

DOSTOEVSKY READING AND STUDY GUIDE

Professor Bruce V. Foltz

I. Difficulties in Reading Dostoevsky

Dostoevsky's novels are relatively accessible, and they are generally quite engaging, so most readers are able to plunge right in without preliminaries. Two obstacles, however, are worth noting at the outset. The first is an obvious one: between the many diminutives and nicknames, as well as the "patronyms" (derived from the father's first name) that are common in Russian address, it is difficult to keep track of the characters. So the reader is urged to turn to the "List of Characters" on pages xix and following. There you will learn that, taking into account the option of using or not using the patronym, there are at least sixteen different ways of addressing or referring to the youngest Karamazov brother! Mark these reference pages and refer to them whenever you come across an unfamiliar name—it may turn out to designate a familiar character.

The second difficulty is less obvious. Just because Dostoevsky is such a master storyteller, and because he seems to be dealing in the very same currency of ideas to which we have grown accustomed in Western Europe and America (freedom, and truth, and goodness, and the like) it is easy to think we understand him when we may be well off the track.

For example, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in America and Western Europe, Dostoevsky was read as a "psychologist" who had a penchant for the dark and morbid side of the human mind. Later, he was read as an "existentialist" who found no meaning to life and was fixated on despair and absurdity. In fact, Dostoevsky is one of the most hopeful and joyful

writers, and he was arguably the greatest writer of Christian literature since Dante. How could intelligent readers and critics have been so wrong? The *first* answer lies in certain special features of Russian history and culture.

II. Background in Russian Thought and History

Even before the fall of ancient Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire had been moved east to the newly founded city of Constantinople (aka Byzantium, aka Istanbul) on the Bosphorus Straits joining Europe and Asia. This "Second Rome" was to flourish and to reign uninterrupted over an empire of varying size (and which it understood as simply the Roman Empire) for well over a millennium (330—1453) until it finally fell to the Ottoman Turks. It was from Byzantium that Orthodox Christianity arrived in Russia, and when Constantinople finally fell, Russia had just freed itself from its Tatar overlords under the leadership of the city-state of Moscow. Thus, Moscow—with its seven hills, just like Rome, and just like Constantinople—quickly came to see itself as the "Third Rome," the heir and sustainer of ancient civilization stretching back without interruption to Alexander the Great. (The Russian word "Czar," for example, is simply a Slavonic transliteration of "Caesar.") Thus, it is not surprising that Russia took over the double-headed eagle as its imperial symbol, the two heads looking both East and West, just as Constantinople had done.

In fact, throughout its history Russia has had of necessity to look in both directions: both East to waves of Mongol

and Tatar invaders coming hard over the southern steppes in search of plunder and tribute, as well as West, where under the sponsorship of the Vatican, waves of Western armies (from the Teutonic Knights in the Middle Ages to the later imperial kingdoms of Poland and Lithuania) came to forcibly impose Roman Catholicism upon Orthodox lands. (Dostoevsky's choice of a Latin Inquisitor in his "Legend" was hardly accidental.) At the same time, Russia has culturally identified with both East and West: seen itself as both European and Asian, and embraced in its spirituality both the mysticism of the East and the rationality of the West. So that terms which sound quite familiar (such as the concept of freedom that is so important in Dostoevsky's writings) may have a very different meaning from what we assume. Thus, for Dostoevsky, freedom is understood not by means of the political concept of Liberty, but through the theological concept of love.

This East-West balance or equipoise, however, began to be tilted toward the West in the eighteenth century, beginning with the reforms of Peter the Great, who exercised coercion of many kinds to force Russia to Westernize and modernize. This led in the nineteenth century to a polarization among Russian artists and intellectuals between the *Westernizers*, who wanted to further and radicalize Peter's reforms and make Russia "scientific" and "socialistic" and rationalistic, and the *Slavophiles*, who believed that even though Russia was European, it was at the same time non-European—different and unique. Some of these Slavophile intellectuals even felt that Russia—the Third Rome and perpetuator of the ancient civilization from which the West itself derived—could serve as the bridge between East and West, and even hold the key to correcting what they saw as a profound imbalance that had developed in Western Europe and America: a dominance

of the head over the heart, of discursive rationality over contemplative insight, of utility over beauty.

