

FYODOR MIKHAILOVICH DOSTOEVSKY TODAY¹

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THE centenary of the death of the Russian writer F. M. Dostoevsky (1821-81) is not merely an anniversary like any other, but a landmark in human history which deserves to be noted, observed and reflected upon. It is not just by chance that his novels and stories are still being read appreciatively, particularly by non-Russian speakers who have no background in Russian culture. Furthermore, it is not simply a desire to penetrate the secrets of the Russian heart, the peculiarities of the Russian character or the Russian style of life that creates their interest in his writings. Dostoevsky did of course reflect his own age and describe the situation in the Russia of his time, and it is valuable to study this aspect of his work. But it is not the whole. From the depth of his sensitive heart and with his prophetic finger this writer touched on something not exclusively Russian, but universal, global, even cosmic. He introduced philosophy and theology into a story in such a way that even a hundred years later everyone can find something familiar and personal in it, irrespective of his culture and language. He unearthed seeds which bore shoots many years later. He reflected in a Christian way on the crops and the future of what had been sown, and traced the mechanism of the historical process, not merely from the political and socio-economic point of view, but in human terms. This is probably the most significant feature of Dostoevsky's work.

The literature he has left, highlighting the tragedy of his contemporary situation — the tragedy of the struggle between good and evil — points to the future. This can be seen in *The Adolescent*:

Oh, when the evil of the day passes and the *future* comes, then the future artist will discover beautiful forms to depict even the passing disorder and chaos. At that time similar 'notes' will be necessary . . . and will give material which is honest, however chaotic and fortuitous it may be. Some true features will nevertheless survive and will show what might be hidden in the soul of another adolescent of those troubled times — something not without significance, for generations come from adolescents.²

¹ Translated from the Russian by E. Newton.

² *The Adolescent*, Chapter 13, Part Two (Moscow, 1972), p. 558.

Alyosha and the boy Kolya in *The Brothers Karamazov* are adolescents with hopes for a better future. What Alyosha Karamazov went through after the death of the *starets* Zossima made him a man of perfect courage: 'Threads from the innumerable divine worlds knit together in his soul and it quivered all over in its "contact with other worlds" . . . whatever idea there was in his mind was already there for his whole life and the world to come.'³ Perhaps too, Shatov in *The Possessed* is one of those adolescents, uneasily bearing within himself the seeds of good. Personal ambitions and illness, the sorrow and confusion of the pre-revolutionary years, a rising tide of unbelief, all depicted — sometimes grotesquely — in Dostoevsky's novels, do not smother a yearning for the *future*, for something more just, more human, more divine, much more beautiful. The contrasts between the tragedies of his heroes seem to give added weight to prince Mishkin's vision in *The Idiot: Beauty will save the world*.⁴

'Future artists' in both East and West have taken up the gauntlet thrown down by Dostoevsky, the cavalier of Russian tragedy. Some of them have done so in order to fight in the arena of ideas, others to stand shoulder to shoulder with him and to underline the 'certain true features' to be seen in events after his time. Books, reviews and articles have been written to commemorate his death, and have analysed his works knowledgeably and usually lovingly. Take, for example, the article 'Russian Tragedy' by Archpriest Sergius Bulgakov,⁵ or Nikolai Arsenev's four essays, 'The Spiritual Bases of the Work of Dostoevsky', 'An Element of Awakened Chaos and Dostoevsky's Hunger for Comeliness', 'Dostoevsky and Youth' and 'The Religious Experience of Dostoevsky',⁶ or George Steiner, *Tolstoi or Dostoevsky*.⁷ These all contain 'certain true features', illuminated by a fresh conception of the situation and, as is natural, by the sympathies and antipathies of good authors.

Can one more article such as this add anything new? Perhaps not; but its purpose is not to find something new, but to look at the works of Dostoevsky from the ecumenical point of view, from the angle of the interests and perspectives of the ecumenical movement in its desire for

³ *Brothers Karamazov*, p. 554.

⁴ 'Beauty will save the world' — Hyppolitus said to Prince Mishkin: 'Is it true, prince, what you say — that "beauty" will save the world?', *The Idiot*, Vol. II, Part III. Paris 1943, p. 73. Later on, the opinions of Aglai, p. 239.

⁵ Sergius Bulgakov, 'Russian Tragedy', in *Quiet Thoughts*. (YMCA Press, Paris, 1976) (from articles 1911-1915 (Moscow, 1918)).

⁶ Nikolai Arsenev, *Dostoevsky, Life with God* (Brussels, 1972).

⁷ George Steiner, *Tolstoi or Dostoevsky*. An essay in contrast (London, 1959).

Christian unity and service to the world, which is no more peaceful now, a century after his death.

