

Dostoevsky on immortality of the soul and unearthly Paradise

“Now suppose that there is no God, and no personal immortality (personal immortality and God are one and the same an identical idea). Tell me then: Why am I to live decently and do good, if I die irrevocably here below? ... And if that’s really so ... why should I not kill, rob, steal, or at any rate live at the expense of others? For I shall die, and all the rest will die and utterly vanish!” (from the letter to Nikolai Osmidov of February 1878).¹

Fyodor Dostoevsky, who wrote his last novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, in 1878 was convinced at the time that a man of high awareness (not a “flower” or “cow”) who does not believe in the immortality of the human soul must inevitably arrive at the idea of “logical suicide.”² Interestingly, nearly ten years earlier he created his most devilish character, Alexei Kirillov from *The Possessed*, believer in and spokesman for the identical stance. This unfulfilled engineer and constructor of bridges (it is worth remembering that Dostoevsky himself was a trained engineer), who in despair rejected any thought on the existence of life beyond the limit of physical death, intended to build – in quite a physical sense – eternal life on earth that would have a pre-mortal form and thus would not have to be preceded by the fact of resurrection. Kirillov believed in “eternal

1 *Letters of Fyodor Michalyovitch Dostoevsky to his Family and Friends*. Trans. by E.C. Mayne, London: Chatto and Windus, 1917, p. 222.

2 F. Dostoevsky, *A Writer’s Diary*, vol. 1: 1873-1876. Trans. by K. Lantz, Evanstone (Illinois): Northwestern University Press, 1997, p. 653–656.

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life here” and not in “future eternal life.”³ At the same time, as a modern Prometheus, he burns a candle in front of the icon of the Saviour because he considers him a man “loftiest of all on earth.” However – and this was the foundation of his tragic-heroic worldview – he could not believe in Christ’s personal resurrection. And he thus talked to young Verkhovensky:

“there was a day on earth, and in the midst of the earth there stood three crosses. One on the Cross had such faith that he said to another, ‘To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.’ The day ended; both died and passed away and found neither Paradise nor resurrection. His words did not come true. Listen: that Man was the loftiest of all on earth, He was that which gave meaning to life. The whole planet, with everything on it, is mere madness without that Man. There has never been any like Him before or since, never, up to a miracle. For that is the miracle, that there never was or never will be another like Him. And if that is so, if the laws of nature did not spare even Him, have not spared even their miracle and made even Him live in a lie and die for a lie, then all the planet is a lie and rests on a lie and on mockery. So then, the very laws of the planet are a lie and the vaudeville of devils.”⁴

In order not to fall into the religious scepticism himself and not to commit suicide out of despair, Kirillov had to object to the idea of “former God,” and then perform the act of rationalization of his rebellion. “I have no higher idea than disbelief in God”,⁵ since the traditional, and in fact “fictional God” did not live up to his great promise as he did not offer people personal immortality. One should place oneself in an empty spot because it is only then that the paradise on earth will come into being where there will be no evil and people will live there “as gods.” Still, as Kirillov argued, rejecting traditional God is extremely difficult and must end with an act of tragedy. The proof of the demise of God will only assume validity when it is supported by the suicide of the one who rejects him. The theory of eschatological suicide that Kirillov preached had thus nothing to do with the suicide out of despair, since after it had been accomplished it led to new life:

“But I will assert my will, I am bound to believe that I don’t believe. I will begin and will make an end of it and open the door, and will save. *That’s the only thing that will save mankind and will re-create the next generation physically* [emphasis mine – G.P.]; for with his present physical nature man can’t get on without his former God, I believe. For three years I’ve been seeking for the attribute of my godhead and I’ve found it; the attribute of my godhead is self-will!... I am killing myself to prove my independence and my new terrible freedom.”⁶

3 F. Dostoevsky, *The Possessed, or the Devils. A Novel in Three Parts*. Trans. C. Garnett. New York: Vintage, 1916, p. 238.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 639–640.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 639.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 640.

