

**CONCORDIA TEACHERS COLLEGE**

**FYODOR MIKHAILOVICH DOSTOYEVSKY (1821-1881):  
CHRISTIAN MYSTIC AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHER**

**by**

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I will tell you that at such moments one thirsts for faith as the parched grass, and one finds it at last because truth becomes evident in unhappiness. I will tell you that I am a child of my century, a child of disbelief and doubt, I am that today and (I know it) will remain so until the grave. How much terrible torture this thirst for faith has cost me and costs me even now, which is all the stronger in my soul the more arguments I can find against it. And yet, God sends me sometimes instants when I am completely calm; at those instants I love and I feel loved by others, and it is at these instants that I have shaped for myself a *Credo* where everything is clear and sacred for me. This *Credo* is very simple, here it is: to believe that nothing is more beautiful, profound, sympathetic, reasonable, manly, and more perfect than Christ; and I tell myself with a jealous love that not only that there is nothing but that there cannot be anything. Even more, if someone proved to me that Christ is outside the truth, and that in reality the truth were outside of Christ, then I should remain with Christ rather than with the truth (*Pisma*, edited and annotated by A.S. Dolinin, 4 vols. Moscow, 1928-1959, I:142, cited in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1849-1859*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 160).

Dostoevsky became more intimately acquainted with his own people in Siberia; he mingled with the muzhik and persuaded himself that this thief, murderer and drunkard still had that essential kernel or spark within him without which human life is impossible. He saw at first hand both the muzhik's faith and his love for his fellowman. This was the core of Dostoevsky's early message from Siberia to his friend A. Maykov, and it is a theme to which he returns again and again at later times to explain the changes within himself which occurred during his Siberian exile.... (Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*. Edited by George Gibian and translated by Robert Bass, Vol. III; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967, p. 140. Cf. Masaryk's source in F.M. Dostoevsky, *Polnae Sobranie Sochinenii*, ed. and annotated by G.M. Fridlender, et al., 30 vols. Leningrad, 1972, X, P. 304 and I, p. 198).

This paper will explore the following thesis: Fyodor Dostoyevsky's work among the early socialist movement (the famous "Petrashevsky circle") and his later repudiation of it entailed a unique religious perspective and synthesis in nineteenth century Russian thought. His view incorporated a certain mystical reaffirmation of Orthodox Christianity united to a fervent Russian nationalism, both which were set forth in a masterful urbane literary form. Dostoyevsky's existential

psychology and his moral idealism would inspire other later Russian intellectuals and social critics. One example in our own day is the Soviet dissident and litterateur, Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

### **Dostoyevsky and the Circle of Petrashevsky (the 1840's)**

Fyodor Dostoyevsky was born in Moscow on October 30, 1821, in the Moscow Foundling Hospital where his father was a resident physician. Unlike his contemporaries, Turgenev, and later, Tolstoy, who came from cultured, wealthy landed gentry, his folk were of the lower rung of middle-class society. Ernest J. Simmons speaks of his roots as being "intellectual proletarian" (*Feodor Dostoyevsky*, New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969, p. 5). His parents were both quite devout Christians from all indications. Moreover, his father, an ex-army surgeon, was also a very strict disciplinarian. His mother was kind and unusually charitable; his father could be the same. Yet, often he became outrageously harsh and rigid in domestic and social matters. This was what undoubtedly led to his untimely murder by the serfs who worked his small country estate in 1839 (Joseph Frank in his *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821- 1849*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, pp. 6-54 details his early relationships and experiences). In later times, though, Dostoyevsky spoke to his second wife, Anna, about his "happy and placid childhood." Avrahm Yarmolinsky is skeptical about this, but he nevertheless observes: "Looking backward late in life, he said that, in spite of 'all deviations,' his parents had earnestly striven to be among the 'best' people in the highest sense of the adjective" (*Dostoevsky: His Life and Art*, 2nd. ed.; New York: Grove Press, 1960, p. 9). Frank, in the book noted earlier has carefully examined the interplay of Dostoevsky's youthful associations with the Russian peasantry and the Orthodox faith as well as his ambivalent relationship with his proud, stern father (*Dostoyevsky: The Seeds of Revolt*, pp. 16-41 and 43ff.)

The famous novelist-to-be was educated in Moscow in a fairly ordinary way, yet he had opportunity to imbibe from the Bible, novelists like Radcliffe, Balzac, and Scott, the historian Karamzin, and the poets Zhukovsky, Lomonov and Pushkin. It is also quite probable that young Fyodor had read and digested the romantic German philosophy of Johann C.F. Schiller as well. Certainly, he showed a marked interest in literature and an extensive acquaintance with it from his school boy days (Frank, *Ibid.*, pp. 55-65, 70, 80 81). Later, Fyodor continued his formal education (due to his father's prodding) by studying at the School for Engineers in St. Petersburg from 1839 to 1843. While he endured the rigors of this setting, he frequently would steal away from dull studies and drills on military fortifications to peruse Russian and other favored authors. These were quite a variety: Homer, Shakespeare, Byron, Goethe, Hugo, Racine, Rousseau, George Sand, and Eugene Sue (Cf. Ernest J. Simmons, *Feodor*

*Dostoevsky*, p. 6 and Frank, *Idem.* above). Facts concerning this period of Dostoyevsky's career are scarce, but that which is known suggests that he exhibited both an image of shy sensitivity, and paradoxically, at other times, he joined in Bohemian exultation with his fellow cadets. He joyously pursued good food and drink, conversation, music and theater, and the company of pretty girls. He began to exhibit traits at this time too of thoroughgoing passion, gambling fever, dreamy idealism, and altruistic friendship. During this time also he began to display his tendencies toward self-improvement and hopes of quick financial success (Simmons, *Ibid.*, p. 7. \*Cf. also Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, pp. 77-100, and Yarmolinsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Art*, ch.3, "A Raw Youth," pp. 24-35).

After graduation from the Engineering Academy in 1843, he served in the Engineering Corps for a year. But afterwards he resigned his Commission in the army to devote himself to his real love, writing. His early literary apprenticeship was to become the translator for Balzac's *Eugenie Grandet*. This was followed quickly by his own literary first-born, *Poor Folk*, in 1846. Dostoyevsky allowed a young friend of his to deliver the manuscript into the hands of Vissarion G. Belinsky, Russia's then leading critic. The latter ecstatically praised the rookie production as having both high artistic and social value (Cf. Simmons, *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8). Indeed, Belinsky was delighted with the novel primarily because of its vivid themes of social inequalities in the tradition of Pushkin's "The Station Master" (1830) and N. Gogol's famous story "The Overcoat" (1842).

During this period Dostoyevsky was passing through an early transformation of intellectual outlook and style as a novelist.<sup>1</sup> He had taken on a humanitarian cause as he had discovered the unbelievable conditions of Petersburg's humiliated and injured people. This was his so-called "Gogolian period" when his earlier literary Romanticism was being transmuted into a sentimental Naturalism (Cf. Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt*, pp. 133-136). Simmons mentions how at this time he added the new dimension of intense psychological analysis of characters from the "inside" - a new in-depth syn-thesis where each part is understood in relation to the whole. Such was the beginnings of the new school of Russian realistic fiction (*Feodor Dostoevsky*, p 8). But Dostoyevsky's immediate success and his high delight in basking in literary celebrity did not hold out. His subsequent stories, *The Double* (1846) and *Netochka Nezvanova*, the first an amazing account of abnormal psychology involving a character named Golyadin, the second about a young woman's morbid love for her step father, did not meet with the previous admiration of *Poor Folk*. Belinsky did not see the all-important social significance in these. Dostoyevsky, however, in his account many years later,

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<sup>1</sup>We cannot enter into the details here, we can only offer an interpretative summary of this period. See the critical literature especially Frank and Yarmolinsky.

*The Diary of a Writer*, while admitting inadequacy in developing the tale of Golyadin's schizophrenia still insisted: "I never projected a more serious idea into literature" (Simmons, *Ibid.*, p.10).

But Dostoyevsky's intense concern for the inner alienation of human souls did not meet with Belinsky's taste. Thus, opposing views of art and differing social visions soon would divide the two men. It was to be a case of standing dichotomies: pure vs. social uses of art, Kantianism vs. left wing Hegelianism, and Dostoyevsky's firm faith in autocracy and the Orthodox faith vs. Belinsky's advocacy of atheistic Socialism (aimed at the reactionary Church and Nicholas I's oppressive rule). At the same time, it seemed that Dostoyevsky's literary fame was ebbing as he moved from the "Belinsky Pleiade" to the intermediate "Beketov Circle" (a progressive Utopian Socialist group which included Aleksey Beketov, A. Plesheev, and Valerian Maikov) and even further (Cf. Frank, *Dostoevsky, The Seeds of Revolt*, pp. 137-238, and Yarmolinsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Art*, pp. 36-75).