The struggle between good and evil, sin and virtue, truth and falsehood — all this goes on in the human heart during man's short stay on the earth, between individuals and between groups based on human agreement and human community.⁸ In this conflict, Christian values form an intricate web which not everyone sees. But on that web human existence is woven. Although people are linked in their freedom in various ways — sometimes including such a 'web' — their choice and their craftsmanship determine its pattern. Dostoevsky shows us a spider's web of a canvas, and how the embroidery upon it is spoiled by the blindness of his heroes, their inclination towards evil, sin, darkness and lies. But he also calls us to return to the 'canvas' of the Creator, which means: forgiveness and repentance through active love; he also calls us to 'kiss the earth' which bears both death and life, sorrow and joy, the temptations of the 'wise spirit' of the Grand Inquisitor and the silent presence of Him Who is above all and Who, of his own free will, lowered himself to the semblance of a 'fearful corpse'.⁹ In this struggle there is tragedy, but also at the same time an imperative dialectical call to step-by-step progress towards perfection, towards the harmony of the future age, described by the Apostle Paul in a phrase which unites faith, love and hope, to the end that 'God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 15.28).

In Dostoevsky's novels we meet people fighting on both sides of the conflict, people who leave traces either of good or evil, who bear in themselves and to those around them either salvation or destruction. There are repugnant characters such as Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, Smerdyakov and Pyotr Stepanovich in *The Possessed*, for instance. But worse than they are the 'idealists of evil', those who bear the external appearance of respectability, such as Verkhovensky in *The Possessed* or Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers*; also the destructive Kirillov, Shatov and others, attracted by absurd ideas, who try to tear themselves away from the vice of evil but do not have the strength to do so. There is a great number of unhappy, weak and sick people,

⁸ Dmitri Karamazov: 'It is a terrible thing that beauty is not only frightening but also something mysterious. It is the devil fighting with God and the battlefield is people's hearts'. *Brothers Karamazov*. Life and Culture (Riga, 1928), Vol. I, p. 166.

⁹ See *Brothers Karamazov* — the Grand Inquisitor. Also *The Idiot*, Vol. II, p. 104. 'Christ is a fearful corpse . . . The frightening force of nature. . . . How can one overcome it, when even He, Who was conquering nature throughout His life, to whom it submitted itself, did not overcome it . . . Nature and "the Creature"?'

depressed by their wretched lives. And then there are those like the *starets* Zossima, Alyosha, the Tatar Aley in *Notes from the House of the Dead*, brilliantly characterised as emphasising and distributing good, about whom Seraphim of Sarov in his discussions with the Motovilo said that in saving themselves they promoted the salvation of thousands around them.¹⁰ These last also bring peace to their environment, and with their 'peaceful spirit' support and raise up Grushenka and the 'old ladies' seeking the solace and blessing of Zossima and many, many others. Pride, licence, egoism, money-grubbing, voluptuousness and hate, issuing in self-destruction, are the lot of some. Gentleness, meekness, self-sacrifice, longing for the truth and self-giving are the characteristics of others, such as prince Mishkin. Between them lies a whole range of categories — the 'spiritually impoverished', 'ordinary people' or those described in *The Idiot* as being 'wiser'.¹¹ But ahead of them all shines the image of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor.

Dostoevsky sometimes lays the paint on thick and portrays one-sided characters. Perhaps this is necessary in order to make the dialectical contradictions clearer. However, even in the extremest expressions of evil he sometimes sees something human. In his anti-heroes he tries to find something to offset their general sinful way of life, some sort of partial justification, even a trace of a conversion to good and truth.¹² Humanly speaking, he is sorry for his anti-heroes. He wants to forgive them for the sake of the small portion of goodness remaining in them. He also gives darker sides to his positive characters, some weakness natural to the human being. This is what makes his

¹⁰ See the discussion between Seraphim of Sarov and the merchant Motovilov.

¹¹ *The Idiot*, Vol. II, pp. 165-7. 'Ordinary People. They have a brain, but no ideas, no talent, no specialities, not even any eccentricity. They have a heart, but are not generous . . . There are an extraordinary number of such people: they can be divided, like all people, into two main groups: some are limited, others "more intellectual", the former are happier. To a "limited", "mediocre" person there is, for example, nothing easier than to fancy himself to be an unusual, original person and indulge himself in this fancy without any qualms. Some of our young ladies have had their hair cut, wear blue glasses and call themselves nihilists. They believe that by wearing blue glasses they will soon acquire their own convictions. . . . For the majority of "the more intellectual", it is not so tragic; all that happens is that in the end they ruin their liver. But, all the same, before humbling and subjugating themselves, these people sometimes play pranks for a long time, from their youth onwards, before age subdues them and all their desire for originality. . . . Never in their life have they any desire to humble themselves . . . They can never, in their lifetime, find out what exactly they need to discover, what, in fact, they are waiting for their whole life: be it gunpowder or America. But, it is true, this yearning for discovery was also the fate of Columbus and Galileo. . . .'

