5-1-1948

The Concept of Suffering in the Philosophy of Dostoyensky

Francis Carl Rossow
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_Rossowf@csl.edu

THE CONCEPT OF SUFFERING IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF DOSTOYEVSKY

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of Philosophy

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity

---

by
Francis Carl Rossow
May 1948

Approved by: Theodore Graebner
David M. Bretscher

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE CONCEPT OF SUFFERING IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF DOSTOYEVSKY

(Outline)

Controlling Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to describe Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering, to point out the factors that gave rise to his concept, to compare his concept of suffering with the Christian viewpoint, and finally to show the value of Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering to the world of today.

Chapter I. Introductory

I. The suffering caused by two world wars is chiefly responsible for the increasing demand for Dostoyevsky's writings in the twentieth century.
II. In view of Dostoyevsky's present popularity, it is incumbent upon us to examine his concept of suffering.
III. Before one can understand Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering, one must first become acquainted with his life---a life of extreme suffering.

Chapter II. The Life of a Great Sufferer

I. Early childhood experiences begin the development of Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering.
II. Dostoyevsky's father sends him to an engineering school in St. Petersburg.
    A. The poverty and loneliness which Dostoyevsky experiences here stimulate in him an interest in the problem of suffering.
    B. His father's death develops in Dostoyevsky a "guilt-complex," a fundamental theme in his works.
    C. This "guilt-complex" is developed further by his first epileptic fit.
III. Dostoyevsky turns to writing instead of an army career.
    A. The outgrowth of the poverty and suffering that haunt his first attempts is Poor Folk, his first novel.
    B. The Double and Netachka Nezvanova arouse a storm of literary criticism.
IV. Dostoyevsky becomes involved in The Petrachevsky Conspiracy.
    A. He barely escapes execution.

C. Transition: We can best approach Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering by way of the human riddle.

II. The Cause of Suffering.
  A. The primary cause of man's suffering is the freedom he is born with.
    1. The freedom to choose between good and evil involves torture of the conscience.
    2. The liberty to choose or reject God causes unspeakable torments.
  B. To be precise, therefore, it is the misuse of his freedom that causes man the greater part of his suffering.
    1. Christ, the God-Man, is the True Freedom.
    2. But man usually revolts, deifies himself, makes himself a man-God, and looks upon his freedom as unlimited.
    3. Unlimited freedom is really boundless slavery.
    4. Misused freedom is synonomous with evil.
  C. The evil that causes suffering need not be external evil.

III. The Character of Suffering.
  A. External suffering, according to Dostoyevsky, is inadequate in value.
  B. Dostoyevsky, therefore, favors inner suffering.

IV. The Value of Suffering.
  A. Suffering is "redemptive." This may mean:
    1. Suffering leads man to a knowledge of his deficiencies and, therefore, drives him to Christ.
    2. Suffering atones for sin.
  B. Suffering leads man to Christ, the True Freedom, and therefore leads man to genuine freedom.
  C. In this final freedom man is happy; suffering, therefore, leads to happiness.
  D. Suffering benefits not only the individual sufferer but also society in general.
    1. Through suffering one learns that he is guilty for all.
    2. Therefore, he feels responsible for all and fulfills the law of love.
  E. However, to be of any value, suffering must be accepted and understood.
    1. People who reject suffering from their world-view will not benefit from it.
    2. Certain types of people by their very make-up cannot attain the values of suffering.
    3. Those who seek evil that the value of suffering may be attained thereby will not profit from their suffering.

V. The novel, Crime and Punishment, best illustrates Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering.

Chapter IV. Two Problems

I. If man's freedom makes it possible for him to suffer, why should he not surrender his freedom and avoid suffering?
   A. Introductory: In a sense this objection is refuted already by the values of suffering. But the objection is made on the assumption that the suffering isn't worthwhile.
   B. Dostoyevsky grants that it is "natural" for man to give up his freedom.
   C. He grants that the surrender of his freedom will even effect a so-called happiness for man.
   D. But renunciation of freedom is a renunciation of man.
   E. For man to surrender his freedom is also an affront to God.
   F. This explains why Dostoyevsky is opposed to authoritarianism either in Church or State.
   G. Conclusion: Either freedom with suffering or contentment without freedom.

II. How does Dostoyevsky reconcile the presence of evil and suffering in the world with the existence of God---or if He exists, with the justice and love of God?
   A. Dostoyevsky's concern over the problem of theodicy is best shown by Ivan Karamazov. From his remarks we gather that there are three possible conclusions to arrive at in view of the presence of evil and suffering in the world.
      1. God does not exist, and the universe is meaningless.
      2. He exists but has concealed the meaning of suffering and life.
      3. He is a Tyrant.
   B. Dostoyevsky rejects many of the solutions that men have devised for the problem.
      1. Suffering is not <u>in proportion to</u> sin.
      2. The original sin explanation is no good because it is too general.
      3. Ideas of "divine providence" or "world-harmony" are inconsistent and an affront to God.
      4. Nor does Dostoyevsky favor any effort to "correct" God's world.
   C. For Dostoyevsky the solution to the problem of theodicy lies in freedom.
   D. In the last analysis, he declines to answer the problem. He advocates bearing suffering rather than explaining it.

Chapter V. Dostoyevsky's Concept of Suffering Compared With the Christian Concept

I. Comparison of the two concepts is difficult.
   A. Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering is nowhere systematized.
   B. A novice must evaluate a master.
II. Certain points of agreement, however, are immediately obvious.
   A. Both concepts look upon Christianity, not as a relief from, but as a triumph over suffering.
   B. Dostoyevsky's correlation of suffering and love is a unique fulfillment of the Christian law of love.
III. However, Dostoyevsky, in his concept of suffering, denies the total depravity of man, if not in fact, at least in theory.
IV. Dostoyevsky does not place God as prominently in the pattern of human suffering as does Scripture.
   A. This however, is due to the nature of his writings.
   B. At worst, it is a mistake of emphasis rather than of fact.
V. Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering agrees with the Christian viewpoint in its claim that suffering leads to redemption but goes beyond Scripture in its claim that suffering actually buys redemption.
VI. Both Scripture and Dostoyevsky advocate bearing suffering patiently, but Dostoyevsky goes beyond Scripture in advocating seeking suffering.
VII. There is little difference in the problem of theodicy.
   A. Both Scripture and Dostoyevsky urge us to endure rather than explain suffering.
   B. Dostoyevsky sees the solution of the problem in God's freedom and man's; the Christian sees the solution in the fact that God is Love and man is a sinner.
VIII. Whether or not Dostoyevsky preaches "Christ," preaches "hope," in his concept is a moot question.
   A. The apparent absence of the atonement in his novels is due to the nature of the situation.
   B. The preponderance of evidence supports the thesis that Dostoyevsky is an apostle of hope.

Chapter VI. Conclusion: A Personal Appraisal of Dostoyevsky

I. Dostoyevsky's realistic delineation of the suffering soul is effective "law-preaching" and prepares us for "gospel."
II. In his unique correlation of suffering and love, Dostoyevsky presents us with an effective way of fulfilling the law of love.
III. Of greatest value, both to Church and State, is Dostoyevsky's preservation of freedom even at the cost of suffering.

THE CONCEPT OF SUFFERING IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF DOSTOYEVSKY

I. Introductory

The theme of suffering was a popular one in nineteenth century Russian literature. Says Berdyaev: "Russian literature in the nineteenth century did not follow Pushkin; it was consumed in pain and distress, suffering for the salvation of the world as though it were expiating for some sin."[1] Speaking of the Russian writers themselves, Berdyaev continues: "They are in the throes of religious anguish . . . they suffer for the world."[2]

The work of Dostoyevsky[3] is the climax of Russian literature of this kind. It is "the finest expression of its earnest, religious, tormented character; its path of sorrow led to Dostoyevsky, and all the shadows of Russian life and history were gathered together in him."[4] Every reader of Dos-

---

1. Nicholas Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 29.
2. Ibid., p. 30.
3. Many different spellings of this name occur. The one appearing here seems to be the most common and will hereafter be employed throughout the paper, also in quotations, in order to avoid confusion.
4. Berdyaev, loc. cit.

toyevsky discovers the theme of suffering permeating all his novels. Dostoyevsky is almost exclusively a writer of human tragedy and suffering.

To the world of his day, however, the writings of Dostoyevsky meant little. It was a generation content with creature comforts. Science, invention, industry, democracy, and "practical" Christianity were at their height in the nineteenth century. And with this kind of world people were satisfied. They could imagine nothing better. For them this was the "real" world. Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, and others joined in protesting against this materialistic world-view and proclaimed the human heart as the stage of all reality. But these "prophets of the fourth dimension," as they are called, were at that time merely looked upon as fanatics.

In the twentieth century, however, we are witnessing the rising popularity of Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, and other seers of the suffering soul. During the First World War the "thin crust over a volcanic abyss" which our ancestors mistook for the "real" world broke, and today the works of Dostoyevsky are being avidly read under the conviction that his picture of divine heights and diabolic depths in the human soul is the world of reality.[5]

Another World War has served to increase the demand for Dostoyevsky. Ours is a suffering world. And ours too is a

---

5. Walter Marshall Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, pp. 217 - 218.

world seeking the "why" and the "wherefore" of its suffering. Dostoyevsky, the writer of human suffering, has an answer, and to him people are turning. Thus the ascendency of Dostoyevsky. In view of its timeliness and aptness in the world of today, Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering is well worth our examination. It is the purpose of this thesis to describe Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering, to point out the factors that gave rise to his concept, to compare his view of suffering with the Christian viewpoint, and finally to show the importance of Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering to the world of today.

Before one can understand Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering, one must first become acquainted with those factors in his life---a life of extreme suffering---that gave rise to his concept. Even his writings are difficult to appreciate fully unless we know something about the man himself. "The characters whom Fyodor Dostoyevsky created, their conflicts over guilt and their struggles for redemption, are and will remain an enigma for the reader who does not know something of the experiences of the man himself, for perhaps more than any other writer he drew from the depths of his own experience."[6] Dostoyevsky's heroes, therefore, are not mere <u>dramatis personae</u>. They are himself. Their doubts, their struggles, their restlessness, their iniquities, their sufferings ---all were once his. Quite obviously, therefore, an under-

---

6. Glen Martin, "Guilt and Redemption in Dostoyevsky," <u>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</u>, Vol. II, No. 4 (May, 1947), p.10.

standing of Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering, found in his writings and embodied in his heroes, is likewise dependent upon an acquaintance with his life. In the course of this paper we will discover that nearly every phase of Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering owes its origin to some experience in his life. In examining his life, therefore, we will throw light upon his concept of suffering. "It is certainly owing to the combined poverty and disease which made up his life, that he had such an unexampled insight into the lives and hearts of the humble, the rejected, the despised, the afflicted, and the oppressed."[7]

In treating Dostoyevsky's life we by no means intend to present a complete biography. We are not interested in his life primarily, but in the effect his life had upon his concept of suffering. "His life is not only interesting in itself but because it was to a quite exceptional extent the raw material of his art."[8] Therefore, those aspects of his life which were to a large extent responsible for his concept of suffering will be especially treated and emphasized. On the other hand, there is little danger of giving a distorted picture of Dostoyevsky's life. In treating especially the darker side of his life we will not be neglecting brighter aspects, because there were hardly any bright spots in

---

7. Maurice Baring, Landmarks in Russian Literature, p. 163.
8. J. A. T. Lloyd, A Great Russian Realist, p. 16.

his life. One might almost dare to say that in the case of Dostoyevsky life and suffering were synonomous.

In the hope then of discovering the factors that gave birth to his concept of suffering and in the desire to throw more light upon that concept, we turn to a brief examination of the life of Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

II. The Life of a Great Sufferer

When speaking of Dostoyevsky's life it is almost a mistake to speak of it as a "life" in the ordinary sense of the word. "He had no life: that which served him for life was a long sequence of suffering upon suffering, extreme sensation piled upon extreme sensation. It is one huge, grotesque and heart rending blunder, utterly devoid of beauty and balance and sanity."[1]

Even his birth was symbolical, for Fyodor Mihailovich Dostoyevsky was born in a workhouse infirmary in Moscow, October 30, 1821. Thus in the very first hour of his life his place in the world was indicated to him. As at the workhouse, so also during the rest of his life he was to be in close contact with sorrow and suffering.

It is likewise a mistake to speak of "childhood" in the case of Dostoyevsky, for everything that is relevant to childhood was excluded from his life. His father, the physician at the infirmary, was a tyrant in the home. As a result, little Fyodor developed a deep hatred for him.[2] Fyodor's first teacher was as much a tyrant in the school. When Fyodor was still young his mother died. A voice difficulty

---

1. J. Middleton Murry, Fyodor Dostoyevsky: A Critical Study, p. 55.

2. It is commonly thought that this hatred revealed itself many years later yet in Dostoyevsky's portrayal of Fyodor Karamazov in The Brothers Karamazov.

that Fyodor contracted in his childhood, although somewhat remedied by trips away from home, manifested itself all his life in the low, artificial, rasping tones of his voice. Much as Fyodor wished to make friends, his excessive reserve, suspiciousness, and morbid timidity kept his schoolmates at a distance. Thus Dostoyevsky grew up sheltered from all contact with the external world and deprived of friends. "This lonely childhood, this artificial development of his sensibility, left an indelible mark upon him."[3]

Already in childhood Dostoyevsky displayed an unusual interest in the sufferings of others. Despite his father's strict orders to the contrary, the young Fyodor risked talking across the fence with the patients of the infirmary, inquiring into the nature and cause of their misfortunes.

After Fyodor's elementary education was completed, his father sent him to the Military Engineering School at St. Petersburg in the hope of making a soldier out of him. Here Fyodor continued his reserved way of life. He hated the brutalism and materialism of his schoolmates and avoided their companionship. It was here too that Fyodor began his lifelong poverty because his father would not send him any money. Many a hero in Dostoyevsky's novels in continual search for money, living in a small, dingy, smoke-filled room, bare of

---

3. Henry Troyat, Firebrand: The Life of Dostoyevsky, p. 22.

furniture and devoid of light, is but a reflection of the existence that Dostoyevsky eked out in St. Petersburg.

