languages

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

---

Dr. Andrew Wisely, Director

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

DOSTOEVSKY'S VIEW OF THE RUSSIAN SOUL AND ITS IMPACT ON THE  
RUSSIAN QUESTION IN THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Baylor University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Honors Program

By  
Paul C. Schlaudraff

Waco, Texas

May 2014

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements . . . . .	iii
Chapter One: Introduction . . . . .	1
Chapter Two: The Life of Dostoevsky Leading Up to <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> . . . . .	11
Chapter Three: Ivan and Smerdyakov. . . . .	36
Chapter Four: Father Zosima and Alyosha . . . . .	48
Bibliography: . . . . .	64

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Adrienne Harris, for her tremendous amount of support on this project. Her flexibility, understanding, and unwavering dedication were truly amazing in light of the many other duties she conducted simultaneously. For guiding me through this massive undertaking and being a constant help throughout my time at Baylor University, I am extremely grateful.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Occasionally, entire nations are possessed of a national spirit or consciousness that enables them to excel in ways that no other country does. America, for example, was always driven by the idea that it was destined for greatness. Thoughts of “manifest destiny”, the “Protestant work ethic”, and the “American spirit” drove a small British outpost of thirteen colonies to emerge as the world’s sole superpower by the end of the 20th century. Similar ideas are found in other countries as well. However, it is unlikely that any country understands this concept of national consciousness as well as Russia. Its entire national identity is centered around the belief that Russia and Russians are different than every other country or people group on this planet. In fact, historians, philosophers, authors, and others developed an entirely new term during the 19th century to describe this peculiarly Russian concept: the “Russian soul” (*russkaia dusha*). Most Russian historians would agree on its key characteristics and thus debate has centered on two questions: “What makes Russians different?” and “What is Russia destined to do or become?” That second question has become vitally important to Russia’s national identity and is known as the “Russian question” (*russkii vopros*). Though many people have attempted to answer these questions, no one has answered them quite the way that Fyodor Dostoevsky did.

One of Russia’s greatest novelists during its Golden Age of Literature, Dostoevsky dealt closely with these two questions. This thesis will contend that he

presented his answer to both questions in his magnum opus, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Furthermore, it will contend that his unique view of the Russian soul caused him to answer those questions differently from his contemporaries. To do so, it will explore the circumstances of Dostoevsky's life and times that enabled him to address these crucial questions. Beginning with his childhood, and tracing the progression of complex socio-political issues in Russia throughout his life, this thesis will examine what led Dostoevsky to his distinctive view of the Russian soul, how that contrasted with his contemporaries, and his purpose for *The Brothers Karamazov*. The principal portion of this thesis will be an explication of *The Brothers Karamazov* which will focus on Dostoevsky's answer to the Russian question and its relation to the Russian soul.

In order to accomplish these goals, one must define the terms "national soul" and, more specifically, the "Russian soul." For the purposes of this thesis, a "national soul" may be thought of as the unique national consciousness and characteristics of a people group. While similar, it should not be confused with the notion of nationalism. In his respected explication of nationalism, Benedict Anderson loosely defined a nation as "an imagined political community... It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."<sup>1</sup> Correspondingly, nationalism involves a visualization of political community on the part of its members. But, whereas nationalism defines how people groups identify politically and patriotically, a national soul relates to how those groups identify or connect spiritually and mentally. Just like nationalism, national souls are constructed ideas. They often grow gradually over many years, but their formation may be sped along by important national events,

---

<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

artwork, books, or people. Additionally, national souls are closely associated with the inherent understanding and being of individuals. A national soul includes how a person of a particular country acts and thinks. Not necessarily about certain subjects or ideas, but just the very method and manner that he or she uses to think. Consequently, it would not be completely necessary for the peasants in a small English village to identify themselves as “English” in order for them to share the same “national soul” as industrial workers in London. These people share a national soul just by the way that they think. The “Russian soul” takes this concept even further.

Almost every Russian seems to have a concept of what the Russian soul is. If you asked them however, it is unlikely that you would receive a clear definition. Even the Russian authors who are credited with creating the phrase, including Gogol, Belinsky, and Dostoevsky, never offered a concise definition. Indeed, few, if any, conclusive attempts have been made to define the “Russian soul.” The fact that so few attempts have been made is likely due to the complexity of the Russian soul’s meaning and etymology. Robert Williams offers one of the most in depth looks at the history of the phrase “Russian soul” in his essay *The Russian Soul: A Study in European Thought and Non-European Nationalism*. In it, he traces its development and eventual emergence in Gogol’s *Dead Souls*. According to Williams, the phrase arose out of a necessity to define a distinctly Russian concept and used borrowed European terms.<sup>2</sup> While this is helpful, Williams’ primary purpose was never to specifically define the Russian soul. Like many scholars, Williams was content to use a general understanding of the Russian soul in order to explore its origins. Such an understanding is not sufficient for the purposes of

---

<sup>2</sup> Robert Williams, “The Russian Soul: A Study in European Thought and Non-European Nationalism” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31(1970): 573-588.

this essay, however, since we must deal closely and frequently with Dostoevsky's view of the Russian soul. Thus, I will identify a few key elements of the Russian soul which were central to Dostoevsky's own understanding.

One of the most basic elements of the Russian soul is an inclination of Russians to not only accept, but thrive on suffering. An oft quoted passage from Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer* states, "I think that the most basic, most rudimentary spiritual need of the Russian people is the need for suffering, ever-present and unquenchable, everywhere and in everything."<sup>3</sup> Unlike almost any other national group, the Russians seem to need suffering as part of their being. Much more will be said on this subject later, but for now it is sufficient to note that this need is closely associated with Russian Orthodoxy. In particular, Christ's example of suffering unjustly for the sins of others is a central concept of faith for the Orthodox believer. For Dostoevsky, it was inextricably linked with his answer to the Russian question.

The second characteristic is a particular belief that someday Russia will become an example for the entire world to follow. This element of the Russian soul holds that Russia and its people will accomplish something great and, in doing so, become a beacon for the rest of the world. Williams writes, "From the beginning the Russian soul was oriented toward neither the national romanticism of the past nor the eager imitation of European ways, but toward a distinctly Russian future. It was not a symbol of nostalgia for what Russia might have been but of hope for what she might yet become."<sup>4</sup> And though Russians share this belief, they do not necessarily accept the same vision for their

---

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk Culture and Conversation During Perestroika*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 83.

<sup>4</sup> Williamson, "The Russian Soul" 581.

country. Dostoevsky and Lenin, for example, had conflicting views on the subject. Thus, while they both shared the belief that Russia offered a redemptive hope for the world, Dostoevsky had a very different vision in mind than Lenin.

Along with this understanding of the Russian soul, some basic information about 19th century Russia may be helpful before jumping into the specific details of Dostoevsky's life. Several important, world historical events occurred during this century that had a profound impact on Russia. Among these are the Napoleonic Wars, the emergence of Utopian Socialism, and the publication of the Communist Manifesto. Napoleon's bid for power throughout Europe and his ensuing invasion of Russia hastened Russia's emergence in Western politics. By the time Napoleon was eventually defeated, Russia was actively involved in reshaping Europe at the Congress of Vienna, where the great European powers partitioned Napoleon's empire. Such events hastened the link between Russian and Western ideas. This link started in the 18th century and was strengthened significantly during the Napoleonic era. As a result, intellectuals in Russia started evaluating the social changes occurring throughout Western Europe. Russian nobles started reading the literature of French, German, and English philosophers and critics at a much faster rate than they had in the 18th century. Consequently, ideas such as Utopian Socialism began to take root among the Russian gentry. Around this same time, Russia "developed a glorious literary culture of its own, which in time became the accepted standard of excellence in its homeland and a model to be imitated by many writers in other countries."<sup>5</sup> Gogol published his revolutionary *Dead Souls* in 1842 and spurred debate on a variety of issues, including the Russian soul. The famous literary

---

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Riasanovsky and Mark Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 329.

critic, Vissarion Belinsky, established a system of literary review for Russians to evaluate and discuss Russian literature on a wide scale. This further spurred conversation and the spread of new social ideals. Such a development was important for the consciousness of Russia as a nation. As the public expenditure of the Russian government increased, by as much as 44 percent per capita between 1830 and 1850, a new, bureaucratic middle class began to emerge as the need for educated government workers increased.<sup>6</sup> This new social class would fill the void between the nobility and peasantry in Russia. With the ability to read and write, this group would begin to challenge the established social constructs in Russia. This challenge would eventually lead to a number of revolutions in Russia which culminated in the October Revolution of 1917. Needless to say, these changes during the 19th century had a significant impact on Dostoevsky's answer to the Russian question. By the time he wrote *The Brothers Karamazov* in the 1870's, Dostoevsky had witnessed one of the most transformational periods in Russian history which is apparent in the depth of the novel itself.

*The Brothers Karamazov* is a fictional story about the four sons of Fyodor Karamazov. Three of these sons, Dmitry, Ivan, and Alyosha, are the legitimate children of Mr. Karamazov. The fourth, Smerdyakov, is an illegitimate son Mr. Karamazov had by a half-crazed woman that roamed the small village where the events of the story occur. As book begins, the first three brothers return to the town where their father lives after long absences from home. The primary source of conflict in the plot is the issue of a debt between Dmitry and his father that Dmitry has come to resolve. Dmitry believes he is owed a greater portion of his father's fortune than he has hitherto received and demands a final payment in full. His father contends that he has already given Dmitry more money

---

<sup>6</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848*, (London: Abacus, 1977), 229.

than he deserved. Their disagreement is exacerbated by the fact that Dmitry and his father are fighting for the affections of a local town prostitute named Grushenka, despite the fact that Dmitry is already engaged.

In an attempt to settle the dispute, the men meet with Father Zosima, who is the elder at a local monastery that Alyosha, the youngest brother, wishes to join. The meeting ends in disaster as Fyodor Karamazov causes an embarrassing scene instead. Afterwards, Alyosha sets about meeting and discussing the issue with Dmitry and Ivan. Along the way, he has a chance encounter with a schoolboy named Ilyusha which has importance consequences later in the story. When he meets with Dmitry, Alyosha discusses Dmitry's thoughts and feelings regarding the debt and his affair with Grushenka. Later, Alyosha and Ivan debate the existence and belief in God at a local village tavern. After their conversation concludes, the story follows Ivan as he meets with Smerdyakov, who has adamantly latched onto Ivan's logical arguments for denying the existence of God. At this time, Smerdyakov also drops hints about the possible murder of Fyodor. Though concerned, Ivan dismisses these hints and leaves the next day for Moscow at his father's suggestion whereupon the story shifts back to Alyosha. By this time, Father Zosima has died and Alyosha despairs. A short while later, he renews his faith after a meeting with Grushenka. Later, Alyosha's young friend Ilyusha becomes ill and Alyosha seeks to comfort him and his father. Shifting once again, the story follows Dmitry's attempt to return money he had stolen from his fiancé. He wants to feel morally released to renounce his engagement and marry Grushenka instead. This is his primary motive for seeking more money from his father. Eventually, Dmitry sneaks into his father's house in order to take the money he needs. There, he contemplates killing his father before

ultimately deciding against it. As he is leaving however, Dmitry is caught by one of his father's servants whom he strikes in the head in order to escape. The next day, Fyodor Karamazov is found dead and Dmitry is arrested for the murder.

The last part of the novel focuses on the trial of Dmitry Karamazov. Ivan returns in a vain attempt to save his brother. He questions Smerdyakov and confirms his suspicions that Smerdyakov committed the murder. During this questioning, Ivan further learns that his conversations with Smerdyakov provided the philosophical justification that Smerdyakov used to rationalize the murder. Unfortunately, Smerdyakov commits suicide that night and there is no proof of his guilt. At the trial, Ivan claims credit for the murder but his admission is dismissed as a fit of madness. Though it initially looks like Dmitry might be declared innocent, he is found guilty and sentenced to exile in Siberia. The story ends shortly after Alyosha gives a speech about love and remembrance to a group of Ilyusha's schoolmates after Ilyusha dies.

The first chapter of this thesis will focus on the life and times of Dostoevsky leading up to the creation of *The Brothers Karamazov*. A general review of Dostoevsky's life before *The Brothers Karamazov* is necessary for two reasons. First, it will show us the important influences in his life that would later shape his understanding of the Russian soul and Russian question. Second, such a review will demonstrate the shifting social ideas that caused Dostoevsky to write on the subject in the first place. Some key elements of this chapter will include Dostoevsky's early connection with Russian peasant culture, his introduction to Russian literary society, and his association with Utopian Socialism. Additionally, it will explore Dostoevsky's life-changing experience in a Siberian prison camp and how it affected his outlook on Christianity and

the Russian soul. It will then follow the development of alternative answers to the Russian question with which Dostoevsky contended, specifically those stemming from the rise of Utopian Socialism, which foreshadowed Leninism and Stalinism.