Dostoevsky, moreover, was one of the principle figures in the Slavophile movement. He came to feel strongly that it was of the greatest importance not only for itself but for the West as well, that Russia find a way to reclaim its unique cultural and religious inheritance from its Western "captivity." At the same time, he was unusually well-read in Western thought and literature, as well as well-traveled in Western Europe, so the tension between these two poles of heart and the head (and as he saw it, of East and West) was in play within his own life as well. And the tension between these poles (which as we shall see, is the tension between the rationalistic and atheistic Ivan, and the warm-hearted believer Alexei) served as a kind of arena for the interplay of ideas in his novels, giving them a peculiarly "open-ended" character.

III. Background in Dostoevsky's Approach to Writing

Dostoevsky's novels are strongly dialogical: they have both a *Socratic* and an *experimental* quality. Socratic, because like Socrates as he is presented by Plato in his earlier dialogues, they place into interaction with each other people whose lives and thoughts embody important and competing ideas. Indeed, many believe that Plato put his philosophical work into such an interrogative, open-ended form precisely in order to accomplish in writing what his teacher Socrates had done in his life: to confront people individually with the need to decide what is true about the most important matters. Dostoevsky, too, is in this sense perhaps the greatest Socratic teacher of modern times.

Or to employ a contemporary analogy, Dostoevsky's novels are like laboratory

experiments, in which the outcome can be (and often was, to the writer himself) surprising due to the “chemical interaction” of the characters. Dostoevsky’s notebooks show that far from being didactic or ideological, he was often eager to see how things would turn out when Character A was put into contact with Character B. Sometimes the person he had expected to be a hero became a villain during the course of the novel, in interaction with certain other people and situations. Dostoevsky’s writings, then, undertake to perform experiments in which important ideas and outlooks are embodied in the thoughts and lives of individual characters whom we see in interaction with each other—experiments whose outcomes we ourselves are called upon to decide!

Archimandrite Vasileios, who is currently the Abbot of Iveron Monastery on Mount Athos in Greece, and who some would compare to Father Zosima in *The Brothers Karamozov*, sums up brilliantly this “openness” of Dostoevsky’s writings—rather remarkably suggesting that his writings contain inspired elements, and thus can work upon the reader in a way analogous to holy scriptures, while at the same time suggesting that this “open” character may be the *second*, and ultimate reason his novels are often misunderstood:

“Dostoevsky follows the story [he is writing] from within. He lives the experience of his heroes. He knows what is going on inside them through a communion of life. And this experience, this inner knowledge, is constantly manifested in his narrative. He assembles events. He weaves dialogue. He shapes his phrases. He says something quite explicitly, or he leaves it to be understood. But always he is on the inside, unswervingly guiding things where

he wants them to go. Or, better, Christ is directing things by His all-holy will. . . . With what passion and cogency [Dostoevsky] maintains every position! You see how both views, both sides of the question have something to be said for them. And how Truth, which is [ultimately] a divine-human person, is something beyond the thoughts which try to express the ineffable or the opinions which divide people.

And so Dostoevsky circulates unseen, clad in white raiment, with the Risen One, giving peace and joy to the despairing and the despised.

He criticizes you, without saying as much. He offers you health of soul without comment. He speaks to you without addressing himself to you. He raises personal questions of the utmost importance to you, even as he talks to himself.

And because he leaves you free, you approach him. Because he does not set himself up as your teacher, you prick up your ears. Because he has what you want, you remain forever close to him despite yourself. If he asked to be listened to, that in itself would be enough to send people running from him. It would be proof that he was lying.

Falsehood advertises itself and seeks supporters. Truth is honored in being despised, and saves those who are able to recognize its worth.

He does not speak of something of his own, but reveals that which operates and turns out according to the will of God.

He appears to be doing something irrelevant, even

muddled. His heroes are often deranged, possessed, criminals even. His stories are dense and complicated, but his axis is steady. And the point he is leading to is clear and comforting. Everyone comes of their own accord to him, to the place where their unknown being is to be found, their longing for home.” Archimandrite Vasileios, *From St. Isaac the Syrian to Dostoevsky*, trans. Dr. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2004), pp. 18ff.

IV. Background in Dostoevsky’s Earlier Writings

Dostoevsky was a prolific writer, but we can briefly note certain concerns that reappear in his most important writings prior to his last masterpiece:

- In *Notes from the Underground*, we become acquainted with the “underground man,” a petty clerk and self-styled intellectual who rants endlessly about the oppressiveness of modernity—denouncing reason, technology, bureaucracy, and generally all the modern ways of imposing human order upon the world—as an assault upon human freedom. Yet in his merely “underground” exercise of resistance, he has himself become enslaved to a spiteful negativity, for he has failed to find the true freedom that even in this early work, Dostoevsky suggests can be found only in love and self-giving.