The affair happened as follows. During the early months of 1846, Dostoyevsky's name and work became a by-word in Petersburg cultured circles due to N. A. Nekrasov's promotion of them in the *Petersburg Almanac*. He was perhaps unable psychologically to handle all of this accolade, and quite soon his exuberances of vanity led him into trouble with Ivan Turgenev whose mockery eventually caused Fyodor to forever part company with the group (Frank, *Ibid.*, pp. 159-164). The insults of Nekrasov and Turgenev combined with his growing controversy with Belinsky over Socialism (whether it be of a Slavophilic or rationalized Western variety), pushed him to the brink. It is about this time too that his financial indebtedness to his publisher Krayevsky became unbearably heavy. Thus in 1848 we find him begging his brother Michael and other friends for money. Also during this period, his friend and physician, Dr. Yanovsky, speaks of his nervous seizures, his "kondrashka", or apoplexy (Cf. Frank, *Ibid.*, pp. 164ff.; Yarmolinsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Art*, pp. 54-62). Years later, his novel, *The Insulted and Injured* will chronicle in veiled form many details of his experience in these times, including what he spoke of as his "mystic terror" (Frank, *Ibid.*, pp.167-168).

While the noxious literary rumors and ridicule of Turgenev and company deeply affected young Dostoyevsky, his falling out with his earlier idol, Belinsky, was the greatest blow. It was, though, a likely development given their ultimate differences in world views and social philosophy. Interestingly, Belinsky himself had moved from an earlier humanitarian and romantic Socialism (*a la* Schiller and Gogol) to a more left-wing Hegelian position under the influence of Mikhail A. Bakunin (1804-1876). Though he did not accept the radical overtones of Bakunian anarchism, he did begin to see literature in a more extreme socio-political fashion than before (Cf. Frank, *Ibid.*, pp. 119-125; and see also Nicholas A. Riasonovsky, *A History of Russia*, Fourth Edition; New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, pp 359ff. and Yarmolinsky, *The Road To Revolution: A Century of Russian Radicalism*, New York: Collier Books, pp.

71-72)\* Belinsky even found a way, at least initially, to reconcile his Utopian Socialist tenets (based on George Sand and P. L'eroux) with a Christian doctrine of love and foreseen a "Golden Age" of Christic liberty, fraternity, and equality. But the Slavophiles' narrowing of this vision and their blunting of its intrinsic social concerns for the mystical inclinations of Orthodoxy and idealized *obshchina* (peasant brotherhood) did not appeal to him (Yarmolinsky, *The Road To Revolution, Ibid.*; Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, pp. 125-126).

Even before Fyodor's crucial interactions with the Belinsky disciples and his later entanglement in the literary-social radicalism of the Petrashevists, during his early years in the mid-to-late 1840's, his thinking was pulled in two directions. Like many cultured Russians, he was influenced by German Romantic literature and Idealism on the one hand, and French Socialism on the other. One outlook scorned involvement in the empirical and practical affairs of man and society (or else tended to endorse the *status quo* and actually linked politics to an intuitive religious metaphysical Absolutism). The other outlook had a more activist vision of realizing a new society and human community either *via* "Christian" social humanitarianism or by philanthropic social evolution. During the 1830's and 1840's the latter sentiments were elaborated in the various philosophical-Socialist circles of Fourier, Saint-Simon, and Marx and Engels (actually they were more in the 1840's). The great French litterateurs such as Balzac and Victor Hugo heavily breathed this spirit, this *Zeitgeist*. For Russia this influence arrived close upon the heels of the Decembrist uprising (1825) and Nicholas I's stern repressive measures against it and all like aspirations (Cf. Frank, *Ibid.*, pp. 137-238 and Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, pp. 319-329;359-367).<sup>2</sup>

Frank has a provocative discussion of these two "romanticisms" which so profoundly affected Dostoyevsky before and after the writer's contact with the Petrashevsky circle:

Dostoevsky always remained stamped with the complex cultural physiognomy of the time. Indeed, one of the secrets of his genius may well have been his refusal ever to decide emotively between the personal and literary tensions created by equal devotion to the two Romanticisms. On the one hand, we see his commitment to the supernatural, other-worldly and more traditionally Christian outlook of metaphysical Romanticism-Christian at least in spirit, and even though the artist is substituted for the priest and the saint. But, on the other hand, we also have the strong tug of his feelings toward the practical application of Christian values of pity and love toward

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<sup>2</sup>\*Cf. also Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire, 1801-1917* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 256-267 which has an excellent discussion of Belinsky in the context of Slavophilism vs. Westernism in the 1840's.

the "philanthropic" ground swell of French social Romanticism flooding in ever more irresistably after 1830. The one keeps its eyes devoutly fixed on the eternal; the other responds to the needs of the moment. The former concentrates on the inner struggle of the soul for purification; the latter combats the degrading influence of a brutalizing enviroment. The supreme value attributed to suffering comes into conflict with compassion for the weak and clashes with the desire to refashion the world. Dostoevsky felt the competing pull of both of these moral and religious imperatives, and the balance of their opposing pressures helps to account for the unremitting tragic impact of his best work (*The Seeds of Revolt*, pp. 111-112).

So when Belinsky began to pick at Dostoyevsky in personal conversations about literature and to write critical reviews of his "feuilletons" in the *Otechestvennye zapiski* (*Fatherland Notes*) and in *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*) the fat hit the fire! For one primary example, he scathingly criticized *The Double* saying, "[it] ... suffers from another important defect: its fantastic setting. In our days the fantastic can have a place only in the madhouses, but not in literature, being the business of doctors, not poets' " (V. G. Belinsky, *Selected Philosophical Works*, Moscow, 1948, cited in Frank, *Ibid.*, p. 177). Yet the great issues which stood between Belinsky and Dostoyevsky revolved around Christ and faith, and over the Divine mission of the Russian people (Cf. Frank, *Ibid.*, pp. 182-198). Belinsky's original vision, based upon "New Christianity" (Utopian Socialism emphasizing the opposition of the true religion of Jesus Christ, a hopeful humanitarian faith of light and love, contrasted with the false religion of fear and perdition) had been more and more altered. For as he fell more under the influence of the German Left-Hegelians (D.F. Strauss, L. Feuerbach, etc.), the Humanistic Socialism of Alexander Herzen (1812-1870) , and the Hegelian psychology of Max Stirner (*The Ego and His Own*), Belinsky's original Christian aspirations were replaced by purely humanistic ones. By 1845, previous to meeting Dostoyevsky, he had written to Herzen "in the words *God* and *religion* I see darkness, gloom, chains and the knout, and I like these two words as much as the four following them." (cited in Frank, *Ibid.* , pp. 187-189). Also he had jettisoned his youthful naivete about the people, reacting both to Bakunin's ardent revolutionism and the Slavophiles' mystical idealizations.

While Belinsky probably never *totally* abandoned his belief in God or man, his increasing rationalism and determinism pained Fyodor Dostoyevsky. In Dostoyevsky's later recollections he would (with somewhat dramatic exaggeration) accuse his former master Belinsky of inclining him toward "atheism" (Frank, *Ibid.*, pp. 191-2).

Eventually, this tension did lead Fyodor Mikhailovich into a situation which would drastically alter his career and the course of his life. Ernest J. Simmons comments:

It is not surprising, then, that Dostoyevsky, seeking new friends after his rupture with Belinsky and his disciples should have found them among the gatherings at the home of idealistic Mikhail Petrashevsky where discussions were held on the writings of the French utopian socialists, Fourier, St. Simon, and Proudhon, and on the need for social reforms in Russia. But he also associated himself with a smaller group of more venturesome souls in these gatherings, the so-called Durov Circle, whose members, convinced that reforms could not be achieved by peaceful methods, secretly conspired to promote revolutionary action to free the serfs. They planned to propagandize their views by printing their own writings on a clandestinely procured hand press. It is also known that Dostoevsky repeatedly and enthusiastically read to members of both circles Belinsky's famous contraband letter to Gogol, in which, among other things, he excoriated the church and praised atheism (*Feodor Dostoevsky*, p. 13)<sup>3</sup>

It would appear that Dostoyevsky, because of his all-or-nothing personality, wished to exemplify "pure art" in his life in order to refute and spite Belinsky. Robert Lord in his masterful study on Dostoyevskyan writing and thought observes:

Herzen was convinced it was the atmosphere of suspicion engendered by Nicholas I which had bred this type, this spiteful hypochondriac, with a character like a mimosa; Dostoyevsky's Man from Underground 'germinated in a test-tube'. Dostoevsky himself epitomized this type in his novel *The Devils* when he contrasted the natural craving for danger and sensation of the earlier generation of Decembrists with the neurotic, exhausted and complex character of the young men of his own day (*Dostoevsky: Essays and Perspectives*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970, p. 13.).

