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“The Dream of a Ridiculous Man”: Christian Hope for Human Society

Forty-odd years ago Edward Wasiolek described “Dream of a Ridiculous Man”¹ [1877, hereafter “Dream”] as a “blasphemy,” a “Golden Age without Christ.”² In this essay, though, analysis of the story renders “Dream” an instance of *Christian* hope for human society in Dostoevsky’s time, and even now. Such a view arises from certain textual elements that have definite Christian associations: “dream,” a “shining star,” “water,” “*юродивый*” (fool-for-Christ), “*образ*” (form/icon), “*живой*” (living), and “*истина*” (truth). Their Christian meanings are evident in the context of Dostoevsky’s philosophy of art and Christian faith commitment but also through New Testament intertexts from the author’s extant copy of the Russian New Testament. Other textual elements such as “*вдруг*” (suddenly) and “heart” have a distinct Dostoevskian meaning and role in the story’s unfolding narrative and enhance its Christian character. Also important for the Christian appreciation of “Dream” is this story’s intertextuality with Dostoevsky’s 1864 essay “Socialism and Christianity” (*PSS*, 20:191-94), whose three phases of societal and personal development are replicated in the life of the Ridiculous Man on the twin-Earth and then in his post-dream existence. Indeed, the sequential occurrence of all these various elements in the unfolding narrative of “Dream” are progressive markers in the

¹ All materials by Dostoevsky will be parenthetically referenced in the text according to the Academy edition: *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* [hereafter *PSS*], Leningrad: Akademiia nauk/Nauka, 1972-90. For “Dream” this means: *PSS*, 25 [volume number]:104-19 [page numbers]. All translations in this essay have been done by me.

² *The Major Fiction*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1967: 145 and 148.

transformative process of the Ridiculous Man³ [hereafter RM] from an indifferent, solipsistic being to a dynamic person who under the transforming influence of Christ and Christian thinking is passionately committed to persuading other humans to change as he has and in doing so to change society all around them—and this no matter how ridiculous RM and his preaching may seem to his listeners/readers.

Crucial to a Christian view of “Dream” is Dostoevsky’s extant copy of the Russian New Testament—its role in his life and its intertextuality with passages in “Dream.” In *Dostoevsky and His New Testament*, Geir Kjetsaa has established through Dostoevsky’s own words and those of his wife the very prominent role that the Russian New Testament played in his life and writings—from his early years but especially from his time in Siberia until the day of his death.⁴ In an 1873 article for the *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky noted that in his “family [they] knew the Gospel almost from the cradle” (*PSS*, 21:134). Even more, in an earlier article for the *Diary* Dostoevsky wrote that during the four years of his Siberian imprisonment, the Russian New Testament lay always under his pillow, and from time to time he would read from it and read aloud to others (*PSS*, 21:12). Indeed, the significance of the New Testament during those four years was confirmed by Dostoevsky’s (second) wife as well as its role in his life until the very day of his death. On January 28 [Old Style], 1881, Dostoevsky followed his frequent practice when pondering or in doubt about something to open randomly the New Testament that lay always in sight on his writing table and to read the page on the reader’s left. The passage read aloud by his wife at that moment was verses 14 and 15 of chapter three in Matthew’s Gospel, where Christ has come for baptism from John the Baptist who observes that rather he John should be receiving baptism from Christ. On hearing this passage, Dostoevsky concluded that he was going to die, and his wife should not hold him back from this happening just as Christ did not want John to hold Him back from receiving John’s baptism.⁵ Six hours later Dostoevsky died. In Dostoevsky’s copy of the New Testament, his wife later underlined this

³ While the protagonist of “Dream” is actually a man, the story’s Russian title focuses rather on a non-gender-specific human being (*человек*) who perhaps can represent an “everyman.”

⁴ *Dostoevsky and His New Testament*, Slavica Norvegica III, Oslo and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Solum Forlag A.S. and Humanities Press, 1984: especially 5-8 but also 8-17; on pages 18-79 is the listing of the biblical verse-passages Dostoevsky marked off in his copy of the Russian New Testament.

