

ABSTRACT

Orthodoxy and Existentialism: The Religious Root of Dostoevsky's Moral Dialectic

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In my thesis, I show the ways in which Russian Eastern Orthodoxy relates to and impacts Fyodor Dostoevsky's Existentialism. I begin by identifying and explaining the Orthodox theme of transformative suffering, as it appears in the ecclesial tradition of Kievan Rus, after which I demonstrate the presence of this theme and tradition in Dostoevsky's upbringing in Nicholaevan Russia. I close by relating this transformative suffering to the moral dialectic Dostoevsky establishes in his novels, specifically *Notes From Underground* and *Crime and Punishment*. In doing so, I show the similarities and conversation between Russian Eastern Orthodoxy and Dostoevsky's existentialism.

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ORTHODOXY AND EXISTENTIALISM: THE RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF
DOSTOEVSKY'S MORAL DIALECTIC

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One	1
Chapter Two	7
Chapter Three	25
Chapter Four	40
Conclusion	63
Bibliography	65

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

One of the greatest writers in Russia and the world is nineteenth century figure Fyodor Dostoevsky. Renowned for his ability to capture powerful, controversial, and engaging philosophical ideas in the heart of his characters and stories, Dostoevsky continues to fascinate and perplex. A seemingly endless stream of scholars have attempted to capture and express the mysterious beliefs and ideas of a man whose work is as relevant today as it was in his own.¹

Many scholars have described Dostoevsky as an existentialist because of his emphasis on certain questions dealing with human existence. Though the term “existentialism” came into popular use in the mid-twentieth century, the ideas common to twentieth century existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus present themselves in Dostoevsky’s works. Though difficult to define, existentialism is a philosophical movement which focuses heavily on the individual as a source of meaning, value, and identity, especially with regard to individual’s honesty and integrity to his subjective motivations and desires. As expressed in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, existentialism may be defined as “the philosophical theory which holds that a further set of categories, governed by the norm of authenticity, is necessary to grasp

¹ Recent works on Dostoevsky include Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011).; Nancy Rutenburg, *Dostoevsky’s Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).; Robin Feuer Miller, *Dostoevsky’s Unfinished Journey* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 2007).; Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of a Prophet* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).; W.J. Leatherbarrow, *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

human existence.”² Like the existentialists of the twentieth century, Dostoevsky likewise pursues an understanding of the individual apart from outside laws and social norms. One of the primary questions he pursues in his writings is, “What is a human being?” and his response relies on a definition of the individual, concentrating on human freedom and subjective passions.

Though there is considerable agreement regarding Dostoevsky’s existential qualities, scholars have debated the nature and degree of his faith.³ While his texts seem to convey an overtly Christian message, in the form of characters like Elder Zosima and Alyosha Karamazov, characters and events from these same works concede a bitter and calculated voice of atheism and determinism. Because of the contradictory tone of his works, scholars defend different viewpoints regarding the true nature of Dostoevsky’s writings. While some consider him an undeniably Christian writer with an insurmountable faith in Christ, others consider him a begrudging apostate, a man once ensconced by Christianity but who gradually denounced his faith in a long and futile struggle to defend God in the wake of gratuitous suffering.⁴

² Steven Crowell, "Existentialism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, available at <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/existentialism/>>.

³ On existentialism see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* (London: Methuen, 1960). Gordon Marino, *Basic Writings of Existentialism* (New York: Modern Library, 2004).; Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard and Existentialism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).; Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: New American Library, 1975). On existentialist Dostoevsky, see Malcolm Jones, “Dostoevskii and Religion,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii*, ed. W.J. Leatherbarrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 148-174.; Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008).; J.A. Jackson, “Freedom and Otherness: The Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky’s Underground,” *Religion and Literature*, Vol. 43, No.3 (Autumn 2011): 179-186.; Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

⁴On the Christian Dostoevsky, see J.A. Jackson, “Freedom and Otherness: The Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky’s Underground,” *Religion and Literature*, Vol. 43, No.3 (Autumn 2011): 179-186.; Ann W. Astell, “The Writer As Redeemed Prostitute: Girard’s Reading of Dostoevsky’s *Notes From Underground*,” *Religion and Literature*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Autumn 2011): 186-194.; Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011).; Malcolm Jones,

While there is some merit to arguments in favor of Dostoevsky's de-conversion, they are ultimately untenable. Though he masterfully captures and understands the bleak nihilism of his time, Dostoevsky does not believe it expresses a full truth. Dostoevsky does not shy away from the gruesome realities of pain and suffering. Nor does he attempt to provide logical argument to counter these realities. However, the lack of such an argument is not the lack of a response. Throughout his body of literature, Dostoevsky repeatedly shows his answer to the pain inherent to life. His answer is not a logical argument, but human experience itself. Grappling with a human nature, not governed by rationale, but split between a desire for egoistic tyranny and divine selflessness, the individual must constantly choose. He must choose between these desires, and the content of each choice shapes his choosing of the next. If one repeatedly and consciously chooses in favor of the egoistic self, he will become a domineering and heartless devil. If one repeatedly and consciously chooses selflessness, he may gravitate towards a selfless nature, but will not be able to embrace it fully.

Dostoevsky does not reject selflessness in wake of the ego. This is due to the passionate and loving suffering he experiences from individuals in his life. From his own experience, he discovers a grace and love in the world which provides a joy that transcends words. While one might catch glimpses of it in life, it is unattainable on one's own. Thus, from the evidence of his own passions, Dostoevsky determines the need for

"Dostoevskii and Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii*, ed. W.J. Leatherbarrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 148-174. On Dostoevsky as a Cynic, see Andrew Lesic-Thomas, "The Answer Job Did Not Give: Dostoevsky's 'Brat'ia Karamazovy' and Camus's 'La Peste,'" *The Modern Language Review* Vol. 101, No. 3 (July, 2006): 774-788; Bruce K. Ward, "Dostoevsky and the Hermeneutic of Suspicion," *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (September, 1997): 270-283; D. H. Lawrence, "Preface to Dostoevsky's *The Grand Inquisitor*," *A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Rene Wellek (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 90-97.; William Hamilton, "Banished from the Land of Unity: Dostoevsky's Religious Vision through the Eyes of Dmitry, Ivan and Alyosha Karamazov," *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, ed. Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 65-94.

an outside aid by which the individual will not avoid suffering, but transform it through and into love. For Dostoevsky, this outside aid is Christ.

As mentioned, one of Dostoevsky's goals is to discover "what is a human being?" and, from there, determine the way to a meaningful existence. The answer he develops stems from an epistemological framework which culminates in an anthropology which defines human beings according to their division between human self-will and divine selflessness. This anthropology and division is what Andrew Wasiolek calls Dostoevsky's moral dialectic of crime and freedom: "Dostoevsky's moral world is dialectical; man is poised with every choice he makes between the self and God...Man freely chooses the value his act shall have, and the value his act shall have comes from the choice...of the act for self or for God".⁵From this framework, Dostoevsky articulates a salvation and sanctification begotten through Christ and rooted in human suffering. Dostoevsky's answer is thoroughly Russian Orthodox, as his answer resonates with the kenoticism exhibited by the first saints of Russia, Boris and Gleb.

Kenoticism is a term referring to humble self-sacrifice and self-rejection as a means of grace and sanctification. For patron saints Boris and Gleb, this kenoticism takes the form of non-violent death in the wake of violent political overthrow. Boris and Gleb believed that their deaths of non-resistance matched the example of true humanity given by Christ who, likewise, offered himself as a sacrifice through a non-resistant death in the wake of violence. This pouring out of the self, or "voluntary, sacrificial death," as G.P. Fedotov describes it, seeks to use and transform suffering and death as, and into, a new

⁵ Edward Wasiolek, *Dostoevsky: The Major Fiction* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1964).

source of life in Christ⁶ostoevsky articulates a very kenotic understanding of salvation and which reflects his own experiences as a nineteenth century intellectual in Russia.

This thesis seeks to demonstrate the enormous influence of kenoticism on Dostoevsky's thinking, making him a quintessentially Russian Orthodox writer. To begin, I will first argue that there is a uniquely Russian form of Orthodoxy in part by rearticulating the thesis Christian Raffensperger presents in his work, *Reimagining Europe: Kievan Rus in the Medieval World*.⁷ I will develop the ways in which Russia developed a unique micro-Christendom apart from the dominant Catholic and Orthodox empires of the Middle Ages and discuss some of the characteristics common to Russian Orthodoxy, namely the kenoticism epitomized by patron saints Boris and Gleb. In Chapter Two, I provide a brief biography of Dostoevsky's life and works, revealing how his life experiences in Nicholaevan Russia inspired his pursuit to reconcile suffering and faith through literature. I will close with an analysis of Dostoevsky's novels *Notes From Underground* and *Crime and Punishment* in the third chapter, demonstrating how the moral dialectic of these novels both returns to, and embodies, Russian kenoticism.

Sources for this project range from English translations of Dostoevsky's own writings to secondary sources such as biographies of Dostoevsky. Chapter One relies heavily on Raffensperger's study of Kievan Rus and G.P. Fedotov's *The Russian Religious Mind*, but also draws on primary sources in translation such as *The Russian Chronicles* edited by Joseph F. Ryan. The second chapter utilizes secondary source biographies, including Konstantin Mochulsky's *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, Joseph

⁶ G.P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind: Kievan Christianity, the Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 96.

⁷ Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe: Kievan Rus' in the Medieval World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

Frank's *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt*, and Malcolm Jones's "Dostoevskii and Religion." My analysis in chapter three centers on Dostoevsky's novels, *Notes From Underground* and *Crime and Punishment*, with additional insight from secondary sources such as Edward Wasiolek's *Dostoevsky: The Major Fiction*, Rowan Williams' *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction*, and J.A. Jackson's "Freedom and Otherness: The Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky's Underground."

Dostoevsky articulates a philosophy that embraces both suffering and faith simultaneously. For him, one finds this philosophy not by logic, but experience. Dostoevsky returned to the Orthodoxy of his childhood after experiencing the loving suffering of fellow inmates in Siberia, and he credits such moments as the reason for his Christian faith. In order to rightly comprehend both Dostoevsky and his works, therefore, it is important to approach him on his own terms, approaching understanding and truth from the foundation of the human experience, not philosophical argumentation.

CHAPTER TWO

Developing the Micro-Christendom of Rus

During the Middle Ages, political authorities throughout Europe sought to achieve religious independence to acquire greater control over their territory. In the Latin West, the Papacy held significant sway over the Holy Roman Emperor and regional rulers, limiting the authority of each. As Christian Raffensperger states in his work, *Reimagining Europe: Kievan Rus' in the Medieval World*, “The conversion of an entire pagan kingdom was the goal of dominant micro-Christendoms like the German Empire, the Byzantine Empire, and the Papacy...Deflecting that power-hungry expansion, yet attaining the goal of Christian conversion, became the high-stake game that many medieval pagan rulers played”.¹ Though its place as a European nation is still debated, Medieval Russia, Kievan Rus was heavily influenced by this effort to forge new “micro-Christendoms”.² Kievan Rus wished to be a micro-Christendom apart from both Latin and Byzantine Christendom, in order to achieve political unity and independence. The political motives that birthed this new micro-Christendom led to the development of a uniquely Russian form of Orthodoxy, distinguished by various features, including the kenoticism of Russian patron saints, Boris and Gleb. This kenoticism would impact the lives and work of various Russian intellectuals, including Fyodor Dostoevsky.

The Kievan crown first adopted Christianity in 988 under Vladimir I, who sought to make a Rus’ian micro-Christendom for largely political reasons. Prior to this time,

¹ Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 158.

² Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 3.

Kievan Rus was a predominantly pagan territory.³ Though Princess Olga, the grandmother of Vladimir, converted to Christianity in 955 AD, and called for a Catholic bishop to visit Rus in 959 AD, she did not succeed in Christianizing her territory. Following Olga, her son, Sviatoslav, held no desire to convert either himself or Rus to Christianity. Olga attempted to convert him, assuring him that his followers would follow his conversion, but he replied, “How shall I alone accept another faith? My followers will laugh at that”.⁴ Sviatoslav remained devotedly pagan throughout his life, a decision which was popular amongst Rus’ian nobility, but greatly impeded his expansionist goals.