The second and third chapters will be explications of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Chapter Two will begin by outlining Dostoevsky's intent and purpose for writing his final novel. Next, I will argue that Dostoevsky uses the characters Ivan and Smerdyakov to condemn the rise of socialism as an answer to the Russian question. Chapter Three will explore Father Zosima and Alyosha, contending that they offer Dostoevsky's alternative answer to the Russian question. Throughout both chapters, I will show how Dostoevsky associated his beliefs regarding the Russian soul with his ultimate solution. More specifically, I will demonstrate how Dostoevsky believed that the concepts of unjust suffering and mystic hope for tomorrow would enable Russia to transform itself.

Most of the evidence regarding the circumstances of Dostoevsky's life will come from biographies about him. Where possible, it will pull from Dostoevsky's own literature or that of his contemporaries. Some general information on the period is taken from other sources. Sections pertaining to Dostoevsky's view on the Russian soul in *The Brothers Karamazov* are drawn from a close reading of the text itself. Where outside information is considered useful or enriching, preference is given to Dostoevsky's own letters or writings from his contemporaries.

From this explication of Dostoevsky's biography and *The Brothers Karamazov*, we will gain a new understanding of Dostoevsky's work and the Russian soul itself. Though various researchers and scholars have investigated and written about *The Brothers Karamazov* thousands of times, a thorough investigation concentrated solely on

Dostoevsky's view of the Russian soul in association with his answer to the Russian question is lacking. This thesis will outline Dostoevsky's answers to the fundamental questions surrounding the Russian soul in contrast to the prevalent ideas of his time. By associating Dostoevsky's view of the Russian soul with his answer to the Russian question, this thesis will provide a more holistic view of Dostoevsky's answer that can then be compared against those of his contemporaries.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Life of Dostoevsky Leading Up to *The Brothers Karamazov*

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky was born in Moscow on November 11, 1821, to Mikhail and Maria Dostoevsky. His subsequent childhood and upbringing was very different from the majority of his contemporaries at the time. Dostoevsky was born into an economic class that was unique to a very small percentage of the Russian population. Though Dostoevsky's father, Mikhail, had been born the son of a priest, he did his best to reestablish his family's ancestral claim to nobility by abandoning his father's profession in order to become a doctor. Through his devoted efforts as a physician in a Moscow hospital, Mikhail finally ascended to the rank of collegiate assessor, which was the lowest rank of hereditary nobility, under Peter the Great's system in 1828. He subsequently "hastened to establish his claim" to all the privileges that were entitled to a man of such a rank.<sup>1</sup> In this manner, Fyodor also joined the ranks of the hereditary nobility seven years into life. However, it is important to note that Dostoevsky, unlike many of his peers and fellow authors, was born neither noble nor wealthy. His father had worked his way up to his position and often struggled to provide a living for his family that was commensurate with his noble status. This fact would set Dostoevsky apart from many of his contemporaries, such as Leo Tolstoy, and give him a unique perspective on Russia's political and social development throughout his life.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979) 9.

Another important factor which would influence Dostoevsky's beliefs concerning the Russian question was his frequent interaction with the Russian peasantry as a child. When he was young, Fyodor would travel regularly to the Dostoevsky summer estate located about 120 miles outside of Moscow. In addition to giving Fyodor a taste of life away from the city, it gave Fyodor the opportunity to interact freely with the Russian peasantry. Peter Semenov, a later compatriot of Dostoevsky's, stated that these interactions brought him "closer to the peasantry, their way of life, and the entire moral physiognomy of the Russian people."<sup>2</sup> Other noble parents "purposely kept [their children] from any association with the peasants."<sup>3</sup> These interactions, so rare for Russians of similar noble class, undoubtedly contributed to Dostoevsky's idealistic views of the Russian peasantry later in his life. Many of the characters, places, and events that Dostoevsky observed at the family estate would later be used in *The Brothers Karamazov*.<sup>4</sup>

Dostoevsky's experiences with religion in his young life were also somewhat unique. While most authorities on Dostoevsky are quick to focus on his intense religious experiences later in life, especially during his exile in Siberia, the formation of Dostoevsky's religious consciousness began in the confines of a devout Russian Orthodox home. Dostoevsky himself writes that, "I came from a pious Russian family... In our family, we knew the Gospel almost from the cradle."<sup>5</sup> In addition to being read to from the family Bible, as well as many religious primers and stories of Biblical heroes, he

---

<sup>2</sup> Frank, *Seeds of Revolt*, 30.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Frank, *Seeds of Revolt*, 32.

<sup>5</sup> Frank, *Seeds of Revolt*, 43.

would often be required to recite daily prayers from memory for the family. By the beginning of 19th century, many of the upper nobility in Russia had largely abandoned in-depth religious education of their children. While many aristocrats would still observe the religious rites of the church such as baptism or the Eucharist, religious teaching was often ignored in the home. In fact, the 18th century had largely seen a decline in the influence of the Orthodox Church.<sup>6</sup> There were far fewer devout keepers of the faith left outside of the peasantry or lower ranks of nobility.

For this reason, Dostoevsky's distinct association with religious experience inside the Orthodox Church would have set him apart from his peers later in life. However, the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were a time of growth in the Russian church for those outside of the intelligentsia and noble classes. Dostoevsky's association with the church as a child would have connected him with Old Russia and the beliefs of the larger Russian populace. Joseph Frank writes:

“By the early nineteenth century, the two powerful idea-feelings of religion and nationalism had been inseparable for Russians for a thousand years. One can well understand how they must have blended together in Dostoevsky's consciousness, during these childhood excursions, into an inextricable mélange of ardor and devotion that he later found it impossible to disentangle.”<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, he would have been inundated by the perception that Russian Orthodoxy was not only unique, but the only pure and right dogma. Russia and Russian Orthodoxy clearly distinguished themselves from the rest of Europe and Catholicism. Apollon Maikov, an influential literary critic who was closely associated with Dostoevsky during

---

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 116.

<sup>7</sup> Frank, *Seeds of Revolt*, 45.

the mid-1840s, wrote that, “Everyone knows, that Russia... preserved them [the dogmas of the Christian faith] in such purity and immutability that only the Russian Church fully has the right to its historical name of Orthodox.”<sup>8</sup> While Dostoevsky would struggle later in life with some elements of his faith, his association with the national sentiments of the Russian peasantry and religion during his childhood undoubtedly had a strong influence on his life in later years.

Fyodor eventually left home to study in St. Petersburg when he was 13. His father had decided that he and his elder brother should be educated to become military engineers. As a result, both he and his brother Andrei were sent to the Academy of Engineers in St. Petersburg. Attending such an academy was far from ideal for the blossoming literary mind in Dostoevsky. As a child, he had been raised on literary and artistic works of the Romantics from Alexander Pushkin to Friedrich Schiller. He went to St. Petersburg with visions of grandeur, only to be thrust into the heart of one of the strictest military academies in Russia. He immediately felt distanced from the majority of his comrades at school who he felt sought nothing more than military advancement and comfortable, extravagant lives.<sup>9</sup> In this grey world, Dostoevsky began his path to becoming one of the greatest novelists the world has known.

Despite, or perhaps because of the bleak environment of the Academy in St. Petersburg, Dostoevsky became increasingly fascinated with literature and writing during his time there. Due in large part to the initial isolation he experienced from many of the other students, he began spending his time “freely and joyously” with the authors he

---

<sup>8</sup> Frank, *Seeds of Revolt*, 216.

<sup>9</sup> Frank, *Seeds of Revolt*, 76.

loved best.<sup>10</sup> In addition to continuing his study of literature through his classes and personal readings, he eventually met many comrades who would later be members of the same literary circles that Dostoevsky joined in early adulthood. However, up until the death of his father in 1839, Dostoevsky had not considered writing as a serious occupation. His future as a military officer had been essentially laid out for him from the time he was young. After his father's death, Dostoevsky was able to contemplate a life outside of the military for the first time and thus, increasingly turned his significant talents towards writing. Though he was still limited due to the amount of time and effort required by his coursework at the Academy, the groundwork was laid for Dostoevsky's successful literary debut. When he graduated in August of 1843, Dostoevsky completely invested himself in his literary pursuits. The result was one of the most sensational debuts in Russian literature with the publication of *Poor Folk* in 1845. This book would catapult Dostoevsky to instant fame and forever link him to the important social issues of his day.

In the decades leading up to *Poor Folk*'s publication, a social theory known as Utopian Socialism became popular in Russia's literary society. Its rise influenced the young Dostoevsky and his first novel significantly. This theory began in France and Germany in the late 18th century before spreading to Russia by the early 1820's. Utopian Socialism encompassed a wide set of ideas and social philosophies. First, Utopian Socialism sought to establish a perfect society built around the concept of shared communal living. Second, Utopian Socialism tended to be closely associated with Christianity. Christ was seen as a revolutionary who wanted to upend the traditional social order with a new message of love and equality. Finally, Utopian Socialism was

---

<sup>10</sup> Frank, *Seeds of Revolt*, 100.

overwhelmingly idealistic. Unlike later socialists, Utopian Socialists appealed to all classes of men and did not believe in the eventual rise of class warfare, as Karl Marx envisioned. Many of them held that men would one day willingly create their own utopian social order. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels noted this distinct feature of Utopian Socialism in *The Communist Manifesto* when they wrote:

“They want to improve the condition of every member of society, even that of the most favored. Hence, they habitually appeal to society at large, without distinction of class; nay, by preference, to the ruling class. For how can people, when once they understand their system, fail to see it in the best possible plan of the best possible state of society? Hence, they reject all political, and especially all revolutionary, action; they wish to attain their ends by peaceful means, and endeavor, by small experiments, necessarily doomed to failure, and by the force of example, to pave the way for the new social Gospel.”<sup>11</sup>

Subsequently, this philosophy sought to promote national and international unity rather than class violence which would later mark the Bolshevik Revolution and other socialist uprisings.

When Dostoevsky published *Poor Folk*, which contained many of the ideals of Utopian Socialism, leading members of the intelligentsia who were proponents of Utopian Socialism quickly swept him into their fold. Chief among them was Vissarion Belinsky, the most influential literary critic in Russia during the 19th century. One can only describe Dostoevsky’s short time with Belinsky as life-changing. Belinsky was the well-respected editor and critic for the literary publication *Notes of the Fatherland*. His influence on Russian culture during the early half of the 19th century was almost unmatched. He immediately lauded the young Dostoevsky as a champion of Utopian Socialist ideals. Furthermore, he welcomed Dostoevsky into his private literary circle.

---

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *Birth of the Communist Manifesto*, (New York: International Publishers, 1971) 121-122.

There, Dostoevsky met many young, literary icons like Ivan Turgenev. While his time with this group would be short-lived, it nonetheless had a profound impact on the young writer. Belinsky in particular made a lasting impression on Dostoevsky. Almost 30 years after meeting Belinsky for the first time, Dostoevsky would describe their first encounter by saying, “I left him in a state of ecstasy... with my whole being I felt that a solemn moment had occurred in my life, a decisive cleavage; something entirely new had begun.”<sup>12</sup> Belinsky’s interaction with Dostoevsky would leave two lasting effects that would significantly and irreversibly alter the course of Dostoevsky’s literary journey. First, Belinsky’s strict adherence to atheism would significantly affect Dostoevsky’s own beliefs on God and religion. Second, Dostoevsky’s discussions with Belinsky would ultimately cause Dostoevsky to reject his ties with Utopian Socialism later in life due to his conflicting beliefs with Belinsky on the role of God, religion, and the Russian people.

While Dostoevsky enjoyed the attention and praise he received from Belinsky, conversations regarding socialism and Christianity caused friction between the two visionaries. Belinsky was one of a growing number of socialists who rejected Christ as part of the socialist ideal. While Dostoevsky did begin to doubt his own faith in God during his younger years, Belinsky’s outright derision of Christianity angered Dostoevsky. In his mind, Belinsky’s dismissal of God reeked of arrogance. Consequently, Dostoevsky began to associate more frequently with other literary groups which were better aligned with his concept of Christ and socialism. Many of these groups were themselves socialist in nature. For almost a year, Dostoevsky lived communally in an apartment with a group of other influential writers known as the

---

<sup>12</sup> Frank, *Seeds of Revolt*, 172.