- In *Devils* (previously translated as *The Possessed*) Dostoevsky portrays a motley group of student revolutionaries whose attempts to put into action their infatuation with the rationalism of Western socialism and utopism becomes demonic and murderous, contrasting them with bourgeois representatives of the traditional order in Russia, who in comparison emerge as shallow, silly, and sentimental. The heart

become trite *versus* a rationalism that has become deranged and demonic.

- Finally, in *Crime and Punishment*, the hyper-intellectual university student Raskolnikov, having been persuaded by the utilitarian ethics of Western Europe, decides to put this theory into practice by killing and robbing an unpleasant old pawn-broker who exploits students, and distributing the money more rationally. But acting from his thoughts, and ignoring the admonitions of his heart, he finds himself afterward in a hell of isolation, from which he is delivered only by repentance and love. (We later learn from Elder Zosima that “Hell is the inability to love.”) Moreover, we find that his crime is not just against God and man, but against nature, against the earth itself. (We find this later in Ivan and his simultaneous love for, and “blasphemy” against, nature.)

V. Background in *The Brothers Karamozov*

The chapter that introduces and contextualizes the “Grand Inquisitor” discussion is called “The Brothers Get Acquainted.” The title is at first surprising, for although Alyosha and Ivan have been separated for several years, they are hardly strangers. So the “acquaintance” of the chapter title must refer to something less ordinary, something deeper, and indeed we soon find out how this is the case. Alyosha (the monastic “novice” or probationary monk) and Ivan (the intellectual whose mind is filled with heady thoughts) meet at a tavern where Ivan wastes no time in baring his soul to his brother, even as he plunges headlong into what both agree are the greatest ideas of their time. Ivan first shocks his brother by announcing he has concluded that the world has no meaning, but he immediately reassures Alyosha with his conviction that youthfulness itself has the buoyant power to save him from this nihilistic undertow—at least until he is

thirty, the age at which Ivan foresees the likelihood of taking his own life. But why keep on living even now? Though he finds the nihilistic “logic” inescapable, for the time being at least he is still able to love life, and he confesses that above all he loves nature: “I want to live, and I do live, even if it be against logic. Though I do not believe in the order of things [i.e. in the world as divinely ordered creation], still the sticky little leaves that come out in the spring [he is quoting a poem by Pushkin] are dear to me, the blue sky is dear to me, some people are dear to me. . . Sticky spring leaves, the blue sky—I love them, that’s all! Such things you love not with your mind, not with logic, but with your insides, your guts. . . .” (230) (We note here that Ivan himself counterposes love and logic, with logic leading to nihilism and death, while love—stimulated first of all by the world of nature, and after that by other people—moves in the opposite direction, affirming and sustaining life.)

Ivan then goes on both to exhibit and explore the youthfulness he has valorized by asserting that young people, at least in contemporary Russia, need above all to resolve for themselves “the everlasting questions,” “the eternal questions,” presumably because the traditional answers can no longer be unthinkingly assumed. What are these perennial questions? “None other,” Ivan declares, “than the universal questions: is there a God, is there immortality? And those who do not believe in God, well, they will talk about socialism and anarchism, about transforming the whole of mankind according to a new order, but it’s the same damned thing, the questions are all the same, only from the other end.” Alyosha, “looking at his brother with the same quiet and searching smile,” agrees entirely with both claims: that God and immortality both are, and should be, the foremost questions for Russian youth, and that the current talk of socialism and

transforming humanity are “the same questions from the other end.” (234f)

His agreement with Ivan’s alternatives will come as no surprise to readers of *Karamozov*, since when Alyosha is first introduced in the novel it is noted that had he not been convinced of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, he would certainly have been a socialist. For socialism, the novel’s narrator adds, “is not only the labor question or the question of the so-called fourth estate, but first of all the question of atheism, the question of the Tower of Babel built precisely without God, not to go from earth to heaven but to bring heaven down to earth.” (26) “Socialism” in this Dostoevskian sense, it is important to note, *is not primarily an economic system*. It is, rather, the characteristically modern attempt to re-order the world purely according to human contrivance—a project that is itself based upon the conviction that the world has no inherent order, no “nature” of its own.