The reigns of both Olga (r. 945-963) and Sviatoslav (r. 945-972) demonstrated to Vladimir that Christianity was the best way of achieving national unity and autonomy. In addition to being pagan, Kievan Rus existed as a conglomeration of tribal regions which paid tribute to a Grand Prince in the capitol of Kiev.⁵ Consequently, it lacked national organization. Christian conversion could unite previously divided nations, as well as open diplomacy with foreign countries of the same faith. For this reason, Miroslav Labunka argues that “almost without exception the conversions of ruling princes were prompted by political (e.g. dynastic) or economic considerations,” and “Princess Olga was surely not an exception.”⁶ Olga likely converted to Christianity in order to open Kievan Rus’s trade with other nations. During her reign, both western and eastern

³ While still relatively mysterious, the paganism of Kievan Rus’ consisted of a small pantheon of anthropomorphized gods led by the god of thunder and heaven, Perun, Miroslav Labunka,, "Religious Centers and Their Missions to Kievan Rus': From Ol'ga to Volodimer," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 12/13 (1988): 172.

⁴ Quoted in Labunka, "Religious Centers," 171.

⁵ Norman Stone, *The Russian Chronicles: A Thousand Years That Changed the World* (Godalming, Surrey: CLB, 1998), 31.

⁶ Labunka, "Religious Centers," 167.

empires began powerful campaigns to spread Christianity east. The German empire defeated Hungary in 955, establishing a Latin Christian influence in the regions of Hungary, Poland, and the West Slavic tribes.⁷ Aware of this spread, Olga made several journeys to the imperial city of Constantinople in the Byzantine Empire and met with Otto I of Germany (r. 962-973) to bring a Christian influence directly into the heart of Kiev.⁸ She likely did this to establish peaceful relations with the Christian nations for the sake of future diplomacy, trade, and territorial expansion. Identity as a pagan state negatively impacted trade and political unions, and the economy of Rus largely depended upon foreign trade.⁹ Consequently, Olga considered Christian conversion imperative.

Olga failed in her attempt to convert Kievan Rus, and Sviatoslav refused to try. Sviatoslav's refusal and subsequent diplomacy confirmed the necessity of conversion, as his country's paganism limited effective economic and political relations surrounding nations. Sviatoslav had long desired to create a new capitol away from Kiev, his sights set on the coast of the Danube River. He thus began a campaign against the Bulgars, who controlled the basins of both the Dnieper and Danube rivers.¹⁰ Sviatoslav had the forces necessary to conquer the Balkan region, but he was prevented from doing so by a pact made between the Bulgars and Byzantium. Byzantium was not in favor of a Latin Christian state but was far more opposed to the spread of Sviatoslav's paganism. Consequently, Emperor Niceophorus Phocas (r. 963-969) sent envoys to the Bulgars, addressing them as his "coreligionist Bulgarians" and those who "profess the truly

⁷ Labunka, "Religious Centers," 167.

⁸ Labunka, "Religious Centers," 168.

⁹ Labunka, "Religious Centers," 167.

¹⁰ Labunka, "Religious Centers," 173.

Christian doctrine,” according to primary source Leo the Deacon.¹¹ The Bulgars gladly accepted the alliance with Byzantium, and Sviatoslav was prevented from capturing the Dnieper and Danube basins. His failure was solidified in the peace treaty of 971, forcing him back to Kiev.¹²

As mentioned, both Olga’s and Sviatoslav’s reigns revealed the failure of paganism as a national religion. The nations surrounding Rus were predominantly Christian, subservient either to Rome or Byzantium, and were thus at odds with Rus because of its paganism. As a result, Rus’ian paganism limited foreign diplomacy, trade, and territorial expansion. These limitations inspired Prince Vladimir I to seek personal baptism, along with the eventual Christianization of Kievan Rus. Miroslav Labunka asserts that “Vladimir’s conversion was prompted by political, dynastic considerations”.¹³ All available evidence shows that Vladimir was a practicing pagan up to his eventual conversion to Christianity, which came about with his marriage to Princess Anna of Byzantium.¹⁴ Vladimir was raised a pagan by his father, Sviatoslav, and it seems that he may have attempted to arrange a “pagan pantheon” for his realm as a means of establishing an “articulate religion” in Kievan Rus.¹⁵ Such evidence indicates that it was not personal conviction towards Christianity that encouraged Vladimir to convert both himself and the Rus’ian people. Rather, his encouragement came in 987 when Emperor Basil II of Constantinople asked Vladimir for military aid against Byzantine general, Bardas Phocas, who rebelled against Basil and declared himself emperor. In return for his support, Basil promised Vladimir his sister’s hand in marriage.

¹¹Quoted in Labunka, “Religious Centers,” 174.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Labunka, “Religious Centers,” 184.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ihor Servcenko, "The Christianization of Kievan Rus'," *The Polish Review* 5.4 (1960): 31.

Vladimir jumped at the opportunity to form family ties with the Byzantine emperor and immediately dispatched six-thousand men to repel Phocas's troops. Once Phocas was defeated, however, Basil refused to give Anna to Vladimir, inciting Vladimir to attack the Byzantine post of Cherson in 989. This attack occurred at the same time as a new revolt led by Bardas Sclerus, along with Bulgarian rebellions. In the midst of these crises, Emperor Basil "decided to sacrifice his sister on the altar of political expediency," and gave her to Vladimir, and Vladimir returned Cherson as a dowry."¹⁶

Though Basil agreed to give Vladimir his sister in marriage, he did so under the condition that Vladimir convert. In 988, Vladimir willingly baptized both himself and the entire Rus'ian territory, personally taking the new Christian name "Basil" in honor of his new godfather, Emperor Basil II.¹⁷ Following the superficial baptism of Rus came the gradual Christianization of the territory. Once Vladimir returned, he began destroying the very pagan sites he once erected, and he created a new Church of St Mary.¹⁸ Vladimir and his wife, Anna, established a religious standard throughout the country of the ideal Christian family.¹⁹ By declaring Rus a Christian nation, Vladimir enacted Olga's advice to Sviatoslav. He personally converted, and so transformed the entire Rus'ian territory: "What Sviatoslav could not achieve by arms alone, Vladimir did achieve—by Christianizing his realm." (Labunka 35).²⁰

Vladimir's political motivations behind conversion led to the creation of a uniquely Rus'ian micro-Christendom. This is evident in the pre-history to Rus'ian

¹⁶ Andrzej Poppe, "The Political Background to the Baptism of Rus': Byzantine-Russian Relations between 986-89," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 30 (1976): 198.

¹⁷ Labunka, "Religious Centers," 185.

¹⁸ Labunka, "Religious Centers," 187.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Labunka, "Religious Centers," 35.

Christianization. In his attempt to erect a new pagan pantheon, Vladimir exhibited a desire to form a united Rus'ian state subservient to a single ruler. Vladimir's "consolidation of gods was an original approach in the Middle Ages, and perhaps foreshadowed the creation of a Rus'ian micro-Christendom over the next decades."²¹ Unsurprisingly, then, Vladimir "had not given up his intention of remaining ecclesiastically independent," after marrying the princess of Byzantium and converting to Byzantine Christianity.²² From the onset of Rus'ian Christianization, Vladimir took ecclesial control. Although he was baptized by the bishop of Cherson in Byzantium, the Byzantines did not send a missionary bishop to Kiev. Vladimir, not Byzantium, appointed and sent priests throughout Rus, including the priest who betrayed the city of Cherson to Vladimir. This priest, Anastasius, became the first head of the first Church in Kiev.²³ These facts all indicate that Vladimir was intent upon creating his own Christendom, and that the Byzantines were not actively involved in the Christianization of Rus.

Other factors that indicate the formation of a Rus'ian micro-Christendom concern the metropolitans in Rus, the Slavonic liturgy in Rus, and the emphasis on Rus'ian saints. Beginning with the metropolitans in Kievan Rus, Constantinople established a metropolitan in the central see of Kiev. This figure one of the highest religious authorities in Eastern Christianity installs, arranges, and manages the bishops, churches, and priests of a given ecclesiastical territory. Though there is some debate surrounding the identity of Rus's first metropolitan, the first recorded was Theopemptos in 1039.²⁴

²¹ Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 160.

²² Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 163.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 171.

Whether he was actually the first metropolitan or not, it is worth noting that the Byzantine metropolitans were not the figures to originally shape Rus'ian Christianity. As previously stated, Vladimir was the first to establish Christendom in Rus. And, if Theopemptos was the first metropolitan, Vladimir's son, Iaroslav, continued with his father's efforts at Christianization prior to the metropolitan's arrival. Following Iaroslav, much of the evidence suggests that the Byzantine metropolitans were largely ineffectual in their institution of Byzantine values.²⁵ In other words, little evidence suggests that the Byzantines took a truly authoritative position in the world of Rus'ian Christianity.

The Byzantine metropolitans in Rus were not that effective as "agents of Constantinople" because of their distance to Rus physically, culturally, and linguistically.²⁶ It can be challenging for foreign bishops and priests to take on roles of authority when they are perceived as outsiders. For the most part, the Byzantine metropolitans were largely Greek speakers, few of them able to either speak or write in Old East Slavonic or Church Slavonic.²⁷ In addition, there were large swathes of time when a metropolitan was not present in Kiev.²⁸ The metropolitans served short terms, and it took some time for the new metropolitan to arrive in Rus from Constantinople. Both of these factors prevented a Byzantine metropolitan from effectively integrating with/in Rus'ian culture and thereby exerting significant ecclesial and political control.

With regard to political influence, primary source evidence indicates that the Byzantine metropolitans were influential only insofar as they *confirmed* the political decisions of the Rus'ian nobility. Rarely did they sway authorities away from those

²⁵ Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 174.

²⁶ Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 172.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 173.

decisions which were deemed politically advantageous. In the *Canonical Responses of Metropolitan Ioann II*, for instance, Byzantine metropolitan, Ioann II, urged the Riurikid dynasty to stop intermarrying with royal families of the Latin West.²⁹ Following the Great Schism in 1054, in which the heads of both the Eastern and Western Churches excommunicated one another, the Byzantines and Latins opposed integrating with one another. Despite Ioann's wishes, the Riurikids continued to marry families "out of the faith," suggesting that the "metropolitan's advice was followed only if it did not conflict with the political realities of the current situation."³⁰

As mentioned, cultural-linguistic and physical distance limited the influence Byzantine metropolitans had in Rus. However, their influence was also limited due to the presence of other metropolitans. In the latter half of the eleventh century, three metropolitans existed coterminously in Rus. It has been suggested that these additional metropolitans were added in order to "[mirror] the post-Iaroslave triumvirate," adding sees in Pereiaslavl' and Chernigov.³¹ Regardless of how these sees came into being, they did exist. The existence of multiple metropolitans was very irregular for the Eastern church, thus indicating the influence Rus wielded in ecclesiastical matters, as it was Rus'ian influence that led to this change. As well, the lack of Byzantine influence is confirmed by the appointment of a Rus'ian metropolitan in 1051, when Prince Yaroslav the Wise elected Hilarion as the metropolitan of Kiev.³²

With regard to the liturgy, Rus did not take on the structure of the Byzantines but of the Bulgarians, who were members of the Western Church. Rus adopted and

²⁹ Quoted in Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 173.

³⁰ Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 174.

³¹ Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 175.

³² Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 173.

translated the the Slavonic Liturgy of the Bulgars, thus distinguishing itself from both the West and the Byzantines).³³ Rus's linguistic separation from the Western Church was a significant factor in its remaining ecclesiastically independent from them. Its distinct liturgical structure, in addition to its linguistic separation, kept it from becoming just another part of the Eastern Church under Constantinople.

Additionally, and—arguably—most importantly, the saints were a key way of distinguishing Rus as a unique micro-Christendom. As is expected of all nations adopting a popular religion, many elements of this religion are absorbed through their converters. In the case of Vladimir and Rus, the “converters” would be the Byzantines, though, as shown, they were not a steady or even seminal converting factor in the grand scope of Russian Christianization. Vladimir and the Rus'ian people adopted many Saints, such as Cyril and Methodius, but it was not long before the Rus'ian people built upon the adopted saints of the Byzantines with their own.