Dostoyevsky's interest and role in the Petrashevsky circle was most likely of an "experimental" and paradoxical kind; his intellectual and literary irony made him immune to any initial political activism. Despite the fact of his apparent pathos in reading the letter of Belinsky to Gogol, he remained a secretive and

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. also Frank E. Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris-Turgot, Condorcet, Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Comte* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, The Academy Library, 1962) for a rundown on French radicalism and socialism which formed the basis for many ideas discussed by the Petrashevists.

nervously reticent participant in the Petrashevsky soirees (Lord, *Dostoevsky: Essays, Ibid.* Cf. also Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, chapters 17 & 18 on the extent of his involvement, pp. 239-272 ). Unfortunately, in the passage of time Dostoyevsky's association and sympathy for the more radical Palm-Durov clique within the Petrashevsky group, especially with Mikolay Speshnev (like N. Stavrogin, the handsome, suave, and uncommitted aristocrat in *The Devils*) got him into trouble. He was drifting further into Speshnev's inner circle, the "Russian Society", a group which aimed to spread discontent everywhere - beginning with the schools, but also with other malcontents like the religious dissidents (*raskolniki*) and the peasant serfs (Frank, *Ibid.*, pp. 266-272). Friends noticed his increasing melancholy, and he spoke of having his "own Mephistopheles" (i.e., Speshnev, who mesmerized him). Frank concludes:

No wonder Dostoevsky was plunged into gloom and melancholy: he felt inextricably trapped in a labyrinth from which there was no escape except through catastrophe; and he later told his second wife that, if not for the providential accident of his arrest, he would certainly have gone mad (*Ibid.*, p. 272).

Dostoyevsky's paradoxical activities, his extreme melancholy, and the philosophical and political perplexities of the times form a historical matrix. This matrix is subject to many interpretations and different levels of historical and literary presentation. However, Dostoyevsky's style as an author, his purposeful combination of the elements of psychological-social realism with profound idealistic and spiritual inquiry - all in fantastic dramatic embroidery - can be seen in the light of his reaction<sup>4</sup> to issues at the heart of the Petrashevsky affair. And, of course, personality dynamics will be seen to have played a vital part. Most importantly, we suggest, Dostoyevsky's outer conflicts and persecutions blended with his inner psychic struggles toward a denouement--the episode of his arrest and "mock execution" by the authorities, and finally, his "death and resurrection" among the outcasts in Siberia. It was this excessively close contact with the extremes of life and the eventual rubbing shoulders with the various types of Russian prisoners, criminals, peasants, and prison authorities that transformed him. After 1850, his earlier estimations about man, society, and God-his understanding of faith, freedom, and utopia-would be critically recast in existential depth! (Cf. Avrahm Yarmolinsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Art*, pp. 52-192 and also his *Road To Revolution*, pp. 75 83; 169-171, especially for background on "populism", "socialism" and Dostoyevsky's reactions).

Frank succinctly recapsulizes the contentions between Belinsky and Fyodor Dostoyevsky :

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<sup>4</sup>Some might prefer the term response, but whichever term you employ, Dostoyevsky entered into all aspects of life and literature with his whole self - emotion, reason, will, passion.

There can be no question either that the religious theme of Dostoyevsky's great novels was profoundly affected by the challenge of Belinsky. Not, to be sure, that atheism, or doubts about the beneficence of God, first loomed on his mental and emotional horizon in 1845 . . . . but it was Belinsky who first acquainted Dostoyevsky with the new- and much more intellectually sophisticated-arguments of Strauss, Feuerbach, and probably Stirner. And though his religious faith ultimately emerged unshaken -even strengthened- from the encounter, these doctrines did present him with an acute spiritual dilemma. Traces of this inner crisis can certainly be found in the wrestlings of Dostoyevsky's own characters with the problems of faith and Christ. Feuerbach had argued that God-and the Son of God so far as He was divine-were merely fictions representing the alienated essence of mankind's highest values. The task of mankind was thus to reappropriate its own essence by reassuming the powers and prerogatives alienated to the divine. The Left-Hegelians, to be sure, did not recommend this as a task for any particular individual to undertake; it was only mankind as a whole that could recoup this great human treasure; but Max Stirner comes very close to urging everyone immediately embark on their own personal deification.... Nobody has grasped more profoundly, or portrayed more brilliantly the tragic inner dialectic of this movement of atheist humanism; and if Dostoyevsky had no effective answer to Belinsky in 1845, he amply made up for it later by the creation of his negative heroes. For when such characters reject God and Christ, they invariably engage in the impossible and self-destructive attempt to transcend the human condition, and to incarnate the Left Hegelian dream of replacing the God-man by the Man-god (*Ibid.*, pp. 197-198).

So, it seems clear that, despite some of his rather bizarre actions, Dostoyevsky's involvement in the Petrashevsky circle was a matter of Christian social concern mixed with a desire to *show up* atheistic reforms with Christian works of love. As we have already seen, however, he did not fully realize the serious implications (at that time) of what he was doing (Cf. Frank, *Ibid.*, 239-291). Avrahm Yarmolinsky, whom we have copiously cited, provides a useful retelling of the entire Petrashevsky debacle in his *Road To Revolution* ("The Coasts of Utopia," V, pp. 80-83). We shall not attempt to recount the whole episode here. The significant point is: while the various radicals and Socialists were acutely conscious of their philosophical distinctives, the secret police of Czar Nicholas I hardly concerned themselves with such minor details. The latter agency, moreover, had been aware of the dubious activities of the circle since 1848 and had kept it under surveillance by police spies. The government was not going to put up with *any* kind of political turmoil or Socialist agitation. The result was that on the night

of April 23, 1849 Petrashevsky and thirty odd comrades were abruptly rounded up and thrown into the Peter and Paul Fortress. Later, when other arrests were made, the number of the incarcerated totaled over a hundred men. Eventually, these were tried by the Investigating Commission and their liberal and radical intentions were revealed. Although the government interrogators could prove no more than "a conspiracy of ideas" (Speshnev's and Filipov's more violent designs being unknown), the authorities handed down a court-martial and death-sentence for fifteen of the individuals involved (Frank, *The Years of Ordeal, 1849-1859*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 6-49). Dostoyevsky was among those condemned to die by a firing squad.

Dostoyevsky endeavored during the period of interrogations to explain his connection with the Petrashevsky activities in the light of his literary-philosophical quarrel with Belinsky as well and positively interpret the overall aims of the group as innocent (cf. Frank, *The Years of Ordeal*, pp. 44-48). He was somewhat deceptive in that he talked of the peaceful Fourierism of the group (which sort of Socialism he considered a mirage and outdated). He tended to ridicule the government's fears of a republican overthrow of the Czar. He also recounted how freely he had spoke even within the Palm Durov circle satirizing and parodying the plans and tone of the Utopian Socialists as "killingly funny". But his tactics, his reduction of the social-political proposals of the Petrashevists to personal motives of egoistic display, vanity and bravado did not quell the reactions of the authorities, as we know.

All in all, however Dostoyevsky acquitted himself honorably even if not entirely truthfully. He informed on no one and provided his inquisitors answers which were at once judicious and prophetic. Paradoxically, he believed that something good would come out of Socialism. He described it as a "science of ferment, a chaos, alchemy rather than chemistry, astrology rather than astronomy." But, he lamented the disorganization of the Petrashevsky circle which rendered it incapable of revolution since it was impossible to locate three people who could agree on any definite course (Frank, *Ibid.*) Thus, he would deny that his young friend Golovinsky had advocated a revolution to liberate the serfs, or that the group had envisioned a "revolutionary dictatorship" during the transition period. He denied ever hearing Petrashevshy discussing any open revolution at the meetings, and he treated the Commission's suspicions with contempt. " No wonder General Rostovtsev commented that, as a witness, Dostoevsky had been 'clever, independent, cunning, stubborn' " (Frank, *Ibid.*, p. 48). Nevertheless, before the final examination by the Military court, it could be said that he conducted himself with honor and reserve under stress.

