LOVE AND THE INDIRECT ICON

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KIERKEGAARD, DOSTOEVSKY AND CHRISTIAN EROTICS

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis brings the work of Soren Kierkegaard into conversation with Orthodox theology in order to explore the question of love as an iconic bond between eternity and the temporal. Though Kierkegaard's account of human love stands in stark contrast to certain Orthodox readings on exactly the matter of iconic possibility, I turn to the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky in order to argue for a conception of the icon as indirect in ways that complicate easy distinctions between eastern and western traditions of Christianity. I suggest that Dostoevsky's iconologic sensibilities are predicated on a conception of faith characteristic of Kierkegaard, wherein God's self-communication in Christ passes through offense at the paradoxical lowliness by which the divine is revealed. An image does not draw its beholder into the divine life directly, by virtue of some immediate capacity to attract or compel, but indirectly through a relation in faith to the fullness of the hidden source that the image makes so partially visible. I argue that Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* can be read in terms of this iconic movement, and that the iconology of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* can be read in terms of this indirectness. So read, both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky offer an account of love that forms hearts so as to see eternity's image amidst the broken, patterned after the self-giving of God's own love in the abasement of Christ.

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INTRODUCTION

Considering love in terms of iconic movement seems reasonable in relation to the work of Fyodor Dostoevsky. The Russian novelist was immersed in the world of Orthodox Christianity, in which icons are a basic element of piety and practice. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, a story that explores love and its potential in a variety of forms, icons appear regularly as a means of religious encounter, both among the faithful and the fallen.[1] The task appears less pertinent to the writings of Søren Kierkegaard, whose Danish Lutheran context makes his reputation for Protestant iconoclasm less than surprising. His set of reflections entitled *Works of Love* hardly bares witness to conventional iconographic sensibilities, repudiating as it does the devotional significance of the particular created forms to which we are drawn.[2] Yet it seems to me that this is exactly a site through which fruitful parallels can be drawn between Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky. The apparent disconnect here is mitigated somewhat by the fact that I am interested less in the particular painted icons of Eastern Christian tradition, than in what might be called an iconic structure of faith more generally. Of more decisive significance, however, is that in light of Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard, I propose an account of the icon as characteristically 'indirect' in such a way as to complicate easy identification of the former with conventional iconographic theology, and open a chink in the so-called iconoclasm of the latter.

Alex Fryszman's essay on Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky helpfully explicates the

1 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002). Henceforth referred to in the text as *BK*.

2 Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Henceforth referred to in the text as *WL*.

general direction taken by this thesis, while simultaneously marking the critical point of departure where I understand the burden of the work to lie.[3] Fryszman aims to rethink the relationship between Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky beyond the traditional existentialist parallels drawn by scholars like Leo Shestov and Walter Kaufmann in the first half of the twentieth century. When Shestov discovered Kierkegaard, for instance, he proclaimed him to be Dostoevsky's *doppelgänger*, united with the great Russian author in resisting the mainstream European intellectual tradition of reason and theoretical thought, in order to emphasize the freedom of the individual.[4] Fryszman, however, argues for a more ambiguous account of their similarities through the 'prism' of Mikhail Bakhtin's literary analysis. He suggests that Bakhtin's famous reading of Dostoevsky's polyphonic poetics bears traces of the Russian critic's reflections on Kierkegaard's authorship, which can also be seen in terms of a certain dialogical multi-voicedness.[5] As will become clear in chapter two, I think this is a helpful way of approaching the relationship between Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, particularly as it highlights the indirectness that characterizes both of their modes of communication. Each speaks in the context of ongoing conversations that call for continued response, resulting in an indeterminacy of interpretation common to both of their works.

Where I take leave of Fryszman is in his assumption that there remains a tension in Dostoevsky between this polyphonic poetics and his vision of Christian fulfillment in

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3 Alex Fryszman, "Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky Seen Through Bakhtin's Prism," *Kierkegaardiana* 18 (1996): 100-125.

4 See Shestov, "Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky," in *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, trans. Elinor Hewitt (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969), 1-28.

5 Fryszman, "Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky," 102-104.

Christ. Fryszman reflects on this in terms of the "semiotics of the icon" that also seems a generative principle of Dostoevsky's art. He sees no way to reconcile such a particular teleology with the indeterminacy of dialogical encounter, and here Fryszman presumes a basic departure from Kierkegaardian thought. Despite their similarities, Fryszman concludes, "we will thus have to be content with the observation that there is a fundamental contradiction between Dostoyevsky's iconologic pattern and Kierkegaard's iconoclastic attitude."[6] One of the primary aims of this thesis is to repudiate such a claim as predicated on an inadequate account of the icon itself. Dostoevsky's 'iconology' does not stand in tension with his polyphonic art, but is characterized by a necessary indirectness that reveals his poetics to be fundamentally theological. If the incarnation of God in Christ stands behind the movement of iconic grace, I turn to Kierkegaard's account of the Incarnation for its emphasis on the contradiction and paradox of the God-man, such that he can be approached only indirectly through the possibility of offense. This, I suggest, is what animates Dostoevsky's iconology, dissolving the tension within his art and creating a space within discourse of the icon even for Kierkegaard.

The other layer through which I draw this discussion, of course, concerns the question of love and human erotic relations. As stands the status of the icon, it seems, so stands the potential invested in erotic encounter. The rich iconic tradition of Orthodoxy has a much easier time celebrating sexual love and marriage than does the Protestant iconoclasm from which Kierkegaard's stark distinction between Christian and erotic love seems to emerge. If we complicate the assumption of this iconoclasm, however, the

6 Ibid., 106.

possibilities begin to change on both ends. An icon as indirect as I suggest Dostoevsky envisions, chastens Orthodox confidence in the direct evocation of eternity through the finite body of another. On the other hand, Kierkegaard's interest in the offensive abasement of God in Christ is a reminder that even a body whose externality fails to attract might become an icon of eternity for one who has eyes to see it. That is to say, as Kierkegaard does, that love forms a heart; the incompleteness of the indirect icon means that it becomes what it is in a relation of faith that both requires and produces a conversion to the sort of penitential consciousness that might avoid taking offense at the divine incognito.

Chapter one sets out the problem by juxtaposing Kierkegaard with the Russian theologian Paul Evdokimov, in order to cast their divergence on matters of erotics in terms of iconographic sensibility. It explores the theology of the icon at the heart of Evdokimov's thought, and draws out Kierkegaard's objection to the directness of any such account that fails to confront adequately the contradiction of the God-man, and so bypasses the movement of faith through the repulsion of offense. I suggest at the end, however, that this critique need not entail a total dismissal of the icon, and I gesture to a theological conception of indirect iconic movement in which Kierkegaard might have more interest.

At this point I leave off from Kierkegaard and Evdokimov in order to explore the work of Dostoevsky as an Orthodox writer whose iconographic sensibilities are predicated on a very Kierkegaardian account of faith. In a sense, I offer Dostoevsky as an Orthodox instantiation of the kind of iconology I begin to intimate in the first chapter.

Chapter two is primarily concerned with the poetics of Dostoevsky's fiction, particularly in relation to *The Brothers Karamazov*, and I suggest that its heavily mediated and dialogical style is a theological commitment after the pattern of divine revelation in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Dostoevsky's fiction trades in an indirect mode of iconic reception, an icon characteristically broken in its vulnerability to the ongoing response of others.

The third chapter returns to Kierkegaard, now bringing his work into conversation with Dostoevsky as an attempt to fill out my earlier gesture towards a Kierkegaardian icon. Here I also return more intentionally to the theme of love, reading *Works of Love* as an expression of iconic movement that properly attends to the distance between the image and its source, and so to the subjectivity of the one who apprehends it. I also turn my attention from the poetic structure of *The Brothers Karamazov* to its narrative substance, exploring Dostoevsky's vision of love and its works as well. Here we discover that love for the beloved can become a sort of iconic experience of encounter with eternity, but as for Kierkegaard this involves a penitential divestment of the preference that might wish to make this movement directly.

If there is a guiding theme that orders these multiple layers of investigation, it is the 'indirect icon' which I suggest marks a substantial point of contact between Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky. That this icon is indirect means that Dostoevsky's theological vision is of a piece with his dialogical poetics, characterized by the self-emptying in openness to continued human response that brought the incarnate Christ to the cross. That I speak of icons at all suggests that Kierkegaard is not the straightforward

iconoclast he is generally made out to be, with all the disinterest in the earthly that so often attends this caricature. In fact, I submit that Kierkegaardian language of the indirect is the surest home for iconic movement, maintaining all of creation as a possible icon for one who has been crucified with Christ to its direct relation with eternity. This is not finally to despair of all erotic attachments to created forms, but to order them properly in love of their loving Creator.