As has been argued in the past, “One of the best ways to increase the strength and centralization of a particular micro-Christendom was to create indigenous saints, as they acted as rallying points for religious independence and directed devotion inward, rather than outward to a foreign source.”³⁴ Chief amongst indigenous Rus'ian Saints are Boris and Gleb, who became the patron Saints of Rus, as well as becoming the new standard of “Rus'ian” Sainthood. Boris and Gleb were both sons of Vladimir I, in addition to a third brother, Sviatopolk. While the middle brother, Boris, was out on an expedition against the Pechenegs, he received word that his father had passed away. Instead of continuing his expedition, he turned his entourage around and began a journey back to Kiev. Along

³³ Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 177.

³⁴ Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 180.

the way, he was informed that his eldest brother, Sviatopolk, planned to kill him in an attempt to establish a monarchy (though there was a Grand Prince in Rus, he did not hold the authority of an undisputed monarch). Rather than prepare a defense against Sviatopolk as his entourage advised, Boris refused to protect himself, thus inspiring his soldiers to defect and join Sviatopolk. In preparation for his death, Boris spent the evening in prayer, and he was stabbed to death in his tent by Sviatopolk's men.³⁵

After Boris died, Sviatopolk then sent soldiers to kill the youngest brother, Gleb. Gleb was just a boy at the time, and, upon hearing his elder brother's plan, refused to believe Sviatopolk would do such a thing. When Sviatopolk's men found Gleb, Gleb begged for his life but was shown no mercy. Gleb's own cook slit his throat, and his body was thrown between two logs in a forest.³⁶

The story of Boris and Gleb is intriguing for several reasons. For starters, it was very rare in the Byzantine hagiographical tradition for laymen to receive Sainthood, especially for deaths that were not explicitly spiritual. Although there is certainly a spiritual aspect to their deaths—particularly in regard to Boris's—their martyrdom appears more politically driven than anything else. Thus, “[t]his fact has to be kept in mind in order to appreciate the paradox that two princes killed in a feud were the first to be canonized by the new Church of a recently converted people”.³⁷ It is intriguing that the Rus'ian people would select political figures for their patron Saints. As well, it is interesting that two figures should be glorified for an act that could appear cowardly. Given Sviatopolk's nature, it would seem justified for both Boris and Gleb, two men

³⁵ Stone, *Russian Chronicles*, 60.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ G. P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind: Kievan Christianity, the Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 95.

clearly superior in character to their elder brother, to defend both themselves and their country from Sviatopolk's regime. However, that was not the case, and to the surprise of some, Boris and Gleb were revered for their sacrificial act.

The kenotic, or self-emptying, nature of Boris and Gleb's martyrdom is pivotal in the development of an authentically Russian Orthodoxy. The nature of this kenoticism, in relation to the political quality of Boris and Gleb's martyrdom, is of particular importance as it lends itself to the ultimate question: "in what did the Russian Church and all the nation perceive the holiness of the princes and the meaning of their Christian achievement?"³⁸ There were two primary interpretations of the martyrs stories: *The Legend* and *The Lector*. *The Legend* was written anonymously and portrayed the death of the brothers in an evangelical light, emphasizing humility and grace. In other words, "[the] ascetic idea is strongly emphasized: the vanity of the world and the senselessness of power".³⁹ According to this account, Boris claims before his death,

If I go to the house of my father, many people will pervert my heart that I may expel my brother, as my father had done before the holy baptism, for the sake of glory and the kingdom and of this world which passes away and is thinner than a cobweb...All this, as if never existed for them, all has disappeared with them. ..Therefore, Solomon, having passed through all and acquired everything said: vanity of vanities, all is vanity. The only help is from good works, from true faith and from sincere love.⁴⁰

According to the passage, Boris forgives a life of material glory and accolades which could have been possible were he to fight against Sviatopolk. Seeing such material gain as ultimately fruitless, Boris instead dies for an ideal which he believed would be more transformative than any superficial glory. He believed this for himself and the Rus'ian people.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 98.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 98.

According to the second account, *The Lector*, the brothers' martyrdom was less an act of humility and grace as it was one of political practicality. Nestor, the author of this account, argued that Boris and Gleb would uproot the Rus'ian political system into chaos were they to challenge the authority of their brother, even if such authority were seized outside the bounds of pre-existing protocol. Both brothers recognized that their own father, Vladimir, had achieved power in a way similar to that of Sviatopolk, and they realized the new precedent they would be setting were they to challenge their elder brother who was, by birth, guaranteed the Grand Prince-ship. Both "princes give up resistance lest they should occasion the destruction of their warriors. 'It is better for me to die alone,' Boris said, 'than so many souls.' Gleb also, 'chose to die alone for all, and for this reason he dismissed them' (his warriors)'.⁴¹ Thus, they enacted a response of non-resistance in order to maintain the tradition of "seniority."⁴²

Though both chroniclers' accounts were perpetuated early on, the years reflected which interpretation the Rus'ian people favored and accepted. Though Nestor emphasized, to a degree, the sacrificial nature of the brothers, his emphasis paled in comparison to that present in *The Legend*, and the Rus'ian people favored *The Legend*. This account is "purified from all practical morality, even from the idea of the courageous fulfillment of duty," which Nestor heavily emphasized.⁴³ Rather, *The Legend* focused on the "human weakness of the sufferers," which is reflected in later liturgies of Russia stating, "You have forsaken the perishable glory of this world. Hating the kingdom of the world and loving purity, you have suffered the iniquitous murder in no

⁴¹Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 102.

⁴²Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 98.

⁴³ Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 103.

way resisting your slayer brother... You were slain for the sake of the immaculate Lamb, the Savior of our Souls sacrificed for you.”⁴⁴

The Rus’ian people established Boris and Gleb as the patron saints of Rus for their selfless suffering in the wake of violence. Consequently, the story of Boris and Gleb’s martyrdom set a standard for canonization and holiness, particularly amongst royalty. In the years to follow, chroniclers compared the death and murder of princes with the example of Boris and Gleb.⁴⁵ This comparison on the part of the chroniclers suggests that Boris and Gleb’s martyrdom, as a self-offering sacrifice, served as an atonement for sins. The deaths of Prince Iaropolk Iziaslavich, Prince Igor Olgovich, and Prince Andrew Bogoliubsky confirm this standard.

Consider, first, the murder of Prince Iaropolk Iziaslavich in 1086. Iaropolk’s death is very mysterious, though primary source evidence indicates that it was a violent and undesired one.⁴⁶ While on a military expedition, Iaropolk was stabbed while lying down in a cart. After pulling the sword out of his wound, Iaropolk declared, “O Lord My God! Receive my prayer and grant me a death from another’s hand, like that of my kinsemen Boris and Gleb, so that I may wash away all my sins with my blood and escape this vain and troubled world and the snares of the devil.”⁴⁷ The Rus’ian people did not canonize Iaropolk, though the chronicler does go on to ensure the Prince’s heavenly entrance.⁴⁸ This assurance is no doubt due to Iaropolk’s invocation of the patron saints in the midst of his suffering.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 105.

⁴⁶ Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 106.

⁴⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Igor Olgovich and Andrew Bogoliubsky also endured violent deaths, but, unlike Iaropolk, they were glorified as saints. Igor Olgovich was Prince in Kiev for a brief time before his death in 1147. At the time of his reign (r. 1105-1147) the royal families, the Monomachovichi and the Olgovichi, battled for control of Kiev.⁴⁹ After only twelve days on the throne, Igor was deposed and thrown into prison. To ease his suffering, Igor asked to live in a monastery, and his request was granted. However, he could not hide forever from political violence. Remembering his former place as Prince, many Kievan citizens decided to kill Igor, convinced that he would attempt to seize the throne. Though the metropolitan, presiding prince, and the aristocracy attempted to stop the people from harming Igor, they failed. An angry mob broke into the monastery where Igor resided and tried to kill him. The prince at the time, Vladimir, successfully saved and removed Igor, but the victory was short-lived. The mob broke into the home of Vladimir's mother where Igor hid and murdered him. The mob mutilated Igor and afterwards dragged his body throughout Kiev. Once the mob finished dragging Igor, several pious bystanders "gathered his blood and pieces of his cloth, obviously considering him a holy martyr."⁵⁰ The chronicler describes Igor as a holy and upright man who exhibited the utmost humility and suggests the saintliness of Igor through a speech clearly reminiscent of Boris and Gleb:

He wept and remembered all that had happened to Job, and meditated in his heart: 'Such sufferings and various kinds of death occurred to the just.' How holy prophets, apostles were crowned with martyrs and shed their blood for the Lord...and how holy orthodox kings shed their blood, suffering for their people, and also our Lord Jesus Christ redeemed the world from the temptation of the devil by His precious blood.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 107.

⁵¹ Quoted in *ibid*.

Likewise, Igor's final speech, as preserved by the chronicler, suggests a selflessness and humility in suffering that mirrors the final words of Boris. Igor states: "I thank Thee, O Lord, that Thou hast humbled my soul. Grant me to transit into light from this dark, vain, and shortliving age...If they now shed my blood I shall be a martyr to my God."⁵²

Finally, Andrew Bogoliubsky is another example of the standard Boris and Gleb established. Though Bogoliubsky confirms this standard, he does so in a distinct manner compared with Iaropolk and Igor. Unlike these two princes, Andrew did not die a passive death against violent aggressors. Rather, he fought back loudly and harshly. In many ways, his death epitomized much of his reign. Andrew was somewhat of a political tyrant known for a "warlike, energetic, [and] ambitious" nature.⁵³ This very nature inspired twenty conspirators to slaughter him defenseless in his bed. As recorded, on the evening of the Apostle's day, the conspirators snuck into Andrew's bedroom, removed his sword which "had once belonged to Saint Boris," and began to repeatedly stab the sleeping prince. In his effort to defend himself, Andrew cried out, "Woe unto you, ungodly men, who have become similar to Goriaser...God and my bread will take vengeance upon you."⁵⁴ Goriasier was the name of one of Gleb's assailants. Consequently, the chronicler, and/or Andrew, is subtly comparing his attack to Gleb's. After the murderers leave Andrew to die of his wounds, Andrew then humbly declares: "O Lord, look upon my infirmity and see my humility, my bitter sorrow and pains...I thank Thee, Lord, that thou hast humbled my soul...And now, O Lord, if they shed my blood, join me to the choirs of Thy holy martyrs."⁵⁵ This final prayer and invocation matches, in both structure and

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 108.

⁵⁴ Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 108.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 109.

content, the speech Boris delivers upon his death: “Glory to Thee, for Thou hast vouchsafed me to flee the seductions of this deceptive life...For Thy sake, I am ‘murdered the whole day,’ they treated me like a lamb for consumption. Thou knowest, my Lord, that I do not resist, do not object.”⁵⁶ The sacrificial lamb imagery that Boris uses is an intentional reference to Christ’s own death as the sacrificial lamb. By uttering it, Boris seeks to present himself as a humble offering. Thus, in copying Boris, Andrew likewise appears as a holy sufferer and selfless offering.

Andrew’s death is especially important because of his political unpopularity. The citizens of Rus did not look fondly on his reign, yet they glorified him as a saint all the same. Because the citizens of Kiev had no other reason to like the prince, it seems clear that “his violent death alone...started the posthumous veneration of him.”⁵⁷ Though each of the prince’s deaths highlights and confirms the standard of holy suffering Boris and Gleb set, Andrew’s death, in particular, reveals how highly the citizens of Kiev and Rus regarded suffering. Even after a domineering and, arguably, cruel reign, Andrew became a Rus’ian saint because of his suffering and ultimate humility.

Boris and Gleb’s martyrdom and glorification are important because it established an ideal for Russian Orthodoxy. Kiev established Boris and Gleb as patron saints of Rus because of admirable qualities. As previously discussed, the literati of Kievan Rus did not admire the martyred brothers first and foremost because of their political selflessness; rather, it was their spiritual selflessness. As demonstrated by adoption of the *Legend*, Kievan Rus respected, cherished, and glorified Boris and Gleb because of their humility in violent death. These two brothers offered their lives in the memory of Christ, and this

⁵⁶ Quoted in Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 99.