This extreme poverty was not without its good results. Fyodor was a victim---but an intelligent victim---of his sufferings. He not only suffered, but he began to learn the value of suffering and to acquire an interest in suffering. "This young engineering student, worried continually by the most sordid needs of existence, had commenced to look beneath the surface of things, and to examine not only his own heart but the sense of want in the human race."[4] It was at the engineering school that Dostoyevsky acquired that rare power of detecting the soul's growth through suffering.[5] "A being who becomes accustomed to everything, that I think is the best definition one can give of a man," Dostoyevsky wrote later.[6]

We now come to two especially significant events in Dostoyevsky's life, the death of his father and his first epileptic fit. Fyodor had written home for money, and, as usual, his father had refused to grant his request. Upon this refusal Fyodor cursed his father for his stinginess and in a fit of anger wished that his father would die. By a mere coincidence his father was murdered a few days later by three peasants on account of his tyranny. The result was

---

4. Lloyd, op. cit., p. 19.
5. Ibid., p. 21.
6. Quoted in Troyat, op. cit., p. 41.

that Fyodor felt responsible for his father's death, felt guilty for a crime he actually had not committed. "Following the tortured corpse of Mikhail Andreevich [his father] he entered that strange region . . . where the innocent according to earthly laws are guilty according to other unwritten laws, where a given act no longer depends upon its author."[7]

This "guilt-complex" is a fundamental theme in Dostoyevsky's writings. His novels are peopled with neurotic, guilt-ridden characters. In The Brothers Karamazov Ivan, who dreamed of his father's death without committing it, is more guilty than Smerdyakov, who did the actual killing. Smerdyakov himself accuses Ivan: "You are the only real murderer in the whole affair, and I am not the real murderer, though I did kill him."[8] Likewise in The Possessed Stavrogin accepts the responsibility for his wife's murder, merely because he entertained the thought of it, although it is really Pyotr Stephanovitch who orders the murder.

Although there is much debate as to when Dostoyevsky experienced his first epileptic fit, it is commonly held that it occurred at the time of his father's death and may have even been caused by the guilt-feelings he experienced at the time. "It is impossible to know the extent to which the unconscious phase of this disease served also as a death pun-

---

7. Ibid., p. 53.
8. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 762.

ishment and an identification with the dead father. He reports himself that the attacks always left him with a heightened sense of guilt as though he had committed some terrible crime for which he had not yet been punished."[9]

Upon completion of his training at St. Petersburg Dostoyevsky turned to writing instead of an army career. Poverty continued to haunt him in his first attempts. Servants frequently robbed him. He lost enormous sums at billiards. "Money, money, always money! Dostoyevsky did not know how to earn it, how to use it, or how to keep it."[10] These financial difficulties plus the continual boredom he experienced led to illness and nervous exhaustion. His complexion became cadaverous; the glands of his neck were swollen; he coughed frequently. It is said that at this period of his life he believed that he was either consumptive or mad, that he avidly read medical books, and asked his doctor to study the bumps on his skull.[11] "Do you understand, sir, do you understand what it means when you have absolutely nowhere to turn?" asks Marmeladov in Crime and Punishment.[12] So likewise did Dostoyevsky experience the dreadful feeling of a life without purpose.

The outcome of all this suffering was his first novel, Poor Folk, "Life, and life only, taught him the secret of

---

9. Martin, op. cit., p. 10.
10. Troyat, op. cit., p. 103.
11. Cf. Ibid.
12. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, p. 17.

Poor Folk," says Lloyd.[13] Poor Folk showed remarkably well Dostoyevsky's interest in suffering humanity about him. Because of this feature especially, the book was hailed as a tremendous success. "His greatest asset, love of suffering, an endless capacity for suffering with others, gave the work its blessing," writes Stefan Zweig.[14] However, much as Poor Folk treats of suffering, it treats only of external suffering. Dievushkin and Varenka suffer, but their sufferings are merely social, material, and earthly. They do not experience metaphysical anguish. They live in a world where two times two make four. It took the lonely years in Siberia to develop Dostoyevsky's far more important concept of inner suffering.

Dostoyevsky's popularity, however, was short-lived. Poor Folk was followed by The Double and Netachka Nezvanova, both of which were severely criticized. Dostoyevsky's daughter describes at great length how severely her father suffered under this literary criticism "as he lost his illusions" concerning friendship and particularly how he writhed under the malice of Turgenev,[15] Dostoyevsky's contemporary, who "exasperated at the success of Poor Folk did his utmost to injure Dostoyevsky."[16] The effect of this literary criticism

---

13. Op. cit., p. 51.
14. Stefan Zweig, Three Masters: Balzac - Dickens - Dostoeffsky, p. 111.
15. It might be interesting to note here that Dostoyevsky maliciously caricatured Turgenev later in the person of Karmazinov in The Possessed.
16. Aimee Dostoyevsky, Fyodor Dostoyevsky: A Study, p. 45.

was only to make Dostoyevsky all the more self-conscious and reserved. On one occasion he attended a party at Turgenev's house. When he entered the people were playing cards and laughing. Dostoyevsky left immediately. Turgenev followed him and found him pacing back and forth in the courtyard, giving vent to his feelings, because he thought the people had been laughing at him. "He thought only of running away as soon as possible, of returning to his badly lighted little room, heavy with the smell of tobacco and encumbered with books and papers."[17]

It is now that we arrive at the most important period of Dostoyevsky's life as far as the development of his concept of suffering is concerned, namely, the period of his imprisonment and its antecedent events. For a lack of anything else to do Dostoyevsky had joined a small group agitating for political reforms in Russia, chiefly, the abolition of serfdom, and even advocating revolution, although Dostoyevsky himself was not a revolutionary. By means of a government spy, Dostoyevsky was discovered reading a letter written by Bielinsky to Gogol in which serfdom, the Church, and the clergy were attacked. Consequently, he and his "fellow-conspirators" were arrested and imprisoned in the notorious Peter and Paul Fortress for eight months. [18]

---

17. Troyat, op. cit., p. 83.
18. This affair is usually designated "The Petrachevsky Conspiracy"---although the name is a gross exaggeration.

One cold, frosty morning Dostoyevsky and nine others were led out to a hard-frozen field outside the city. There they listened to the reading of their sentence; they were to be shot. In the distance they could see a covered cart laden with what they took to be coffins. Three were led to the post at a time. Dostoyevsky perceived that he was sixth. In The Idiot Dostoyevsky tells us his thoughts and feelings at the time in the words of Prince Myshkin about "his friend" (Dostoyevsky).

> He had only five minutes more to live. He told me that those five minutes seemed to him an infinite time, a vast wealth; he felt that he had so many lives left in those five minutes that there was no need yet to think of the last moment, so much so that he divided his time up. He set aside time to take leave of his comrades, two minutes for that; then he kept another two minutes to think for the last time; and then a minute to look about him for the last time. He remembered very well having divided his time like that. He was dying at twenty-seven, strong and healthy. As he took leave of his comrades, he remembered asking one of them a somewhat irrelevant question and being particularly interested in the answer. Then when he had said goodbye, the two minutes came that he had set apart for thinking to himself. He knew beforehand what he would think about. He wanted to realize as quickly and clearly as possible how it could be that now he existed and was living and in three minutes he would be something---someone or something. But what? Where? He meant to decide all that in those two minutes! Not far off there was a church, and the gilt roof was glittering in the bright sunshine. He remembered that he stared very persistently at the roof and the light flashing from it; he could not tear himself away from the light. It seemed to him that those rays were his new nature and that

> in three minutes he would somehow melt into them . . . . The uncertainty and feeling of aversion for that new thing which would be and was just coming was awful. But he said that nothing was so dreadful at that time as the continual thought, 'What if I were not to die! What if I could go back to life---what eternity! And it would all be mine! I would turn every minute into an age; I would lose nothing, I would count every minute as it passed, I would not waste one!' He said that this idea turned to such a fury at last that he longed to be shot quickly.[19]

Just as the soldiers lifted their rifles to fire, a white handkerchief was waved, and the rifles were lowered. The conspirators' sentence was commuted to four years of hard labor in Siberia. No execution had been intended at all, but this mock execution was staged only for the purpose of teaching the conspirators a lesson. So harrowing was the experience, however, that one of the prisoners went insane. The covered cart turned out to be filled with old clothes instead of coffins.

On January 23, 1850, Dostoyevsky arrived at the prison fortress in Siberia. Garbed in a coat half-black, half-gray, with a yellow patch on the back, his head half-shaven, Dostoyevsky took his place among hardened criminals. In this world of vice, obscenity, drink, card games, filth and bedbugs Dostoyevsky spent many a trying hour. He was often abused by the prison authorities. It was here at Siberia that his epilepsy, which was to plague him all his life, assumed its true proportions. Dostoyevsky once wrote: "If

---

19. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, p. 55.

we were all to meet again in hell, it would remind us of the place where we were now."[20] In his physical labor, however, Dostoyevsky found delight. To him carrying stones and bricks and shoveling snow were a relief from the worries and doubts that waged war within him.

A consciousness of inner suffering as constituting real suffering was one of the more significant developments of Dostoyevsky's life at Siberia. Dostoyevsky's real sufferings lay not in the physical but in the metaphysical realm. It was at Siberia that he was plagued with "those cursed everlasting questions" that Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov, and a host of other characters in his novels were troubled with. In a letter to Madame Fonvïzin, Dostoyevsky wrote: "I am a child of the century, a child of disbelief and doubt . . . What terrible tortures I now suffer because of this thirst for faith which is all the stronger in my soul that the arguments against it are more numerous."[21] At another time Dostoyevsky said: "No quest causes a man so much heartaching as the endless quest for something he can worship."[22] "Here is the key to Dostoyevsky's suffering: he needs God, and cannot find Him."[23]

From the doubts that Dostoyevsky frequently expressed, however, one must be careful not to deduce that Dostoyevsky

---

20. Quoted in Troyat, op. cit., p. 159.
21. Quoted ibid., pp. 171 - 172.
22. Quoted in Zweig, op. cit., p. 219.
23. Ibid.

was not a Christian, as Murry holds.[24] In the very same letter in which Dostoyevsky expressed his doubts to Madame Fonvizin[25] he concluded:

> And yet sometimes God gives me moments of complete serenity. In such moments I compose for myself a profession of faith in which everything is clear and sacred. This profession of faith is simple. Here it is: Believe that there is nothing more beautiful, more profound, more appealing, more reasonable, more courageous, more perfect than Christ . . . If any one proved to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if it were really established that truth is outside Christ, I would prefer to be with Christ than with the truth.[26]

Speaking of Dostoyevsky's Siberian exile, Hromadka says:

> It was exactly there that he began to sense and fathom the invisible, intangible presence of Christ, of the living Christ, of the Crucified and Risen. There he came to understand the very heart of the Gospel: the majestic, loving, and all powerful God coming down from His holy place and encountering man not on the highest peaks of human achievement, moral virtues, and sublime ideas, but rather in depths where human life reaches the most gruesome depravity, helplessness, misery, and sorrow.[27]

That Dostoyevsky found Christ in the midst of all his suffering was primarily the result of a Bible that had been given him upon his entry into prison by the wife of one of his fellow-prisoners. Since he received no letters and had no books to read, this was his only intellectual nourishment while he was in prison. Says Troyat of Dostoyevsky:

---

24. Cf. Murry, op. cit., pp. 44 & 68.
25. See above.
26. Quoted in Troyat, op. cit., pp. 171 - 172.
27. Joseph L. Hromadka, Doom and Resurrection, pp. 40 - 41.

> His meditations on the Bible were of major importance; all his works and his whole life from then on bore the imprint of the doctrine of the Gospel. What are the novels of his second period but comtemporary histories of apostles, touched by grace, precipitated into doubt, forgotten, redeemed and driven toward ineffable certainty? The study of the Scriptures changed the perspective of Dostoyevsky's world.[28]

That Dostoyevsky himself was aware of the importance of the Bible given him is evident in the stress he lays upon the effect of the Bible upon Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment, given to him as he entered prison.

Another significant development arising out of his Siberian exile was his discovery of the common man. Upon his entry into prison, Dostoyevsky was at first rejected by his fellow-prisoners because he was educated, because he had committed no real crime, because he accepted his suffering gladly, and even because Dostoyevsky tried to be "one of them." Since he craved their friendship, they thought he must therefore be unworthy of it. Spurned as he was, Dostoyevsky, nevertheless, loved his comrades and never shunned their company. In time the love became mutual, although the gap existing by reason of Dostoyevsky's superior training was never completely hurdled. Little by little Dostoyevsky discovered that the stupid and wicked brutes around him had a soul. He once wrote: "In the penitentiary I ended up by discovering men, real men, profound, powerful and beautiful characters.

---

28. Op. cit., p. 171.

Gold under filth."[29] Hereafter Dostoyevsky was to write of the despised, the miserable, and the scum of society.

On February 15, 1854, Fyodor Dostoyevsky was sent to Semipolatinsk to complete his sentence as a simple soldier in the Seventh Battalion of the Siberian Infantry. Here he wrote House of the Dead, a record of his prison experiences. It was here also that he cultivated the friendship of a schoolmaster, Issen,[30] and his wife, Maria. Unfortunately Dostoyevsky developed a strong affection for Maria. "This pleasure in confused situations, in attachments without a future, in sensual denial, characterizes Dostoyevsky's whole youth . . . He delighted in grazing the adorable danger of sin. Like his heroes, he was willing to live for the impossible."[31]

Soon after Issen died. Once again Dostoyevsky felt responsible for the death. Nevertheless, he continued to court Maria and finally on February 6, 1857, they were married. The marriage was an unhappy one. Maria was terribly disappointed to discover that her husband was subject to fits of epilepsy, and Fyodor was continually depressed by the feeling that he had deceived her.

On May 7, 1859, Dostoyevsky was pardoned and allowed to retire from the army. However, he was closely watched by

---

29. Quoted in ibid., p. 169.
30. Issen was the type for Marmeladov in Crime and Punishment, whose habit it was to drink in order to achieve the extreme limit of sorrow.
31. Troyat, op. cit., p. 184.

the police. Moreover, he was forbidden to return either to Moscow or St. Petersburg. So the Dostoyevskys lived in Tver, a very dead town, which Dostoyevsky considered but another prison. It was not till November 25, 1859, that Dostoyevsky received full pardon and was allowed to return to St. Petersburg.