Beketov circle. Though this group would only last about a year, Dostoevsky cites his time with them as critical to regaining his psyche after the despair he suffered after his break off with Belinsky. While he did not completely reject socialism or accept faith in Christ at this time, Dostoevsky began to move closer to those ends. His association with the next literary circle would define his life in ways he could never have imagined.

In the spring of 1847, Dostoevsky began to attend dinners with a man by the name of Mikhail Butashevich-Petrashevsky. Petrashevsky was roughly Dostoevsky's own age and had become a very popular social figure in St. Petersburg. In fact, his literary circle was one of the most influential at that time. This circle would meet to discuss various progressive ideas that were relevant to the literary currents in St. Petersburg and Russia at that time. Topics would often cover the advantages of one form of socialism over another or the plight of the peasantry. Even though he attended these meetings, Dostoevsky himself was far from convinced by the myriad of socialist proposals. He would state later that, "But precisely because I do not adhere to any of the social systems, I studied socialism in general, all of its systems, and this is why... I see the faults in every social system. I am convinced that the application of any of them would bring with it inescapable ruin..."<sup>13</sup> However, Dostoevsky was far from unsympathetic to socialism's cause. He did believe that one day a real solution to Russia's problems with unification could or would be discovered.

Having determined that socialism was either completely hopeless or heading in the wrong direction, Dostoevsky began to search elsewhere for answers. He surmised that the solution would be found by examining Russia's already existing social traditions.

---

<sup>13</sup> Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, 252.

In essence, Dostoevsky believed that a return to Russia's roots would yield far better results than searching for answers from the French or Germans. Alexander Milyukov, the eventual architect of the reforms that emancipated the serfs and an attendee of many of the same social gatherings which Dostoevsky attended, wrote that Dostoevsky held:

“... that we should seek for the sources of a development of Russian society not in the doctrines of Western Socialists, but in the life and age-old historical organization of our people, where in the *obshchina* [communal ownership of land], *artel* [worker's wage-sharing cooperative], and in the principles of mutual village responsibility there have long since exist much more solid and normal foundations than in all the dreams [of other schools].”<sup>14</sup>

These convictions would last throughout Dostoevsky's life. While he would certainly develop such ideas further, these firsthand accounts from his contemporaries demonstrate that Dostoevsky was already looking intently to the Russian people and their unique “soul” for answers to Russia's problems. Ultimately, his apparent disinterest in the ideas of Utopian Socialism made Dostoevsky seem somewhat aloof at his meetings with the Petrashevsky circle. He always gave his primary attention to ending serfdom, choosing to devote himself to the national issues facing Russia in the late 1840's. The reconciliation of peasant and noble following the eventual abolition of serfdom would become a major issue for Dostoevsky and his contemporaries in later years.

At the time however, his association with Petrashevsky caused problems with the reigning Tsarist authority. And while it is certainly true that the debates at Petrashevsky's certainly called for change to Russia's socio-economic system, it must be stated that there was no subversive intent, at least on Dostoevsky's part, at these

---

<sup>14</sup> Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, 254.

meetings. Frank states:

“It should not be imagined, however, that he would have considered such a step of any great importance; he went to Petrashevsky’s as he would have gone to any other social gathering. There was nothing secret or conspiratorial about Petrashevsky’s ‘Fridays’ any more than there had been about the reunions of the Belinsky pleiade or the Beketov circle.”<sup>15</sup>

Eventually however, Petrashevsky’s circle invited unwelcome attention to itself from the secret police. Petrashevsky himself was placed under secret surveillance after circulating a petition to allow serfs to buy property and subsequently raise their status to that of a tenant.<sup>16</sup> The secret police would eventually succeed in planting a spy in the Petrashevsky circle who attended its final seven meetings. Dostoevsky was at two of those meetings.<sup>17</sup> At both meetings, he furiously defended the notion that the serfs must be freed. The debates at Petrashevsky’s had increasingly discussed tangible methods for creating change in Russia. In fact, the day before Dostoevsky’s eventual arrest as a result of his involvement with the circle, he had been meeting with friends discussing the details of operating a printing press for propaganda purposes. Eventually, the conversations at Petrashevsky’s were deemed too radical for the secret police to tolerate any longer. Subsequently, the police systematically arrested each member that could be reasonably associated with the circle. Dostoevsky was arrested on April 22, 1849.

Up to this point, Dostoevsky was closely associated with the national sentiments of Russia and Utopian Socialism. However, he had rarely, if ever, experienced the true pain and despair of Russia’s poorest. He had lived in relative ease on the stipends sent by his father and enjoyed success and fame as a writer. Like his peers, Dostoevsky’s

---

<sup>15</sup> Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, 244.

<sup>16</sup> Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, 249.

<sup>17</sup> Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, 284.

theories were simply academic. His life would be changed forever after his arrest. Dostoevsky was charged with treason and sentenced to death on November 16, 1849. Fortunately, as he and his fellow prisoners were about to be shot by a firing squad December 22<sup>nd</sup>, a messenger arrived with a note from the tsar which commuted their sentences. Instead, they would be sent to labor camps in Siberia. In the prison camp, Dostoevsky was brought face to face with destitute criminals from the poorest ranks of Russia's society. Life there would force Dostoevsky to reexamine his spiritual and personal beliefs. As a result, his understanding of God, the Russian soul, and socialism was radically changed.

One cannot overstate the effect of Dostoevsky's exile on his future as an author and thinker. Dostoevsky seemed to know his life was changing forever before he even left for Siberia. He wrote to his brother shortly before his departure:

“As I look back on the past I think how much time I have wasted, how much of it has been lost in errors, in mistakes... Now, in changing my life I am being reborn in a new form. Dear brother, I swear to you I will not lose hope and I will keep my spirit and my heart pure! I will be born again for the better. That is my sole hope, my sole comfort.”<sup>18</sup>

At the labor camp in Siberia, Dostoevsky was completely removed from friends, family, creature comforts, and even the literature that he loved so much. Dostoevsky was only permitted to read from a copy of the New Testament. He spent the majority of his four years at the prison camp within the walls of a small confine. One-hundred and fifty men inhabited one crammed wooden shelter within that confine. Prisoners slept on wooden boards without blankets. Dostoevsky routinely went to the camp hospital for afflictions related to his epilepsy and a general state of weakness due to the labor conditions at the camp.

---

<sup>18</sup> Richard Freeborn, *Dostoevsky*, (London: Haus Publishing, 2003), 36.

In spite of such hardships, Dostoevsky was less concerned with the physical conditions of the prison camp than he was with the spiritual, mental, and relational aspects of life as a prisoner. To this point in his life, Dostoevsky had largely read French and Russian idealists who believed that the peasantry was “good”, “moral”, “better than the wealthy”, and “more moral than the wealthy.”<sup>19</sup> Utopian Socialist principles and an idealistic view of the Russian people left Dostoevsky expecting to enter a site with an oppressed, but almost saint-like people. What he saw during the first few months at the penal settlement in Omsk must have horrified him. He was surrounded by convicted criminals of all sorts. These criminals despised him because he was a member of the gentry, in spite of the fact that he had been sent to prison for promoting their cause. He writes, “I had already become acquainted with convicts in Tobolsk, and here in Omsk I settled down to living with them for four years. They were course, ill-natured, cross-grained people. Their hatred for the gentry knew no bounds... They would have eaten us alive, given the chance.”<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, he experienced a deplorable lack of morality that was frightening even to him, despite being in a prison camp. A general “lack of remorse [was] exhibited by the worst of them for unspeakable crimes against children and women...”<sup>21</sup> Dostoevsky writes, “In the course of several years, I never saw a sign of repentance among these people; not a trace of despondent brooding over their crimes, and the majority of them inwardly considered themselves absolutely in the right.”<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 92.

<sup>20</sup> Frank, *The Years of Ordeal*, 76.

<sup>21</sup> Freeborn, *Dostoevsky*, 78.

<sup>22</sup> Frank, *The Years of Ordeal*, 95.

Fights broke out repeatedly at the camp and crimes of theft were commonplace.

Dostoevsky's vision of a Christ-like peasantry was surely shattered. The initial hatred, crime, and depravity were thus extremely difficult for Dostoevsky.

However, as much as Dostoevsky learned about the depravity of the Russian people, his most important lesson may have been discovering the existence of good in even the most debased men. Richard Freeborn writes that, "Among the most important things he learned from his years of incarceration was the need for unity among the different layers and sections of Russian society... Along, of course, with the horrors were the small kindnesses, the moments when the peasant convicts showed him compassion..."<sup>23</sup> For years, Dostoevsky had been proclaiming the needs of Russia's underprivileged peasant class. Living at the prison camp in Omsk undoubtedly opened his eyes to the full extent of human capacity for inflicting pain and suffering. It is therefore understandable that Dostoevsky would lose his innocent belief in the inherent goodness of the Russian peasantry. And yet, Dostoevsky would later become a champion of Russia, as well as one of the strongest proponents of its people and their values. As Frank writes:

"But how could he argue on behalf of Russia without, at the same time, overcoming his violent repugnance for that portion of the Russian people existing all around him in flesh and blood and whose life he was condemned to share... Nothing was more emotionally necessary for Dostoevsky than to find some way of reconciling his ineradicable love for his native land with his violently negative reactions to the loathsome denizens of the camp."<sup>24</sup>

After his first few months in Omsk, Dostoevsky probably never expected to regain his belief in the Russian people. However, through the suffering inflicted upon the

---

<sup>23</sup> Freeborn, *Dostoevsky*, 39.

<sup>24</sup> Frank, *The Years of Ordeal*, 114.

prisoners, Dostoevsky discovered how men could be unified in an unexpected way. Among the murderers and thieves sent into hopeless exile, Dostoevsky found compassion and the value of simple people. In one of the more moving recollections of his experiences with the prisoners, Dostoevsky proclaims, “Even in prison among the brigands, I, in four years, finally distinguished people. Believe it or not, there are profound, strong, marvelous personalities there, and how delightful it was to find them under a coarse crust. And not one, not two, but several.”<sup>25</sup> He later detailed how he taught a young prisoner to speak and read in Russian. Another man to whom he lent an insignificant amount of money was eternally grateful for his charity and cried when Dostoevsky left Omsk. Dostoevsky had often been intolerant of this man, but was overwhelmed by the enormous amount of gratitude displayed by him. Through experiences like these and surely countless others that are not recorded in Dostoevsky’s letters (there are no extant letters written during his actual time in prison), Dostoevsky learned the redemptive value of collective suffering. The Russian ability to endure and thrive through suffering manifested itself at a time that Dostoevsky needed it the most.

Up until his time spent at Omsk, he had seen the Russian peasantry in a purely Romantic light. He had advocated for their advancement on a purely academic level and was initially swept up in the ideals of Utopian Socialism. Now, Dostoevsky had seen them at both their best and their worst. Consequently, his time in exile was far from wasted. He came to understand the commonly held values, actions, and feelings of the Russian people in a way that few others had. Dostoevsky understood this himself and wrote, “All in all, the time hasn’t been lost for me. If I have come to know not Russia,

---

<sup>25</sup> David Lowe and Ronald Meyer, *Fyodor Dostoevsky: Complete Letters Volume One 1832-1859*, (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis Publishers, 1988) 190.

then the Russian people well, and as well as perhaps few people know them.”<sup>26</sup>

Dostoevsky would later use his understanding of Russia and its people extensively in his writings, particularly *The Brothers Karamazov*. The knowledge he gained would be instrumental in his outline of a new vision for Russia. This vision would incorporate everything he had learned about his own people and their soul, as well as his emerging belief in the ultimate failure of socialism which will be explored more extensively later.

Before delving into those topics and Dostoevsky’s reemergence on the stage of world literature, it is absolutely essential to understand his religious and psychological conversion at Omsk. Joseph Frank states that, “...Dostoevsky was unwittingly placed in the perfect physical and psychological situation for a conversion to have taken place.”<sup>27</sup>

His conversion cannot really be described as a complete reversal of his beliefs.