⁵⁷ Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 109.

passive death led to their subsequent immortality as Russian saints. They established an ideal which is clear in the lives of many Russians, including Iaropolk, Igor, and Bogoliubsky, and this ideal became both a standard and mark of holiness. Most importantly, the pattern of death begun by Boris and Gleb led to an idea of “kenotic holiness” which affirmed “the redeeming and purifying merit of suffering and holiness.”⁵⁸ This kenotic holiness encouraged a lifestyle of asceticism by which the individual may learn to reject the passions of the flesh and sin and become conformed to the will of God, and it encouraged the rise of Russian monasticism by its official father, Saint Theodosius.⁵⁹

The purifying and saving power of suffering is a theme of Russian Orthodoxy that encouraged and inspired many Russian intellectuals and artists, including Fyodor Dostoevsky. Though it may be difficult to prove the overt impact of Boris and Gleb on Dostoevsky, the character of holy suffering begotten by these patron saints holds an evident role in the writer’s personal experiences and literature. Dostoevsky grew up in a devoutly Orthodox household in which he received a strong education in the gospels and saints’ lives. Though he departed from his faith during his involvement with the Russian intelligentsia, he returned to Christian belief after an eight-year long prison sentence. During this prison sentence, Dostoevsky learned and experienced a selfless love which returned him to the Orthodoxy of his childhood. As he relates, he witnessed this love through his own suffering and the suffering of the inmates around him. Dostoevsky departed prison with a newfound existential assurance in Christ’s love, inspiring his lifelong endeavor to reconcile the atheistic rationalism of the intelligentsia with his

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 110.

experience of selfless suffering and love. His life experiences provide the basis for the themes of transformative death and freedom in his novels.

CHAPTER THREE

Formation of the Underground Man

Freshly emerged from prison in 1854, Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote this mysterious note to friend Natalya Fonvizina: “If someone were to prove to me that Christ was outside the truth, and it was really the case that the truth lay outside Christ, then I should choose to stay with Christ rather than the truth.”¹ Beginning from a humble and thoroughly Orthodox household in which he nurtured a religious idealism, Dostoevsky matured to a state of bitter cynicism. After receiving an engineering education he did not want, followed by a challenging writing career in St. Petersburg, he expressed a painful recognition of “much that is shameful and cruel in the Russian people.”² This realization, conjoined with the socialism and nihilism of the Vissarion Belinsky and others, led to Dostoevsky’s imprisonment in a Siberia. The suffering and grace of this imprisonment inspired Dostoevsky to return to the Orthodoxy of his childhood in an attempt to fulfill a mission of his life: to discover what it means to be truly human.³ Dostoevsky’s challenging and convoluted note to Natalya Fonvizina is a testimony to the existentialism he would develop to the end of his life. Ideas of existentialism, rooted in his personal experiences and historical context, lay the foundation for the literary outpourings that embody the Russian kenotic idea of holy suffering.

¹ Dostoevsky quoted in Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), 15.

² Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 11.

³ Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, 17.

Before beginning a study of Dostoevsky's own life events, it is necessary to provide a cultural connection between the tenth and nineteenth centuries, demonstrating the ways in which the Orthodoxy of Boris and Gleb could find residence in the mind of a nineteenth century figure like Dostoevsky. Though these periods stand far apart in time, the cultural background of the nineteenth century unsurprisingly inspired Dostoevsky to reach theological conclusions that encouraged the individual to work through suffering, not around it, and so articulate a soteriology highly compatible with the kenoticism of Kievan Rus. Dostoevsky's focus upon, and use of suffering, stems undeniably from a familiarity with suffering akin to life under Nicholas I. Therefore, it would be beneficial to discuss the reason for this familiarity.

Dostoevsky lived from 1821-1881. Therefore, for a large portion of his life, he lived under the reign of Tsar Nicholas I (r. 1825-1855). Unlike his brother and forerunner, Alexander I, Nicholas grew up during the wars with Napoleon, not the late Enlightenment. This atmosphere no doubt contributed to his adoption of an authoritarian regime. Rather than "Western notions of enlightened despotism," Nicholas adopted a "patriarchal authoritarianism" rooted in Russian nationalism.⁴ Count Sergei Uvarov neatly articulated Nicholas's political ideology with the doctrine known as "Official Nationality," a three-tiered foundation to the tsar's administration that stood in comical contrast to the progressive cries of the French Revolution. While France called for freedom, liberty, and equality, Nicholas's Official Nationality demanded Orthodoxy,

⁴ Steinberg, Mark and Riasanovsky, Nicholas, *A History of Russia*, 8th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 321.

Autocracy, and Nationality.⁵ This ideology led to a regime bent on eliminating revolution, both in and out of the country.

Considering the first tier of Official Nationality, Orthodoxy established the Church as the highest ethical authority in Russia. This tier emphasized a depraved human nature and rejected human reason as a reliable or primary source of ethics and ideals. In this way, Orthodoxy rejected the Age of Reason, growing at the time. The tier of Autocracy followed Orthodoxy, as depraved human beings need a governing authority to establish and maintain order. The autocrat was chosen by God and stood as a paternal figure over the people of Russia: “the Russian polity was described as a ‘family’ in which the tsar was the stern but benevolent father and the people were obedient and loving children, though often in need of discipline and help.”⁶ Consequently, the Russian Orthodox Church of the nineteenth century was strongly tied to the government and was, debatably, governed by the tsar. Finally, Nationality (*narodnost*) referred to the humble and subservient character of the Russian people. For Nicholas, while the tsar was governing father, the Russian people were obedient children. Nicholas made evident such an understanding when he spoke these words against the Decembrists, “Love for the monarch and devotion to the Throne are based on natural traits of the people.”⁷ All three tiers led to a reign of severe censorship and oppression beginning with Nicholas’s response to the Decembrist revolution in 1825.

Beginning with the Decembrist Revolution—an event upon which I will reflect later in the chapter—Nicholas I led a highly intolerant government. He censored education, press, and publishing, limiting severely the freedom of speech of his Russian

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

subjects.⁸ The sheer volume of thinkers punished for their literary outbursts provides evidence of the strictness of this regime. In addition to Dostoevsky, who was imprisoned for involvement in a mild socialist reading group, a slew of writers experienced censorship in one form or another. The poet Kondraty Ryleyev was hanged due to involvement in the Decembrist Revolution; writer Alexander Pushkin was “exiled to the Caucasus, confined to his estate, harassed by the police, personally supervised by Tsar Nicholas I and prevented from traveling abroad.”⁹ Likewise, Pyotr Chaadaev was declared publicly insane because of his works, despite being perfectly sane; Ivan Turgenev was arrested and consigned to house arrest for over a year, and so on.¹⁰ Each of these writers expressed a strong dissatisfaction with the nature of the Russian state and encouraged reform to various degrees and by various methods. Because of their critiques, the Russian government, headed by Nicholas I, chastised them in one way or another.

Nicholas’s autocracy shaped and encouraged Dostoevsky’s focus upon suffering, in particular his thoughts on freedom in suffering. Some argue that the Russian writers are distinguished from other writers of the nineteenth century because of their persistence, even despite the “ever-present threat of censorship and reprisal.”¹¹ This conviction in the wake of hardship, on a very basic level, explains some of the character and content of Dostoevsky’s later thoughts regarding philosophy, the nature of humanity, and salvation. His response that individuals ought not avoid suffering, but allow its transformation into an asset for human reformation, is consistent with the determination exhibited by the intellectual, literary martyrs of nineteenth century Russia. Likewise, his

⁸ Norman Stone, *The Russian Chronicles: A Thousand Years That Changed the World* (Godalming, Surrey: CLB, 1998), 267.

⁹ Stone, *The Russian Chronicles*, 274.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

identification of individual freedom as the lone guiding stone for morality follows understandably from life under a restrictive regime like Nicholas's.

Another important nineteenth century development that shaped Dostoevsky's kenotic philosophy was the Westernizer and Slavophile debate which existed in full fervor during Dostoevsky's life. In the 1830s, Russia's enigmatic position in the world fascinated many Russian intellectuals.¹² Physically situated between Asia and Europe, from a cultural standpoint, Russia was (and is) divided between the West and the East. Though maintaining a great historical connection with Asia, the West exhibited great influence on Russia in terms of culture and technology in the eighteenth century.¹³ Two of the major city centers in Russia, Moscow and St. Petersburg, exhibited this divide, as Moscow had strong roots in the Byzantine East, and St. Petersburg was inspired by the West.¹⁴ As well, there existed a social divide between the western-educated upper class and the ordinary masses who largely maintained the eastern "traditions of the past."¹⁵ This division between West and East inspired multiple camps of thought in response, primarily the camps of the Westernizers and the Slavophiles. Briefly put, the Westernizers admired the technical and cultural advancements Russia acquired from interaction with Europe, so they encouraged a future in which Russia embraced its Western acquaintance and shrugged off the history and culture prior to strong Western integration in the pre-Peter the Great times.¹⁶ Conversely, the Slavophiles argued that Russia was "culturally distinct from Europe," and that Peter the Great's efforts towards

¹² Stone, *The Russian Chronicles*, 271.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

westernization damaged Russia.¹⁷ One famous Slavophile includes Ivan Kiereyevsky, who wrote *On the Nature of European Culture and its Relationship to Russian Culture* in 1852. Amongst other things in this work, Kiereyevsky argues that pagan and Roman influence inculcated an unhealthy fascination and emphasis upon human reason in the West. This fascination and emphasis led to a dissolution of human nature to great degree, as well as an encouragement of individual autonomy that led to “progressive social integration.”¹⁸

Though I will not consider whether Dostoevsky was a Westernizer or Slavophile, given his expressions later in life it seems clear that the general debate between the two camps significantly impacted him. Just as the determination of nineteenth century Russian writers encouraged a character which would seek to use suffering as an avenue to truth, so, too, this debate and the question it surrounds provide a reasonable basis for some of Dostoevsky’s interests and conclusions. The question of Russia’s identity and place in the world led to subsequent questions of what it meant to not only be “Russian,” but to be a human individual. As it was, one of the primary differences between the Slavophiles and Westernizers concerned each’s view of the human individual.¹⁹ Whereas the Slavophiles saw the ideal world as one in which the individual was a bonded member of a larger society, the Westernizers emphasized the rights and dignity of the individual person.²⁰ As I will later demonstrate, existential questions regarding the nature of personhood and humanity are prominent in Dostoevsky’s works. Likewise, the cultural divide between West and East, educated classes and non-educated masses, Western

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Steinberg, Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 359.

²⁰ Ibid.

reason and Eastern understanding of individuality, provided grounds for Dostoevsky's future attempts to reconcile nineteenth century rationalism with the experiential sufferings of the everyman—especially since Dostoevsky grew up in an environment heavily subject to both Western education and Eastern ideals. In this way the cultural context of the nineteenth century not only prepares Dostoevsky for his future endeavors, but provides a reasonable inspiration for conclusions that embody the kenoticism of Boris and Gleb.

Having briefly explained the nineteenth century context in which Dostoevsky lived and worked, I will now consider Dostoevsky's personal background in terms of religious development. To begin this exploration of Dostoevsky's religious background, consider this excerpt from his journals, "I came from a pious Russian family...In our family, we knew the Gospel almost from the cradle."²¹ Dostoevsky was raised a devout member of the Russian Orthodox Church and tradition. Both he and his brother, Andrei, recall regular attendance at Sunday and Saint day services, in addition to participation in weekly vesper services. Both of Dostoevsky's parents—his mother, in particular—called upon their children to active involvement in the church, and were asked to recite Bible verses and prayers in front of household guests.²² As Malcom V. Jones describes, "before he even learned to read, [Dostoevsky's] imagination was fired by events from the lives of saints, providing models of asceticism, compassion, suffering, humility and self-sacrifice, based on the example of Christ."²³ From his nanny Dostoevsky learned the stories of renowned Eastern Saints, he learned the alphabet by reading Christian Scripture, and his

²¹ Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt 1821-1849* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 43.

²² Malcolm Jones, "Dostoevskii and Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii*, ed. W.J. Leatherbarrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 150.