Dostoyevsky's full pardon ushered in the "busy day" in his life---days of overwork, days of endless struggle against poverty that was to continue almost till the time of his death. Together with his brother Mikhail, Fyodor put out Vremya, a conservative newspaper. Soon after his pardon he wrote Insulted and Injured. An unfortunate flirtation at this time with a certain Polina Suslova[32] resulting in travel abroad and in huge gambling losses became the motivation for a new story, The Gambler.

Misfortune followed misfortune. On account of a gross misunderstanding of an article on Polish affairs publication of Vremya was prohibited. Only after considerable effort was Dostoyevsky able again to start another newspaper, the Epocha. Both liberals and conservatives considered Dostoyevsky an enemy to their cause. At the same time both his brother Mikhail, and his wife, Maria, died, one soon after the other. "My life was broken in two . . . Around me I felt a frost and a vacuum," wrote Dostoyevsky.[33] Besides,

---

32. Polina Suslova is the type of Grushenka in The Brothers Karamazov and of Natasya Filipovna in The Idiot.
33. Quoted in Troyat, op. cit., p. 256.

Dostoyevsky was burdened not only with his own debts but also with those left by his brother. He had no time for grief. Even at the deathbed of his wife he was forced to write Notes From the Underground. In 1866 Crime and Punishment, the book which more than any other brought him fame and popularity, was published; and yet Dostoyevsky was compelled to pawn his overcoat and his last shirt at the time in order to obtain money.

His marriage to the attractive Anna Grigorievna in 1867 probably staved off utter disaster. She was formerly a secretary to whom Dostoyevsky had dictated The Gambler, and in the course of their association they fell in love with each other. This was a fortunate marriage. Although by no means her husband's intellectual equal, Anna Grigorievna was a practical, business-like woman who handled Fyodor's money affairs much more efficiently than he was able to.

Nevertheless, the designs of a notorious rascal, Stellovsky, a publisher, compelled the Dostoyevskys to choose between debtor's prison and flight; they chose the latter and traveled abroad in Western Europe for four years. But misfortune followed after. Dostoyevsky's obsession for gambling plunged him deeper and deeper into debt. At first his wife despised his gambling-habit, but in time she even encouraged it because she learned that under the feelings of guilt her husband experienced as a result of gambling away the family earnings he would get down to work. It was at

this time that Dostoyevsky wrote two well-known books, The Idiot and The Possessed. A little daughter, Sonia, born to the Dostoyevskys, died soon after her birth and brought excessive grief to them. Dostoyevsky's epileptic fits grew more and more frequent, each one making his work increasingly more difficult. Hounded by creditors, attacked by misunderstanding readers, barely staving off starvation, Dostoyevsky shuttled back and forth from country to country. "Siberia was no more than purgatory, the anteroom of Dostoyevsky's sufferings; France, Germany, and Italy were his hell."[34]

The Dostoyevskys returned to Russia in July, 1871, but Fyodor was compelled to burn all his manuscripts before crossing the border in order to avoid their confiscation. The success of his latest productions combined with his wife's sound business judgment rescued them from debt for a season. Upon his return Dostoyevsky began publication of The Writer's Diary, a tremendously successful and influential magazine. The genius of Dostoyevsky was now recognized; for a change he lived a comparatively settled and well-ordered life. At this time also Dostoyevsky began work on The Brothers Karamazov, considered by many critics to be one of the greatest novels ever written, in spite of the fact that it never was really finished.

---

34. Zweig, op. cit., p. 118.

Once again Dostoyevsky became the victim of a "guilt-complex" when his son, Aliosha, died of an epileptic fit. Since Aliosha had inherited the malady from his father, Dostoyevsky felt responsible for his death.

Soon after the Pushkin Festival at Moscow in 1880,[35] one of the few bright spots in Dostoyevsky's life, he fell ill with a severe attack of emphysema, the result of catarrh in the lung. He recovered shortly, but one day as he stooped to pick up a pen he noticed blood on his lips, the result of a hemorrhage. Sensing that death was near he told his wife to read to him from the New Testament used by him in prison. The passage she chanced upon was Matthew 3,14: "But John held Him back and said, 'It is I that should be baptized by Thee,and dost Thou come to me?' And Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Detain Me not; for thus it behoves us to fulfil a great truth.'" Upon hearing this Dostoyevsky interrupted, "You hear, Do not detain me. That means that I am to die."[36] And a few hours later he did die from the rupture of an artery in his lung.

This was on the 28th of January, 1881. On the 30th he was buried at the Alexander Nevsky Monastery in St. Peters-

---

35. At this festival a monument was dedicated to the poet Pushkin. Dostoyevsky won an oratorical duel with his life-long rival, Turgenev, over the significance of Pushkin. Dostoyevsky was hailed by the Russian people and made an honorary member of the Society of the Friends of Russian Literature.

36. Quoted in Baring, op. cit., p. 149.

burg. Only in his death did Dostoyevsky receive that full homage which he had striven for all his life without success.

Deeply religious as he had always been, Dostoyevsky must have often wondered why God had permitted him to suffer so severely. We get an insight into his attitude toward his sufferings from a remark he once made in reply to a denunciation of his imprisonment as unjust by one of his friends:

> No, it was just . . . Who knows, perhaps God sent me there that I might learn the essential thing, without which there is no life, without which we should only devour each other, and that I might bring that essential thing to others, even if but to a very few, to make them better, even if but a very little better. This alone would have made it worth while to go to prison.[37]

A number of parallels between Dostoyevsky's life and his novels have already been pointed out. It is because we have witnessed the sufferings of Dostoyevsky himself that we can now understand the inner struggles of a Raskolnikov, the agonizing doubts of an Ivan Karamazov, and the listlessness of a Stavrogin. "Since he himself is volcanic, his heroes are volcanic too."[38] And because we are acquainted also with his "better moments" and higher aspirations we can understand the virtuous Aliosha Karamazov and the lovable Prince Myshkin. Here was a man who wrote from the innermost

---

37. Quoted in Aimee Dostoyevsky, op. cit., p. 87.
38. Zweig, op. cit., p. 143.

recesses of his own soul. Out of the abysmal depths of his own suffering he drew the masterful pictures of suffering that we find in his novels. And he was interested in his creations only so long as they depicted in a high degree the sufferings of his own life.

And it is because we have witnessed the sufferings of his own life that we are prepared to examine his concept of suffering. His own sufferings had deepened Dostoyevsky's understanding of suffering. "It seems as if he had been bound to pass through the greatest Inferno of life in order to become the greatest seer of the suffering soul."[39] Such a man's testimony about suffering is deserving of our attention. "He was a faithful witness, and we know that his testimony is true."[40]

---

39. Janko Lavrin, Dostoevsky and His Creation, p. 14.
40. William Lyon Phelps, Essays on Russian Novelists, p. 130.

III. Dostoyevsky's Concept of Suffering

Introductory:

Even a cursory reading of Dostoyevsky will lead to the discovery that he is concerned primarily with man in his novels. There is scarcely any mention of scenery, art, etc., in his books. No lengthy descriptions, no careful settings, will one find in the writings of Dostoyevsky. Even time and place are nearly forgotten in Dostoyevsky's concern over the characters that make up his novels. His work is "an anthropology in motion."[1]

And when speaking of man, Dostoyevsky speaks of man suffering. "Human beings are heroes for him, and therefore worth depicting, only so long as they are problematic creatures, rent in sunder by conflicting trends."[2] In fact, such a policy is hardly avoidable in Dostoyevsky's anthropology, because for him man's role in this life is primarily a role of suffering. "Life is suffering, life is fear, and man is unhappy," says Kirillov in The Possessed.[3] Besides, as we shall see a little later, this was as it should be. Suffering is man's highest role. "The idea that suffering raises man to his highest level is essential in Dostoyevsky's anthropology: suffering is the index of man's depth."[4]

---

1. Berdyaev, op. cit., p. 43.
2. Zweig, op. cit., p. 143.
3. Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 114.
4. Berdyaev, op. cit., p. 92.

Because of his unusual interest in man it is quite natural for Dostoyevsky, therefore, to approach the problem of suffering from the human viewpoint. This by no means means that Dostoyevsky was not concerned with the problem from God's angle at all. He certainly was, as we shall see later on. But man holds the center of the stage in the work of Dostoyevsky.

> Dostoyevsky . . . was much less concerned with God than with man and his destiny . . . he was not haunted by theology but by anthropology; he did not have to solve the divine problem as does the pagan, but the problem of the spiritual man, the Christian.[5]

Since Dostoyevsky's approach to the problem of suffering is from the human viewpoint, it is perhaps wise that we begin our study of his concept of suffering also from man's angle. "It is probably precisely by way of the human riddle that we can best approach him."[6]

The Cause of Suffering:

To what cause or causes, then, did Dostoyevsky attribute the sufferings of mankind? Nicholas Berdyaev, Dostoyevsky's interpreter, tells us that Dostoyevsky considered neither "fate"[7] nor the exploitation of man by man[8] the primary sources of human ills. For Dostoyevsky man himself is by

---

5. Ibid., p. 24.
6. Ibid.
7. Cf. Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, p. 126.
8. Cf. Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 143.

nature the cause of his own sufferings, because he is free. His freedom gives birth to his suffering. "The world is full of wickedness and misery precisely because it is based on freedom."[9]

Furthermore, the "burden" of freedom is inescapable. Man is born with it; freedom is his very essence. "Without freedom there is no man, and Dostoyevsky conducted all his dialectic on man and his destiny as the dialectic of the destiny of freedom. Now the way of freedom is the way of suffering, and man must follow it to the end."[10]

The suffering that results from freedom manifests itself, first of all, in the torments man's conscience undergoes in his liberty to choose between good and evil. "Didst Thou forget that man prefers peace, and even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil?" asks the Grand Inquisitor of Christ in The Brothers Karamazov. "Nothing is more seductive for man than his freedom of conscience, but nothing is a greater cause of suffering."[11]

Moreover, the freedom with which man is endowed involves the liberty to choose or reject God. This can often become a cause of unspeakable agony and doubts. The very presence of suffering in the world could become an argument against the existence of God---or at least against the con-

---

9. Ibid., pp. 85 - 86.
10. Ibid., p. 66.
11. p. 302.

tention that He is a just and loving God. Headed by Ivan Karamazov, the characters of Dostoyevsky's novels are plagued by the problem of theodicy.[12] More than anything else in this world Dostoyevsky's heroes wanted the infinite certainty of God.

> The most tormenting question of his characters was: Is there a God or not? In other words: Is there or is there not an Absolute Value towards which the will of man and mankind may be directed? . . . If not, then the existence of both Man and Cosmos becomes something accidental and devoid of any higher meaning.[13]

For Dostoyevsky's characters there must be either an Absolute Value or an absolute void.

We see then that man's freedom involves the possibility of rejecting God. And herein, according to Dostoyevsky, lies the chief cause of man's suffering. For Dostoyevsky Christ was the True Freedom.[14] Two roads lay before man; one leading to the God-Man, Jesus Christ, the other to self-deification, the man-God.[15] And man usually chooses the latter. To be precise, therefore, it is not actually freedom but the misuse of freedom that lies at the bottom of most human suffering. At the moment that man becomes self-reliant,

---

12. The problem of theodicy will be dealt with more completely in a following chapter.
13. Lavrin, op. cit., p. 57.
14. Cf. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 95.
15. Probably the most interesting extreme of this self-deification is Kirillov in The Possessed, who claims that man can show that he is God only by taking his life (cf. pp. 111-116).

looks upon his freedom as unlimited, sets himself up against the objective established order of the universe, and emancipates himself completely from all law---at that moment the course of man's suffering begins. And this is what interested Dostoyevsky: what happens to man when he turns aside to arbitrary self-will. "The volumes of Dostoyevsky might be described as one continuous rogues' gallery, well populated from every walk in life. Man, the sinner, man defiant in self-will, and man tragically self-defeated, were fundamental realities in Dostoyevsky's world."[16] It is this misuse of freedom that brings about the suffering of a Raskolnikov, an Ivan Karamazov, and a Stavrogin.

Boundless freedom is not really freedom at all according to Dostoyevsky. Rather it is boundless slavery. "But irrational freedom, blind defiance of all convention and compulsion, is not Dostoyevsky's last word. When a man exalts himself in his freedom, tries to become a superman or 'man-God,' he becomes a slave to his own divided, uncontrollable self, and his plans turn out the opposite of what he intends."[17] This becomes especially evident in Dostoyevsky's Stavrogin in The Possessed. The sight of his body dangling from a noose in the garret of his home is concrete evidence that "killing " God results not in absolute freedom but in absolute void.

---

16. David Wesley Soper, "Dostoevsky and The Catholic Mind," Theology Today, Vol. IV, No. 2 (July, 1947), p. 221.
17. Horton, op. cit., p. 11.

For Dostoyevsky man's misuse of freedom is synonomous with evil. And evil, in turn, is made possible by freedom; in fact, Dostoyevsky goes so far as to hold that evil is a proof---a terrible proof---of freedom.[18] To be exact, therefore, it is not freedom, but the evil which freedom makes possible, that is the cause of human suffering. We might conclude, then, that freedom makes it possible for man to suffer, but it is his evil which brings about the actual sufferings. Freedom is the remote cause, evil the immediate cause, of suffering. With Dostoyevsky the process would not be "freedom to suffering" but "freedom to evil to suffering."

Man's evil need not be external, need not be what society commonly calls a "crime." Occasionally, of course, Dostoyevsky's heroes (e. g., Raskolnikov) do begin their career of suffering when they commit a serious crime. But anyone well-acquainted with the works of Dostoyevsky is surprised at the disproportionate relation between subjective guilt and objective misdeed in his novels.

> For him there seems to be in every individual a latent volcano of unconscious guilt so constructed that almost any overstepping of the common social standards brings a violent eruption, usually all out of proportion to the seriousness of the infraction which sets it off. Subjectively, there are really no degrees of guilt in Dostoyevsky; the individual is either guilty or not guilty.[19]

---

18. Cf. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 95.
19. Martin, op. cit., p. 11.

It is not always necessary, therefore, that a crime be committed in order for this "volcano" in man to be released. Quite often, as we have already seen in the case of Dostoyevsky's own life, and also in the case of Ivan Karamazov and of Stavrogin, the mere fulfillment of an evil wish or desire is enough to plunge man into the abyss of suffering.