**The New Vision: Incident in Semenovskiy Square  
(On to the Soul's Refinery -- Fire in Siberia)**

The story of the Czar's carefully orchestrated and cruel scenario of a "mock execution" of the Petrashevskyists is well known. After eight months' imprisonment, early morning on December 22, Dostoyevsky and a number of other "conspirators" were taken to Semenovskiy Square in closed escorts and placed upon a black-draped scaffold, ostensibly being prepared for death. The men were divided up into groups of three to face the firing squad. After a priest had been brought in to administer whatever comforts could be given to the repentant among the condemned, the first trio were brought down and tied to three stakes standing in the newly fallen snow. At this point the soldiers in the firing squad prepared to fire. The few moments of suspense, which seemed to last an eternity to Dostoyevsky, tested both the bold proclamations of atheism of such persons as Petrashevsky and Speshnev (who both humbly kissed the crucifix which the priest offered), as well as the inner fortification of himself. Years later he will speak of this as a supreme moment of mystery and terror (it is recalled in biographical but fictional manner in a description of a condemned man in Dostoyevsky's profound novel, *The Idiot*, 1868). Frank describes in intimate detail the tragic and comic aspects of this event as the firing squad shot its deadly volleys into the air and the first three victims were untied and returned to their place as "terrible, repulsive, frightening". He says,

One of them, Nicolay Grigoryev was white as a sheet, all the blood drained from his face; he had already shown signs of mental derangement in prison, and the mock ceremony finished him off entirely; never recovering his senses, he remained a helpless invalid for the rest of his days. Meanwhile, an aide-de-camp arrived on the scene at a gallop carrying the Tsar's pardon and the real sentences. These were read to the astonished prisoners, some of whom greeted the news with relief and joy, others with confusion and resentment. The peasant blouses and the night caps were taken off, and two men-looking like executioners, and dressed in worn multi-colored caftans-climbed the scaffolding. Their assigned task was to break a sword over the heads of the prisoners, who were compelled to kneel for this part of the ceremony; the snapping of the sword signaled exclusion from civilian life, and they were given convict headgear, soiled sheepskin coats, and boots (Frank, *Ibid.*, p.58 ; Cf. pp. 51-57 for the sources of the paragraph above).

The final item of fitting garb for the almost condemned men were the iron shackles to be worn in their exile in Siberia. For Dostoyevsky, three days later, on Christmas Eve, 1849, he was to begin his strenuous sentence in his "new life". Indeed, this is a proper way to speak of this time, because out of these experiences, he would gain a new perspective on his existence.

From letters which he wrote to his brother Michael immediately after the Semenovskiy incident, we know that his heart was filled with a new buoyancy and

sense of spirited hopefulness (Cf. Yarmolinsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Art*, pp. 88ff.; Frank, *The Years of Ordeal*, pp. 59-62; and see the comments of Ralph E. Matlaw in his translation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Notes From Underground & The Grand Inquisitor*, New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1960, p. viii.).

Dostoyevsky's sentence, as we know, was commuted to four years hard labour in Siberia and another four years in the army. He will describe these hardships in living and hellacious color in his work *The House of the Dead*, published in 1861-2. But for the moment, he exalted in the unexpected mercy of God (even through the Czar) and pondered over the immense occurrence of his "salvation" which over shadowed everything else, including his wrecked literary ambitions. Frank, in his marvelous second volume on Dostoyevsky's life highlights how he had begun to see his commitment to literature and to social betterment from the perspective of eternity. He quotes the writer 's denunciation of the wastefulness and laziness of his previous life and his incapacity to love. Then comes the most important thought: " ` Life is a gift, life is happiness, every minute can be an eternity of happiness. *Si jeunesse savait [If youth only knew] !* Now, in changing my life, I am reborn in a new form. Brother! I swear that I will not lose hope and will keep my soul and heart pure. I will be reborn for the better. That's all my hope, all my consolation! '"(Frank, *Ibid.*). Looking at life this way allowed him to see it as a sheer gift, in fact a blessed miracle. He also would hereafter believe that one had the capacity to overcome all the harsh and oppressive circumstances of life and preserve his human integrity because man had a truly free will. In this he differs greatly from the determinism of Belinsky and others. He also refuses to accept the notion that men commit crimes because of economic necessity (Frank, *Ibid.*, pp. 63ff.). Most importantly, we behold Dostoyevsky's passionate and unparalleled emphasis on Christian forgiveness and an all-embracing love of other suffering human beings (which he had begun to practice with his fellow prisoners and his relatives).

Dostoyevsky said goodbyes to his brother Michael and family and his friend Alex Milyukov and left for Siberia on December 24, 1849- he was twenty-eight years old. Frank in his book, *Dostoyevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1849-1859* (pp. 67-103) has done an excellent job of surveying both the exile's first impressions of the Siberian world of exile and the "moral horrors" that he discovered there. One very important point he underscores (as would Dostoyevsky himself fourteen years later in his *Diary of a Writer*) was Dostoyevsky's meeting of the Decembrists' wives in Tobolsk on the way to Omsk. He recalls how these sublime sufferers (who had pleaded with the guards to see the exiles) sacrificed everything to follow their husbands to Siberia and how they also served and consoled needy prisoners in many ways (Frank, *Ibid.*, pp.73 ff.) He cherished the memory of their blessing with the cross and their gift of a New Testament, a gift which he kept throughout his imprisonment, particularly dear since it was all convicts were allowed to read. Inside the Bible too, was a little gift of ten rubles. It was this occasion when Dostoyevsky met Madame Natalya Fonvizina, a devout and Biblical Christian. It

would be in a letter to her in 1854 that he would set forth his famous religious *Credo* (see Introduction).

Soon however, he was to see the other side of life: the ugliness and cruelty of the prison enclave, he was to learn of Major Krivtsov, a barbarian overseer of the prisoners, and he was to witness the floggings of the inmates and feel their resentment and hatred of their overseers (Frank, *Ibid.*, pp 74-84). Moreover, at this time the stresses and shocks of his mock execution and exposure to the deplorable conditions of camp life brought on his first serious epileptic attacks (these occurred periodically from 1850-1853). Fortunately, smart behavior, friendly alliances with some camp officials, and hard work on the outside kept Dostoyevsky in good physical if not mental shape. Thus he survived the more obvious ordeals of his *Katorga*.

But aside from making adjustments and winning friends like Dr. Troitsky of the prison hospital, he maintained his sanity by remembering characterizations of individuals and events by catch phrases and proverbs in his head (like Alexander Solzhenitsyn in the later twentieth-century Soviet Gulag!). He also kept hidden in his hospital room little memo books which are sometimes referred to as the "Siberian notebooks".

The most crucial aspect of Dostoyevsky's adjustment to prison life was his eventual success at establishing friendly relations with some of the peasant-convicts. This provided a welcome relief from his oppressive sense of living in a world encircled with enmity and hatred. Thus, when his convict fetters came off in 1854 (February, 1854), and his obligation to serve in the Russian army for an indeterminate time arrived, he nevertheless spoke of freedom and joy . Frank cites his remarks:

The fetters fell off. I picked them up. I wanted to hold them in my hand, to look at them for one last time. I seemed already to be wondering that they could have been on my feet a minute before. 'Well, with God's blessing, with God's blessing!' said the convicts in coarse, abrupt voices, in which, however there was a note of pleasure. Yes, with God's blessing! Freedom, new life, resurrection from the dead .... What a glorious moment! (Cited on pp. 85-86).

From what can only be called "a world of moral horror", then, did our esteemed writer realize his new framework of spiritual and social-philosophical convictions ( Cf. Frank's chapter 7 in his *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal*, pp. 87-104; and Yarmolinsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Art*, pp. 165-175 ). He himself declares in his famous *Diary* that his change of convictions (or regeneration of convictions) was a slow, gradual process over a long time (Frank, *Ibid.* p 87). Yet, he did come to the gradual realization that he was a brother to the convicts in Omsk not because of his political persecutions, but because he saw glimmers and traces of Christian charity and transcendence of human nature even among the desperate and sinful. He saw evidences amidst

the most immoral situations of the moral nature and freedom of man (Frank, *Ibid.*, p. 88).