Dostoevsky had never completely abandoned his faith in Christ. Neither had he lost all his doubts about Christianity. In one of only two letters by Dostoevsky written in the immediate aftermath of his release, Dostoevsky confides some of the details about this conversion to a friend named Natalya Fonvizina, who was one of the Decembrist wives who had followed their exiled husbands to Siberia. He tells Natalya in his letter:

“I will tell you about myself that I am a *child of the age, a child of disbelief and doubt* up to this time and even (I know this) to the moment they put the lid on my coffin [italics added]. Such awful torments I have suffered and I still suffer now from this thirst for faith, which is always the stronger in my soul the greater are my arguments against it.”<sup>28</sup>

While Dostoevsky did not emerge entirely confident in his faith, he did renew his belief in the Russian people through a powerful late night experience.

---

<sup>26</sup> Lowe and Meyer, *Complete Letters Volume One*, 190.

<sup>27</sup> Frank, *The Years of Ordeal*, 119.

<sup>28</sup> Lowe and Meyer, *Complete Letters Volume One*, 194.

After months and months of kindling hatred toward the criminals with whom Dostoevsky spent his sentence, he suddenly recalled a childhood memory that would change his entire outlook on life. One day when exploring the woods surrounding the family home in Daravoe, Dostoevsky thought he heard the cries of a wolf in the woods. The frightened young Dostoevsky ran away from the woods into the arms of one of the serfs that worked on the farm. This serf, known only as “Marey”, soothed the young child and blessed him with the sign of the cross.<sup>29</sup> Dostoevsky recalls this experience in his own words:

“... he [Marey] could not have looked at me with an expression gleaming with more genuine love if I had been his only son. And who forced him to do so. He was our peasant serf, and I, after all, the son of his owner; no one would know how kind he had been and reward him for it... The encounter was isolated, in an empty field, and only God, perhaps, saw from above what deep and enlightened human feeling, what delicate, almost womanly tenderness, could fill the heart of a coarse, bestially ignorant Russian peasant serf not yet expecting, nor even suspecting, that he might be free.”<sup>30</sup>

Dostoevsky’s sudden remembrance of this experience resulted in a completely changed heart and mind. Dostoevsky reexamined his attitude toward the Russian peasantry and adopted a much more Christ-like attitude. He states, “...I suddenly felt I could look on these unfortunates with quite different eyes, and suddenly, *as if by miracle*, all hatred and rancor had vanished from my heart.”<sup>31</sup> He was finally able to see the good in even the most vile and villainous Russian. Frank explains that, “Each Russian peasant was now a potential Marey, who had managed to preserve in his soul the highest and most sublime

---

<sup>29</sup> Frank, *The Years of Ordeal*, 123.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Frank, *The Years of Ordeal*, 124.

of the Christian virtues.”<sup>32</sup> This change, while seemingly small at first, would alter the course of Dostoevsky’s writing career forever. From here on out, Dostoevsky was able to reconcile his desire for a *unified* Russia with the horrible depths of depravity that he had experienced in the prison of Omsk. As a result, he would go on to be a champion of the Russian people, advocating for a new Russia built upon the common values of the peasantry and the love of Christ that could not be separated from his new understanding of the Russian soul.

When Dostoevsky was finally released from prison on February 14, 1854, he was a completely changed man. His time in prison had molded and shaped his views regarding the Russian people. Consequently, his entire outlook on life and the people around him had been transformed. He wrote to his brother with a renewed sense of hope and understanding, “There is clarity in my soul. It’s as though I have my whole future and everything that I’ll do right before my eyes. I’m satisfied with my life. There’s only one thing to fear: people and tyranny.”<sup>33</sup> Promoting the causes of Russian nationalism and fighting the tyranny of the tsar would be Dostoevsky’s mission for the next twenty-seven years of his life.

Of course, the world had not stood still while Dostoevsky served out his prison sentence. Tsar Nicholas I’s attempt to suppress dissent had not met with success, despite his exile of key members of the intelligentsia like Dostoevsky himself. A new generation of young men had taken up the cause of freedom and assumed the mantle of liberation for the serfs. This new generation was extremely different than “the men of the 40’s” who

---

<sup>32</sup> Frank, *The Years of Ordeal*, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Lowe and Meyer, *Completed Letters Volume One*, 189.

were peers of Dostoevsky. As a result of the new idealism and radicalism that marked the political movements of the younger generation, Russia would experience a rapid series of changes leading up to the Bolshevik Revolution approximately seventy years later. These changes included the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the eventual assassination of Alexander II in 1881. During this time, a more radical version of socialism was developing in Russia under the influences of Alexander Herzen, who is considered the father of Russian socialism, and other more radical members of the intelligentsia. Exploring these events in more detail provides insight into the literature that Dostoevsky wrote after his release. These works, including *Notes from the Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, eventually catapulted Dostoevsky to international acclaim and firmly established him as one of the foremost novelists in the history of literature.

Upon being released from prison, Dostoevsky was forced to serve four years as a soldier in Semipalatinsk. After this time period, Dostoevsky was restored to the ranks of nobility, discharged from the army due to health issues, and granted permission to return to Russia. After almost ten dramatic and life-changing years, Dostoevsky finally left Siberia in July of 1859. As Richard Freeborn states, “He returned to European Russia a convinced patriot, belligerent in his conviction of Russia’s spiritual superiority over the West, only to confront a state of intense ideological debate in which radical concerns had become predominant.”<sup>34</sup> In the decade since Dostoevsky’s departure from Western Russia, a new intelligentsia had firmly established itself as the director of political and

---

<sup>34</sup> Freeborn, *Dostoevsky*, 45.

social movements in Russia. This new social group was part of a growing populace between the rank of noble and peasant called the *raznochintsy*, or “people of miscellaneous ranks”. This was an official social status created by the Code of Law in Imperial Russia. Just like Dostoevsky’s father, this group largely consisted of medical personnel, the priesthood, or lower government managers.<sup>35</sup> It had grown considerably since the 17th century and had assumed a much more important role in Russian society during the 1800’s. Many of the *raznochintsy* were young men who had recently returned from service as officers in the Crimean War (1853-1856). They had become disillusioned with the government after its multiple failures and were further exposed to Western ideas during the war. “It was they who set the tone that others would follow – a ‘tone’ that instantly aroused the active displeasure of the representatives of the older generation of the 1840s whom they made it their first business to displace.”<sup>36</sup> The “tone” they set was defined by an entirely new philosophy that came to be known as “rational egoism.”

This new line of thinking held that reason and “rational” thought, not spirituality, were sufficient for solving not only Russia’s problems, but life’s as well. The primary proponent of rational egoism was Nikolay Chernyshevsky. Like many of the *raznochintsy*, Chernyshevsky was educated as a seminarian, even graduating from a theological seminary. However, he had embraced socialism after he entered the university in St. Petersburg in the 1840s. In the mid-1850s, Chernyshevsky actively

---

<sup>35</sup> Freeborn, *Dostoevsky*, 46.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 244.

began writing for progressive periodicals in St. Petersburg.<sup>37</sup> Unlike many of the progressive figures in the 1840s, such as Belinsky whom he studied, Chernyshevsky had very little interest in literature or the arts. To him, the arts were to be used to promote the needs of the people, whatever those might be. Consequently, his primary passions as a proponent of rational egoism were politics, economics, and social change. He appealed directly to reason as the support for his proposals in favor of a new socialist regime. Chernyshevsky's ideals would be fundamental to many of the policies and beliefs of the Soviet Union in years to come.

It is important to understand the mindset of the *raznochintsy* that Chernyshevsky inspired. Referring specifically to the growing rank of seminarians that would make of the majority of this group in the 1850s-1860s, Joseph Frank makes this observation:

“For their part, the seminarians abhorred (and had no wish to acquire) the easy, elegant manners, the cosmopolitan culture, the reverence for art as a source of wisdom... that distinguished the slightly older generation of the 1840s... For Chernyshevsky and [Nikolay] Dobrolyubov, such reverence for art still smacked of religion. As the scions of clerical families, both had been intensely religious in their youth; but they had converted to atheism, with equal zeal, under the influence of Feuerbach and his Russian Left Hegelian followers such as Belinsky, and more specifically, Herzen.”<sup>38</sup>

This insight is useful in understanding the development of socialism as a movement by the *raznochintsy*, which Dostoevsky would soon speak out against. This new generation of progressives was very distinct ideologically from the landed gentry and noble classes. This group was disaffected by the tradition and beliefs that were embedded in the gentry. By and large, the gentry were more connected to the ideals of an older Russia. Not only

---

<sup>37</sup> Frank, *The Stir of Liberation*, 244.

<sup>38</sup> Frank, *The Stir of Liberation*, 245.

were they connected to those ideals, they were connected to *idealism*. This idealism manifested itself in the way that the gentry and older generations sought to address the issue of serfdom. Many of those that promoted change appealed to the arts and religion as a means to bring about the social change necessary for creating a new and better country. Their dissociation from the harsh reality of those less fortunate likely fueled this idealistic belief that change could come about without the need for violence. Such idealism is evident in the Utopian Socialist texts, predominately written by nobility, which dominated Russian literature in the 1830s and 1840s.

The *raznochintsy* were of an entirely different mindset. Unlike the landed gentry, their experiences were closely related to those of the peasantry. Their roles as priests, doctors, and government workers connected them daily with various serfs. Additionally, they could not rely on the financial security that most nobles were blessed with. They were, however, educated. As a result, they were exposed to the Utopian Socialist literature written by previous generations. This literature convinced them of the desperate need for social change in Russia, and that socialism was the answer. But, unlike the previous generations, the *raznochintsy* were disillusioned with the arts and religious appeals as means to achieve change. Years of discussion and literature from the landed gentry had not resulted in consequential reform. Recent failures during the Crimean War had further convinced them that the nobles' leadership was incapable and naïve. In light of these circumstances, it is easy to see why the *raznochintsy* rejected the appeal of arts and religion.

They opted instead for a controversial reliance on reason and science to create radical social change. The universal rejection of God by the growing number of

adherents to rational egoism was the logical development from the ideas touted by progressives like Belinsky and Herzen, who was an early theorist on communal living and class struggle. As a nation, Russia was steadily developing a new and changing identity. While the number of *raznochintsy* and intelligentsia was still small in relation to the peasantry, their influence on the ideas and culture of the country was having an effect. However, their intellectual takeover of Russian social values would not go unchallenged.

When Dostoevsky finally returned to St. Petersburg in December of 1859, he was eager to rejoin influential literary circles. While working in exile, Dostoevsky had published three short texts of little note, including *A Little Hero*, *Uncle's Dream*, and *The Village of Stepanchikovo*. Many literary critics at the time had determined that Dostoevsky had completely exhausted his talent as an author.<sup>39</sup> However, with the decrease in censorship afforded by Alexander II, his experiences in a prison camp, and the surging strength of the rational egoists, Dostoevsky would have all the inspiration he needed for renewed literary successes. Indeed, after his return from prison, Dostoevsky viewed his work and the development of Russia in an entirely different light. One must recall that the major focal point of political discussions in the 1860s and the preceding decades still centered on serfs and their freedom. Whether a member of Dostoevsky's "men of the 1840's" or a part of the growing number of rational egoists under Chernyshevsky and others, both groups debated how, when, or if the serfs should be granted their freedom.

For his part, Dostoevsky was concerned about a higher question. In an anonymously written announcement for a new editorial published by his

---

<sup>39</sup> Frank, *The Stir of Liberation*, 19.

brother, Dostoevsky writes:

“We live in an epoch in the highest degree remarkable and critical. Russia is in the midst of a great transformation, and the important social-political changes being awaited, which will finally resolve “the great peasant question” are only the external symptoms of a more fundamental mutation: This transformation consists in the fusion of enlightenment, and those who represent it, with the principle of the people’s life, and the union of the entire majestic Russian people with all elements of our current life – the people who, 170 years ago, recoiled from the Petrine reforms, and since that time, torn away from the educated class, have been living their own separate, isolated, and independent existence.”<sup>40</sup>

This quote from Dostoevsky has several implications. It implies that Dostoevsky was already looking forward to a future in which the peasantry would be freed and Russia would become a more unified country. In his view, the debates regarding freeing the peasantry were only external manifestations of a new “fusion” between the ideals of the peasant class with the scientific “enlightenment” of the intelligentsia and nobility. Therefore, the most important subject for the Russian community was the issue of unification. Dostoevsky was perfectly suited to address this specific problem.