The Character of Suffering:

When man misuses his freedom, when man does evil or is evil, then his suffering begins. The question arises: What is the character of his suffering? Suffering there will be. But in what manner?

In the event that the misuse of man's freedom manifests itself in a crime, then, of course, a certain amount of his suffering is imposed from without. That is, the crime is punished, the criminal is imprisoned or otherwise disciplined. And Dostoyevsky occasionally deals with this external suffering in his novels. Thus Raskolnikov is deported to Siberia for the murder of two elderly women. But external punishment, according to Dostoyevsky, does not constitute the real suffering of man. Quite often man looks upon his legal punishment as a relief from inward moral torture. This, as we have seen, was the attitude of Dostoyevsky toward his own legal punishment. And this seems to be the feeling of Mitya Karamazov also as he is faced with the prospect of trial and probable imprisonment.[20] At best, legal punishment

---

20. Cf. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 720.

is only a symbol,[21] the "outer husk,"[22] of the real suffering that takes place within man. Furthermore, external suffering, although of some value in Dostoyevsky's estimation, is not particularly useful to the sufferer, not only because it is not "real" or "full" suffering, but also because it very often serves only to embitter the heart.[23]

Long before the machinery of the law has been put into motion, the suffering which Dostoyevsky speaks of especially in his novels has commenced. For, according to Dostoyevsky, man's real suffering, even in the case of a criminal, is primarily within him, is primarily inner suffering. "The torments of a man's conscience are more frightening than the severities of a whole code of laws."[24] Father Paissy speaks of the recognition of sin by the conscience as "the real punishment, the only effectual one."[25] "There is no greater agony than that of the man who is guilty in his own eyes."[26] When man is overwhelmed by his feelings of guilt, when he rigorously condemns himself, when he is overly self-conscious, when he is ever the victim of shame and remorse, when he is ever seeking happiness and cannot find it---then, according to Dostoyevsky, man is suffering in the full sense of the term. Dostoyevsky made

---

21. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 93.
22. Lloyd, op. cit., p. 174.
23. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 72.
24. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, loc. cit.
25. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, loc. cit.
26. Martin, op. cit., p. 12.

clear that "the real punishment of a crime is to be a criminal."[27] "Sin is the supreme suffering of all."[28] Quite often man's inner suffering is accompanied by physical suffering, headaches, illness, sleeplessness, and even insanity. Wherever man turns, he can find no escape. And none of Dostoyevsky's heroes can endure such hellish living with their guilty selves for more than a brief interim. Confession and punishment from without become the prime needs of their lives. "Hence man seeks deliverance not only in the outer but also in the inner world,not only in the social but also in the spiritual sphere."[29]

Man's suffering, then, is not outward but inward, not a body-suffering but a soul-suffering. His suffering consists not in the struggle between him and the world which all can witness, but it consists in the battle between heaven and hell in his own soul where none can see.

The Value of Suffering:

What value, if any, did Dostoyevsky attribute to suffering? "The good that can be derived from evil is attained only by way of suffering and repudiation of evil. Dostoyevsky believed firmly in the redemptive and regenerative power of suffering." 30 That suffering has redemptive value was a

---

27. Lloyd, op. cit., p. 117.
28. Ibid., p. 210.
29. Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, p. 102.
30. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 95.

characteristic Russian view.[31] Thus also did Dostoyevsky look upon his own sufferings. Commenting on the imprisonment imposed upon him and his comrades, Dostoyevsky writes in his Writers Diary: "It seemed to us that the penalty inflicted upon us would purify us, so to speak, and that our many sins would be forgiven for its sake."[32] Upon the death of his wife Dostoyevsky is said to have observed: "She has suffered so much that I wonder who could refuse to forgive her."[33] And likewise in all his novels suffering has value, is not an end in itself but a means to an end. "It buys everything and pays for everything. At bottom it is the only currency that Dostoyevsky validates in his novels and in his own mind."[34]

In saying that Dostoyevsky attached "redemptive" value to suffering it is possible to have two different meanings of the word "redemptive" in mind.[35] On the one hand, the "redemptive" value of suffering may lie in its ability to awaken the individual sufferer to an awareness of his own shortcomings and evil, to an awareness of the misuse he has made of his freedom. And once man has achieved that awareness, his suffering will in addition lead him to a realization of his need for Christ, and eventually bring him to his

---

31. Cf. ibid., p. 29.
32. Quoted in Troyat, op. cit., p. 132.
33. Quoted ibid., p. 256.
34. Ibid., p. 376.
35. The theological difficulties created by Dostoyevsky's "redemptive" view of suffering will be dealt with more completely in a following chapter.

Savior. In other words, suffering is redemptive in the sense that it leads to redemption, in that it causes the sufferer to dethrone Self and surrender it back to Christ. Dostoyevsky certainly includes all of this in the "redemptive" value he attaches to suffering. In his Notes From the Underground Dostoyevsky writes: "Man's freedom is perhaps a suffering, but at the end of the ordeal, however abject and wounded he may be, he reaches the ineffable light of Christ."[36] Commenting on Dostoyevsky's view of suffering as "redemptive", Glen Martin says: "Once man ceases to be at war with himself and the world, he finds himself at peace with God. And this peace is the final goal of all life and the perfect assurance of redemption."[37]

On the other hand, Dostoyevsky included much more in his view of suffering as having "redemptive" value. For Dostoyevsky suffering may not only lead to redemption, but it often actually buys redemption. First of all, suffering is often an expiation for man's sins. "Life is the expiation of sin by suffering."[38] Mitya Karamazov, commenting on the murder charge being brought against him, says: "I want to suffer, and by suffering I shall be purified."[39] Thus even earthly life itself, when it involves suffering, may be considered an atonement.[40] Furthermore, through suffering the

---

36. Quoted in Troyat, op. cit., p. 251.
37. Op. cit., p. 14.
38. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 95. See also pp. 43, 44, 91, and 92.
39. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 618.
40. Cf. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 157.

"capacity for redemption" is born within the sufferer.[41] "It is indeed true that he [Dostoyevsky] shows man wandering among the chasms of inner division . . . but this division does not in the end destroy the identity of the individual person. The image of man is restored through the God-man."[42] Speaking of the value of suffering Berdyaev also says: "Spiritual life is restored to him [the sufferer] , and he has found it in himself: that is to say that, according to Dostoyevsky, the spiritual life is immanent in man and not transcendant."[43] Commenting on the sufferings he has undergone, Mitya Karamazov tells his brother, Alyosha: "Brother, these last two months I've found myself a new man. A new man has risen up in me. He was hidden in me, but would never have come to the surface, if it hadn't been for this blow from heaven."[44]. . . . . This then, in its fullest sense, is what Dostoyevsky has in mind when he looks upon suffering as being "redemptive.". Ordinarily this view of suffering is designated "purgatorial suffering." [45]

Whatever the "redemptive" powers of suffering might be, Dostoyevsky is primarily interested in suffering because

---

41. Cf. Martin, op. cit., p. 12.
42. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 31.
43. Ibid., p. 50.
44. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 719.
45. Cf. Horton, op. cit., pp. 12 & 13.

it leads to Christ. We have already noted that for Dostoyevsky Christ is Freedom. Once man has found Christ through suffering, he has found freedom, Therein lies the second value of suffering----it procures freedom. Says Berdyaev: "By it [suffering] the freedom that has been spoiled and turned into its contrary is reborn and given back to man. Therefore is Christ the Saviour freedom itself. In all Dostoyevsky's novels man goes through this spiritual process."[46]

This new freedom is far different in character than the unlimited freedom man seeks apart from Christ. The freedom in Christ is not an escape from responsibility but the assumption of new and greater responsibilities. The man free in Christ curbs his will and disciplines himself. Arkady in The Raw Youth describes this new freedom thus: "Gradually, by systematic practice you overcome your will, beginning with the most absurd and trivial things, and end by conquering your will completely, and become free."[47] In the eyes of the unregenerate, of course, this new freedom is not freedom at all but bondage instead. As Glen Martin tersely describes it: "Redemption involves not escape but discipline; it leads not to the bondage of man's freedom but to the freedom of Christ's bondage."[48]

---

46. Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 95. Cf. also p. 72.
47. Dostoyevsky, The Raw Youth, p. 473, quoted in Martin, op. cit., p. 13.
48. Op. cit., p. 13.

For Dostoyevsky, then, there are two freedoms, initial and final. Between these two lies man's path---the path of inner suffering.

When man has attained final freedom in Christ by way of suffering, he has also attained happiness. For Dostoyevsky, therefore, suffering leads to happiness. Father Zossima comforts Alyosha: "Life will bring you many misfortunes, but you will find your happiness in them."[49] Hero after hero in Dostoyevsky's novels passes through the lowest depths only, in the end, to reach the loftiest heights. In view of this ultimate happiness to be attained by his suffering, man finds joy already in the midst of his sufferings. So it is in the case of Arkady in The Raw Youth. The greater his sufferings, the greater pleasure he derives from imagining a future of joy. He seeks suffering not for suffering's sake but because it adds worth and brilliance to his idea of future happiness. "You will see great sorrow, and in that sorrow you will be happy," says Father Zossima to Alyosha.[50] In his Notes From the Underground Dostoyevsky writes:

> And why are you so firmly and solemnly convinced that only that which is normal and positive, in a word, his well-being is good for man? Is the reason never deceived about

---

49. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 339.
50. Ibid., p. 87.

> what is beneficial? It is possible that, as well as loving his own welfare, man is fond of suffering, even passionately fond of it . . . I am sure that man will never renounce the genuine suffering that comes of ruin and chaos.[51]

For Dostoyevsky, then, it is not the normal life, the life of ease, security, and creature comforts, that brings man happiness, but rather the life of storm, of trials, misfortunes, and great sufferings, preferably brought on by oneself.

In view, then, of the benefits that accrue to the sufferer through his sufferings according to Dostoyevsky, it seems difficult to conclude, as is commonly done, that Dostoyevsky is a pessimist, a writer of despair. The charges of "gloominess" and "morbidity" in his novels are, for the most part, unwarranted. "There is always light in his darkness, and it is the light of Christ."[52]

So far we have spoken of the value of suffering to the individual sufferer himself. But, according to Dostoyevsky, the suffering of the individual benefits not only the individual himself but society in general. From the sufferings of the one the many profit. For it is by means of suffering that the individual is enabled to fulfill the obligation of love toward his fellowmen. This is the great theme developed

---

51. Quoted in Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 54.

52. Ibid. p. 31. The problem posed here will be dealt with more adequately in a later chapter. It is only mentioned here in passing.

by Father Zossima in The Brothers Karamazov.[53] Commenting on this theme Stefan Zweig explains it thus: "One who has suffered becomes a brother through sympathetic understanding."[54]

What particularly enables the sufferings of the individual to benefit society in general is the feeling of universal guilt, and, consequently, universal responsibility, which they engender in the sufferer. The one is guilty for the many; the many are guilty for the one---this is another great "Dostoyevskian" theme. We have already noted that Dostoyevsky himself felt guilty of the death of his child, because it had inherited epilepsy from him. "For know, dear ones," says Father Zossima, "that every one of us is undoubtedly responsible for all men and everything on earth, not merely through the general sinfulness of creation, but each one personally for all mankind and every individual man."[55] The actions, words, and even desires of the individual have their repercussions on society. "Evil is not confined to a single criminal and his direct victim; it spreads like a grease spot . . . Even those who know nothing of crime are mysteriously accomplices in it."[56] In all his novels Dostoyevsky has the knack of making his readers feel

---

53. Cf. pp. 337-388.
54. Op. cit., p. 165.
55. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 194.
56. Troyat, op. cit., pp. 405-406.

responsible for the sufferings of his heroes. Somehow we feel responsible for the distresses of the fragile Sonia, driven to prostitution by the circumstances of her poverty, yet suffering quietly and meekly. Dostoyevsky makes us aware of our guilt for all even more effectively in a story that Ivan Karamazov relates to his brother about an illegitimate child who, buffeted about in his childhood by society, is transformed into a savage and ends up by committing a murder for which he is condemned to die.

> And in prison he was immediately surrounded by pastors, members of Christian brotherhoods, philanthropic ladies, and the like. They taught him to read and write in prison, and expounded the Gospel to him . . . He was converted. He wrote to the court himself that he was a monster, but that in the end God had vouchsafed him light and shown grace. All Geneva was in excitement about him---all philanthropic and religious Geneva. All the aristocratic and well-bred society of the town rushed to the prison, kissed Richard and embraced him; 'You are our brother, you have found grace.' And Richard does nothing but weep with emotion, 'Yes, I've found grace! All my youth and childhood I was glad of pigs' food, but now even I have found grace. I am dying in the Lord.' 'Yes, Richard, die in the Lord; you have shed blood and must die. Though it's not your fault that you knew not the Lord, when you coveted the pig's food and were beaten for stealing it (which was very wrong of you, for stealing is forbidden); but you've shed blood and must die.' And on the last day, Richard, perfectly limp, did nothing but cry and repeat every minute: 'This is my happiest day. I am going to the Lord.' 'Yes,' cry the pastors and the judges and philanthropic ladies. 'This is the happiest day of your life, for you are going to

> the Lord!' They all walk or drive to the scaffold in procession behind the prison van. At the scaffold they call to Richard: 'Die, brother, die in the Lord, for even thou hast found grace!' And so, covered with his brothers' kisses, Richard is dragged on to the scaffold, and led to the guillotine. And they chopped off his head in brotherly fashion, because he had found grace.[57]

With Dostoyevsky, innocence is a vain word. Man must identify himself with the grief and sorrow, corruption and misery of the most destitute sinners, must take upon himself the responsibility for the tragedy of the human race. For Dostoyevsky, a self-righteous condemnation of the world in the name of lofty ideals is as bad as the violence of the wicked. Such judges, according to Dostoyevsky, are the only ones worthy of being judged.[58]

It is this lesson of universal guilt that suffering brings home to the sufferer. And with this lesson comes, quite naturally, the feeling of universal responsibility. If man is guilty for all, it is incumbent upon him to assume responsibility for all, to be his brother's keeper. "Only through that knowledge [i. e., universal guilt] , our heart grows soft with infinite, universal, inexhaustible love."[59] Man undoes his guilt for all by his love toward all. Love for the brother---that is one of the great messages of Dostoyevsky.