The initial discussion at the tavern thus frames the later “Grand Inquisitor” narrative with a series of opposing pairs: Logic *versus* love. Death *versus* life. Socialism and the refashioning of world and humanity *versus* faith in God and immortality. Ivan *versus* Alyosha. And as we shall see: the figures of the Grand Inquisitor *versus* the Russian Monk.

Finally, in the next chapter (“Rebellion,” immediately preceding the “Grand Inquisitor” chapter) Ivan makes explicit to his monastically inclined brother his own *practical* atheism, explaining why he refuses to believe in God. Ivan argues that human suffering, especially the suffering of the innocent, stands as a refutation of God—*even if God exists!* And he relates a heartbreaking tale of a young child being subjected to harrowing suffering at the hands of an inhumanly callous “aristocrat.” At the same time, by rejecting

God and immortality, he implies the need to find meaning “from the other end”: i.e. with “socialism” and the attempt to reconfigure the world according to human plans and designs, rather regarding it as divinely ordered creation. Thus, the “sticky green leaves” that allow him to keep on living remain for him merely an aesthetic and emotional peculiarity of the world, not an epiphany of divine goodness.

In the “Grand Inquisitor” chapter, then, the two young brothers are still at the tavern, continuing the same, weighty discussion.

VI. The “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor”

A. Who is the “audience” of “The Grand Inquisitor”? Who is it “for”?

Ivan, the narrator, is in a peculiar and important sense the original audience, for it is a story he has long told to himself alone. And it is above all Ivan who must come to terms with its meaning. He tells the story to his brother in order to explain his own kind of atheism, and thus his own disturbing conclusion that the Inquisitor does more to help humanity than does Christ. He also tells Alyosha the story in order to see whether he can corrupt him, thus identifying himself with the Devil, the Great Tempter--and later in the book the Devil appears to Ivan as his alter ego. Like Ivan, the Inquisitor turns against Christ, even though he knows that Christ is divine--that he is what Dostoevsky called the “God-man”. The Inquisitor, and Ivan with him, choose not the “God-man” or divine humanity—humanity as it is humbly and unselfishly joined in mystical union with God--but the “Man-god,” humanity usurping the role of God, and redesigning in Promethean fashion not only nature and society, but its own nature as well. “The kiss burns in his heart, but the old man holds to his former idea.” (p. 262) Thus, the young man Ivan, like the old Inquisitor, is divided between heart and

mind, and in the end both choose the latter over the former. It is this triumph of thoughts and ideas over the heart that is the downfall of all Dostoevsky’s tragic characters: Raskolnikov’s utilitarian plan to kill a wretched old pawnbroker and put the stolen money to better use; the “demonic” outcomes of the student revolutionaries (often sounding like Al-Qaida operatives) who are driven by their ideas and ideologies; and Ivan’s atheistic insistence that without God, “everything is permitted,” and that leads him later in the novel to a kind of insanity.

At the same time, within the larger narrative of the novel, Alyosha is the audience for the story, since it is being told to him, and since he is being tempted by it. Russia itself, Dostoevsky’s most immediate reading public, is also the audience, since the author is concerned that his country will fall prey to the Western rationalism that the Inquisitor espouses—and which in fact happened with the triumph in Russia of a political philosophy imported from the West (Bolshevism). Finally, all humanity—and thus we ourselves—are the subjects, for Dostoevsky feels that we must each decide whether the world is to be transformed through calculation and cunning and when necessary deceit, or whether it is to be transformed as Father Zosima and his younger brother and Alyosha are transformed: one person at a time, and through faith in a higher power and an ultimate order and the regenerative power to be found therein. We must also each decide whether human freedom is a blessing, despite its capacity to be misused, or rather a curse from which we are best delivered, no matter whether the deliverer arrives in the name of church or government or enlightenment--in the form of a scientist, or an intellectual, or a revolutionary. Do we yearn for, as Erich Fromm put it some years ago, an “escape from freedom”?

