

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY'S
HISTORICAL CONCEPTIONS FOR RUSSIA

by

Marlene Struger, A.B.

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School, Marquette University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Re-
quirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
July, 1965

PREFACE

Fyodor Dostoevsky was considered by his Russian contemporaries not only as a great literary figure, but above all a Russian national prophet. Since this latter aspect is largely neglected in the West, the present study is intended to disclose how his attitude toward Russian Orthodox Christianity influenced his historical conceptions for Russia.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Roman Smal-Stocki who, as a person and as a professor, inspired and encouraged my work.

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CHAPTER I

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF DOSTOEVSKY

Fyodor Mihailovitch Dostoevsky was born on October 30, 1821, in the Moscow hospital for the poor where his father worked as a physician. The living quarters which were provided for the family by the hospital were far from being adequate.

Although the Dostoevskys originally came from the gentry, their financial status had not been promising. Existing on the edge of poverty, Fyodor's childhood was lonely and overshadowed by the depressing atmosphere of the surroundings of the hospital and the constant quarrels at home. The ill temper of old Dostoevsky did little to bring happiness into the unfortunate circumstances in which the family had to live.

Upon the death of his mother in 1837, Dostoevsky was sent to St. Petersburg to attend the College of Military Engineering. While in the capital, the news of his father's assassination in 1839, reached him.

After graduating from College in 1843, he received a commission which he resigned a year later in favor of a literary career. Soon thereafter, his first novel Poor Folk published in 1846, became a tremendous success. Belinsky's¹ favorable criticism gave Dostoevsky access to the literary

¹Vissarion G. Belinsky (1811-1848), famous Russian literary critic, Westerner and founder of the radical intelligentsia. He was considered to be the spiritual father of Russian socialism.

world of St. Petersburg.

But the initial good fortune was only short lived. A year after this publication, Dostoevsky became acquainted with the Petrashevsky circle.² In 1849, two years after this encounter, he was arrested and sentenced to death for having read Belinsky's letter to Gogol at a meeting.³ This conviction rested on charges of treason against the Russian government for violating the law of censorship.

Actually his membership in a literary circle of St. Petersburg was nothing extraordinary for a person of his reputation. Most Russian intellectuals of the nineteenth century created groups in which political, social and literary subjects were discussed. Usually these young men met in private homes where their meetings would not attract the eye of a government spy. It was unfortunate for Dostoevsky that the Petrashevsky circle came to be considered revolutionary in its aims.

The severeness with which Dostoevsky was punished is an excellent reflection of the political climate prevailing

²Named after its founder, Mihail V. Butashevich-Petrashevsky (1821-1866), a Russian government official whose home became the meeting place for political discussions. Western ideas and Fourier's socialism were the main topics in the circle.

³The letter written to Gogol from exile, contained severe criticism of Gogol's reactionary interpretation of the Russian Church and the government. Belinsky accused Gogol of falsifying the true state of conditions in Russia.

in Russia in those days. Alexander Milyukov,⁴ a contemporary of Dostoevsky, who met the latter in one of the literary circles, gives a vivid description of the political atmosphere in Russia during the forties.

The rotten pillars of reaction were crumbling one after the other, and all over Europe new life seemed to be in bud. Yet in Russia, at that time, prevailed the most crushing reaction: Science, no less than the Press, could hardly breathe beneath the heavy yoke of the administration, and every sign of mental vitality was stifled. From abroad, a quantity of liberal writings, partly scientific, partly literary were smuggled into the country. In the French and German papers, people, despite the Censorship, were reading stirring articles; but among ourselves all scientific and literary activity was rendered well-nigh impossible and the Censorship tore each new book to pieces.⁵

The death sentence was later converted to four years of hard labor in the prison camps of Siberia. Preceding this announcement, however, all prisoners were led to the Semenovskiy Square in the capital where, according to Tsar Nicholas I's order, the preparation for the public execution was to be acted out completely. Even a priest was summoned to give the last sacrament and only then was the amnesty proclaimed.

The incident was characteristic of the extreme sadism of the Russian autocrat. The purpose behind this mockery of

⁴A.P. Milyukov (1817-1897), literary historian and critic who met Dostoevsky in 1847. He too was arrested in connection with the Petrashevsky affair, but was released shortly after.

⁵Avraham Yarmolinsky (ed.), "From the Reminiscences of A.P. Milyukov: 1848-1849," in Letters of F.M. Dostoevsky, trans. Ethel Colburn Mayne (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), p. 271.

human dignity was to show the people how dangerous it was to indulge in opposition to the government.

Dostoevsky's mood on that fateful day can best be seen in the letter which he wrote to his brother Mihail:

Brother! I have not become downhearted or low-spirited. Life is everywhere life, life in ourselves, not in what is outside us.

Although death had appeared inevitable to Dostoevsky, the amnesty granted by the Tsar generated a feeling of gratitude rather than contempt toward the autocrat. After the experience of facing the firing squad, a sense of submission instead of revolt emerged within him.

During the years 1850-1854, he was subjected to hard labor in the prison of Omsk where not only political offenders were kept, but also some of the lowest criminals of the Empire.

After his release from penal servitude, he still was forced to stay in exile for several years. During this period he served as a private in the Seventh Siberian Battalion at Semipalatinsk. Only in 1859, was he finally permitted to return to the European part of Russia.

The Petrashevsky affair and the subsequent decade in Siberia had not only interrupted the career of a brilliant

⁶S.S. Koteliansky and J. Middleton Murry (eds. and trans.), Dostoevsky: Letters and Reminiscences (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923), p. 6.

young writer, but had drawn an irrevocable line between his former beliefs and the conceptions to which he adhered for the rest of his life. Some scholars even believe that he would never have reached the height of national fame if the incident had not divided his life and caused him to revise his principles.

In the moment in which he faced death he had been torn by the roots out of his life; in the four years of his imprisonment the habit of separation entered irrevocably into his being. He endured the severances; and he grew strong and proud in his isolation. The bodily man which holds the timeless soul in time became hardly more than a fragile shell. It was subordinate to the spirit which it housed. In itself it did not weaken; but its strength was its own no more. It lived because Dostoevsky's spirit desired to live. His soul gave his body⁷ nourishment, not his body fed his soul.

Although Dostoevsky had endured terrible hardship in Siberia, his gloomy days had been brightened by the friendship of Baron Wrangel⁸ and the acquaintance with the Isaev family in Semipalatinsk.

From the social contact with the Isaevs Dostoevsky developed a deep feeling of love for Maria who, after the death of her husband, became in 1857 the writer's first wife.

⁷J. Middleton Murry, Dostoevsky: A Critical Study (2d ed.; London: Martin Secker, 1923), p. 51.

⁸Baron Alexander E. Wrangel was district prosecutor in Semipalatinsk for the years 1854-1855. Dostoevsky was a frequent guest in the house of Wrangel.

The happiness with Maria Isaeva, however, lasted only a few years. After their return to St. Petersburg her illness got worse and in April of 1864, she died of consumption.

That same year gave Dostoevsky still another great loss. In June, his brother Mihail passed away, depriving him of a friendship which remained unequalled in his whole life. The death of Mihail also ended the close collaboration under which the two brothers had published the journal Vremya (1861-63),⁹ and Epoca (1864-65).¹⁰

In the subsequent years Dostoevsky's financial situation became increasingly desperate. He was forced to sell the publishing rights of all his previous works to Stellovsky¹¹ who, using his predicament, greatly underpaid him.

During the production of The Gambler,¹² Dostoevsky engaged Anna Snitkin¹³ as his stenographer to meet the deadline set by this new publisher. A year later, Anna became his second wife.

⁹Vremya (Time) was suppressed by the Russian government for publishing an article written by Strakhov on the Polish question in 1863. Strakhov was on the editorial staff of the journal, and his article was unfortunately taken to be against the official view.

¹⁰Epoca (The Epoch), was abandoned because of insufficient funds after the death of Mihail.

¹¹F.T. Stellovsky, publisher who bought the rights.

¹²Dostoevsky's novel, first published in 1866.

¹³Anna G. Snitkin (1846-1918), second wife of the writer who, after his death, organized and edited his letters.

In spite of the money which came from this novel, his debts rose to a point that in 1867 he and his wife had to leave for Europe to escape the numerous demands of the creditors. The trip, which was intended as a short vacation, lasted four long years from 1867-1871, during which the Dostoevskys suffered immensely from homesickness.

Europe was not unfamiliar to Dostoevsky. He had already travelled abroad in 1862, 1863, and 1865. During those years, several reasons seemed to have induced him to leave Russia, of which the primary appears to have been the search for medical aid.

Dostoevsky's ailment showed its first signs in form of epileptic seizures which, according to a letter written to Mihail, he had developed in prison.

In general terms, prison took a great deal away from me and added a great deal to me. I have, for example already written to you of my illness. Strange fits, like¹⁴ epilepsy, but all the same not epilepsy.

The doubts as to the true nature of these symptoms caused him to consult physicians in France and Germany since he could not obtain a plausible explanation from the Russian doctors.

Furthermore, those earlier trips to Europe were linked to a love affair with Polina Suslova¹⁵ whose acquaintance he made in 1861 in St. Petersburg.

¹⁴Letter from F. Dostoevsky to his brother Mihail, July 30, 1854, in Jessie Coulson (ed.), Dostoevsky: A Self-Portrait (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 74.

¹⁵A woman with a questionable reputation to whom Dostoevsky felt for a time physically attracted. By 1865, she had abandoned him for a younger lover.

Both factors mentioned above were later overshadowed by the enormous passion which Dostoevsky developed for the roulette tables of Wiesbaden and Baden Baden at the time of his second visit to Europe.¹⁶

During the four years of voluntary exile in Europe, his love for gambling flared up again. Possessed by this fever, he hoped to overcome the financial misery which continued to plague him in spite of the monetary advance which he constantly received from Katkov¹⁷ for the publication of The Idiot and The Possessed in The Russian Messenger.¹⁸

The visits to the casinos, however, resulted in financial ruin. To maintain a halfway decent living for his family, he was forced to beg his Russian friends for additional funds.

By July 1871, life outside of Russia had become unbearable to Dostoevsky. With his pregnant wife and the two children, who were born in Europe, he returned to the Russian capital.

Having finally settled in Russia, Dostoevsky visited Europe again only for very short summer trips to Bad Ems¹⁹

¹⁶Two German cities famous for their gambling casinos.

¹⁷Mihail N. Katkov (1813-1887) famous Russian publicist and editor. Founded The Russian Messenger in 1856.

¹⁸A monthly with a Slavophil orientation in which Dostoevsky's four main novels were published over a length of time. Crime and Punishment (1866), The Idiot (1868), The Possessed (1871-72), and The Brothers Karamasov (1879-80).

¹⁹Summer of 1874, 1875, 1876 and 1879.

in Germany where he underwent special treatment for his epilepsy.

As time passed he derived far more pleasure from spending his vacation at Staraya Russa²⁰ with his wife and their four children. The surroundings of his native land had also a beneficial influence on his literary productivity.

After completing The Possessed, he occupied himself with the thought of publishing his own journal. When in 1873 he became the chief editor of The Citizen,²¹ the ground-stone for the later Diary of a Writer was laid.²²

The new position gave Dostoevsky a chance to place his political ideas in writing. Under the general title of "The Diary of a Writer," he presented his own articles in this weekly. When by 1874 a disagreement occurred with the owner of the magazine, he resigned his editorship.

Two years later he finally established his own journal, The Diary of a Writer; the name which he had formerly used in compiling his articles. The Diary of a Writer contained primarily his political creed and his opinions on the internal problems which Russia faced after the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861.

²⁰Small village not far from St. Petersburg which became the favorite resort of the Dostoevsky family from 1872 on.

²¹Weekly journal which was owned by Prince Meshchersky and reflected a reactionary political view.

²²A monthly which appeared regularly from Jan. 1876-Dec. 1877. After a short interruption, it was resumed in 1880 (one issue in Aug.) and in 1881 (one issue in Jan.). The last edition reached the public only after the death of the author.

Despite the strenuous work through this new enterprise Dostoevsky did not neglect his career as a novelist. By 1880 he completed The Brothers Karamazov which was to appear in The Russian Messenger.

As the year 1881 approached, Dostoevsky's life seemed to have been crowned with success. Having established himself in Russia not only as a great literary figure, but above all as a national prophet,²³ his future appeared to be full of promises.

Then, suddenly on January 28, 1881, death took him away from the Russian people to whom he had dedicated his entire life. The shock and the sorrow which spread through the nation was probably best summarized in the letter of Constantine Pobedonostzev²⁴ to the future Tsar of Russia:

Last night F.M. Dostoevsky passed away. He was a close friend to me, and it is sad that he is no more.

But his death is a great loss to Russia too. In the circle of writers he -- he alone almost -- was an ardent preacher

²³In June 1880, Dostoevsky delivered a speech on the occasion of the unveiling of the Pushkin Memorial in Moscow. After his speech, which was extremely nationalistic, he was hailed as a national prophet. The event constituted the zenith of his public life.

²⁴Pobedonostzev (1827-1907). Since 1872 member of the Council of Ministers. After the ascension of Alexander III in 1881 he was appointed Procurator of the Holy Synod. Politically an arch reactionary, a Slavophil and a supporter of autocracy, he met Dostoevsky when the latter was chief editor of The Citizen.

of the fundamental principles of religion, nationhood, love of the country. Our unhappy younger generation, gone astray like sheep without a shepherd, cherished a belief in him, and his influence was very great and beneficent. Many -- unhappy young people -- turned to him as to a confessor, personally and in writing. There is no one now to replace him.²⁵

²⁵Letter from Constantine Pobedonostzev to Alexander III (at that time Tsarevitch), January 29, 1881, in Koteliansky and Murry, p. 264.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DOSTOEVSKY'S
LIFE -- SPAN

The ideas of the French Revolution and the wave of liberalism which swept Europe in the beginning of the nineteenth century did not affect the autocratic system in Russia. The Napoleonic Wars and the subsequent victory of Russia had strengthened the rule of the Tsar. The conflict had united the people and developed a feeling of national pride and national consciousness.

When, after the defeat of Napoleon, the European powers met at the Congress of Vienna (1815) to conclude several treaties for the preservation of peace, Russia emerged as the main defender of these international arrangements.

By proposing to supplement the political provisions of the Congress with a Holy Alliance,²⁶ Tsar Alexander I, who not only inspired this alliance but also became its leading force, called upon the nations of Europe to abide by the principles of Christianity in dealing with foreign and domestic matters.

In time, however, Russia's leadership was overshadowed by the reactionary policies of the Austrian Minister Metternich. National self-interest began to take precedence over international peace questions and often the alliance

²⁶The Holy Alliance was signed in 1815 by Russia, Austria, and Prussia.

was used to suppress the rising of liberal movements.

Tsar Alexander I unable to oppose this powerful member of the alliance, was forced to abandon many of his liberal plans.

With the ascension of Nicholas I to the throne of Russia the liberal ideas which Alexander I had promoted were completely rejected. The new Tsar, not showing any inclination toward liberalism, reaffirmed his intention to rule Russia under the principle of autocracy.