²³ *Ibid.*

mother gave him numerous religious texts, including a translated copy of Johannes Hubner's *One Hundred and Four Sacred Stories from the Old and New Testaments Selected for Children*. This last work is of exceptional importance, not only because it was intended for memorization, but also because it contained many stories and themes that are prevalent in Dostoevsky's works: the Fall in Eden, Job, and the raising of Lazarus.²⁴ Dostoevsky read a prodigious amount as a child, including both philosophical and religious texts. In particular, he memorized much of the Bible and was fond of the four Gospels.²⁵

Dostoevsky was also greatly impacted by the relationships he formed as a child. In particular, Dostoevsky learned to associate the Russian people with "deep spirituality" after the peasant, Marei, saved him as a child.²⁶ When he was wandering in the woods one day, a wolf found and chased Dostoevsky. The peasant saved him, and he was so gracious and caring as he made the cross over Dostoevsky that Dostoevsky forever remembered his saintly composure. Dostoevsky extols the importance of such memories through his character, Alyosha Karamazov, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, when Alyosha tells that the best education is likely the "beautiful, sacred memory, preserved from childhood."²⁷ Such memories were of immense importance during Dostoevsky's prison period.

Besides the religion of his youth, Dostoevsky's love of romantic literature and philosophy greatly influenced the young writer. Dostoevsky held an early fascination with the romantic works of Schiller, Pushkin, Balzac, Hugo, and others. Dostoevsky

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, 9.

²⁶ Jones, "Dostoevskii and Religion," 151.

²⁷ Ibid.

devoured books from an early age, and his literary acquaintance with the romantic idealists formed a basis for the internal yearnings and inquiries that epitomized the writings of his future. When Dostoevsky's parents sent him and his brother to engineering school in Petersburg, Dostoevsky wrote,

At that time, my brother and I were longing for a new life; were desperately dreaming of something, of "all that is beautiful and noble"—at that time, these little words were still fresh and uttered without irony. We passionately believed in something, and although we both knew perfectly well that all they would ask us about on the examination was mathematics, nonetheless we dreamed only of poetry and poets.²⁸

Describing the degree of Dostoevsky's love for the Romantics, Konstantin Mochulsky tells that, "Every Saturday a carriage from the hospital used to come for the boys to take them home, where their beloved books were waiting for them. Their mother died of consumption. She passed away in 1837; her death affected Dostoevsky much less than did Pushkin's."²⁹ The literature of Dostoevsky's youth played an important role such that it was of greater influence even than the personal interactions he had with family and friends. The internal wrestling inspired by his readings inculcated a tendency towards an arguably detrimental introversion, as the dreaming Dostoevsky vainly sought for the truest form of "living life."³⁰

As mentioned, Dostoevsky's parents sent him to an engineering academy where he studied mathematics, fort formation, and other essentials of a military science education. Though responsible and successful as an engineering student, Dostoevsky did not enjoy the work and quickly left the military once his education was finished to become a writer in St. Petersburg. His first published work was *Poor Folk* (1846), which

²⁸ Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, 10.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

illustrated the social struggles due to class strife in the 1840s. Head of the Natural School in St. Petersburg, Vissarion Belinsky, reviewed and admired Dostoevsky's work. Belinsky, a literary critic, was renowned for his ability to shape and direct budding writers. As well, he was a fire-brand socialist and atheist, and his ideas greatly moved Dostoevsky.

Belinsky quickly became a mentor to Dostoevsky. While he shared Belinsky's passion for socialism, the men differed with regard to religious observance. Whereas Dostoevsky professed the Orthodoxy of his childhood, Belinsky vehemently attacked all forms of religious practice. Unlike the romantic socialists, Belinsky "felt impelled to destroy Christianity: [his] socialism was atheistic."³¹ Though Dostoevsky began at odds with Belinsky, he slowly conformed to his mentor's atheistic leanings. In one of their early conversations, Belinsky recalled Dostoevsky's initial recoiling to attacks on Christianity: "Every time I mention Christ, the expression on his face changes; he looks as if he's going to burst into tears."³² Though Belinsky may have been unaware of Dostoevsky's eventual shift towards atheism, Dostoevsky himself declares his own conversion: "During the last years of his life, I stopped visiting him [Belinsky]. He had taken a dislike to me; but at that time I passionately accepted all his teaching."³³ In fact, so intense was Dostoevsky's anti-conversion there was a point when he felt himself capable of joining the radical Nechayev movement, whose aim was to abolish the government of Russia as a whole, along with family, religion, and property. Dostoevsky

³¹ Jones, "Dostoevskii and Religion," 152.

³² Ibid.

³³ Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, 119.

states, “Probably I could never have become a Nechayevist, but a Nechayevist, this I do not vouch; it is possible I too could have become one...in the days of my youth.”³⁴

Just as he gleaned an early atheism from Belinsky, so too did Dostoevsky draw much of his intellectual concern with suffering from him. Belinsky heavily critiqued the autocracy of the Russian state and its degradation of the individual. He promoted a philosophy which promoted individual rights, freedoms, and passions above all else. As he states, “What is it to me that the Universal exists when the individual personality [*lichnost*] is suffering?”—here, the “Universal” referring to Hegel’s understanding of society at-large.³⁵ Belinsky’s ideas on freedom and the individual passions played an integral role in Dostoevsky’s moral dialectic which preached the importance of human freedom and passions.

Belinsky’s clear influence on Dostoevsky drove him to take part in the Petrashevsky Circle, an involvement for which he was later convicted and exiled to Siberia. Mikhail Petrashevsky was a prominent socialist who held regular gatherings at his apartment in St. Petersburg from 1844 to 1849. Here gathered socialist sympathizers who shared their ideas concerning revolution and the Russian government. At these meetings, Dostoevsky reportedly read aloud Belinsky’s controversial letter to Gogol on three separate occasions. This letter expressed Belinsky’s overarching philosophy, as he writes,

You [Gogol] have failed to observe that Russia sees her salvation not in mysticism, not in asceticism, but in the achievements of civilization, enlightenment, humanitarianism. What she needs is not sermons...or prayers...but an awakening in the people of their sense of dignity...Look about

³⁴ Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, 121.

³⁵ Steinberg, Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 359.

you a little more attentively and you will come to see that it [the Russian people] is by nature a profoundly atheistic people.³⁶

Additionally, twentieth century scholarship reveals Dostoevsky's involvement in a secret printing press whose aim was to lambast the Russian tsar and government in an attempt at revolution.³⁷ The Russian government charged and imprisoned Dostoevsky, along with the whole Petrashevsky Circle, for these actions.

Dostoevsky spent four of his eight years in exile in the prison at Omsk. It is here, Joseph Frank speculates, that Dostoevsky began his close reading of the Bible. The prisoners were allowed limited reading material outside Scripture, so Dostoevsky spent this time in deep study of the Bible, returning to the stories he poured over as a child. His time in prison greatly challenged the utopian ideals he developed in St. Petersburg. Yet, the sufferings he endured in Omsk had great spiritual worth. In his journals of 1880, Dostoevsky reflects upon his time in prison, telling how his fellow inmates revived the spiritualism of his youth. Malcom Jones contends that, "it was from them that he had again received into his soul that Christ whom he first knew in his parents' home as a child and whom he had nearly lost when, in his turn, he transformed himself into a European liberal."³⁸ The individuals he met were the wives and family members of those aristocratic rebels exiled in the Decembrist uprising.

The Decembrist Uprising, a protest stemming from discontent with Alexander I, shaped the reign of his successor, Nicholas I. Alexander began his reign in 1801, preaching many progressive-sounding ideals, including the abolition of serfdom and the creation of a constitution. However, the rise of Napoleon took his attention away from

³⁶ Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, 123.

³⁷ Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, 124.

³⁸ Jones, "Dostoevskii and Religion," 155.

home and prevented the implementation of these policies. Once Napoleon was defeated, Alexander still did not make good on his promises. His failure to do so was met with further opposition than was the case at the start of his tenure, as the many soldiers who traveled west during the Napoleonic wars developed a taste for more liberal western ideals. These ideals they vented in the Decembrist Uprising, after Alexander's sudden death in 1825. Gathering in what was intended to be a bloodless protest outside the royal palace, the gathering soon turned violent as Nicholas's men fired a cannon into the crowd, killing and injuring many members of the uprising. In addition to those injured in the cannon fire, five of the ring leaders were beheaded and 31 members were exiled to Siberia for life. Nicholas's rise to power set the stage for the sort of Russia into which Dostoevsky would grow up. And these Decembrist exiles cared for Dostoevsky during his own stay in prison:

Later himself in exile in Siberia, Dostoevsky would meet the wives and families of the surviving Decembrists, who had dedicated themselves to alleviating the lot of the newly arrived 'unfortunates.' These women had voluntarily followed their husbands to Siberia; and their selfless devotion, as well as their unceasing efforts to soften the blows of fate for a new generation of political exiles, served him as a living refutation of all theories denying the existence of free will and the possibility of moral heroism and self-sacrifice.³⁹

Following his release from prison, Dostoevsky returned to St. Petersburg where he resumed his writing career. In 1854, he wrote the letter to Natalia Fonvizina previously cited. This letter, now famous, encapsulates the transformation that took place within Dostoevsky during his time in exile. He writes about his most recent discoveries concerning truth and how it "shines most clearly in affliction."⁴⁰ For years, Dostoevsky struggled with the painful realities of life and the idealism of Christian religion. He could

³⁹ Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, 4.

⁴⁰ Jones, "Dostoevskii and Religion," 155.

not intellectually reconcile the suffering of the world to any degree—let alone in gratuity—with the hopeful outlook and love of Christianity. That said, while Dostoevsky could not intellectually support faith in full, he could not reject the experience of contentment and love he experienced both as a child and in prison—a love which transcended all suffering and provided a hope and memory that allowed joy in pain. In his letter, he reflects on such “moments of complete tranquility” which God sent him in suffering.⁴¹ From these moments, Dostoevsky concluded that loving Christ was the most noble and worthwhile goal one could have in life. Regardless of the intellectual failings posed by the problem of gratuitous evil, he could not resist his Christian experience. Consequently, he concludes: “Even if someone were to prove to me that the truth lay outside Christ, I should prefer to remain with Christ than the truth.”⁴²

As Rowan Williams argues in his work, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction*, Dostoevsky was not promoting irrationalism with his statement; rather, he sought an alternative understanding of truth. The primary distinction lies in the difference between “objective and subjective in religious language.”⁴³ Following his release, Dostoevsky took great strides in a lifelong investigation of this subjective truth, one which is not measurable or provable, but is manifested by human freedom. He refined this understanding of truth in the years following. For this reason, Williams sees Dostoevsky’s literature as his way of “slowly evolving religious idiom and practice” to make sense of Orthodoxy in the wake of modern philosophy.⁴⁴ Malcolm Jones suggests that, “What one observes in Dostoevsky’s novels is a reflection of the process of

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Jones, “Dostoevskii and Religion,” 156.

⁴³ Williams, *Language, Faith and Fiction*, 16.

⁴⁴ Williams, *Language, Faith and Fiction*, 17.

discovery—or rediscovery—of the Christian tradition, in the face of its most deadly...opponents.”⁴⁵ For Dostoevsky, the important understandings one gleans in life come from an education of the whole person, not simply the mind. For this reason, he sought truth through the human story and suffering. He reflects upon this poignantly through the mouth of his character, Ippolit, in *The Idiot*: “It is life that matters, life alone—the continuous and everlasting process of discovery, and the discovery itself.”⁴⁶

Dostoevsky’s personal history in Nicholaevan greatly informed his literature. His experiences from childhood, the engineering academy, Belinsky, and prison nurtured a slowly developing existentialism which led him to find truth and Christ through selfless and loving suffering. Dostoevsky’s life provides a rational basis for the moral dialectic he established in his writings—a moral dialectic which reflects the embrace of suffering common to the early Russian Orthodox theme of kenoticism.

