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# Russia: The Spiritual Solution

Jesse Zeldin

When Russia came to the 19th Century, it was a comparatively new multi-national empire still in the process of formation. It was a country—not a nation—torn by conflicting currents and attitudes, in search, as has so often been said, of an identity. Russia, in other words, was schizoid, as some claim it still is. Certainly, no attentive reader of modern Russian literature, that is, Great Russian literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, can help but be struck by the uneasiness of the writers, by their sense of conflict and perturbation, and by their desire somehow to bring peace out of what seemed to be chaos. Writer after writer appears to be obsessed by what he perceives to be a split not only in his country's social order, but in Russian consciousness itself, so that he becomes a kind of psychiatrist seeking to heal a patient who is not only a schizoid but often a paranoid as well. I would suggest that the very concept of "wholeness" (*tsel'nost'*) so developed by the Slavophile thinker Ivan Kireevsky has this background.

In general terms, the writers took one of two approaches in their treatment of the patient, and sometimes a writer like Herzen swung back and forth between the two: the material, factual, rational approach and what I shall call, for lack of a better term, the spiritual approach. It is as though these people had all taken the 17th century Cartesian division between the world of extension and the world of mind seriously and could not bear it. Most of them solved the problem by escaping it, that is, by insisting that the truth lay on one side or the other, that it was either material or spiritual, in this, of course, echoing the division in the post-Cartesian west between empiricism and idealism. In other—and more specifically Russian—words, most laid claim either to *istina* (propositional truth) or to *pravda* (metaphysical truth). The difference between the two was made clear by Dostoevsky in *The Diary of a Writer* when he remarked that the idea of the renewal of man is preserved in Russia "*nye v revolyutsionnom vide*," but "*v vide Bozheskoi pravdy, v Khristovoi istiny...*"<sup>1)</sup>

While this species of "Russian schizophrenia" becomes manifest in the 19th century, I should like to suggest, if I may play the psychiatrist myself, that its causes lie, first, in the final destruction of the Byzantine concept of harmony between Church and State, the view that Church and State together formed a symphony, that occurred in the 17th century when the father of the first Romanov Tsar, Philaret, who was by instinct and in practice far more a politician than a priest, became Patriarch of the Russian Church (an office that had been established only about thirty years earlier); and second, when the reforming Patriarch Nikon

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1) Quoted by N. Losskii, *Dostoevskii i ego khristianskoe miroponimaniye* [New York : Izdatelstvo imeni Chekhova, 1953] p. 344.

not fifty years later was deposed by the second Romanov Tsar, Mikhail.<sup>2)</sup> Peter the Great merely gave the coup de grâce when he destroyed the Patriarchate entirely and replaced it by his institutional tool, the Holy Synod. This may well be the most important bequest to his people of this last entirely native Russian monarch, who took to calling himself Emperor, by the way, rather than Tsar. We are not speaking here of the mere alienation of classes that Peter's system gave rise to: historians have often and well remarked that phenomenon. We are referring rather to that subordination of the Church and spiritual life to the State and material machiavellian practice which effectively exiled the spirit from daily life, so that religiosity, or the spiritual, had to be *revived*—I would say resurrected—in later years, each time, we should note, by laymen rather than by churchmen. Organized Russian religiosity was even denied the outlet accorded to Roman Catholicism by the exercise of charity and the provision of education even in a highly nationalistic Europe and to Protestantism by the “work ethic” and, in the case of the more extreme sects, by the abolition of liturgy entirely in favor of individual relationship to the transcendental, so that for these last, the Church rather than the community became the individual's “heart.”

In Russia the Church was effectively secularized, even to the extent of the State at one time requiring the priest to reveal the secrets of the confessional if by any chance the “sins” of the communicant could be deemed to be subversive. When it did enter into education, it was ill-prepared for the task and did so by command of the State rather than of its own volition, and it never used education as a means for spiritual affirmation as Roman Catholicism so often did.

Originally, of course, the Church in Russia, an Orthodox Church, was different from the Churches in the West in that its essential, its core function was liturgical. When a Church of this kind—I am speaking here of the official institution—is secularized, when the liturgy is used for secular purposes, that Church loses its very reason for being, in so far as persons seriously concerned with spiritual values are concerned. What happened in fact in the course of at least the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, partially, of course, under the influences of French rationalism and German idealism, the former negatively and the latter positively, was that two Churches arose in Russia, two ways of looking at the world, the Church Visible, the organized, official Church which was no more than a secularized arm of a would-be totalitarian State, and the Church Invisible, which was the Church of Slavophile writers and thinkers in particular and of sincere believers in general. Men like Khomyakov, Ivan Kireevsky, Gogol, and Dostoevsky may sometimes have attended the official Church (Dostoevsky was a notoriously lax church-goer for most of his life) for sacramental purposes, but they contemplated and sought to define their spiritual lives outside that Church. Among ordinary believers there was a like phenomenon in that two types who were also separated from officialdom

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2) One could, with justice, date the subordination of the Church to the State in Russia at the time of the establishment of Muscovy as the most powerful state in those lands at the end of the 15th century. Nikon was, in effect, the last Patriarch (if he was not also the first) to attempt to assert the independence of the Church from the crown.