¹² See Nikolai Arsenev's articles.

characters convincing and alive. Evil is always only a deception, something coming from outside, something which possesses a person only because he is imperfect or has been deluded, or even more often, because he has a generally unsettled life, is the victim of prejudices, or has lost the way. In an evil person the human element is always still present, even if it is by a false path that he is seeking for blessing. All that needs to be done is to support, correct and guide him. But Good — in the absolute meaning of the word — exists only in its final ideal, in Christ, the beginning and end of a genuine life of perfection. Good has not been perfected in other people. But even their imperfect good can touch the human heart and make it different, less evil, less erring, as is evident, for example, in the story of Dmitri Karamazov or Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*. In both cases it was women who brought about the change for good — Grushenka and Sonya. Up till then they themselves had not been so good, but acquired blessed strength to relieve the sufferings of their neighbours by bearing their own sufferings and the sufferings of others. (Special mention should be made of the role of women in the lives of Dostoevsky's heroes: it is much more positive than negative.)

This, then, is the Christian way, a way of suffering and the way of the cross for the sake of resurrection and the renewal of life. St. Augustine, and before him Mary Magdalene, and the sinners who came to John for baptism in the Jordan in order to wash away their sins — were they not following the path of Christ himself, the sinless Saviour of the world who, knowing everything from beginning to end, from time everlasting, went down into the muddy waters of one of the most insignificant rivers in the world in order to leave a mighty symbol for the cleansing from sin and the reception of the waters of life, yes, the waters of life eternal, even though he did it in the turbid Jordan? This is the path traced in Dostoevsky's novels. The 'dregs' settle to the bottom of the streams of pure water, and so it must be, for otherwise how could the pure water flow? And how else could there be nourishing soil to support the *new lives*? — lives striving for greater perfection, seeking to glorify the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega of existence, the Christ, the eternal Word. He was incarnate and made man in all his humiliation, all his poverty, even in the repulsiveness of a material life, in order to elevate its lies, deceit, temporality and corruption to a kind of cosmic triumph of life where there would be neither the lie of the 'Grand Inquisitor' nor the deceit of the 'Five' in *The Possessed*, nor the temporality of the fruitless quarrels between

'believers' and 'non-believers', where 'corruption' becomes a fertile soil bearing together the fragrant flowers and fruits of a new life. All this for time everlasting, on the earth and in the infinite dimensions of heavenly space and time, in comparison with which the satellite of one of the small stars of the universe, our sun, is nothing. Yet in this 'nothing' the 'microcosmos' has its place — the human being, created in the image and likeness of *God* — and, therefore, God-like — for whose sake the Creator of the universe, its Provider and Saviour, was incarnate and made man. In order to highlight the value of the poor, the oppressed, the weak, the worthless human being he humiliated himself on the cross, and took on the fearful appearance of a corpse in order to manifest the glory of the resurrection. He did it too, so that he could stand before the tribunal of Pilate, as in *The Master and Margarita* by M. Bulgakov or the tribunal of the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*. And he stands before the tribunal of humanity today, in the midst of the struggle between good and evil, between the destruction of one of the failing planets and its working for its own resurrection and for the affirmation and increase of life beyond the boundaries of this little world in our solar system and others like it through the vast cosmos, whose ultimate destiny (if it proves to be ultimate) is known only to God and his Christ.

Do not the outlines of this path traced by Dostoevsky have some significance for the ecumenical movement? Man and society, microcosmos and macrocosmos, earth and heaven, the unity of the Church and the unity of mankind in the complexity of our common existence — is it not in this field that the ecumenical movement must bear its first-fruits? Is not Christ's weakness in his encounters with 'powers, forces, leaders of the darkness of this world' a challenge facing the ecumenical movement in its programmes?