Unlike most other men, Dostoevsky had experienced life on several different levels of Russian existence. As a child, Dostoevsky’s father had been part of the *raznochintsy*. Later, he had ascended to the ranks of hereditary nobility and landed gentry. Thus, Dostoevsky had spent the majority of his life as noble, learning their customs and mindsets. However, his world had been fundamentally challenged during his time in prison. He learned what it meant to live on nothing in the presence of peasant criminals. Furthermore, he had come to love and understand them after a miraculous conversion that taught him to love. One of the complex things about Dostoevsky is that he had both the mind of the rational egoists, who questioned God and relied on logic

---

<sup>40</sup> Frank, *The Stir of Liberation*, 35.

alone, and the heart of a devoted Orthodox believer. As a result, Dostoevsky felt connected to the sincere faith and belief of the peasantry, as well as the progressive intelligentsia who debated the existence of God. As he reentered society and debated ideas of liberation and reconstruction with other intellectuals, Dostoevsky began to develop his unique solution to Russia's issues.

For Dostoevsky, this solution had to be very different from any theories postulated by Western theorists, despite his affinity for their ideas. While grateful to the innovative proposals by French and German philosophers, Dostoevsky understood that Russia was very different from the West. He firmly believed that social reconstruction could and *should* be done peacefully, without the violence increasingly proposed by the intelligentsia in Russia. To him, the idea of class conflict reeked of Western socialist thought. He argued:

“Indisputably the most important issue is the question of the amelioration of the condition of the peasants... Not the enmity between the classes, between conquerors and conquered, as everywhere in Europe, should lie at the foundation of the development of the future principle of our life. We are not Europe, and among us there will not and should not be conquerors and conquered.”<sup>41</sup>

While Dostoevsky understood the increasing social tensions between the gentry and lower classes which would one day result in revolution, he was convinced that alternative solutions to class struggle were possible. For him, it was not a two possibility end game that only the Westerners or Slavophiles could win. Essentially, the Slavophiles believed that Russia should exclusively preserve the traditional values of Old Russia while the Westerners believed that Russia should adopt the values and industrialization of Western Europe. Many books have been published concerning the debates between the two

---

<sup>41</sup> Frank, *The Stir of Liberation*, 35.

camps. I will not attempt to address Dostoevsky's own relationship to either camp directly since that is not the primary purpose of this essay. However, it is impossible to understand Dostoevsky's purposes without understanding the cultural context in which he wrote.

Regarding this cultural debate, Dostoevsky wrote, "We are not here talking about the Slavophiles or Westerners. Our era is totally indifferent to their domestic quarrels. We are speaking of the reconciliation of civilization with the principles of people's life."<sup>42</sup> The "principles" Dostoevsky referenced were the defining beliefs of the mass Russian populace. Separated from the noble classes, the Russian peasantry had preserved a distinct value set which was not prevalent among the nobility. Thus, Dostoevsky had begun to envision a new Russian nationality. He expounded upon this new vision saying:

"We foresee, and foresee with reverence, that the character of our future activity must be in the highest degree pan-human, that the *Russian idea* [italics added], perhaps, will be the synthesis of all those ideas which Europe has developed, with such persistence and courage, in each of its nationalities; that perhaps everything antagonistic in these ideas will find reconciliation and further development in *Russian nationality* [narodnost]."<sup>43</sup>

Convinced that Russia would finally resolve its class conflict through a new "Russian idea", Dostoevsky began a journey to explore, create, and propagate this idea.

Fundamentally, it had to create a synthesis between peasant and noble. Inherently, this meant investigating the Russian soul and what connected even the worst criminals and noblest members of society. His magnum opus, *The Brothers Karamazov*, would address this particular issue and give the world his very own vision for Russia's destiny.

---

<sup>42</sup> Frank, *The Stir of Liberation*, 36.

<sup>43</sup> Frank, *The Stir of Liberation*, 37-38.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Ivan and Smerdyakov

By the time Dostoevsky began writing *The Brothers Karamazov* in the spring of 1878, he had once again ascended the literary ranks with the publications of the novella *Notes from the Underground* (1864), and the serial novels *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and *The Idiot* (1869). In *Notes from the Underground* and *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky explicitly attacked Russian Nihilism, a socio-political movement which rejected all forms of authority. Dostoevsky believed that nihilism caused men to reject their community, ignore the inherent good of the church, and resort to lonely, destructive self-brooding. The protagonists in *Notes from the Underground* and *Crime and Punishment* are men already tainted by the nihilistic worldview which Dostoevsky saw becoming prevalent in Russian society. Unfortunately, this caused them both to fall short of becoming a hero that could be an example of Dostoevsky's answer to the Russian question. When he wrote *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky tried a different tactic. There, he attempted to portray "a perfectly good man" in the guise of Prince Myshkin.<sup>1</sup> Dostoevsky essentially asks the question of how an ideal, Christ-like character would fit into the "real world", filled with pride, selfishness, loathing, and despair. Ultimately, Dostoevsky's "perfectly good man" is destroyed by the evil in the world and succumbs to madness.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Frank and David Goldstein, *Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky*, (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 262.

For the next ten years, between the publication of *The Idiot* and beginning work on *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky would search for a hero and a plot that could bridge the gap between *Notes from the Underground/Crime and Punishment*, and *The Idiot*. This hero had to be relatable and convince readers that there was a better solution to the “synthesis” of the Russian nationality than socialism. The hero must resolve the ongoing disputes concerning faith and reason, East and West, socialism, and the adoption of peasant virtues. Dostoevsky eventually settled on Alyosha Karamazov as that hero. For his plot, Dostoevsky devised a two-novel series which would follow the spiritual and mental reformation of the Karamazov brothers, especially Alyosha’s.

According to this plan, *The Brothers Karamazov* was only meant to be an introductory novel. The events of *The Brothers Karamazov* occur thirteen years prior to the proposed events of the second novel. Unfortunately, Dostoevsky never completed that second novel. Though rumors swirled that a completed manuscript was kept somewhere by Dostoevsky’s wife after his death, no such manuscript has ever been found. Consequently, we are forced to draw what conclusions we can from the only novel that we do have. Fortunately, *The Brothers Karamazov* has more than enough depth for us to discern an idea of what Dostoevsky’s vision for Russia was.

Recalling the two primary questions which concerned Dostoevsky’s lifework, “What makes the Russians different?” and “What is Russia destined to do/become?” one sees that both questions are linked at their core. The answer to the first imparts additional significance to the second. As stated previously, a central element of what Dostoevsky and his contemporaries called variously the “Russian idea”, “the Russian spirit”, and

ultimately the “Russian soul” was the almost mystic belief that Russia would eventually lead the world into a new paradise on earth. It was this belief which made determining Russia’s destiny such a crucial issue. In 1915 Nikolai Berdyaev, a Russian political philosopher and Christian communist born four years before the publication of *The Brothers Karamazov*, opened his book, *The Fate of Russia*, with a chapter entitled *The Soul of Russia: The Psychology of the Russian People*. He explains:

“Russian national thought senses the need and obligation to solve the enigma of Russia, to comprehend the idea of Russia, to define its purpose and place in the world... In times past there was a presentiment, that Russia is destined for something great, that Russia – is some special land, not like any other land in the world. Russian national thought grew up with the sense of Russian as God-chosen and God-bearing. This courses its way from the old idea of Moscow as the Third Rome, through Slavophilism – to Dostoevsky, Vladimir Solov’ev and the contemporary Neo-Slavophiles.”<sup>2</sup>

Russians of every social status and political bent seemed to firmly believe that utopia on earth was attainable, and that Russia would lead the way. However, they each had a different idea on how to build that utopia. Therefore, it was imperative for the national consciousness of Russia to determine its eminent providential fate.

Such a necessity led Dostoevsky and his contemporaries to search for the answer to this distinctly Russian question. Socialist thinkers, especially those among the more radical *raznochintsy*, answered this question with socialism. They believed that socialism would be able to effectively merge the noble and peasant classes in thought, spirit, and circumstance. Additionally, prevailing socialist doctrine was abandoning Utopian Socialism and becoming more radical, tending to rely less on Christian views of love and charity in its teaching.

---

<sup>2</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Fate of Russia*, (Moscow: Leman and C. I. Sakharov, 1918), Section I, Chapter I, accessed March 20, 2014, [http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd\\_lib/1915\\_007.html](http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1915_007.html)

Throughout the decade leading up to the publication of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky struggled to confront what he saw as manifestations of this new brand of Russian socialism. He wrote to a friend in 1873:

“Socialism – whether consciously or in the most preposterously unconscious form, or used as a disguise for despicable acts – has affected almost an entire generation. The facts are clear and ominous... We must combat this, because everything has been contaminated. My idea is that socialism and Christianity are the antitheses of one another.”<sup>3</sup>

Dostoevsky was absolutely certain that the lack of faith exhibited in this new form of socialism would be detrimental to Russia and incompatible with the Russian soul.

According to Dostoevsky, while the primary aim of socialism was the alleviation of suffering for the poor and downtrodden, removing God from the equation could not help but to turn a “love of mankind” into hatred. He argues that:

“... precisely because of the intolerableness of their suffering, I assert that the realization of one’s utter impotence to help, to render service, or to bring alleviations to suffering mankind, coupled with one’s complete conviction of the existence of that suffering, can even transform the love for humanity in your heart into hatred for humanity.”<sup>4</sup>

These words seem almost prophetic when one considers the aftermath of socialism in Russia. Dostoevsky confronted this issue head on when he wrote *The Brothers Karamazov*. While Dostoevsky may have failed to prevent the eventual socialist takeover which occurred less than forty years after his death, his book significantly affected Russian thought and debate for decades to come.

Published in serial form for a literary magazine called *The Russian Messenger* between 1879 and 1880, *The Brothers Karamazov* was instantly recognized as a

---

<sup>3</sup> Frank and Goldstein, *Selected Letters*, 371.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871-1881*, (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2003), 285.

monumental piece of literature and philosophy. To see just how important it was at the time, one can observe the reactions to its publication. One reader wrote:

“After the Karamazovs (and while reading it), several times I looked around in horror and was amazed that everything went on as before, that the world did not shift on its axis.... [T]his is something to such a degree prophetic, fiery, apocalyptic, that it seemed impossible to remain in the same place where we were yesterday, to have the same feeling that we had, to think of anything other than the terrible day of judgment.”<sup>5</sup>

Many readers experienced similar reactions. Indeed, with the amount of attention and uproar that the novel caused, it did not seem at all unlikely that Dostoevsky’s prophetic vision for Russia would come to fruition. In order to understand the furor and to devise Dostoevsky’s alternative vision for the Russia, I will now turn my attention to the explication of the novel itself.

*The Brothers Karamazov* is made up of four parts and an epilogue. Each part is composed of three books containing three to fourteen chapters. Part I focuses on the Karamazov family history and story background. Part II explores the religious and philosophical beliefs of Father, or alternatively Elder, Zosima, and Ivan. This chapter presents the juxtaposition between the beliefs of the *raznochintsy*, represented by Ivan, and Dostoevsky’s own views as presented by Father Zosima. It is the central part of the novel and will receive most of my attention. Part III contains the inciting moment for both Alyosha and Dmitry. Alyosha struggles with his direction in life following the death of Father Zosima, while Dmitry is arrested for murder after breaking into his father’s house. Part IV does little to conclude the story. Dmitry is found guilty at trial, Ivan is driven almost to insanity, and Alyosha is conflicted by the death of Ilyusha, the young schoolboy that threw stones at Alyosha. However, Dostoevsky does provide hope

---

<sup>5</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011), vii.

for the future of Russia in the epilogue through Alyosha's interaction with the schoolboys at Ilyusha's funeral.

At its core, the novel is a test of the ideals espoused by socialist thinkers. The primary question that it asks is whether or not God exists. In 1870, when writing to Apollon Maikov about *The Life of a Great Sinner*, which was the original concept for *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky stated, "The main question, which will run through all the parts of the novel, is the question that has tormented me either consciously or unconsciously all of my life – the existence of God."<sup>6</sup> To answer this question, Dostoevsky set up a brilliant test for the socialist answer to the Russian question and his own. On the one hand, he presents Ivan and his unintentional protégé Smerdyakov. On the other, he offers Father Zosima and Dostoevsky's eventual hero, Alyosha. While other characters certainly play an important role in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the issue of God's existence, the Russian soul, and Russia's destiny primarily concerns these four. By paying special attention to them, Dostoevsky's vision becomes clear.

This explication will begin with an introduction of Ivan and Smerdyakov. I will investigate and contrast their two beliefs and then examine how their ideals compared to Father Zosima and Alyosha's. Smerdyakov's murder and subsequent suicide will demonstrate the ultimate failure of Ivan's socialist ideals while Dostoevsky's vision for the Russian soul becomes apparent through the characters of Father Zosima and Alyosha. Throughout, I will show how Dostoevsky applied the lessons that he learned in his early life. Finally, I will conclude with a summary of the components of Dostoevsky's answer to the Russian question.