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sprang up: "holy fools" wandering the countryside and Elders attached to monasteries. There is no need here to go into the great proliferation of small sects that came into being, nor need we speak of the Old Believers.

In the days of Nicholas I the split was very clear: we should note that Nicholas regarded himself in many ways as a second Peter the Great; when he adopted the totalitarian motto "Autocracy, Nationality, Orthodoxy," the Orthodoxy he had in mind was that of the Institution, the Church Visible, what we may call the "legal," or at least the "authorized" Church, which was ruled by the Holy Synod—rather than by the Holy Spirit—and which was governed, in turn, by an Overprocurator, a layman, who served the material interests of the Empire and sought to assure that the spiritual lives of the Emperor's subjects were in accord with those interests. After all, as late as the end of the 19th century the Overprocurator Pobyedonostsev functioned rather as a minister of the Crown than as a servant of the Divine. On this score, we might keep in mind that men of an overt spiritual bent, most of them Slavophiles, were as unpopular with the bureaucracy as overt materialists, many of them Westernizers. Indeed, I would suggest that the material mode of thought adopted by the later Westernizers such as Chernyshevsky, Pisarev, and Dobrolyubov, their decision to adopt the extreme of Descartes' world of extension, made them more compatible ideologically with official thinking than the Slavophiles. The Westernizers were in bad odor not because of how they thought but because the practical conclusions they advocated threatened the political structure of the Empire, and Russia was much more a political entity than a cultural one. The Slavophiles, on the other hand, were persecuted not only or even primarily because of the practical changes they wished, but because they had opted for a spiritual solution, which the official State and Church understood far less than they did the secular, material world of the revolutionaries. Of course, in the Soviet Union the Slavophiles—and the most reactionary among them at that—eventually won.

From the literary point of view, the split I have been trying to outline was manifested already by 1840 in the two founders of modern Russian literature, Pushkin and Gogol, although the latter seems to have been far more vehement about the problem than the former. In these two we find the two main modes of literary substance and style to be developed—and, it may be, distorted—by succeeding authors.

Despite the romantic slant of some of Pushkin's settings and themes, he seems to me to be a clear product of the scientific classificatory bias of the Age of Enlightenment, as that Age came to Russia. After all, the 18th century *was* the century of Linnaeus and classification, the century, in this sense, of precise exploration of the natural world, as it was also the century that, in literature, strove for exactness of both form and language in both France and England, the century of the encyclopedia and the dictionary. In this sense, the 18th century was a century devoted to both the rational and the material (philosophically, it was the century of the English empiricists, of course). If we look at Pushkin's style, in both poetry and prose, we find that clear, simple, precise, I would say rational use of ordinary language that was advocated by many of the classical French and English. German *Sturm und Drang*, romanticism, and idealism are alien to him, as he himself said in a letter of 2 March

1827 to Baron Delvig.<sup>3)</sup> He writes, in fact, as though he had never heard of Schiller, that same Schiller who was so beloved of the young Dostoevsky, or of Herder, who had such a strong influence on Gogol, while he gives every sign of admiring the French school that was to culminate in Flaubert, that endless reviser of his own work who was always searching for, and sometimes finding, the *mot juste*. Pushkin is classical in the same sense, if I may change countries, as John Keats is classical—aware of, and occasionally committed to romantic themes, because those are the themes of his day, but economical, exact in his expression even of those themes. Like Keats, he is more Greek than he is Renaissance, despite his admiration for Shakespeare, whom Keats also, of course, much admired and thought of imitating. Unlike Gogol, Pushkin was not at all attracted by the *romanzi* of 16th century Italy, however: Pulci and Ariosto were simply not the sort he could properly appreciate. In time he became a bare-bones thorough-going realist, far more so than the Gogol whom Belinsky mistakenly praised for his “naturalism.” Indeed, we all remember Pushkin’s regret that his Tatiana did not write her letter to Eugene in Russian; but the exigencies of realism, Pushkin tells us, forced the author to reveal that she wrote it in French, from which he translated it into the Russian of *Eugene Onegin*.<sup>4)</sup>