⁵ Anna G. Dostoevskaia, *Vospominaniia*, Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1971: 375-77.

passage, and added in the margin: “[These lines/verses] were opened and read aloud by me at the request of Fëdor Mikhailovich on the day of his death at 3 o’clock.”⁶

The element of “dream” has a definite Christian-New Testament association with which Dostoevsky was most likely familiar. In “Dream” RM debates whether this event-phenomenon at the heart of his story was just that—a dream—or rather another mode of real life that has radically affected his post-dream living. Critics like Mikhail Bakhtin and Christopher Pike have stressed the transformative nature of RM’s dream-experience.⁷ Also in RM’s dream, he is borne away to the twin-Earth by a “dark being unknown to him” with a “human face,” toward whom at first he feels revulsion, but with whom as a “companion” he gradually becomes comfortable and briefly converses. Together, these aspects—a major, real-life, transforming experience with a human-faced being—resonate with dream events in the Gospel of Matthew through which God speaks to humans with positive, life-changing messages, and with which Dostoevsky was familiar. In that Gospel, Joseph—the husband of Mary and thus the earthly father of Jesus [Christ]—has three dreams in which an “angel of the Lord” speaks to him concerning Jesus: that Mary’s pregnancy is through the Holy Spirit as God’s salvific act (1:20-21); that Joseph is to protect Jesus from harm by King Herod by taking Jesus and Mary to Egypt (2:13); and once Herod is dead, that Joseph can return with Jesus and Mary (2:19-20). Also in this Gospel, in a dream God—not an angel—warns the Magi who find Jesus to return to their countries without speaking with Herod (2:12).⁸ In these New Testament dreams, then, God usually through an angel affects a positive experience for humans, just as RM’s dream with the help of his “companion” leads to a positive dramatic change especially in RM’s post-dream life/living.

In the retelling of his dream-experience, RM vividly recalls certain details of that night when he unexpectedly fell asleep and dreamed—

⁶ Kjetsaa, p. 6. In the web reproduction of Dostoevsky’s extant Russian New Testament, on page six a pencil-graphic near verses fourteen and fifteen has the comment that these verses were marked off in pencil by Dostoevsky’s wife, 31 July 2009. <http://dostoevskii.karelia.ru/Gospel/006/text.htm>.

⁷ *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 3rd ed., Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1972: 260, and “Dostoevsky’s ‘Dream of a Ridiculous Man’: Seeing Is Believing,” *The Structural Analysis of Russian Narrative Fiction*, Essays in Poetics Publication, no. 1, ed. Joe Andrew, assoc. ed. Christopher Pike, Keele, UK: Keele University, 1982: 26-63, here 27-28.

⁸ In the web reproduction of Dostoevsky’s extant Russian New Testament, a graphic indicates that the bottom corners of pages two and three have been bent, the pages on which are narrated the first of Joseph’s three dreams and that of the Magi, 31 July 2009. [http://dostoevskii.karelia.ru/Gospel/002\[003\]/text.htm](http://dostoevskii.karelia.ru/Gospel/002[003]/text.htm).

November 3rd sometime after 10pm. Two further details are present before but also during RM's dream: the eight-year-old girl who tugged at his elbow with poignant, desperate cries to help her mother—cries quite familiar to RM, and a tiny star shining in the dark sky. Indeed, seeing this star RM decides to commit suicide that very night (*PSS*, 25:105-07). In his dream RM again sees that star, but now on his journey to the twin-Earth. Here, then, like the star of Bethlehem seen by the Magi (Matthew 2:2 and 10), this star now heralds RM's transforming experience. Just before arriving on the twin-Earth and right before RM senses the sorrow in his companion's response "'You will see everything,'" the "image-icon of the poor little girl flashed before" him, the little girl who he acknowledges "saved" him because of his questions about helping her (*PSS*, 25:110-11, 108). It is noteworthy that in her study of "Dream" in relation to Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol" (1843), Robin Feuer Miller has suggested "a biblical (and Christmas) resonance to the bright star [in "Dream" with that of Bethlehem] that leads the ridiculous man (read "wise man") to that poor abode (read "poor child") and to salvation."⁹

Another element with Christian association is RM's experience with water in his dream after he has committed suicide. As RM lies motionless in a coffin, a steady drop of water which is seeping through the coffin lid falls on his closed left eye. This at first irritatingly regular dripping may well be seen as some cleansing, or even more, a baptism into a new life. Indeed, this may be that rebirth through water and the Spirit marked off by Dostoevsky in John's Gospel (3:5-6), thus further marking RM's personal transformation.¹⁰ For this regular dripping water moves RM to make an emotional appeal with his "whole being" to the "ruler of everything that was happening with" him, that if this "ruler" "is exacting vengeance" for RM's "irrational suicide" with "*безобразием*" (ugliness, shapelessness) and "*нелепостью*" (absurdity) in RM's further existence, RM would then show his long-lasting, if silent, contempt for that "ruler."