⁴⁵ Jones, “Dostoevskii and Religion,” 159.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dostoevsky's Moral Dialectic

As established in his biography, Dostoevsky returns to the Christian faith after experiencing the selfless love and suffering of his fellow inmates in Siberia. He became convinced of the authenticity of this love and so sought to reconcile it with the rationalism he embraced earlier in life. His attempt at reconciliation led to a literary journey which culminated in a philosophy embodying the holy suffering of Boris and Gleb. In this chapter, I will analyze Dostoevsky's literature, specifically his works, *Notes From Underground* (1864) and *Crime and Punishment* (1866), and thereby demonstrate its relation to Russian kenoticism.

One of the first existentialist works of literature, *Notes From Underground*, focuses on the internal strife of an impoverished ex-civil servant in St. Petersburg. This nameless individual—whom I shall call the “Underground Man”—is unveiled in Dostoevsky's small novella in two parts. Each part develops a fundamental anthropology implying the need for a Christian salvation in which the individual, through the grace of Christ, transforms suffering and death into joy and life. In the first part, entitled “Underground,” Dostoevsky introduces the reader to the internalized world of the Underground Man, discussing his philosophy and, specifically, his struggles with over-consciousness and modern rationalism.

To begin, the Underground Man struggles with over-consciousness. He considers himself a highly conscious individual because he is simultaneously aware of “everything

beautiful and lofty,” in addition to wickedness within himself.¹ While he experiences moments of genuine sentimentality and compassion, he also experiences hateful and spiteful desires. Though he recognizes the authenticity of his charitable moments, he looks back on them shamefully, convincing himself that they are only delusions that weaken him.² Because of the conflicting nature it reveals, the Underground Man describes his consciousness as “inertia,” a nagging state of second-guessing that prevents him from starting or finishing anything: “perhaps I really regard myself as an intelligent man because throughout my entire life I’ve never been able to start or finish anything.”³

While the Underground Man considers this inertia a sickness, he also admires it. He believes that his degree of consciousness makes him superior to the “normal” individual because it demonstrates his ability to see and understand the moral complexities behind every human decision, thought, and feeling.⁴ However, this same awareness prevents him from carrying out revenge. To the Underground Man, the average individual is narrow-minded and, for this reason, ignorantly enacts revenge to attain justice.⁵ Because of his heightened consciousness, the Underground Man cannot transcend the complexities behind every motive and action. Rather, his consciousness paralyzes him, forcing him to retreat like a mouse into the “underground” of silent contemplation.⁶

Besides over-consciousness, the Underground Man struggles with a form of rationalism common to the nineteenth century. According to this rationalism, human

¹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 7.

² Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 16.

³ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 18.

⁴ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 8.

⁵ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 10.

⁶ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 11.

beings are essentially rational creatures who commit all actions for a reason and need only “be shown their true rational interests in order to follow them.”⁷ The Underground Man attacks this philosophy, arguing that human beings not only act irrationally by chance, but by intent. They do so in order to establish themselves as individuals apart from an order of reason which eliminates personal freedom and moral responsibility. In his polemic, the Underground Man references and mocks the rationalism of Nikolay Chernyshevsky in his work, *What Is To Be Done?*, citing Chernyshevsky’s image of the “crystal palace.”⁸ Through this rejection, the Underground Man provides a crucial foundation to Dostoevsky’s kenotic thought. By denying Chernyshevsky’s understanding of reason, Dostoevsky, through his protagonist, denies the theory that human beings are essentially thinking things. As he will develop in Part Two of the *Notes*, as well as *Crime and Punishment*, a human person is defined by his freedom and how his experiences, both internal and external, shape who he becomes. Specifically, he will show the power of individual choice in suffering.

In Part Two of the *Notes*, Dostoevsky steps away from the internal rumblings of his protagonist and into the outward world with which he interacts. In this section, entitled “Apropos of the Wet Snow,” the Underground Man recalls events when he was twenty-four years old. These events include three encounters which exhibit the existential problems he describes in Part One. In the first of these encounters, the Underground Man encounters an officer who casually knocks him aside in a bar. The Underground Man is unreasonably perturbed by this encounter, especially since the officer made no attempt to

⁷ Jones, “Dostoevskii and Religion,” 160.

⁸ This crystal palace represents Chernyshevsky’s utopian ideal which society reaches by properly enacting his understanding of reason and socialism see Jones, “Dostoevskii and Religion,” 160.; Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 35

address him. In revenge, the Underground Man plans to bump into the officer the next time they meet. When the chance finally comes, the Underground Man carries out his plan but is ultimately dissatisfied, as the officer pays no heed to him.

In the second situation, the Underground Man reunites with four acquaintances from school. The acquaintances gather to host a goodbye party for Zverkov, one of the four, who is leaving for a job outside St. Petersburg.⁹ The Underground Man rudely invites himself to the party, as he is desperate for human interaction and wishes to display intellectual dominance over the friends.¹⁰ Especially, the Underground Man is eager to assert his superiority over Zverkov who has always been cruel to him.¹¹ Though not expected to attend, the Underground Man joins the four, but arrives an hour early, uninformed of the party's rescheduling. When Zverkov and the others arrive, they immediately deride the Underground Man for his shabby clothes and meager salary, leaving him "crushed and annihilated."¹² In defense, the Underground Man makes many threats against the friends, but desperately recants them once the four prepare to leave.¹³ The friends say they are going to a brothel, so the Underground Man begs them for money so that he can join. One of them disdainfully throws him some money, and they then depart.¹⁴ Before leaving for the brothel himself, the Underground Man determines that if he can't set things right with Zverkov, he will slap him.¹⁵ By the time he gets to the brothel, however, the four friends have already hired prostitutes and retired to

⁹ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 61.

¹⁰ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 70.

¹¹ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 61.

¹² Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 75.

¹³ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 80.

¹⁴ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 81.

¹⁵ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 82.

separate rooms. Unsure what to do, the Underground Man decides to hire a prostitute of his own.¹⁶

The third situation concerns the Underground Man's interactions with the prostitute, Liza. The Underground Man wakes up next to Liza and enters into an awkward conversation with her regarding the evils of prostitution.¹⁷ He notices that Liza is visibly moved by his words and subsequently feels legitimate interest in her, as well as a desire to dominate her.¹⁸ Because of her response, the Underground Man moves the conversation in a more uplifting direction. He encourages Liza to leave the brothel and then expounds upon the greatness of familial love, describing the love he would show a daughter were he to have one.¹⁹ At the end of this speech, Liza says that he sounds as if he was reading from a book.²⁰

Liza's comment infuriates the Underground Man because it is true. He spoke only as a means of manipulating and controlling Liza, and she has caught him in his deception. Consequently, he responds with a violent self-defense. He insists that his talk of familial love grew from place of deep sentiment and honesty and then proceeds to tell of the moral and physical decay that will inevitably come of her life of prostitution.²¹ Liza realizes the truth of his words and begins to cry.²² Shocked by her tears, the Underground starts to leave the brothel, but stops when Liza sits up and turns towards him. Before leaving, the Underground Man gives Liza his address and tells her to visit him.²³

¹⁶ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 86.

¹⁷ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 91.

¹⁸ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 93.

¹⁹ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 95.

²⁰ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 98.

²¹ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 99-100.

²² Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 104.

²³ *Ibid.*

Shortly after leaving the brothel, the Underground Man feels shame for his sentimentality with Liza, and he begins to worry about her visit to his home.²⁴ When he spoke with her in the brothel, he acted as a hero and guide to her. He fears that Liza will no longer consider him a hero figure, if she sees the shabby condition of his apartment.²⁵ Thus, when she finally visits, he lashes out at her, taking back all of the kind words he said in the brothel.²⁶ He claims that he never intended to save her, but merely spoke kind words in order to gain control over her.²⁷ Upon hearing his words, Liza feels sympathy for the Underground Man and begins to hug him.²⁸ He then sobs for fifteen minutes about his struggles with others and himself, stating, “They won’t let me...I can’t be...good!”²⁹

In the midst of his crying, the Underground Man comes to the realization that his position with Liza is now reversed. Rather than the dominant figure, he is now the “humiliated creature”.³⁰ Eager to regain control, the Underground Man begins another tirade against Liza, and she realizes that he only wishes to dominate her. Consequently, the Underground Man tells her that he is incapable of understanding any sort of selfless love. He only knows and commits tyrannical love: “I was no longer able to love, because, I repeat, for me to love meant to tyrannize and to preponderize morally. All my life I’ve been incapable even of picturing any other love, and I’ve reached the point now of sometimes thinking that love consists precisely in the right, voluntarily granted by the beloved object, to be tyrannized over.”³¹ When Liza starts to leave, the Underground

²⁴ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 106.

²⁵ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 109.

²⁶ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 121-122.

²⁷ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 122.

²⁸ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 123.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 124.

³¹ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 125.

Man thrusts a five ruble note in her hand in a last-ditch effort to assert dominance.³² Liza rejects the note, leaving the Underground Man ashamed of his actions. He then closes the narrative in a state of confusion, unsure whether it is better to seek “cheap happiness” or “lofty suffering.”³³

These three important scenarios, and the work as a whole, demonstrate a universal human illness foundational to Dostoevsky’s philosophy. In the opening of the novella, the Underground Man mentions that he suffers from an illness of the liver. Though aware of his illness, he refuses to go to a doctor out of spite, or “wickedness,” even though he knows his refusal will not harm his doctors.³⁴ This physical illness and refusal neatly embody the existential illness which plagues the Underground Man: he suffers from over-consciousness. As Dostoevsky highlights in Part One, the Underground Man recognizes well his own wickedness and for this reason cannot be a “good” member of society. Yet, he is unable to be a wholly wicked individual because he feels guilt and self-consciousness for his misdeeds. Thus, he finds himself in a constant state of moral turmoil, sometimes relishing his depraved actions, sometimes praising spurts of moral integrity—he does this specifically in Part One when he praises himself for never taking bribe as a civil servant.³⁵

The Underground Man’s state of over-consciousness makes him aware of his depravity, while simultaneously preventing him from acting uprightly. What follows is a condition of internal paralysis. This paralysis is evident in all three of his encounters. Chronologically, these encounters take place before the first part of his novella. They are

³² Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 126.

³³ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 128.

³⁴ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 3.

³⁵ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 4.

a living-out of the first half which serves as the Underground Man's philosophical analysis of these happenings.

The Underground Man's struggle with modern rationalism lies at the root of his paralysis. This rationalism, which he associates with Chernyshevsky, asserts that human beings will act righteously so long as they are aware of the right thing to do. Accordingly, morality is a matter of knowledge and comprehension. The Underground Man takes issue with this view and its implications for several reasons. He argues that a defining feature of humanity is not only its ability, but its desire, to act irrationally. Thus, there are moments when individuals intentionally act against their best "interests." These individuals, like the Underground Man, act this way in order to feel the full force of their existence through the assertion of their free will.

This assertion of free will reminds the individual of his existence and rejects the existence of some moral law that determines his life, another key element of the Underground Man's understanding of reason and morality. According to the Underground Man, there exists no absolute moral law because such a law eliminates man's freedom, identity, and moral responsibility. There is no morality outside the individual. He states this in the first half of the *Notes*:

...man, whoever he might be, has always and everywhere liked to act as he wants, and not at all as reason and profit dictate; and one can want even against one's own profit, and one sometimes even *positively must*... One's own free and voluntary wanting, one's own caprice, however wild, one's own fancy, though chafed sometimes to the point of madness—all this is that same most profitable profit, the omitted one, which does not fit into any classification, and because of which all systems and theories are constantly blown to the devil. And where did all these sages get the idea that man needs some normal, some virtuous wanting? What made them necessarily imagine that what man needs is necessarily a reasonably profitable wanting? Man needs only *independent* wanting, whatever this independence may cost and wherever it may lead.³⁶

³⁶ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 26.

According to the Underground Man's argument, not only does morality fail to exist outside the individual, but individual freedom determines the value of every action. Considering the "normal" and "good" profits of "prosperity, wealth, freedom, peace, and so on," the Underground Man asks, "has man's profit been calculated quite correctly?"³⁷ Rather than these "profits" which he finds false and arbitrary, the Underground Man argues that freedom is the only real profit.