---

<sup>6</sup> Frank and Goldstein, *Selected Letters*, 331.

Ivan Karamazov is Fyodor Karamazov's oldest son by his second wife. He is different from every other character in the novel in a number of meaningful ways. He is the only brother that achieved any sort of higher education. He spent most of his adult life working or studying in Moscow. Not only did he attend a university, but he gained a significant amount of intellectual acclaim for publishing a paper which was of substantial interest for the church and secularists alike. To a reader during the 19th century, Ivan would be almost instantly recognizable as a member of the young, Russian intelligentsia. He is the quintessential example of so many young men in Russia at the time who were caught up in the social changes of the late 19th century.

In terms of characterization, Ivan would be described as an intellectual and a realist. However, he was neither a nihilist nor completely confident in his beliefs. Additionally, Ivan's disavowal of God did not stem from scientific reason. Instead, Ivan was disturbed by the amount of senseless suffering in the world. He was especially concerned for the plight of innocent children. He could not understand how a just and good God could possibly allow children to suffer, and thus he rejects him. Linda Ivanits states that, "Despite his inner sense that there is far more to creation than his mind can grasp, Ivan attempts to narrow it to what he can document in the here and now – the horrendous pain of earthly life, and above all, the suffering that adults inflict on children."<sup>7</sup> In Ivan, one sees the same inner turmoil that Dostoevsky struggled with throughout his life. Ivan desperately wants to find an answer to the problems he sees in the world, but seems unable to. He tries repeatedly to reconcile the conflict in his mind between faith and reason in his many conversations with Alyosha and Smerdyakov.

---

<sup>7</sup> Linda Ivanits, *Dostoevsky and the Russian People*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 171.

Unfortunately, his sense of reason prohibits him from coming to a full understanding as he clings desperately to the simple dictates of logic.

It is easy to see the similarities between Ivan and Dostoevsky as a young man. Dostoevsky clearly drew heavily upon his own experiences when he created Ivan. In many ways, Ivan's story is the same as Dostoevsky's. Separated from his family and living in a large city, Ivan became very interested in the political and social issues of the young intellectuals. Dostoevsky did much the same when he went to St. Petersburg. Dostoevsky began to question his faith and was swept up in the wave of Utopian Socialism. Outside influences like Belinsky encouraged Dostoevsky in this regard. It took a fateful trip to a Siberian prison camp to restore his faith and convince him that there was good in humanity, even when confronted firsthand with its intolerable cruelties. Despite that experience, Dostoevsky struggled with his faith his entire life. He himself stated that Ivan's argument against God due to the suffering of innocent children was "irrefutable."<sup>8</sup> Just like Dostoevsky, Ivan is unable to reason his way through the suffering that children experience.

Despite these similarities, Ivan does not represent the voice of Dostoevsky. Instead, Ivan represents the young intelligentsia who rejected Christianity in favor of socialism. Dostoevsky describes Ivan's convictions by saying that such a:

"...body of beliefs is precisely what I recognize as the Synthesis of today's Russian anarchism. It is the denial, not of God, but of the significance of His creation. Socialism as a whole... has become a program of destruction and anarchy. The original anarchists were, in many instances, people of sincere convictions... I do not know whether I have carried it off well or not, but I do know that the personality of my hero [Ivan] couldn't be more realistic."<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Frank and Goldstein, *Selected Letters*, 465.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, Ivan concludes that if God and immortality do not exist, “everything is permitted.”<sup>10</sup> He also argues that Christ’s dictates of “Freedom” and “Light” are impossible for mankind.<sup>11</sup> In his now infamous *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, Ivan presents a fantastic tale of what would happen if Christ came back in the form of man again. In the story, Christ returns to perform his miracles, and the people believe in Him. But the Catholic Church arrests Him and sentences Him to burn at the stake. The Grand Inquisitor tells Christ that mankind is not noble enough for the faith that He offers. What man really wants is enslavement. They want to be fed and told what to do. If everything is permitted, some organization must take control and give men what they really want.

However, Dostoevsky also makes clear that, in his opinion, Ivan is not a typical socialist. Instead, Ivan is given the opportunity to grow and develop as a character. Though he espouses socialist beliefs, its answer remains unsatisfactory to him by his very nature. Gibson argues that, “The best evidence against what [Ivan] says is what he does.”<sup>12</sup> Ivan does not act as if everything is permitted and he certainly does not join revolutionary societies wishing to implement socialism. Ivan is horrified when he learns that his rationale regarding God was used by Smerdyakov to justify the murder of his father. He tries to claim responsibility for the murder at Dmitry’s trial and later develops an escape plan in the hopes of getting Dmitry free. He concludes that his ideas concerning socialism are in fact dangerous for society. The very fact that Ivan reaches

---

<sup>10</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 65.

<sup>11</sup> Frank and Goldstein, *Selected Letters*, 469.

<sup>12</sup> A. Boyce Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 176.

this conclusion about socialism and godlessness is important. Dostoevsky states that:

“The difference is that our socialists... knowingly act like Jesuits and liars, refusing to admit that their ideal is an ideal of the coercion of the human conscience and the reduction of mankind to the level of cattle, whereas my socialist (Ivan Karamazov) is a sincere man who openly admits that he agrees with the Grand Inquisitor’s view of mankind and with the contention that belief in Christ assumes that man is a much nobler creature than he really is.”<sup>13</sup>

By honestly assessing socialism, Ivan is able to realize its terrible consequences.

Unfortunately, Ivan could not find any other answer to the Russian question in light of his “irrefutable” argument against God’s existence, namely the suffering of children.

Subsequently, Ivan is forced to endure the consequences of his beliefs as they are played out right before his eyes. Dostoevsky uses the character of Smerdyakov to test Ivan’s beliefs, ultimately showing their fatal flaw.

Smerdyakov was Fyodor Karamazov’s only son born out of wedlock. He is the ultimate result of his father’s lustful habits. Smerdyakov’s mother was the local village “holy fool.” While the fact that Fyodor Karamazov had lecherously taken advantage of a mentally handicapped girl was an unfortunate auspice to be born under, Smerdyakov was taken in and treated kindly by Grigory, the steward who was responsible for raising the other three brothers as young children. It was soon evident however, that Smerdyakov was determined to make the worst out of life. He was “unsociable and taciturn”. As a child, “he was very fond of hanging cats, and burying them with great ceremony.”<sup>14</sup> He had no friends, though he idolizes Ivan. He makes a special point to torment the simple-minded steward Grigory with arguments against Christianity.

---

<sup>13</sup> Frank and Goldstein, *Selected Letters*, 469.

<sup>14</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 111.

As mentioned previously, Smerdyakov plays an extremely important role in *The Brothers Karamazov* because he is the embodiment of the socialist ideals when taken to Ivan's ultimate conclusion. At first, Ivan took a special interest in Smerdyakov. They discussed philosophy and Smerdyakov opened up to Ivan. Smerdyakov was "always inquiring, putting certain indirect but obviously premeditated questions, but what his object was he did not explain, and usually at the most important moment he would break off and relapse into silence or pass to another subject."<sup>15</sup> Ivan began to dislike Smerdyakov for just this reason. Still, Smerdyakov seemed to believe that he and Ivan shared an understanding that no one else had. In fact, Smerdyakov believes that they are the only two intelligent men in the village.

When Smerdyakov hints to Ivan about the possibility of Fyodor Karamazov's murder, he warns Ivan to leave the village beforehand and remove himself from the whole situation. However, he only tells him to go to the nearby village of Chermashnya instead of Moscow like Ivan originally planned, just so that he can return quickly in case anything were to happen while Ivan was away. Smerdyakov's implication was that Ivan should remain close so that he could return to collect his inheritance money. Ivan initially repels any such notions. Later that same day however, for some odd reason that even Ivan cannot determine, he tells Smerdyakov that he will in fact go to Chermashnya. On the way to the train station however, he changes his mind and goes to Moscow instead. It is almost as if some inner part of Ivan wants Smerdyakov to go through with the murder, but he is too afraid of the consequences to stay behind to see it happen. When he wakes up the next morning on the train just outside of Moscow, Ivan whispers

---

<sup>15</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 231.

to himself, “I am a scoundrel!”<sup>16</sup> After the murder, Smerdyakov lays the blame for the murder on Ivan, claiming that he was only a tool who carried out Ivan’s wishes. He says:

“It was all that going to Chermashnya. Why! You were meaning to go to Moscow and refused all your father’s entreaties to go to Chermashnya – and simply at a foolish word from me you consented at once! What reason had you to consent to Chermashnya, sir? Since you went to Chermashnya with no reason, simply at my word, it shows that you must have expected something from me... *You* murdered him; you are the real murderer, I was only your instrument... and it was following your words I did it.”<sup>17</sup>

And why did Smerdyakov commit the murder? The external motivation was of course the 3,000 rubles which he stole after murdering Fyodor Karamazov. His justification however, as he tells Ivan repeatedly during their meetings after the murder, was the very phrase that Ivan had often said. “Everything is permitted.”

Smerdyakov reminded Ivan that his own reasoning led to the murder of Ivan’s father. He essentially asks, if there is no God, no immortality, and if you can kill for money and get away with it, why should you not? When Ivan finally realized his own guilt, it was too late. He turned mad with grief, at last realizing that everything is in fact not permitted and he was responsible for the murder just like Smerdyakov. For his part, Smerdyakov also seems to realize that Ivan’s logic does not hold true in practice. He commits suicide in despair. Dostoevsky’s summary of this socialist consequence is thus:

“For the world says: ‘You have desires and so satisfy them, for you have the same rights as the most rich and powerful. Don’t be afraid of satisfying them and even multiplying your desires.’ That is the modern doctrine of the world. In that they see freedom... And what follows from this right of multiplication of desires? In the rich, *isolation* and spiritual suicide; in the poor, envy and murder...”<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 242.

<sup>17</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 524

<sup>18</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 270

Dostoevsky thus makes it clear that Ivan's answer to the Russian question is not only wrong, it is terrifying. Moreover it predicts with almost eerie accuracy the results of socialism. When the Bolsheviks finally came to power 40 years later, the state did indeed take the place of religion, subjecting its citizens to enslavement of thought and placating them with bread. Soviet leaders committed atrocities against its own people for the "wellbeing" of the state. Obviously, such atrocities were not part of the vision that Dostoevsky had for the Russian people. Ivan's remorse and Smerdyakov's suicide indicate that, when confronted with the results of socialist and atheist thought, mankind is nobler than Ivan's *Grand Inquisitor* believed. Despite all logical conclusions that God must not exist and everything is permitted, man's soul rejects such conclusions. Therefore, there must be an alternative answer to the Russian question that aligned more closely with an accurate view of the Russian soul. Dostoevsky contrasts the test of socialism in Ivan and Smerdyakov with his treatment of Father Zosima and his hero, Alyosha. Through them, one can explore how Dostoevsky believed that the Russian question should be answered.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Father Zosima and Alyosha

Though his appearance in *The Brothers Karamazov* is relatively short, Father Zosima is arguably the most important character in the novel. While Dostoevsky describes Alyosha as his hero, *The Brothers Karamazov*'s primary purpose regarding Alyosha is to introduce him to the reader, establishing him for an expanded role in Dostoevsky's next novel. Father Zosima remains the primary conveyor of Dostoevsky's beliefs. It is his character that is contrasted against Ivan's. Dostoevsky offers him as a rebuttal to Ivan and his socialist ideals. Dostoevsky describes Books 5 and 6 as "the culminating point of the novel."<sup>1</sup> Book 5 covers Ivan's *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* and his initial conversation with Smerdyakov. Conversely, Book 6 tells the story of Father Zosima's life and teachings. Dostoevsky had this to say about Father Zosima:

"In [Book 6], there will be the death of Elder Zosima and his last conversations with his friends... If I can bring it off, I will have accomplished something useful: *I will force them* [the socialists] *to admit* that a pure and ideal Christian is not an abstraction but a tangible, real possibility that can be contemplated with our own eyes and that it is in Christianity alone that the salvation of the Russian land from all her afflictions lies."<sup>2</sup>

Dostoevsky's goal was to provide a clear and realistic image that could convey his answer to Russian question. Through Father Zosima, Dostoevsky makes the argument that Christianity offers the "salvation of the Russian land." He claims that it will provide the reconciliation of the Russian people. And yet it is not just any type of Christianity that

---

<sup>1</sup> Frank and Goldstein, *Selected Letters*, 469.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

will make such a vision a reality. Father Zosima identifies the key attributes that are necessary for Dostoevsky's new Russia. Alyosha is his test subject and proves that Dostoevsky's vision is superior to the socialist vision exemplified by Ivan and Smerdyakov. By examining Father Zosima and Alyosha in depth, one can determine the precise characteristics that Dostoevsky viewed as vital to the salvation of the Russian soul.