CHAPTER ONE

ICONS AND EROTICS: KIERKEGAARD AND ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

I
The Body's Grace: Erotic Possibilities

In his intriguing essay "The Body's Grace," Rowan Williams locates the significance of human sexuality within the theological claim that we are loved and desired by God; loved as God loves God in the circulating desire of Trinitarian life. The grace to which he refers is fundamentally to do with the experience of this love, the experience of being desired and of finding oneself a pleasing source of joy to another. Properly understood, claims Williams, the structure of human sexuality draws us into an experience of this kind of grace, in which our very selves are perceived as wanted and significant. Our own desire, he reminds us, cannot finally be fulfilled in isolation. In order to be pursued and developed, it must risk making itself known to its object. Not only that, but truly to flourish our desire must be perceived by its object as itself desirable, eliciting a reciprocal arousal.[1]

Of significance for Williams is the recognition that the proper ends of one's own desire are embedded in the fulfillment of desire in another. "To desire my joy," he goes on to suggest, "is to desire the joy of the one I desire: my search for enjoyment through the bodily presence of another is a longing to be enjoyed in my body."[2] Williams' point

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1 Rowan Williams, "The Body's Grace," in *Theology and Sexuality - Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene Rogers (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 2002), 312. William's account of sexual desire here draws on the work of the philosopher Thomas Nagel.

2 Ibid., 313.

seems to be that properly understood, desire for a particular other is not fundamentally a matter of narcissistic self-gratification. In the end, one's own search for enjoyment turns on one's body becoming a source of joy for someone else. Insofar as it might be fulfilled, desire is pulled beyond itself into the relational joy of pleasing another person, of being enjoyed.

Williams' account of erotic desire is reversed in Kierkegaard, for whom true Christian love is the (paradoxically 'freeing') duty to love the neighbor over against any one particular erotic attachment (*WL*, 52-54). If Williams vindicates erotic desire to the extent that it finally desires the joy and delight of its object, Kierkegaard worries that this desire for the joy of the other is ultimately nothing more than a desire for one's own joy. The preferential zeal of erotic desire remains in the realm of pagan self-love for him, insofar as it loves only that which it finds to be attractive. To desire the particular object which one already perceives as lovable is simply to love that in the other which is like oneself. For Kierkegaard therefore, the task is not to seek out a lovable object (a futile act of self-love), but to find the given object (the neighbor) lovable, whether or not one is 'charmed' by her qualities (*WL*, 159).

I would suggest that the difference between Williams and Kierkegaard on this point is not that the former fails to appreciate the Christian imperative to love the neighbor. For Williams, the mutuality that structures true erotic desire certainly encourages us to recognize the relational constitution of our identities, "*beyond* the

customary imagined barrier between... the private and the shared."[3] Our lives cannot be extricated from those of our neighbors, with and to whom we belong. Williams' description of the risk involved in being constituted through a relation of bodies exceeding our control parallels Kierkegaard's insistence that Christian love is directed towards the neighbor 'whom you see', not whom you would like to see.

For Kierkegaard, such a divestment of self in recognizing one's simultaneous debt and obligation to all is negated in erotic love by the charms of the beloved. In Williams' terms, such 'love' would no longer be risky enough insofar as it finally hangs on one's own preferences, not the givenness of the neighbor before one's eyes. Williams, however, offers a very different account of the possibilities of erotic love. At least two things are going on here that make this possible for him. In the first place, Williams clearly finds the love of erotic attachment itself to be profoundly structured by the risk and vulnerability that subvert self-interest. In sexual relation, he notes, "I am no longer in charge of what I am."[4] This is the structure of any experience of desire for Williams, and the attractive charms of the particular beloved do nothing to negate it. There is surely some truth in this. It may be the case that erotic desire is first attracted by that which it finds lovable, but it rarely takes long before a couple is confronted by unexpected (and sometimes unattractive) aspects of each other that were not at first apparent. Even after a lifetime spent together, one continues to be shaped and formed in unpredictable ways by a partner who is inevitably not the person you thought you knew.

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3 Williams, "The Body's Grace," 317.
4 Ibid., 313.

Kierkegaard, however, knows this too. He argues that true Christian love must be faithful and limitless, remaining unchanged no matter how its object changes (*WL*, 167). He warns against loving only the perfections in a person (that which charms), requiring that Christian love be directed at the whole of what we see, perfections and imperfections alike. It is thus not a matter of finding the perfect object of love, but of loving perfectly over time the object that has been given or chosen.

The second pertinent element of Williams' analysis, then, may speak to a more profound difference between his work and Kierkegaard's. This element is suggested already by the title of the essay. "The body's grace" is a phrase borrowed from Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet* in reference to a young woman named Sarah Layton, whose experience of a loveless and finally painful seduction remains somehow profoundly and positively meaningful. Williams' conviction is that the body can be an occasion of grace, an occasion for the experience of being desired by God and gratuitously becoming "the object of God's love for God."[5] Sexual intimacy is an exercise in transformation towards the joy of divine life - not only in success, but in the moments of pain and misunderstanding as well. Undoubtedly Williams is convinced that faithfulness in committed unions is central to the full flowering of the body's grace in this sense. Such faithfulness alone can provide the space and time needed in order for exposure and risk to cultivate the profound transformations of abounding grace.[6] And yet, Williams is loath to

5 Ibid., 317.

6 Ibid., 315. Williams, however, by no means excludes experience of the body's grace from celibates. Even singles need to know something about desiring and being desired, he claims, and the attempt to "expose oneself first and foremost to the desirous perception of God" is none too easy a task. It is, however, a crucial one in keeping the community of God's Spirit mindful that our human delight in

deny the potential for grace in other encounters of the body as well; even encounters like Sarah Layton's in which corrupted desire is manifested in asymmetrical relations that may even border on abuse.

There is a sense in which the body's grace is for Williams a mode of iconographic reception. Like an icon, the body and its relations can open a gateway for God; not by its own perfection in representation, but by its openness in response to God's action. The grace of the body moves from the visible to the invisible, from the experience of one's body as a source of joy to an experience of being desired by God and drawn into God's very being. As Williams says elsewhere of icons, "in their presence you become aware that you are present to God and that God is working on you by his grace."[7] This, he claims, was Sarah Layton's experience of her body, and it appears to be here that Kierkegaard stands in starkest relief.

II
Iconographic Vision: Love and the Orthodox Tradition

Consideration of Kierkegaard in light of the icon brings us to the work of Paul Evdokimov, whose own reflections on love and marriage have everything to do with the centrality of 'iconographic vision'[8] to his theology. In a brief engagement with Kierkegaard's philosophical stages (of the aesthetic, ethical and religious), Evdokimov

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another can only be fully understood within the experience of God's delight in us (317).

7 Rowan Williams, *The Dwelling of the Light - Praying with the Icons of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI:Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), xix.

8 Peter Phan takes this expression to be the appropriate trademark-label for Evdokimov's thought. It is also one of the ways Evdokimov characterizes the work of Dostoevsky. See Phan, *Culture and Eschatology - The Iconographical Vision of Paul Evdokimov* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1985), 276.

concludes with the claim that "despite the powerful genius of his religious attitude, Kierkegaard remains *in front of God* and not *in God.* The miracle of the wedding at Cana is beyond Kierkegaard. The joyful breath of grace is never to be found in the dark and ironic pages of both his books and his life."[9] Evdokimov goes on obliquely to assign a docetic christology to Kierkegaard. Docetic tendencies, he reminds us, produce estrangement both from God and within human community. What begins as a negative relation of apophatic distance becomes mere absence in contrast to the 'loved otherness' at the essence of the sacrament of marriage (*AI*, 23).

Though it does seem bad form to imply that one's interlocutor is a heretic in a passing reference, I will defer engagement with Evdokimov's portrait of Kierkegaard until further on. In the meantime, it will be helpful to continue exploring the thematics of Evdokimov's work, especially as an entrance to the Orthodox spirituality in which iconography becomes so very important. In one sense, this is to depart from the Anglican Archbishop Williams, but in a more profound sense it is to remain with many of the same concerns. Like Williams, Evdokimov and his Russian teachers (especially Dostoevsky) are interested in the grace of the body and want to think about love in the context of human joy and the inbreaking of divine transfiguration. Also like Williams, the experience of love is here inextricable from an understanding of the relational constitution of one's identity, expressed for Dostoevsky in particular (as we will see in the

9 Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon - A Theology of Beauty*, trans. Fr. Steven Bigham (Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1990), 22. Henceforth referred to in the text as *AI*. See also a parallel passage in *The Sacrament of Love – The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Anthony Gythiel and Victoria Steadman (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 114. Henceforth referred to in the text as *SL*.

following chapters) through the divestment of self in an ascetic posture of penitential love towards all creatures. For Evdokimov, however, all of this can be captured in talking about love as illuminated by the Taboric light of iconic presence.