⁹"Dostoevsky's 'The Dream of a Ridiculous Man': Unsealing the Generic Envelope," *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson*, eds. Elizabeth Cheresch Allen and Gary Saul Morson, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University and The Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1995: 86-104, here 99. This passage is also found in a slightly enlarged version of this article as chapter 6 "Unsealing the Generic Envelope and Deciphering 'The Dream of a Ridiculous Man'" in Miller's *Dostoevsky's Unfinished Journey*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007: 105-27, here 120-21.

¹⁰The comment for this verse from the web reproduction of Dostoevsky's New Testament is: "Verse six is marked off in pencil on the right," 31 July 2009 <<http://dostoevskii.karelia.ru/Gospel/220/text.htm>>.

Very soon after RM's emotional appeal, he is dramatically released from his coffin/grave and borne by his spirit-like and "human-faced companion" to the twin-Earth in his continuing personal transformation (*PSS*, 25:110).

As RM narrates who he once was but also who he has become through his dream-experience, Dostoevsky's intense use of "вдпыз" (suddenly) helps set off RM's arrival on the twin-Earth but especially his living among the children of the Sun. The вдпыз qualifying RM's standing/arriving on the twin-Earth is the thirty-seventh instance in some nine pages of printed narration: Part 1 (*PSS*, 25:104-07) fourteen times, Part 2 (107-09) four times, and Part 3 (109-12) nineteen times. Relatedly, in his study of *Crime and Punishment* Vladimir Toporov has noted that вдпыз occurs some 560 times on 417 pages of that novel, and that "the maximum frequency of its use is owing to steps in the plot coinciding with *transitions* and also to the description of change of spiritual states/conditions."¹¹ Likewise in "Dream," "вдпыз" (suddenly) traces the shifts in RM's human character from before and during his dream as he arrives on the twin-Earth and begins a new phase in his transformative process. It is true that in Part 5 (115-19), there are three further instances of this adverb: RM notes that if someone *suddenly* proposed to the now corrupted children of the Sun a return to their original idyllic state, they would refuse this (116); and as RM *suddenly* comes to from his dream, *suddenly* his ready and loaded revolver flashes before him, but in a single instance he pushes it away from himself (118). In no way, then, do these three final instances of вдпыз change RM's positive life-changing dream-experience, especially since his living among the children of the Sun. Indeed, the very last instance of "*suddenly*" dramatically affirms RM's personal transformation as he rejects real suicide after awakening from his dream. In this way, the adverb вдпыз highlights RM's change of heart that is especially strengthened by his living with the children of the Sun, a change in RM that may not be that surprising.

In his dream, although RM had intended to shoot himself in the head, specifically in the right temple, instead he shoots himself in the heart. Why this change in RM's plan? In an October 31 [Old Style], 1838 letter to his brother Dostoevsky expressed the role of the heart in human cognition and living: "To know nature, the soul, God, love... These are

¹¹ "O strukture romana Dostoevskogo v sviazi s arkhainymi skhemami mifologicheskogo myshleniia (*Prestuplenie i nakazanie*)," *Structure of Texts and Semiotics of Culture*, eds. Jan van der Eng and Mojmir Grygar, The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1973: 225-302, here 234 (emphasis original); see also 235-36, 266-68.