B. What is the “topic” of “The Grand Inquisitor”? What is it “about”?

Only in the most superficial and literal sense is the “Legend” about the Spanish Inquisition or even the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. In a somewhat deeper sense, it reflects Dostoevsky’s belief that the Western Church as a whole (in both its Catholic and Protestant versions) has lost its mystical roots, and become more an affair of the head than of the heart. Deeper yet, it is about what Dostoevsky (like Nietzsche) sees as the hidden nihilism of Western civilization. And while Nietzsche explicitly poses the Man-god (or *Übermensch*) as an alternative to this nihilism, Dostoevsky (whom Nietzsche much admired) poses a re-affirmation of the God-man. (As the Russian philosopher Berdyaev put it, “Dostoevsky knew everything that Nietzsche knew. But he also know something that Nietzsche did not know.”) Finally, the Grand Inquisitor is about the human predicament, about how to reconcile faith and discursive rationality, about how to purify the heart, and reconcile it with the head. But this, of course is the task of religion, the topic of the next section, “The Russian Monk.”

VII. “The Russian Monk”

This section for the most part speaks for itself rather eloquently, and it is thus for each reader to decide its meaning and importance for himself or herself. Many believe that it offers one of the most compelling visions of the Christian life—of the life really lived according to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount—that has been articulated in modern times. Only two points need be briefly raised here: What is the relation of this “Russian Monk” section to the “Grand Inquisitor” section? And: How is the Christianity depicted here different from the Christianity of the West?

A. Relation of “The Grand Inquisitor” to “The Russian Monk”

Two clerical figures strand quietly before us, both dressed in black robes, and both calling both us, and the way we live our lives, into question. It is a striking comparison, but hardly a neutral or even a fair one. One represents a low point of Western Christianity (the Spanish Inquisition), while one represents a high point of Eastern Christianity (the flowering of monasticism in late 19th Century Russia, under the leadership of the Optina Monastery, which Dostoevsky visited repeatedly and which served as model for this chapter.) One trusts in human schemes and one trusts in divine goodness. Judging from his letters, it is clear that Dostoevsky sees the second as the “refutation” of the first. The first narrative presents what he calls a “blasphemy,” one to be refuted by the second. What is the blasphemy? Not that there is no God, but that creation is meaningless: “the theme of [these two sections] is blasphemy and the refutation of blasphemy. . . . As it manifests itself in Russia among (almost) our *entire* upper crust, and principally among the younger generation, i.e. the scientific and philosophical refutation of the existence of God having been already discarded, the present day *serious socialists* no longer bother with it. . . . Instead, they vehemently *deny* God’s creation, God’s world and *its significance*.” (Letter of May 19, 1979 in Joseph Frank and David Goldstein, eds., *Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoyevsky*, trans Andrew MacAndrew [New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989]). Despite his admission that it is principally nature that somehow allows him to keep on living, Ivan is nevertheless insistent that creation is pointless and cruel. Indeed, it is this meaninglessness that makes Christ in the “Legend” an impotent figure, since He is

an anomaly in the real order of things. Ivan, and the Inquisitor, are proto-existentialists, proclaiming the meaninglessness and absurdity of creation—a meaninglessness that grants a license to all those Promethean rationalists daring enough to re-design the created order. But how is this a blasphemy?

B. Background in Russian Orthodoxy

In a letter dated September 6, 1979, Dostoevsky notes that this “refutation” of the earlier section will not be a “point by point” refutation, but that it will present “in the form of an artistic picture” a “worldview that stands in direct opposition to the one previously presented.” That worldview, of course, is that of Russian Orthodoxy.

One of the most distinctive features of Eastern Christianity (now prevalent in Russian and the Slavic countries, Greece and the Balkans, and among Christians in the Middle East) is its emphasis upon the cosmic dimension of redemption: the salvific work of Christ is seen as redeeming not just humanity but nature as well. For the Fall was not just a Fall of humanity, but a Cosmic Fall, bringing death, suffering, and corruption into the world as a result of the misuse of human freedom. And as symbolized by the cross uniting the vertical with the horizontal, the God-man joins together what had been torn apart: God and creation, the invisible and the visible, nature and grace. The religious “icon,” so important in Orthodoxy, is thus emblematic of this healing, for it is a visible window upon the invisible, a window into paradise in the midst of a fallen world. Beauty in general plays a most important role in Eastern Christianity, for with Plato, it sees beauty as the invisible breaking-forth into the visible. (Dostoevsky is often quoted for his prophecy that “beauty will save the world.”) Given this cosmic healing, brought about by the Great Physician, there is a deep goodness to be found both in nature and in