On the other hand, Dostoyevsky was enabled to observe that men could actually approach the demonic level of existence. One example he noticed was the character Pavel Aristov, who was more sinister than anything he could have imagined. The latter person he recalls as totally unrepentant, grossly sensual, and cynically cunning in his wickedness - " a moral Quasimodo " (Frank, *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109). Other characters like Gazin, whom Dostoyevsky portrays as like a giant evil spider, and Orlov, a cold-bloodied "superman" beyond morality, fill in the negative side of the picture (Cf. Frank, *Ibid.*, chapter 11 "Monsters In Their Misery", pp. 146-162). It was because of such a discovery that he was enabled himself to go from a mood of bitter self-recrimination and masochistic self-hatred to new and more fully Christian understanding of his predicament. Indeed, he had begun to understand the psychological dynamics of revolution and observed in people like Petrov, a type which combined a shrewdness and taste for violence which could incite the masses (Frank, *Ibid.*, pp. 100-103). And, he saw too that a real revolution would not come from the "intelligentsia" , but from below. The Revolution of 1917 proved him correct.

### **Dostoyevsky vs. *the Devils*: Slavophile and Nihilist**

Dostoyevsky's reflections and subsequent regeneration, as we have noted, chiefly reveals his state of inner turmoil about being trapped into the political intrigue and revolutionary activism by Speshnev , his "Mephistopheles" in Petrashevsky. What was important was that his experiences in Siberia allowed him to really get to know the "peasant" he was supposedly going to deliver from bondage. Initially, he felt foolish. As he learned about the real feelings and attitudes of his fellow convicts, he was taken back by their apparent disinterest in gentlemanly socialist reform notions. There were definitely two phases in his imprisonment: First, a malice toward the "vile" beings he encountered, and second, a renewed humanitarian feeling toward them. Frank takes a sharply divergent position from Lev Shestov here, as the latter believed that Dostoyevsky had completely rejected his earlier tenderhearted ethos toward those suffering injustice. Frank discusses this in marvelous detail and concludes that a controversy with Polish convicts over the behavior of the Russians caused him to realize that he was, after all, "a Russian patriot"(Cf. *The Years of Ordeal* , pp. 105-115). Furthermore, he shows us the internal conflicts and the external catalysts of loneliness and deprivation which helped to "explain" (*a la* William James' method in *Varieties of Religious Experience*) Dostoyevsky's "conversion" (Cf. pp. 116-145). His thesis, which we accept essentially (with certain supernaturalistic qualifications!), is that Dostoyevsky's "recovery" of his faith in Siberian exile was not actually a total recovery from a position of apostasy and unbelief. This version, he thinks, takes Dostoyevsky's misleading comments in

his polemics against the Populists in the 1870's too literally. We have taken notice of this in our paper in the first section. The account of Raskolnikov's regeneration in his epic *Crime and Punishment*, for instance, should not be taken as a model of his own. Frank states: " Since Dostoevsky had always remained in some sense a Christian (even if an unorthodox one, who accepted the Socialist shift of the Christian message from the heavenly to the earthly paradise), his conversion in prison camp should not be seen as that of a strayed ex-believer returning to Christ " (*Ibid.*, p. 117). Fundamentally, his argument turns on Dostoyevsky's reminiscences of his childhood comfort from fear because of "the peasant Marey", and the blending of this memory of the goodness of a simple Russian peasant with the wonderful exhibition of brotherly love and forgiveness of the camp convicts during the Easter season.

Thus, his whole attitude did change toward his fellow inmates, who before he had somewhat despised. His vision had been tinged, as it were with the beauty and glory of God. He begin to see in full elucidation the image of God in the debauched, depraved, and seductive figures in his world-"diamonds in the filth"( *Ibid.*; pp. 123-124). Frank emphasizes, however, that it is not just a general faith in God and Christ, but it is a re-affirmation of faith in the common Russian people, who in some sense, bear the human image of Christ (*Ibid.*, p. 125), Though Dostoyevsky was hardly a typical Slavophile, a more earnest Slavophilism could not be imagined. Such a leap of faith made it possible for Fyodor Dostoyevsky to overcome his previous condescension toward peasants and serfs, which was implicit even in his previous philanthropy. " Hence his recovery of faith in the people was also a rediscovery of Orthodoxy, or at least an estrangement from his previous 'progressive ' Christianity, whose doctrines he could well castigate as the fatal source of all his old illusions." (*Ibid.*, p. 126).

Dostoyevsky was permitted to return to St. Petersburg in 1859. He had married his first wife, Marya Dmitrievna Isayeva, and had been permitted to retire from service in the army (he had become an officer through the help of high-placed friends). Then he began to write and publish again; he had an unfortunate love affair with Polina Suslova; his first wife died; debts and troubles at home caused him to travel over Europe; he began to gamble obsessively; and he wrote *Notes From The Underground* (1864). During this second time of troubles (literary ups and downs and problems with indebtedness) he met Anna Grigoryevna Snitkina, who soon married him and who became his secretary and personal confidant. It was during this period from 1866-1880 that Dostoyevsky wrote his greatest and most philosophically profound works: *Crime and Punishment*, 1866; *The Idiot*, 1868; *The Possessed (The Devils)*, 1871-72 ; and *The Brothers Karamazov* , 1879-1880 .

Particularly important in our discussion here are the types of Dostoyevskian works which critique his earlier naive sociological theories which he had reformed in the light of his deeper insights into human nature. The context of his writing these mature reflections and self-critiques and publishing these revised beliefs was his observations made during the various travels in Western Europe, Such observations

convinced him that mechanical amelioration of social needs was not the answer (Cf. his *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, 1863). More immediately, however, the impetus was the rise of the so-called liberal and radical camp of Russian Socialism, which based itself on the European notions of man's perfectibility and rationality, and made utilitarian achievements the ultimate criterion of human progress. This new type of Russian thought was called *Nihilism*, and its representatives were individuals like Bakunin, Nechayev (1847-1882), and N.G. Chernyshevsky (1828-89) (Cf. Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Origin of Russian Communism*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948, pp.7-75; Cf. Yarmolinsky, *The Road To Revolution*, pp. 124-242, etc.). This kind of radicalism was especially galling to Dostoyevsky not only because he had himself seen its erroneousness in anticipation, but because, as a loyal Slavophilic subject of Alexander II (who had began an emancipation program for serfs in 1861), he distrusted their extremism. The most obvious extremism was their ridiculing of religion and patriotism. One important example of this attitude is Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is To Be Done?*, which like his projected *Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Life* endeavored to propagate a secular utopianism of man acting in his own advantage to create a perfect harmonious society (Cf. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground & The Grand Inquisitor*. Selection, translation, and introduction by Ralph E. Matlaw, New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1960, pp.x-xxii ; see also Simmons, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 18-19; 22-25 ).

This rivalry between Dostoyevsky and the liberals lasted for several years, being vented both in periodical literature and in places Dostoyevsky's fiction( the fundamental differences between himself and them being their irreconcilable perspectives on human nature.) In the *Notes* Dostoyevsky mercilessly satirizes the radicals. His "underground man" demeans the socialistic egoism that human beings can govern themselves by scientifically measured self-interest.

The polemical structure of his *Notes* is that of a confessional which is subdivided into several parts and into two main sections. Here the aim is the demolition of the ideas of Chernyshevsky, *et al.*, that man is essentially good and can, by communal cooperation and rational "enlightenment", achieve a new Eden or Golden Age based on the inexorable determinism and necessity of scientific truth. Dostoyevsky scoffs at this tawdry utopian-liberalism by showing that man is in reality quite capricious, irrational, and rebellious- in a word, man is *a sinner* - radical evil lurks inside him. Marvelously coy, Dostoyevsky laughs at the precise categories and the beautiful abstractions of human reason as nothing more than cloaks of man's inhumanity and finitude. Herein he repudiates the various hated symbols of communistic social organization: "the anthill," the chicken-coop," and " the crystal palace. " All of these are only the physical and impersonal (quite mechanical) stage-sets; man's real needs require a spiritual setting for fulfillment (Cf. Matlaw, *Dostoevsky*, *Notes*, pp. xii-xiii). Simmons gives us an exceptional overview of the plot:

The underground man is profound analyst of himself and others. He is deeply, morbidly conscious of his personality and an astute logician in explaining its complex nature. The work highlights what had only been

suggested earlier - Dostoyevsky's searching dialectic, his extraordinary ability to dramatize conflicts of the human mind. And this feature distinguishes the remaining masterpieces. *Notes from the Underground* is cast in the form of "a confession," but Dostoevsky adroitly suggests the presence of an unseen interlocutor whose reactions and implied gestures to what the hero says convey to his monologue the heightened impression of overhearing a telephone conversation. . . .

In the first part of the underground man, an unhappy individual of about forty, engages in a microscopic analysis of himself. It is soon apparent that he is one of those dull fantastic creatures of the early tales with the important difference that he is dully aware of his dualism. In fact, an irresistible urge to discuss the contradictions of his nature is the entire substance of his self-analysis. He is the supreme alienated man for whom no truth is absolute and every good is relative. His dissection leads him to the conclusion that ambivalence is based on one fundamental opposition—a conflict between will and reason. For him the whole meaning of human existence lies in self-assertion of the irrational will.