The first signs of the change which had occurred in the political climate in Russia, found its expression in the brutal suppression of the Decembrist Revolt in 1825.²⁷

In foreign affairs, Nicholas I's outlook was characterized by an extreme reactionary position. Determined to abide by the "principle of legitimacy"²⁸ established at

²⁷ The Decembrists were a group of Russian nobles who took advantage of the temporary confusion which had occurred in Russia after the death of Alexander I, in 1825. Since the Tsar had died childless, and his brother Constantine had already renounced his claim to the throne in 1823, Nicholas, the third brother, was next in the line of succession. As Alexander I, however, had failed to make this change public, the Russians for a while did not know to whom they should take the oath of allegiance. When Nicholas was finally recognized as the lawful heir, the nobility staged in December of 1825, a demonstration in which they demanded liberal reforms from the Tsar before pledging their loyalty.

²⁸ It guaranteed the legitimate rulers their pre-Revolutionary territories.

the Congress of Vienna, he showed no sympathy for national liberation movements. Thus Nicholas I considered it his duty to rush to the aid of the Austrian Emperor Francis Joseph I when the latter was faced with rebellion in Hungary in 1849.

Above all, Nicholas I was interested in preventing the penetration of the revolutionary spirit into his country. When, therefore, most traditional European governments crumbled under the pressure of liberalism during the upheaval of 1848-1849, he could pride himself on having retained unlimited power in his Empire.

Although Nicholas I was committed to the European allies, he could not resist pursuing the traditional imperialistic policy of the Russian Empire in the Balkans.

During the Greek struggle for independence from the Sultan, which began in 1821 and ended with the ascension of Prince Otto of Bavaria as the King of Greece in 1832, Russia succeeded maneuvering herself into a powerful position in the Mediterranean area.

When the Turks refused to respect the rights of the Christians on their territory; France, Britain, and Russia went to the aid of the Greek insurgents. After the decisive defeat of the Turkish fleet at Navarino (1827), Russia utilized the anti-Turkish sentiment of Europe to advance her own policies.

In 1828, she declared war against Turkey and proceeded to conquer two vital positions of which Kars extended Russia's border deeper into the Caucasus while the other,

Adrianople, promised to become the key to the Mediterranean.

The Treaty of Adrianople (1829), terminating the war gave Russia the right to establish an Orthodox Protectorate over the Moldavian and Walachian provinces. Gaining considerable ground in the Balkans, she presented herself to the Balkan people as the defender of Christianity.

Additional fortification of Russia's power evolved from the agreement of Unkiar Skelessi (1833), in which the Sultan was forced to cede to the Tsar the sole use of the Straits for his warships in return for the latter's assistance in suppressing the Egyptian revolt against Turkey.

The Russian advance was met with suspicion by Western Europe, in particular France and Britain. Russia's aggrandizement in the Mediterranean interfered primarily with Britain's imperialistic projects. To protect her "life lines" Britain resorted to intrigue to curtail Russia's sphere of influence. Russian expansion in the Mediterranean area perceived as a possible competitor to British interests, had to be halted.

The opportunity for France and England to intervene into the political situation in the Near East arose from new antagonism between Egypt and Turkey in 1838. A revised convention was formulated in 1841 which reduced Russia's power by opening the Straits to international traffic.

Thus the settlement of the Near Eastern conflict resulted in the frustration of Russian hopes. A decade later when Turkey objected to the creation of a Russian protectorate for Orthodox Christians in the Holy Land, the Crimean War (1854-1856) began.

Unaware that France, the traditional defender of Catholicism in the Near East, and England had incited Turkey to refuse Russia's demands, the Tsar found himself confronted with a joint European opposition.

The active participation of France, Sardinia, and England in the attack on Russia and the ostentatious neutrality of Austria were proofs to the Russian autocrat of the essential enmity of Western Europe.

The Peace of Paris (1856) greatly reduced Russia's power in the Near East. She was forced to surrender her previous acquisitions in the Caucasus, retreat from her influence in the Balkans, and abandon her military fortification on the Black Sea.

In the period following this defeat Russia turned her interest to the East in hope of expansion. In contrast to her failure in the Balkans she succeeded in gaining some territory in the Middle East²⁹ and finally in the Far East.³⁰

Besides the pursuit of external aims, Alexander II differed from his father in that he recognized the necessity of internal reforms.

In 1861, Alexander II emancipated the millions of serfs in Russia. A year later the Financial Reform (1862) followed and in 1863 the educational system was revised.

²⁹Tashkent (1865), Bokhara (1866), Samarkand (1868), Khiva (1873), and Kokand (1876). All cities were situated in Turkestan which had a Moslem population.

³⁰Region around the Amur river and the territory on which Vladivostok was built in 1860.

In 1864 a Judicial Reform was finally proclaimed which granted the Russian man equality before the law, abolished corporal punishment, and introduced the jury system into the courts.

With the accomplishment of internal reforms and territorial acquisitions in the East, Russia once more directed her attention toward the Balkans and Constantinople.

The Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) gave Russia a good chance to pursue her old aims without drawing the attention of the western powers on her policies. Utilizing Europe's preoccupation with the war, she repudiated the provisions of the Peace of Paris and rebuilt her navy on the Black Sea.

Although Russia's actions remained unopposed, she realized that any attack on Constantinople would at once be countered with western opposition. Russia therefore looked for allies in Europe.

In 1872, the Three Emperors League was created between Russia, Austria, and Germany. For a time, the alliance seemed to work, especially since Austria like Russia was interested in limiting the power of the Ottoman Empire. With the assurance of support from Austria, Russia embarked on her traditional objectives.

By the middle of the seventies the Turks were reprimanded for having failed to fulfill the reforms promised for the Christians in the Balkans.

When Serbia and Montenegro revolted against the Turkish oppression in 1876, Russia undertook to encourage

the Slavic peoples in their fight. On behalf of the Slavs Russia exerted pressure on the Sultan.

As tensions mounted, Russia declared war against Turkey³¹ and immediately launched a decisive attack on Constantinople. Having secured an agreement with Austria over the future partition of the Balkan territory,³² her dream of final conquest seemed almost a reality.

Short of victory, Russia had to terminate the war because of the absence of adequate supplies from the homeland and the threat of British intervention on the side of Turkey.

The Peace of San Stefano (1878) restored to Russia the possessions in the Caucasus and established the autonomy of Bulgaria under Russian leadership. This latter provision was of particular significance to the Tsar since it provided the necessary outlet to the Mediterranean Sea via the Aegean.

Russia, however, did not enjoy her victory for a long period of time. Once the Turkish threat was diminished Austria became envious of Russia's power, and Britain -- the old rival -- was pressing for a revision of the settlement.

At the Congress of Berlin (1878) Bismarck played the "honest broker" while England was determined to revoke the

³¹Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878).

³²According to the Convention at Reichstadt, Bosnia was to be given to Austria, and Bessarabia to Russia after the defeat of Turkey.

provisions of San Stefano and limit Russia's protectorate in the Balkans. The revised treaty reduced the size of the newly formed Bulgaria, and forced Russia away from the Aegean coast. Again, the passage of Russian warships through the Straits was prohibited.

After the Congress of Berlin Russia became frustrated with her inability to obtain Constantinople. The negative outcome of the war seemed to postpone the conquest for an indefinite time. Hindered by Western Europe in her imperialistic adventures into the Balkans, she turned once again to the East to expand the borders of her Empire.

CHAPTER III

THE FUNDAMENTAL ROOTS OF DOSTOEVSKY'S HISTORICAL
OPINIONS AND CONCEPTIONS: RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY

The Problem of Dostoevsky's Religiosity

The significance of Russian Orthodoxy revealed itself to Dostoevsky during his exile in Siberia. For the first time in his life, he realized that besides the high society of St. Petersburg there existed another people who cherished far superior values.

In time, the prolonged contact with this new world began to transform him. Understanding the people, he wanted to love what they loved and believe in what they believed.³³

Judging from his own words, his faith in Christ was regained through associating with the people.

So, don't tell me that I do not know the people! I know them: it was because of them that I again received into my soul Christ Who had been revealed to me in my parents' home and Whom I was about to lose when, on my own part, I transformed myself into a "European liberal".³⁴

This comment indicates that prior to Siberia his mind had not preoccupied itself with religion.

³³Letter from F. Dostoevsky to Doctor A.F. Blagonravov, December 19, 1880, in Yarmolinsky, p. 258.

³⁴F.M. Dostoievsky, "Seizing upon an Occasion," The Diary of a Writer, (August, 1880), ed. and trans. Boris Brasol (New York: George Braziller, 1954), p. 984.

Dostoevsky had indeed found his way to Christ in Siberia, but he had accomplished this by a reasoning process rather than by intuition. This assertion rests on the answer which he gave to an unbeliever:

If the "I" can grasp the idea of the universe and its laws, then that "I" stands above all other things, stands aside from all other things, judges them, fathoms them. In that case, the "I" is not only liberated from the earthly axioms, the earthly laws, but has its own laws, which transcend the earthly. Now, whence comes that law? Certainly not from earth, where all reaches its issue, and vanishes beyond recall. Is that no indication of personal immortality?³⁵

At the time of his release from prison, the acceptance of faith was actually more a recognition of the ideal for which Christ stood. It was Christ the man Whom he loved rather than the Divine nature of Him. His religion was limited to the love of Christ because in Him he found the expression of the highest ideal to which a human being was capable and to which mankind could aspire.

In a letter to Madame Fonvizin,³⁶ the writer himself gave ample evidence of the degree of his belief.

About myself I must tell you that I am a child of the age, a child of unbelief and doubt, to this day and even (I know) to the edge of the grave. What terrible torments the thirst to believe has cost and still costs me, becoming all the greater in my soul for the arguments against it in

³⁵Letter from F. Dostoevsky to N. L. Osmidov, February 1878, in Yarmolinsky, p. 234.

³⁶Wife of a Decembrist who had followed her husband to exile in Siberia.

my mind! And yet sometimes God sends me moments of complete tranquility; in those moments I love, and know that others love me, and in such moments I have constructed within myself a symbol of faith, everything in which is clear and sacred to me. This symbol is very simple; here it is: believe that there is nothing more beautiful, profounder, more sympathetic, wiser, braver, or more perfect than Christ; and not only is there nothing, but, as I tell myself with jealous love, there could not be anything. Even more: if somebody proved to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if it were a fact that the truth excludes Christ, I would rather remain with Christ than the truth...³⁷

This letter is not only proof of his doubts, but it discloses the real nature of his relation to Christ. It shows that his love for Christ was essentially the love for Him who lived by the gospel of love. This factor he recognized as the great unifying force for all mankind.

That he could have conceived of Christ being separated from the truth was a sign of agnosticism rather than atheism, because by accepting Christ, he could not have denied God.

Sixteen years later, the same problem was exposed in The Possessed. Almost verbatim Dostoevsky's words were repeated by Shatov.³⁸

"Wasn't it you who said that even if
it was proven to you mathematically

³⁷Letter from F. Dostoevsky to N. D. Fonvizina, February 1854, in Coulson, p. 72.

³⁸Shatov, character from The Possessed who represents a former liberal with socialist ideas who had converted to Orthodoxy and nationalism.

that the Truth was outside Christ,
you would prefer to remain with
Christ outside the Truth?"³⁹

Stavrogin,⁴⁰ the confirmed nihilist, admitted that not only now, but even at the time when he had said those words, he had already been an atheist.

The answer of the protagonist seems to indicate that Dostoevsky was aware of the atheistic aspect of his thoughts. To accept Christ without truth and without His Divine origin could indeed be only understandable if Christ represented to him the symbol of infinite perfection in which truth as such was irrelevant. This however constituted not a negation of God, but rather a denial of the order which He may have created in the world outside of Christ.

At the time when the novel was produced, the writer himself was still searching for God and the true meaning of things. His position seems to have corresponded to the stage reached by Shatov.

I believe in Russia and in the Russian Orthodox Church.... I believe in the body of Christ I believe that His new coming will take place in Russia.... I believe - I believe..." Shatov mumbled in ecstasy. "But in God? Do you believe in God?" "I - shall believe in God."⁴¹

³⁹Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, trans. A.R. MacAndrew (New York: The New American Library, 1962), p. 236.

⁴⁰Nikolai Stavrogin, nihilist protagonist of The Possessed.

⁴¹F. Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 239.

Thus, two decades after Siberia, he still had not reached an answer for the doubts which had plagued his mind.

Moreover, evidence that this matter greatly disturbed him, even to the end of his life, may be found in a letter in which he referred to Ivan Karamazov.⁴²

My hero takes a thesis which is, in my opinion irresistible: the senselessness of suffering of children, and he deduces from it the absurdity of all historical reality.⁴³

Through the voice of Ivan Karamazov, Dostoevsky himself seemed to question God's sense of justice. Ivan could not conceive of God punishing the children for the sins of the adult, and any other explanation for the suffering to which these helpless creatures were submitted appeared nonsensical. If, Ivan asserted, God needed a certain amount of suffering in this world to balance off the harmony in the next world, he refused to partake in such an arrangement on grounds of his humanitarianism.⁴⁴

By this statement Ivan did not refute the idea of God, but rather God's conception on what harmony constituted.

⁴²Ivan Karamazov, character from The Brothers Karamazov. He was the brilliant intellectual who tried to explain the world by reason.

⁴³Letter from F. Dostoevsky to N.A. Lyubimov, May 10, 1879, in Coulson, p. 220.

⁴⁴Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, trans. Constance Garnett and ed. Manuel Komroff (New York: New American Library, April, 1963), pp. 219-227.

Only a year after Dostoevsky had written the novel, mentioned above, he expressed similar thoughts in a public speech:

Can you for one moment admit the thought that those for whom the building had been built would agree to receive that happiness from you, if its foundation was suffering, the suffering of an insignificant being perhaps but one who had been cruelly and unjustly put to death, even if when they had attained that happiness, they should be happy for ever?⁴⁵

The speaker himself denied the right to accept such a sacrifice.⁴⁶

Judging from the above extract of his writings, it may be assumed that he remained throughout his life a man who could not quite reconcile his immense love for Christ, Whose suffering for mankind he regarded as the highest symbol of perfection, with God. Who seemed to be the source of the needless suffering of, e.g. innocent children.

Sacrifice to him had only meaning where sin had already been committed. In this connection he even praised it as the greatest act of self-purification. This aspect, however, will be discussed at a later stage.

Concluding the analysis of Dostoevsky's religiosity,

⁴⁵Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Dream of a Queer Fellow and The Pushkin Speech, trans. S. Koteliansky and J. Middleton Murry (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1961), p. 51.

⁴⁶Ibid.

it is justifiable to assert that, during all the years after his release from Siberia, Christ the Man had been the Model according to which he intended to mold the Russian people.

All his glorification of the Russian nation and all his fanatical criticism of the western world were measured in terms of this ethical ideal.

Although for a theologian the separation of Christ and truth is a self-contradictory proposition, for the student of Dostoevsky's historical conceptions it is an assurance that his theories are of secular rather than spiritual value.

The Ethical Ideal of Orthodoxy as a Justification for Russia's Leadership in the World

In Siberia Dostoevsky came to the conclusion that the most powerful national resource which the Russian nation possessed was the Orthodox faith of her people.

Bringing this thought in accord with the political objectives which he visualized for Russia, he had to find a historical explanation to render his theories acceptable to the Russian man.

Orthodoxy had to be presented as an antithetical force which was powerful enough to discredit all the political and religious ideas and institutions that had developed outside of Russia.