known by the heart, not the mind. [...] If then the goal of knowledge is to be love and nature, then here a clear field is opened to the *heart*" (PSS, 28, 1:53-54, emphasis original). In "Dream" RM observes that "apparently not reason but *desire*, not the head but the *heart* directs dream" (PSS, 25:108, emphasis added). Indeed, on the twin-Earth RM expresses to the children of the Sun that he "had a presentiment of them all and their glory *в снах моего сердца и в мечтах ума моего*" (in the *dreams of my heart* and in the *daydreams of my mind*)—thus, the distinction about where dreams arise as opposed to daydreams (PSS, 25:114, emphasis in English added). Ironically, although in his dream RM attempts to terminate the means for dreaming, for knowing God—by shooting himself in the heart, RM's dream-suicide leads to a real and new life in his post-dream living. "*Всё равно*" (It's all the same/It doesn't matter) no longer describes his life. For through his dream-experience RM has become a *feeling, effusive human being* whose living among the children of the Sun from that point forward in the unfolding narrative intertextually replicates the three stages in human and societal development outlined in Dostoevsky's 1864 essay "Socialism and Christianity."¹²

The year 1864 was quite momentous for Dostoevsky. His first wife died in April and his brother Mikhail in July—all as he was working on completing *Notes from the Underground*. In the fall of that year he wrote his brief essay "Socialism and Christianity," the conclusion of which reads: "Patriarchy was the primeval/primordial condition. Civilization [is] the middle, transitional [one]. Christianity [is] the third and final degree of a/the human being, but here development is ended, the ideal is achieved/attained [...] there is a *future life* [*будущая жизнь*]" (PSS, 20:194, emphasis original).

On the twin-Earth, RM certainly experiences the primordial condition of patriarchy—living spontaneously in masses: "God is the idea of collective humanity, of the mass[es], of all/everyone. When a human being lives in masses [...] then the person lives *spontaneously*" (PSS, 20:191, emphasis original). Among themselves—the children of the Sun, and then with RM, communication is spontaneous and intuitive amid ineffable loving acceptance—indeed, this is so even with the non-human creatures on this twin-Earth. Even more, RM's interacting with the children of the Sun in such spontaneous and loving interactions bespeaks the presence of God among them as exemplified in the words of verses seven and eight of chapter four in John's First Epistle marked off with

¹²Joseph Frank considered this essay a "source" for "Dream": *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet 1871-1881*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2002: 357.

three lines in pencil in the margin of Dostoevsky's Russian New Testament: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is from God, and everyone who loves is begotten of God and knows God. He who does not love knows not God, because God is love."¹³

No matter how loving RM has become in his dream, he is still fallible, and acknowledges that awful "*правду*" ([reasoned] truth), that in some way not-really-explained, he corrupted the children of the Sun. Now they have become conscious individual personalities, who fight for mine and yours, love lies and voluptuousness, are cruel, profess that science will give them wisdom, that knowledge is higher than feeling and the consciousness of life is higher than life, proclaim that Truth is attained only through torment and that suffering is beauty, have become evil yet readily speak of brotherhood, and pursue bloody conflicts (*PSS*, 25:115-17)—marking Dostoevsky's second stage in human and societal development:

[In civilization] in this further development comes a phenomenon, a new fact, which no one can escape—this is the development of personal consciousness and the negation of spontaneous ideas and laws (authoritative, patriarchal laws of the masses). [...] This condition, that is the disintegration of the masses into personalities, otherwise civilization, is an unhealthy condition. The loss of the living idea about g[G]od witnesses to this. [...] That] this is disease [is clear in] that the person in this condition feels badly, is depressed, loses the source of living life [*источник живой жизни*], does not know spontaneous sensations and is conscious of everything. (*PSS*, 20:192)

Extremely distraught at what he has perpetrated, RM pleads with the children of the Sun to crucify him, even teaching them how to make a cross. In RM's words, their reaction is to consider him a "*юродивого*" (holy fool-for-Christ), whose persistent entreaties to renounce their new ways provoke them to threaten RM with confinement in a madhouse if RM does not desist (*PSS*, 25:115-17).¹⁴ But RM is not the classic *юродивый* who pretends "to be a fool and madman for the sake of the Lord, in order to suffer abuse and reproaches from people and [then] with audacity to unmask them."¹⁵ Rather, RM in the final moments of his dream but especially in his post-dream living exemplifies a new fool-for-Christ whose mission in life is passionate preaching for the sake of the

¹³Kjetsaa, *Dostoevsky and His New Testament*: 47. All biblical translations are based on Dostoevsky's New Testament.