---

57. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 284.
58. Cf. the speech of Marmeladov in Crime and Punishment, pp. 11-28, and the discourse of Father Zossima in The Brothers Karamazov, pp. 382-386.
59. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 194.

> If one were asked to sum up briefly what was Dostoyevsky's message to his generation and to the world in general, one could do so in two words: love and pity. The love which is in Dostoyevsky's work is so great, so bountiful, so overflowing that it is impossible to find a parallel to it, either in ancient or in modern literature. It is human, but more than human, that is to say, divine. Supposing the Gospel of St. John were to be annihilated and lost to us forever, although nothing, of course, could replace it, Dostoyevsky's work would go nearer to recalling the spirit than any other books of any other European writer. It is the love which faces everything and which shrinks from nothing.[60]

Before concluding our remarks on Dostoyevsky's concept of the value of suffering, it is very necessary to point out that Dostoyevsky never considered suffering to be of value ipse facto. Quite often, the value of suffering is dependent upon a subjective state of the sufferer, upon the attitude he assumes toward his suffering. For certain types of people suffering has no value. Those who do not understand the meaning and purpose of suffering and, therefore, reject it will not benefit from suffering. It is precisely because he rejects suffering from his world-view that Ivan Karamazov fails to benefit ultimately from his own inward struggles. "A refusal to take up the burden of the Cross, a repudiation of suffering, makes of suffering a dark and incalculable force. Thus, there are two kinds of suffering: a dark suffering leading to perdition and an illumined suf-

---

60. Baring, op. cit., pp. 252-253.

fering leading to salvation."[61] On the other hand, the development of spirituality in the sufferer is a sure sign that he has accepted his suffering and has not been crushed by it. Some people, by their very make-up, are unable to suffer and, therefore, unable to derive its benefits. So it is with the self-righteous prig, the man without desire, the dry mind, and the proud intellectual.[62] And for Dostoyevsky, "inability to suffer sometimes proves to be the greatest evil of all."[63]

A final group unable to derive value from suffering are those who"seek evil that good may come." They reason: if evil causes suffering, and suffering results in good, why not seek evil to bring about good? Dostoyevsky looked upon such reasoning as specious, and considered those who so reasoned as insincere, as content with the evil and not too concerned as to whether the good that is supposed to follow actually follows or not. Perhaps the best example of this type of "sufferer" is Svidrigailov in Crime and Punishment, who in his constant experimentation with evil loses his capacity for deriving value from suffering, and, when he finally becomes satiated with evil itself, shoots himself. Likewise Stavrogin in The Possessed delights in the basest deeds imaginable and constantly conjures up new

---

61. Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, p. 117.
62. Cf. Troyat, op. cit., p. 275.
63. Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, p. 113.

crimes, baser than ever, to commit. He too becomes satiated with evil and finally hangs himself in the garret of his home. Dostoyevsky may have advocated seeking suffering, but he never advocated seeking evil in order that suffering (and therefore good) might come.

> Only an immature or enslaved mind would deduce from Dostoyevsky's thesis that we must choose to follow the path of wickedness in order to enrich our consciousness and profit from a new experience . . . He teaches . . . that it is madness to think that a man can deliberately enter on a course of wickedness to get what he can out of it and then throw himself into the arms of good: such an argument cannot be taken seriously and indicates a worthless state of mind . . . When a sinning man begins to think that evil is enriching him, that it is leading to good, that it is only a stage in his progress, from that moment he has fallen completely: he goes all to pieces and every door to improvement and regeneration is closed to him. Such a man can never rise above himself: self satisfaction in evil is a sign of total loss. To climb from evil to a high spiritual level one must denounce the evil in oneself and suffer terribly.[64]

Crime and Punishment:

Before discussing Dostoyevsky's treatment of certain problems that arise in connection with his concept of suffering as presented so far, it is perhaps wise to pause here and throw light upon his concept by means of a synopsis of one of his novels, to show thereby a little more concretely how man is launched upon his career of suffering.

---

64. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, pp. 93-94.

how he suffers, how he reacts to his suffering, and how he is finally led through his suffering to ultimate freedom and happiness in Christ. Nearly any one of Dostoyevsky's novels could serve our purpose, for the same fundamental theme runs through all his works. It is, however, in the person of Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment that Dostoyevsky sets forth his concept of suffering most clearly and strikingly.

Raskolnikov's problem is that of total freedom. When the story opens he has just been expelled from the university and is now living in extreme poverty. Partly in order to escape his predicaments, partly to "overstep the barriers," he decides to kill an old woman, a pawnbroker. After all, why shouldn't he kill this woman? She was stupid, deaf, even wicked, for she exacted exorbitant rates of interest from her victims. "What value has the life of that sickly, stupid, ill-natured old woman in the balance of existence?" Raskolnikov concludes.[65] In fact, people would benefit by her death---a horribly logical conclusion. Moreover, all the great men of history were people who in pursuit of a principle did not hesitate at such a paltry thing as a human life. Such was Napoleon, Raskolnikov reflects. He was great precisely because he asserted his will, stopping at nothing. Certainly, then, he too has the right to commit this

---

65. Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, p. 67.

crime. Aspiring to be a modern Napoleon, Raskolnikov plans to kill the old woman, rob her, and use the money for the benefit of his mother and sister and also for the purpose of continuing his own studies.

Once the crime is committed, Raskolnikov is plunged into the abyss of suffering. Just as logic led him to commit the crime, so it is logic that leads Raskolnikov to suffer. After the killing he had expected to experience and overcome remorse. But he felt none. However, if there is no conscious reaction to a real crime, then there is no crime at all. And if there is no crime, then there is no law, no good and evil, no Absolute Value. Which meant that his own "superman" law was as fictitious as the law against which he had protested in his aspiration to be a Napoleon. For this reason he concluded that he had not murdered the woman but the "principle." He had not destroyed the woman, but she had "destroyed" him. "Did I murder the old woman? I murdered myself, not her," Raskolnikov concludes.[66] For that reason he says that he never will forgive the old woman. Moreover, after overcoming the remorse he expected would come, Raskolnikov expects his instinct of goodness to vanish from his heart. But---it stays.

Constantly tormented by inner doubts and frustrated by his own inner feelings, Raskolnikov isolates himself

---

66. Ibid., p. 407.

from society and passes away his time in his bare, ugly room, or in walks along the river. or in dingy alehouses. And then one day he meets Sonia. . . . . .

Sonia is a young lady forced by poverty to prostitution. She differs from Raskolnikov in that her sin is entirely through self-sacrifice and untinged by pride. Even while sinning she clings unfalteringly to the "slave morality" of the Christian faith. Not that Sonia illustrates the thesis that a person may willfully sin and still remain within the pale of Christianity. But rather, like Marmeladov, she is the symbol of all the despairing on earth waiting for the Day when they will be understood.

In the course of their association the Christianity of Sonia begins to bear fruit in Raskolnikov. The seed of future "resurrection" is planted in Raskolnikov's heart when Sonia one night reads to him from her Bible the story of the Resurrection of Lazarus. Here in a low-pitched room lighted by one flickering candle, the Risen Christ, speaking through the story of Lazarus, enters Raskolnikov's heart and there begins to wrestle with the demon of pride.

Some time later Sonia learns from Raskolnikov's own lips that he has murdered the pawnbroker. She points out that he has killed, not a "louse" as he thought, but a fellow human being. No principle is ever worth the life of a human creature. She urges him to confess his crime and give himself up.

"You mean Siberia, Sonia? I must give myself up?" asks Raskolnikov gloomily.

"Suffer and expiate your sin by it, that's what you must do," Sonia replies.[67]

Porfiry, prefect of police, meanwhile guesses that Raskolnikov has committed the murder. One day he visits Raskolnikov and says:

> You made up a theory and then were ashamed that it broke down and turned out to be not at all original. It turned out something base . . . Suffering too is a good thing. Suffer! . . . I know you don't believe in it---but don't be overwise; fling yourself straight into life, without deliberation; don't be afraid---the flood will bear you to the bank and set you safe on your feet again. . . Are you afraid of the great expiation before you? No, it would be shameful to be afraid of it. Since you have taken such a step, you must harden your heart. There is justice in it. You must fulfill the demands of justice. I know that you don't believe it, but indeed life will bring you through. You will live it down in time.[68]

Under this threefold influence Raskolnikov finally breaks down, goes out and kisses the earth "that he has defiled," and confesses his crime. He is sentenced to hard labor in Siberia. Sonia accompanies him.

Still Raskolnikov does not repent. He is not ashamed of his crime but rather of his weakness in confessing it. His only mistake, so he thinks, is that his crime wasn't a

---

67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., pp. 445-446.

successful one. Sonia continues her work with the Gospel; yet she never "pesters" him with it. Finally, after a period of illness, the Risen Christ prevails in Raskolnikov's heart. Gone is his pride and egotism and self-will. In his recovered humility Raskolnikov realizes that he has done wrong, that he has misused the freedom given him. Raskolnikov now understands himself and God. He learns that man is not God; he has, therefore, found his place in the world. "Life had stepped into the place of theory and something quite different would work itself in his mind."[69] This is the "resurrection unto life " with which the book ends. Raskolnikov accepts his punishment eagerly and speaks of it as "only seven years."[70]

Thus thanks to Sonia Raskolnikov discovers real freedom and happiness at last. Freedom to Evil to Suffering - back to Freedom---this is the path that Raskolnikov trod. And that by way of epitome is Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering.

---

69. Ibid., p. 531.
70. Ibid., p. 532.

IV. Two Problems

Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering as explained thus far gives rise to two problems. The first of these is: If man's freedom makes it possible for him to suffer, why should he not surrender his freedom and avoid suffering?

In a sense this objection is refuted already by Dostoyevsky's concept of the value of suffering. For Dostoyevsky there would be no point in avoiding suffering in view of its ultimate values. But the objection is made on the assumption that the suffering that man undergoes is too high a price for the values received. Those who make the objection are not thinking of the ultimate goal which the sufferer arrives at; they are thinking only of the pain and torment the sufferer must pass through. And they ask: If freedom is the cause of this suffering, why not hand over one's freedom to the Church or State, let us say, and avoid the suffering? Why not let the Church or State be the individual's conscience and make the decisions and do the thinking that constitute so much torment for the individual? Why not let the Church or State dictate the individual's way of life and let the individual meanwhile be happy? How does Dostoyevsky meet this objection?

That surrender of his freedom is the natural reaction of man toward the torment freedom involves, Dostoyevsky grants. He points this out again and again in the words of the Grand Inquisitor to Christ in The Brothers Karamazov. "I tell Thee that man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find some one quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which the ill fated creature is born."[1] The ordeal of freedom is too difficult for man. It is a source of constant unrest to him, and he is too weak to bear it. "I swear, man is weaker and baser by nature than Thou hast believed him!" the Grand Inquisitor continues.[2] It is, therefore, very normal for man to surrender his freedom and let others make his decisions and do his thinking. The Grand Inquisitor even reprimands Christ for His "lovelessness" in failing to reckon with this weakness of man.

> Thou didst choose what was utterly beyond the strength of men, acting as though Thou didst not love them at all---Thou who didst come to give Thy life for them! Instead of taking possession of men's freedom, Thou didst increase it, and burdened the spiritual kingdom of mankind with its sufferings forever. . . In place of the rigid ancient law, man must hereafter with free heart decide for himself what is good and what is evil, having only Thy image before him as his guide. But didst Thou not know he would at last reject even Thy image and Thy truth, if he is weighed down with the fearful burden of free choice? They will cry aloud at

---

1. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 302.
2. Ibid., p. 304.

> last that the truth is not in Thee, for they could not have been left in greater confusion and suffering than Thou hast caused, laying upon them so many cares and unanswerable problems.[3]

Only a few men succeed in bearing their burden of freedom. That is why the Grand Inquisitor accuses Christ of coming only for "the elect."[4]

Dostoyevsky furthermore grants that the surrender of freedom by man will effect a so-called "happiness" for him. "Doubtless at the price of its repudiation evil and suffering could be abolished and the world forced to be 'good' and 'happy!.'"[5] The Grand Inquisitor describes the happiness of men who have handed their freedom over to the Church:

> Yes, we shall set them to work, but in their leisure hours we shall make their life like a child's game, with children's songs and innocent dance. Oh, we shall allow them even sin, they are weak and helpless, and they will love us like children because we allow them to sin. . . The most painful secrets of their conscience, all, all they will bring to us and we shall have an answer to all. And they will be glad to believe our answer, for it will save them from the great anxiety and terrible agony they endure at present in making a free decision for themselves. And all will be happy.[6]

But for Dostoyevsky such a happiness was not worth the cost. For when man repudiates his freedom, he repudi-

---

3. Ibid., p. 302.
4. Ibid., p. 303.
5. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 86.
6. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, pp. 307-308.

ates himself, because freedom is his very essence. "Freedom is the supreme good: man cannot renounce it without renouncing himself and ceasing to be 'man'."[7] In his Notes From the Underground Dostoyevsky writes that man must "feel assured of the one thing with which he cannot dispense---namely of the knowledge that men are still men, and not keyboards of pianos over which the hands of Nature may play at their own sweet will, and continue so to play until they threaten to deprive him of all volition."[8] For man, therefore, to surrender his freedom does not befit his dignity as a man.

Moreover, in rejecting his freedom in the interest of earthly happiness man is losing sight of his possibilities as a man, namely, that he is a creature destined for a higher and divine life.[9] Man forgets the future in his interest in the present. He loses sight of the heavenly because of his love for the earthly. He lets the proximate overshadow the ultimate.

Furthermore, only by preserving his freedom can man preserve the image of God which he bears. It is true that by rejecting his freedom man may avoid suffering and attain a certain happiness, "but man would have lost his likeness to God, which primarily resides in his freedom."[10] For Dostoyevsky, then, freedom and suffering are the path to life,

---

7. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 56.
8. Quoted in Stanley Hopper, The Crisis of Faith, p. 265.
9. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, pp. 190-191.
10. Ibid., p. 86.

but bondage and happiness the way of death.