In the second part the underground man relates experiences which illustrate his dualism, and its possible resolution is suggested in the episode with the prostitute who possesses Christian pity and love and therefore can be saved, whereas he has only reason to fall back on and is cut off from life. A more explicit resolution, deleted by the censor, indicated that his salvation was to be found only in the realization of a need for faith in Christ.

Perhaps his most powerful work and his most incisive critique of Nihilism of the 1860's is found in his work, *The Possessed* or *The Devils* (the original Russian title). Here he precisely aims his literary volleys at the atheism and the humanism of that era (1860-1870). Bakunin, Dobroyubov, Pisarev, etc. were representatives of this type of thought (Cf. N. D. Rookowsky, "The Lesson of Russian Nihilism," in *America*, January 4, 1969, pp. 13-16).

During this period of time Dostoyevsky had been working on a novel project about atheism, the question of God's existence, a project which eventually became part of a larger design of a five-part novel series to be called *The Life of Great Sinner* (some notes which served for composing *The Brothers Karamazov*). Yet, Dostoyevsky still was pondering contemporary social issues and the question of revolution. He bitterly resented critics who asserted that his novels (unlike Goncharov's or Turgenev's) failed to address the burning social issues of the day. He, however, claimed his *Notes* and *Crime and Punishment* were a more profound interpretation of Nihilism than Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. He was, moreover, determined to create some sort of special chronicle which could silence his opponents. For he could see that the revolutionary tendencies were leading toward more than pressure toward ending serfdom; but he foresaw the positivist and socialist notions prevalent among the revolutionists were leading toward increasing terrorist violence.

Dostoyevsky believed that bourgeois capitalism, the power greedy Catholic Church, and Protestant rationalism were undermining the West, while the strengthening of socialism in Russia was a direct threat to the nation's future. He considered capitalism and socialism mortal enemies of Christianity. In his opinion, a truly topical and patriotic novel should unmask the demonic nature of revolutionary forces, and by doing so would perform a civic and religious duty (so Marc Slonim tells us in his "Afterword" in Andrew R. MacAndrew's translation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Possessed*, New York: New American Library, Signet Classic, 1930, p. 696).

And while Dostoyevsky was contemplating his political expose of subversive radicalism and Nihilism, he came across a newspaper item that enabled him to jell the plot of his prospective novel, It was s fantastic account of members of a Moscow revolutionary cell, headed by S.G. Nechaev, a Bakunian disciple who orchestrated the murder of a certain Ivanov, a student at the Agricultural Institute and a member of Nechayev's cell, "the People's Avengers". Nechayev, like Lenin in later days, was not above using any strategy which accomplished his purposes. One of his precepts in his *Catechism of the Revolutionary* was that " morality is everything that contributes to the triumph of the revolution; immoral and criminal is everything that stands in its way " (cited by Roodkowsky, *Russian Nihilism*, p. 14). Thus, Nechayev spread a false rumor about Ivanov's betrayal because he found the student a hindrance to his plans. He was a grim fanatic and ready to use blackmail, lies, and murder to succeed. While this arch-revolutionary's diabolical methods were condemned even by the Russian socialists of the seventies, he nevertheless held hypnotic power over his disciples until his arrest. Ivanov's murder probably served as a catalyst to Dostoyevsky, already in a letter which he wrote in 1870 he mentions it: " One of the main events in my tale will be Ivanov's murder by Nechayev. " (Cited by Slonim in F.Dostoyevsky, *The Possessed*, p. 697). Slonim provides a useful interpretative capsulization of this:

[Dostoyevsky] denied, however, having used Nechayev as the prototype of Peter Verhovensky and Ivanov as that of Shatov, and although there are some similarities between the scenes in *The Possessed* and the actual events of the early seventies, it would be a gross error to take this highly exaggerated and polemical narrative as a precise rendering of social conditions. As was customary with Dostoyevsky, he did not simply represent reality but borrowed facts and occurrences from it which were then transformed in the laboratory of his creative imagination. Historical accuracy in *The Possessed* is sacrificed for the purpose of political denunciation and polemical in tent. The latter is most evident in Dostoyevsky's representation of Stephan Trofimovich, with whom the story begins, and Karmazinov, a secondary character. He did give Stephan Trofimovich some traits of Timofy Granovsky, an idealistic historian and Moscow professor of history in the forties. But the inefficient parasite of Savrogin's mother has little likeness to his alleged prototype and Dostoyevsky invented him for a double purpose; he

wanted to laugh at the "beautiful souls" of useless liberals, and to prove that the progressive humanists of the forties were responsible for the socialist leanings of the following generation. Peter Verhovensky is Stephan Trofimovich's son, and though he treats his father with contempt, the latter recognizes that his own negligence and vanity formed the mind and character of this monstrous young man. Thus Dostoyevsky tried to trace the origins of the "revolutionary disease" and to stress the role of heredity in its eruption. In the case of Karmazinov, he was simply giving vent to his hostility toward Turgenev, caricaturing the famous novelist in the figure of the pompous, vain, egocentric, and hypocritical writer who flirts with the revolutionaries and simply wants to be "in" on latest fashions.

Slonim continues:

Of course, Stephan Trofimovich and Karmazinov are fictional images distorted by sarcasm and anger. The same polemical passion guided Dostoyevsky's pen in the sketches of the individual "devils" as he called the members of the underground group led by Verhovensky, the archvillain. They are freaks, demented visionaries, petty clerks gnawed by ambition, cowards spreading malicious gossip, potential criminals, jealous husbands--at their best--naive young men. Here again we have a collection of cartoons rather than a gallery of realistic portraits. But if Dostoyevsky failed in his immediate and topical purpose of drawing a picture of contemporary Russian society, *he succeeded*, in a most uncanny way, in making a prophecy [emphasis ours!]. The people and situations he depicted might not have been typical of the seventies, but they did become extremely representative some fifty years later. He predicted the fanatical intransigence of the leaders, the justification of mass murder, the denial of individual freedom, and the replacement of religious precepts by a stricter revolutionary dogma. Peter Verkhovensky, who deals with human beings with utter cynicism, and is always plotting, intriguing, thriving on scandals, and taking advantage of the lower instincts in men, is a typical Communist politician of the Stalin era. Even more so is Shigalov, who foresees an earthly paradise in which one tenth of mankind will rule the remaining nine tenths with an iron hand; he accepts slavery as the price of equality and material well-being, and extols dictatorship as a prerequisite of a Communist regime .... (*Ibid.*, 697-738).

Dostoyevsky envisioned this work--especially in regard to its ironic hero, Nikolai Stavrogin, as the germ of his *magnum opus*, as it involved much more than questions of revolutionary conspiracy, having profound religious and moral implications as well. Though he was throwing it like a bolt at the Nihilists and

Westernizers, he was conscious that he was making a statement about Russia's destiny as well. His Slavophilic faith can clearly be seen under the guise of the repentant Shatov who sees revolution only in terms of the larger questions of God, Orthodox Christianity, and the Russian spirit (Cf. Simmons, *Dostoyevsky*, pp.35-38; Slonim, F. Dostoyevsky, *The Possessed*, p. 699. For a general background for this work as well as *The Brothers Karamazov*, see Yarmolinsky, *Dostoyevsky, His Art and Life*, pp. 280-303; 315-399 and Robert Lord, *Dostoyevsky:Essays and Perspectives*, pp.48-200). This is going to be for him the central religious and social idea. He wrote Maikov in a letter about how the spiritual malady which afflicted youth in the 1840's (including himself!) had not ended; the devils had entered others such as Nechayev. But in himself it had been drowned, and like the demoniac in the Gospel story, he sat delivered at the feet of Jesus. Dostoyevsky wrote: " The whole vocation of Russia is contained in Orthodoxy, in the light from the East which will stream to mankind blinded in the West because it has lost Christ . If you want to know, this is precisely the title of my novel. It is called 'The Devils' ! " (cited in Simmons, *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36).

I cannot resist citing a classic passage from Dostoyevsky's famous *Devils* at this juncture. In a conspiratorial party arranged and controlled by Peter Verkhovensky; (remember the Petrashevsky parties!) Shigalov the Nihilist, delivering a speech on how all the political systems of the past are self-contradictory and ignorant of man's actual nature, notes that even his brilliant and comprehensive vision of utopia is deficient:

(Some laughter from the audience.) " Furthermore, I must warn you that my system is not yet complete." (More laughter.) " I have become entangled in my own data and my conclusions directly contradict my original premises. I started out with the idea of unrestricted freedom and I have arrived at unrestricted despotism. I must add, however, that any solution of the social problem other than mine is impossible. . . .