With moral law out of the question, the human will becomes the only grounds of all action and the human person the source of morality. Thus, through his protagonist, Dostoevsky presents his readers with a "moral dialectic of choice." If individuals are the only true source of morality, they must choose how to exert their will.³⁸ And, as Dostoevsky will ultimately show, the individual has to decide between two sides of himself: the egoistic self and God.³⁹ The dialectic embodies this choice. The Underground Man is caught between these two sides—resulting in his paralysis—but often chooses the one in favor of his self-will and freedom. In order to increase awareness of his own identity, and thereby secure freedom, the Underground Man inflicts pain on others and himself to attain mastery over each. As the Underground Man reveals, pain upon others and the self convinces one of a mastery of the two and, so, increases awareness of one's own identity. Edward Wasiolek explains: "The answer lies in Dostoevsky's conception of the *will* as an unqualified premise of existence. It finds its satisfaction in hurting others and in hurting itself. In hurting others, it is conscious of its power over others; in hurting itself it is conscious of itself. What the will wants more than

³⁷ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 21.

³⁸ Edward Wasiolek, *Dostoevsky: The Major Fiction*, (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1964), 53.

³⁹ J.A. Jackson, "Freedom and Otherness: The Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky's Underground," *Religion and Literature*, Vol. 43, No.3 (Autumn 2011): 182.

anything else is awareness of itself, and it will subvert every motive to gain this satisfaction.”⁴⁰ Individual freedom is the ultimate root of all rational decision-making.

Each scenario in “Apropos of the Wet Snow” exhibits the Underground Man’s attempt to gain freedom and applies the philosophy in the first part of the novella. The officer in the bar perturbed the Underground Man because he ushered him aside without any recognition of his person. As a result, the Underground Man experienced a loss of freedom. He responds, therefore, by preparing a ridiculous plan to assert his self over the officer’s. The same occurred in the gathering of the three friends. The Underground Man did not enjoy the company of the friends but wished to meet them in order to exert his power over them. Given his past experience with them in school, he wished to dominate them intellectually. When he was met only with ridicule, however, he chased after them. Finally, the Underground Man took momentary power over Liza by becoming a heroic figure to her. He grabbed her attention and became a source of inspiration and encouragement with his words about prostitution and her future. However, when she visited him at his home, he became ashamed of his poverty and lashed out at her. When Liza tries to comfort the Underground Man, he sees his position of domination failing, and so attempts to regain power by disparaging her and giving her money.

Dostoevsky uses the Underground Man to illustrate the consequences of rejecting universal reason. On one hand, one can use one’s freedom to dominate all those around one. On the other, one can use one’s freedom for “good.” The Underground Man experiences this “good” in a small way during his encounter with Liza. Expecting Liza to take part in the “hurt-and-be-hurt” normalcy he has come to adopt and expect in life, the Underground Man is surprised because Liza does not force her will against his; rather,

⁴⁰ Wasiolek, *The Major Fiction*, 55.

she seeks to comfort him.⁴¹ Liza represents a use of the free will in favor of selfless love. The Underground Man cannot fathom any love outside the tyrannical and only sees her love as a testament of his lost authority. Consequently, he lashes out at Liza and drives her away.

Dostoevsky's *Notes* is such an important novel because of the way it encapsulates the nature of moral choice. Dostoevsky does not believe in outside moral absolutes, but thinks that the individual will dictates morality: "[man] in Dostoevsky's world does not choose what is already determined, but determines what he chooses."⁴² Because of this moral choice, apparent evil can actually be good. Looking ahead to *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky argues that protagonist, Raskolnikov, finds salvation, in part, through the murder of a pawn broker.⁴³ Such salvation occurs because actions have no moral value apart from individual intent. And for this reason, the characters of Dostoevsky's world constantly face moral dilemmas. They must choose between the self and God.⁴⁴

Though the individual can determine his good outside exterior law, Dostoevsky maintains that one finds true "good" by serving God. Though he makes no explicit religious claims in his work, Dostoevsky writes in his personal journals of a wish to insert a "Christian" solution in his *Notes*.⁴⁵ Complaining to his brother about the publisher's refusal to admit a Christian ending to his work, Dostoevsky writes: "Those swines of censors—where I mocked at everything and sometimes blasphemed for form's sake—that's let pass, but where from all this I deduced the need of faith and Christ—that is

⁴¹ Wasiolek, *The Major Fiction*, 54.

⁴² Wasiolek, *The Major Fiction*, 56.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Jackson, "Freedom and Otherness," 182.

suppressed”⁴⁶ That said, since he makes no explicit mention of this solution in the *Notes*, he leaves the reader with only implicit cues. One such cue occurs at the end of Part One, when the Underground Man declares the need for something beyond the underground: “it is not at all the underground that is better, but something different, completely different, which I thirst for but cannot ever find.”⁴⁷ Dostoevsky hopes to demonstrate the need for a Divine grace apart from the individual through his depiction of the Underground Man’s paralysis. One must choose to live for God, rather than the self, as service to God releases the individual from the tyranny of the self in its destruction of itself and others. For “[t]he individual freedom that contradicts the laws of universal rational harmony is in turn contradicted by what the freedom implies: a destructive will.”⁴⁸ Thus, while desirable, free will also corrupts.

Thus, the *Notes* is integral because it lays the psychological foundation for all of Dostoevsky’s major characters. These individuals embody battling moralities, as Dostoevsky does not believe such things exist outside the individual. Any “salvation” depends upon human action and choice. As Malcolm Jones mentions, the Christian salvation implied in the *Notes* seems to be this: the solution has something to do with “living life.”⁴⁹ Having rejected humanity’s identity as rational animals, Dostoevsky demonstrates the power and necessity of human experience as a teacher. Through the thoughts and experiences of the Underground Man, Dostoevsky shows the futility of absolute freedom. Though rational, living by one’s own will leads to one’s moral and psychological demise. And Dostoevsky demonstrates this demise through the written

⁴⁶ Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, 256.

⁴⁷ Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*, 37.

⁴⁸ Wasiolek, *The Major Fiction*, 58.

⁴⁹ Jones, “Dostoevskii and Religion,” 161.

experiences of the Underground Man. Therefore, Dostoevsky seeks a means to “limit the horror and preserve the freedom” presented by the battle between the human will and God.⁵⁰ His solution takes shape in works like *Crime and Punishment*, in which he demonstrates the need for the egoistic self to die in a process of transformative suffering guided by divine grace. This death and suffering culminate in the fruition of the other side of human nature, divine love.

Crime and Punishment is one of Dostoevsky’s most famous novels. In it, Dostoevsky actuates the moral dilemma he establishes in *Notes From Underground*: the choice between man and God. Dostoevsky accomplishes this through his young protagonist, Rodion Raskolnikov, an impoverished ex-student living in St. Petersburg. Raskolnikov, like many of Dostoevsky’s characters, steeped himself in the progressive ideas of his time. The story centers around his murder of Alyona Ivanovna, a miserable old pawnbroker who regularly short-changes her clients. Throughout the novel, Raskolnikov tries to justify the murder to himself, claiming that it is not evil because he is removing a wicked member of society.

Besides the murder, Dostoevsky provides several side-stories of importance. Raskolnikov’s mother and sister, Pulcheria and Dunya, visit from out of town, hoping to ask him about Dunya’s new fiancé. Dunya just left work as a maid for the family of a married man named Svidrigailov. Svidrigailov attempted to woo Dunya, inspiring her to flee the household to avoid a scandal.⁵¹ Upon leaving the Svidrigailov’s, Dunya receives a proposal from a middle-class aristocrat named Luzhin.⁵² Luzhin promises financial

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment: A Novel in Six Parts with Epilogue*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1993), 34.

⁵² Ibid.

security for Dunya and her family, but only under the condition that she marry him immediately. Since Luzhin lives in St. Petersburg, Dunya travels with her mother there to meet with Luzhin and gain Raskolnikov's blessing.⁵³

Besides Dunya's relationship with Luzhin, the character, Marmeladov, introduces another storyline of great importance. In his walks about town, Raskolnikov meets a man named Marmeladov. Marmeladov married a noblewoman named Katerina Ivanovna and, due to the pressure of Katerina's noble heritage, falls to drinking.⁵⁴ Marmeladov regularly squanders his family's wealth, forcing his daughter, Sonya, into prostitution to provide. Tragedy strikes the Marmeladovs early in the novel when a carriage strikes Mr. Marmeladov dead.⁵⁵ To express his condolences, Raskolnikov gives the Marmeladovs some money he stole from Alyona.⁵⁶ In so doing, he meets Sonya, and the two form the roots of a romantic connection. At this time, an investigator named Porfiry investigates Raskolnikov.⁵⁷ Porfiry begins to suspect Raskolnikov after he revisits the crime scene. Raskolnikov, on multiple occasions, nearly gives himself up in his fevered delirium. Because of Raskolnikov's suspicious behavior, Porfiry makes regular visits to question him about the murder.

Throughout the story, Raskolnikov struggles whether or not to give himself up. While he considers himself justified for murdering Alyona, another side of him thinks he should confess. As the story progresses, Svidrigailov arrives in St. Petersburg with the expressed intent of apologizing to Dunya for shame he brings upon her.⁵⁸ Svidrigailov's

⁵³ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 35.

⁵⁴ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 16.

⁵⁵ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 175.

⁵⁶ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 185.

⁵⁷ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 250.

⁵⁸ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 281.

wife, Marfa Petrovna, wrongly suspects Dunya of seducing her husband, leading to the defamation of Dunya's name throughout her small town.⁵⁹ When Marfa dies suddenly after Dunya's departure, Svidrigailov visits her in St. Petersburg to offer her a small fortune.⁶⁰

Though Svidrigailov denies any interest in marrying Dunya, he reveals his true intent over time. He hopes his gift, in addition to information about Raskolnikov's crime, will pressure Dunya into marriage. Having overheard Raskolnikov admit his crime to Sonya, Svidrigailov threatens to identify Raskolnikov as the murderer. Svidrigailov fails in his blackmail attempt, however, as Dunya refuses to listen to him.⁶¹ Svidrigailov lets Dunya go, and he proceeds to commit suicide.⁶²

The story ends with Raskolnikov finally offering his confession.⁶³ Though he hesitates and maintains, even in confession, that he is innocent, Raskolnikov obeys Sonya's plea to confess. Because he comes forward with his confession, he receives a lesser sentence and spends eight years in Siberia. Sonya follows him, and Raskolnikov declares his love for her in prison. The author hints at Raskolnikov's conversion in Siberia, as the last scene depicts him clutching a copy of the New Testament Sonya gives him earlier in the novel.⁶⁴

Crime and Punishment is significant because of the ways it reflects the moral dialectic Dostoevsky presents in *Notes from Underground*. Raskolnikov embodies the Underground Man's struggle between God and self. Like the Underground Man,

⁵⁹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 34.

⁶⁰ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 293.

⁶¹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 489.

⁶² Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 511.

⁶³ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 531.

⁶⁴ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 550.

Raskolnikov rejects moral law. He denies the existence of moral absolutes, and he makes this clear in his essay “On Crime.”⁶⁵ In this essay, Raskolnikov argues that certain exceptional individuals have the power and duty to transgress common moral actions for the sake of the common good. Raskolnikov sees himself as one such exceptional individual.⁶⁶ Consequently, he considers his “crime” an act of justice. He confirms this conviction after overhearing a student complain about Alyona.⁶⁷ The student tells an officer that Alyona forces students into poverty with her crooked sales, and that the world would be better off without her. Raskolnikov concludes from this comment that he is destined to murder Alyona.⁶⁸ Though he maintains this philosophy throughout the novel, he has his doubts. Immediately following the murder, Raskolnikov falls into illness and delirium. He irrationally inserts himself into the murder investigation on multiple occasions, even though there is no evidence linking him to the case. Such actions highlight a conflict of will in Raskolnikov: while he wishes to follow his own will, he also desires community and compassion. In light of the Underground Man, Raskolnikov clearly struggles with a desire for freedom.

As suggested in the title, a key theme in *Crime and Punishment* is crime. Dostoevsky uses crime to highlight the moral dialectic he describes in *Notes From Underground*. Because the Underground Man struggles with common views of rationality and justice he alienates himself from society. Dostoevsky uses crime to accomplish the same purpose in Raskolnikov, alienating him through the murder of Alyona Ivanovna. This alienation follows Dostoevsky’s definitions of “crime” and

⁶⁵ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 251.