Icons

The primary theological realities that authorize the use of icons in Eastern Christianity are the creation of human beings in the divine image, and the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Negotiating the intricacies of these relations is tricky business, however, as the church discovered anew in the iconoclastic controversies of the eighth and ninth centuries. As Evdokimov tells the story, the iconoclastic objection turned on an impoverished understanding of art that insisted on accounting for physical likeness and symbolic likeness as mutually exclusive. Images could be nothing but portraits of physical likeness, and a portrait of God is of course inconceivable (*AI*, 193). One is left with either a separation of the human and divine natures of Christ, or their illegitimate Monophysite collapse. In the words of Leonide Ouspensky, another prominent 20th century theologian of the icon, the iconoclasts simply understood by the word 'icon' something very different from the Orthodox. They assumed that an icon had to be of the same nature as the person it represented, consubstantial with its model. Thus for iconoclasts, the only true icons of Christ were the elements of the Eucharist as they became his real body and blood, in both his natures.[10]

As Evdokimov notes, however, the purpose of an icon is not to represent the

10 Leonide Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 148.

natures of Christ at all, either divine or human. Instead, the visible humanity of Christ seen in an icon becomes a *symbol* of the whole person of Christ as the God-man, inviting contemplation on the mystery of the Incarnation itself (*AI*, 197). For the Orthodox, consequently, the Holy Gifts cannot be an icon of Christ exactly by virtue of their identity with their prototype. The idea behind the icon presumes a basic difference between the image and what it represents, recognition of which negates the question of idolatry altogether.[11] The concerns of the iconoclasts, then, finally reflect a basic confusion concerning the Chalcedonian dogma of the Incarnation. As Ouspensky has it, they lack a clarity about the distinction between nature and person, seeing in an image of Christ an attempt to represent one nature or the other. The third possibility recognized by the Orthodox abolishes this dilemma in representing the person of Christ, in which both natures are united hypostatically without confusion or division.[12]

The language of symbol that Evdokimov uses is significant for him over against that of sign or allegory, both of which communicate directly and didactically without a relation of presence between the signifier and the signified. A symbol, by contrast, represents mystery indirectly, as an intermediary. It is, however, related to that which it symbolizes by a true relation of presence (*AI*, 166-67). We can thus say that an icon carries the name of the prototype, but not its ontological nature. It has no existence in itself, neither capturing nor retaining anything. It exists only by participation in the reality symbolized and becomes a centre from which the divine energies radiate, without

11 Ibid., 150.
12 Ibid., 152.

their being circumscribed by it. "Being a material point in the world," Evdokimov claims, "the icon opens a breach through which the Transcendent shines, and the successive waves of this presence transcend all limits and fill the whole universe" (*AI*, 196).

The other major locus of iconoclastic objection proceeded from the prohibition of images in the Old Testament. As Ouspensky points out, however, the Orthodox response made it clear that the Christian image is actually legitimated by its absence before the Incarnation.[13] The primary historical source here is John of Damascus, whose three treatises now called *On the Divine Images* were written at the height of the iconoclastic controversy in the mid 8th century.[14] According to John, the Old Testament prohibition of images reiterates that worship is due only to God, and not to created things. Its concern is therefore with idolatry, given the impossibility of depicting the invisible.[15] On this count the Old Testament law-giver was exactly right: how could the formless be made, or the bodiless be given colour? The key for John is that through the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, the formless has indeed taken form. "For it is clear," he argues, "that when you see the bodiless become human for your sake, then you may accomplish the figure of a human form; when the invisible becomes visible in the flesh, then you may depict the likeness of something seen."[16] In depicting what we have seen of God, claims John, we do not venerate matter, but the fashioner of matter who became matter for our sake and

13 Ibid., 50.

14 See St. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. Andrew Louth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003).

15 Ibid., I.7.

16 Ibid., I.8.

through it worked our salvation.[17] As a result, we ought to image this descent. Christ's birth, baptism, transfiguration, miracles, death, resurrection, ascension - "depict all these in words and colors," he says, "do not be afraid, do not fear."[18]

There is a further sense from John, however, that the Old Testament prohibition not only precedes the Incarnation, but actively anticipates it. The law may not have been an image, he concedes, but it was the foreshadowing of an image.[19] Ouspensky picks up on this theme of an incarnational fulfillment of the Old Testament and connects it with the "destiny" of the Israelite people to serve the true God in prefiguring that which would be revealed in the New Testament. "This is why there could only be symbolic prefigurations [in the Hebrew scriptures], revelations of the future," he claims.[20] This is something of an enigmatic statement, but its significance is elucidated in the importance Ouspensky attributes to a particular canon of the 692 Quinisext Council.[21] At issue in this canon are representations of the scene in John's gospel just prior to Jesus' baptism, in which John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God. Certain representations had therefore depicted Jesus in the form of a lamb, but the canon accounts for this lamb as a "hidden figure" of Christ the true lamb, offered by Hebrew Law as a shadow and symbol of the truth transmitted to the church. The canon therefore decrees that henceforth Christ be represented in human form as truth itself, in fulfillment of the Law. As Ouspensky has it, the "image contained in the symbols of the Old Testament becomes reality in the

17 Ibid., I.16.
18 Ibid., I.8.
19 Ibid., I.15.
20 Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 52.
21 Canon 82, printed in volume 2 of Rhalli and Potli's *Syntagma of Canons*, 1852. See Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 114ff.

Incarnation. Since the Word became flesh and lived among us, the image must directly show that which happened in time and became visible, representable and describable."[22] The real significance of the Quinisext Council for Ouspensky, therefore, is that here the link between the icon and the dogma of the Incarnation gets formulated officially (that is to say, at a council) for the first time. Moreover, it indicates a sort of guideline for what kind of image this icon should be: the face of the incarnate God, the historical person of Jesus Christ.[23]

Two related points are in order here, returning now to Evdokimov's interest in icons. The first is that in its recapitulation of the divine image in humanity, the Incarnation provides a christological foundation both for icons in a more technical sense, and for the iconographic status of all people more generally. As the 'image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15), Christ is the visible of the invisible, the image of God and humanity at the same time. As a result, "Christ's humanity is a vehicle of revelation, and

22 Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 118. The language of symbol Ouspensky uses here can be confusing, especially in relation to Evdokimov's preference for symbols over against signs. On the one hand, Ouspensky makes a very similar distinction, arguing that while signs only portray reality, symbols always bring forth a superior reality and require participation in a presence. The material may be directly accessible to us, but the spiritual is indicated through symbols. (21). This is to understand symbols in the way Evdokimov does when he describes the icon as a symbol of the whole person of Christ, as opposed to a representation of one of his natures. On the other hand, Ouspensky follows the canon in contrasting the veiled and hidden 'symbols' of prefigurement in the Old Testament with their direct image in New Testament truth through the Incarnation. For Ouspensky, however, even this 'direct image' of the New Testament icon remains a 'symbol' in the earlier sense of its spiritual (as opposed to merely material) representation. He imagines something of a progression after the fall from the Old Testament 'church' through the New Testament, and towards the celestial Jerusalem still ahead (34). Just as the Old Testament used symbols to prefigure Christ which can now be discarded in light of the Incarnation, the symbolism of the church, and in particular, of an icon "is an authentic reflection, though of course a very weak one, of the glory of the age to come" (38). On a certain level, the church has access beyond the symbolic, but on the level of that which the church itself still anticipates, it does not.

23 Ibid., 118. This is not, of course, to repudiate icons of the Virgin or the Saints: following John of Damascus, Ouspensky makes it clear that these are also important images worthy of reverence. See John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, I.19 and Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, ch. 3.

it becomes the truth of every human person. Man is not true nor real except as he reflects the heavenly. What a marvelous grace! Every creature can be the mirror of the uncreated, 'the image of God'" (*AI*, 183-84). Further, Evdokimov imagines the same potential for human productivity, as it participates in the divine creative work: "If every person is created in the image of God and is a living icon, *earthly culture is the icon of the Kingdom of Heaven*" (*AI*, 71).[24] All things expressed by the human spirit, Evdokimov reasons, will be integrated into the Kingdom, coinciding with its truth as inspired image to its original. Art, science, painting, music - all true culture will finds its "liturgical origins," pushing beyond its own immanence to erect the "Sign of the Kingdom, that fiery arrow pointed toward what is to come" (*AI*, 71).