If we turn from Pushkin’s style to his heroes, we find them many times yearning for the spirit but being forced back, whether they like it or not, into the material, which, while it often destroys them, yet is the only world in which they may really exist: Eugene in *The Bronze Horseman*, Aleko in *The Gipsies*, Hermann, the most obvious of all, in *The Queen of Spades*. In the last case, we are left with the distinct feeling that Hermann would have been better off, would have been “smarter”—and so would we be—if he had never attempted to go beyond, or outside, the extended world, if he had kept to the realm where a spade may be called just what it is, a spade. Pushkin shows himself over and over again, despite the sympathy with which he may portray certain individuals, to be a man of this world, for which he was, indeed, criticized: many reviewers disliked *Onegin* because, they said, the settings and the personages so much resembled people and places they actually knew.

Like Lermontov’s Pechorin, many of Pushkin’s protagonists are superfluous, to use a shop-worn term, because they are incapable of accepting the so-called real world. This is the same problem as that of Goncharov’s Oblomov, of Turgenev’s Lavretsky, even, in a tragic sense, of Turgenev’s Bazarov. The last, and possibly the greatest example of the type is Yuri Zhivago. That Pasternak agreed with Zhivago, as Turgenev agreed with Bazarov—in everything, Turgenev said, except Bazarov’s opinion of art—is beside the point. It is also beside the point that Pushkin was adopted by those, like Gogol and Dostoevsky, who denied the material solution themselves. They praised Pushkin for what they saw as his universalism, not for his particularity. In their hands Pushkin has a tendency to take on mystical qualities that he surely would have denied for himself.<sup>5)</sup>

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3) See Pushkin, Alexander, *Polnoe sobraniye sochinenii* [Moskva : Izdatelstvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1937], vol. 13, p. 320.

4) See *ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 65.

5) Pushkin does not go so far as to condemn the spiritual, but he does worry about it,

On the other hand, the other great progenitor of modern Russian literature—and he the more “Russian” of the two—Gogol, not only believed in the spiritual solution, he condemned materialism as in itself, inherently, evil. He seems to have been much more troubled than Pushkin was by the division that had occurred in Russia in the sense that he wished to heal it and he thought he knew *a priori* how to do so: it is doubtful that Gogol ever questioned which path the Russian psyche—or soul, he would have said—should follow. Indeed, I suspect that he did not think there was a serious choice to begin with; if he had lived four more years he might well have agreed with Fyodor Tyutchev and considered his viewpoint vindicated, if not to say proven, by the result of the Crimean War. For him much more was involved than simply the identity of Russia or than the quarrel between east and west or than the political question of whether Russia was to be a part of Europe or not. For Gogol, as for many of his successors, the battle was between good and evil and the choice—if it can be called a choice—was whether to be saved or damned, individually and collectively.

It seems to me to be impossible to read Gogol—whether one takes his early Ukrainian tales, his major fictional works, *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*, or his *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy*—and not be convinced that he was a member of the Church Invisible. In his opinion, parlous times had come upon earth and men’s souls were in grave jeopardy, for two apocalyptic armies stood arrayed against each other: one followed the flag of thingness, of materiality, and thus of discord and strife, while the other, much smaller but much nobler, had gathered around the flag of the spirit, and thus of harmony and peace. It would be foolish to think of compromise between them—reconciliation among men was possible only through baptism into the spirit and reception into the brotherhood of the Church Invisible.

In *Dead Souls* Gogol makes it perfectly clear that any concession to materiality will make the person (and he is deeply concerned with persons, despite his inability to portray characters such as we might meet in our daily lives) a non-person, will convert him into a thing, into a material “it.” For him, exclusive feeding of the body means the starvation of the soul, which in its turn means the death, that is, the passing out of existence, of the human personality. Gogol’s point is that the world materialists accept as final, the world in which sensual objects are things-in-themselves, must be rejected as inherently false. Nicholas I never realized—nor, perhaps, did Gogol himself—how subversive a doctrine Gogol was preaching, for he was in fact denying the validity of that Church Visible which had for about two hundred years been a part of the monarch’s government. Russia had moved, via Peter the Great, from the Papo-Caesarism of Patriarch Philaret Romanov to the Caesaro-Papism of Nicholas I, and both were only two sides of the same coin, which in Gogol’s estimation was counterfeit to begin with.

This point of view is quite overtly stated, I think, not only in *Dead Souls* but in

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possibly because of a serious anti-romantic turn of mind (his attitude involves a misinterpretation of romanticism, of course). He became an observer of the actual world and was satisfied to meet that world on its own terms.