Kirillov, like no other hero of Dostoevsky's, thus rivalled God at the eschatological level; it was only him who transferred his dispute with the Creator to the sphere of the struggle to achieve an individual immortality for all human beings. Even Ludwig Feuerbach, the promoter and worshipper of the idea of natural man-god, never dared to declare the necessity to cast physical death into oblivion. And thus Kirillov, created by Dostoevsky, may be the best proof of the way that European ideas assumed an existential, Apocalyptic dimension when transplanted to Russia. The act of "correcting God" was to constitute a justification of the claim from the Book of Genesis that everything that God had created was good. The eschatological suicide as the tragic first step on the road towards transforming man into god turned into the eighth and most important day of Creation. Dostoevsky's protagonist also declared the possibility to stop time only thanks to man's earthly efforts since time was only a "subjective idea" that unnecessarily kills people. The new man-god must destroy the idea of time himself in order to bring to life the principal prediction of the Apocalypse: "In the Apocalypse the angel swears that there will be no more time."⁷ And the "lack of time" indeed means the eternal personal existence in history. While in the Revealed Word immortality was guaranteed by the resurrection of God-Man, in Kirillov's project it was to be the consequence of the individual, first and last eschatological suicide of the man-god. Kirillov drew conclusions from this for the ethics in the time prior to the final transformation of man and the world. Before the suicide, as he explained to Shatov, everything was "good," that is "indifferent." When somebody breaks their head in retaliation for the harm done to their child, it will be just as good as if he did not do it, just like "when somebody dies of hunger" "or "harms and disgraces a girl." In the world ruled by death, everything is "good" and everything "is allowed." That is why Kirillov agrees to bargain with Pyotr Verkhovensky, although he sincerely hates him. After all, today everything "is good," but tomorrow, when the first day without death comes, young Verkhovensky "will be crushed" like a slimeball.⁸ For the time being, however, Prometheus and the man-god *in spe* operates conforming to the slimeball's order, for the sake of it if not for any other reason. Paradise starts tomorrow.

Constructing the image of the protagonist, the author endowed him with traits resembling his own, which turned Kirillov into a mystically inspired preacher of personal immortality, which he understood in the spirit of immanence, however – alien to Dostoevsky. The writer himself naturally never believed in the possibility of attaining individual eternal existence within the biological and historical immanence, although he was firmly convinced that without personal immortality the whole human life along with science and other human activities would be totally senseless. According to the author of *The Possessed* the genuine adversary of God first of all had to defeat physical death. Dostoevsky was convinced that Kirillov's image was not the product of his creative imagination, but reflected the principal features

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 238; cf. Rev 10,6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 641.

and objectives of 19th-century Russian atheists, wishing to redeem the world with their own hands. The influence of Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums* is also mentioned – the Russian anti-theists of the 1840s jumped one over another to get hold of the work and who did not know German he was told its gist. Still, apart from various significant correspondences with the program of Russian contemporary anti-theists, Kirillov's plan clearly surpassed its time. After all, even Feuerbach finally accepted the fact that a human being dies irreversibly as a person and then only lives in nature and in the memory of his family and friends. Could Dostoevsky then have imposed his own problems on Kirillov and asked him to solve them in a fierce struggle with Christian God? Nothing of the kind. The writer did not extrapolate his own existential worries onto the Russian anti-theists, but in a flash of genius he managed to predict the future development of secularized eschatologism in Russia. When he created the character of Kirillov, he did not know yet the doctrine of Nikolai Fyodorov (1829–1903), who by the end of the 1870s developed a Promethean Project of Resurrecting Deceased Fathers. This was to be the scientific and technological process that would allow “to manage all the molecules and atoms of the external world in order to collect what has been scattered, and reunite what has been decomposed into the bodies of the fathers which they had when they were dying.”⁹ Dostoevsky's genius, however, consisted primarily in that in Kirillov's figure he predicted the logical development of Marxism and quasi-Marxism in Russia. Alexander Solzhenitsyn said in 1993 in Lichtenstein that the principal misfortunes of the world result from the modern conviction which forces one to treat the death of an individual as the end of the whole universe.¹⁰ “Après moi le déluge” – as one of the protagonists of *The Idiot*, the mortally ill Hyppolite Terentyev, said. The roots of the ethical egoism, according to Solzhenitsyn, were hidden in the Enlightenment and Marxism. Such a claim would probably meet with a reluctance of many an orthodox Marxist, for instance Georgi Plekhanov, who considered the death of an individual to be natural, and even to be an organic enrichment of the universe. But Solzhenitsyn was right, although he did not attempt a logical proof of his claim. The intuition of death as an inextricable element of physical universe was a central claim only of classical Marxism. Solzhenitsyn, however, believed that it was the practices of Russian Bolshevism, and thus both Leninism and Stalinism, that were a true test of the ideology. And he is absolutely right with regard to their approach to personal death. In the USSR there was a constant conviction that death will exist until science does not put an end to it. As late as in the early 1960s, Komsomolskaya Pravda assured its readers that death will end around the year 2000.

The great objective of Kirillov's – attaining personal immortality – was also the aim of Dostoevsky himself, at least from the period of his imprisonment in the hard

9 *Философия общего дела. Статьи, мысли и письма*, изданные под редакцией В.А. Кожевникова и Н.П. Петерсона, vol. 1, Верный 1906, p. 442.