The second point to note is the experience of doxological joy that accompanies Evdokimov's iconic encounters in the eschatological present. An icon is illuminated by the glory of divine light, a radiant transcendence that breaks into earthly time and space. This divine light calls forth doxology, praise that will "burst forth from the heart of every creature" (*AI*, 183). It transfigures the whole world and bathes it in the light of redemption. This is the joy of God's presence amidst the earthly, and of the earthly on its way towards deification. The experience of other worlds through an encounter with the physicality of our own draws one into a rapturous joy of praise to God and love for creation. Such encounters, Evdokimov thinks, are given especially beautiful expression in the novels of Dostoevsky, from which he draws his favorite image of iconographic joy:

24 Emphasis original.

Alyosha's vision of the wedding at Cana, from *The Brothers Karamazov*.[25] Here the joy of iconic presence, which overflows into ardent love for all of creation, is linked particularly to the joy of a marriage celebration through the gospel story of Jesus' first miracle.

Much troubled by the death of his beloved elder Zosima earlier that day, the young novice Alyosha returns at night to the elder's cell and begins to pray. A monastery Father is keeping vigil by intoning the gospel over the body, and as he listens Alyosha has a sort of vision. The gospel reading is from John, the story of Jesus' first miracle at the Cana wedding. Alyosha reflects on the passage, on what he has been missing: "Ah, that miracle, ah, that lovely miracle! Not grief, but men's joy Christ visited when he worked his first miracle, he helped men's joy... 'He who loves men loves their joy...'" (*BK*, 360). Alyosha's eyes are suddenly opened to Christ's love for even the poorest and most wretched, and to the joy of life in earthly celebration as water is turned to wine. Slowly, Alyosha's vision of Cana is transformed into a vision of the great wedding feast of the marriage of the Lamb, as described in John's apocalypse. Here he is met by the dead elder Zosima, who points him to their 'Sun', awful in greatness but boundlessly merciful. "He became like us out of love, and he is rejoicing with us," Zosima tells him, "transforming water into wine, that the joy of the guests may not end" (*BK*, 361).

Alyosha emerges from this vision as if reborn, filled with rapturous delight in the mystery of the universe. He throws himself to the ground transfigured, embracing it and

25 *BK*, 359-363. Though sustained engagement with Dostoevsky will be postponed until chapter two, the significance of this episode to Evdokimov as a link between his thinking on both icons and erotics, calls for a brief retelling.

overflowing with an unspeakable love for every piece of creation from the earth to the stars. An unquenchable joy in the beauty of this world meets in Alyosha with a profound love for each of its creatures, animated by their true source in the divine life. "It was as if threads from all those innumerable worlds of God came together in his soul, and it was trembling all over, 'touching other worlds.' He wanted to forgive everyone and for everything, and to ask forgiveness..." (*BK*, 362). In the midst of this renewal of ardent love for creation, Alyosha's soul is "visited" and something comes to "reign in his mind" which would mark him steadfastly for his whole life. Alyosha's experience of transfiguration is also an experience of conversion to the one in whom the mystery of the earth touches the mystery of the heavens; the one who visits poor wedding feasts and turns water into wine that the joy of the people might not run dry.

Evdokimov and Sexuality

It is no coincidence that the image of iconic transfiguration that Evdokimov most celebrates concerns a wedding. For him, the true spiritual *eros* of marital reconciliation is a privileged site of iconographic anticipation of the eschaton. The miracle at Cana is a profound image of this spiritual and divine love over against all forms of possessive love that lack real joy as much as they lack a true giving-up of the self. This fundamental division between forms of *eros* is central to Evdokimov's thought. If human beings are sexual by the very structure of their existence, he suggests, it is necessary to distinguish between 'energies of sexuality' (the "spiritual element of the masculine and the

feminine") and pure 'sexual energy' of strictly physiological origin.[26] The distinction is related to the ambiguity of beauty in the disruption of its originary unity with goodness and truth, a problem Dostoevsky spent his lifetime contemplating. Beauty is not simply "that which is normal, that which is healthy," as Dostoevsky first assumed early in his life. It is instead profoundly divided, both offering salvation and killing by its temptations and charms (*GD*, 209). "To the Eros of creation," Evdokimov says, "responds the Eros of destruction" (*GD*, 210).

The important thing to notice, however, is that the distinction in question does not pit something like 'romantic' or 'sexual' love against a broader conception of 'neighbor' love. For Evdokimov, in fact, the two forms of *eros* represent opposing responses to sexual differentiation itself. "The fall has split the compound male-female into masculine and feminine," he describes. "These contraries can clash in an insoluble opposition (possessive love) or appear complementary, making extreme opposites coincide and constituting by this a harmony" (*GD*, 208). The real heart of the distinction lies in the degree of selflessness love manifests; either submitting itself in radical openness before the divine, or clutching at the other in slavery to concupiscence. Evdokimov concludes that "true love transcends all possessions and desires, and attains the vastness of a clear sky and the open seas; the dimension of universality. It is passionately self-less" (*GD*, 215). Yet such love need not be fundamentally non-erotic. In fact, it may just be that the sacrificial offering of oneself to the particular desired other is a privileged form of true

26 Evdokimov, *Gogol et Dostoievsky* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1961) 210. Henceforth referred to in the text as *GD*. Translations of this work from the french are my own.

love's selflessness.

At this point it may be helpful to pause for a moment in order to note the influence on Evdokimov of Vladimir Soloviev, the young contemporary of Dostoevsky whose thought is clearly in the background of Evdokimov's work. From Soloviev, Evdokimov takes what he calls a 'personalistic' conception of love and marriage, predicated not on procreation or social utility, but in the persons of the spouses themselves.[27] The experience of sexual love, claims Soloviev, is uniquely capable of separating human individuality from egoism and false self-assertion. It facilitates the sacrifice of egoism in the encounter and affirmation of oneself in another; a relation of complete and steadfastly reciprocal interchange such that egoism is undermined not only in principle but in concrete activity.[28]

For love to function in this way, however, it must recognize its proper ends beyond mere physiological or social significance. More important is the relation of love to the ideal nature of the human being, his or her personal form of the divine image.[29] This means that for Soloviev, a key component of genuine love is faith, since love recognizes the unconditional significance of one whose empirical being is yet imperfect and intransigent. Through faith, love regards the other as he or she exists in God; the proper object of love must simultaneously be the ideal-yet-unactualized being of a higher sphere, and its natural human counterpart. True love is thus deprecated when its 'otherworldly' mystical basis is forgotten, and animal-physical, or even legal-social bonds

27 See Evdokimov's discussion of Soloviev in *SL*, 41-45..

28 Vladimir Soloviev, *The Meaning of Love,* trans. Jane Marshall (London: The Centenary Press, 1945), 22.

29 See Ibid., 37.

are made its primary conditions.[30]

The distinction Soloviev draws here is the root of Evdokimov's own distinction between 'energies of sexuality' and 'sexual energy'. For love to be 'passionately self-less', it must engage the whole of its object, including his or her spiritual existence. The root of concupiscence, therefore, lies not in sexuality (or in 'the flesh' more generally), but in its perversion through the neglect of its intrinsic spiritual significance. Soloviev, no less than Evdokimov, understands sexual love in terms of iconographic possibility. Rightly ordered, relations of love between earthly human beings mark a point of entry into the true nature of universal existence as united mystical body.[31] Soloviev puts it like this:

> The genuine spiritual love is not a feeble imitation and anticipation of death, but a triumph over death, not a severance of the mortal from the immortal, of the temporal from the eternal, but a transfiguration of the mortal into the immortal, a taking of the temporal into the eternal. A false spirituality is a denial of the flesh, true spirituality is the regeneration of the flesh, the rescue of it, the resurrection of it from the dead.[32]

For Evdokimov's part, the spiritual significance of sexuality is nothing less than a prefiguration of harmonious unification in the Kingdom to come. If the original consubstantiality of Adam and Eve is broken at the fall into separate and polarized individuals (as we have already seen Evdokimov claim), marriage presupposes a grace that recapitulates this original unity in Christ by the 'sacrament of love'. "The nuptial community arises as the prophetic figure of the Kingdom of God: the ultimate unity, the community of the Masculine and the Feminine in their totality in God" (*SL*, 32). This prophetic unity represents the success of true spiritual love that properly engages the

30 Ibid., 62.
31 See further ibid., 74-82.
32 Ibid., 55.

'energies of sexuality' as the spiritual element of the masculine and feminine. Elsewhere Evdokimov refers to these energies as the 'charisms' of sexual differentiation.[33] These charisms appear antagonistic, even incompatible, in the world. Man and woman are juxtaposed side by side as strangers forever, their attraction to each other reflecting the Fall in the infinite distance between them. It is only in Christ, in the order of grace, that the true complementarity of man and woman is revealed. In Christ, each includes the other without negation or mutilation. Thus for Evdokimov, "the fearsome antagonism of the sexes is not resolved by radical monasticism alone; it can be transcended only by a *mutual* spiritual conversion. Its metaphysically conjugal and consubstantial elements culminate in the One in whom there is neither male nor female, for in Christ, the vitiated

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33 See *SL*, 31-41, as well as Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World - A Christian Anthropology on the Charisms of Women*, trans. Anthony Gythiel (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994).