The task of the ecumenical movement is not mere formal proclamation of 'repentance, the cross and the resurrection'. The 'sacrament of the Word' about which Protestantism has so much to say, and which sometimes impedes ecumenical progress, must become the proclamation of the 'sacrament of life'. But for this we need inspiring examples of life, of life worthy of mankind. And Man with a capital M must make his appearance in a million human lives — but not that 'man-god' of whom the heroes of *The Possessed* dreamed, and who is none other than an Anti-Christ.¹³ Maxim Gorky's 'Man with a

¹³ *The Possessed*, dialogue between Kirillov and Stavrogin. See the edition of I. L. Lodizhnikov (Berlin 1921), Vol. 1, p. 296.

capital M' is not the 'man-god' of Kirillov in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*. The latter is an antithesis to Christ, a 'wise man' whose ideal is pride in 'the wise spirit' that inspired the Grand Inquisitor. Maxim Gorky's man, as well as Dostoevsky's, is, if we may use Christian terminology (whether understood theologically or in a secular fashion), a 'conciliar person', a member of the Body of Christ. It is through his appreciation of his membership of the 'Body' (society) that Man with a capital M must supply examples of life worthy of him. In the dialectics of living relationships this means a transition from the small, weak, insignificant man — the 'individualist' of Dostoevsky — to 'Man with a capital M', the social person of Gorky. This implies a movement from the personal, always somewhat egoistic, to the social, in other words, from 'I' to 'We'. However, this also implies movement through the 'social', with a certain suppression of the personal, to the full worth of Man — to the harmony of the personal and the social in the process of growing perfection, whose marker beacon always is and always will be 'God, all in all'. The trinitarian nature of God as recognised in Christianity implies the ideal harmony of the personal attributes of God in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit within the *koinonia* and the dynamics of *symphonia* for the 'unity of all in all'. This points to the need within the ecumenical movement to re-think structures and relationships, to include them within the life of each person, man or woman, child or old person, so that they become aware of their own place as a link in the organic chain of life-following-Christ, so that each individual life is at the same time the life of the Body. How necessary that is for the unity of the Church and the unity of mankind — and the guiding light, as Dostoevsky says, is Christ.

But returning to reality — to what is in the mind and hand of each person at the end of the twentieth century — we come up against what could be termed the 'perversion of the ideal'.

The man-god Kirillov in *The Possessed* represents a perversion of the God-man, and because of that perversion ends his life absurdly. His man-godness is in the end like an animal snapping at one's fingers.¹⁴ The potential man-god convinces himself that there is no death, that

¹⁴ *The Possessed*, Vol. II, p. 351. 'Then something so hideous and rapid occurred that Pyotr Stepanovich could no longer marshal his thoughts in any sort of order. He had scarcely touched Kirillov when the latter suddenly bent his head and with his head knocked his candle out of his hand; the candlestick flew with a clatter to the floor and the candle went out. At that same instant he felt a terrible pain in the little finger of his left hand. He yelled and all he remembered was that, beside himself, he, with all his force, hit with his revolver the head of Kirillov which had fallen towards him and bitten his finger.'

only life exists, and therefore shoots himself in the head in order here and now to possess the 'fulness' of his man-godness; before this, in an animal fear of death, he bites Pyotr Stepanovich's finger. Here is a perversion! Instead of fullness there is the nothingness of non-existence; instead of order there is outrage. In *The Brothers Karamazov* we have the *starets* Ferapont, the hermit, who is in actual fact a wild fanatic, an ignorant monk, an opponent of the *starets* Zossima. This 'hermit' out of obscurantism saw visions of some sort of 'good spirit' (comparable with the diabolical figures of M. Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*) and in his 'wisdom' distinguished between this imagined 'good spirit' and the Holy Spirit. The teachings of Christ in the Gospels are cut across by the ideas of the 'wise spirit' of the Grand Inquisitor. For full and responsible life in the freedom of sonship is substituted the animal-like well-being of an insignificant existence subdued to the 'wisdom of Grand Inquisitors'. The Christian message of resurrection and eternal life is itself falsified and exchanged for something else — something which has nothing substantial in common with Christianity. Life somehow changes into death, development into dying.

How wise and shrewd the ecumenical movement needs to be if it is not to be led into the perversion of the ideal of which Dostoevsky's grotesque examples warn! And how wise and shrewd the humanitarian movement for justice, peace and a better organisation of the human family must be if it is to avoid perverting great ideas prompted by humanity and bringing them down to the level of the 'Five' of Pyotr Stepanovich or the genocide committed in Kampuchea! The clearest cases of today's perversion of ideals are militarism pretending to promote security, the transformation of our world into a powder-keg, a magazine of potential nuclear annihilation, and the activity of multinational corporations, allegedly aimed at bringing prosperity to the nations, but in fact dispensing corruption, radical injustice and destruction of the economic, social and political order, and making the world a place of egoistic acquisition and of unawareness that the resources are not boundless.

One of Dostoevsky's novels is entitled *Poor People*, and the theme of poverty runs through other of his writings as well. Poverty here should be taken in the material sense — but beyond that there is something more terrifyingly destructive, spiritual impoverishment.¹⁵ The gap today between rich and poor is appalling. Sooner or later such gaps

¹⁵ See the article entitled 'Poverty is not a vice, but a wolf to be kept from the door' in CCPD Dossier No. 18, *Christians' Participation in Development in Socialist Contexts*.

always end in an enormous explosion, with terrible bloodshed. Thought should be given to this, and in this connexion CCPD's programme, 'A Church in Solidarity with the Poor', is relevant.