In four articles, written as an answer to a pro-western professor Alexander Gradovsky,⁴⁷ the whole significance of Orthodoxy to Russia is disclosed.⁴⁸

The contents of these articles is especially valuable since Dostoevsky himself had referred to them as follows:

... a reply to my critics, chiefly to Gradovsky. But it is not a reply to the critics, it is my profession de foi [statement of my belief] for the whole future. In it now I express myself definitively and undisguisedly, I call things by their names.⁴⁹

Interpreting the role of Orthodoxy in history, Dostoevsky traced its beginning to the moment when the Oecumenical Church had been disrupted by the encounter with the Roman state. The objectives pursued by the state and the Church were two fundamentally opposite world ideas. In the West.

⁴⁷Alexander D. Gradovsky (1841-1889), professor of law at the Imperial St. Petersburg University. Politically a Westerner, he attacked Dostoevsky's ideas exposed at the Pushkin Speech in Moscow in 1880.

⁴⁸F. Dostoevsky, "Of one very Fundamental Thing," "Aleko and Derzhimorda. Aleko's Yearnings after the Serfs. Anecdotes," "Two Halves," and "To One - Humble Thyself, and to Another - Be Proud. A Storm in a Tea-cup," in The Dream of a Queer Fellow and The Pushkin Speech, trans. S. Koteliansky and J. Middleton Murry, passim, pp. 60-95.

⁴⁹Letter from F. Dostoevsky to Constantine Pobedonostzev, July 25, 1880, in Koteliansky and Murry, p. 260.

the inevitable clash of these two systems was averted by a compromise. The Church copied the structure of the state, by accepting its laws and taking up a political function, while the state agreed to tolerate religion and promote it within its borders.

This historical stage Dostoevsky designated as the period from which the division of the original Church had started. Thus, the whole evil which had afflicted mankind in Europe had developed from the fact that state ideals began to take precedence over moral ideals.

The part of the Oecumenical Church which had not succumbed to the temptation of secular power, had migrated to the East. There, in isolation, the Church had remained true to the principles given to mankind by Christ.

From this division the function of Orthodoxy as an opposition force emerged. In time the Western Church, which had adopted the form of a state, became intolerable to the people who searched for a moral foundation. The rising discontent culminated in the Protestant Reformation, which, however, did not achieve a return to the original Christian community, but resulted in the rise of numerous independent groups, each following a different interpretation of religion.

The failure to bring the people of Europe back to the norms of Christian morality caused mankind to turn away from Christ and search in nationalism and socialism for new ideals.

The reliance on reason rather than spiritual guidance

disseminated the germs of atheism and led politically to such movements as the French Revolution. In the slogan *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*; man was looking for a new identity in which his frantic quest for ideals could be satisfied.

The efforts to substitute the original Christian society of brotherhood with a new form of communal existence was necessarily doomed to failure because it proposed the same type of coercion which the Catholic Church had used to unify men.

Being frustrated with the secular as well as the spiritual institutions, the people of Western Europe had reached a level from which only general chaos could evolve.

Believing that the final stage was approaching, Dostoevsky was convinced that Russia's time had come in which she had to use Orthodoxy as an antithesis to counter the European idea successfully. For him Orthodoxy constituted the only possible alternative to total destruction.

After Europe had searched in vain for a road which would lead her back to Christ, Russia's task was to bring back to humanity the teachings of Christ which had become obscured during the centuries in which Catholicism and Protestant rationalism had dominated the western hemisphere.

From Dostoevsky's conceptions of the historical role

of Christian ethics, it is clear that for him Orthodoxy was far more than a religious confession by which man attained salvation. It embraced the whole meaning of history and every idea which preceded a historical development depended upon it.

Regarding Christ's idea as the only moral idea, he believed in the ultimate victory of the Orthodox world over the western world. He awaited it as an inevitable historical event which would take place in the near future.

Following his thoughts one would be justified to assume that once such a society would be reached, the role of the state and the church would become superfluous. In his vision of future society he must have conceived of a withering away of all institutions which, in the final stage, would manifest itself as Christian anarchism.

Although such an assumption comes dangerously close to the Marxist ideal its apparent parallel is in reality characterized by the fundamental difference that Dostoevsky never stepped out of the limits of the Christian world order. In spite of the political implications which his messianic conceptions contained, he was sincere in his desire to abide by the moral ideal which he had received from Orthodoxy.

The Russian Orthodox Ethical Ideal as the Source of Reforms in Russia

For Dostoevsky the "Russian land" rather than the Orthodox Church was the medium through which people arrived at Christian truth. Besides, his concern with Christian ethics instead of the official dogma of the Church led him to believe that each man was personally capable of searching for truth without the intermediary services of the Church. Thus in The Possessed, Shatov urged the nihilist not to go to the Church but to the land and to work.

. . . find God through labor. That
is the essence of everything.⁵⁰

The Church as an organization had little significance. It was to the principle for which the Church stood that his whole attention was directed. This differentiation also explains why he was not perturbed with the subordinate role of the Orthodox Church to the Tsar. For him, it was sufficient that the idea of Orthodoxy existed among the people. To attribute a political function to the Church other than supporting the Tsar would have meant the acceptance of western standards.

Besides, he would have never thought of calling on the Orthodox Church to act independently from the government on behalf of the people, because it was not the duty of the Church to secure improvement of social conditions.

⁵⁰F. Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 242.

He was indeed far removed from the position of a religious fanatic who would have spoken up for the rights of the Church, or insisted on the separation of the Orthodox Church from the state.

Since the idea and not the Church had political significance, his faith rested on the ethical ideal which Orthodoxy carried. Only the symbol which the Church represented contained the new life. In it he saw the potential of a universal world order, and toward it he was pushing the Russian nation.

By taking recourse to Orthodoxy as the most promising national asset of the Russian people, he was convinced that Russia would fulfill her historical mission. To the Orthodox Church itself he therefore attributed the role of promoting the idea of spiritual self-perfection among the people, so that the nation as a whole would become morally strengthened.

The isolated role which Dostoevsky had thought out for the Orthodox Church was characteristic of his general conception on the importance of churches. The laudable tone with which he contrasted the Orthodox Church to the Catholic Church is, therefore, a good indication of the ideal place which the Church -- any church -- should occupy in society.

In his evaluation, the Catholic Church represented the epitome of secularization. He depicted Rome as a supranational state interested in earthly possessions and political power rather than in the words of Christ.

His hatred was voiced in the following description:

Why, Roman Catholicism is known to have made even sharper turns: once upon a time, when this was necessary, it did not hesitate to sell Christ in exchange for mundane power. Having proclaimed the dogma that "Christianity cannot survive on earth without the earthly power of the Pope," it thereby had proclaimed a new Christ, not like the former one, but one who had been seduced by the third temptation of the devil - the temptation of the kingdoms of the world: "All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall and worship me!"⁵¹

The Orthodox Church, on the contrary, had preserved Christianity in its original meaning by attending more to the spiritual welfare of the people than participating in international power politics.

Moreover, he upheld the subordinate status of the Orthodox Church since it was an assurance that the Church would remain a non-political organization.⁵²

Being convinced of the superiority of the Russian system, he even praised the Russian clergy for preaching submission and passivity to the people rather than the conceptions of human dignity and individual freedom. This becomes especially evident from the role which the monks in his novels play.

⁵¹F. Dostoevsky, "Dead Force and Future Forces," The Diary . . ., (March, 1876), p. 255.

⁵²F. Dostoevsky, "The Germanic World Problem. Germany is a Protesting Country," The Diary . . ., (May - June, 1877), pp. 728-29.

Dostoevsky attributed a special meaning to the fact that religion in Russia had not been perpetuated by a well organized clergy as in the West, but rather through the prayers, the hymns, and the pilgrimages of the common people. Among the Russians, the heart and not the mind had preserved Christianity.⁵³

This primitive form of transmitting the teachings of Christ was by far superior to the rationalistic approach of the Western Church exemplified in the use of sermons and the catechism.⁵⁴

Throughout his writings, he did not stress confession and absolution as a genuine method of repentance and redemption. For him, the inherent sense of justice in the Russian people constituted the assurance that each man was willing to suffer and repent individually for his sins. This inner sense of justice which guided the Russian people was fortified by their love of Christ. From this love for Him all actions became directed toward reaching Him.

Thus the Russian masses were capable of self-improvement through the desire to become equal in their moral ideal to Him from Whom they had received this ideal.

Bearing in mind the climate of political unrest throughout the world, Dostoevsky must have conceived the idea of combining this spiritual quality with national pride, thereby inducing the people to resort to spiritual reform rather than political revolution. The success of such a project would establish the safest antidote against any outbreak of violence.

⁵³F.Dostoevsky, The Dream of a Queer Fellow and The Pushkin Speech, p. 63.

⁵⁴Ibid.

As he was fundamentally opposed to the use of revolutionary means to bring about change, he reverted to an ideological combat. Actually the acceptance of moral rather than political ideals for solving the Russian internal problem dated back to the years in the penal labor camps in which he had discovered that he could approach the prisoners only under the guidance of his Christian morality. It had been the only common denominator by which communication had been successful.⁵⁵

Siberia had also taught him another lesson which the sheltered life in Moscow and St. Petersburg had failed to provide. In close communion with the people he found out that submission to authority rather than rebellion characterized the mentality of the Russian people in spite of the deplorable conditions in Russia.

Studying the people, Dostoevsky had realized that the masses had preserved an infinitely higher degree of Christian morality than his former acquaintances which caused them to bear their burdensome existence. It was from that point on that he made it his duty to become the defender of the common man by preaching the ethical ideal which the people had retained.

The insight gained into the life of the masses caused Dostoevsky to regard their misery with a sense of understanding and compassion. Becoming familiar with their thoughts and beliefs he apparently arrived at the conclusion that the political unrest had not stemmed from

⁵⁵Letter from F. Dostoevsky to his brother Mihail, February 22, 1854, in Yarmolinsky, p. 60.

them, but from the radical intelligentsia whose conceptions of liberalism were degenerating into revolutionary ideas aimed at the destruction of the established order in Russia.

Thus his life task became to save Russia from internal chaos by using religion not only as a regenerating force but also in its function as a pacifier.

Having witnessed the readiness with which the people accepted suffering as a means of liberating themselves from sin, he evidently became convinced that this Christian ideal could be used to subdue the revolutionary spirit which had permeated the Russian country.⁵⁶

⁵⁶F. M. Dostojewski, "Der Büsser," Literarische Schriften, ed. Moeller v.d. Bruck, vol. XII of Sämtliche Werke (München: R. Piper & Co., Verlag, 1921), pp. 311-12.

CHAPTER IV

DOSTOEVSKY'S CONCEPTIONS OF REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS
IN RUSSIA DURING HIS AGEThe Liberal Heritage as the Cause of Nihilism
and Socialism in Russia

As Dostoevsky lived in the era of revolutions in Europe and revolutionary ideas began to be preached in Russia, he considered it necessary to take a clear stand toward revolutions and the conceptions of revolutionaries.

Having become a victim of revolutionary ideas himself, he decided after the years of imprisonment in Siberia to uncover the causes which were responsible for this political estrangement.

Furthermore, his interest in the study of concepts which lead to political unrest arose from the realization that the utopian socialist thoughts⁵⁷ which he himself and other members of the intelligentsia had embraced in the 1840's had never gone beyond the realm of theorization whereas the ideals held during the sixties and the seventies were beginning to take the shape of a political force aimed at undermining the existing order in Russia.

Trying to analyse the reason for the change between his own generation and the new development in Russia, his study

⁵⁷ Dostoevsky distinguished utopian from political socialism by considering the first merely a play with ideas.

was directed at establishing a cause and effect relation for the succession of such ideas.

Examining the political climate which had prevailed among the Russian intelligentsia during his youth, he realized that the liberal concepts taken from Western Europe had produced a growing disconcert for the traditional Russian ideals.

Therefore, when during the forties socialist ideas -- still utopian -- began to penetrate from the West, many intellectuals anxiously turned to these new theories in hope of finding an ideal solution for reorganizing society.

In time, the orientation toward the West severed the link to the national resources with which the strengthening of Russia's society should have been attempted. The real danger, however, began to develop when after the upheaval in Europe (1848-1849) socialism which till that point had represented to the Russian intellectuals the ultimate goal toward a regenerated world, turned itself into a force calling for political action.⁵⁸

In his opinion, the transformation of socialism into a revolutionary weapon had resulted from the prolonged frustration over unfulfilled promises. In western societies the change had come as an answer to the exploitation by

⁵⁸F. Dostoevsky, "One of the Contemporaneous Falsehoods," The Citizen No. 50 (1873) collected in The Diary . . ., p. 148.

the capitalists; in Russia it had developed out of the failure of the liberals to return to their native soil for new inspiration.⁵⁹

Unable to find their road back to the Russian ideals these liberals prepared a climate in which the young generation searched in vain for some guiding principles. Not being able to find security in the heritage left by their fathers, the youth developed their own concepts of values which in time found its expression in such movements as political socialism and nihilism.⁶⁰

Thus the political unrest which was unfolding itself in Russia during the second half of the nineteenth century, had to be blamed on the older generation who had not provided the adolescents with a solid foundation.

Instead of condemning the youth for having adopted political socialism and nihilism, Dostoevsky voiced his contempt for those liberals who, not embracing themselves any Russian values, had in addition sent their children into the world with a feeling of hatred for the land that was nourishing them.

By accusing the fathers rather than the sons for the revolutionary tendencies in Russia, Dostoevsky's study of ideas leading to such movements was characterized by a profound understanding of the young people who had erroneously accepted the new revolutionary ideals.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 148-49

⁶⁰Ibid.

Remembering his own fascination with socialist ideas, he seemed to have been able to project himself into the position of these people. Even though he became in the meantime a reactionary, he had not forgotten how his former indoctrination by Belinsky had appeared to him as an introduction into a new truth.⁶¹

In expectation that the utopia would manifest itself in form of a global movement, the ideas propagated by Belinsky had at one time wide acclaim. In retrospect, however, he labelled the whole utopian idea as a cleverly camouflaged political program. Having freed himself of this influence, Dostoevsky's memories of the socialist circles in St. Petersburg were summarized three decades later:

Those among us - that is, not only the Petrashevtzi, but generally all contaminated in those days, but who later emphatically renounced this chimerical frenzy, all this gloom and horror which is being prepared for humankind under the guise of regeneration and resurrection -- those among us were then ignorant of the causes of their malady, and, therefore, they were still unable to struggle against it."⁶²

It is understandable that as a fanatical nationalist he tried to apologize for his former beliefs by asserting that he was too young to know better.

Since now his aims were directed at arresting the revolutionary spirit in Russia, he must have considered it necessary to indicate that the cause for his adherence

⁶¹Ibid., p. 148.

⁶²Ibid., p. 149.

to utopian socialism had been his faith in its promise of universal brotherhood.⁶³

Thus pointing to his own mistakes and his subsequent conversion, he considered himself not only well qualified to criticize those liberals who had not renounced their un-Russian political conceptions, but to lead the youth to the same political path which he had taken.

The degree of guilt which rested on the older generation was best represented in his novels. Fyodor Karamazov,⁶⁴ Varvara Stavrogin,⁶⁵ and Stepan Verkhovensky,⁶⁶ give an appalling example of life spent in the pursuit of useless aims.