The laughter grew louder and louder, but it was the young, the obviously less indoctrinated ones who laughed the most. . . .( *The Possessed*, p. 384).

An interesting character to juxtapose with Shatov and Shigalov is Kirilov, the half-mystical, half-insane engineer who professes "Christian atheism" (recall Dostoyevsky's paradoxical behavior in earlier days). Kirilov is a generous and passionate epileptic, who in a sheer act of will, wants to assert a man-god who will transform the suffering world and reclaim man's dignity. Slonim notes:

Kirilov's theories and his maniacal suicide reflect Dostoyevsky's favorite themes of transgression and a search *for* God which assumes the disguise of a struggle *against* God. In *The Possessed* militant atheism often is represented as the reverse of ardent religious faith. It leads to diabolical deceit, crime, evil, and degradation only if the atheist does not

have a substitute for the divine force, only if he does not believe in anything, not even in revolution. Thus, the main hero of the novel is not Verkhovensky, this harlequin of the underground movement, an ambiguous and Mephistophelean apostle of destruction, but the handsome, elegant, and mysterious Stavrogin. Verkhovensky idolizes this former Guards officer and hopes to turn him into "the pretender, the dark prince of revolutionary rebellion. But Stavrogin's force is only in negation. It is true that Kirilov, Shatov, and others got their ideas of atheism, nationalism, or socialism from Stavrogin, but their master is committed to none of these; for him theories are only a matter of intellectual exercise. This rich landowner married to a crippled and demented beggar, this sadist who pushes to suicide the girl child he had raped, this aristocrat who plays with revolutionary machinations, is the embodiment of strength without direction, he may represent the symbol of Russia's latent forces which the "devil's" try to harness for their own nefarious intentions.

Once again, Slonim observes:

Stavrogin is equally capable of noble action and of beastly brutality, he is attracted both by vice and beauty, by degradation and sublimation. For him everything is permissible because he does not obey any moral code. And therefore he belongs to the company of Dostoyevsky's 'transgressors,' those who challenge God and society and their own conscience by willful actions "beyond good and evil." Whatever Stavrogin undertakes leads inevitably to disaster, and he becomes a tragic figure in the world of "little demons." [Thus Dostoyevsky satirizes Nietzsche's "superman"!] (*The Possessed*, "Afterword", p. 700).

### **Dostoyevsky As Moralist-Prophet: *The Brothers Karamazov***

In this rather lengthy analysis of Dostoyevsky and his work, we have reached the penultimate portion and now focus on the moral, religious, and social vision of Fyodor Dostoyevsky. I contend that this unique literary and philosophical synthesis culminates in Dostoyevsky's superlative story, *The Brothers Karamazov*. This story, which he tells with magnificent artistry, is an extraordinary drama within which there is action and reaction, melodrama and high tragedy, clusters and explosions, deep and superficial characters, lengthy developments and speedy climaxes - all with an impending sense of doom and judgment. But as most of my literary review is merely borrowed second-hand eloquence, I will allow a person who has first-hand interpretative eloquence to describe how this great work epitomizes the essence of Dostoyevskian truth:

The characters -- there are some fifty men and women in the book -- are drawn with that understanding of emotional ambivalence and the role of the unconscious which distinguishes Dostoyevsky's art. They are not transcripts of ordinary humanity. Their ecstasies and agonies are too intense, their soul-searchings too keen, their tossings between good and evil, between love and hatred, too abrupt, their impulses too perverse. Yet they have a compelling reality. The inwardness and authority with which Dostoevsky portrayed the Karamazovs may be due to the fact that they are projections of several elements within his own breast. They are creatures of flesh and blood, endowed with a distinct life of their own, but they may also be taken as symbols. The old man Karamazov seems to be the pattern of the sensualist in all his unredeemable animalism, his bastard son, Smerdyakov, the moral idiot, being the evil growth of his blind lust. It is with the three legitimate sons that we reach the human plane, and the violent Dmitri, the subtle Ivan, the gentle Alyosha, appear respectively as the body, the mind, and the spiritual member. It belongs to the substance of Dostoyevsky's thinking that he should represent the body as striving toward union with the spirit, the intellect as cruelly divided against itself and fundamentally inimical to life.

The book derives further significance from the fact that it is concerned with ideas. The crime novel is also a philosophical novel, but that does not mean that the author engages in dry abstract disquisitions. With Dostoevsky, intellection has the force and heat of emotion. The ideas either grow naturally out of the situations, or are formulated in the course of those absorbing arguments which are among the highpoints of the narrative. They revolve around the whole complex of problems that cluster about morality and religion. "The Brothers Karamazov" may be viewed as a vast parable, or, better still, as a religious disputation, such as carried on, with a difference, in the Book of Job. Ivan, the dialectician, upholds the negative: if God can allow the suffering of the innocent, of children, above all, even though this be the price of some future beatitude, then this world is meaningless and unacceptable. His blasphemies go further. In his fantasy, "The Grand Inquisitor," he shows the Catholic Church at the height of its power serving not Christ, but the Evil One who tempted Him in the desert; the church is using the means that Christ had spurned in order to make men happy and save them for His terrible gift of freedom. It is Ivan's tragedy that he cannot wholeheartedly side with Christ against Satan and the Grand Inquisitor. To understand Dostoevsky's intention here one must remember that among his favorite ideas was the dubious notion that Catholicism, in arrogating to itself temporal power, had betrayed Christ, and so became the mother of socialism. The latter Dostoevsky abhorred as a crass doctrine which set the nourishment of man's body above the well-being of his soul, and which would result in the establishment of a sane, safe, social order, orphaned of God. Ivan's own faith, no less than Dmitri's regeneration, the serene faith which guides Alyosha, and the saintly life and Orthodox teachings of his master, Zosima, all indirectly refute Ivan's argument and proclaim a religious acceptance of life. The reader must decide for himself who wins the debate. As for Dostoevsky, he was, consciously at least, on the side of the angels, as the final scene emphatically attests. (Avrahm Yarmolinsky, "Introduction," to Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, translation by Constance Garnett, revised, with an introduction by Avrahm Yarmolinsky, New York: The Heritage Press, 1949, pp. xi, xii.)

The only proper manner of interpreting Dostoyevsky's discovery of the good and evil in man in his Petrashevsky experience and in Siberian prison camp, is to take seriously his own supernatural faith framework. Naturalistic and evolutionary "explanations" miss the mark we feel in that they attribute too much to fear and external conditioning. Frank, whom we have quoted often in this paper, says that

Dostoyevsky had believed in Christ long before any great test had presumably existed. He points out, moreover, that the Eastern, Orthodox doctrine of original sin is a relevant consideration:

[The view] ...which holds human nature as irremediably enthralled by evil, has much less force for an Eastern Orthodox Christian than for a Roman Catholic or Protestant. As the theologian Ernst Benz has pointed out, "The consciousness that man was imprinted with the image of God is so dominant [in Orthodoxy], that the idea of original sin could never become established within the Orthodox Church in its blunt Western form." Orthodoxy conceives of sin as "damaging" or a "tainting" of the image of God; but it cannot rob man of his original nobility." Such a view accords much more closely with what Dostoevsky found in the house of the dead than does the western Augustinian dogma that man as ineluctably evil (*The Years of Ordeal*, pp. 147-148).