Evdokimov goes to great lengths specifying these charisms and their significance, especially in the case of the feminine. In part this is in response to the stream of Christian tradition that has been deeply suspicious and fearful of the feminine element. The alternative world Evdokimov delineates is not one in which the distinction between the masculine and feminine collapses in any sense, however, but one in which the feminine becomes the unique bearer of the spiritual communion by which male and female may be ultimately harmonized. Exactly through her female charism of essential motherhood, woman becomes the spiritual instrument of human nature, giving birth to the 'hidden man of the heart'.

In truth, however, Evdokimov's interest in the feminine charism goes far beyond redress for historical oversight. There is for him a special affinity between the religious principle and woman's spirituality. This affinity turns on the fact that men do not possess the paternal instinct in the same way that women possess the maternal instinct. Mary as *Theotokos* is key here, as for Evdokimov "the motherhood of the Virgin appears as the human figure of the fatherhood of God" (*Woman and the Salvation of the World*, 152). The reality of God's Trinitarian existence makes motherhood the religious principle of human nature, and for Evdokimov all women bear the essential charism of motherhood, whether married or celibate. There is an essentially feminine character to Christianity (in this Nietzsche was right!), exemplified in the salvific mode of surrender to suffering and total oblation of self in contrast to more 'masculine' modes of resistance (*Woman and the Salvation of the World*, 155).

This account of sexual charisms plays deeply throughout Evdokimov's work, and there is clearly much more that ought to be said of it than I can engage at this point. His account of these charisms, for example, trades in essentialized caricatures of masculine and feminine traits that more recent work on theology and sexuality would want to take issue with. Among other things, this leads to a rather impoverished engagement with questions of homosexuality. This, incidentally, marks one substantive divergence from the approach of Williams with which I began.

fragmentation of humanity is overcome in the *pleroma* (fulness [sic]) of the 'convergence of opposites'."[34]

III
Faith in Kierkegaard: The Icon Beyond Orthodoxy

I began this chapter by suggesting that the divergence between Kierkegaard and Williams on the possibilities of erotic love has its roots in matters of iconographic sensibility. Williams simply seems far more comfortable with the notion that created form can become a sacramental entrance into the divine life. On the one hand, this is a contrast I do not want to push too far. Williams does not use the language of icons in this context himself, and it is not clear from his brief article what might all be involved for him in the reception of the body's grace. Moreover, terminological confusion to do with the use of the word 'erotic' makes Kierkegaard seem farther from Williams than he really is. In the former, 'erotic love' denotes an inferior form of pagan self-love that need not be associated with marital life over against singleness. There can certainly be true Christian love between spouses for Kierkegaard, but then it ceases to be an erotic attachment. Williams is equally interested in distinguishing between good and bad forms of love that cross differences in marital status, but he is also happy to call appropriate forms of this good love 'erotic'. The difference is in part rhetorical; both want to advocate a Christian account of love as opposed to self-interest, agreeing on the categories but assigning them different names.

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34 Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World*, 250.

And yet, the terminological choices do seem to bespeak certain fundamental differences. In distinguishing the Christian from the erotic, as we have seen, Kierkegaard is trying to avoid the middle term of admiration in love by which erotic attachment turns back into love of self. He is claiming that there is a necessary divide between Christianity and the fulfillment of one's perception of what is desirable. This cannot be the case in Williams, for whom the very structure of this desire engenders Christian selflessness insofar as it finds its end in someone else's joy. Such confidence in the goodness of the created order, I suggest, has everything to do with an openness to being surprised by the iconic potential of earthly forms. This, at least, is what Evdokimov presumes in his complaint against Kierkegaard. We are now in a position to appreciate the significance of this complaint, as well as the seriousness of the challenge Kierkegaard poses to someone like Evdokimov. We begin by returning to Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*.

Kierkegaard and Evdokimov

The divide between Christianity and the fulfillment of natural human desire is necessary for Kierkegaard insofar as it is part of the structure of faith in the paradox of the God-man. This is the possibility of *offense*, the key concept in Kierkegaard which "guards the approach to the essentially Christian" (*WL*, 59). If Christianity supplants erotic love and friendship with something yet 'higher', he cautions, this something is not higher by the reckoning of human aspiration. Exactly as the 'highest', in fact, the essentially Christian will be an offense to 'the natural man' (*WL*, 58). For Kierkegaard, as a result, the communication of faith begins with a repulsion; without this and without the

possibility of offense, Christianity is abolished.[35]

Here is where Evdokimov cannot help but interject, responding that such a requirement misses the breath of grace and transfiguration, the miracle at Cana, and the icon itself. Claiming the necessity of such offense to 'the natural man' is tantamount to denying the divine image in him at creation, and its affirmation in the Incarnation. For Evdokimov, a docetic christology is a legitimate concern at this point. He takes Kierkegaard's famous engagement to Regina Olsen as exemplary. His love for her, claims Evdokimov, remained fatally general and abstract. He loved the 'young girl' in her, losing sight of the concrete human being at stake (*SL*, 112-13). What Kierkegaard failed to realize in his fear of the settled life of marriage is that a commitment to the unique, particular other is exactly what directs one's gaze to Christ by a sacramental mediation of grace. Love is never simply within the immediate reach of human nature; it involves the divine inbreaking of sacramental presence. Marriage is thus not grounded in the ethical, but the religious (*SL*, 114).

All of this is bound up with an account of the Incarnation for Evdokimov, in which the whole of both human and divine natures coexist in the single, unique person of Jesus Christ. To stand outside of the Incarnation (as Evdokimov seems to suggest Kierkegaard does), is to make the love of the betrothed unhappy and impossible insofar as the otherness of the other is kept unbridgeably fundamental. The wording of Evdokimov's complaint is particularly interesting in this context: without the bridging of

35 Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity,* trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 139. Henceforth referred to in the text as *PC*.

the infinite qualitative difference between God and man in the Incarnation, he claims, love would be made unhappy "and all communion, even communication, *indirect and veiled*." (*SL*, 114).[36] As when Christ broke bread on the road to Emmaus, he argues, a moment of clarity also exists in love. In this moment, God's own love for the beloved iconically illuminates for the lover a loveliness others cannot understand; "it is a very pure instant when the lovers taste the 'bread of angels' and recognize one another in a direct, sudden revelation" (*SL*, 111).

Evdokimov's distaste for the veiled and indirect, however, is for Kierkegaard exactly the pathology of modern thought by which Christianity is threatened. Ironically, Kierkegaard makes his appeal on the basis of the Incarnation as well. The essentially Christian, he argues, is not to be found in the communication of the God-man, Jesus Christ, but in his very person as the communicator. Insofar as we take the Incarnation seriously, faith is built on a paradox, on a 'sign of contradiction'.[37] This is why Kierkegaard understands the possibility of offense to be necessary in the communication of the essentially Christian. This is also why he claims that direct communication is antithetical to the structure of faith. Even if the teaching of Christ might make direct claims, the very being of the communicator as a contradiction negates this directness. The illuminating clarity of the Incarnation for Evdokimov is contrasted in Kierkegaard by the unrecognizability of God appearing incognito in the lowly form of a human being. Direct communication is made indirect when the communicator is not in the character of

36 Emphasis added.
37 See *PC*, esp. 124-127.

what he essentially is. Against Evdokimov, it is only outside of the incognito, outside of the Incarnation, that direct communication is possible (*PC*, 132-33).