¹⁴In the textual variants of "Dream" the sentence with "*юродивого*" has been written into the galley-proof version (*PSS*, 25:297).

¹⁵Evgenii E. Golubinskii, *Istoriia russkoi tserkvi*, vol. 1, part 2, Moskva: Krutitskoe patriarshee podvor'e, 1904 but 2002 rpt.: 656-57.

Truth, someone whose fully conscious and developed I—that Christian ideal—freely returns to spontaneous living by giving back all of himself for the sake of everyone, requiring nothing for himself—however ridiculous others may consider him for acting this way. In his words and actions, then, RM’s post-dream living exemplifies the third and final stage of Dostoevsky’s scheme for human and societal development:

Christ [...] HE is the ideal of humanity. [...] In what is the law of this ideal? Returning to spontaneity, to the mass[es], but a free [returning] and even not according to the will, not according to reason, not according to consciousness, but according to the spontaneous terribly powerful, invincible feeling, that *this* is terribly good. [...] In what is the ideal? To attain the full power of consciousness and development, to be fully aware of one’s own I—and to give back *all* willfully *for the sake of all/everyone*. [...] And according to Christ you will receive: There is something much higher than the god-belly. This is to be the lord and master even of your very self, your own I, to sacrifice this I, to give it back to all. In this idea is something irresistibly beautiful, delightful, inevitable, and even inexplicable. [...] The whole infinity of c[C]hristianity over socialism lies in this that a/the c[C]hristian [person] (the ideal), giving back everything, himself demands nothing for himself. (*PSS* 20:192-93, emphasis original)

From RM’s first post-dream, waking moment in the story’s unfolding narrative, three words *k*—closely associated and found especially on the story’s last two pages—represent Christ and the transforming Christian effect of RM’s dream-experience: *образ*, *живой*, and *Истина*. They are combined in the phrase “*её [истины] живой образ*” (its [T/truth’s] living image-icon) (*PSS*, 25:118) and express that Christ is immanent in RM who is ever becoming.

The role of *образ* in Dostoevsky has been definitively discussed by Robert Louis Jackson.¹⁶ According to him, the entwining/fusion of the aesthetic and Christian in Dostoevsky’s writings realizes a moral-aesthetic spectrum from *образ* to *безобразие*:

The concepts of *образ* (image or form, but also icon) and *bezobrazie* (shapelessness, the monstrous, or deformed) are structuring moral and aesthetic categories in Dostoevsky’s art and find their source in traditional Christian theology and symbolism. God created man in His own image. But this image becomes obscured, even disfigured. It is never completely lost; however, it remains to be rediscovered, “restored”—in theological terms, redeemed—in all its original purity. The fundamental concerns of Dostoevsky in his art are always related to this task of restoration.¹⁷

¹⁶*Dostoevsky’s Quest for Form*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1966: 40-70.

¹⁷Robert Louis Jackson, “Introduction,” *The Art of Dostoevsky: Deliriums and Nocturnes*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981: 5-19, here 18.

In “Dream” *образ* occurs first in: “*образ бедной девочки, которую я обидел, промелькнул передо мною*” (the image-icon of the poor little girl, whom I offended/hurt, flashed before me) (*PSS*, 25:111), as RM and his companion are nearing the twin-Earth.¹⁸ In using the word “*образ/image-icon*” for RM’s “seeing” of the poor little girl, Dostoevsky thus highlights the ongoing transformation RM has been experiencing as he begins to live among the children of the Sun. However, much more significant are the two further instances of “*образ*” near the end of “Dream”—in RM’s post-dream living—in “*живой образ*” (living image-icon); indeed, the first instance of that phrase was even emphasized by Dostoevsky himself.¹⁹ The qualification of *образ* with *живой* probably echoes the author’s Christian thinking, especially with regard to John’s Gospel, whose fifty-eight marked verse-passages—almost a third of the one hundred seventy-nine listed by Kjetsaa for Dostoevsky’s entire New Testament—significantly engaged Dostoevsky.²⁰ Besides Christ’s close identification with “living/life-giving water” (John 4:14, 7:38), Christ expressly identifies Himself as “life” in two passages especially marked off by Dostoevsky. Just before raising his friend Lazarus from the dead, Christ proclaims to Lazarus’s sister Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, even if he dies, will come to life. And everyone who lives and believes in Me will not die forever” (John 11:25-26).²¹ And in the Last Supper discourse, Christ again identifies Himself and explains His relationship to the Father: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you would know Me, then you would know also My Father. And from now you know Him, and have seen Him” (John 14:6-7).²² It is noteworthy that Christ’s identification in verse six—“the way, the truth, and the life”—includes another word crucial in Dostoevsky’s writing and “Dream”:

¹⁸This sentence which evolved through a number of variations (*PSS*, 25:293) draws on a statement in this story’s preparatory materials: “*Мелькнула мысль о девочке*” (A thought about the little girl flashed) (*PSS*, 25:234, emphasis in English added).

¹⁹Two further instances of *образ* are expressed in the nominative plural and prepositional plural: “the actual *образы* and forms of my dream [...] were so charming and *прекрасны/beautiful*, and so *истинны/true*, that having awakened I of course could not *воплотить/embody* them in our weak/poor words” (*PSS*, 25:115); and the children of the Sun “laughed even at the possibility of their former happiness and [...] could not even imagine it in forms and *образах*” (*PSS*, 25:116).

²⁰Kjetsaa, *Dostoevsky and His New Testament*: 8 and 25-43.

²¹Dostoevsky underlined the words “I am the resurrection and the life”—Kjetsaa: 36.

²²Dostoevsky underlined from the words “No one” through “My Father”—Kjetsaa: 39.

“истина” (truth) which is implicit in the phrase “её [истины] живой образ” or “its [T/truth’s] living image-icon.”²³

The word “истина” (T/truth) figures prominently not only in John’s Gospel but also in “Dream”—especially in RM’s post-dream living. Of the twenty-two instances of *истина* in John’s Gospel, Dostoevsky clearly marked off six that closely associate and/or identify that word with Christ. Besides verse six of chapter fourteen cited above, in chapter eight there are four marked-off instances when Christ describes who are His true disciples: “[Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him: if you remain in My word, then you are truly My disciples.] And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (vv. 31-32); and “But as I tell the truth, yet you do not believe in Me. Who of you will unmask Me in a lie? If then I speak the truth, why do you not believe Me?” (vv. 45-46). The sixth and final marked-off instance of *истина* again shows the extremely close association of this word with Christ: “For the law was given through Moses, [and] grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:17). In John’s Gospel, then, Christ and *истина* are distinct yet also closely related, if not identical.

In the printed version of “Dream,” there are seventeen instances of *истина* (in various grammatical cases), associated by RM with his dream-experience and relatedly his post-dream living. Notably, all these instances are concentrated on merely six of the story’s fifteen-sixteen pages. Even more, according to the *Статистический словарь языка Достоевского*, there are 138 instances of *истина* in all of Dostoevsky’s literary writings.²⁴ Thus, the seventeen instances of *истина* in “Dream” comprise more than twelve percent of all such occurrences, reflecting this word’s prominence for Dostoevsky in “Dream.” On the first two pages of “Dream” (PSS, 25:104-05), RM speaks of “knowing/recognizing” *истина* (truth): “Sad [to view them] because they do not know the truth [1st instance], but I know the truth [2]. Oh how difficult for one-alone to know the truth [3]!” and “And after this I learned the truth [4]. I recognized the truth [5] last November, indeed the third of November,

²³In his well-known 1854 letter to Natal’ia Fonvizina, Dostoevsky passionately professes “that there is nothing more beautiful, profounder, more attractive, wiser, more steadfast and more perfect than Christ, [... indeed] with jealous love I say to myself there cannot even be.” He then asserts that in the close relationship between Christ and *истина*, “if someone would prove to me that Christ is outside the truth [*истины*], and it *really* would be that the truth [*истина*] is outside Christ, then I would rather want to remain with Christ than with the truth [*истиной*]” (PSS, 28, 1:176, emphasis original).