But we must consider deeper things. In one place Dostoevsky quotes from Revelation words which are worth citing again:

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need for nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see . . . (Rev. 3.14-8).

The cold and the hot, in the words of Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, are believers in the world and God's believers,¹⁶ but according to Dostoevsky the difference is between ideological following of the Grand Inquisitor in his attachment to 'the knowledge of the wise spirit' and following the silent shadow of Christ and here and there lighting icon-lamps, if only to give relief to 'some old ladies' (Kirillov in *The Possessed*). The lukewarm is that overwhelming mass of people who live simply because life has been given to them, who live without any high-flown thoughts or ambitions of religious or material development, but at the same time devote all their energy to the satisfaction of their trifling egoistic demands. Such become rich, but not in God; they are prosperous and self-satisfied; from the chapel in their pettiness they judge others and would like to rule them too — as, for example, Mrs Khokhlakov in *The Brothers Karamazov*, who judged the *starets* Zossima because he 'started to rot' after his death and who offered Dmitri Karamazov the 'serpent' of goldfields instead of the wafers of real help that he needed. Apart from this majority there is another category described in *Notes from the House of the Dead*:

. . . strange people, humble and not at all lazy, but whom it seems fate has destined to be poor. They are always solitary, always

¹⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*.

slovenly, they always look somehow downtrodden and rather despondent and are for ever being ordered about by somebody, running somebody's errands . . . No initiative (which grieves them and is burdensome) . . . Only to serve . . . Only to dance to somebody's tune . . . their destiny is to do things for others . . . No revolutions can help them get rich . . . They are poor everywhere . . . Such people are to be found not in one single nation, but in all societies, classes, parties, newspapers, associations.¹⁷

Probably what John the Evangelist wrote in The Apocalypse as the words of the Angel of the church at Laodicea and what Dostoevsky said about the 'strange people' are somehow linked: the first group is surely not possible without the second. The conceit of the rich Laodiceans and the everlasting poverty of the 'strange' together constitute the phenomenon of spiritual impoverishment. However, the 'cold' and 'hot' categories are not free of the marks of spiritual impoverishment either. If the latter are in isolation, and even more if they are at enmity with each other, they too are spiritually poor, unfortunate, miserable, blind and naked. This subject Dostoevsky discusses is exceedingly confusing,¹⁸ but it is also so topical that it would seem that the whole future of the human race depends on the proper placing, elaboration and concluding of the theme. In the ecumenical movement it arises in the context of the programme, 'A Church in Solidarity with the Poor', but so far debates on what 'poverty' is, how to interpret the Gospel text, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit', the meaning of 'spiritual impoverishment' have not reached any clear conclusion. Meanwhile militarism and the activities of multinational corporations are being seen within the framework of spiritual impoverishment. Egoism, consumerism and moral corruption are other elements to be taken into account. I believe it is impossible for us to ignore these findings, either in the West or in the East. Teilhard de Chardin remarked on them in *The Future of Man* when he said that the lukewarmness of the indifferent, egocentric majority can and must be lifted and borne away on the tide of progress, where the combination of 'faith in God' and 'faith in the world' provides the powerful ideological stimulus of 'perfection' — a concept which mankind has not yet

¹⁷ *Notes from the House of the Dead* (Berlin 1921), Vol. 1, pp. 81ff.

¹⁸ In actual fact the problems of 'poverty', 'spiritual poverty', 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' and 'spiritual impoverishment' are complex. Three books on 'The Church and the Poor', published by CCPD (edited by Julio de Santa Ana), as well as the Melbourne Conference on 'Your Kingdom Come', have only touched on this complexity.

grasped, and which is now only beginning to be taken seriously in the ecumenical movement.¹⁹

Obviously any analysis which divides people into categories simply according to their material wealth and poverty is erroneous. Dostoevsky shows that each person is at the same time both rich and poor, and this dialectic holds in both the material and the spiritual realms. The CCPD programme for 'A Church in Solidarity with the Poor' supports the movement for freedom, revolutionary change for the benefit of the poor, for justice, for participation, for a sustainable society (JPSS). If it heeds what Dostoevsky says about the struggle within each person, in his own heart, the struggle in which sin and evil often prevail and good and truth are defeated, yet where, in the last analysis, the bright image of the saving, active love of Christ heals all, then it will become both more profound and more active. For people do not suddenly become happy once revolutionary changes have occurred. After and beyond the 'struggle for justice' this happiness still remains a beckoning vision, which can be realised only by increased self-awareness and responsibility, by the education of a 'new man', high in his human worth and fully devoted to the social ideal. Yes, and the general principle holds good that happiness is something to be found in other ways than through the socio-political order, poverty or riches, intelligence or stupidity.