Father Zosima was the chief elder of the local monastery in the village where the events of *The Brothers Karamazov* take place. He had become not only locally famous, but famous throughout Russia for his distinct piety and holiness. Alyosha had become attached to him as young man, sincerely believing his holy teachings. Due in large part to his status as such a holy man, Zosima was asked to preside over a meeting between Dmitry and Fyodor Karamazov in order to resolve their dispute. Father Zosima has a profound impact on everyone at the meeting, aside from Fyodor Karamazov himself. He is unable to resolve the dispute, but predicts that dangerous and dramatic events are about to occur. He leaves the meeting and begs Alyosha to carefully watch Ivan and Dmitry. He dies due to a wasting illness shortly thereafter and Alyosha records his life-story on his deathbed.

Before becoming a monk, Father Zosima was the son of landowners and an officer in the army. While in the military, Zosima makes clear that he was far from perfect. He said, "Drunkenness, debauchery and devilry were what we almost prided ourselves on. I don't say that we were bad by nature, all these young men were good fellows, but they behaved badly, and I worst of all."<sup>3</sup> Father Zosima's transformation into Alyosha's mentor occurs when the young Zosima rashly challenges a man to a duel

---

<sup>3</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 255.

over a presumed offense. The night before, Zosima had become irate and repeatedly punched his defenseless orderly in the face. Upon awaking the next day, Zosima was crushed by his own cruelty. That morning before the duel, he fell down at the knees of his servant and begged his forgiveness. Shortly afterwards, he refused to take a shot at the man he had challenged to a duel. Though initially branded a coward, he began to tell everyone of the new idea he had which caused him to call off the duel. He gained a small notoriety within the camp before befriending a man who sincerely believed in his words. One day, this man confessed to Father Zosima that he had murdered a young widow fourteen years before and desperately wanted to know how he should make it right. Father Zosima convinces him to confess the murder. The man does so, but is not believed. He eventually becomes sick and Father Zosima is blamed for inciting the man to madness. Zosima quietly departed and eventually took up residence in the town where the events of *The Brothers Karamazov* take place.

The most important part of this account is a theme which is repeated often throughout Father Zosima's tale. It is the theme of universal responsibility. When crushed by his guilt over hitting his servant, Father Zosima remembered the words of his younger brother when he was dying:

“My dear ones, why do you wait on me, why do you love me, am I worth your waiting on me? ... Mother, my little heart, in truth we are each responsible to all and for all, it's only that men don't know this. If they knew it, the world would be a paradise at once... In truth, perhaps, I am more than all others responsible for all, a greater sinner than all me in the world.”<sup>4</sup>

This idea, the concept that an individual is responsible to everyone and also responsible for their sins, is at the center of Dostoevsky's vision for Russia. Dostoevsky

---

<sup>4</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 257.

believed that only when everyone on earth understands within themselves that they are responsible for others and accountable to them, not only for their own sins, but for the sins of everyone, then Russia will emerge from its present darkness. Dostoevsky was completely aware of the ridiculousness of the concept. How can someone be responsible for someone else's sin? Father Zosima is asked, "But how can I possibly be responsible for all... Can I, for instance be responsible for you?"<sup>5</sup> He responds, "You may well not know it... since the whole world has long been going on a different line, since we consider the veriest lies as truth and demand the same lies from others. Here I have for once in my life acted sincerely and, well, you all look upon me as a madman."<sup>6</sup>

For Dostoevsky, the concept of universal responsibility arises from such a distinct knowledge of one's own unworthiness. It comes from a deep understanding of humility and thankfulness for the grace of God. It is completely different from the socialist idea which demands equality on the ground that all men are worthy and deserve to be treated better. That idea leads to the effects that Dostoevsky illustrated through Ivan and Smerdyakov. Dostoevsky believed that the only way the Russian soul could achieve its ultimate form was for each person to wholeheartedly accept Father Zosima's ideas. Father Zosima said, "Until you have become really, in actual fact, a brother to everyone, brotherhood will not come to pass. No sort of *scientific teaching, no kind of common interest* [italics added], will ever teach men to share property and privileges with equal consideration for all."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 259.

<sup>6</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 260.

<sup>7</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 261.

Dostoevsky's belief that the Russian people would accept his vision of universal responsibility before every other country in the world is built upon another characteristic which is inherent within Eastern Orthodoxy and the Russian people. It is the theme of Christ and suffering which is necessary, as Dostoevsky saw it, to truly love. In Dostoevsky's view, both socialism and the Catholic Church had lost this image of Christ. Consequently, neither had any hope of offering a true reconciliation for mankind. The themes of Christ and suffering are prevalent throughout the New Testament and extremely important in Eastern Orthodox teaching. In Christ's Sermon on the Mount, He lists what are now referred to as the Beatitudes. The last Beatitude says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."<sup>8</sup> This theme of suffering unjustly is prevalent throughout the Bible. In Orthodox tradition, the lives of saints who bore extreme suffering are upheld as ideals for the Church. Dostoevsky was sure to have known the story of Boris and Gleb, two Russian princes who refused to resist death in imitation of Christ's innocent suffering on the cross. These first Russian martyrs were fundamental to Russia's identity. Indeed, the story of Boris and Gleb inspired entire cults of Russian monks who intentionally endured suffering in order to become closer with God.

Dostoevsky observed this concept of suffering for wrongs not committed as a core quality of the Russian people and Russian Orthodox. It set them apart from Western ideals that were prevalent in Europe and socialist thought at the time. Suffering was natural for Russians and was a fundamental component of the Russian soul as Dostoevsky saw it. In a letter to Apollon Maikov in 1871, Dostoevsky attributes much of

---

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 5:10-11 (Revised Standard Version)

Europe's troubles to its rejection of Russian Orthodoxy. He wrote, "All of Europe's misfortunes, all, all of its ills, without exception, harkens back to its loss of Christ with the establishment of the Roman church, after which they decided that they could manage just as well without Christ."<sup>9</sup> Part of the reason he believed the Catholic Church had lost Christ was because it no longer emphasized Christ's suffering and love the way the Russian Orthodox Church did. If Russia were to lose this emphasis as well, it would lose a fundamental part of its very soul.

Dostoevsky closely associated the concept of suffering with the universal responsibility of mankind. Through it, he claimed that both the Russian common people and the nobility would one day unify Russia and provide a light to the world. Father Zosima proclaims:

"But God will save Russia, for though the peasants are corrupted and cannot renounce their stinking sin, yet they know that their stinking sin is cursed by God and that they do wrong in sinning. So that our people still believe in righteousness, have faith in God, and weep tears of devotion. It is different with the upper classes. They, following science, want to base justice on reason alone, but not with Christ, as before, and they have already proclaimed that there is no crime, that there is no sin... But God will save Russia... Salvation will come from the people, from their faith and meekness."<sup>10</sup>

This is the idea which Father Zosima passed on to Alyosha and the other monks at the monastery. Throughout the next chapters of the novel, Alyosha's faith would be tested. In the end however, his beliefs hold true and he becomes the hero Dostoevsky claimed he would be.

The contrast between the two tests of ideals finally becomes apparent when one investigates Dostoevsky's hero, Alyosha Karamazov. In the same way that Dostoevsky

---

<sup>9</sup> Frank and Goldstein, *Selected Letters*, 344-345.

<sup>10</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 272.

used Smerdyakov to illustrate the consequences of accepting socialism as the answer to the Russian question, he used Alyosha to demonstrate the result of freely accepting universal responsibility for mankind. Furthermore, he shows how two elements of the Russian soul, the love of suffering and mystic hope in the future, tie into his answer to the Russian question. In order to see how Dostoevsky relates these elements to his conclusion, one can inspect Alyosha first as a character and then trace the results of his actions to understand Dostoevsky's final message for Russia.

Even from the author's preface, Dostoevsky makes it clear that Alyosha is meant to be a different type of hero than Russia had ever seen. He begins by telling the reader that Alyosha does not fit the normal criteria for a "hero." He states that:

"... although I call Alexey Fyodorovich my hero, still I myself know that he is by no means a great man, and hence I foresee such unavoidable questions as these: What is so remarkable about [him], that you have chosen him as your hero? What has he done? What is he known for, and by whom? Why should I, the reader, waste time learning the facts of his life?"<sup>11</sup>

The only answers that Dostoevsky provides to these questions are that Alyosha is "eccentric" and that readers will have to read on further in order to perhaps discover why Dostoevsky finds him so remarkable. Clearly, Alyosha is not meant to be a traditional hero in the sense that he accomplishes great or "heroic" deeds. On the contrary, Alyosha is quite unassuming. Therefore, Dostoevsky had to do something different with Alyosha which made him worthy of the reader's attention. To that end, Dostoevsky created a character with a completely different outlook on life than any other character in Russian literature.

---

<sup>11</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 7.

When Dostoevsky introduces Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*, one immediately understands that Alyosha embraced the concept of universal love for mankind wholeheartedly. Dostoevsky calls him a “lover of humanity.”<sup>12</sup> As a student of Father Zosima, Alyosha accepts the spiritual guidelines that Father Zosima espouses. He never judged anyone, even when his father had drunken orgies in their home. He demonstrated continual love for Ivan despite his atheism and remains faithful to Dmitry despite believing him to be guilty of his father’s murder. Almost every passage involving Alyosha is a demonstration of his love towards others. In fact, he is so good and pure that even those characters that initially disliked him (i.e. Fyodor Karamazov, Ilyusha) or sought to corrupt him (i.e. Grushenka) seem irresistibly drawn to him.

At first glance, Alyosha appears very similar to Dostoevsky’s “perfectly good man”, Prince Myshkin. However, Dostoevsky took special pains to ensure that Alyosha was not thought of as a mystic or a fool. Just like with Father Zosima, Dostoevsky wanted to demonstrate that his representation of universal love for mankind in Alyosha was a real possibility and not some unattainable abstract. To do so, Dostoevsky showed that even Alyosha had character flaws. Despite the number of admirable virtues and qualities which set Alyosha apart, he was susceptible to the same sinful desires and doubts which all men face. Following the death of Father Zosima and his discussions with Ivan regarding the existence of God, Alyosha becomes a very real and accessible character. In the immediate aftermath of Father Zosima’s death, rumors swirled that his body would not decay and smell like that of an ordinary man due to his great amount of piety. Alyosha wholeheartedly believed these rumors. However, when Father Zosima’s body acted just like any other, Alyosha despaired. He viewed it as a great injustice for

---

<sup>12</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 21.

such a holy man. When visited a short time later by his friend Rakitin, Alyosha was wearied and irritable. Asked if he was rebelling against God, Alyosha echoed the words of his brother Ivan with whom he had spoken to earlier saying, “I am not rebelling against my God; I simply ‘don’t accept His world.’”<sup>13</sup> Here, one sees a man who is trying desperately to come to grips with a harsh reality that seemed contradictory to his belief of God’s plan.

As a result of this struggle, Alyosha’s many flaws become more manifest. While normally composed, reverent, and pure, the issue with Father Zosima’s decaying body seemed to break Alyosha’s strong outer shell. Consequently, Dostoevsky introduces us to Alyosha’s human nature and predispositions as a member of the Karamazov family. Dmitry was correct when he said that all the Karamazovs were insects that were tied to their sensual lusts.<sup>14</sup> Even Alyosha knew about his base instincts and was afraid of his own potential lust for women. This terror haunted him and was why he was always on his guard around women. Dostoevsky’s original notes for Book Seven overtly state that “sensuous feelings for Grushenka bit him” on the night before he went to visit her.<sup>15</sup> Grushenka had even had designs to tempt and lure Alyosha into sin, though she drops them upon meeting him for the first time.<sup>16</sup> The only thing that protected him from those feelings was the overwhelming grief he felt due to the death of Father Zosima. Dostoevsky writes that, “On the contrary, this woman [Grushenka], dreaded above all women, sitting now on [Alyosha’s] knee, holding him in her arms, aroused in him now a

---

<sup>13</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 294.

<sup>14</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 98.

<sup>15</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 462.