Not only are the efforts to remove man's freedom in order to avoid suffering an affront to man but they are an affront to God. In toying with man's freedom, we are toying with God's program for man. The Grand Inquisitor even admits to Christ that by depriving men of their freedom the Roman Catholic Church has "corrected" the work of Christ and that in so doing they were not working with God but against Him.[11] Berdyaev sums it up very nicely when he says:

> An overwhelming majority of people . . . give up the great ideas of God and immortality and freedom and come under the spell of a fallacious love of one's neighbor in which God has no part, a false compassion which promotes a godless systematization of the world . . . The euclidian mind, full of revolt and self-limitation at the same time, tries to improve on the work of God. He created a universal order that is full of suffering and imposed on man the intolerable load of freedom and responsibility; in the euclidian's world there will be no suffering or responsibility---or freedom either.[12]

In view of all this, Dostoyevsky urges man to be free rather than "happy," to retain his freedom at any price. For Dostoyevsky, tragic freedom is better than compulsory happiness, because it leads ultimately to the feet of Christ and, therefore, to real happiness. "This unlimited liberty is a torment and a ruination to man, but its pain and di-

---

11. Cf. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 305.
12. Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, pp. 190-191.

saster are dear to him."[13] If man keeps both his dignity as a human creature and his ultimate goal in mind, he will realize that he cannot afford to repudiate his freedom.

This explains why Dostoyevsky was so much opposed to the principle of authority either in the Church or in the State. Commenting on Dostoyevsky's "religion," Berdyaev explains: "Such is the road of freedom which Dostoyevsky puts forward and at its end is Jesus Christ, in the depths of man's soul. It can be seen at once that such a religion is in opposition to a religion of authority; it is as free as it may be."[14] Dostoyevsky's antipathy for Roman Catholicism lay chiefly in this that it strove for universal happiness at the price of individual freedom. So burdensome is the yoke of liberty for man that he has tried to rid himself of it within the pale of Christianity itself. The Grand Inquisitor points out how the Roman Catholic Church has made capital of this desire of man and deprived him of his liberty, and for the sake of his earthly happiness assumed all responsibility for him. But Dostoyevsky finds in Christ's refusal to succumb to the three temptations of Satan that it is incumbent upon Christianity to preserve man's freedom rather than remove it. The principle of authority can easily be transformed into a denial of the mystery of Christian

---

13. Ibid., pp. 50-51.
14. Ibid., p. 37.

freedom, the mystery of Christ-crucified.[15]

Dostoyevsky was equally opposed to authoritarianism in the State. Any form of government which denied the principle of individual liberty, even though it were formulated for the sake of the individual's material happiness, was anathema to Dostoyevsky. That is the theme of The Possessed.[16] Shatov describes the advocates of a Socialist Utopia in Russia thus:

> The enemies of all true life, out-of-date Liberals who are afraid of their own independence, the flunkeys of thought, the enemies of individuality and freedom, the decrepit advocates of deadness and rottenness. All they have to offer is senility, a glorious mediocrity of the most bourgeois kind, contemptible shallowness, a jealous equality, equality without individual dignity.[17]

Because all Socialist Utopias left no place for human freedom and moral responsibility in their vast "ant heap" and because the material happiness which they promised could be purchased only at the price of the soul, Dostoyevsky never championed any move to establish one.[18]

Any effort to remove man's freedom, and thereby remove his suffering, in the interest of man's material happiness is, according to Dostoyevsky, motivated by a false love. In

---

15. For a full insight into Dostoyevsky's attitude over against authoritarian religion please see The Brothers Karamazov, pp. 293-308.
16. This book is especially noted today for its uncannily accurate prophecy of modern Russia.
17. Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 589.
18. Cf. Horton, op. cit., p. 11.

the interest of the "now" the "then" is forgotten. And for Dostoyevsky it is the "then" that is important, even though it be attained by suffering in the "now." Man, then, is faced with a dilemma: "On the one side, freedom; on the other, contentment, well-being, rationalized organization of life; either freedom with suffering or contentment without freedom."[19] As for Dostoyevsky, he "maintained the imperishable reality and worth of the free human spirit, even when its freedom was manifested in crime, insanity and self-destruction."[20]

The second problem in connection with Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering as outlined thus far is the problem of theodicy. That is, how did Dostoyevsky reconcile the presence of evil and suffering in the world with the existence of God---or if He existed---with the justice and love of God?

Dostoyevsky himself was tormented frequently by this problem.

> No one has felt human suffering more acutely than Dostoyevsky . . . The sufferings of innocent children upset him and hurt his conscience more than anything else, and the justification of their tears was for him the task of all theodicy: he understood the common repulsion of a universal order the price of whose establishment seems to be the misery of the innocent.[21]

---

19. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 190.
20. Horton, loc. cit.
21. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 107.

Because Dostoyevsky was himself so often plagued by this problem, he could portray it so poignantly in his novels. More than any other "Dostoyevskian" character, Ivan Karamazov is troubled by the sufferings of mankind. "It's not that I don't accept God, you must understand, it's the world created by Him I don't and cannot accept," Ivan tells his brother Alyosha.[22] Ivan continues:

> I must have justice, or I will destroy myself. And not justice in some remote infinite time and space but here on earth, and that I could see myself . . . Surely I haven't suffered, simply that I, my crimes and my sufferings, may manure the soil of the future harmony for somebody else? I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down with the lion and the victim rise up and embrace his murderer. I want to be there when every one suddenly understands what it has all been for . . . Oh, Alyosha, I am not blaspheming! I understand, of course, what an upheaval of the universe it will be, when everything in heaven and earth blends in one hymn of praise and everything that lives and has lived cries aloud: 'Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed.' When the mother embraces the fiend who threw her child to the dogs, and all three cry aloud with tears, 'Thou art just, O Lord!' then, of course, the crown of knowledge will be reached and all will be made clear. But what pulls me up here is that I can't accept that harmony.[23]

Ivan is particularly disturbed by the sufferings of children. "Listen! If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me please? It's beyond all comprehension why they should suffer and

---

22. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 279.
23. Ibid., pp. 289-290.

why they should pay for the harmony."[24] Because he is unable to reconcile human suffering with divine providence, Ivan therefore concludes: "Too high a price is asked for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter on it. And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket . . . It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return Him the ticket."[25]

It seems then that there are three possible conclusions to derive from the presence of suffering in the world: 1) God does not exist and the universe is meaningless, or 2) He exists but has concealed from us the meaning of suffering and life,[26] or 3) He is a tyrant. In the first case, there is no Absolute Value and self-will is the highest law for everyone. In the second and third cases man may be compelled to hand in, as did Ivan, his "entrance ticket."

That is the problem as Dostoyevsky sees it. We agree with Berdyaev that "nobody has stated the problem of suffering as a problem of theodicy in an acuter form than Dostoyevsky, and no-one has disclosed the inward dialectic of this problem with so much power."[27]

It is interesting to note that Dostoyevsky rejects many of the solutions that men have devised for this problem.

---

24. Ibid., p. 290.
25. Ibid., p. 291.
26. Cf. Lavrin, op. cit., p. 120.
27. Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 86.

Although it is a fundamental tenet of Dostoyevsky that suffering is the result of evil, he would reject the contention that suffering is in proportion to the sins of the individual. We dare not set up a proportion between sin and suffering. "The notion that every suffering is deserved, and is a just consequence of sin, can lead to a conception of life diametrically opposed to that propounded in the Gospel commandments of love and charity."[28] To explain the presence of suffering in terms of original sin, is likewise useless, because it is a general rather than a particular explanation.[29]

Similarly, Dostoyevsky rejects "world harmony" or "divine providence" solutions to the problem of theodicy. Not that God has no purpose in the sufferings of men. Suffering for Dostoyevsky has its values, its goals, in God's scheme of things, as we have already seen in the previous chapter. But God doesn't "send," "dispense," or "impose" suffering. Rather the suffering of an individual is self-imposed, brought about by means of the freedom he himself possesses. And God "sends" suffering only indirectly, only in so far as he has given man that freedom which makes it possible for him to suffer. The dangers involved, as Dostoyevsky sees them, in a "divine providence" (in the sense we ordinarily take it to mean) are made very clear by Berdyaev in

---

28. Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, p. 116.
29. Ibid.

a discussion of Dostoyevsky's theodicy:

> Dostoyevsky everywhere hunts down this world harmony, and that is the most Christian thing about him. Rational theology establishes not only a false theodicy, which in actual fact justifies not God but godlessness: it also sets up a false doctrine of divine providence in the world. The world is not in such a state as justifies an optimistic doctrine of the action of divine providence in it. If everything is from God, and everything is directed by God toward happiness, if God acts in the plague and in cholera and in tortures, in wars and enslavements, alike, the consequence, when thought out, must be to lead to the denial of the existence of evil and injustice in the world.[30]

It seems that for Dostoyevsky the direct inference from suffering and evil in the world to the "providence" of God, from bad to good, is as difficult as the inference from black to white.

Furthermore, such a "divine providence" is, according to Dostoyevsky, an affront to God. It makes God appear always as a tyrant, an autocratic monarch, who employs every part of the universe, every individual personality for the establishment of a common world order, organized and operated entirely for His glory.[31]

Moreover, such a view of "providence" is nigh impossible in Dostoyevsky's ideology. For, as Berdyaev interprets Dostoyevsky, "the divine is disclosed in 'parts,' never in the 'whole,' in the individual and never in the common . . .

---

30. Slavery and Freedom, p. 88.
31. Cf. ibid.

God is in the child which has shed tears, and not in the world order by which those tears are said to be justified."[32]

According to Dostoyevsky, then, God is not World Providence, is not the Autocrat of the universe. We have neither need nor right, therefore, to justify all suffering in the world with the idea of God as Providence or as Sovereign of the universe.

Nor did Dostoyevsky have any sympathy for those who, in their inability to solve the problem of theodicy, rebel and try to correct what they consider a "mistaken" world by making a "happier" and "better" world of their own.[33] First of all, the assumption that God's world is a mistaken world is utterly without warrant. Furthermore, those who attempt to make a "better" world only cause more suffering ultimately and create new evils. Moreover, a corrected world, a world of happiness instead of freedom, marks the fall of man.[34]

How then does Dostoyevsky solve the problem of theodicy? As for the existence of evil in the world, Dostoyevsky, according to Berdyaev, uses it as an argument <u>for</u> God rather than <u>against</u> God, as is usually done. Berdyaev claims that the entire work of Dostoyevsky is proof of this and he sums

---

32. <u>Ibid</u>.

33. Dostoyevsky's attitude toward such measures has been thoroughly discussed in the previous section of this chapter; only there the procedure to make men "happy" at the expense of their freedom was not, as here, a reaction to the insolvability of the problem of theodicy.

34. Cf. Berdyaev, <u>Slavery and Freedom</u>, pp. 86 & 88.

it up paradoxically: "The existence of evil is a proof of the existence of God. If the world consisted wholly and uniquely of goodness and righteousness there would be no need for God, for the world itself would be god. God is, because evil is."[35]

For Dostoyevsky, however, the real justification of God lies in freedom. "If freedom does not exist as a mystery behind all creation then we can admit neither the verity of this suffering world nor of a God who would create so horrible and meaningless a thing."[36] Freedom is the theme of this world; suffering is only the progression of that theme. Suffering is only a part of the plot (freedom) and, therefore, subordinate to it.

In the final analysis, however, Dostoyevsky declines to answer the problem. What is important about suffering is not that we explain it but that we endure it. Time and again we find the problem of theodicy stated in Dostoyevsky's novels, but we search with difficulty for its solution therein. Always the emphasis is on the experience of suffering rather than the solution of it. It is always one "Dostoyevskian" hero directing another hero not to ask why God gives him a cross to bear, but to bear it, and to help

---

35. Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 87.
36. Ibid., p. 85.

others bear theirs. That is the message of Father Zossima. That is the power of the idiot, Prince Myshkin, and that is always the answer of Alyosha to his brother, Ivan.

V. Dostoyevsky's Concept of Suffering Compared With the Christian Concept

It has already been noted that in the twentieth century we are witnessing the rising popularity of Dostoyevsky. With each passing day his novels grow in demand. For people who are interested in the age-old problem of suffering, its why and its wherefore, for people who are themselves suffering, Dostoyevsky furnishes a realistic presentation of the problem and supplies a comforting solution. Our concern at present, however, is not only how realistic or how comforting Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering is, but how "Christian" it is. In view of Dostoyevsky's rising popularity at present, this is certainly an important issue. To what extent is Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering an application of the great passages of Scripture that deal with suffering? Is Dostoyevsky's viewpoint the Scriptural viewpoint?

This is not an easy question to answer. Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering is nowhere systematized. We look in vain in Dostoyevsky's novels for a treatise on suffering, for a didactic presentation of the problem so unambiguous in its language and so unified in its composition that there can be no doubt as to what Dostoyevsky "holds" and "believes." Rather must we search for Dostoyevsky's "beliefs" in the conversations of the heroes that people his novels and in

the events that befall them. Quite often, then, Dostoyevsky's "presentation of the problem," if we dare to call it that, is interrupted by much that is purely story. The seed is scattered, it is wheat among the tares, so to speak. Dostoyevsky's approach to the "eternal why" is realistic rather than academic, is in terms of flesh and blood rather than in terms of logic and argument. Consequently, no unified impression of Dostoyevsky's concept can really be obtained. This makes comparison difficult. Opinions quite varying in their character can easily be derived, perhaps with justice, from the same source.[1]

Furthermore, any critic of Dostoyevsky cannot help but be aware of the impertinence, shall we call it, that he is guilty of in voicing a criticism of Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering. For in the majority of cases it is the inexperienced in suffering dealing with one well versed in the art, one who has plumbed the depths of sorrow, one who has himself tasted suffering and can, therefore, say with a greater degree of surety what it is all about. It is a novice that must undertake to evaluate a master.