²⁴*Статистический словарь языка Достоевского*, eds. A. Ia. Shaikevich, V. M. Andriushchenko, and N. A. Rebetskaia, Moskva: Izyki slavianskoi kul’tury, 2003: 134.

and since then I remember my every moment.” Then in discussing his dream (*PSS*, 25:109) RM observes: “But does it really matter whether it was a dream or not, if this dream proclaimed to me the Truth [6]? Why, if once you have recognized the truth [7] and seen it, then you know that it is the truth [8] and there isn’t, it cannot be anything else, whether you are sleeping or living/alive. [...] My dream, my dream—oh, it proclaimed to me a new, great, renewed, powerful life!” However, in describing the corrupted state of the children of the Sun (*PSS*, 25:116), RM notes that “they knew grief, and loved sorrow, they yearned for torment, and [in their depravity] said that Truth [9] was achieved only through torture. Then science appeared/arose among them.” Even worse, the children of the sun insist that they “have science, and through it [...they] will try to find again truth [10], but [...then they] will receive it already consciously.” Six further instances of this word are concentrated on the story’s second last page (*PSS*, 25:118). On awakening from his dream and in an instant pushing away his loaded revolver—and in doing so thereby rejecting his pre-dream life and plan of suicide, RM describes his reaction to his new way of living and its character: “Oh now life and [more] life! I raised my hands and called to eternal truth [11]; I did not [so much] call, but began to cry, [for] rapture, immeasurable rapture roused my whole being. Yes, life and—preaching! About preaching I decided at that very minute and, already of course, for my entire life! I am going to preach, I want to preach,—what? The truth [12], for I have seen it, have seen it with my own eyes, have seen all its glory!” Now, though, his dream-experience has been not only recognizing but above all insistently *seeing the truth*, while still unable to explain in words precisely what he experienced and so changed his way of living. According to RM:

This is an old truth [13], but there is something new here: I cannot get much confused. Because I have seen the truth [14], I have seen and know, that people can be beautiful and happy, not having lost the capacity to live on earth. I do not want and cannot believe that evil would be the normal condition of people. And you see, they all only laugh at this belief of mine. However, how am I not to believe: I have seen the truth [15]—not that I invented it through my mind, but I have seen, have seen, and its [truth’s] *living image-icon* has filled my soul forever. (*PSS*, 25:118, emphasis original)

Notably, in preparatory materials intertextually related to this passage, Dostoevsky wrote even more pointedly: “in [my] heart [is] Truth, its [Truth’s] *living image-icon*, which I saw in such full/filled-in wholeness, that I can no longer not believe, that it cannot be on earth—how then for me to get confused. If I did not have this image-icon I would [really] get

confused” (*PSS*, 25:235, emphasis original). In “Dream” proper, the “living image-icon [of truth]” has so pervaded RM’s being that he exclaims: “the living image-icon of what I have seen will always be with me and always will set right and direct me. [...] You know, I wanted even at first to conceal that I had corrupted them all, but this was a mistake—here’s already the first mistake! But truth [16] whispered to me that I *am lying*, and preserved and directed me” (*PSS*, 25:118, emphasis original). Truth indeed has influenced RM to exercise his conscience, to assume responsibility for his shameful deed, and then properly to acknowledge this to others. Yet in acknowledging his desire at first to conceal his corruption of the children of the Sun as his *first mistake*, RM also implies that he is aware that there will be other mistakes in the future. Nevertheless, just as truth *whispered* to him now, so the *living image-icon of truth*--which “has filled [...RM’s] soul forever” and is Dostoevsky’s identification of Christ in “Dream”—will continue to “set right and direct” RM. That *истина*/Truth is synonymous with Christ has been noted by Diane Oenning Thompson in an analysis of *The Devils*. Here, the elder Verkhovenskiï is distinguishing *правда/pravda* and *истина/istina*: “I’ve been lying all my life. Even when I spoke the truth [*правду*], I never spoke for the truth [*истину*], but only for myself” (*PSS*, 10:497). According to Thompson, then, “Stepan’s own truth, *pravda*, which usually designates earthly truth or justice, is now opposed to *istina* (verity), a common biblical term and *synonym for Christ*.”²⁵ Thus, under the influence of *истина*/Truth, *i.e.* Christ, RM’s post-dream existence has now become a new human living, so aptly described by Paul Evdokimoff as “*la vertu consciente*” (conscious virtue).²⁶ In such a condition, RM clearly shows that neither he nor other humans can return to Dostoevsky’s first stage of human development—spontaneous living in masses, for the consciousness of the second stage has changed him and them. Now, however, this same consciousness is no longer an unhealthy condition of existence but rather a positive quality of virtuous living that actually enhances the third and final stage of human and relatedly societal development through Christ-like living.