"The Overcoat" as well, for the latter is a tale of the corruption of innocence by the material world. Akaky Akakyevich falls from grace, so to speak, when he is seduced by the material world, much as, in some interpretations, Adam was seduced by the flesh.<sup>6)</sup> One might, indeed, regard the tale as a story of the fall of man, with Akaky Akakyevich's overcoat taking the place of Adam's fig leaf. He who is seduced is by definition corrupted, and he who is corrupted has lost his position in God's real world; he has entered the world of at best illusion: we take note of the conclusion of the tale which calls into question the very possibility of Akaky's existence, as the conclusion of "Nevsky Prospekt" informs us that St. Petersburg itself, the material capital of the Empire, is a lie, a view of the city, incidentally, that Andrey Bely was to suggest about seventy years later in his novel *St. Petersburg*.

Gogol's distinction between the material and the spiritual, thus, is a distinction between the false and the true, the illusory and the real. If we are going to solve our problems—and this point is made just as strongly in *Dead Souls*—it can only be by returning to the truth, by being resurrected into a transfigured world. After all, Gogol's last book, *Selected Passages*, does end with an essay entitled "Easter Sunday," in which he informs his readers that reconciliation is to be effected only by the adoption of the spiritual; for Easter Sunday is a celebration of the brotherhood of man, which persists despite outward signs, even if it appears that at times, even in Russia, the Church Visible has overwhelmed the Church Invisible:

No, not in outward signs [Gogol says] not in patriotic exclamations... but on this day to look at a man as at one's finest treasure—so to embrace him and clasp him to ourselves as our very own brother... [whom] we have not seen for a number of years and who has suddenly, unexpectedly returned to us. ... the ties binding us to him are stronger than the earthly blood of our kin: we are related to him through our perfect Heavenly Father, Who is many times closer to us than our earthly father; on this day we are in His actual family, in His very house. This day is that holy day on which all humanity... celebrates its holy, heavenly brotherhood, from which not one man is excluded.<sup>7)</sup>

If we look at *Selected Passages* carefully, we can only be surprised that Nicholas's censor passed it at all (in fact, Gogol did complain that he had grossly mutilated it), for Gogol is in effect telling his audience that the truth persists *despite* the Emperor's Church. Belinsky could not have been more wrong, in other words, when he wrote that Gogol was a "proponent of the knout, apostle of ignorance, champion of obscurantism, panegyrist of Tatar ways..."<sup>8)</sup> Belinsky, at the time in his last, materialist phase, refused to distinguish between the two Churches. He thought Gogol was defending the official church, when in fact Gogol, perhaps unconsciously,

6) Gogol could easily have been borrowing from John Milton on this score: *Paradise Lost*, in Zhukovsky's translation, had gone through four editions by 1842.

7) N. V. Gogol, *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*, translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Jesse Zeldin [Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969] p. 251.

8) See Vissarion Belinsky, *Polnoe sobraniye sochinenii* [Moskva: Izdatelstvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1956], vol. 10 pp. 65–78.

was doing just the opposite. He would accept *no* version of materiality as a cure; the only acceptable cure for him was to be found in that transfigured world which was already the Kingdom of God. Belinsky, on the other hand, at this time saw no way out except by the work of man's hands. Belinsky was even closer to the rulers of Russia than either he or they ever suspected, for, like them, he had become a prisoner of Machiavelli without knowing it.

For Gogol and those of his temperament the rejection of the material also meant, mistakenly, a rejection of the rational. He did not, after all, wind up as an Hegelian, even if the extra—or supra—territorial aspect of Hegel might have appealed to him, as it did, indeed, to many of the utopians of the time. This can readily be seen in Gogol's style, which directly contrasts with Pushkin's. Indeed, we would do well to remember Gogol's statement that "... neither Pushkin nor anyone else ought now to be our model: other times have come."<sup>9)</sup> Unlike Pushkin, on the one hand, and unlike Hegel on the other, Gogol is in particular a master of the illogical connection, the outlandish metaphor, and the curious simile, as for example his comparison of the two Ivans in the tale of "How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich": one Ivan is like a radish with the tail up and the other is like a radish with the tail down. It is as though Gogol were convinced that logic is no more than an abstract construction placed upon the material to make the latter palatable; but for him, this process, by making material acceptable, also falsifies it. Gogol violates even rules of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary to the same end of revealing just how cacophonous and trivial this material realm is. I would suggest that this is what lies behind his famous depictions of *poshlost'*.<sup>10)</sup>

Gogol is also, of course, capable of soaring rhetorical flights, as for example, the famous troika passage of *Dead Souls*, which is far too well-known to bear quotation here. It is in such passages that we are supposedly transported into a free spiritual world where the truth (*pravda* rather than *istina*) may be perceived. It is here that the patient may be cured—and only here.