There are certain phases of Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering where a Christian immediately finds himself at home. For instance, Dostoyevsky's view of the role Christi-

---

1. It has already been noted that Murry in contradistinction to all other sources consulted by the writer holds that Dostoyevsky himself was not a Christian! Cf. Murry, op. cit., pp. 44 & 68.

anity itself plays in suffering, namely, that it is not a relief from suffering but rather a triumph over suffering, agrees with both the Scriptural delineation of Christianity[2] and with our own experience. Christianity, according to Dostoyevsky, "does not promise freedom from care and suffering but instead triumph through and over them."[3] Moreover, we see in Dostoyevsky's message of universal guilt and, consequently, universal responsibility, universal brotherhood, universal sympathy for sufferers, a unique fulfillment of the law of Christian love. It is in complete harmony with the exhortation of Paul: "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."[4]

There still remain, of course, many other points of agreement between the Christian view of suffering and the "Dostoyevskian" viewpoint, only not so immediately obvious. These will become clearer in the course of our discussion.

Basic to Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering is his assumption of man's freedom of will in things spiritual. That is, man by nature has the power to choose or to reject God. Scripture grants the latter but denies the former.[5] Dostoyevsky's view, of course, though not excusable, is at least explainable in view of his Greek Catholic background. It is,

---

2. John 16, 33.
3. Martin, op. cit., p. 14.
4. Gal. 6, 2.
5. I Cor. 2, 14.

however,not within the scope of this paper to criticize Dostoyevsky's theology but only his theology which affects his concept of suffering. For that reason we are interested in Dostoyevsky's assumption only because it attributes to man the capacity for regeneration, for redemption, in his experience of suffering. That is, according to Dostoyevsky, suffering, though it be sent by God Himself, is not the sole cause of the values that ultimately accrue to the sufferer. Suffering rather stirs up the latent power that man already has within him to reach his ultimate goal, God. That is, for Dostoyevsky spiritual life is not solely transcendental but partly immanent. "Dostoyevsky attributed to man the ability to tread the road of truth which would lead him through the darkness and horror of division and catastrophe to a definitive freedom."[6] Dostoyevsky had faith in the infinite and divine strength of the human soul. In other words, he denies a total depravity. The dangers of such a view are pointed out by Horton in his criticism of both Berdyaev and Dostoyevsky: "The doctrine of Divine-Humanity . . . is . . . exposed to dangers of an opposite sort---excessive idealism about man's capacity for overleaping the gulf that separates him from God, and becoming literally a co-creator."[7]

In defense of Dostoyevsky, however, it might be pointed out that nearly all his heroes are fortunate inconsistencies.

---

6. Berdyaev, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, p. 72. We should note here that Berdyaev himself does not make this statement in criticism of Dostoyevsky.

7. Op. cit., p. 222.

That is, Dostoyevsky grants his heroes the power to choose or reject God; yet in nearly every instance they choose the latter course of action. Raskolnikov, Stavrogin, Ivan Karamazov---all of them reject the True Freedom, Christ, and choose the path of self-freedom. There does seem to be, then, a total depravity, if not in theory, at least in practice according to Dostoyevsky. But again, it must be remembered that the capacity for redemption, once their course of action is entered upon, is within them.

It is this innate freedom of man, according to Dostoyevsky, that is the primary cause of his suffering.[8] That is, man's freedom involves the possibility of rejecting God and deifying self. When this course of action is entered upon, man begins his career of suffering. Is this the real cause of human suffering? Of course, according to the Christian viewpoint also, misuse of freedom will eventually involve suffering. C. S. Lewis points out that "to render back the will which we have so long claimed for our own is in itself, wherever and however it is done, a grievous pain."[9] But our

---

8. When Dostoyevsky says that freedom causes suffering, he is sometimes also speaking of the torments man's conscience undergoes in its "liberty" to choose between good and evil. This is the kind of freedom that the Grand Inquisitor describes as an endless cause of torment. Christian experience, I think, bears witness to the truth of this observation. We too have experienced the burden of doing our own thinking in ethical problems, in making our own decisions in matters of right and wrong, especially in adiaphora and in matters where Scripture is silent. Man would much rather have "a rule to go by."

9. C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain, p. 79.

question really is: Does not Dostoyevsky perhaps leave God out of the picture when diagnosing the cause of suffering? Scripture does not, of course, deny that much of man's suffering is self-imposed. But Scripture, without making God the Author of evil,[10] always places God in the very center of the pattern of human suffering. That is, God has purpose in suffering and, therefore, "imposes" or "permits" suffering upon men in order to awaken in them a sense of their deficiencies and shortcomings and thereby impel them to lean entirely upon Him. In other words, God uses suffering in the case of an unregenerate to create faith and in the case of a Christian to strengthen faith.[11] That is the lesson we learn from Job. With Dostoyevsky, however, suffering seems to be self-imposed rather than God-imposed. God lies at the end of suffering in Dostoyevsky's novels but never, very clearly at least, in the midst of suffering. Of course, according to Dostoyevsky, God does impose suffering indirectly, inasmuch as He has imposed upon man the freedom which brings about his suffering. Another point to remember is that Dostoyevsky's approach to suffering is nearly always from the human standpoint rather than the divine. That is, Dostoyevsky is not primarily concerned in what is going on

---

10. James 1, 13.

11. This does not mean that suffering is a means of grace. God saves only through the Word. Actually, suffering drives man to the Word and thereby his faith is created or strengthened. Cf. R. R. Caemmerer, "Temptation," in Laetsch (ed.), The Abiding Word, Vol. II, p. 191.

in God's mind or what God's plans are in human suffering. Dostoyevsky is concerned almost exclusively with what is happening to the sufferer, what is going on in his mind and soul. This may account for the apparent absence of God in the sufferings of Dostoyevsky's heroes. At any rate, Dostoyevsky's error seems to be more a mistake of emphasis than of fact.

Perhaps Dostyevsky's widest divergence from the Christian viewpoint of suffering lies in the realm of the value of suffering. The difference lies not so much in the ultimate value of suffering but in its immediate value, not in the end to be attained but in the means whereby that end is attained. This demands further explanation.

According to the Christian viewpoint, God's purpose in imposing suffering upon man is, in the case of the unregenerate, to draw him to Himself and, in the case of the Christian, to draw him ever closer to Himself.[12] When everything goes well with us, we tend to turn our thoughts self-ward, away from God. God, who is Love, and therefore interested in our happiness, knows that our happiness lies in Him, not in our selves, even though we in our self-absorption may for a time deem ourselves "happy." But as long as life is a "bed of roses," we feel no need for God. God cannot get at us.

---

12. Job 23,10; Ps. 66,10; Is. 1,25; Is. 48,10; Jer. 9,7; Zech. 13,9; Rom. 8,28; II Cor. 4,8-12; I Thess. 3,3-5; James 1,12; I Pet. 1,7; 4,12-14; Rev. 7,14.

As St. Augustine put it: "God wants to give us something, but cannot, because our hands are full---there's nowhere for Him to put it."[13] At best "we regard God as an airman regards his parachute---it's there for emergencies but he hopes he'll never have to use it."[14] For that reason God makes our own life less agreeable to us, inflicts pain and suffering upon us, to draw us from ourselves unto Him in whom there is genuine happiness. Through suffering we learn of our own sins, our shortcomings and deficiencies, and, therefore, our need for God. Suffering is evil found out. Or as Lewis tersely puts it: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."[15] In the midst of this "law-preaching" we turn to the "gospel."[16] In the realization of our deficiencies we turn to Christ, our Redeemer, and through Him lean upon the Father for all that we need. And in this close communion with God we discover true happiness and true freedom. The bringing to faith in Christ, therefore, or the strengthening of faith is God's goal in suffering. And in the eternal happiness and freedom that spring from this faith-fellowship with God lies the value of suffering. To sum up in the words of Scripture: "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven."[17]

---

13. Quoted in Lewis, op. cit., p. 84.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 81.
16. Cf. Ps. 119.
17. Acts 14,22.

Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering is similar in many respects. For him also suffering awakens man to his deficiencies and eventually leads him out of self-reliance unto Christ-reliance. And the ultimate value of suffering consists, as in the Christian concept, in the fellowship with God which it eventually brings about and in the true happiness and freedom which man derives from this fellowship. According to Dostoyevsky, then, the goal is the same. But the route traveled is a little different. As we have already noted, suffering, according to Dostoyevsky, not only leads to redemption but often actually buys redemption. The immediate value of suffering lies not only in the awakening from self-reliance that man experiences. More than that, through suffering the "capacity for redemption" is born, the spiritual life that is immanent in man is roused from its lethargy and channeled toward God. Scripture denies any such "spiritual life" within man, any such "capacity for redemption." To such extremes does Dostoyevsky carry this "redemptive" view of suffering that at times he looks upon suffering itself as having atoning value in God's sight, as if by suffering man were expiating for his sins. Scripture nowhere even hints that suffering has expiatory value. It seems then that in his "purgatorial suffering" view we find in Dostoyevsky his widest divergence from the Christian viewpoint of suffering.

While still speaking of the values of suffering, we might note in this connection another difference between Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering and the Christian viewpoint. In view of the ultimate values of suffering both viewpoints advocate bearing and enduring suffering. But with that exhortation Christianity halts. It does not advocate seeking suffering. It does not inculcate self-imposed suffering. It never puts suffering in man's hands, but leaves the matter entirely up to God's direction. At best, Scripture urges us to rejoice in tribulation,[18] urges us to take upon us the role of Christianity which may involve suffering, but never so urges for the sake of suffering. "Deny thyself," "Take up thy cross and follow Me," Scripture says,[19] but it never advocates any form of asceticism or masochism, any deliberate pursuit of suffering.

Dostoyevsky, it seems, goes a step farther and advocates seeking suffering. Whereas he renounces seeking suffering via the path of evil, he does not renounce seeking suffering directly. In our biographical chapter we got the impression that Dostoyevsky himself sought suffering. Likewise, the heroes of his novels. Sonia advises Raskolnikov to seek suffering. Father Zossima urges Alyosha to go out into the world and suffer. In his conversation with Satan

---

18. Rom. 5,3-5; James 1,2-3; I Pet. 2,19; 3,14; 4,12-13.
19. Matt. 16,24.

Ivan says: "Suffering is life. Without suffering what would be the pleasure of it?"[20] Natasya Filipovna takes inordinate delight in running away from Myshkin into shame and death.[21] Stefan Zweig describes Dostoyevsky's heroes thus:

> Suffering, their own personal pain, is often their greatest felicity . . . For their suffering is also their happiness, they hold to it tenaciously, they warm it at their breasts, they fawn upon it with caressive fingers, they worship it with their whole soul.[22]

Says Martin: "Both in the man and in many of his creations, there appears an inordinate need for punishment which frequently goes to the extreme of masochism."[23] The charges brought against Dostoyevsky, then, of asceticism, masochism, or of "morbid delight" in suffering do not seem to be unwarranted.

Comparison becomes difficult when we come to the problem of theodicy. As previously noted, we often find the problem stated in Dostoyevsky's novels but seldom, if ever, the solution. Dostoyevsky seems more interested in enduring than in explaining suffering. That, we might remark in passing, seems to be the Scriptural emphasis also.[24] At best, Dostoyevsky sees the solution of the problem in freedom. Christianity, however, finds the solution of the problem in

---

20. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 780.
21. In this case, however, it is doubtful whether Dostoyevsky approves of her course of action.
22. Op. cit., p. 155.
23. Op. cit., p. 11.
24. Cf. the conversations of Job with his friends.

the nature of God Himself, in the fact that He is Love. Suffering and evil exist; yet God exists, and He loves those who are suffering, we say. This inference from black to white is not possible unless we keep in mind what it means that "God is Love." Love is more than kindness. Kindness is interested in the present, love in the ultimate. Kindness may, therefore, dispense with suffering, whereas love may dispense suffering. "We want, in fact, not so much a Father in heaven as a grandfather in heaven---a senile benevolence who, as they say, 'liked to see the young people enjoying themselves.'"[25] God is infinitely more than this. He is interested in our being entirely and eternally for and with Him, for in that "forness" and "withness" lies our happiness. Because of what we are, sinners, God uses suffering, as we have already seen, to bring us into communion with Him. C. S. Lewis sums up the solution very nicely:

> The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves, is only insoluble as long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word 'love' . . . To ask that God's love should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God; because He is what He is, His love must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled, by certain stains in our present character, and because He already loves us He must labor [via suffering] to make us lovable . . . What we would here and now call our 'hap-

---

25. C. S. Lewis, op. cit., p. 28.

> piness' is not the end God chiefly has in view: but when we are such as He can love without impediment, we shall in fact be happy.[26]

In view of our heavenly goal, then, "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."[27] By way of epitome, then, we might say that for Dostoyevsky the solution to the problem of theodicy, if any, lay in two facts: that God is Freedom and man is free; for the Christian the solution lies also in two facts---but entirely different ones: God is Love and man is a sinner.

A final question. Does Dostoyevsky "preach Christ " in his novels? Does the atonement of Christ have any meaning for Dostoyevsky in human suffering?[28] This is a moot question. Opposing views are held. Murry and Horton seem to feel that Christ and hope are lacking in Dostoyevsky's novels. Horton holds that Dostoyevsky's writings "end in an impasse."[29] Zweig, Hromadka, and Baring, however, decidedly hold that Dostoyevsky's novels do "preach Christ."

In discussing this question we must keep in mind especially two factors. First, although Dostoyevsky's novels speak of the sufferings of both Christians and unregenerate, they are primarily constructed around the lives of the lat-

---

26. Ibid., p. 36.
27. Rom. 8,18.
28. For the Scriptural emphasis on the use and power of the atonement in suffering see Rom. 8, 32-39.
29. Horton, op. cit., p. 12.

ter. Thus Crime and Punishment is the story of self-willed Raskolnikov, The Brothers Karamazov of doubt-tormented Ivan, and The Possessed the story of the infamous Stavrogin. The point is that an unregenerate in the midst of his sufferings quite naturally finds no strength in the atonement of Christ. This may account somewhat for the absence of the atonement in Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering.

Secondly, as has already been pointed out, Dostoyevsky nearly always presents Christ at the end of suffering rather than in the midst of suffering. And then the story ends. When Raskolnikov has finally discovered Christ, Dostoyevsky ends the story abruptly by referring to his life of suffering in Christ thereafter as material for "a new story."[30] We might imagine that that would be the story of what the atoning Christ meant to Raskolnikov during the harrowing years he spent in Siberia. But the story was never written. Moreover , that Christ is brought in so late in Dostoyevsky's novels is obviously again the result of his dealing primarily with the sufferings of the unregenerate. Furthermore, Dostoyevsky was more interested in depicting the road to Christ than the road with Christ.