10 А. Солженицын, “На пороге нового тысячелетия: политика, нравственность, прогресс”, *Русская мысль*, 1993, no 3997, p. 16–17.

labour camp in Omsk in Siberia and the forced exile in Semipalatinsk in Kazakhstan (1850-1859). Already in January 1850, while still imprisoned in the fortress of Tobolsk, the writer received a copy of the Gospels from the wife of a Decembrist, Natalia Fonvizina, which he then preserved and treasured for the rest of his life. Soon after his imprisonment ended, he wrote a letter to his benefactor, which since then has been one of the most important sources defining the essence of the contemporary outlook:

“I want to say to you that there are moments when one does, ‘like dry grass’¹¹, thirst for faith, and that one finds it in the end, solely and simply because one sees the truth more clearly when one is unhappy. I want to say to you, about myself, that I am a child of this age, a child of unfaith and scepticism, and probably (indeed I know it) shall remain so to the end of my life. How dreadfully has it tormented me (and torments me even now) this longing for faith, which is all the stronger for the proofs I have against it. And yet God gives me sometimes moments of perfect peace; ... in such moments I have formulated my creed, wherein all is clear and holy to me. ... there is nothing lovelier, deeper, more sympathetic, more rational, more manly, and more perfect than the Saviour; I say to myself with jealous love that not only is there no one else like Him, but that there could be no one. I would even say more: If anyone could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth really did exclude Christ, I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with truth.”¹²

Thus the great scepticism of Kirillov, referring primarily to the faith in personal resurrection of Christ, was also partly the scepticism of Dostoevsky himself. The polyphony of his novels, discovered by Bakhtin, had its deepest roots in the tension within the outlook of the writer himself, who was torn between the hope for eternal life and grim scepticism. “If anyone could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth really did exclude Christ, I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with truth” – what could that mean? Let us push aside two explanations which present themselves nearly automatically. The first one says that Dostoevsky’s Christ did not have a universal nature, but was solely a Russian Christ. Still, the letter to Fonvizina was written more than 20 years prior to *A Writer’s Diary*, and the writer was then far from his later nationalistic ideas. Secondly, it would be natural to offer the explanation that Dostoevsky could understand “truth” to be the atheistic and rationalistic “truth” of the people of the 1940s. If it were the case, it would not be much of a problem for the writer, since while writing his letter, he had no doubt which side of the “truth” he was to adhere to. Where did the above-mentioned tension come from and why did Dostoevsky prefer to stay with Christ than with the truth (without quotation marks)? The answer is possible precisely in the context of the figure of Kirillov. The truth, Dostoevsky believed, consisted solely in personal

¹¹ Cf. Ps 102(101), 5, 12; Iz 42,15.

¹² *Letters of Fyodor Michalyovitch Dostoevsky to his Family and Friends*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1917, p. 67.

resurrection of Christ, which in his opinion was not absolutely certain in view of the scepticism of human *ratio*. In Dostoevsky's notes from 1860-62 we can find the following confession:

“The miracle of resurrection was deliberately made for us so that it would later serve as a temptation, but one must believe, for precisely this temptation (to stop believing) will be the measure of faith.”¹³

What can be concluded from that, which was observed by Czesław Miłosz in his discussion of Dostoevsky, is that childish faith has not been possible on earth for long since genuine trust in life after death always demands the heroic passage through the “fire of doubt.”¹⁴ Since even the founder of Christianity did not impose his point of view on people,¹⁵ Dostoevsky – contrary to what he then had done to Kirillov – preferred to abandon the truth if only it turned out in his awareness to be external to Christ. In other words, if Jesus had not risen from the dead, seeking this path independently by a human being would turn out to be, as the writer's intuition told him, the cause of even greater calamities than the abandoning of resurrection.¹⁶ But in Dostoevsky's world – thus contrary to Miłosz¹⁷ – we have at the same time a clear distinction of the horizontal “Paradise of Christ” and unearthly “Paradise of God the Father.” He contrasted the Paradise of Christ, which is to find its fulfilment as universal brotherhood on earth, and “rational egoism” of the Enlightenment people, which, as he thought, could only lead to the earthly “kingdom of Baal.” The Paradise of Christ – referred to in *A Writer's Diary* from 1881 as “our Russian socialism” and “universal unification in the name of Christ”¹⁸ – was for the writer only the crowning of the earthly life of man, and at the same time the necessary prelude to the unearthly existence:

“It is completely senseless to attain such a great goal [Paradise of Christ – G.P.], if, upon attaining it, everything is extinguished and disappears, that is if man will no longer have life when he attains the goal. Consequently, there is a future life in paradise. ... Antichrists are wrong when they reject Christianity on the basis of the

13 Ф.М. Достоевский, *Полное собрание сочинений в тридцати томах*, vol. 20: *Статьи и заметки*, Ленинград: Наука, 1980, p. 152.

14 С. Miłosz, *Ziemia Ulro*, Kraków: Znak, 1994, p. 72.

15 Ф.М. Достоевский, *Полное собрание сочинений в тридцати томах*, vol. 20: *Статьи и заметки*, p. 156.

16 The writer, who eagerly desired personal immortality, had also moments of severe doubt, e.g. when in Basel he looked at the painting by Holbein the Younger, “Dead Christ”: “From such a painting the faith can perish.” А.Г. Достоевская, *Воспоминания*, Москва: Художественная литература, 1981, p. 437.