For Dostoevsky, these pro-western people were nothing but a parasitic element which had lived off the land without contributing one positive iota to its people. He condemned them for indulging in petty conversations about humanitarianism without ever engaging in any constructive work. Using these individuals as a background in his novels, he attempted to show the influence which family traditions had on the development of future generations.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Fyodor Karamazov, character from The Brothers Karamazov described as spending his days in complete debauchery, thereby exerting an evil influence on his children.

⁶⁵Varvara Stavrogin, in The Possessed, mother of the nihilist N. Stavrogin, represented as a lady interested only in social status.

⁶⁶Stepan Verkhovensky, in The Possessed, father of Peter Verkhovensky(nihilist), who is influenced by European liberal thoughts.

Believing that the seeds of all evil had been implanted through the cessation of traditional values, Dostoevsky stated his intention of using The Possessed for exposing his views, in a letter to the future Tsar Alexander III of Russia.

It is an almost historical study, in which I have tried to explain how such monstrous phenomena as the Nechaev⁶⁷ movement are possible in our strange society. My view is that this phenomenon is not accidental or isolated. It is the direct consequence of the great gulf between all educated Russia and the original native springs of Russian life.⁶⁸

Thus, for Dostoevsky the Nechaev incident⁶⁹ was a case study of ideas which were directed toward the destruction of Russia.

Since revolutionary ideas, however, were for Dostoevsky primarily of psychological interest, he proceeded to analyse not only the mental birth of such ideas; but pursued them as they passed from one generation to another thereby studying their causes and their subsequent direction.

⁶⁷ Sergey G. Nechaev (1847-1882), student who organized during the latter part of the 1860's, revolutionary "cells" in Russia, directed at overthrowing the status quo in the Empire.

⁶⁸ Letter of F. Dostoevsky to the Grand Duke Alexander Alexandrovich, February, 1873, in Coulson, p. 202.

⁶⁹ S. Nechaev gave orders to assassinate the student I. Ivanov for becoming disloyal to the "revolutionary organization". The actual murder was committed by a group of students under the leadership of Alexis Kuznetzov, in Moscow in 1869.

To illustrate the different political ideas which had evolved among the Russian intellectuals from the liberal heritage, Dostoevsky used the character of Stavrogin in The Possessed.

Identifying this protagonist with the intelligentsia of the forties, Stavrogin became representative of all Russians who had been "contaminated" with western ideas. Dostoevsky used him to trace the manner in which the political ideals of nationalism, socialism, and nihilism held by the previous generation had developed.

By describing the thinking process of Stavrogin's mind, the writer intentionally represented it as containing all the conflicting ideas which had emerged in Russia. In Stavrogin revolution and reaction existed at one and the same time to the extent that his mind was capable of conceiving diametrically opposed concepts, such as the idea of spiritual reform and the program of total annihilation. No extension of human thought was alien to him because he carried the seeds of all in himself. He possessed the potential of developing into a negative or a positive force.

Thus the acceptance of nationalism and Orthodoxy by Shatov was the victory of the positive side. The orientation of Kirilov⁷⁰ toward atheism -- the underlying philosophy of socialism -- was the expression of the negative force.

Shatov and Kirilov, the products of ideas conceived by Stavrogin, represented the two main currents of Russia's

⁷⁰ Kirilov, character from The Possessed.

political thought. Shatov characterized the faction of the intelligentsia which had returned to the native land and its values, Kirilov symbolized the Russians who, searching for an ideal, had turned to socialism and atheism.

Stavrogin himself, however, accepting neither of these two ideals became the incarnation of nihilism. He, contrary to the other factions, was possessed by the morbid desire to uproot everything.

Dostoevsky described him as being beyond good or evil for the very fact that he was not affected by either. Like the nihilist idea, which lacked any ideal, he was not capable of experiencing the feeling of love or hate.

Demonstrating total absence of interest in the effects which his ideas had caused, the fact that Shatov became a believer left him as cold as the atheism professed by Kirilov. Being indifferent to his own actions as well as those of others, Stavrogin remained untouched by Shatov's accusation:

. . . "I found out that, at the same time - perhaps on the very same day -- that you were sowing those ideas about God and Russia in me, you were poisoning Kirilov's mind, the wretched maniac. You implanted all sorts of lies and other drivel in his mind and brought him to the edge of insanity."⁷¹

Thus there was no system in Stavrogin's plan since values had long ago ceased to exist.

⁷¹F. Dostoevsky, The Possessed, p. 235.

Identifying the Nihilist movement of his day as the consequence of western liberalism in Russia, Dostoevsky was particularly interested in a study of the climate which gave rise to these alien conceptions.

By using his novels as the battleground of ideas, Dostoevsky succeeded in placing his characters in a setting which permitted an observation of the effects which the immediate surroundings exercised on an individual.

Showing a unique insight into the mind of a revolutionary at work, the writer, in his analysis carefully avoided overstressing the influence which the outside world had on the formation of thoughts. He established a clear distinction between the power of conditioning and the theory of environmental determination. The first he recognized as an essential weapon used moulding the minds of the youth; the second he negated by taking recourse into the realm of religion.⁷²

Dostoevsky's conception that revolutionary ideas were created through deviation from moral standards and loss of political identity with Russian ideals, can be seen from the following letter:

Our Belinskys and Granovskys⁷³ would
not believe it if they were told they

⁷²F. Dostoevsky, "The Milieu," The Citizen No. 2 (1873), in The Diary . . ., pp. 9-22.

⁷³ Timothy N. Granovsky (1813-1855), professor of history at the University of Moscow. A Westerner and a sympathizer of socialist ideas.

were the fathers of Nechaev's disciples. This kinship, this inheritance of an idea, developing as it descends from the fathers to the children, is what I wanted to express in my book [The Possessed]."⁷⁴

Studying the development of revolutionary ideas from a psychological point of view, Dostoevsky's preoccupation with the environment took a specific meaning.

For him the receptivity of ideas was conditioned by an internal and external sphere; the internal consisting of family traditions and the external representing the entire outside world. Since he considered the outside world analogous to the Russian land from which no evil could proceed he directed his study toward the family as the most influential source in which dissention was bred.

Since in the Russia of his day it was not only fashionable to speak French but as it also served as a sign of social status, Dostoevsky decided to attack the custom of employing foreign tutors to educate the children of Russia.

He pointed to the negative results which the use of the French language had left in Russia. He felt contempt for those Russians who believed that they could replace their native tongue with French. For him such an attempt signified the exchange of a living language with an artificially nurtured tongue.⁷⁵

⁷⁴Letter from F. Dostoevsky to the Grand Duke Alexander Alexandrovich, February, 1873, in Coulson, p. 203.

⁷⁵F. Dostoevsky, "The Russian or the French Language," The Diary . . ., (July-August, 1876), p. 397.

Laughing at the Russian nobility who pretended to speak French like the Parisians, he compared the degree of their proficiency with the niveau of a French hair-cutter's apprentice. Thus he described with extreme disgust the Russians abroad who ostentatiously spoke French although they could express themselves only with a limited vocabulary.⁷⁶

His national pride revolted against the supposition that ideas conceived in a Russian soul could become expressed in a foreign tongue. For him the Russian language alone could reflect the mind of a Russian in all its nuances, because some thought existing in his native land were unknown to foreigners.⁷⁷

Although Dostoevsky spoke of the language as such the implication that he was opposed to the penetration of foreign ideas through this means is fairly obvious. Thinking in terms of conditioning, the ulterior purpose of his criticism was to persuade the parents to use Russian teachers who would direct the mind of the young toward things Russian.

The above assumption rests on the evidence taken from a letter Dostoevsky wrote to a close friend in which he discussed the importance of historical works:

You see, my idea is that the ballads could become a great national work and would

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 397-98.

⁷⁷Ibid.

contribute mightily to the regeneration of the consciousness of the Russian. Why, Apollon Nicolayevich, every schoolboy will know and learn these poems by heart. But having learnt a poem, he will also learn the idea and attitude, and as this attitude is true, it will abide in his soul all life long.⁷⁸

For Dostoevsky, the usage of the national language constituted identification with the Russian people. He regretted the fact that the upper classes had already separated themselves from the people and were deepening the cleavage by disassociating themselves from the language.⁷⁹ Some members of Russia's society openly demonstrated their apartness by refusing to speak the native tongue, considering it a language of the peasantry.

He referred to the Russians who had been brought up by western education through the services of foreign nurses and tutors as "intellectual proletarians," people who had no solid foundation in their native land. The foreign education had rendered them subject to the whims of Europe.⁸⁰

To abolish Russia's dependence on Europe, and the influence of political ideas from her, he recommended to the mothers of the future leaders of Russia to re-evaluate their intentions of educating the children in a European fashion.

⁷⁸Letter from F. Dostoevsky to A.N. Maikov, May 15, 1869, in Koteliansky and Murry, p. 76.

⁷⁹F. Dostoevsky, "What Language should a Future Pillar of His Motherland speak?" The Diary . . ., (July-August, 1876), p. 400.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 403.

He urged them to realize that the study of Russian was far more important. To reach an understanding among the Russian people mastery of the native tongue was the only assurance that the rapprochement of the two parts of the Russian population would be successful.⁸¹

Regarding the question of instruction administered to people in general, he did not think that education per se determined what path an adolescent would choose, but rather how this education had been administered and to what extent it had remained in conformity with the Russian truth.

The special problem which confronted Dostoevsky at that point was that the Russian masses which he adored for their uncorrupted mind, had not received any type of formal education. Their thoughts had remained untouched by western or even Russian political ideas.

Thus to build a case on the virtues of the people, other than a generalization that they were virtuous by reason of religious practices, seemed to be a futile endeavour. This explains why his criticism on the effects of education had to be limited to that segment of the population who possessed the privilege of attending higher schools of learning.

Arguing from the premises that the Russian masses were innocent because of their ignorance, the burden of the guilt fell on the educated classes.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 400.

It was over this issue that Dostoevsky came in conflict with the liberal critics of his day. For him the assumption that not the educated, but rather the culturally underprivileged favored revolutionary theories on the Nechaev order was preposterous.⁸² Besides, it was a dangerous underestimation of the potential which revolutionary ideals had in the minds of those who were determined to change the future of Russia in accord with their plan.⁸³

Considering the upper classes in general, Dostoevsky disagreed with the theory that those who had not completed their degree or had failed to pursue their studies had a natural disposition toward criminality. For him the concept of inborn evil did not exist. On the contrary, he held the surroundings of these unfortunate people responsible for their estrangement. He refuted the assertion that higher education immunized a young person from joining the ranks of the Nechaievtzi.⁸⁴

Such reasoning would lead to the reciprocal assumption that those who did not comply with the educational norm would necessarily indulge in destructive activities. In his opinion it was equally wrong to clear the entire youth of revolutionary tendencies such as propagated by the Nechaev organization as to identify those who had become subjected to nihilist influences as misfits of society.⁸⁵

⁸²F. Dostoevsky, "One of the Contemporaneous Falsehoods," The Citizen, No. 50 (1873), in The Diary . . ., p. 145.

⁸³Ibid., p. 146.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 147.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 146.

As a result of his former attraction to socialist ideas, Dostoevsky was especially sensitive to those intellectuals who possessed the naivité of linking revolutionary fervor with progressive stupidity.⁸⁶ Reasoning from his past involvement with socialist circles, he indicated the fact that all members had obtained a high degree of education. Drawing a parallel between the Petrashevtsi of the old days and the Nechaievtzi of the present, he admitted that he could have become a Nechaievetz himself had they existed at that date.⁸⁷

This admission was simultaneously intended as a reproach against those who held the destiny of the future generation in their hands. The parallel, mentioned above, had as its aim to show that now, as thirty years ago, the Russian man lacked an ideal after which he could model himself.⁸⁸

For the misguided youth which had become victimized by the political sins of their fathers, he felt pity instead of contempt. His compassion was not only characteristic of his knowledge of human nature and its vulnerable position to sin, but reflected his sincere belief in the gospel of love.

Not only preaching the ethics of Orthodoxy, but also living by it, he did not condemn those who had sinned against the laws of God or of men -- be it in action or in thought -- but directed them to repentance. Thus, his sympathetic understanding was even extended to those who had deviated from the Russian truth.

⁸⁶Ibid. .

⁸⁷Ibid.,, p. 147.

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 153-54.

Perhaps this all inclusive desire to forgive rather than condemn had evolved from the constant awareness of his own former political transgression. Their sins, similar to his own, had been caused through the intercourse with foreign ideas.

. . . among us there were but a few who could have managed to struggle against a certain cycle of ideas and conceptions which had a strong grip upon youthful society. We were contaminated with the ideas of the then prevailing theoretical socialism.⁸⁹

Having stated already Dostoevsky's predicament concerning the absence of education among the Russian masses, it is of interest to note that he had a similar problem in the definition of what the outside world -- which influenced the mind -- consisted of. If the outside world referred only to Russia, no corruption could evolve. Therefore, if the family -- the internal sphere -- was dedicated to the country, it could not produce deviators. Consequently, for Dostoevsky, the threat could only proceed from the educated classes who represented the European world in Russia.⁹⁰ Idealizing his land and the Russian peasantry, he naturally searched for the evil in the other camp.

From this distinction it is clear that Dostoevsky had to rebut the pro-western liberal assumption that the ignorant people of Russia were responsible for the high rate of destructive activities in Russia. Substantiating his defense of the masses from the premises that they had been

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 148.

⁹⁰F. Dostoevsky, The Dream of a Queer Fellow and The Pushkin Speech, p. 40.

isolated from the wave of liberalism that had swept over Russia's intellectuals, he discarded the thought that the seeds of nihilism could have developed from their ranks. He denied the alternative that the people could possess a natural inclination toward destruction on grounds of their Orthodox faith.⁹¹

The theory of innate predisposition toward good or evil he rejected, because he had faith in the divine gift of free will. Thus, every man determined his own fate by obeying or disobeying His laws. Conscience responsible to God and not to man was the ultimate criterion by which an individual selected the right path. The association of ignorance or lack of education with crime consequently assumed a certain degree of prejudice from God toward man.

Such an admission would have been equivalent to accepting the division of mankind into privileged and underprivileged classes. Moreover, it would imply the presupposition of a force which directed the fortunes of men in a predetermined pattern, selecting some for eternal damnation while granting to others the right of salvation. The acceptance of predestination, however, would have rendered Dostoevsky's aspiration to the ethical ideal of Christ as the assurance of peace of earth meaningless.

⁹¹F. Dostoevsky, "A Peculiar Summer for Russia," Post-Scriptum, The Diary . . ., (July-August, 1876), p. 425.

Political Socialism: A Greater Threat than Nihilism

In an analysis of revolutionary ideas, Dostoevsky attributed far greater importance to socialism than to nihilism. Examining these two political theories he apparently considered nihilism an essentially sterile force which could not produce a new universal idea since it advocated only negation and annihilation.

Assuming a certain consistency in Dostoevsky's opinions, it seems that he used the same reasoning process in interpreting the future role of nihilism as he had used in refuting Protestantism as a source of regeneration.⁹²

Judging from his writings, the significance of socialism and nihilism was studied more in terms of their ultimate goals than in their actual revolutionary activities. The future danger proceeded not from those who used destruction as an end in itself, but from those who accepted destruction as the means to their ends.

Although the immediate effects of nihilism as depicted in The Possessed demonstrate the full force of destruction directed at an established society, their overall significance became minimized through the exposition of the monstrous plan which the socialist mind had devised for mankind. Shigalov⁹³ stated the socialist idea of the future society:

"One-tenth will be granted individual freedom and full rights over the remaining nine-tenth, who will lose

⁹² F. Dostoevsky, "Three Ideas," The Diary . . ., (January, 1877), p. 564.

