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# Prayers from Underground: The Psalmic Voice in Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground

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## **Prayers from Underground: The Psalmic Voice in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground***

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Criticism concerning Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* has primarily focused on the social and historical context in which the novel was situated. Scholars have traditionally resisted a religious reading and therefore have usually found their grounding in the political, psychological, and philosophical systems of thought in mid-19th century Russian society. Though many of these readings of Dostoevsky's short novel are valid, they have missed the deeply theological concerns of *Notes from Underground*, and have focused, if at all theologically, on the possibilities of the novel as a forerunner of 20th century existentialism. However, my research demonstrates that *Notes from Underground* serves as a narrative which illustrates the theological relationship between the human being and the divine in prayer. The novel expresses this by exploring the relationship between the reader and the author in their interaction through literature. This paper utilizes close readings of *Notes from Underground* and the Psalms, while also utilizing the literary criticism of Mikhail Bakhtin and the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer to explore the author-reader relationship. Both of these latter thinkers contemplate the problems of approaching a veiled author (or Author) from a reader's isolated position. Dostoevsky's novel too meditates on the isolation and alienation of its protagonist in his quest for meaning. However, the novel also situates all of its future readers in a similar position of isolation, later enabling an ongoing and communal interpretation of literature, through literature, that is itself a prayer.

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