Happiness comes from an awareness of the fullness of life. It is a good thing when that fullness is expressed in 'macro' terms, but it can also be expressed in 'micro' forms. 'A little kindness can turn a hut into a paradise', as a Russian proverb runs. This 'kindness' is to be sought with Diogenes' lantern in both the 'macro' and the 'micro' dimensions. As Dostoevsky writes at the end of *Humiliated and Insulted*, 'We may be humiliated and insulted, but we're together.'²⁰ It is better to be poor economically than spiritually impoverished — any community is better than the individualism of estrangement. This corresponds to the biblical understanding of 'riches' and 'poverty'. (And the poor are always more in solidarity with each other, in the best sense of the term, than the rich.)

However, 'together' has also another meaning. There are different kinds of 'agreement' and 'community', which, taken together, do indeed express the grand truth of socialisation (and at the same time

¹⁹ See Lebedyev's dissertation in *The Idiot*. 'Show me the thought which binds humanity today.' *The Idiot*, Vol. II, p. 64.

²⁰ *Humiliated and Insulted* (Paris 1945), Vol. I, pp. 372-7.

the grand truth of the inner linking of the structure of the Church in *koinonia* and *symphonia*), but at the same time are opposed to this harmony of diversity in the dialectics of world existence.²¹ There also exists, as we must now notice, a solidarity of the 'rich' for greater oppression, enslavement and power over the world.

False communities and agreements are usually camouflaged by a show of general well-being and prosperity. Dostoevsky's key to an understanding of them is given in the examples of the 'Five' in *The Possessed*, of the agreements between Fyodor Karamazov and Smerdyakov, and of the secret understanding, felt only spiritually, between Smerdyakov and Ivan Karamazov. In our world such 'false communities and agreements' have widened to engage whole societies — such as Hitler's Reich, 'Kampuchean Communism' and other distortions of socialisation.

When Dostoevsky reflects on true agreement and community he has in mind above all the wholeness of a nation, but not in the sense of national socialism. A Russian and a Russophile, he naturally nurtures the idea of the significance of the Russian people — a God-bringing people, called from above to save the whole world. He is also convinced that every nation has its own national idea, its own wholeness. In the Russian people, in the words of Dostoevsky's heroes, the national idea is expressed in a 'national God', a 'Russian Christ'. That is why he spoke against the 'unbelief' of his time. For him, unbelief meant a violation of the idea of a 'national God', an attempt to thwart not only the divine ideal for the nation, but also the idea of a 'nation' itself — the community of the national body, which one of the heroes seeking the truth, Shatov, identifies with the Divine Body. 'The nation,' says Shatov in *The Possessed*, 'are the Divine Body . . . The only God-bearing nation is the Russian nation . . . I believe in Russia, I believe in Orthodoxy . . . I believe in the Body of Christ . . . I believe that the second coming will take place in Russia . . . I will believe in God.'²² The thought of the mission of salvation of the Russian people recurs in *The Idiot*, *The Brothers Karamazov* and other works. In *The Idiot* Prince Mishkin affirms that the resurrection and renewal of all mankind will

²¹ The dialectics of personal feelings and social relationships are constantly present in Dostoevsky's works. For example, what is said of Elizabeth Nikolaevna in *The Possessed*: 'Beneath her constant, sincere and utter hatred for you, there are sudden flashes of love and . . . insanity . . . the most sincere and boundless love and — insanity! On the other hand, in the love which she feels for me, also sincerely, there are sudden flashes of a hatred — of the most powerful kind!' *The Possessed*, Vol. 1, pp. 52-3. (And what about the socio-political context?)

²² *The Possessed*. See pp. 306-15 of the Russian version.