⁹³ Shigalov, character from The Possessed, is a political socialist.

their individuality and become something like a herd of cattle."⁹⁴

The promise of freedom and equality will manifest itself in form of the herd existence. Total equality will be obtained through the creation of universal slavery from which only the leaders will be exempted since their extraordinary intellectual capacity will destine them to become rulers.⁹⁵

Dostoevsky warned Russia of the power of socialism for it carried an ideal which transcended the period of destruction. It did not aim at annihilation, but merely at crippling society by destroying all traditional values and replacing them with a new set of principles.

The danger of the new socialist morality was that it used the concept of equality and freedom in a distorted manner. It was the antithesis of Christianity using the same terminology without abiding by the Christian definition of these terms. In this apparent similarity to Christianity the attraction of the socialist program was to be found.

Visualizing the new order as the ascendancy of the Anti-Christ, the future society would advance universal enslavement instead of salvation. Its success would rest on the total dissolution of traditional values and the injection of a new ideal to which the people could aspire. Contrary to the nihilists' view the proponents of the future socialist state realized that the strength of a theory lay in its ability to present to the people a definite goal.

⁹⁴F. Dostoevsky, The Possessed, p. 385.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 399.

Man's emotions had to be enkindled by an idealized version of the future. Since the herd existence to which human beings were predestined did not expect the use of reason, the rational faculty had to be paralysed rather than encouraged. This was to be accomplished during the period of unrest.⁹⁶

The attraction which the promise of socialism had on the Russian people did not escape Dostoevsky's attention. He was particularly concerned with the influence which these ideas exerted on the newly emancipated peasants. Recognizing that the peasantry was apt to accept some political direction in the future, he feared that the activities of the socialists would be directed at undermining their Christian tradition.⁹⁷

Showing such insight into the socialist system indeed reflects a profound understanding of the importance which the peasantry, as a class, could have for future socialist domination. Realizing this factor, he exposed the real aims of the socialists by drawing the attention of the people to this subversive program.

The greatest talent of Dostoevsky rested in his ability to predict the future course of revolutionary ideas by analysing their immediate impact. Out of this foresight, he must have considered socialism rather than nihilism to be the primary evil. Whereas nihilism would come to an end in the near future, political socialism would develop

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 399.

⁹⁷F. Dostoevsky, "The Milieu," The Citizen, in The Diary . . ., p. 13.

into a potential enemy. The realization of the inherent danger in socialism is indicative of his profound comprehension of the whole future problem to the extent that he seemed to have possessed a premonition of the final form which socialism would take.

The irresistible attraction of socialism was that it carried an idea which contained a universal message. It proposed the alleviation of the miserable social conditions under the existing order. Its program of destruction was supported by a belief in the right cause. Unlike nihilism, it was marked by a positive approach.

Dostoevsky clarified this difference in The Possessed by depicting Shigalov as the ardent socialist who believed in the inevitable success of his ideal system. Quite in contrast to this self-confidence stood Stavrogin's confession:

" . . . the only thing that has come out of me is negation . . . "98

Stavrogin, as nihilism, was doomed to destroy himself with the same indifference with which he had proposed the arbitrary extermination of everything on earth. He was the protagonist to whom Dostoevsky had denied the possibility of salvation. Existing outside the moral law, there was no exit for him.

Projected into the political field, the death of Stavrogin was analogous to the disintegration of nihilism

⁹⁸F. Dostoevsky, The Possessed, p. 691.

into nothingness. In contrast, the power of socialism consisted in its dreadful parallel with Christianity. Promising a new paradise on earth, mankind was led forward in the name of an idea instead of in the name of Christ.

In an article⁹⁹ published in The Citizen, a year after the completion of The Possessed, Dostoevsky disclosed his observation of certain socialist conceptions which began to manifest themselves among the Russian people. With alarm he realized that the seeds of socialism were already taking roots in the minds of the emancipated serfs.

The new conception on the role of the environment advanced by socialists resulted in a wave of acquittals in the jury trials. People who previously had decided on questions of justice by consulting their conscience, now adopted an apologetic position, reducing personal responsibility for crimes by referring to the corrupt environment as the determining factor.

For Dostoevsky the nonchalant acceptance of violence as the natural product of a bad milieu carried the danger of arriving at a point where the idea of revolt itself would become a normal conception.

Thus, in the article, he exposed several cases in which transgressors were acquitted or given leniency solely from considerations based on their background. For

⁹⁹F. Dostoevsky, "The Milieu," The Citizen, in The Diary . . ., pp. 9-22.

Dostoevsky, such an interpretation of justice was indicative of the degree to which the revolutionary mood in Russia had already distorted the basic conceptions of good and evil. In time, violation of the law would become regarded as a justified revolt against an oppressive or unjust environment.¹⁰⁰

Such a conception would not only obscure, but even replace the traditional Christian standards of justice, giving everything a coating of relativism. It would constitute the preparation of the people for the new world order. Peter Verkhovensky's¹⁰¹ boastful words in The Possessed would then reflect actuality:

"In reality, I'm a crook and not a socialist, ha-ha-ha-! I have them all at hand already: we have the teacher who makes the children entrusted to his care laugh at their God and at their families; we have the lawyer defending the well-educated murderer because he has reached a higher stage of development than his victims and couldn't get hold of their money without killing them; the schoolboys who, to experience a strong sensation, kill a peasant, are also with us; the juries who acquit criminals are all working for us; the prosecutor torn by his anguished fear of not being liberal enough does us a service."¹⁰²

For Dostoevsky, the gradual disintegration of absolute moral standards signified a decisive step toward Shigalov's

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰¹ P. Verkhovensky, character from The Possessed, who organized revolutionary "cells" to destroy the order of a community.

¹⁰² F. Dostoevsky, The Possessed, p. 401.

ideal state in which "total obedience and depersonalization" would characterize the relation of the masses to their rulers.¹⁰³

Recognizing the false pretensions with which the socialists were infesting the mind of the people with the promise of a new type of freedom, Dostoevsky utilized his journal to uncover their true aims. Appealing to the Christian tradition of the Russian people, he directed their attention to the atheistic foundation on which the new idea was built.

Using Belinsky's thoughts on socialism as his target, Dostoevsky's accusation was substantiated from the maxim that without the recognition of a Christian moral law which demanded responsibility from each individual for his actions, the idea of freedom lost its entire meaning.¹⁰⁴

The socialist idea was a frightening reality for Dostoevsky. He had detected its results among people who had been misled with the promise of regeneration. It was for the formulation of this new morality that he held the older intellectuals, especially Belinsky, responsible. Belinsky had already conceived it as an antithesis of Christianity. He had refuted Christ and the Christian moral law as an obstacle for the new world order. Belinsky had even assumed that the role of Christ would become obsolete in the future age of science and reason.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 399.

¹⁰⁴F. Dostoevsky, "Old People," The Citizen, in The Diary . . ., No. 1 (1873), p. 6.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 6-7.

Dostoevsky defied socialist truth since it was based on reason and not revelation. He regarded it as a system whose evolution would inevitably result in the universal enslavement of humanity. In The Possessed, Shigalov expressed the course which socialism would take:

"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."¹⁰⁶

Shigalov's conclusion underlined Dostoevsky's basic argument that freedom outside of the Christian world order was unintelligible. Man's freedom depended on the acceptance of Christian morality. For him, there was no alternative to this axiom.

The progressive deterioration of Christian moral standards would accelerate the coming of the socialist state. Dostoevsky recognized that the preparation of the chaotic conditions was intentionally instigated by the proponents of socialism. Society had to be atomized as Shigalov had proposed, before man could be remolded in accordance with the preconceived plan.

To check the advance of socialism in Russia, Dostoevsky demanded that the Russian people fortified their resistance by insisting on Christian ethics as the measure of all conduct. He reminded the people that they had only preserved their national identity by retaining Christ in their hearts.

Since not the upper classes, but the people had saved

¹⁰⁶F. Dostoevsky, The Possessed, p. 384.

Russia from succumbing to the same degeneration which had affected the western world, his intention was to promote among the people the same kind of immunity against socialism as they had shown against the penetration of western civilization.

Dostoevsky's plea for a return to the soil was consequently not only directed to the upper classes, but to those segments of the population which had fallen prey to the morality of the socialists.

If the global idea of Orthodoxy was to become the new universal order, a halt had to be put to further indoctrination of Russian people with un-Christian ideals.

Christian morality and the Russian country were for Dostoevsky an inseparable unit.¹⁰⁷ To erase Christ from the minds of the people -- as the socialists were doing -- was a perversion of the meaning of life on earth. Arguing from a Christian position he questioned the value of existence that denied God as the source of it. To him, the new socialist truth which proceeded from rational deliberations would perpetuate itself only as an eternal lie.

The inner revolt of Dostoevsky against the supposition that truth could be obtained from reason alone was best expressed in his novels. Depicting at length the distorted conceptions of law and justice which dominated the mind of the rationalists, he demonstrated that in the end, even the

¹⁰⁷ Letter from F. Dostoevsky to Doctor A.F. Blagonravov, December 19, 1880, in Yarmolinsky, p. 258.

confirmed atheist . had to recognize a truth which transcended his reason.

He traced the transgressions of his heroes back to the fact that they had separated the mind from the heart, failing to consult the latter in their decisions. The reliance on reason as the source of truth had isolated them from Christ. Thus, man was led to idolize himself from a belief in his own omnipotence. Once man had accepted himself as the supreme law, his behavior became relative to what his reason considered good and evil. Such a perversion of morality, however, was a defiance of Christian ethics.

It is obvious that for Dostoevsky a true Russian could not exist in such a relation to his Creator. He characterized the Russian as a person who instinctively perceived the difference between sin and virtue. Christ was so deeply implanted in the Russian heart that eternal estrangement was inconceivable. This assertion led Dostoevsky to the conclusion that a Russian always found the way to repentance. ¹⁰⁸

Having treated the concept of sin in his novels in terms of Christian ethics, he took the environment to be irrelevant in the final evaluation of man's conduct.

Although he rejected the validity of truth founded on reason, his intense preoccupation with this question leads the author to the assumption that he admitted it to be a powerful antithesis to Christianity.

In his novels he exhibited a profound concern for the

¹⁰⁸F. Dostoevsky, "The Milieu" pp. 14-15.

reasoning process of an atheist. At times it seems that he even used the mind of his protagonist as a testing ground of his own stability; though atheism, as exposed by Dostoevsky, leaves more the impression of an intense desire to affirm rather than deny God. Overtly the atheist denied God, while in reality he was searching for Him. The renegade is possessed by a constant awareness of Him. Every rebuttal of God's world and the laws governing it appear to bear witness of a desire to believe.

The rationalist, unlike the nihilist, is never completely at loss. For him the line of demarcation is not insurmountable. The atheist can reach Christ by repenting and receiving Christian enlightenment.

The problem of atheism was for Dostoevsky simultaneously the problem of socialism.¹⁰⁹ He intended to use the same basic approach in the fight against socialism. For him the final battle between Orthodoxy and socialism was not to be won by the use of violence, but through Christian enlightenment.¹¹⁰ Since socialism was essentially a godless idea, it had to be discredited through the preaching of Christian truth.

The propagation of such means reflected the same reasoning as the one used by Dostoevsky in analysing the relation of atheism and religion per se. Whereas the road to salvation for an atheist was open through repentance, delivery from socialism rested in the return to the Russian soil.

¹⁰⁹F. Dostoevsky, "Old People," p. 7.

¹¹⁰F. Dostoevsky, The Dream of a Queer Fellow and The Pushkin Speech, p. 58.

For Dostoevsky the controversy between socialism and Orthodoxy was already unfolding itself. He became aware of the germs of socialism in the manner in which the doctrine of environmental determination was replacing the moral standards. To regard the environment as the criterion of man's actions on earth was the submission of people to the laws of those who controlled the environment. For the claim of freedom to remain valid, however, man had to retain his right of expressing his choice in accordance with the Divine law. To accept the ambience as the measure of all things, meant in reality not a superior form of existence, but the delegation of God's gift of freedom to those who controlled the environment.

Socialism was trying to revoke these inalienable rights so that the conscience of man would become overruled by a sense of obedience to human laws.

Dostoevsky did not examine the problem of justice from mere curiosity about trial procedure, but with the intention to gather evidence in support of his theory. For him, the sense of justice found in the Russian masses, served to express Russia's political power. The ability of the people to differentiate good from evil signified the triumph of Orthodoxy over socialism, and in the final stage -- the supremacy of Russia over the western world.

The claim of national supremacy had to be substantiated by showing the link of the people with Christ through the manner in which justice was expressed. It was the visible sign by which the depth of Orthodoxy was measured, an important factor for the future role which was designated to the Russian nation.

Demonstrating an intense concern for the role of conscience as the criterion of human conduct, he wanted to prove that the will of accepting suffering was not the result of an outside force but the inward urge to confess one's sins. Besides, the desire of the Russian people to seek remission of sins through confession and self-inflicted punishment was an indication that they would not revolt against the land, but would look for the faults in themselves.

Projecting his observations into the political field, he possibly felt that he had detected in this the seeds for the future regeneration of the entire world.

Detecting the non-violent character of the Russian common people, Dostoevsky apparently arrived at the conclusion that this disposition seen politically could serve a twofold purpose. First it assured the dedication of the people to the Russian government; second it could be developed into a powerful opposition force against socialism.

For Dostoevsky, an efficient counteraction aimed at arresting the spreading of socialism seemed to be the primary problem confronting Russia. Realizing that the socialists had already enlarged their sphere of influence by beginning to infest the minds of the common people, Dostoevsky appealed to the Christian sense of the people in hope of a successful rebuttal.

He understood that the socialists were determined to destroy through subversion the traditional values which the Russian people had preserved during the westernization of the upper classes. They tried to erase the

adherence to Christian morality from the people.¹¹¹

Since the people had received their enlightenment from Christ through the Russian land, the socialists tried to separate them from the land. The common people had to be alienated from the soil in the same manner in which the upper classes had previously been led away. Loss of contact with the land would facilitate the undermining of truth. By injecting hatred against the laws of the land, the socialists were driving at extinguishing man's capacity to distinguish between good and evil.¹¹²

The importance which Dostoevsky attributed to divine rather than secular justice did not conflict with his loyalty to the autocratic government and its laws. On the contrary, his inquest into the essence of justice was in its ultimate aim directed at fortifying the state.

Proving that the Russian man lived by the gospel of Christ was a simultaneous acknowledgement of his passive character. In the political realm such a state of mind was highly beneficial to the autocratic system, since it assured law abiding citizens.

By professing responsibility to the Divine law the Russian masses were less apt to violate the positive law since the latter was derived from the former.

Moreover, the Christian character of the Russian people was an indication that they would resort to spiritual

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 40.

¹¹²Ibid.

rather than political reforms in hope of improving their conditions.

Considering the dissemination of revolutionary ideas in Russia, Dostoevsky's preoccupation with religion reflected not only his conservative position, but exposed his frantic search for a dam which could hold the revolutionary tide. Turning to the land and the people, Dostoevsky discovered that in them, and through them the Russian nation could be saved.