As he concludes his narrative, RM expresses a simple yet seminal *modus vivendi* that he himself has realized and will continue to realize:

²⁵ “Problems of the Biblical Word in Dostoevsky’s Poetics,” *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, eds. George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001: 69-99, here 78, emphasis of the last three words added.

²⁶ *Dostoevsky et le problème du mal*, Lyon: Ondes, Éditions du Livre français, 1942: 65.

It is so simple: in a single day, *in a single hour*, everything would be put in order! The main thing is love others as yourself/oneself, here's what's principal, and this is everything, nothing more is needed: only [then] will you find how it can be put in order. All the same, this is only an old truth [the 17th instance], which they have repeated and read a billion times, but you know it has not taken root! (*PSS*, 25:119, emphasis original).

RM's words focus on the well-known biblical commandment "Love others as yourself." It is true that the synoptic evangelists include these words as the second of the two great commandments (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27). Yet John's Gospel but especially his First Epistle express the import of these words far more strongly. In John's Gospel, Dostoevsky marked off especially the passage in the Last Supper discourse concerning the great commandment to love one another (15:12-16, especially vv. 12-14): "This is my commandment—love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater than this love, as when someone lays down his soul [life] for his friends. You are My friends, if you fulfill what I command you." In John's First Epistle, Dostoevsky marked off certain passages in chapter four. Besides verses seven and eight cited above, there is: "No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, then God will abide in us and His love will be perfected in us. That we abide in Him, and He in us, this we will recognize from that He gave us His Own Spirit" (vv. 12-13). Clearly, realizing the divine precept to love others as oneself enables an individual to become God's good friend, in whom God dwells and even more thereby shows Himself forth in human society.

In "Dream" the "living image-icon of truth" animates RM to espouse the Johannine imperative of loving others as oneself. This is evident in the very last words of the story that have been set off from the preceding narrative: "And that little girl I have found... And I will go! And I will go!" Perhaps, not surprisingly, dramatically changed RM has again exercised his conscience by seeking out the little girl whom he so brusquely rejected, but whose tugging—even more, her cries—were the actual catalyst for his being who he is continuously becoming in his post-dream living.²⁷ Even more, though, it is notable that the two concluding

²⁷ Notably, Robin Feuer Miller describes "Dream" as a "conversion tale of the Christmas story variety": "Dostoevsky's 'The Dream of a Ridiculous Man': Unsealing the Generic Envelope" (1995) 86-87; also, "Unsealing the Generic Envelope and Deciphering 'The Dream of a Ridiculous Man'" (2007) 106. In the Russian version of Miller's article, that English description is rendered as "*рождественский рассказ о религиозном обращении*" (a Christmas story about religious conversion): "'Сон смешного человека' Достоевского"

exclamations were “written into” the story’s galley proof (*PSS*, 25: 297). True, the two instances of “*пойду*” (I will go) graphically show the change in RM for they are verbs—action. These future perfective assertions may at first seem incomplete—what activity will RM go to realize? The answer can probably be found some fifteen lines earlier where RM explains: “I will go/*я пойду*/ and will say everything tirelessly because all the same I have seen with my own eyes, even though I do not know how to retell what I have seen” (*PSS*, 25:118). Thus, redeemed through the “living image-icon of truth” that has filled his soul forever, RM has gone from “*всё равно*” (it’s all the same, it doesn’t matter)” to “*пойду*” (I will go) and become an instance of Christian hope for human society. For if someone like RM can change so dramatically, then there is hope that others can also change in this way—if they strive to “love others as oneself.” For RM’s words, his experience—even more, he himself—are an example for his listeners/readers that such a positive change in themselves and in human society is possible if they want to believe and do believe through and in Christ, the “living image-icon of truth.”

Popytka opredeleniia zhanra,” *Dostoevskii i mirovaia kultura, Almanakh No. 20*, Sankt-Peterburg-Moskva: Serebrianyi vek, 2004: 148-69, here 148.