In other words—as if it were not already abundantly apparent—Gogol came down hard on the spiritual side, without leaving even a toe hold for materiality.

As for Gogol, so also for his longer-lived contemporary Fyodor Tyutchev. Again the material world is a degradation, although, unlike Gogol, Tyutchev spent little time decrying it. Still, the position he chose is definite:

Not by the mind is Russia understood,  
Nor is she measured by a common rule;  
She has a special stature of her own,  
In Russia one can only put his faith.<sup>11)</sup>

As typical of Tyutchev's approach as that exemplified in this so-called political poem, is the following:

9) Gogol, *Selected Passages*, p. 247.

10) See Gogol's remarks on *poshlost* (banality) in "Four Letters to Divers Persons Apropos *Dead Souls*," in *Selected Passages*, pp. 103–105.

11) *Poems and Political Letters of F. I. Tyutchev*, translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Jesse Zeldin [Knoxville : The University of Tennessee Press, 1973], p. 144.

My soul, Elysium of shades,  
Shades silent, luminous, and lovely,  
Untouched by thought of our raging time,  
By its joys untouched, untouched by its griefs—

My soul, Elysium of shades,  
What tie is there ‘twixt life and you?  
‘Twixt you, of best days past the phantoms,  
And our time’s insensible mob? <sup>12)</sup>

In both poems—and others could be cited—Tyutchev in effect rejects *istina* with its concern with material phenomena and decides for *pravda* with its concern for a reality of spirit that transcends the fleeting manifestations that occupy space and travel along linear time. But unlike Gogol, who would cheerfully abolish materiality altogether, and unlike Pushkin, who bows to its inevitability, Tyutchev seems to return to the double-realmed Cartesian universe and splits himself deliberately between the two kingdoms, so that he could write in 1853, on the eve of the Crimean War:

Days of battle and triumph will come,  
Rus will achieve her heirdom’s borders,  
Ancient Moscow will become  
The newest capital of her three. <sup>13)</sup>

Still, the material exists, but only to serve its superior, the spiritual, as the Soviets were surely aware when they transferred the capital back to Moscow, thus repudiating Peter, as they also did when they restored the Patriarchate. Tyutchev, aware of his own situation, wrote after the death of Nicholas I, in late summer or early fall of 1855, when the defeat of Russia in the war could no longer be doubted:

It was not God you served, nor Russia,  
You served yourself alone,  
And all your deeds, both good and ill,  
All was a lie in you, but empty ghosts:  
You were not Tsar, but acting sham. <sup>14)</sup>

We need not cite Tyutchev’s political letters, which make no pretense to anything but patriotic—if not to say chauvinistic—politics and a trumpeting of the Church Visible.

We must also note, however, that most of Tyutchev’s contemporaries, and the later Symbolists, regarded him as a poet in direct contrast to Pushkin (who was the first to print Tyutchev’s verses in his journal *The Contemporary*, by the way), in that they saw his work as aimed at a “higher reality” where the truth and salvation—if there is any—lay. For Tyutchev the world was spiritually one but was being disrupted by the forces of materialism; it was to this oneness or wholeness (*tsel ‘nost’*) as Ivan Kireevsky and Ivan Aksakov put it, or universality (*vsemirnost’*) as Odoevsky

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12) *Ibid.*, pp. 51–52, slightly revised.

13) *Ibid.*, p. 136, slightly revised.

14) *Ibid.*, p. 138, slightly revised.

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and Dostoevsky put it, that man must return, or that he must at least recognize. In Tyutchev's view, materialism could only lead to chaos, the triumph of the forces of darkness. Like Gogol, Tyutchev skates very close to the manichean heresy.

With all this, however, in style Tyutchev never gave up his 18th century connections and retained many of the characteristics of that uncertain classicism which preceded Pushkin; his sympathies are with Derzhavin in his use of archaisms, his tendency to syllabic versification, and his use of "composed" adjectives.<sup>15)</sup>

In the long run, thus, Tyutchev, while convinced of the reality of the spiritual, also reluctantly recognized the machiavellian necessities of preservation in the world as it is. But he never approved them and was sure that there would be a final cataclysm that would resolve the conflict:

When nature's final hour strikes,  
The body of earth will be destroyed:  
Waters again will mantle the land,  
And God's image will float above them.<sup>16)</sup>

(The reference is, of course, to man, who biblically was created in God's image.)