CHAPTER V

FRANCE AS THE SCAPEGOAT OF DOSTOEVSKY'S
ANTI-WESTERN SENTIMENTFrance as the Vanguard of Papacy and Related
European Problems

Dostoevsky's hostile views of the West found their fullest expression in his criticism of France. Since France had exerted the greatest influence on Russia, he mostly used her to express his anti-western sentiment.

This hatred for France was caused primarily by the protective role which she had displayed for the ambitions of the Papacy. For him, France was the country which the Catholics had chosen as a front so that they could advance their own political objectives.

The wars instigated by Napoleon III in Italy, Mexico, and Prussia seemed to support his claim of Catholic subversion of France's foreign policy.

After the defeat of France in 1871 Dostoevsky predicted in a sarcastic manner that France would still continue to be the main protector of Rome. The new French government would again be used by the Catholics for the promotion of their interests. This time, however, Dostoevsky thought that Rome would incite the French people to fight against Bismarck and destroy the the citadel of Protestantism repaying Bismarck for his anti-Catholic policy.¹¹³

¹¹³F. Dostoevsky, "Dead Force and Future Forces," The Diary . . . (March, 1876), pp. 254-59.

This program known as Kulturkampf¹¹⁴ found a very favorable acceptance in Dostoevsky's mind. It is, therefore, of special interest to interject at this point his comment on Bismarck's anti-Catholic actions:

However, Bismarck, for example would not have persecuted Catholicism so strongly if he had not sensed in it a dreadful, proximate enemy in no distant future. Prince Bismarck is too proud a man to waste in vain so much energy on a comically impotent foe. Yet the Pope is stronger than he. I repeat: in our day papacy is, perhaps, the most dreadful among all "segregations" threatening universal peace.¹¹⁵

Since Rome had abandoned the ideal of a spiritual community of men by erecting an international political empire, she had acted in defiance of the true meaning with which the Christian communities had once been formed. Therefore, Rome had long ago lost her claim to Christian leadership, for Christian unity could only be achieved without the need of political coercion.¹¹⁶

Doubting the predominance of Catholicism in the remote future, Dostoevsky was convinced that the Slavic world would emerge as the leader of mankind. Thus the rebirth of the whole world would proceed from Russia.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴Kulturkampf, the struggle between the Roman Catholic Church and the German government from 1873 to 1887, mainly over the government's effort to control education, civil marriage, church appointment, etc.

¹¹⁵F. Dostoevsky, "Dead Force and Future Forces," p. 258.

¹¹⁶F. Dostoevsky, "Three Ideas," The Diary. . ., p. 563.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 565.

Although Dostoevsky believed that the Catholic idea in its historical development was in a state of decline, he nevertheless feared that in a last attempt to save her political power Rome might succeed in reaffirming her position through infiltrating socialism in France.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, he imagined that the Catholic clergy would in time permeate the socialist movement by equating the socialist's conceptions of communal life with those of Christianity. Hence the Catholic Church which for centuries protected the nobility and the ruling houses would associate with the people and even defend socialism for the sake of expediency.¹¹⁹

Now that the days of the French monarchy were terminated, the Pope would turn to the people in search for a protector. The Roman clergy who had neglected the common people for the favors of the aristocracy and the monarchy would cater to the people by making them believe that in reality they had always supported the cause of the underprivileged, but had been prevented from action by the power of the ruling classes.¹²⁰

This political flexibility of Rome he attributed to her role as an organization that was interested in playing a dominant factor in international politics.

The Church was destroyed and finally transformed into a State. The Papacy

¹¹⁸F. Dostóevsky, "Dead Force and Future Forces," The Diary . . ., p. 256.

¹¹⁹Ibid., pp. 254-59.

¹²⁰Ibid.

appeared - the continuation of the ancient Roman Empire in a new incarnation."¹²¹

The contentious mood with which Dostoevsky wrote about France was also related to the fact that the Russian upper classes had traditionally been influenced by French culture. He castigated the Russian intellectuals who followed French ideas and attacked particularly those liberals who voiced universal humanitarian ideas and the abolition of serfdom in Russia. while living in Paris on the money extracted from the labor of their Russian serfs.¹²²

His aversion against France was further enkindled by the disrespect with which the French treated the Russians. Instead of accepting the Russians as equals they discriminated against them. Thus, the Russian intellectuals who tried so hard to imitate the western way of life had in reality only become the laughing stock of the West.¹²³

Dostoevsky pointed out that the Russians were considered to be barbaric, uncivilized and a more Asiatic than European nation. If the Russians, therefore, really wanted to earn recognition from Europe, they had to stop copying the West and begin to respect their own people and their own native country.¹²⁴

¹²¹F. Dostoevsky, The Dream of a Queer Fellow and . . ., p. 89.

¹²²Ibid., p. 74.

¹²³F. Dostoevsky, "My Paradox," The Diary . . ., p. 351.

¹²⁴F. Dostoevsky, "Wir sind in Europa nur Hanswürste," Tagebuch eines Schriftstellers, in Harry Harvest, Dostojevski und Europa (Zürich: Rotapfel Verlag, 1951), pp. 123-27.

Although Dostoevsky's claim to Russian universality would have presupposed a conciliatory approach to Europe, his writings were characterized by predominantly negative criticism. With the awareness of the increasing rivalry of the European nations toward Russia's expansion, Dostoevsky's treatment of everything European had belligerent undertones. At times his fanatical nationalism took such proportions that he could have been considered the most outspoken enemy of the western world.

Often the glorification of his native land, the people, and their faith became so overemphasized and exaggerated that he lost all sense of objectivity. His view of Europe tended to become distorted in such moments and, carried away by uncontrolled emotions, his image of Europe resembled one long hate and smear campaign.

Dostoevsky's contempt for Europe became especially apparent during the years of his voluntary exile in Europe. Traversing Europe in an attempt to escape his Russian creditors, he expressed his impressions of Europe's people and her culture in the most hostile fashion. Everything in the West tended to bore him to a degree that he was "nauseated".¹²⁵

He became especially hateful toward the Russian exiles who lived in the European capitals and negated their own country. To him Western Europe was hell on earth. This attitude might have been a product of homesickness and poverty. His letters contained one single cry for his native land. In the feeling of utter isolation Dostoevsky lived for the moment in which he could return to his homeland.

¹²⁵Letter from F. Dostoevsky to A.N. Maikov, March 20, 1868, in Koteliansky and Murry, p. 67.

With the chaotic conditions increasing in Europe and the failure of the new western ideas to bring equality and brotherhood to the nations, Dostoevsky considered the time had arrived for Russia to embark on her mission. The ideas which he had pronounced as early as 1861 now became imminent.

And who knows, dear foreigners, perhaps Russia was meant to wait until you have finished, so as to have time to grasp your ideas, to understand your ideals and aims and the character of your aspirations; to reconcile your ideas, to give them a universal meaning and, finally, free in spirit and free of all outside class or national interests, to move on to a wide new activity unknown to history, starting from where you have finished and carry you along with her.¹²⁶

In Dostoevsky's evaluation of Europe there seemed to be a basic contradiction. He despised Europe and spoke of European civilization in the most contemptible fashion. On the other hand he stressed the great love and understanding which the Russians had for the West. In the Pushkin Speech, presented in Moscow in 1880, Dostoevsky spoke of Russia's relation to Europe in the following words:

All our Slavophilism and Westernism is only a great misunderstanding even though historically necessary. To a true Russian, Europe and the destiny of all the mighty Aryan family is as dear as Russia herself, as the destiny of his own native country, because our destiny is universality, won

¹²⁶F. Dostoevsky, "Five Articles," Time (January, 1861), trans. in David Magarshack, Dostoevsky's Occasional Writings (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 63.

not by the sword, but by the strength
of brotherhood and our fraternal aspi-
ration to reunite mankind.¹²⁷

Judging from this speech it appears that Dostoevsky intended to indicate that he was not attacking the people of Western Europe as such, but merely the political, religious, and social system which had been created for them.

The Russian Agrarian Commune in Contrast to Western Materialism

In a comparative study of materialism and idealism, Dostoevsky chose to contrast the values held by the French people to those of his native land. In the summer issue of the Diary of a Writer in 1876, after several trips to Europe, the writer conveyed a grim view of the consequences which the victory of the bourgeois class in France had brought about.

With the rise of the bourgeoisie all values became dictated by the idea of profit. Concern for material wellbeing overshadowed all human aspirations. The depth of materialistic thought even extended into the realm of human reproduction.

In the decline of the birth rate among the upper classes of France, he felt he had found an example par excellence of the schemes which the ingenious mind of the profit orientated bourgeoisie had concocted. To maintain a higher living standard, the French limited the number of their children.¹²⁸

¹²⁷F. Dostoevsky, The Dream of a Queer Fellow and . . . , p.58

¹²⁸F. Dostoevsky, "Children's Secrets," The Diary . . . (July-August, 1876), p. 414.

The invention of birth control devices was an economic measure which profited the bourgeoisie in a twofold manner: it assured their own comfortable living and simultaneously provided a source of revenue for the payment of the war debts to Germany.¹²⁹

The decline of the population of France appeared as a dangerous sign for the future political role of France. Since the reduction in the number of children was occurring predominantly in the upper classes, the proletarians became the only class in which the propagation continued uninhibited.

From this unequal distribution of the population the entire structure of French society in the near future could become revolutionized. Dostoevsky thought that if this trend was not halted, the proletarian class in time would dominate the recessive upper classes. The proletarians instead of the wealthy segment of the population would become the rulers of the country. Their power would rest in their numbers rather than in their qualification.¹³⁰

Dostoevsky referred to the proletarian classes in France with utmost contempt. For him they were not representative of the true people, since those continued to work on the land. He attacked the city dwellers for their lack of moral standards and their attitude toward multiplying without bothering about the sacrament of matrimony or baptism. The new-born creatures from such parentage either perished under the miserable conditions into which they were born, or else were crowded into the numerous institutions for homeless children from which they often emerged as potential criminals.

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 415.

All these vices, in his eyes, were the inevitable result of the morality which guided the bourgeoisie.¹³¹

Criticizing the effects of the bourgeois rule in France, Dostoevsky utilized his personal observations of Europe in comparison with the conditions prevailing in Russia. Russia with her sense of Christian morality served him as a refreshing contrast to the decadence of France. Using France as a case study of materialism, he concluded that the whole western world with its business orientated mind, was progressing toward the last stage of historical development. The bourgeois philosophy had pushed mankind to a point from which no regeneration from its own accord was possible. Europe was rapidly advancing in the direction of complete chaos.

Studying the causes of French materialism, Dostoevsky thought that the origin of all the problems in France sprang from the misconception which the French had on the ownership of land. He felt that the conglomerate of poverty stricken masses in the big cities of France was the result of depriving the people of the right to possess land (natural right). With the rise of the factories the migration of the people from the villages to the large cities was facilitated by the absence of ties to the land. Employment in the factories held the promise of improving one's living standard. Thus thousands of people converged upon the industrial centers and from this mass migration of the rural population the new proletarian class began to develop rapidly.¹³²

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 415-16.

¹³² Ibid., p. 416.

Although Dostoevsky showed no sympathy for the proletarian class, he exhibited great compassion for the children who were forced to live in the shadow of the factories. He pitied the young people who had been deprived of growing up in nature. For him, the practice of child employment for the sake of financial profit, was a criminal intervention into the normal development of childhood. Because of the surroundings of an adult world which had abandoned all moral standards, the youth that was forced into the factories became corrupted. Therefore, he could conceive of little hope for a healthy future generation that became exposed to the immorality which dominated the relations of the adult world.¹³³

It is interesting to note that Dostoevsky did not oppose the idea of industrialization as such. His mind merely revolted against the manner in which the factories had changed the entire structure of western society. People in Europe had become subjected to the exploitation of the property owning minority.

In his conception, employment in factories should not have the effect of separating mankind from the land. Industrialization could only be beneficial to a country if it provided a healthy climate and preserved the spiritual wealth of its people. He thought that factory owners had to grant every worker the possibility to live with his family outside of the narrow confinements into which the laboring masses were being pressed. As an ideal solution, Dostoevsky dreamed of creating living quarters on the land where people would

¹³³F. Dostoevsky, "The Land and the Children," (July-August, 1876), The Diary . . ., p. 418.

house together in a communal arrangement. The return to the land, the "communal garden", Dostoevsky regarded as the only assurance of a strong nation.¹³⁴

For Dostoevsky, as a Russian, the idea of community life was the key to the solution of the evil which the extreme concern for individualism had created in Europe. Through his analysis of western civilization, he arrived at the conclusion that Europe had reached a point from which only Russia could save her by leading her back to the land on which, in the final analysis, the structure of society depended.

You see how all this happened: at first, there were castles, and beside them - mud huts. The barons lived in the castles - and the vassals, in the mud huts. Thereupon the bourgeoisie began to rise behind fenced towns - slowly, on a microscopic scale. Meanwhile, the castles came to an end, and king's capitals came into existence - big cities with king's palaces and court hotels; this has lasted up to our century. In our century a dreadful revolution took place, and the bourgeoisie came out victorious.¹³⁵

After enumerating the evils of the bourgeois phase in history, Dostoevsky concluded his thought in the following manner:

At present people are awaiting the third phase: the bourgeoisie will expire and a regenerated mankind will come in its wake. It will distribute the land among communes, and will start living in the Garden."¹³⁶

From the above writing, it is evident that Dostoevsky was sincerely convinced that the apportionment of land to

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 417.

¹³⁵Ibid.,

¹³⁶Ibid., pp. 417-18.

the people was relevant to the regeneration of mankind. Whereas the European nations regarded the land question as a buy and sell proposition; at home in Russia people believed in their inherent right to work on a piece of land. This opinion he substantiated by citing examples of serfs who, even after receiving their freedom, would rather continue to live in subordination to their former landlord than abandon the land. For the Russian peasant the thought of remaining without a share (not ownership) of land was inconceivable.¹³⁷

For a proper evaluation of Dostoevsky's view on the Russian common man and his fanatical glorification, it is necessary to compare a different opinion on the state of mind of the peasantry.

In rebuttal to Dostoevsky's assertion on the significance of the land, the experiment of a contemporary Russian liberal landowner conveys a diametrically opposed observation.

In the middle of the nineteenth century Nicolas Ogarev¹³⁸ freed the serfs on one of his estates in order to give them the opportunity of improving their social conditions. He allotted them land with the expectation that removing the obstacle of toiling the land for him, they would take the initiative to better their own existence. With regret, however, he observed that the Russians showed no inclination for alleviating their position. Besides, he discovered that the people had no knowledge of human rights or personal responsi-

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 419.

¹³⁸N. Ogarev (1813-1877), was a liberal and a Westerner. He left Russia in 1856 and became a collaborator of A. Herzen in London.

bility. This ignorance impeded their will of working independently from the commune. Self-determination was an alien concept to their mentality. Adhering to a fatalistic interpretation of the entire world order, the Russian man accepted his place in society as an inescapable reality. Moreover, the idea that God assigned to every man a definite place on earth was so deeply enrooted in his mind that the idea of changing his manner of life was unthinkable. The Russian peasant thus acknowledged God's will from a feeling of fear rather than from a belief in Divine justice.¹³⁹

What Ogarev termed lack of initiative and total insecurity on part of the peasantry, Dostoevsky admired as the sign of devotion to the land and a predisposition to communal existence. Dostoevsky completely ignored the fact that after the Emancipation of the serfs in 1861, the lack of financial means forced them to accept land on terms of communal ownership, a kind of agrarian Communism.¹⁴⁰ He considered only the ideal side of this communal life in which he believed he had found the seeds for the future greatness of Russia.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹Richard Hare, Pioneers of Russian Social Thought (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 30-31.