other people, one which we can discover even within suffering and evil—a goodness that shows us that the world is not unredeemed and that the inherent goodness of creation (indeed, paradise itself) has been restored. But how is it possible to discover this? Where lies the path back to the Garden? Not through thinking and proof and investigation, but through *love*: not with the head but with the *heart* do we enter the Kingdom, and so do both Zosima and his brother rediscover the divine goodness first in the natural order, and then in other people. (The reader can make a valuable discovery by placing a check-mark in the margin at each mention of the word “heart,” and then reviewing them. An even more interesting discovery can be made by performing this same experiment at various points in the Bible, especially the Psalms and the New Testament.) Indeed, this is just how humanity has fallen: under the influence of the passions (anger, greed, lust, etc.) our conscious identity has become dislodged from its natural home in the heart, and taken residence in the head, in the realm of discursive reason with its planning and calculation aimed at satisfying the passions (providing “bread,” power, etc.). “Repentance,” a change of heart and thus a healing and purification of the heart, will allow us to recover our natural capacity to love: to love creation, to love humanity, and to love God Whom we will then find everywhere in nature and humanity. Thus, the healed soul, the soul which has (like Alyosha) once again learned how to love, can be reunited with God, a union that the Eastern Church calls “*thêosis*.” “The Russian Monk,” then, presents these teachings in dramatic form, teachings which are of course by no means alien to the Western Church, since they are drawn from a shared history. And it is appropriate that Dostoevsky would present the “refutation” of Ivan’s atheism and “blasphemy” not with

more ideas, but with people, with lives, with real possibilities for life.

It is, however, probably not possible to improve upon Dostoevsky's own reflection upon these two options for life, one that he articulates in a letter dated June 11, 1879:

My socialist (Ivan Karamazov) is a sincere man who openly admits that he agrees with the Grand Inquisitor's view of mankind and with the contention that belief in Christ assumes that man is a much nobler creature than he really is. So the question is asked point blank: "You, the would-be future savior of mankind, do you despise man or do you respect him?"

And all this is supposedly done in the name of love for mankind. They are saying, in effect: "The commandments of Christ are stern and abstract and unbearable for the weak," and so, instead of the law of Freedom and Light, they impose on men, through bread, the law of chains and enslavement.

In the next book, there will be the death of Elder Zosima and his last conversations with his friends. This is not a sermon, but rather a sort of story, an account of an incident in his own life. If I can bring it off, I will have accomplished something useful: I *will force them to admit* that that a pure and ideal Christian is not an abstraction but a tangible, real possibility that can be contemplated with our own eyes. . . .

VIII. Implications for this Course

There is much that we can bring from these readings into our discussions. But perhaps two issues stand out above all. First, we are familiar with many critiques of

Western culture, but often they are ultimately external—either because they come from a non-Western perspective (such as Buddhism or Taoism) or else from a Western perspective that itself sees much of Western culture as errant and misguided (such as Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx). Dostoevsky's critique is different, for he is both an insider and an outsider. He believes in the great, high preoccupations of Western humanity (Love and Freedom and Justice and God) but he is convinced that he understands how the West has betrayed its own best insights through a severing of discursive rationality from what Pascal called the "logic of the heart." Once again, as a Russian, Dostoevsky feels that he is in a privileged position to help the West return to its own truest vision, for he has one foot in the East and one in the West, one in rationality and one in the mystical quest for union with the divine that so typifies Eastern spirituality.

Second, and of more immediate relevance to our own "quest for meaning," there is the question of whether we should bring about change through transforming ourselves or through transforming society. Change the world? Or change yourself? This was the great, burning question of the Countercultural Sixties. It is not, perhaps, a question that has been superseded. For as comfortable as may be the belief that we can somehow do both, Dostoevsky poses a challenge to us: *Where—primarily and above all--do you put your faith, your trust? In humanity itself? Or in a numinous or transcendent source to which humanity must first turn, and from which it must first recover its own meaning?* As much as we prefer the both/and, this may be the ultimate example of Kierkegaard's either/or. (Kierkegaard, a kindred spirit to Dostoevsky, certainly thought it was.) Our answer to this, Dostoevsky's great question to us, is perhaps the most important element

of our quest for meaning. What do we need most? What should we strive to be? The Inquisitor? Or Zosima? This may seem like a loaded question, and of course for Dostoevsky it certainly is. He believes that if we really understand what is at stake, and thus if we are not blinded by our passions for bread and for power and for all else that desire may dictate, and if we are not confused by a rationality run amok, we will choose Love and Freedom and Beauty every time.