<sup>16</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 300.

quite different, unexpected, peculiar feeling, a feeling of the interest and purest interest without a trace of fear, of his former terror. That was what instinctively surprised him.”<sup>17</sup> Not only does Alyosha’s struggle to maintain sexual purity become clear, but he begins to drink wine and eat foods that are forbidden to the monastic order. While never expressly forbidden to Alyosha since he was not part of the monastery, he had previously abstained from drinks and extravagant foods in his quest for faith.

And yet, despite Alyosha’s flaws as a human and the earth-shattering blow to his convictions, he never completely loses his faith in God. In fact, Alyosha’s faith is renewed following Father Zosima’s death due to precisely the same force which allowed Dostoevsky to emerge from his time in the Siberian prison camp with a stronger faith of his own. The unexpected kindness of the criminals in Dostoevsky’s camp renewed his faith in the same way that Grushenka’s unexpected kindness renewed Alyosha’s. After Grushenka admits that she initially desired to seduce Alyosha, she repents of it and opens up to Alyosha about her past. Wronged by a man five years prior, Grushenka explains her torment now that the same man has returned to the town. She explains that she is going to meet him tomorrow and has considered murdering him. She then begins sobbing uncontrollably in her attempt to make up her mind. Upon hearing her story, Alyosha immediately understands her pain and also realizes that Grushenka would never commit such a murder. The kindness she showed to Alyosha and her willingness to open up to him convince Alyosha that Grushenka is a far better person than he had ever believed. More, he realizes that it was his own willingness to forgive and not judge

---

<sup>17</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 300.

which allowed Grushenka to forgive. He explains:

“What am I beside her? I came here seeking my ruin, and said to myself, ‘What does it matter’ in my cowardliness, but she after five years in torment, as soon as anyone says a word from the heart to her-it makes her forget everything, forgive everything, in her tears!”<sup>18</sup>

Grushenka also realizes the power of Alyosha’s love and forgiveness. She cries to Alyosha, “I’ve been waiting all my life for someone like you, I knew that someone like you would come and forgive me.”<sup>19</sup> Alyosha’s forgiveness gives her the strength to become a better person and she rushes off to the officer who hurt her in order to forgive him.

By the time Alyosha left Grushenka’s that evening, he had transformed into the hero as Dostoevsky called him. The smell of Father Zosima’s body no longer torments Alyosha because he had a renewed spirit of love. Instead, he once again trusted in God having seen the strength that love and forgiveness generate. That night, Alyosha dreams he was at the wedding feast in Cana with Jesus. He meets Father Zosima there who tells him that helping Grushenka was Alyosha’s first step towards his future ministry. Alyosha wakes from the dream to realize that by demonstrating God’s infinite love and mercy, he can help change the world, particularly Russia. In the final paragraph of Book Seven, the narrator proclaims:

“He longed to forgive everyone and for everything, and to beg forgiveness... Not for himself, but for all men, for all and for everything... It was as though some idea had seized the sovereignty of his mind-and it was for all his life and forever and ever. He had fallen on the earth a weak youth, but he rose up a resolute champion, and he knew and felt it suddenly at the very moment of his ecstasy.”<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 305.

<sup>19</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 307.

<sup>20</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 312.

In this passage, one can clearly see Alyosha's transformation into the hero. His sudden embrace of Father Zosima's principles of universal love and forgiveness changes him from a "weak youth" into a "resolute champion." For Dostoevsky, this type of transformation is heroic, and that is why he chose Alyosha as his primary hero. Once again, one sees that Dostoevsky believes that these new ideals of freely accepted love and responsibility are what make someone a hero.

Throughout the latter half of the novel, Dostoevsky demonstrates how these ideals would fare in Russia. Furthermore, he argues that the Russian soul's association with suffering would enable Russia to implement his new idea on a widespread basis. Alyosha's interaction with the schoolboys, in particular, demonstrates Dostoevsky's evidence of proof for his theory. Whereas Ivan's socialist tendencies were shown to be an insufficient, and in fact devastating, answer to the Russian question by Smerdyakov, Dostoevsky's portrayal of Alyosha is meant to prove that Father Zosima's ideals are able to transform Russia into something greater. This answer would connect both noble and peasant alike without the need for socialism.

Initially, Alyosha's episodes with the schoolboys seem out of place in *The Brothers Karamazov*. They are certainly tangential to the main plotline dealing with the murder of Fyodor Karamazov. However, it is precisely for this reason that one must investigate them. These episodes take up a rather large portion of the novel. Therefore, it is important to understand why Dostoevsky would add them despite their lack of a real connection to the rest of the story. Ultimately, one finds that Alyosha's interactions with the schoolboys demonstrate the triumph of Dostoevsky's answer to the Russian question, at least in his own mind. They clearly illustrate the contrast between the consequences of

Ivan's ideals and those of Father Zosima. Furthermore, they show that the Russian soul's association with unjust suffering and hope in the future tie in perfectly with Dostoevsky's vision.

Once, as Alyosha left his father's house, he met a group of boys with satchels full of stones. When another boy, named Ilyusha, began throwing stones at the group, Alyosha was hit. The first group of boys furiously told Alyosha what a horrible scoundrel Ilyusha was and stated that he intended to hit Alyosha. Convinced that Ilyusha was mistreated by the boys, Alyosha attempted to determine why and struck up a conversation with him. Ilyusha immediately became irritable and furiously began to assault Alyosha verbally before throwing stones at him in an attempt to make Alyosha angry. Alyosha is saddened and asks what he did to provoke Ilyusha's anger. Ilyusha then bit Alyosha's finger to the bone, but Alyosha still refused to fight back. Alyosha told the boy:

“Very well... you see how badly you've bitten me. That's enough, isn't it? Now tell me, what have I done to you... Though I don't know you and it's the first time I've seen you... yet I must have done something to you-you wouldn't have hurt me like this for nothing. So what have I done? How have I wronged you, tell me?”<sup>21</sup>

At this response, Ilyusha runs off sobbing and Alyosha is left standing in the street wondering about the event.

This first interaction with the schoolboys illustrates how accepting universal responsibility for the sins of others can change lives. Additionally, it demonstrates that the Russian ability to bear suffering unjustly enables Alyosha to show true love for Ilyusha. In Dostoevsky's mind, the ability to endure suffering, accept universal responsibility for the sins of others, and give love and forgiveness are all closely

---

<sup>21</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 158-159.

associated. Alyosha's conviction that he must have done something to wrong Ilyusha, despite never meeting him, gives him the strength to accept Ilyusha's outbursts without getting angry or upset. His refusal to retaliate confuses Ilyusha who runs off crying.

As a result of this first interaction, Alyosha opens the door to further outreach with Ilyusha and the other schoolboys. Indeed, Alyosha later finds out that Ilyusha had been retaliating against him because Dmitry had attacked Ilyusha's father. When Ilyusha becomes terminally ill, Alyosha makes it a point to be by his bedside and cheer him up in whatever way possible. He even convinces the boys that Ilyusha fought with to come see him and make amends. In particular, Alyosha meets with their leader, Kolya, and brings him to Ilyusha's house. The scene at Ilyusha's bedside in which Kolya and Ilyusha make up is an extremely touching moment. The reader almost believes at that moment that love and forgiveness will be able to cure Ilyusha. When the doctor comes in to check on Ilyusha, Alyosha and Kolya have a discussion about love, God, and socialism.

By this time, Kolya has come to respect Alyosha but makes it clear that he believes that faith in God is mystical nonsense. Additionally, he claims that it's possible to be just like Alyosha without believing in God at all. He asks, "It's possible for one who doesn't believe in God to love mankind, don't you think so? Didn't Voltaire not believe in God and love mankind?"<sup>22</sup> He proudly proclaims that he is a Socialist and that Christianity has only served to help the rich and powerful subjugate the lower classes. However, through a series of questioning, Alyosha casts doubt on Kolya's beliefs. He reveals that Russian socialist thought at the time was based in conceit, echoing Dostoevsky's opinion of Belinsky so many years earlier. Alyosha reaffirms that simple love and forgiveness is far superior to the egotistic belief that man could solve life's

---

<sup>22</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 466.

problems without God. Kolya too realizes this as well and thanks Alyosha for his words, promising to be better in the future. Once again, Dostoevsky uses Alyosha to prove his belief that socialism was not a viable option. Examples of Alyosha's simple faith and love show the potential success of Dostoevsky's vision.

Unfortunately, soon after Alyosha's conversation with Kolya, Ilyusha dies. The final scene in the novel involves the schoolboys and Alyosha at Ilyusha's funeral. In that scene, he again reemphasizes the importance of suffering unjustly. Kolya explains his envy at the chance that Dmitry has to suffer in the name of truth. Several boys proclaim their agreement, giving an indication that they too might someday be willing to suffer unjustly for the sake of others. Alyosha's last speech at Ilyusha's gravestone is an entreaty to the boys to remember love and goodness they showed to Ilyusha. The story ends with Kolya asking, "Karamazov! Can it really be true what religion says, that we shall all rise from the dead, and shall live, and see each other again, everyone, and Ilyushechka?" Alyosha answers, "Certainly we shall all rise again, certainly we shall see each other and gladly, joyfully will tell each other all that has happened."<sup>23</sup>

The primary purpose of the scene is to demonstrate Dostoevsky's hope for the future, specifically his hope in Russia's children. He hoped that Russia's youth would latch onto his ideals in the same way Alyosha did. Dostoevsky showed that Alyosha's willingness to accept Ilyusha's mistreatment and responsibility for Ilyusha's sin resulted in an outpouring of love and forgiveness in the hearts of many Russian children. By being an example of Christ's own suffering on the cross, Alyosha brings about far better results than Smerdyakov's disastrous experience with "everything is permitted." For Dostoevsky, Alyosha presented the perfect example for Russia's new youth to follow.

---

<sup>23</sup> Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 646.

Alyosha's reassurance that there is an afterlife and Kolya's acceptance give hope to a novel filled with patricide, suicide, insanity, illness, and unjust suffering. It promises what the Russian soul has always known: that not all suffering is in vain and that there is always hope for a better tomorrow.

### Conclusion

Ultimately, this explication offers new insight into Dostoevsky's answer to the Russian question in *The Brothers Karamazov* given his view of the Russian soul. Beginning with his childhood, it shows Dostoevsky's early association with Utopian Socialism and his desire to reconcile the peasant and noble classes in Russia in the wake of the serf emancipation. Furthermore, it demonstrates how Dostoevsky's experience in a Siberian prison camp gave him confidence in the Russian people and their ability to endure suffering. As a result, Dostoevsky became convinced that there was an alternative answer to the Russian question other than the socialist ideas which had become popular in Russia. Subsequently, in his final book, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky outlined his vision for Russia built on his understanding of suffering and the Russian soul. He did so by first condemning socialism through his characters Ivan and Smerdyakov. Finally, he presented an entirely different idea through Father Zosima and Alyosha. In Dostoevsky's view, the Russian soul's need for suffering would enable the next generation of Russian youth to universally accept responsibility for the sins of all mankind. Using Christ's image of unjust suffering, they would be able to love the world and forgive everyone their sins. In the future, it would be possible to contrast how alternative visions of the Russian soul affected the answer to the Russian question and compare that to Dostoevsky.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 2006.
- Berdyayev, Nikolai. *The Fate of Russia*, Moscow: Leman and C. I. Sakharov, 1918. Accessed March 20, 2014, [http://www.berdyayev.com/berdiaev/berd\\_lib/1915-\\_007.html](http://www.berdyayev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1915-_007.html)
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011.
- Frank, Joseph. *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- . *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- . *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- . *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871-1881*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Frank, Joseph, and Goldstein, David. *Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987.
- Freeborn, Richard. *Dostoevsky*. London: Haus Publishing, 2003.
- Engels, Friedrich and Marx, Karl. *Birth of the Communist Manifesto*. New York: International Publishers, 1971.
- Gibson, A. Boyce. *The Religion of Dostoevsky*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848*. London: Abacus, 1977.
- Ivanits, Linda. *Dostoevsky and the Russian People*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Lowe, David, and Meyer, Ronald. *Fyodor Dostoevsky: Complete Letters Volume One 1832-1859*. Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis Publishers, 1988.
- Riasanovsky, Nicholas, and Steinberg, Mark. *A History of Russia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Ries, Nancy. *Russian Talk Culture and Conversation During Perestroika*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Ware, Timothy. *The Orthodox Church*. London: Penguin Books, 1997.
- Williams, Robert. "The Russian Soul: A Study in European Thought and Non-European Nationalism". *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31 1970.