The necessary indirectness of communication is related to the structure of faith: it confronts one with a choice of whether to believe or not. The directness of Christ's communication[38] only brings the hearer face to face with the offense of the contradiction (*PC*, 136). This indirectness means that offense is always a possible response; faith cannot be directly received any more than it can be directly communicated. In other words, indirection makes faith a matter of relation as opposed to a passive reception. If the essentially Christian is to be found in the paradoxical form of the communicator himself, its communication cannot inspire faith by virtue of direct appeal or attraction. Since any reception passes through this contradiction, it must involve a relation in faith characterized by the blessedness of not taking offense. This, it seems, would be the heart of Kierkegaard's concern with iconographic reception in someone like Evdokimov's work. Despite the Russian's protests to the contrary,[39] any icon remains idolatrously direct if it does not require the individual to relate herself to the 'sign of contradiction', in which the possibility of offense is always present. It is thus not the case for Kierkegaard that earthly forms are incompatible with the divine life in a way that undercuts the

38 For instance, his direct claim to be God.

39 As we noted above, Evdokimov accounts for icons as symbols over against either signs or allegories. Symbols, he claims, are characterized by indirect thought through the mediation of intermediaries. Signs, by contrast, communicate didactically by direct associations with the signified (see *AI*, 166-67). Interestingly, Kierkegaard suggests that signs communicate indirectly (through reflection, insofar as a sign is not what it signifies in its immediacy) and therefore non-didactically. Kierkegaard's sign is thus parallel to Evdokimov's symbol in certain ways. Where they diverge is in the place of mediation. For Evdokimov, the symbol itself (the icon) mediates. In Kierkegaard, an additional mediation must always take place in the individual who relates himself to the sign.

Incarnation. There is no suspicion of the flesh that might suggest gnostic impulses.[40] An individual may well encounter moments of iconic possibility in which the divine opens through the lowliness of earthly forms. At issue is the relation the individual bears to these moments, as to the paradox of the God-man himself. In order to receive such moments in faith, one passes through offense at this contradiction. "Blessed is he who is not offended at it," Kierkegaard concludes (*WL*, 59).

All of this comes to a head in the divergent readings Kierkegaard and Evdokimov provide of the possibilities of human culture. We have seen that for Evdokimov, culture becomes an icon of the Kingdom of Heaven. Human production in its purest and highest forms aspires to the divine, pushing beyond its own immanent limits in gesturing towards the world to come. "When it is really true," Evdokimov suggests, "culture finds its liturgical origins, even outside of the liturgy" (*AI*, 71). For Kierkegaard, by contrast, human culture in no way leads us to Christianity's highest, however high it might aspire. Culture will always run into the contradiction of the God-man and be repulsed by the lowly form of its highest; this is how the essentially Christian disciplines (*WL*, 59). If culture is an icon of the Kingdom, then the term of offense is passed over, communication becomes direct, and the essentially Christian is abolished insofar as it is structured by the contradiction of the God-man. On Kierkegaard's account of it, Evdokimov is the one who fails to appreciate the significance of the Incarnation.

In a sense, what Kierkegaard calls Evdokimov to account for is the possibility of a

40 See *WL*, 52: "By the sensuous, the flesh, Christianity understands selfishness. A conflict between spirit and flesh is inconceivable unless there is a rebellious spirit on the side of flesh, with which the spirit then contends; similarly, a conflict between spirit and a stone or between spirit and a tree is inconceivable."

sinful refusal of iconically mediated grace. If culture inevitably finds its liturgical origins 'when it is really true', how do we account for 'false' cultures such as the practical and utilitarian 'technological civilization' Evdokimov admits surrounds us? (*AI*, 43) To direct the question toward the heart of Evdokimov's work, how is it that some people love in true Christian selflessness before God, while others are mired in the possessive love of 'sexual energy'? For Evdokimov, as we have seen, this question is bound up with the ambiguity of beauty in its tragic disjunction from truth and goodness. While truth is always beautiful, he claims, beauty is not always true.[41] Evdokimov's solution is to recognize that the salvific power of beauty is not an autonomous principle of art, but must be subsumed in a religious synthesis by deification through the Spirit's presence. Because religious truth can reunite the ethical and aesthetic within itself, it is exactly religious art (iconography) that allows for the flowering of beauty in its original relation to truth and goodness.

And yet, this account of beauty's ambiguity does not really address Kierkegaard's challenge. His concern is not only with false accounts of the essentially Christian (ie beauty divorced from truth), but with the human refusal of truth itself. Not all who hear will believe, and the faith of those who do believe will be dialectically related to doubt in passing through the repulsion of offense at Christianity's highest. It is not only the formation of false cultures that concerns Kierkegaard, but the formation of Christian culture as well. For this reason, the Anti-Climacus of *Practice in Christianity* declares Christian art to be a new paganism born in the midst of Christendom (*PC*, 254). Far from

41 See Evdokimov, "The Ambiguity of Beauty" in *AI*, esp. 37.

being the nexus of a harmonious unification of beauty, truth and goodness, such art is for him emblematic of the admirer's relation to Christianity over against the true Christian 'imitator'.

However, in Christendom (the 'culturation' of Christianity), the 'admirer' of Christ has become the true Christian. The admirer remains personally detached from his confession, and though he may make the strongest assurances of belief in certain teachings, he "does not discover that what is admired involves a claim upon him, to be or at least to strive to be what is admired" (*PC*, 241). But Christ, of course, asks for imitators, and for Kierkegaard this has everything to do with the abasement of the Incarnation (*PC*, 237). Truly to call forth imitators (that is, to be a true 'prototype' leaving 'footprints' for human beings), one must simultaneously propel people from behind and beckon them from beyond. This is what the Incarnation accomplishes, claims Kierkegaard, in Christ's particular relation of loftiness and lowliness (*PC*, 238). Pure loftiness can require only admiration, because it possesses conditions people do not have and cannot be given. Thus the prototype must also stand behind people, and unconditionally so, in lowlier abasement than any other (*PC*, 239). Only then, in the absence of any earthly advantage, can it dispense with evasions that make of it the unreachable object of detached admiration, and call forth legitimate imitation that strives to become what is admired. Yet Christ has become the object of admiration anyway, and for Kierkegaard the peace and security of the "calm and easy days of Christendom" have only abetted this misunderstanding (*PC*, 245). The weight of historical and cultural certainty removes the danger of being a Christian, the venture of faith itself, since

everyone claims to be one. And yet, Kierkegaard reflects, "in order to be an imitator the imitator had to venture his life, his all, here where it is so fully shown what the certitude of faith is, here where there is no other certainty whatsoever, where there is no help from historical certainty" (*PC*, 250). The admirer, by contrast, merely assumes a pagan relation to Christianity, and it is here that Kierkegaard comes back to the theme of Christian art: "Would it be possible for me," he asks himself, "that is, could I persuade myself, could I be motivated to dip my brush, to lift my chisel in order to represent Christ in color or to carve his figure? That," he answers, "I cannot do" (*PC*, 254).

That Christian art is rooted fundamentally in the non-Christian 'admiration' of Christendom is demonstrated for Kierkegaard by the return of this admiration to the artist in a movement parallel to the return of (pagan) erotic attachment to its source in love of self.[42] The artist may begin by admiring Christ, but ends only admiring himself: "The artist was admired, and what was actual suffering, the actual suffering of the Holy One, the artist has somehow turned into money and admiration" (*PC*, 256). There is no imitation to be found in the forensic analysis to which such art invites its beholder. Neither is there any in the life of such an artist, for whom, Kierkegaard bitterly complains, "the picture of the goddess of sensuality found in his studio occupied him just as much, so that not until he finished it did he start to portray the crucified one." And yet, he laments, "the artist admired himself, and everybody admired the artist" (*PC*, 255).

As Kierkegaard sees it, this movement of admiration's return to its subject takes

42 Kierkegaard makes this connection explicit himself: "Admiration... is just as dubious a fire as the fire of erotic love, which in the turn of the hand can be changed into exactly the opposite, to hate, jealousy, etc" (*PC*, 246).

place everywhere in Christendom and marks its pagan character as surely as does the erotic love praised by the poets. Even when convicted by the example of another admirer - Nicodemus and his furtive nocturnal visit to Jesus - the pastors and parishioners of Kierkegaard's Christendom can only revel in self-righteousness at their own more 'unreserved' confessions of Christ. If only they understood, quips Kierkegaard, that if Nicodemus feared the ramifications of confessing Christ openly, the only thing there is reason to fear in Christendom is renouncing him (*PC*, 247). Consideration of Nicodemus should lead to humility and contrition, but among admirers of Christ it merely inspires a return of admiration in self-love. In his decisive critique of this movement in its multiple manifestations, Kierkegaard disposes with both cornerstones of Evdokimov's theology. Erotic love is not a privileged site of sexual reconciliation and divestment of ego. Neither is Christian art a privileged site for the reconciliation of the transcendentals. Both simply reflect an abortive effort at Christianity which fails adequately to encounter the contradiction of the Incarnation, and so results in nothing more than a glorified paganism.