⁶⁶ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 265.

⁶⁷ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 65.

⁶⁸ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 66.

“criminal.” Dostoevsky considers a criminal “someone who has broken a law and thus puts himself outside of society.”⁶⁹ Because society establishes boundaries for the allowed, it is natural for human beings to act beyond these limits. This desire for the “might be,” according to Dostoevsky, epitomizes crime.⁷⁰ Because Raskolnikov commits a serious crime he places himself outside the boundaries of what’s acceptable and inhabits this “might be.”

In addition, Dostoevsky uses crime to express his thoughts on freedom. Raskolnikov employs crime to assert his freedom. The individual lacks complete freedom, if a social entity outside the self dictates what one can and cannot do. Therefore, the individual must commit crime to reclaim the freedom seized by this governing entity. Applying his understanding of crime, one can consider all of Dostoevsky’s protagonists as criminals, since “[i]t is only when one is free of the domination of society’s will that one is free to exercise one’s will.”⁷¹ Thus, just as the *Notes* sets up a foundational psychology for all of Dostoevsky’s works, so also it establishes a theme of crime. The *Underground Man* stands between the human will and God, showing the consequential paralysis of the two. Raskolnikov actuates one side of the struggle between the two, by demonstrating the consequences of freedom.⁷²

Raskolnikov seeks freedom and moral vindication. He does not offer himself to the authorities out of a sense of guilt, but a sense of pride. He intentionally attracts the interest of the police for two reasons. One, he wants an audience to his crime so that society will see his superiority as one who transcends civil law. By committing his crime

⁶⁹ Wasiolek, *The Major Fiction*, 65

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Wasiolek, *The Major Fiction*, 67.

without remorse and with intent to improve it, he will reveal the arbitrary nature of society's morals along with his free will. Second, by inspiring the investigation, he makes the police into oppressors and himself the oppressed. Taken together, Raskolnikov "makes the kind of world and the kind of Raskolnikov he wants."⁷³ And Dostoevsky demonstrates that Raskolnikov's intent was failure all along when Raskolnikov states, "And, finally, I am utterly a louse...because I am perhaps viler and more loathsome than the louse I killed, and I felt *beforehand* that I would say that to myself *after* killing her."⁷⁴ By providing justification, Raskolnikov defends himself from critics who would accuse him of immorality. In this way, he offers a declaration of superiority and a self-vindication through his confession.

Though Raskolnikov rejects moral laws to preserve his freedom, he time-and-time-again finds himself acting out of compassion, love, and goodwill. When Marmeladov falls drunk at the bar, Raskolnikov takes him home. After Marmeladov has passed away, he gives money to his family. He talks freely about the beauty of falling snow, and he falls in love with Sonya.⁷⁵ Raskolnikov regularly concedes to this "good" side of himself, though he often tries to destroy it. One can determine this from his relationship with Sonya alone. After spending significant time in compassionate conversation, he lashes out at her, cursing her for being a prostitute.⁷⁶ Raskolnikov battles between these two sides of himself and tries intensely "to kill every sign of weakness

⁷³ Wasiolek, *The Major Fiction*, 76.

⁷⁴ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 275.

⁷⁵ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 155.

⁷⁶ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 407-408.

within him, or to use the weakness as a weapon of self-justification.”⁷⁷ In this case, “weakness” refers to those traits and qualities respected by society.

The existence of love and good will in Raskolnikov does not negate the previously discussed theory concerning freedom. Dostoevsky intends for there to be a clear confusion of wills in his characters, one for absolute freedom and dominance and one for God. He illustrates the existence of two contrary wills within the human nature. Though human will constantly attempts to assert itself against outside forces, it simultaneously seeks harmony with them. Consequently, Dostoevsky shows that the human will is not the entirety of human nature. It is through this dichotomy of wills that Dostoevsky prepares his characters for salvation. In the case of *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov bears his free will even through confession. Though he admits his crime to the police, he does not admit guilt. Even in confessing, he declares his innocence.⁷⁸ Despite this conviction, he still desires to love and commune with those around him. This inexplicable love provides the seed of the Divine redemption.

Raskolnikov carries in himself the dual “logics” Dostoevsky describes in the *Notes*. He has the logic of self-will and the logic of God. To illustrate these logics, Dostoevsky provides mirrors, or “doubles,” of Raskolnikov. In the first half of *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov spends the majority of his time mulling over, and visiting, Alyona Ivanovna. In the second half of the novel, he spends his time visiting with Svidrigailov and Sonya. Svidrigailov and Sonya embody the two logics in Raskolnikov. Svidrigailov represents the human self-will, and Sonya represents the Divine. Svidrigailov, like Raskolnikov, objectifies the world around him and sees himself as an

⁷⁷ Wasiolek, *The Major Fiction*, 80.

⁷⁸ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 518.

individual apart from outside legislation. Though never explicitly stated, Svidrigailov likely murdered his ex-wife, providing an obvious connection with Raskolnikov, a fellow murderer. Besides these similarities, Dostoevsky describes Svidrigailov's room as a small, worn, yellowed place in which one has barely enough room to stand. This room mirrors the one in which Raskolnikov plans the murder of Alyona Ivanovna.

Both Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov have dreams which reveal similarities between the two. However, these dreams do not match perfectly because Raskolnikov has not yet committed himself to the self-willed side of himself. Though he regularly concedes to the Svidrigailov within him, Raskolnikov still battles with a desire for compassion and love. Consequently, Svidrigailov represents a potential Raskolnikov to be, one who has committed himself to self-will. The dreams of each reflect this distinction.

In his first dream, Raskolnikov imagines himself as a young boy watching a crowd beating a dying horse. Out of the crowd someone yells, "Take an axe to her!"⁷⁹ This dream foreshadows and reflects the murder Raskolnikov is about to commit. In Svidrigailov's first dream, he looks apathetically on the body of a dead girl who killed herself because of the molestation he committed on her.⁸⁰ Unlike Svidrigailov, who shows no remorse in his atrocious dream, Raskolnikov stands horrified by his own. In his second dream, Raskolnikov attempts to murder Alyona Ivanovna again, but every time he swings the axe she refuses to die.⁸¹ In his second dream, Svidrigailov attempts to comfort a crying little girl, but when he approaches her, she flashes her eyes at him with a look of

⁷⁹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 58.

⁸⁰ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 507.

⁸¹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 277.

uncontrollable lust.⁸² Whereas Raskolnikov's dream reflects an inability for Raskolnikov to kill again, Svidrigailov's dream reveals a perturbed nature that cannot change. Thus, this second dream reveals a concreteness about each's character. While Raskolnikov still finds himself caught between the impulses of human will and the Divine, Svidrigailov commits himself to the actuation of his own will. And Dostoevsky reveals the final end of the self-willed life when Svidrigailov commits suicide.

As an alternative to the self-will side of human nature, Dostoevsky shows the Divine side through Sonya. While Svidrigailov represents the death that accompanies a life of self-will, Sonya represents a rebirth, and this rebirth takes place through confession. Whereas Svidrigailov reveals a life of cruelty and obstinacy, Sonya reveals one of grace and love. When Raskolnikov asks her what she would do if she had the power to end the lives of supposed corrupt men, and revive the good dead, she humbly declares that it is not up to her to decide life and death.⁸³ In addition, Sonya represents and encourages the need for confession through her reading of the Lazarus story. She embodies this story through her own resilience to Raskolnikov's deception, and she proclaims it to Raskolnikov, providing a human and literary testament of the way God can forgive and revive even the most hopeless cases. Raskolnikov's unexplainable attraction towards Sonya signifies his impulse towards the divine, so that when he confesses for the sake of Sonya and not himself, he prepares for the redemption begun in the epilogue.⁸⁴

Thus, Raskolnikov's confession at the end of the novel illustrates a partial fulfillment of both sides of human nature. While he declares his freedom in his

⁸² Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 509.

⁸³ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 408.

⁸⁴ Wasiolek, *The Major Fiction*, 81.

confession and declares the world he wants, he also acts in favor of the Divine, since a look from Sonya inclines him to deliver a confession. By making a confession, Raskolnikov acts in faith towards a less “rational” side of himself, and prepares for a rebirth into selflessness that will take place in Siberia.⁸⁵ Having witnessed the end of Svidrigailov’s way of life, and witnessed the love and joy of Sonya’s, Raskolnikov demonstrates the need for the death of human self-will in order for the Divine to live. This death takes place through the suffering he will endure in Siberia, and the love of Christ accompanies it. Sonya encapsulates this love when she journeys with him to Siberia and continues to provide both human and literary testimony to grace, through actions and the Scriptures she gave him.

Logic does not govern Raskolnikov’s journey into divine grace; rather, he finds grace through the experience of suffering. In order for him to find peace from the conflict within himself, he must give up his pride and die to the self-willed side of his nature. This death is not an immediate happening that begins and ends with his confession. It begins with his confession, and develops over his eight-year period in prison. This prison period is one of transformative suffering, such as one sees in the Boris and Gleb narrative. Both Boris and Gleb willfully gave themselves to death for the sake of political peace and to stand as examples of Christ. Their rejection of personal glory and their dependence upon Christ led to their sanctification and glorification. By willfully offering himself to a legal system he rejects, Raskolnikov makes an initial step of salvific humiliation, and he mirrors Dostoevsky’s own return to Christ through his imprisonment in Siberia.

In this way, Raskolnikov enacts and fulfills the division witnessed in the *Underground Man*, as well as testifies to the transformative suffering paramount to

⁸⁵ Wasiolek, *The Major Fiction*, 84.

Russian kenoticism. Through both the Underground Man and Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky provides a quintessentially Russian Orthodox solution to the problem of suffering. Rather than seek a philosophical argument to explain away suffering, he shows that human beings must embrace suffering in a process of joyful humiliation. For, while this humiliation is painful, the individual transforms it into life and joy through Christ. This is precisely the solution offered by Russian kenoticism.

CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, I revealed how Fyodor Dostoevsky is a quintessentially Russian Orthodox writer. I began this project by first defending the existence of a uniquely Russian micro-Christendom, rearticulating the political and ecclesial motivations that inspired Prince Vladimir to form a distinct Christian empire in Kievan Rus. After this, I then described some traits of the Christian Orthodoxy that arose from this micro-Christendon, chiefly the kenoticism of Russian patron saints, Boris and Gleb. I concluded my argument with an analysis of Dostoevsky's life and works, highlighting how each reflects and embodies the transformative suffering and humility of Russian kenoticism. Beginning with his biography, I showed how Dostoevsky's suffering in prison returned him to the Orthodoxy of his childhood and prepared for a literary career through which he would reconcile his own rational ego and selfless faith. I closed with a brief analysis of his literature, focusing on the ways in which *Notes From Underground* and *Crime and Punishment* exhibited this reconciliation and suggested the need for Christ's incarnate grace, through and in which the individual endures suffering to find love and salvation. In so doing, I showed the relation to, and impact of, Russian kenoticism on Fyodor Dostoevsky's life and works.

Having discussed the influence of Russian Orthodoxy on Dostoevsky, what is the importance of this discussion? In the introduction of this project, I mentioned the existence of works which cast Dostoevsky in an atheistic, agnostic, and/or heterodox light. Though existent, such works do not seem to comprise the bulk of Dostoevsky scholarship—certainly not contemporary studies. While it is important for readers to identify the Orthodoxy of

Dostoevsky's thought, it is especially important to recognize the relevance of Orthodox theology as it relates to Christian existentialism as a whole. Christian existentialists like Soren Kierkegaard also reflect on the importance of human experience and suffering as a means by and through which the individual achieves the highest knowledge. At a time when more and more scholars and students turn to existentialism as an avenue of truth, for both religion and philosophy, it is essential to understand and locate sources of knowledge to both clarify their objects of existential study, as well as supplement them. In the case of Christian existentialism, there exists a fascinating and necessary return and relation to the patristic texts of old. Thus, in this work, I hope to demonstrate the need for this return and relation, just as Dostoevsky suggests the need for some outside grace. Not only does reference to early Christian theology, as expressed and maintained by the Orthodox church, help clarify the ideas of Dostoevsky and others, it furthers one's ongoing pursuit of them as one moves from understanding to application.

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