Once more we find that in the long run Gogol's war can only be won by one side or the other; when all is said and done a negotiated peace—if that were possible—would be only a period of truce before arms are taken up once more. When writers like Gogol and Tyutchev speak of reconciliation they mean, in fact, surrender. Not the mere laying down of arms but a total acceptance of the *Weltanschauung* of those who believed that the panacea for all man's ills was the Church Invisible, even if at times, as Tyutchev thought, the material must be manipulated. Tyutchev seems to have regarded himself as a species of platonic philosopher who, having emerged from the cave and seen the sun, must return and lead others out into the light also, by force if necessary. Let us remember that for Descartes both the world of extension and the mental world were real; the only problem was that of explaining their correspondence. For Gogol and Tyutchev, only the mental, which they made the spiritual, was real, and there was, ultimately, no correspondence at all to be explained.

But, one may ask, did any of those who chose the spiritual believe that a harmony could somehow, nevertheless, come about? Were there any circumstances under which materiality could be made acceptable? I would suggest that, despite all we have said, some did think so, by a way we have already hinted at, the establishment of the Kingdom of God, which would occur through the transfiguration of this world. Of those whose major work was written in discursive prose rather than in fiction or poetry, the most obvious holders of this view are Khomyakov and Solovyov. Both conceived of the cosmos as a whole ruled by the two laws of freedom and love, which in the Christian order, they thought, are one, while they perceived the secular order as governed by the principles of determinism and egoism. The battle is between the two orders: the Christian is unifying and harmonizing, while the secular is divisive

15) See *ibid.*, pp. 11 ff.

16) *Ibid.*, p. 33, slightly revised.

and discordant, leading to chaos and death. What must happen is that the material must be transformed by the spiritual. It is a kind of weighted reconciliation.<sup>17)</sup>

For the final statement we must turn to Dostoevsky, who was just as intransigent as his predecessors, however, even while he preached the doctrines of suffering, humility, and love.

I should like briefly to refer to sections in Dostoevsky's last two novels that have a bearing upon our subject: the first has to do with Versilov, one of the two protagonists of *The Adolescent*, and the second involves Father Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The first points to the problem, I think, and the second offers Dostoevsky's solution to it.

By the time he published *The Adolescent* in 1876, Dostoevsky had long been embroiled in a battle with the materialist-rationalist point of view, which he considered profoundly dangerous to the well-being of mankind in general and of Russia in particular, both morally and spiritually. He had started out on his campaign in the early 1860's with a parody of Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*, *Notes from the Underground*, but a convincing resolution of the problem eluded him. He had attempted to define his position more clearly in *Crime and Punishment*, passed through the positive vision of *The Idiot* (which he himself admitted was a failure) and the negative portrait of *The Devils* (which goes even further underground than *Notes from the Underground*) before he redefined his opposition in *The Adolescent*, and finally refined his response in final form in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

In *The Adolescent* it is Versilov who, borrowing from Gogol, Odoevsky, and Ivan Aksakov, to name only three of the Russian universalists, states the problem that Russians face:

Take note [he says] of a strange fact: every Frenchman can serve not only his France, but humanity, only on condition that he remains French to the utmost possible degree, and it's the same for the Englishman and the German. Only to the Russian ... has been vouchsafed the capacity to become most of all Russian only when he is most European, and this is true even in our day, that is, long before the millenium has been reached. ... I am in France a Frenchman, with a German I am a German, with the ancient Greeks I am a Greek, and by that very fact I am a true Russian, and am most truly serving Russia, for I am bringing out her leading idea. ... Only Russia lives not for herself, but for an idea, and you must admit ... the remarkable fact that for almost the last hundred years Russia has lived absolutely not for herself, but only for the other

17) We note that it is the secular that is being entirely rejected here, while the material is being transformed. This view of the cosmos of course comes very close to manicheanism again, and to the tendency to view all things as either black or white. We see this, for example, in the Soviet inclination to reduce all opposition to evil forces, while preserving for itself the distinction of being the single fighter for the truth. It is correct that there are often signs of such an inclination in western countries as well, but fortunately, the west also often has doubts about its own virtue, in official as well as in unofficial circles. There has thus far been no sign of official doubt in the U.S.S.R. All we have is an occasional heretic, most of whom, like Solzhenitsyn, become just as dogmatic as their opposition.