¹⁴⁰Originally the commune was an arrangement in which all peasants of a given village were allotted a piece of land from the peasant assembly (Mir). The land itself, belonged to the landlord for whom the peasants cultivated it. The commune as a whole was responsible for collecting the taxes for the landlord. Every couple of years the use of the land was redistributed among the peasants by the Mir. After the Emancipation in 1861 the commune retained its structure with the difference that now the peasants leased the land under the control of the government and paid taxes to it.

¹⁴¹F. Dostoevsky, "The Land and the Children," The Diary . . ., p. 420.

There existed still another idea on the communal sense of the Russian people, the presentation of which is of considerable importance since Dostoevsky had considered this theory extremely dangerous.

Alexander Herzen,¹⁴² similar to Dostoevsky, admired the communal sense of the Russian people. Both men perceived in this Russian characteristic the promise of a great future -- the rise of a new universal world order. Their difference, however, lay in the conception of the end result which this embryonic form would take.

For Dostoevsky the embryo was already self-sufficient. All it needed was time so that it could grow and manifest itself in its final form.

For Herzen, the embryo required a re-orientation which would cause it to develop along socialist lines.

Dostoevsky dreamed of a universal spiritual community proceeding from Russia's Orthodox heritage.

Herzen believed in the establishment of a socialist society through the interjection of western socialist ideas into the communal tradition of Russia.¹⁴³

It was the apparent similarity of Herzen's theories with his own conceptions that motivated Dostoevsky to warn the Russian people of its true aims.

¹⁴²Alexander I. Herzen (1812-1870), prominent socialist who left Russia in 1847 and settled in London. Embraced revolutionary ideas.

¹⁴³Alexander Kucherov, "Alexander Herzen's Parallel between the United States and Russia," Essays in Russian and Soviet History, ed. John Shelton Curtiss (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963) pp. 34-37.

Such contrary opinions. did not change Dostoevsky's belief. For him such thoughts were merely a sign of the degree to which some Russians misunderstood their own country and the value which the land possessed for the peasants. Moreover, the high degree of industrialization which he had witnessed in Europe, and of which he could find no equivalent in his native country, led him to assert that only the Russian people had preserved the natural attachment to the land.

Why so? - Because we have a principle, which still persists in the people, that land is everything to them; that they derive everything from, and out of, the land - and this is true of the overwhelming majority of the people. But the principal thing is that it is precisely the normal law of man. In the earth, in the soil, there is something sacramental. If you wish to regenerate mankind into something better, if you wish to make men virtually out of beasts - give them land, and you will achieve your purpose. At least in Russia, the land and the commune - I admit they are in a most miserable state - constitute the great nucleus of the future idea; and therein is the whole trick.¹⁴⁴

Being primarily interested in the destiny of Russia, he thought of communal life as the foundation for the universal character of the Russian people. Through this togetherness the Russians had retained the feeling of compassion and understanding for their neighbor.

The people's love of mankind, in general, would

¹⁴⁴F. Dostoevsky, "The Land and the Children," The Diary . . ., p. 418

eventually lead to the reconciliation of all the conflicting views existent in the world.¹⁴⁵

But. in order to synthesize the different views of other nations, Russia had to accomplish first the synthesis of her own national conceptions.

¹⁴⁵F. Dostoevsky, "A Peculiar Summer for Russia," (Post Scriptum), The Diary . . ., pp. 423-26.

CHAPTER VI

DOSTOEVSKY: THE INTERNAL PROBLEM OF
UNIFICATION OF THE RUSSIAN NATION

The Disunity between the Upper Class and the People

After the years spent in Siberia, Dostoevsky returned as a fanatical nationalist. There, among the simple people, he discarded his admiration for all the pomp of St. Petersburg's westernized society. The elaborate palaces and even the railroads that had been constructed with imported labor now meant nothing but a valueless facade behind which the vast Russian country with its backward customs and people was concealed.

Recognizing that the Russians lacked the necessary technical skill to compete with Western Europe, he resorted to a qualitative analysis of the Russian man. To obtain an equal position among the European family of nations, Russia had to develop her own national wealth.

It was in this search that he became aware of the Orthodox faith among the people. This finding was of special importance for him since it later constituted the bridge by which he himself and other members of the upper class could communicate with the people.

In Siberia Dostoevsky became aware of the cleavage which existed between the masses of Russia and the upper class. He described this fundamentally hostile relationship in a letter to his brother Mihail by citing the words of a common man spoken to him in prison:

"You nobles have iron beaks, you have torn us to pieces. When you were masters, you injured the people, and now, when it's evil days with you, you want to be our brothers."¹⁴⁶

There was no understanding between these two segments of Russia's population. Even in Siberia where common misery and interdependence tended setting aside the differences in human beings, the separation remained insurmountable. In this climate of antagonism, the intellectual exiles led the life of outcasts.

The personal experience of the tensions between the peasants and the intellectuals inspired him to work for a solution of the immense internal problem confronting Russia during his time. In Siberia he came to realize that the masses were so profoundly different from the Russian society that if any reforms were to benefit the Russian nation as a whole, they had to be accomplished from the national resources available to Russia.¹⁴⁷ Any effective change had to be built on the traditional Russian historical development and not on imitation of western ideas.

For him improvement could only be successful if it were acceptable to the mentality of the Russian masses and not to the whims of St. Petersburg's society.

After exposing the damaging effects which westernization had produced in Russia, Dostoevsky decided attacking the forces

¹⁴⁶Letter from F. Dostoevsky to his brother Mihail, February 22, 1854, in Yarmolinsky, p. 60.

¹⁴⁷F. Dostoevsky, "Four 'Manifestoes'," Epoch September, 1864), in Magarshack, p. 250.

which had divided the country internally. In his opinion, the national misery had not been created by the autocratic government or the Orthodox Church, but had developed with the introduction of European civilization. The disintegration of national unity had commenced in the period of Peter the Great (1672-1725), when the upper classes began to negate their native soil.¹⁴⁸ Analysing the essential factors of disunity from a Russian chauvinist position, Dostoevsky's defense of the Russian peasant became characterized by an awareness of the future role which the masses would play in Russia's history.

Back in St. Petersburg, Dostoevsky's writings began to reflect the impressions gathered during the decade of exile. His nationalism received its full expression in the periodicals Time and Epoch. In an attempt to reconcile Russia's upper society with the masses, Dostoevsky embarked on exposing the poisonous effects of western ideas.

In criticizing western civilization, he was determined to prove that the transplantation of European culture and science had failed to take roots in Russia. In his opinion, the imported culture represented a superstructure on extremely weak pillars which had been erected at the expense of the Russian serf.¹⁴⁹ Besides, the introduction of western civilization which was fundamentally contrary to the Russian nature, had only interrupted Russia's normal historical evolution. Its proponents in Russia had, thereby, caused the stagnation of the common man. Thus, in Dostoevsky's

¹⁴⁸F. Dostoevsky, The Dream of a Queer Fellow and . . ., p. 45.

¹⁴⁹F. Dostoevsky, "Four 'Manifestoes'," Time (September, 1860), in Magarshack, pp. 230-31.

analysis of the social structure, the upper class became the scapegoat for all the evils in Russia.

Although he blamed these conditions on the disinterest of the educated classes in Russia's Slavic heritage, the attack of Russia's backwardness did not emerge from a comparison with the height of western civilization but referred back to the period of Peter the Great when the slowing down in the growth of Russia's national traditions was initiated. In a sense, he even glorified Russia's backwardness as a sign of her escape from the general decadence of Europe. He thought of it as a national blessing because it resembled more the primitive Christian society.¹⁵⁰

Recognizing the cleavage between the people and the educated class as the major factor of national disunity, he failed to admit that this was not the primary cause for the unjust conditions. Having become an ardent monarchist and reactionary, Dostoevsky hesitated in exposing the Tsar as the main source of social injustice. As a matter of fact he did not search for the roots of the social evil in the autocratic system of Russia. He advocated reforms from the people themselves through spiritual means instead of demanding legislation. Concrete social reforms were replaced with an obsession of spiritual purification centered on the moral regeneration of the people.

Attacking the upper class, he not only accused them of creating the poverty, illiteracy, and backwardness in Russia; but held them even more responsible for maintaining these unhealthy conditions. The elite had to abandon their

¹⁵⁰F. Dostoevsky, The Dream of a Queer Fellow and . . ., p. 58.

privileged social position by approaching the common man as an equal.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, they had to bring these people up to their own standards by educating them.

He considered the factor of illiteracy one of the reasons for the lack of understanding which existed between the people and the upper class. Too often the educated class used their training to separate themselves from the masses. Education was a sign of distinction, a differentiation which tended to elevate the literate man to a privileged position.¹⁵²

Dostoevsky centered his nationalistic aims on the unification of the educated classes with the common people. He was confident that in the course of this rapprochement the leaders of Russia's society would discover that the masses had preserved the Russian traditions during the years in which they themselves had looked toward the West.¹⁵³

Dostoevsky firmly believed that in time the intellectuals could not fail to perceive that beneath the dirt, the drunkenness, and the poverty of the Russian masses lay hidden the richness of the pure Russian soul. It had remained uncorrupted and independent from all the decadent forces of western civilization. After two centuries of suppression it was now ready to assert itself in its own Slavic nature. From this latent power the regeneration of Russia would proceed.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹F. Dostoevsky, "Four 'Manifestoes'," in Magarshak, p. 230.

¹⁵²F. Dostoevsky, "Five Articles," Time (January, 1861), in Magarshak, pp. 71-78.

¹⁵³F. Dostoevsky, "Four 'Manifestoes'," in Magarshak, pp. 229-30.

¹⁵⁴F. Dostoevsky, The Dream of a Queer Fellow..., pp. 39-42.

Dostoevsky's Slavophil Conceptions as an Argument against the Westerners' Idea

By the middle of the nineteenth century Russia was still ruled by the official principles of autocracy, nationalism, and Orthodoxy. Nicholas I had shown his determination to prevent the penetration of liberal ideas into his country by enforcing the most rigid laws of censorship. During his reign every form of opposition was countered with utmost brutality. The manner in which the Decembrist Revolt in 1825 had been suppressed served the Russian people as a reminder of the unwillingness with which the Tsar approached the proposals for a change of the status quo.

The intellectuals who had participated in the Decembrist Revolt had been influenced by the ideas of French humanitarianism and Britain's constitutional form of government. Their demands for a representative government in Russia and the abolition of serfdom had remained unanswered. Nicholas I responded to the pressure by executing large numbers of the participants even though most of them belonged to the aristocratic class of Russia.

The liquidation of the old intellectuals in 1825 created a vacuum which in time brought about the rise of commoners to intellectual leadership. The ranks of the traditionally aristocratic elite became open to people from various social backgrounds. The new intelligentsia of Russia often did not share the aristocracy's understanding and love for European culture. These men found themselves in a position which corresponded neither to the conceptions of the nobility nor to those of the common people. Facing the issue of pro or anti-Western sentiment, the intellectuals split into the Slavophil and the Westerner faction.

The Westerners continued the pro-European orientation of the former period. They believed that the autocratic government and the Orthodox Church were responsible for prolonging Russia's primitive agrarian society. Nicholas I was reproached for not recognizing Russia's essential unity with the West. Progress had to be accelerated through the development of European technical skills and the adoption of science.

The Westerners refuted the reactionary position advanced by the Slavophiles. They accused the Slavophiles of indulging in sentimental ideas about Russia's past. In their opinion a return to Russia's Slavic traditions constituted a retrogressive movement which desired the revival of primitive and barbaric customs.

The Slavophil movement, however, developed as an opposition to western culture in Russia. Their followers demanded a return to the national heritage. The two hundred years of westernization had to be discarded since the imported culture represented an artificially nurtured development which failed to extend its roots into the Russian soil. Being above all chauvinistic Russophiles, they turned to their native land for inspiration.

On the national front, the Slavophil philosophy concurred with the official interpretation. It was characterized by a reactionary outlook. In foreign affairs, however, the Slavophiles deviated from the Tsar's policy. They objected to the commitment of the Tsar to the "principle of legitimacy" which was established at the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

The disagreement of the Slavophiles with the Tsar developed over the Balkan issue. Although the Slavophiles were loyal supporters of the established order, their concern for the Slavic nations brought them into conflict with the official foreign policy of the government. Their plea for a revision of the official attitude toward national liberation movements in the Balkans remained unanswered.

In vain they pointed to the absurdity of supporting the Western European powers at the expense of the Slavic people. For them, Russia's future rested not on alliances with the European nations but with the Slavic peoples outside the Russian Empire.

Dostoevsky shared the Slavophile's conservative outlook which manifested itself in the desire to preserve the old traditional Russian customs. His affinity to the Slavophiles was further based on the common contempt for western civilization. In time the extreme glorification of the Russian common man established his reputation as the most outspoken Slavophile.

He rejected all western influence in Russia and he severely criticized those who supported westernization. But he never advocated the use of violence to eliminate the penetration of western ideas. Appealing to the Russians who turned to the West, he reverted to persuasion with the intention to convince them that their native land was a far greater source of inspiration.

Reasoning from the premises that the Westerners were essentially Russian nationalists, he intended to convince

them that they were taking the wrong approach toward strengthening Russia. It became one of his main tasks to show that the backward civilization of Russia had the potential to develop into a universal civilization. For a short while his attempt of achieving unity among the intellectuals seemed to have become reality. The Pushkin Speech delivered by Dostoevsky in 1880 in Moscow was acclaimed by the Slavophiles and the Westerners as a unique manifestation of Russian nationalism. Both factions of the intellectuals seemed to be willing to unite in the sentiment of nationalism.

The understanding, however, was not for a long period of time since Dostoevsky, who considered a union imperative, refused to grant any concessions to the Westerners. He was convinced of the infallibility of the Slavophiles' view on Russia's internal affairs. The resources for Russia's future aggrandizement had to come from the native heritage. Insisting on unification on Slavophil terms, Dostoevsky would have never conceived of the idea of scrutinizing his own conceptions in an effort to reach mutual agreement. He was determined in his demands that the Westerners accept the independence of the Russian spirit and the Russian national characteristic of being simultaneously Russian and universal.¹⁵⁵

Starting from the premises that the Westerners loved their native country, Dostoevsky proceeded to analyse the underlying reason for their attraction to western ideas. In his opinion their mental association with the leftist movement in Europe signified a sign of hatred rather than

¹⁵⁵F. Dostoevsky, The Dream of a Queer Fellow and . . ., p. 42.

love for the existing civilization of the western world. The Russians manifested their instinctive aversion against everything European by favoring socialism. By praising the revolutionary forces in Europe, the Westerners negated the existing order in Europe. For Dostoevsky this trend constituted the best proof that the Westerners had remained fundamentally true Russians. By accepting ideas which were directed at the overthrow of the European system, they had unconsciously disclosed their real Russian soul.¹⁵⁶

Furthermore, Dostoevsky asserted that the profound contempt which the European nations felt for Russia arose from the alignment of the Westerners with those factions in Europe who worked for the destruction of the status quo.