One cannot help but feel the power of the risen Christ operating in the lives of the saintly Father Zossima, Alyosha, and Prince Myshkin. Alyosha comforts a group of be-

---

30. Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, p. 532.

reaved, grief-stricken boys with the hope of a future bodily resurrection.[31] On one occasion he diagnosed Ivan's difficulties as springing from his having forgotten the atoning Christ.

> Brother, you said just now, 'Is there a being in the whole world who would have the right to forgive and could forgive?' But there is a Being and He can forgive everything, all and for all, because He gave His innocent blood for all and everything. You have forgotten Him, and on Him is built the edifice, and it is to Him they [the innocent sufferers] cry aloud, 'Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed.'[32]

The lengthy dissertations of Father Zossima, though largely ethical, always hark back to Christ. Prince Myshkin speaks at great length of Christ.[33] All of Dostoyevsky's lovable and beautiful characters were constantly applying Christ to suffering humanity about them. Joseph L. Hromadka sums up the situation rather nicely when he says:

> The evangelical soul . . . may be disappointed at the scarcity in Dostoyevsky's novels of direct and explicit preaching on Christ and His way of salvation. He would be right. The story goes, men and women act, dramas and tragedies unfold in a most earthly way, seemingly without any higher, trans-human motive. All events, all changes, transformations, collapses, crises and victories seem to have little to do with any other-worldly reality and agent. Dostoyevsky does not preach: he only on rare occasions speaks explicitly about Christ . . . .

---

31. Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 940.
32. Ibid., p. 292.
33. Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, pp. 208 & 388.

But Hromadka continues:

> Behind almost all Dostoyevsky's writings stands the invisible, intangible figure of the Crucified and Risen. His majestic glory and unfathomable self-identification with the corrupted world was for him the hinge on which the world revolves. He is the center of gravity of our life. In Him is the solution of what is intellectually and morally insoluble. He is that authority alone which makes us free and gives us a selfless courage. It is He who makes us understand the deepest depth of evil and love the most destitute sinner without confusing the line between truth and lie, right and wrong.[34]

For this reason it seems unwarranted to say that Dostoyevsky had no message of hope for the sufferer, that he is a "morbid" writer, that he is "cruel," that he is a "pessimist."[35] It is true that Dostoyevsky devotes much more time to the tragedy than to the hope, but that is because he is primarily interested in the working out of and the solution to that tragedy. It is true that he is cruel in so far as he would not release man of the burden of freedom. But in maintaining that man keep his freedom at any cost Dostoyevsky was only advocating what he considered best for him. As for explaining the tragic depths of man, it seems that he is only showing in a very powerful way the Scriptural doctrine of total depravity. That Dostoyevsky is an apostle of hope is confirmed by these words of Maurice Baring:

---

34. Op. cit., pp. 44-45.
35. See Time, March 8, 1948, p. 71.

> Although his books are terrible, and deal with the darkest clouds which can overshadow the human spirit, the descent into hell of the human soul, yet the main impression left by them is not one of gloom but one of comfort. Dostoyevsky is, above all things, a healer and a comforter.[36]

Stefan Zweig even waxes poetic in describing Dostoyevsky as a writer of hope:

> For if ever there was a world where nothing is inexorably fixed, where, from the deepest chasm, a path leads up to safety, where every misfortune culminates in ecstasy, where every despair is crowned with hope, then that world is Dostoyevsky's world. Are his works anything other than a series of acts of the apostles, of legends dealing with deliverance from suffering through the spirit, depicting conversion to a belief in life, describing a way of the cross that shall lead to knowledge? Is not each of them a road to Damascus, transferred into the midst of our world?[37]

In this comparison of Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering with the Christian viewpoint we have, quite naturally, dwelt more upon the differences than upon the similarities, because in the differences lie the problems. Such a procedure is likely to give us a distorted picture of Dostoyevsky. It will be our objective in the concluding chapter to erase any such faulty impression. For the present we must carefully avoid any "arguments from silence." Except in his expiatory view of suffering and in the innate powers he attributes to man, it seems safe to conclude that there is no

---

36. Op. cit., p. 164.
37. Op. cit., pp. 156-157.

serious divergence from the Christian viewpoint in Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering. A remark by William Lyon Phelps best indicates this similarity and serves as a fitting conclusion to our present discussion:

> He [Dostoyevsky] never dodged the ugly facts in the world, nor even winced before them. Nor did he defy them. The vast knowledge that he had of the very worst of life's conditions, and of the extreme limits of sin of which humanity is capable, seemed only to deepen and strengthen his love of this world, his love of all the creatures on it, and his intense religious passion. That so experienced and unprejudiced a man, gifted with such a power of subtle and profound reflection should have found in the Christian religion the only solution of the riddle of existence, and the best rule for daily conduct, is in itself valuable evidence that the Christian religion is true. Dostoyevsky has been surpassed in many things by other novelists. The deficiencies and excresences of his art are glaring. But of all the masters of fiction, both in Russia and elsewhere, he is the most truly spiritual.[38]

---

38. Op. cit., pp. 168-169.

VI. Conclusion: A Personal Appraisal of Dostoyevsky

In the presentation of Dostoyevsky's concept of suffering so far, and especially in the critique, it has been difficult to remain objective. So completely does Dostoyevsky win one over that one feels inclined to opinionate rather than present mere facts, to defend Dostoyevsky where perhaps criticism is due.

This does not seem to be a feeling experienced only by the writer. The writer himself has witnessed a growing interest in Dostoyevsky and his works among his own acquaintances. Either by recommendation of another or quite by accident one is led to read one of Dostoyevsky's novels---and suddenly he is a Dostoyevsky enthusiast, a Dostoyevsky "disciple." His novels, especially Crime and Punishment and The Brothers Karamazov, are the subject of many seminarian conversations. The struggles of Raskolnikov, the doubts of Ivan, the "goodness" of Alyosha, the sententious sayings of Father Zossima---all of them receive nearly as much attention as do current events and current publications. There is something about Dostoyevsky's novels that grips the reader and commands his wholehearted attention.

What is that "something?" Answers will be many and varied, but, I think, a common denominator among them will be Dostoyevsky's realistic portrayal of the suffering soul.

One of the reasons many a famous book is famous seems to lie in the author's ability to make his reader identify himself with the heroes of his production. Dostoyevsky, it seems, has an uncanny knack for accomplishing that process within his readers. Raskolnikov's rationalizations have only too often been our rationalizations; the testimony of his conscience is the testimony that ours has many a time given. Ivan's doubts have been our doubts, even though we have not dared to voice them. Alyosha's "goodness" is what we aspire to acquire. The boredom and tedium of Stavrogin have really been the feelings we have experienced in our ordinary and routine daily living. Like Dostoyevsky's heroes we have all desired to overstep the bounds, and once we have, we have suffered as they---inwardly but, nevertheless, terribly. With every hero that Dostoyevsky portrays there lies deep down within us the conviction: "That's really me." We feel that through the men and women who people his novels Dostoyevsky is telling us who we are, what we have thought, how we have suffered.

> One who knows himself well, knows Dostoyevsky well; for if any man has succeeded in realizing the quintessence of all things human, it is surely he. The road to an understanding of his work leads through the purgatory of the passions, through the hell of tribulation, through every realm of human torment.[1]

---

1. Zweig, op. cit., p. 103.

This has value for us. Dostoyevsky proclaims a total depravity that goes beyond the ear, deep down into the heart. Sin and suffering are presented in terms of our own experience. This is what might be called effective "law-preaching." By it we are fitly prepared for "gospel," for Christ. And Dostoyevsky does not fail to lead us to Him. Christ means more to the reader because Dostoyevsky has given his readers a deeper insight into themselves.

Another "Dostoyevskian" stronghold is his unique correlation of suffering and love. This is the task accomplished in the sayings of Father Zossima in The Brothers Karamazov, and is, I believe, one of the reasons the book is so immensely popular. There is nothing "systematic" about his sayings. They read like our Bibles. There is a freshness, a warmth, a spontaneousness about them that captivates the reader. According to Father Zossima, our suffering is to teach us our guilt for all and, therefore, our obligation to love all. Through suffering we are to learn to love our brother. It seems that with this theme Dostoyevsky proposes a unique and effective way of fulfilling the Christian law of love, especially in a suffering world like ours.

> More than any other imaginative writer of our time Dostoyevsky, the dissector, the atomizer of the emotions, has gifted us with a profounder and more generalized feeling of world brotherhood. And Dostoyevsky, unrivalled in his knowledge of the human heart, was unrivalled likewise in

his veneration for the Incomprehensible
that shapes it: for the Divine, for God.[2]

What is perhaps of most value to our present day world is Dostoyevsky's all-out effort to preserve human freedom---our freedom---even at the price of suffering. We are indebted to Dostoyevsky, first of all, for his realistic presentation of the problem, for this is perhaps one of those cases where part of the solution to a problem lies in the recognition of the problem. Time and again Dostoyevsky describes for us the burdensome ordeal of freedom through his heroes, and in their difficulties we recognize our own. Like the people whom the Grand Inquisitor describes, we too experience the agony of arriving at our own ethical decisions where Scripture is "silent." We feel the discomfort that arises from "going by" general principles in the field of behavior rather than specific rules. At times we yearn for "authorities" and "rules," for the "last word." We want a Church and a clergy that will actually do our thinking, deciding, and planning instead of merely guiding and motivating them. In the field of government, we too want a State that will settle our problems rather than a State that will make it possible for us to iron out our own problems freely and intelligently. We want a world that puts food into our mouth rather than one in which we strive for

---

2. Ibid., pp. 215-216.

our own food---because it's so much easier that way and involves much less "discomfort" and "suffering."

Dostoyevsky does not sell human freedom---no matter how great the cost will be in suffering. In view of his ultimate goal, man's freedom is too valuable a thing to be bartered away for the sake of material comforts and happiness. That is Dostoyevsky's great contribution. It seems that all totalitarian agitators and Utopian dreamers can learn a lesson from Dostoyevsky. No form of government, no matter how efficient it is, no matter how beneficial it is to the governed himself, is worth the surrender of man's priceless freedom. Likewise, the Church of our day can take a lesson from Dostoyevsky. The Church may say to the individual: "You have problems to solve. You have difficult decisions to make in your everyday living. We are here to guide you, to give you Scriptural principles to go by, to give you the Power to make correct decisions." But she dare never say: "Leave your burden with us. We will do your thinking. We will make easy rules for you to go by. We will take care of all your difficulties. We will assume all responsibility for you and the suffering that it involves---go out and have a good time, be happy, and don't worry." Man's freedom is too priceless, the suffering that it involves of too much ultimate value to him for him to thus surrender it.

In conclusion, perhaps no better tribute to Dostoyevsky can be voiced by the writer than in the words of one who is perhaps Dostoyevsky's greatest admirer, Maurice Baring:

> The whole reason that his books, although they deal with the tragedies of mankind, bring comfort to the reader instead of gloom, hope instead of despair, is firstly, that Dostoyevsky was an altruist, and that he fulfilled the most difficult precept of Christianity---to love others better than oneself; and secondly, that in leading us down in the lowest depths of tragedy, he shows us that where man ends, God takes up the tale.[3]

---

3. Op. cit., p. 165.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ANONYMOUS, "Faith For a Lonten Age," Time, LI (March 8, 1948), 70-79.

BARING, MAURICE, Landmarks in Russian Literature, London, Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1916.

BERDYAEV, NICHOLAS, Dostoievsky: An Interpretation, tr., Donald Attwater, New York, Sheed and Ward Inc., 1934.

_____, Slavery and Freedom, tr., R. M. French, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944.

_____, Spirit and Reality, tr., George Reavey, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939.

CARMERER, R. R., "Temptation," The Abiding Word, II, ed., Th. Laetsch, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1947.

DOSTOYEVSKY, AIMEE, Fyodor Dostoyevsky: A Study, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1922.

DOSTOYEVSKY, FYODOR, The Brothers Karamazov, tr., Constance Garnett, New York, A. S. Barnes and Co. Inc., 1943.

_____, Crime and Punishment, tr., Constance Garnett, New York, A. S. Barnes and Co. Inc., 1944.

_____, The Idiot, tr., Constance Garnett, New York, Random House Inc., 1942.

_____, The Possessed, tr., Constance Garnett, New York, Random House Inc., 1936.

_____, The Short Novels of Dostoyevsky, tr., Constance Garnett, New York, Dial Press, 1945.

HOPPER, STANLEY, The Crisis of Faith, New York, Abingdon Cokesbury Press, n. d.

HORTON, WALTER MARSHALL, Contemporary Continental Theology, New York and London, Harper and Brothers, 1938.

HROMADKA, JOSEPH L., Doom and Resurrection, Richmond, Va., Madrus House, 1945.

KEMPIS, THOMAS, The Imitation of Christ, New York, E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1947.

LAVRIN, JANKO, Dostoevsky and His Creation, London, W. Collins and Co. Ltd., 1920.

LEWIS, C. S., The Problem of Pain, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1947.

LLOYD, J. A. T., A Great Russian Realist, London, Stanley Paul and Co., 1935.

MARTIN, GLEN, "Guilt and Redemption in Dostoyevsky," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, II (May,1947), 10-15.

MEIER-GRAEFE, JULIUS, Dostoevsky: The Man and His Work, tr., Herbert H. Marks, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1928.

MURRY, J. MIDDLETON, Fyodor Dostoevsky: A Critical Study, New York, Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1916.

PHELPS, WILLIAM LYON, Essays on Russian Novelists, New York, Macmillan Co., 1911.

SOPER, DAVID WESLEY, "Dostoevsky and the Catholic Mind," Theology Today, IV (July 1947), 214-229.

TROYAT, HENRY, Firebrand: The Life of Dostoyevsky, tr., Norbert Guterman, New York, Roy Publishers, 1946.

ZWEIG, STEFAN, Three Masters: Balzac-Dickens-Dostoeffsky, tr., Eden and Cedar Paul, New York, Viking Press, 1930.