Thus, as we have seen, in Dostoyevsky both theological as well as philosophical determinism are rejected. Freedom, man's capacity for redemptive suffering, and Divine grace are affirmed. Also, we know that Dostoyevsky rejected the humanistic relativism of Nietzsche (Cf. Frank's discussion, *Ibid.*, pp. 148ff.). Because of his belief in freedom as well as his dynamic individuality, he would find the compulsory common life - enforced communism- quite agonizing and disgusting. It was one of the worst punishments of imprisonment (Frank, *Ibid.*, pp. 151-155). As in his *Notes*, his depictions of prison life in his letters to family and in *The House of the Dead* reveal to us the irony of his conversion to a brotherly feeling for his fellow Russians and others. But he would continue to see the *Katorga* entrapment in the foolish and inhuman schemes of the Radical Ideologists of the 1860's. One of the most interesting facts in this regard, I think, is Dostoyevsky's discussion of the incredible faculty of hope. And specifically, the hopefulness of freedom and meaningful work. His contention is that when a man has lost all hope, all purpose in his life, he becomes "a monster in his misery" (Frank, *Ibid.*, p. 157, and 156-159, generally). An excellent confirmation of this view is the contrast which Dostoyevsky is able to draw between the forced labor of the camp and the volunteer labor (skills, trades, etc.) which allowed the convicts to earn a little extra money or perhaps use otherwise forbidden tools. Such work, self-imposed tasks and freely performed actions allowed the convicts psychic reinforcement as individuals. Therefore, Dostoyevsky observed: "Without labor and without lawful normal property man cannot live; he becomes depraved and is transformed into a beast....Work saved them from crime; without [private] work the convicts would have devoured one another like spiders in a glass jar" (cited by Frank, *Ibid.*, p.156). Frank immediately comments:

The social-political implications of this assertion are perfectly obvious, and constitute a flat rejection of the moral basis of Utopian Socialism (or any other kind), which views private property as the root of all evil. The prison camp convinced Dostoevsky that private work, which guarantees the individual a sense of self-possession and moral autonomy, was fundamental for maintaining the human psyche on an even keel; such private work offered a relatively "normal" means of instinctive self-preservation against the destructive forces of prison-camp life (Frank, *Ibid.*). Closely related to this Dostoyevskian concept is the implicit belief which he

held along with Orthodox Christian tradition, especially the stream of what G. P. Fedotov has called "the kenotic ideal", that man could joyfully accept suffering because in so doing he was identifying with the crucified and humiliated Christ. It could be seen in the light of faith then, as a moral good and as almost a value in itself (Cf. Frank, *Ibid.*, p. 158). The metaphysical implications here are outstanding. For Dostoyevsky, the atheist who doubts God's existence and immortality, is condemned to live in an ultimately senseless universe, a cosmic *Katorga*. Frank concludes: "... the characters in his great novels who reach this level of self-awareness inevitably destroy themselves because, refusing to endure the torment of living without hope, they have become monsters in their misery." (*Ibid.*, p. 159).

The only other question to be considered then, is whether Dostoyevsky's *Credo*, written to Mme Fonvizina in 1854 can be taken at face value or whether it is a paradoxical rationalization in religious terms. One authority, Robert Lord, seems to think that, at the bottom of his heart, or rather, in the depths of his mind, Dostoyevsky was "joking" (*Dostoevsky: Essays and Perspectives*, pp.59ff.; cf. also pp.69-174 where he applies his thesis). But in all due regard to this learned expert on Dostoyevskyan literature, we must disagree. Indeed, scholars like Frank have compared his faith to that of Augustine and Kierkegaard (even St. Paul and Luther), who also felt the dynamic tension between faith and reason, human knowledge and Divine revelation. Frank would suggest rather, that in some sense he had taken the Left-Hegelian critique of Christianity at face-value, recognizing the self-alienation of the human spirit, but yet, affirmed, beyond demonstratable reason and analysis, the truth of faith. He thus, philosophically and literarily outdialectized the skeptical dialecticians of his time- those like Belinsky and Stirner (Cf. Frank, *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162). Frank has a most instructive chapter, moreover, on how Dostoyevsky's religious synthesis ordered his outlook on politics and society in Russia, his publication entitled "The Russian Heart" (*Ibid.*, pp. 223-240). Again, by looking at letters to his brother Miknail and his friend Maikov, Frank provides numerous examples showing Dostoyevsky's unmistakable and fervent Russian patriotism during the period of the Crimean War (1854-58) and long afterwards. As a loyal and patriotic Slavophile he had been appalled by the corruption, disorder, and incompetence of the Nicholas I regime. Yet, then and afterwards, he continued to oppose the facile Westernism of Belinsky's disciples, Herzen and others. He could, without contradiction, accept Herzen's analysis of the Slavophilic-Westerner interrelationship, that while both groups truly and passionately loved Russia-its people, its customs, and its unique spiritual traditions-the two were like "Janus or the two-headed eagle, they and we looked in different directions while *one* heart throbbed within us (*italics added*)" Frank, citing a comment from Herzen's writings in 1861, p. 233). Thus from then on, it would be Dostoyevsky's animating purpose to portray Russian Orthodoxy and Slavophilic sentiments in art. Yet, ironically, that art has taken on a universal meaning, both in the 19th century and even in the present times.

### **An Intellectual Tradition: Dostoyevsky and Alex Solzhenitsyn**

In an elaborately researched monograph, Russian scholar and political philosopher, Nicholas Rzhevsky, unequivocally confirms our thesis that Dostoyevsky created a unique religious synthesis and conservative intellectual tradition in late nineteenth-century Russian history (Cf. his *Russian Literature and Ideology: Herzen, Dostoyevsky, Leontiev, Tolstoy*, Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1983, pp. 13-14; 22; 65-95; 149-154). Although there are several places where I see his scholarly analysis as supportive of my thesis idea, the most important remarks come on the last two pages of the book, where he is discussing the impact of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's masterful *Ivan Denisovich* and *The Gulag Archipelago*. In Solzhenitsyn's works we definitely see once more Dostoyevskian themes and viewpoints: the unique freedom and value of men, the deep religious feelings of the Russian people, the triumph of individuals over material deprivation and physical suffering, and the spiritual value of creative work. These themes, along with a reemphasis of the moral heritage of Christianity can be heard vividly in Solzhenitsyn's 1978 Harvard address "A World Split Apart" (Rzhevsky, *Ibid.*, pp. 153-4). In a way he underscores the protest of the believing (but educated) peasant against the materialism and de-humanizing "humanism" of the 20th century. Like Dostoyevsky, he argues for the sublime and mystical freedom of man and the power of Christian mercy and sacrifice in the face of secular debasements and mechanizing technocracy.

Another noted scholar who has perceived this connection (but who, as an agnostic humanist, rejects its basis) is Professor Sidney Hook (New York University) who argues for a complete continuity in Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn in their respective belief about transcendent values and a rejection of totalitarianism and utilitarianism (Cf. his *Marxism and Beyond*, Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1983, pp. 197-207).

Finally, we must briefly reconsider the similarities between the life-experiences of Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn. Both authors trace their crucial spiritual perspectives to their prison experiences in Siberia. It can be justly said (and it has been said by thoughtful students before) that the Katorga sufferings and hardships helped to induce a serious religious conversion in each (even if was only by virtue of refocusing their consciousnesses on the ultimate questions of life and death - and childlike faith). So, for each man, there was a true ordeal of "going through a refiner's fire." Both underwent a spiritual and almost literal resurrection. Solzhenitsyn tells us about his own spiritual reawakening in *The Gulag Archipelago* (Vol. 2, pp. 611-15), how a Jewish-Christian doctor named Boris Kornfeld both saved his life in an operation and shared his Christian faith with him on one night (the same night he was murdered, incidentally). Thus, Solzhenitsyn received the Christian message as a living testimony and an inheritance. Moreover, like Fyodor Dostoyevsky, he discovered that among the criminals of all sorts in prison camp (the

political offenders, murderers, thieves, etc.) concrete examples illustrating both the image of God in human nature and the evident evil and depravity of the Fall.

Dostoyevsky's writings like *Crime and Punishment*, *House of the Dead*, *The Idiot*, etc. moreover, can be compared in many ways to the novels of Solzhenitsyn (*The Cancer Ward*, *One Day In The Life of Ivan Denisovich*, *The Full Circle*). Both men through their realistic and extreme encounters in the context of unfreedom, began to see human beings in a new light and human freedom as a most essential quality. Thus both men would come to oppose the anti-human actions and dogmas of their day.

Dostoyevsky, imprisoned by Nicholas I's autocratic regime, sent to be punished and not necessarily rehabilitated, paradoxically emerged as a devout Slavophile, obedient to his government and wise to the excesses of his youthful radicalism.

Solzhenitsyn, on the other hand, was supposedly made to suffer for the purpose of rehabilitation-for the massive "scientific re-programming" efforts of the Gulag Archipelago - designed to purify the Socialist Society [The Utopian State?] of recalcitrant elements. Ironically, this graduate of the system became the most eloquent debunker of the whole program. Like the Anthill and the Crystal Palace, and the Great Soviet Experiment did have its demonically dark side in the Kartorga and Gulag. But the image of God in man and the grace of God provided man in Christ was a light that could not be quenched even by the icy cold and fiery torments of Siberia. He brilliantly and irrefutably documented the evil holocaust of nearly 70 million souls in this century in Dostoyevsky's Russia and elsewhere in the totalitarian Soviet State. Most importantly, he found grace and freedom in the fire of trial, he discovered the gold of truth.

One perhaps-not-so-insignificant note - the textbook of freedom and dignity both came to cherish - this was the Testament of Christ!

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