come to pass through Russian thought, through the Russian God and the Russian Christ. 'Show this,' he exclaims, 'and grow into a giant, powerful and righteous.' 'Sword and barbarity' do not come from the Russian people, but peace and a higher level of culture.²³ To interpret this it may be said that Russian nationality and its meaning for the whole world are not in any way exclusive or superior, nor do they attempt to bind others and take away their freedom. Throughout their history the Russian people have nurtured in themselves a sense of nationality which is necessary for national self-awareness, for national pride, for patriotism and for service to others out of the richness of their own self-awareness, self-sacrificing service to their brothers, be they greater or lesser. The Russian people have no sense of national exclusiveness; they are much more inclined to bow down before the minds, cultures and customs of others. They seek to serve others, not by throwing away their own open, special, deeply-rooted national features, but out of their sharp, fearfully imperative if sometimes subconscious experience of suffering and victory, from the experience of the *koinonia* wholeness of the nation, where each, in all his sometimes extravagant individualism (as Dostoevsky's heroes) is yet an integral part of the whole in suffering and in joy, in oppression and in triumph.²⁴ This was experienced in suffering the Tatar-Mongol yoke, in the patriotic wars against Napoleon and Hitler, in the efforts to liberate Bulgaria, Serbia and Rumania, when the wholeness and the significance of the nation-wide endeavour were especially deeply felt, and also in dispersion and emigration with the despair of being wrenched away from the national body, despite the preservation of personal well-being. All this probably applies in comparable ways to any nation, and in it the Russian people are able to discover their community with all the people of the earth, and in the knowledge of that community to find ways of agreement for the resolution of the problems facing the world.²⁵ This *ecumenical* aspect of the national

²³ *The Idiot*, Vol. II, pp. 259-63.

²⁴ *The Possessed*, discussion between Shatov and Stavrogin, Vol. I, pp. 306-15. *The Idiot*, Prince Mishkin's soliloquy, Vol. II, p. 263. *The Adolescent*, Versilov's opinion of the Russian nation, pp. 461-2.

²⁵ Once more, Versilov's opinion of the Russian nation in *The Adolescent*: 'Over the years some sort of higher cultural type of person, never before seen, has been created, the like of which does not exist elsewhere in the world, — a type of universal scapegoat for all ...' A strange thing: 'the Russian is the most Russian when he is the most European. In France I am French, in Germany, German, in Ancient Greece, Greek, yet at the same time very Russian (p. 462). 'Universal scapegoat' is a characteristic expression, used in connexion with the Russian character.

Russian awareness should be emphasised in any discussion of Dostoevsky.

The limits of a brief article make it impossible to touch on many other matters which Dostoevsky brings before the mind of his reader by his descriptions of the destinies of his characters and by his judgments on them. In his reflecting on the future he was a man of his own time, and not everything in his writing is unconditionally applicable to ours, especially some of his political digressions. His ecumenical views — such as his evaluation of Roman Catholicism — are not contemporary, though they do deserve attention. He was not a theologian in any formal sense of the term. His theology — national theology — is that of the *starets* Zossima. It is ecclesiastical in its sympathy for Zossima's young soul, longing with the incense of the liturgy for the ray of the sun that met the puffs of the incense smoke at the little window in the cupola of the church.²⁶ Dostoevsky, like Lev Tolstoi, is seeking the simplicity and truth of Christ in theology and the life of the church. The ways the two great writers understand life and theology are perhaps different. One goes from simplicity to a sort of complexity, the other from complexity to simplicity. Yet both meet at the feet of Christ — a Russian Christ, a national Christ, as comprehensible and as simple as the 'old ladies' coming up to Zossima.²⁷

In thinking about the ecumenical movement in dialogue with Dostoevsky's writings, i.e. about the concerns of ecumenism with such themes as 'Faith, Science and the Future' or 'The Unity of Church and

²⁶ See *Brothers Karamazov*, Vol. 1, pp. 445-6. This picture of the Orthodox liturgy is useful for a better understanding of 'orthodox spirituality', where there is much about the spiritualisation of the material.

²⁷ And it may be that that 'old woman's' religion is also genuine. See, for example, in *Brothers Karamazov* the episode of the 'six grivens (coins)'. In *The Possessed* a certain Barbara Petrovna says: '... pleasure from charity is arrogant and immoral pleasure. ... Charity corrupts both the donor and the recipient and most of all does not achieve its goal, because it merely reinforces beggary. Lazy people, who do not want to work, crowd around donors like gamblers around a gaming table, hoping to win. ... Charity must be forbidden by law in society today. In the new order there will be no poor at all' (Vol. 1, p. 420). Yes, Barbara Petrovna is probably right, especially if one thinks about today's relief programmes for the Third World, including those of the World Council of Churches. But there is another 'old woman's' psychology of charity, in *Brothers Karamazov*, which is like the widow's mite blessed by Christ ... 'yesterday's six griven ... given them to her, for she is poorer than I ...' Dostoevsky explains: 'Such sacrifices are tokens, willingly given for some reason or other, and always taken from money earned by one's own labour.' (How easy it is to do, without thinking!) *Brothers Karamazov*, Vol. I, p. 435. Where, then, is the qualitative difference between what Barbara Petrovna says, and what the unknown 'old woman' does?