The Europeans, of course, failed to recognize why the Westerners were predominantly inclined to favor the socialist aims. They considered this characteristic as the natural Russian disposition toward destruction. They accused the Russians of being barbarians who took pleasure in the thought of aiding in the extermination of the West. They could not, however, imagine that the Russians were unconsciously drawn into opposition by the very fact that they were Russians. Blinded by hatred, the Europeans had overlooked the essential fact that those Russian Westerners who supported the leftist camp were not barbaric beings who were interested in annihilation, but men who merely desired to accelerate the end of prevailing conditions in hope of a better future.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶F. Dostoevsky, "My Paradox," The Diary . . ., p. 352.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.; pp. 351-54.

The Russians, consequently, turned to Europe not from a desire to imitate but with the intent of revolutionizing the inferior system. In this desire their Russian spirit manifested itself. The paradox, however, was that these liberal Westerners who turned to alien conceptions were not aware of their subconscious motives. They considered themselves to be followers of the West, while in reality they had remained sincere Russians.¹⁵⁸

From examining the article "My Paradox," from which the above thoughts were taken, it is more than obvious that Dostoevsky substantiated his theory from arguments which were not only farfetched but appeared rather unconvincing. It seems that his love for Russia prevented him from being impartial. Since he was a political convert, he tended to adhere more fanatically to his new convictions.

His desire to minimize the anti-Russian position of the liberals in the first half of the nineteenth century was evident from the fact that he used Belinsky as an example for his assertion. For Dostoevsky, Belinsky's conflict with the Slavophiles represented in reality only a superficial disagreement. Recognizing Belinsky's ardent patriotism, Dostoevsky jumped to the conclusion that he too had been a hater of western civilization who had joined the ranks of the socialists to promote revolution in the West.¹⁵⁹

Belinsky himself, however, described his change from liberalism as follows:

Thus now I have switched over to a new extreme - the idea of socialism, which

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 352

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 354

had become for me the idea of ideas, the essence of being, the question of questions, the Alpha and Omega of Faith and Knowledge.... Everything derives from it, exists for it, and goes toward it. It has (for me) absorbed history, religion and philosophy.... . . . That is why France, England or Germany, people who have never met, complete strangers, can feel their kinship But we are people without a fatherland - no, worse than that, we are people whose fatherland is a ghost.... Social solidarity (Sotsialnost) or death! that is my motto.... what good is it to me that a genius on earth lives in heaven, when the crowd wallows in filth? 160

Dostoevsky failed to realize that Belinsky, although a sincere patriot, had not been carried away by emotional nationalism. He, similar to Dostoevsky, embraced the illusion of the universal superiority of the Russian man, crediting him with a capacity to higher national perfection than any other people in the world. Belinsky, however, would have never accepted the role of the Orthodox Church in the same manner as Dostoevsky. For Belinsky the Church and its teachings had served only as a hindrance to Russia's development.¹⁶¹

The intention of Dostoevsky to present Belinsky as a Russian conservative was apparently motivated by the desire to prove that his own liberal position in the pre-Siberian years had actually been conservatism. It was of personal importance for Dostoevsky to show that all Westerners who expressed an interest for Europe were in

¹⁶⁰ Belinsky, quoted in Hare, p. 45.

¹⁶¹ Hare, p. 52.

reality concerned with improving conditions in Russia. Although they had not yet found their true identity, Dostoevsky was confident that the Westerners would ultimately discover their essential Russianism and openly profess it.¹⁶²

In describing the paradox which existed in the political conceptions of the Russian liberals, he hoped to imply that his attraction to the socialist circles of St. Petersburg during the forties had in reality been the expression of his Russian soul.

Whereas his eyes were opened in Siberia, he considered it now to be his duty to point the way to the road of national identity to those who were still living with this error.

Dostoevsky carefully differentiated between the Westerners who lived in Russia and showed a favorable disposition toward European ideals and those Russian Westerners who had abandoned the land and taken up residence abroad. The departure from Russia was for Dostoevsky an unpardonable crime. It meant the total acceptance of western civilization. He considered these individuals lost for the Russian cause. They were traitors who had betrayed their native soil by exchanging Europe for Russia.

Politically they deviated from the Russian liberal line by associating with the European conservatives who were interested in perpetuating the status quo in Europe. They had openly demonstrated their hatred for Russia by joining the conservative camp. Through this transition they ceased to remain Russians. Renouncing the Russian heritage

¹⁶²F. Dostoevsky, "Deduction from My Paradox," (June, 1876), The Diary . . ., p. 357.

and the spirit of revolt embedded in their soul, they had become enemies of their country.¹⁶³

Desiring to judge the pro-Western liberals among the Russians as future converts to Slavophilism, it was of vital importance to him to assert that they had retained their national character. To leave the door toward unification open, Dostoevsky insisted that the Westerners had become sympathizers of Western leftist thought because their instinct had dictated them to revolt against the decadent civilization.

In a word, we are revolutionists, so to speak, because of some personal necessity - if you please, by reason of conservatism.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

DOSTOEVSKY'S CONCEPTIONS OF THE MESSIANIC
MISSION OF RUSSIA

In Dostoevsky's exposition of the negative effects which the reforms of Peter the Great had left in Russia, he managed to view one positive aspect which the contact with the West had produced.

He felt that the acquaintance of the Russian people with western civilization had broadened their horizon. The familiarization with European ideas resulted in an understanding of Europe's ideals and its history.

Although the Russian people obtained a profound knowledge of European ideas they did not accept western civilization or western morality. Realizing the decadent stage of Europe, the Russian people became aware of their universal mission and the importance of saving the West.¹⁶⁵

The time of Peter the Great's reforms was regarded by Dostoevsky as the period which terminated Russia's seclusion from the rest of the world. The Russian people of the pre-Petrine era had lived in unity. The preservation of the Orthodox faith had equipped them with one of the rarest possessions in a decaying world. While the rest of the world had lost true religion, Russia had retained Christianity in its original meaning. In fear that this

¹⁶⁵F. Dostoevsky, "The Utopian Conception of History," (May, 1876), The Diary . . ., p. 361.

Christian truth might become corrupted through contact with the West, Russia had kept herself in isolation.¹⁶⁶ Inspired by the Orthodox truth, she did not need any other enlightenment.¹⁶⁷

When the penetration of western civilization began during the period of Peter the Great some Russians feared that this contact might distort or even destroy the Russian truth. Certain groups of the intellectual class had feared that Russia could become subject to the general pattern of western European countries.

But the "window" that was opened toward the West had quite a contrary effect. It showed the Russians that the West had to be enlightened by Russia's truth. It prepared the Russian people for their mission by awakening the desire in them to serve mankind. This love of humanity Dostoevsky interpreted in the following lines:

He who wishes to be first in the Kingdom of God must become a servant to everybody. This is how I understand the Russian mission in its ideal.¹⁶⁸

Although the mission was to be carried primarily by the Russians, Dostoevsky hoped to persuade the Slavic people of the Balkans to support Russia's aims.

Thus he did not consider this consolidation in terms of a conquest. The Slavic nations would retain

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 360-61.

¹⁶⁷ F. Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Queer Fellow* and . . . , p. 67.

¹⁶⁸ F. Dostoevsky, "The Utopian Conception of History," The Diary . . ., p. 362.

their individuality and Russia would not hinder their independent development. The unification under the "wings of Russia" would assure that the Slavic people, after their liberation from Moslem oppression, would confront Europe on the side of Russia and help to spread the Orthodox truth.¹⁶⁹

To support his claim of the peaceful relations which the Russians intended to establish with the Slavic peoples outside the Empire, Dostoevsky pointed to the protective role which Russia had exhibited in the Balkans.

He praised the Russians for their willingness to help the subjugated Balkan people which he related to Russia's own experience with oppression:

But, probably, such is their nature as Slavs, that is, their ability to rise spiritually in suffering, to gain political strength under oppression, and - amidst slavery and humiliation - to unite in mutual affection and Christ's truth.¹⁷⁰

Thus, Dostoevsky was trying to impress the thought of a pan-Slavic communion on the Slavic nationalities by using the Orthodox faith as a unifying factor. Besides, he hoped that the awareness of the common parenthood of the Slavic peoples and the cultural affinity which had given rise to pan-Slavic trends, would favor such a union.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 364-65.

¹⁷⁰F. Dostoevsky, "A Peculiar Summer For Russia," The Diary . . ., p. 425.

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 424.

Whether Pan-Slavism was supported by the ideas of messianism as professed by Dostoevsky, political conquest, or humanitarianism; the underlying factor was that the Russians who thought in Pan-Slav terms interpreted Russia's intervention in the Balkans as an historical mission.

Among the Pan-Slavists who expressed an Orthodox view on the Balkan question, the city of Constantinople represented the focal point. The most fanatical thoughts in this direction were proposed in the writings of Dostoevsky, since for him the capture of Constantinople signified the starting point for the messianic mission of Russia.

The special meaning which he attributed to this city must be understood through the historical facts¹⁷² and their interpretation by him:

. . . and the last of the Palaeologi appears in the Kingdom of Russia with a double-headed eagle for her dowry; the Russian wedding; Ivan III in his wooden hut, instead of a palace, and into this wooden hut passes the great ideal of the pan-Orthodox significance of Russia, and there is laid the first stone of the future hegemony of the East; there the circle of Russia's future destinies is extended; there is laid down the idea not only of a great state, but of a whole new world, which is destined to renew Christianity by the pan-Slav, pan-Orthodox idea and to introduce a new idea to mankind.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Ivan III (1462-1505), married Sophia Palaeologi, the niece of the last Byzantine emperor. Since Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453 the thought emerged that the Russian Tsar was the lawful heir to the throne of Byzantium.

¹⁷³ Letter from F. Dostoevsky to A.N. Maikov, May 15, 1869, in Koteliansky and Murry, p. 74.

On the capture of Constantinople the salvation of Europe depended. Without this conquest Russia could not fulfill her world mission. Western decadence with its materialistic and atheistic order could only be abolished by the purification power of the Orthodox faith.

In contrast to Dostoevsky, some Pan-Slavists regarded the conquest of Constantinople -- for its strategic position-- a political necessity. As long as the metropolis remained under Turkish domination Russia's navigation routes from the Black Sea were subject to foreign control. The possession of the Straits was of vital importance to the strengthening of Russia's sea power and to her influence in the Mediterranean.

With the new concentration on the Near East in the seventies, the pan-Slav ideas on the political role of Constantinople were best represented by the famous Russian diplomat Count Nicholas Ignatiev.¹⁷⁴ Ignatiev persistently worked toward the establishment of Russia's control over Constantinople. He visualized Russia's expansion in the Balkans as the most expedient means of territorial acquisition.¹⁷⁵ He also foresaw the future conflict with Austria over the Balkan partition. Motivated by a fundamental hostility toward Europe, Ignatiev worked for the sole imperialistic aggrandizement of Russia.

In contrast to Ignatiev, Dostoevsky's Pan-Slavism was motivated not by political objectives, but by a messianic

¹⁷⁴ Ignatiev, diplomat and imperialist, was sent by Tsar Alexander II to Constantinople as Ambassador during the seventies.

¹⁷⁵ Frank Fadner, Seventy Years of Pan-Slavism in Russia (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1962), p. 299.

concept. Whereas Ignatiev represented the official imperialistic view, Dostoevsky's proposals exhibited theocratical ideas. Both men helped to spread a pro-Russian atmosphere in the Balkans though their objectives differed in content. Dostoevsky always upheld the principle of Orthodox guidance. Ignatiev, on the other hand, worked exclusively for the idea of a Pan-Slav Tsardom.¹⁷⁶ In their conceptions on Russia's right to independent action they ostentatiously disregarded European opinion.

Dostoevsky's Pan-Slavism tended to correspond more to the ideas of the prominent Slavophil Nikolai Danilevsky.¹⁷⁷ Both men embraced concurring opinions on the Balkan question, although Danilevsky rejected the messianic mission which preoccupied Dostoevsky's mind.

Danilevsky further differed from Dostoevsky in that he believed in the right of self-determination of every historically cultural civilization.¹⁷⁸ He denied the concept of a common civilization and thereby disagreed with Dostoevsky's vision of Russian universalism.

Their political affinity rested on the conception that the Balkan Slavs did essentially belong to the Russian hemisphere.

In their adoration of Russia they both believed that Europe's civilization was distinct and alien to their country.

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

¹⁷⁷Danilevsky (1822-1895), Russian philosopher and naturalist who became the theoretician of the Slavophil doctrine.

¹⁷⁸Fadner, p. 321.

The Russo-Turkish conflict in the nineteenth century fortified Dostoevsky's idea that the Orthodox world mission depended on the conquest of the metropolis. In his Orthodox megalomania, Russia's hegemony in the Near East represented a necessity. A unified Slavdom with Constantinople as the center of the Eastern world would become Russia's assurance for the success of her historical mission.¹⁷⁹

Dostoevsky's optimism in Russia's ultimate victory received a decisive set back when the Russian army during the Russo-Turkish War (1876-77) failed to conquer Constantinople. With the intervention of the European nations Russia had to abandon her campaign and submit to the provision of the Berlin Congress. Europe's pro-Ottoman sentiment became for Dostoevsky the final proof of antagonism.

The failure to conquer Constantinople temporarily shattered Dostoevsky's dream of Russia's messianic mission. Without the possession of the metropolis the myth of the Third Rome lacked the force to convince the peoples of Europe that Russia had preserved the heritage of the Eastern Empire.

Recognizing the futility of Russia's expansion in the Near East, Dostoevsky for a time dismissed the idea of carrying the Orthodox mission to Europe. In his frustration he turned to Asia as a possible area for Russian expansion. He believed that the peoples of Asia would consider the

¹⁷⁹F. Dostoevsky, "Peace Rumors. Constantinople Must Be Ours. - Is This Possible? Different Opinions," The Diary . . ., pp. 902-908.

Russian man not as a backward barbaric peasant, but as the carrier of a superior universal civilization. Dostoevsky regarded the absence of prejudice in Asia as a factor which would facilitate an assimilation with Russia.¹⁸⁰

Toward the end of his life, Dostoevsky's belief in Russia's messianic mission assumed the proportions of a global idea. In his ultimate vision of the world both Asia and Europe had to be enlightened by the Russian Orthodox faith. Convinced of the universal character of the Russian idea, Dostoevsky prophesied the rise of the East as the final evolution of humanity.

¹⁸⁰F. Dostoevsky, "Questions and Answers," (January, 1881), The Diary . . ., pp. 1048-52.

CONCLUSION

As a national prophet and a man who had dedicated his life to disclosing the greatness of the Russian people, Dostoevsky undoubtedly remains unequalled in his efforts to bring internal unity and stability to Russia.

Looking at his historical conceptions from a retrospective position, his insistence on using the Christian ethical ideal as a guiding principle seemed to have been dominated by a sense of premonition of the course which history would take if Orthodoxy became replaced by socialist morality.

Believing, however, in the final victory of the Christian rather than the socialist ideal, Dostoevsky could not have imagined that the universal mission which he attributed to the Russian people would manifest itself in form of an international movement headed not by Christ, but by the Anti-Christ.

Will Russia, at present the promoter of international communism, return to the path as shown by Dostoevsky? A question of such proportions, affecting East and West alike, remains to be answered.

Therefore man, living in the age of nuclear warfare where the possibility of annihilation is ever present, should recognize that the Christian ideals preached by Dostoevsky contained not only a message for the Russian nation, but for all mankind.

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