17 “Dostoevsky was, so to say, deprived of God the Father and his only hope was to stick to Christ”, С. Miłosz, *Ziemia Ulro*, p. 69.

18 Ф.М. Достоевский, *Полное собрание сочинений в тридцати томах*, vol. 27: *Дневник писателя 1881. Автобиографическое*. *Dubia*, Ленинград: Наука, 1984, p. 19.

question “Why doesn’t Christianity rule on the earth if it is true; why does man still suffer and does not become a brother for his fellow man?” But it is clear why, after all. This is an ideal of a future ultimate life of man, while on earth man is in the state of transition. This will come, but only after attaining the goal, when man finally transforms, according to laws of nature, into a different nature that will not marry or desire. Christ himself preached this only as an ideal, since he himself prophesized that until the end of the world there will be struggle and development (teaching on the sword),¹⁹ because this is the law of nature that life on earth develops, and that there is a full synthetic being ... for whom it is obvious that “there will be no more time.”²⁰

Dostoevsky added that suprahistorical God (and God the Father was meant here, not Christ) is “the full synthesis of all being, scrutinising itself in multiplicity, in analysis,” while man “goes from multiplicity to *synthesis*, from facts to their generalization and comprehension.”²¹ In Dostoevsky’s terminology this meant the “Paradise of Christ” as an introduction to a “future life in Paradise.” But the writer often asked himself the question whether a man who was on this side of eternity could have any, even a rough idea of “unearthly Paradise.” In *Crime and Punishment* Svidrigailov expressed his fear that eternity – which seemed to everyone to be a “vast idea,” impossible to comprehend by the human mind, may in fact turn out to be an off-putting “one little room” or something like “a bathhouse in the country, black and grimy” with disgusting spiders around its dirty corners.²² Prince Myshkin from *The Idiot* imagined Paradise completely differently, convinced that his illness (epilepsy) – and in fact not the illness itself, but the short moment preceding the attack (known as aura) and the first second of the attack – takes man into eternity, and “such extreme consciousness of myself, and consequently more of life than at other times.”²³ In a sane state, Myshkin often believed that “these moments of extreme consciousness” were due to a disease. This is why they could not result from the influence of “Higher Power,” but on the contrary – they turned human life into a “lower kind of life.” Still the protagonist of *The Idiot* rejected the rationalistic scepticism and human common sense:

“What matter though it be only disease, an abnormal tension of the brain, if when I recall and analyze the moment, it seems to have been one of harmony and beauty in the highest degree ... the highest synthesis of life.”²⁴

19 “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth: it is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword” (Mt 10,34).

20 Ф.М. Достоевский, *Полное собрание сочинений в тридцати томах*, vol. 20: *Статьи и заметки*, Ленинград: Наука 1980, p. 173–174.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 174.

22 *Crime and Punishment*. Transl. by C. Garnett. Modern Library: New York, 1932, p. 213.

23 *The Idiot*, Transl. E. Martin, MacMillan: New York, 1915, p. 409.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 409.

The “inexpressible second,” or beginning of epilepsy, in the Prince’s understanding, constituted the fulfilment of the apocalyptic promise that “there shall be no more time.” This was also the same moment that, according to the description in Koran, allowed the epileptic Mahomet to “visit all the dwellings of Allah, in less time than was needed to empty his pitcher of water.”²⁵ A contemporary report has been preserved which also confirms that the writer considered epilepsy to be a “holy disease.” Having exclaimed “God exists!”, Dostoevsky would add:

“Mahomet assures us in his Koran that he saw Paradise and visited it. All wise fools are convinced that he is a simple fool and liar. But he is not! He does not lie! He indeed was in Paradise during his epileptic fit, from which he suffered just like I do.”²⁶

Kirillov in *The Possessed* similarly described his own eschatological tension to Ivan Shatov:

“...what’s most awful is that it’s terribly clear and such joy. If it lasted more than five seconds, the soul could not endure it and must perish. In those five seconds I live through a lifetime, and I’d give my whole life for them ... To endure ten seconds one must be physically changed.”²⁷

In response he hears: “Be careful, Kirillov, it’s epilepsy!”²⁸ Naturally, not every disease and not every epilepsy was the proto-vision of eternity for Dostoevsky. Also Smerdyakov suffered from epilepsy (in the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*), but for him the disease was “to constitute an alibi against the accusation of patricide he had committed.”²⁹ Ivan Karamazov had an even greater intuition of unearthly paradise, which he then lost after rejecting faith in the immortality of the soul. In student times, of which he was reminded by his double – the devil, Ivan made up the “Legend of Paradise,” which perfectly reflected the essence of his outlook from the time preceding his rebellion against the Creator. The “Legend,” only rarely mentioned by scholars, and pushed into the background by “The Grand Inquisitor” extract – later in terms of chronology and plot – is highly significant for the understanding of the essence of Dostoevsky’s “unearthly Paradise.” This is a story of a thinker and philosopher who “rejected everything, ‘laws, conscience, faith,’ and, above all, the future life.” He consistently thought that death ends everything and man vanishes for good in the dark abyss of the universe. When this thinker died, however, the “future life”

25 *Ibid.*, s. 410.