Mankind', it is worth remembering what was said by Zossima's pupil and disciple, the learned monk Paisy:

Secular science, having gained great strength, has in the last century investigated everything, especially that which is promised to us in the Holy Books about heaven, and after a cruel analysis by the scientists of this world, there was absolutely nothing left of the holy things. But they only investigated parts and overlooked the whole, while the whole stands before their very eyes as firmly as before, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. They repudiated Christ . . . but they have in their being the essence of that same Christ.²⁸

This is the whole which Dostoevsky emphasises in his works, and this is the goal and task of the ecumenical movement. And at the same time it is once more necessary for us to find Christ, lost in the learned writings of so-called theologians — Christ and his people in 'community, agreement and conciliarity' in the catholicity of the Church, of the genuine Body of Christ. (The 'death of God' is not a viable solution for the world!)

On what logic is the knowledge of the secrets of the world dependent today? Can the criteria only be sought in human reasoning? Certainly in reason too, but it cannot always grasp everything or find a complete answer for everything. And on what logic does the working of the human heart depend? Here there are probably as many answers as there are hearts — innumerable millions and billions of possibilities. What computer is there that can draw the finest distinctions between biological currents in the minds and hearts of all people past, present and future?

All the same, the logic of the world and of human existence must be in them. Dostoevsky finds it in the dialectical confrontation between metaphysical good and evil, in which because of the fatal attachment of the human heart to evil, it conquers; and so he draws a picture of the eschatological destruction of the world. But that picture is only relative. The possible destruction is the fruit of ignorance and folly, supported by warm emotions, weakly united with something vital. Destruction issues from human minds and hearts which are not tuned to the fine wave-length of the spiritual world which penetrates both the material world and the carnal-spiritual being of man. It arises from

²⁸ *Brothers Karamazov*, Vol. I, pp. 259-60.

insensitivity to vital energies fresher than any of the positive, negative or neutral building-blocks of our material existence, but far from easy to grasp or learn to know. How is it possible to find the right wavelength? Where are instruments to reveal the obvious and unconditioned energies of physical and spiritual existence which are necessary for life itself?

The dialectical confrontation of good and evil must lead to a positive synthesis, and the logic of the world is the logic of life itself, with all its material and spiritual values. Dostoevsky unfolds this logic in the discussions leading up to Zossima's death. To forgive all, to be responsible for all, love all, pray for all and, as a symbol of the giving of oneself for all and on behalf of all, to 'kiss the earth', the Mother and Feeder of all, who produced all from herself and in herself is ready to receive each one to eternal peace.²⁹ Mother Earth on the lips of several of Dostoevsky's characters becomes something like the Mother of God.³⁰ And this is true in so far as Mary came forth from it, in whose womb the heavenly and the earthly were united in the person of Christ, the God-man. Although the earth contains death in itself, it is the source of life, of beauty and of joy. Each human being, man or woman, young or old, and all ages of human existence, all tongues, peoples, states, must foster the life, beauty and joy which will save the world. Life, beauty and joy will not only save the earth, but also the whole universe because, cherished on earth, they pour out the incomprehensible beauty and joy of the eternal anthem of life: in life itself there is neither time nor space, and its true name is 'God is all in all'. Another synonym for life is 'love', not merely contemplative, not simply one of the emotions, but, in Zossima's words, real, suffering, fearful love,³¹ a weapon against death. In the anthem of life death loses its sadness, and the billions of reflections, feelings, hopes, anxieties, despairs and joys

²⁹ *Brothers Karamazov*. Alyosha Karamazov's diary: 'The Life of the starets Zossima, the late Father Superior, at Boz', Vol. I, pp. 439-96.

³⁰ *The Possessed*. Said by an 'old lady': 'How can one conceive of the Mother of God?' 'As the Great Mother, I say, the hope of the human race'. . . . 'So', she says, 'the Mother of God is the Great Mother earth, great because it contains joy for mankind. And each earthly yearning and each earthly tear has a joy for us; and as we suffuse the earth deep down with our tears, we immediately become glad about everything. And our grief no longer exists, that is prophecy' (Vol. I, pp. 178-9).

³¹ See the chapter in *Brothers Karamazov* entitled 'A sceptical lady'. Zossima gives her a lesson which she finds difficult to assimilate. The talk is about 'visionary and active' love. In the words of Zossima: 'Visionary love hungers to perform feats which give rapid returns and which everyone can see. . . . Active love, however, is work and self-control and for some people is, perhaps, a science in itself. . . . Active love by comparison with visionary love is a cruel and frightening thing' (Vol. 1, pp. 85-8).

connected with it find a universal, cosmic community — a community called love, and such real, suffering, fearful love is also ‘God is all in all’ — not only a name, but a dynamic instrument of perfection.

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky is in the centre of a synthesis of positive good, and for this we honour his memory.

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