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States of Europe! And what of them? Oh, they are doomed to pass through fearful agonies before they attain the Kingdom of God.<sup>18)</sup>

Not long afterwards, he exposes more precisely his vision of the future of mankind, and in the process indicates his own schizophrenia:

I picture to myself ... that war is at an end and strife has ceased. ... The great idea of immortality would have vanished and they would have to fill its place; and all the wealth of love lavished of old upon Him ... would be turned upon the whole of nature, on the world, on men, on every blade of grass. ... They would be proud and brave for themselves, but would grow timid for one another; everyone would tremble for the life and happiness of each; they would grow tender to one another, and would not be ashamed of it as now, and would be caressing as children. Meeting, ... they would look at one another with deep and thoughtful eyes, and in their eyes would be love and sorrow. [But] it's noteworthy [he goes on] that I always complete my picture with Heine's vision of 'Christ on the Baltic Sea.' I could not get on without Him, I could not help imagining Him, in fact, in the midst of His bereaved people. He comes to them, holds out His hands, and asks them, 'How could they forget Him?' And then, as it were, the scales would fall from their eyes and there would break forth the great rapturous hymn of the new and last resurrection. ...<sup>19)</sup>

The self-contradiction here is obvious—Russia in the person of Versilov, cannot make up its mind, it is torn in two. Versilov expresses this overtly himself when he later remarks:

I am really split in two mentally. ... It's just as though one's second self were standing beside one; one is sensible and rational oneself, but the other self is impelled to do something perfectly senseless, and sometimes very funny; that is you want to, as though against your will; though you fight against it with all your might, you want to.<sup>20)</sup>

Significantly enough, immediately after saying this, Versilov breaks an icon in two: reality, we may say—at least Russian reality—is broken into opposing halves, and, despite what he says, Versilov turns out to be more a provincial than a universal man.

It is precisely the condition of Versilov, I think, that Dostoevsky would like to cure. It is a condition that he seems to have felt would surely, sooner or later, kill the patient if corrective action were not taken in time—and the time was growing late.

It is in *The Brothers Karamazov*, of course, that Dostoevsky finally proposes a clear cure for the disease. There he suggests not an integration of the personality (the patient is too seriously ill for that) but the entire elimination of one side of it, the elimination of the Church Visible, that is, and the affirmation of the Church Invisible. The point is made through the person whom I take to be the pivotal figure of

18) *A Raw Youth*, translated by Constance Garnett [Melbourne, Toronto: William Heinemann, 1956], pp. 464–65.

19) *Ibid.*, p. 467.

20) *Ibid.*, p. 503.

*The Brothers Karamazov*, Father Zosima,<sup>21)</sup> an Elder of the monastery, we note, and thus outside the official structure.

That Father Zosima is a healer is made clear three times in the novel: first, in the opening scene when he informs Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov that Fyodor is a liar and a liar who persists in his lie, thereby implying that he, Zosima, possesses the truth (this we could call the diagnostic step); second, when he speaks to Alyosha as he lies dying (this we could call the treatment); and third, when he is dead (which we could call the post-operative therapy).

There is no need for comment on the first, except to say that in this scene Dostoevsky gives us fair warning. As for the second, Zosima tells Alyosha the story of his life and quotes his brother as having said, "... life is paradise, and we are all in paradise, but we won't see it, if we would we should have heaven on earth the next day."<sup>22)</sup> Then, in connection with man's suffering in the material world, he refers to the Book of Job, that book of the Old Testament which most particularly considers anguish in the material world and the danger that anguish poses to man's spirit, that speaks, in other words, of the attempt of the Church Visible (represented by the friends of Job) to subvert the Church Invisible (embodied in Job himself).

Of the Book of Job Zosima says:

... the passing earthly show and the eternal verity are brought together in it. In the face of the earthly truth, the eternal truth is accomplished. The Creator, just as on the first days of creation he ended each day with praise: 'That is good that I have created,' looks upon Job and again praises His creation.<sup>23)</sup>

Dostoevsky is here apparently attempting a reconciliation, but "in the face of the earthly truth, the eternal truth is accomplished," which is as much as to say that reconciliation (*primireniye*) may only come about through recognition of the divine, a spiritual solution. In reality, Dostoevsky is here giving only a more elaborate version of the doctrine pronounced forty years earlier by Gogol in *Dead Souls*. The truth of a dogma, after all, cannot be altered by the passage of time.

I would suggest that in the Russia of Alexander II and Alexander III this insistence upon the spiritual called into serious doubt the vitality of the material world as such. Christ overcomes death and Job recognizes reality, in the sense that they affirm the transfigured world of God; what we have is a yearning for, and a belief in the persistence of, "the first days of creation" when the universe was entirely good. But that is also a yearning for a Truth which the material world, left to itself, denies. Therefore the material world must be invaded, occupied, subdued by the spiritual, and thus transformed by it. In this way the patient will be made healthy once more.