26 С.В. Ковалевская, *Из воспоминаний детства*, in: *Ф.М. Достоевский в воспоминаниях современников*, vol. 1, Москва: Художественная литература, 1964, p. 347.

27 F. Dostoevsky, *The Possessed, or the Devils. A Novel in Three Parts*. Trans. C. Garnett. New York: Vintage, 1916, p. 610.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 611.

29 T. Poźniak, *Dostojewski i Wschód. Szkic z pogranicza kultur*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1992, p. 33.

was revealed to his astonished eyes. But not as an ordinary gift, but as a task. If having looked at the Paradise he had reconciled with its existence, then he would have found himself immediately in the eternal kingdom. Since, however, he was heroic in his scepticism, he continued to claim that what he sees is “against his principles.” And for that, as the “Legend of Paradise” has it, he was sentenced to a strenuous walk of “a quadrillion kilometres in the dark.” This act was to be, on the one hand, a grand penance for the now non-empirical and counterintuitive scepticism, but at the same time it gave a total certainty of reaching the great goal. . . The irony of the scene is even greater because mature Ivan has long forgotten his “Legend,” and in Dostoevsky’s novel he is reminded of it by the devil. And it is the devil who says further that the thinker “who was condemned to the quadrillion kilometres,” in whom the rebellious “soul of an enlightened Russian atheist” is mixed with “the soul of the prophet Jonah,” refused again to undertake the act of penance, explaining it with “principles.” Thus he stretched prone on this cosmic road and “lay there a thousand years.”³⁰ Still, after the round millennium of lying down, he got up to his feet – the desire to see heaven was so strong that he suddenly got up and walked towards the gates of Paradise. . . The scornful devil reports this to Ivan without a trace of irony, and even with great excitement:

“Why, the moment the gates of Paradise were open and he walked in; before he had been there two seconds, by his watch . . ., he cried out that those two seconds were worth walking not a quadrillion kilometres but a quadrillion of quadrillions, raised to the quadrillionth power!”³¹

Clearly the “Legend of Paradise” did not play the conceptual role only in *The Brothers Karamazov*, since, as is always the case with Dostoevsky, it was also an indispensable element of the dynamic plot of the novel. At the end of the dialogue between Ivan and the devil (more precisely, this is only Ivan’s internal monologue, because the “Legend of Paradise,” just like “The Grand Inquisitor,” were in fact only disputes of two halves of the soul of one protagonist), we find out that the author of the “work” was the 17-year-old Ivan. We can thus think that the “Legend” used to play an important part in the development of his outlook. Ivan also once dreamed of immortality, but always wanted to be faithful to his sceptical convictions. He hesitated, he was torn in despair and finally he came to the conclusion that the claims of immortality given to people by God were fairy tales and legends for simpletons poor in spirit. The future author of “The Grand Inquisitor” rejected the thought of Paradise on the basis of “faithfulness to his convictions”, because seeing evil in the world he doubted the meaning of human history and the truth of personal immortality. Since the unearthly paradise can be reached via the Paradise of Christ and in the world of physical death no ethical norms are binding, it was also clear that Ivan

³⁰ *The Brothers Karamazov*. Transl. C. Garnett, The Lowell Press: New York, 1912, p. 570–571.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 572.

had to doubt the dogma of any unearthly existence. One hundred years ago, Vasili Rosanov called “The Grand Inquisitor” “The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor,”³² and since then a great majority of Dostoevsky scholars have used this completely inept genre label. For Karamazov, a legend indicated something not to be believed, or even something like an “anecdote.”³³ And the first passages from “The Grand Inquisitor,” where Ivan ironically refers to the Byzantine apocrypha, *The Wanderings of Our Lady through Hell*, popular in Russia, indeed have such a legendary or anecdotal nature; Ivan adds that if his “work” was created in the Middle Ages it would be a “poem” of this kind,³⁴ which was to testify that it was a deeply considered piece and played the key role in rationalizing rebellion against God which no naïve legend (e.g. the above mentioned “Legend of Paradise”) could have played. This transition made by Ivan from the “Legend of Paradise” to the poem “The Grand Inquisitor,” that is – in the ideological sense – the evolution from the faith in unearthly Paradise to the conviction of the need to rationalize rebellion against Transcendence with the hands of the old Inquisitor, reflected the great drama of the protagonist. He completely agreed with the thesis that “There is no virtue if there is no immortality,” and even that he “made it up” in the novel. When the elder Zossima says that Ivan is either happy or very unhappy (“You are blessed in believing that, or else most unhappy”), he agrees with his opponent in the method, but at the same time he rejects his anti-metaphysical (anti-ethical) claims.³⁵ Ivan argues that there is nothing on earth that would make people love their neighbours; neither is there – contrary to socialists – a “law of nature” that would necessitate love of “mankind.” If, however, people love one another in spite of that, this was due to their faith in personal immortality.³⁶ Yes, for Ivan, such faith had long been an illusion and fiction, and that is why he speaks in the same way as Dostoevsky would have spoken, if he had lost such faith too:

“...the whole natural law lies in that faith, and that if you were to destroy in mankind the belief in immortality, not only love but every living force maintaining the life of the world would at once be dried up. Moreover, nothing then would be immoral, everything would be lawful, even cannibalism... for every individual... who does not believe in God or immortality, the moral law of nature must immediately be changed into the exact contrary of the former religious law, and that egoism, even to crime, must become not only lawful but even recognised as the inevitable, the most rational, even honourable outcome of his position.”³⁷

32 В.В. Розанов, *Легенда о Великом Инквизиторе Ф.М. Достоевского. Опыт критического комментария*, in: В.В. Розанов, *Несовместимые контрасты жизни. Литературно-эстетические работы разных лет*, Москва: Искусство, 1990, p. 37–224.

33 *The Brothers Karamazov*. The Lowell Press: New York, 1912, p. 570.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 214.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Ivan Karamazov is also the “author” of the ideological treatise, “Geological Cataclysm”, to which his devil interlocutor ironically refers with the term “poem”. Ivan tries, in vain, to save man in the kingdom of death:

“Man will be lifted up with a spirit of divine Titanic pride and the man-god will appear. From hour to hour extending his conquest of nature infinitely by his will and his science, man will feel such lofty joy from hour to hour in doing it that it will make up for all his old dreams of the joys of heaven. Everyone will know that he is mortal and will accept death proudly and serenely like a god. His pride will teach him that it’s useless for him to repine at life’s being a moment, and he will love his brother without need of reward. Love will be sufficient only for a moment of life, but the very consciousness of its momentariness will intensify its fire, which now is dissipated in dreams of eternal love beyond the grave.”³⁸

Man, as it could be concluded from the devil’s reconstruction of the existential lecture delivered by Ivan, who clearly followed in Feuerbach’s traces, made up the idea of God and life beyond the grave and at the same time impoverished himself. The task of mankind now consists in rejecting illusions and reconstructing the same values for themselves now without the help of elusive transcendence. However, even this work of Ivan’s did not constitute the ultimate moment in his dynamic conceptual development, since that too was summarized by the statement that in the world without personal immortality “everything was lawful.” Because of the cosmic stupidity of human beings, Paradise without God will not come into effect for another thousand years and this is why everyone who already today realizes all this relentless truth can organize their life on new principles, including “cannibalism.”³⁹ This is the path followed by Smerdyakov, who, having killed old Karamazov, explained to his mentor, Ivan: “You were bold enough then. You said ‘everything was lawful,’ and how frightened you are now.”⁴⁰ Because indeed Ivan, who had rebelled against God also because he saw tears of “tortured children,” was terrified when his theoretical “everything is lawful” was put into practice by Smerdyakov in the wretched act of patricide. Smerdyakov represented the worse self of Ivan in the novel and never dreamed of “mutual aid” of people left faced by the dread of death. He realized right away that in the world ruled by death one would be able to kill with impunity, having nothing else in mind than one’s mean benefit. But Ivan himself despite everything did not want to be a moral monster. Having lost faith in personal immortality, he could not have upheld the thought that the only goal of man would now be mutual destruction. His “everything is lawful” was not ultimately intended as encouragement for patricide, but was a guideline for a small group of heroes how to arrange the world without God, so that people do not devour

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 575.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 553.

one another. Already in “Geological Cataclysm,” Ivan said that the “everything is lawful” statement comprises the intuition that some of the self-elected heroes would be allowed to turn into man-gods. Still the superhuman creatures there thought solely of themselves, and not of the salvation of others:

“There is no law for God. Where God stands, the place is holy. Where I stand will be at once the foremost place... ‘all things are lawful’ and that’s the end of it!”⁴¹

Let us note, however, that also such a conclusion could not constitute the ideological point of arrival for Ivan as the whole meaning of the protagonist’s outlook, his internal logic and inevitable results are contained in the poem “The Grand Inquisitor.” The “work” could be considered on three different interpretive planes. Firstly, it constitutes the apology of Christianity as the sphere of freedom, and not the “only right” ideology imposed on man, formulated by Dostoevsky himself. After all, man must arrive in slow toil even at the idea of his own immortality, without the aid of miracle, authority and mystery, which Dostoevsky best expressed in the image of “silent Christ” from “The Grand Inquisitor.” The second interpretation sees “The Grand Inquisitor” as an expression of Ivan’s rebellion against the bad Demiurge. The problem of theodicy was one of the ideological centres both for Ivan and Dostoevsky himself, who was particularly sensitive to the problem of evil in the world and knew very well that two ideals – of Madonna and Sodom – fight against each other in the human heart: “God and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man.”⁴² In his memento for the whole life, published in 1877, the writer placed a comment that he plans to write “The Russian Candide.” And the literary figure of Ivan Karamazov was part of the unfulfilled plan. As the Russian Candide he rebelled against Leibnitz’s optimistic, theistic harmony, thus supplementing Voltaire’s ironic “Poem on the Lisbon Disaster” ... with his grim poem “The Grand Inquisitor.”