East vs. West

It seems to me, however, that this discussion ought not to be the end of the story, leaving as it does Evdokimov a pagan and Kierkegaard a radical iconoclast. It may well be unfair not only to the former, but also to the latter. A first indication that another look might be in order is given by Kierkegaard's description of Christian art. It seems clear, to begin with, that he has Western religious art in mind, and not the tradition of Orthodox iconography that Evdokimov is concerned with. This may appear obvious in light of Kierkegaard's geographical context, but it is not without significance. There is a great

cultural and theological divide between Eastern and Western traditions of sacred art, as Leonid Ouspensky is ever quick to point out. He argues that the art of the Western church has lost touch with its living tradition of scripture and iconography such that it no longer understands what makes art sacred at all. It employs only confused and vague guidelines, at times prioritizing the (religious) subject of a piece to the exclusion of its artist's convictions, and at other times allowing secular subject matter on the basis of purely aesthetic considerations.[43] Ouspensky is nothing short of militant in opposing such Western influences, fighting to "retain the purity of the sacred image against the penetration of foreign elements characteristic of secular art."[44]

Kierkegaard's complaints concerning Christian art are striking in their similarity to this Russian vitriol towards Western iconographic apostasy. What Kierkegaard really finds incomprehensible is the 'artistic indifference' which allows the painter, as we saw earlier, to shift indiscriminately from the goddess of sensuality to the crucified one. As a result of this, he claims, the religious point of view is 'dislocated': "the beholder looked at the picture as in the role of an art expert: whether it is a success, whether it is a masterpiece, whether the play of colors is right, and the shadows, whether the blood looks like that, whether the suffering expression is artistically true" (*PC*, 255). For Ouspensky, the importance of the image is not its artistic or aesthetic value, but its teaching value as

43 Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon,* 12-13.

44 Ibid., 17. In one particularly memorable passage, Ouspensky remarks that although secular scholarship is generally not of interest to the church in its emphasis on artistic 'style', it can occasionally be of great help to ecclesial discernment. "Sometimes, thinking that they are speaking of style", he continues, "[scholars] in fact discover elements foreign to Orthodoxy... In Russian or Balkan art, they discover in detail the deformations which are a consequence of western influences. It is therefore possible to use all of these scholarly facts to purify the sacred art of Orthodoxy." Ibid., 45.

grounded in the icon's dogmatic and liturgical character.[45] Icons are 'theology in images', expressing the whole of Orthodoxy in themselves and communicating the 'word' of scripture in a visual medium. The meaning and content of sacred art, therefore, can only be a subject for theology. "Therefore," Ouspensky continues, "one can neither understand nor explain sacred art outside of the Church and its life. Such an explanation would always be partial and incomplete. In relation to sacred art itself, it would be false."[46] This is why the character and conviction of the artist matters, regardless of how 'religious' his or her subject might be. Like Kierkegaard, Ouspensky would have grave concerns about any artist who could move so unproblematically between the goddess and Christ. This is also why Ouspensky is concerned as much as Kierkegaard with any art that turns its beholders into experts and critics. When issues of colour and shadow are evaluated in terms of *artistic* 'success' or 'truth', art loses its moorings in the Church and its life, and exposes itself to the vicissitudes of 'taste'.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that when Ouspensky begins to outline the positive teaching of the Orthodox Church on the creation of sacred art, he goes immediately to the concept of imitation.[47] Artists are to paint icons according to tradition, as they were painted by the ancient and holy iconographers. This is not an injunction that counsels straightforward copying or repetition, according to Ouspensky. "St. Paul," he reminds us, "did not imitate Christ by copying His gestures and His words,

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45 In reference to the convictions of the Fathers on this matter, see Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 105.

46 Ibid., 10-11.

47 Here he draws particularly on the Apostle Paul's exhortation to "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ", in 1 Cor. 11:1. Ibid., 13.

but by integrating himself into His life, by letting Him live in him."[48] Similarly, iconographers do not simply copy ancient forms, but follow the sacred Tradition and live in it through the continuity of the Church's experience of the Spirit's power. On one level, this may well be the kind of imitation that disrupts a return of admiration to Kierkegaard's 'Christian' artist. At the very least, it directs attention away from his own skill and artistry, and towards the image of One who calls each and every beholder into the Divine Liturgy. On another level, however, Ouspensky's confidence in the historical transmission of this imitative function, the pure line of Orthodox teaching to be defended from all incursions, sits uneasily with Kierkegaard's melding of imitation with a venture of faith in which there is no help from historical certainty.[49] In spite of Ouspensky's emphasis on imitation, we might see a certain return of admiration in the celebration of the 'Triumph of Orthodoxy': the great feast-day at the beginning of Lent, which celebrates the victory of icons at the conclusion of the 9th century iconoclastic controversy. The church triumphant is the one that worries Kierkegaard, as it paves the way for the admirer to become the true Christian. Such a church has not fully embraced his claim that "there was unconditionally nothing to admire" in Christ (*WL*, 240). In the end, this may not be a claim that Orthodox Christianity is willing to make. As with Evdokimov, there may simply be differing accounts of the Incarnation at stake.

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48 Ibid., 13-14.

49 See *PC*, 250. In Ouspensky's defence, he is critical of especially Western failures to submit things ecclesial to ongoing discernment. "Time is not a criterion of truth", he claims. *Theology of the Icon*, 16. His positive examples of such discernment, however, largely involve the excision of Western elements according to a standard of Orthodox teaching. As has been mentioned, however, Kierkegaard's concern is not merely with 'false' cultures, but with Christian (or Orthodox) cultures themselves. It is not clear that Ouspensky would hold Orthodox culture itself open to the kind of ongoing discernment he is talking about.

A Kierkegaardian Icon?

Kierkegaardian iconoclasm, however, need not be mitigated only by appeal to an exaggerated disjunction between Eastern and Western traditions of religious art. Alex Sider, for instance, offers a critique of modern accounts (and practices) of iconographic encounter that implicates both the Greek and Latinate heritage.[50] Moreover, it seems to me that his analysis creates space within discourse of the icon for some of Kierkegaard's most pressing concerns. Consequently, shall I conclude this chapter by using Sider's essay to gesture at a path beyond the Kierkegaard-Evdokimov stalemate, through a theological re-thinking of the icon.

Sider's initial objection is to modern modes of panoptic and technologized sight that render all things univocally present while degrading awareness of the mediations by which we apprehend them. Instead of allowing icons to confront sight with a different order of reality that refuses to conform to technologized expectations, therefore, the modern gaze obliterates alterity by presuming a direct access to that which it sees. The net result, according to Sider, "is a non-dialectical understanding of the icon and its role in the life of the church today. Rather than gesturing, in its positive physicality, to the unfathomable distance from us of that which it represents, the icon has become a mode of 'presencing' God and the saints."[51] Moreover, if recent years have seen something of a renewal of interest in icons, this is the context in which it has taken place. As a result,

50 "Here we ought not to be too eager to accept the characterization of the 'west' common to many contemporary Orthodox apologists, namely, that it never 'got' icons. Again, the roots of our predicament can be traced far back into the pre-Nicene church and rest on Greek and Latin Christianity alike." See Alex Sider, "Image, Likeness, and the Ethics of Memory," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54, no. 4 (2001): 534.

51 Ibid., 531.

contemporary apologists for the icon have tended to downplay mediation, and with it themes of significative deferral, difference and absence. Sider seems to have theologians like Evdokimov and Ouspensky in mind here, especially in the moments where they emphasize the proximity of the prototype into whose likeness we are being transformed; they forget that "our modes of representing the eschatological Kingdom of God always manifest the disanalogies between the 'already' and the 'not yet' more clearly than they paint the analogies."[52]

What Sider calls for is attention not only to the thing signified, but to the mode of signification - especially as this reminds us of the mediate and unfinished nature of our identification with the image. He does not want to temper Orthodox confidence in the possibility restored by Christ of attaining the likeness of God, but he does want to reiterate that this process is by no means complete. "Icons do not univocally depict consummated human nature;" he claims, "rather, icons are tangible expressions of the Church's hope in creation's complete transformation of which Israel, the Incarnation, and by extension the saints are foretastes."[53] For this reason, Sider also wants to talk about icons as "analogical extensions of collective memory," by which the church's past is related to its hope for a promised future. Keeping mindful of the processes of memory and hope by which an icon functions emphasizes the mediation involved in an imaged representation of glory. An icon proleptically figures the consummation of the church's story through the memory of past persons and performances (particularly in Christ), but

52 Ibid., 532.
53 Ibid., 540.

insodoing it ruptures any direct identification with the shape of the present. Mediated by these processes of recollection and anticipation, icons are fundamentally at odds with the panoptic gaze that seeks immediate access to its object.[54]