The obvious difficulty is that the Russia of the Emperors did not agree: the pleas of Solovyov and Leo Tolstoy that the Emperor Alexander III pardon the assassin

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21) There is no point here to discussing Dostoevsky's presentation of the point of view opposed to his own, since he presents it only to refute it.

22) *The Brothers Karamazov*, translated by Constance Garnett [New York : Illustrated Modern Library, 1943], p. 343.

23) *Ibid.*, p. 348.

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of his father went unheeded; once again, as in the days of Nicholas I, the government of Russia made common cause with the revolutionaries. Clearly, the Paradise we are already living in that Zosima refers to is the transfigured world—but that Paradise was resolutely rejected by both the government and its opponents of the left. And it was only to be revived, incidentally, in that part of contemporary ideology called “socialist realism.” The Soviets have much more in common with the so-called reactionaries of the 19th century, I believe, than they do with the materialist-rationalist nihilists and revolutionaries they claim as their predecessors.

Dostoevsky's position is finally clarified in the scenes having to do with Father Zosima's death: it is in those scenes that he informs his readers definitively of the difference between the Church Visible and the Church Invisible and which is to be preferred.<sup>24)</sup>

Father Zosima is dead and his corpse is surrounded by adherents of the official institution—the monks of the monastery. They think that Zosima may have been a saint, but this can only be known for a certainty if a material manifestation—a miracle, that is—occurs: they will accept him as a saint if his body is preserved from the corruption to which ordinary mortal bodies are subject. A material sign does indeed appear: he decays at a much faster rate than is usual, indicating to the establishment that God is displeased with Zosima. The question now is whether Alyosha will succumb to materiality as the monks do. At first he does and the Church Visible seems to have triumphed:

... and now the man who should, he believed, have been exalted above everyone else in the whole world, that man, instead of receiving the glory that was his due, was suddenly degraded and dishonoured! What for? Who could have decreed this? Those were the questions that wrung his inexperienced and virginal heart. He could not endure without mortification, without resentment even, that the holiest of holy men should have been exposed to the jeering and spiteful mockery of the frivolous crowd so inferior to him. Even had there been no miracles, had there been nothing marvelous to justify his hopes, why this indignity, why this premature decay? ‘in excess of nature,’ as the spiteful monks said? Why this ‘sign from heaven,’ which they so triumphantly acclaimed ... and why did they believe they had gained the right to acclaim it? Where is the finger of Providence? Why did Providence hide its face ‘at the most critical moment’ ... as though voluntarily submitting to the blind, dumb, pitiless laws of nature?<sup>25)</sup>

Alyosha would seem to be lost. But, after visiting Grushenka, he returns to the monastery and prays beside Zosima's body. The scene ends as follows:

He longed to forgive everyone and for everything, and to beg forgiveness. Oh, not for himself, but for all men, for all and for everything. ... with every instant he felt clearly ... and tangibly, that something firm and unshakable as that vault of heaven had entered into his soul. It was as though some idea had

24) One can only be surprised that these scenes were not frowned upon—and censored out—by the Imperial government, for—whatever Dostoevsky may have intended to do in his continuation of the story—they represent a challenge to the status quo.

25) *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 403.

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seized the sovereignty of his mind—and it was for all his life and for ever and ever. He had fallen on the earth a weak boy, but he rose up a resolute champion, and he knew and felt it suddenly at the very moment of his ecstasy. And never, never all his life long, could Alyosha forget that minute.

'Someone visited my soul in that hour,' he used to say afterwards, with implicit faith in his words.

Within three days he left the monastery in accordance with the words of the elder, who had bidden him 'sojourn in the world.'<sup>26)</sup>

Alyosha goes forth not to attain material success, nor to engage in social work, but, in contact with the material world, to act as a spiritual healer, to heal the world as Zosima had healed him.

Once again we have an absolute answer, and once that answer is accepted and acted upon, strife will be extinguished, Russia will be whole once more, and man will indeed live in Paradise.

The end of the 19th century by no means brought the end of this struggle. The gauntlet was to be taken up by the Symbolists, by the writers and thinkers of what Nicholas Zernov has called "the religious renaissance," by Maxim Gorky, who was called a "God-builder," and indeed showed himself to be one in his novel *Mother*, and by the ideologists of Socialist Realism (to remain within the literary context). I would suggest, finally, that there has been an attempt to adopt the view of the Church Invisible by the Church Visible by the editors of *Voprosy philosophii* and by the apologists who spring up every time the Soviet Union, imitating the Emperors, suppresses an insurrection and claims to be by this act transforming the world.

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26) *Ibid.*, p. 437.