In order to fully understand the message of “The Grand Inquisitor,” one should try to undertake the effort to see it as part of the dramatic evolution of the views of Ivan himself. Such an attitude allows us to grasp better the polyphonic dimension of Dostoevsky’s work that stemmed from the internal logic of each ideology relevant for the novel, even antitheist one. The Grand Inquisitor having guaranteed bread to people wanted to preserve faith in transcendence and personal immortality in the masses by means of three forces: “miracle, mystery and authority.”⁴³

“Peacefully they will die, peacefully they will expire ..., and beyond the grave they will find nothing but death. But we shall keep the secret, and for their happiness we shall allure them with the reward of heaven and eternity.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 576.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

With this quotation we have finally arrived at the core of the Promethean mission of the Grand Inquisitor, which when it comes to its internal logic, consisted in ensuring happiness to the human herd in the world of death. But the Grand Inquisitor did not desire this happiness for himself, since for the minds similar to his there could be no consolation in the world without God in which every human being is ultimately condemned to annihilation:

“There will be thousands of millions of happy babies, and a hundred thousand sufferers who have taken upon themselves the curse of the knowledge of good and evil.”⁴⁵

This was the final, rational conclusion drawn by Ivan, against the cheerful outlook of contemporary socialists, that at the same time was to be the great fulfilment of dreams and desires of all the earlier atheistic heroes of Dostoevsky’s Pentateuch. But Ivan also delivers such an astonishing reflection:

“Though if there were anything in the other world, it certainly would not be for such as they.”⁴⁶

For whom then, if anything was there? The answer is not complicated – it is for the handful who managed to take the fate of the whole universe in their hands. This is the grand goal for which it was worth investing “one hundred million heads,” naturally those of others. This is the way to discover the gene of immortality for the handful of heroes-sufferers.

The only remedy against such nonsense, in Dostoevsky’s world, was the faith in eternal immortality, which, however, was difficult to achieve also for his “positive” protagonists, who balanced between Christianity and atheism. The most characteristic from this point of view is the figure of inspired Alyosha, who could not quickly move to the position of Ivan, just like Ivan could potentially accept the fundamental arguments of his younger, Orthodox brother:

“As soon as he [Alyosha – G.P.] reflected seriously he was convinced of the existence of God and immortality, and at once he instinctively said to himself: ‘I want to live for immortality, and I will accept no compromise.’ In the same way, if he had decided that God and immortality did not exist, he would at once have become an atheist and a socialist. For socialism is not merely the labour question, it is before all things the atheistic question, the question of the form taken by atheism to-day,

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

the question of the tower of Babel built without God, not to mount to heaven from earth but to set up heaven on earth.”⁴⁷

Thus Dostoevsky accused socialists not of utopism (i.e. dreaming of Paradise on earth), but of terrestrialising Paradise, the “grounding” of the eternal ideal, and ultimately of the reduction of man to the empirical dimension. But was great Fyodor Dostoevsky himself free of such temptations? When in *The Possessed*, his Shatov preached the ideology that in the 20th century led to the fascist crematoriums (“It has never happened that all, or even many, peoples have had one common god, but each has always had its own... Every people has its own conception of good and evil, and its own good and evil”)⁴⁸, he heard from the nihilist Stavrogin that such view “reduces God to a simple attribute of nationality.”⁴⁹ Some scholars believe that Dostoevsky stood on Shatov’s side in this debate, the evidence of which could be some passages from *A Writer’s Diary*. Meanwhile Vladimir Solovyov, although he acknowledged that Dostoevsky when discussing “the national question gave an outlet to the most elementary chauvinism,” he still claimed that the image of Shatov already in its very intention constituted the criticism of nationalism in Russia:

“Already in *The Possessed* we can observe the sharp irony directed at those who bow their heads before a nation just because it is a nation, and value Orthodoxy as an attribute of Russian nationality.”⁵⁰

Not everyone sided with Solovyov, however; many critics, let us repeat that – identified the protagonist with the author. Nationalisation of Christianity by Shatov-Dostoevsky rightly met with the rebuke by the atheist and Narodnik, Nikolai Mikhailovskiy, who confronted with the thesis that “each nation should have its own God,” recalled implicitly that according to the New Testament “there is neither Jew, nor Greek... for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3,28).

“The claim that the Russian nation is the only God-bearing nation ... is equally impudent as the stunts of Lamshin or Pyotr Verkhovensky, who let a mouse out behind an icon ... The borders of good and evil are equally blended here as in Stavrogin, Shigalev, Verkhovenskys.”⁵¹

The quasi-Orthodox nationalism of Dostoevsky later became the subject of severe criticism on the part of those Russian thinkers who approved of his Christocentrism,

47 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

48 F. Dostoevsky, *The Possessed, or the Devils. A Novel in Three Parts*. Trans. C. Garnett. New York: Vintage 1916, p. 255.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 255.

50 *Собрание сочинений Владимира Сергеевича Соловьева*, vol. 3 (1877–1884), Издательство Жизнь с Богом: Брюссель, 1966, p. 197.

51 Н.К. Михайловский, *Литературная критика и воспоминания*, Москва: Искусство, 1995, p. 78.

but could not come to terms with the scandalous nationalisation of Christianity by the author of *A Writer's Diary*. The above-mentioned Solovyov wrote in 1891 “that on no account can we approve of Dostoevsky’s attack on Jews, Poles, the French and Germans, on entire Europe, on all other religions.”⁵² In 1914 Sergey Bulgakov also critically referred to Shatov’s ideology, considering it the reflection of opinions of Dostoevsky himself. God in Shatov’s approach became the “attribute of nationality” – Bulgakov referred to this kind of religion as “an Old Testamental or even polytheistic point of view, which accepted many equal and competing gods”:

“Shatov indeed turned out to be the ideological predecessor of the sickening tendency in Russian life in which nationalism stands above religion, and Orthodoxy is frequently the instrument of politics. Such tendency was also present in Dostoevsky, who ... in the image of Shatov artistically objectivised the temptation of devilish nationalism, hidden under the shell of religiosity.”⁵³

Nikolai Berdyaev wrote in the early 1920s that in the figure of Shatov Dostoevsky showed the significant part of his own soul. The “astonishing dialogue” between Stavrogin and Shatov, in which the latter wanted to base the future belief in God on the modernized belief in Russia and the Russian nation, was in Berdyaev’s eyes “the unmasking of the falsity of religious Narodniks”, who wanted to arrive at the idea of God by means of the idea of a nation.⁵⁴

And this is the great paradox of Dostoevsky that has been retained until this day – the greatness and misery of the writer and thinker. On the one hand, he could brilliantly describe the quasi-religious dimension of Russian atheism, from which the great tragedies of mankind of the 20th century had derived, but on the other hand, any “atheist” or “liberal” can even today say that if Christianity described in its terrifying glory in *A Writer's Diary* is the “true Christianity,” then maybe it would be better to reach for the teachings of postmodernists.

Translated from Polish by Władysław Chłopicki

52 *Собрание сочинений Владимира Сергеевича Соловьева*, vol. 5 (1883–1892), Брюссель: Издательство Жизнь с Богом, 1966, p. 420.

53 С. Булгаков, *Тихія думи. Из статей 1911–15 гг.*, Москва: Издание Г.А. Лемана и С.А. Сахарова, 1918, p. 23.

54 Н.А. Бердяев, *Мирозерцание Достоевского*, in: *Н.А. Бердяев о русской философии*, vol. 1, Свердловск: Изд-во Урал. ун-та, 1991, p. 122.

STRESZCZENIE

Dostojewski o nieśmiertelności duszy i raju pozaziemskim

Artykuł stanowi próbę opisu światopoglądu rosyjskiego pisarza i myśliciela Fiodora Michajłowicza Dostojewskiego (1821–1881) w kontekście rozumienia przez niego nieśmiertelności duszy ludzkiej oraz raju pozaziemskiego w opozycji do ateistycznych i antyteistycznych ideologii Rosji drugiej połowy XIX wieku, w tym przede wszystkim „bezbożnego socjalizmu”. Ukazuje fundamentalne różnice pomiędzy częstkami ideowo-fabularnymi powieści *Bracia Karamazow – Przewrót geologiczny*, *Legenda o raju* i *Wielki Inkwizytor* – w kontekście rozważań pisarza o osobowej nieśmiertelności człowieka i jego istnieniu w „raju pozaziemskim”. W odniesieniu do bliskiej Dostojewskiemu ideowo postaci nacjonalisty Iwana Pawłowicza Szatowa z powieści *Biesy* została sformułowana teza o sprzeczności jego światopoglądu z chrześcijańskim uniwersalizmem, wyrażonym źródłowo w Liście do Galatów apostoła Pawła (3:28): „Nie ma Żyda ani Greka, nie ma niewolnika ani wolnego, nie ma mężczyzny ani kobiety, gdyż wy wszyscy jedno jesteście w Jezusie Chrystusie”.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

Dostojewski, nieśmiertelność duszy, ziemski i ponadziemski raj, antychrześcijański nacjonalizm, chrześcijański uniwersalizm, *Biesy*, *Bracia Karamazow*, *Wielki Inkwizytor*, *Legenda o raju*, *Przewrót geologiczny*

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