Sider makes his appeal with particular reference to John of Damascus, whom we have encountered already, arguing that John's careful attention to mediation through the mode of iconic signification emphasizes the basic difference between an image and its archetype.[55] The danger for Sider is in contemporary appropriations of such iconodule literature, which approach it already invested in the modern science of sight such that the incompleteness of iconic representation is effaced. I have suggested already that Evdokimov and Ouspensky would probably be representative targets. To be fair, there are certainly times when their defense of Orthodox iconography enacts the better moments of John's account in profound ways. Ouspensky's emphasis on painting icons according to the tradition of Orthodox iconography (literally the memory of the church) is one such example, describing such 'imitation' as he does in terms of non-identical repetition.[56] Similarly, Evdokimov's account of the icon as symbol over against didactic sign turns on a recognition of the invisible as a mystery whose meaning is never given directly, and thus is represented only by intermediaries and mediators: angels, symbols, icons (*AI*, 166). What Evdokimov wants to emphasize in the iconographic symbol,

54 Ibid., 541.

55 Sider acknowledges that there are also times when John's attention to this mediation wanes, and he lapses into a problematic rhetoric that identifies the image with its archetype in too straightforward a manner. See particularly Sider, "Image," 545. Sider connects these lapses with John's participation in a problematic, if fundamental, division between 'negative' and 'positive' theology that he traces all the way back to the reception of Origen. As distinct modes of reflection, claims Sider, each fails to wrestle adequately with the ongoing ambiguity of Christ's presence and absence. Ibid., 533-34.

56 See Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 12-13.

however, is the very real presence of the transcendent, however figured and mediated. This John of Damascus would affirm, as, I suspect, would Sider. The problem comes when Evdokimov gives free reign to his fear that a negative relation created by distance will end up as pure absence.[57] This, of course, is what happens in his critique of Kierkegaard, leading Evdokimov to associate the Incarnation with a directness that belies the mediate quality of iconic representation, and so renders his opponent docetic.[58]

Sider's account of the icon, as a result, also opens the door to seeing in Kierkegaard more than a straightforward iconoclast. Though he may not have the latter in mind, it is interesting that Sider describes problematic contemporary understandings of the icon as "non-dialectical" in their emphasis on 'presencing' God and the saints.[59] Such icons do not sufficiently confront us with Christ's absence, or the distance that is revealed between us and God. This, of course, is Kierkegaard's concern as well. He wants to keep mindful of Christ's hiddenness in the Incarnation. Christ is not present so unambiguously as to remove the need for faith as the great daring venture in hope against the understanding. The distance or deferral disclosed in Sider's icon requires that offense at the form of Christ's image (its mediation or mode of signification) is always a possible response. Kierkegaard puts it like this, in a particularly appropriate passage:

> Thus *the prototype* stands infinitely close in abasement and lowliness, and yet infinitely distant in loftiness, indeed, even further away than if it were distant only in loftiness, because to have to go through lowliness and abasement in order to reach it, in order to define oneself in likeness to it, to have no other way at all, is an even greater, is actually the infinite distance (*PC*, 238).

57 Sider, of course, rejects such a pure 'absence' of Christ as much as any pure 'presence'. See especially "Image," 534.

58 See *SL*, 114-115; *AI*, 22-23.

59 Sider, "Image," 531.

The proximity of Christ in fleshly abasement, for Kierkegaard, in no way makes his loftiness straightforwardly present to us such that there is nothing left to risk. This would be the pagan relation to Christianity of the admirer. Christ's image, in other words, discloses his radical difference from all other human beings, such that as the prototype he can stand both unconditionally ahead and behind, beckoning from one direction and propelling from the other. If we can talk about an icon in this context, as I suggest via Sider we can, it is an icon that finally communicates indirectly.

It will be the task of the third chapter to flesh out this gesture towards a Kierkegaardian icon more fully, especially in relation to his unrelenting distinction between Christian and erotic love. This is where we began, and where I suggested that Kierkegaard's apparent distance from the thought of both Evdokimov and Rowan Williams is best accounted for in terms of the icon. As a preliminary offering, however, it seems appropriate to conclude with a few reflections on the experience of Sarah Layton, which Williams finds so profound. Undoubtedly Williams is right to hold open the possibility of grace even through a bodily encounter with an unloving other. The painful consequences of the encounter in no way negate the body's potential to draw one into an experience of God's desire. As Williams points out, in fact, the graced body may more than ever be a source of vulnerability.[60] Such vulnerability is the very paradox of God's self-communication, the paradox of the Word made flesh. As such, the iconic status of the body is not immediate, but is determined by the relation one bears to it. Sarah Layton can certainly relate herself in despair to her experience, taking offense at

60 Williams, "The Body's Grace," 311.

the pain of her body's interaction. But she can also engage her body's vulnerability in the supreme venture of faith, opening herself to receive it as grace in its very renunciation as a secure means of salvation.

I would suggest, however, that this is not only Kierkegaard's reading of the movement of faith, but Dostoevsky's as well. In the following chapters, therefore, I want to suggest that the work of the great Russian novelist goes some way towards mediating this Kierkegaardian challenge in the context of Russian Christianity. Where Dostoevsky goes right, it seems to me, is in his vision of Christian redemption as humble, penitential love in service to all; becoming lowly and embracing the guilt of each before all others. In this, Dostoevsky's communication of faith involves the crucial possibility of offense at the same contradiction made manifest in the Incarnation. He may craft the image of a (worldly) Russian monk as a sort of icon, but this image is decidedly folly to the world and offense to the pious. Like the grain of wheat from the gospel parable which returns throughout *The Brothers Karamazov,*[61] it is only by death that fruit is borne; a total emptying in the radically uncertain yet infinite hope that life will be returned again. What Dostoevsky offers then, is something like an *indirect* iconographic encounter; one in which the mediation of grace by the earthly passes through the very dialectic of faith that such a paradox of mediation ought to provoke.

61 See for instance the epigraph on the dedication of the book from John 12:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

CHAPTER TWO

DOSTOEVSKY'S ICON: THE THEOLOGICAL POETICS OF *THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV*

I
Memory and Polyphony: The Iconographic Novel

One of the sources to which Paul Evdokimov's characteristic interest in icons can be traced is Fyodor Dostoevsky, his literary-theological hero. Much of Evdokimov's early work was on Dostoevsky, and even his later writings refer to the great Russian novelist with regularity. Evdokimov ascribes to Dostoevsky himself what he calls an 'iconographic vision'[1], evident in his novels on multiple levels. Icons were central to the writer from early in his childhood, claims Evdokimov, and this interest in faces and images recurs throughout his work (*GD*, 283). In Dostoevsky's final great novel *The Brothers Karamazov,* the 'face' offered in the most sustained sense for iconic contemplation is that of the elder Zosima, whose death occasioned the profound transfiguration experience for his young novice Alyosha.[2] According to Evdokimov, the character of Zosima was the result of the great difficulty faced by the novelist in trying to describe the eminently good person. Eventually, he says, Dostoevsky had to give up his quest and "borrow the good person from the lives of the great spiritual saints." In

1 See especially "La Vision Iconographique de Dostoievsky," in *GD*, 281-290, as well as *AI*, 42.

2 Evdokimov draws attention to the significance of Dostoevsky's careful descriptions of the elder himself, which calls to his mind the iconographic manual (*GD*, 283). The passage to which he refers is from an early section of book two: "[Zosima] was a short, bent little man, with very weak legs, who was just sixty-five, but, owing to his illness, appeared much older, by at least ten years. His whole face, which, by the way, was quite withered, was strewn with little wrinkles, especially numerous around his eyes. His eyes themselves were small, pale, quick and bright like two bright points. A few white hairs remained only on his temple, and his pointed beard was tiny and sparse, and his often smiling lips were as thin as two threads. His nose was not so much long as sharp, like a little bird's beak" (*BK*, 40).

Zosima, "Dostoevsky drew the face of a saint and put it on the far wall as a sort of icon" (*AI*, 42). It may appear that such an image is finally 'useless' in the world, Evdokimov concedes, as useless as the saints themselves whose participation in worldly activity is never conventionally efficacious. Yet in the light of such images and such lives, the true meaning of the world's events is revealed. As fundamentally theophanic, the lives of saints offer alternative visions, stamping "the heart of this world with the sign of another dimension and age" (*AI*, 43).

For Evdokimov, there is a sense in which this iconographic vision forms the very structure of Dostoevsky's novelistic communication. "Dostoevsky does not oppose an argument to atheism" he suggests, "but a 'face', a living icon of Christ. He gives a brilliant phenomenological description of the experience of God, a fresco of monastic spirituality and saintliness, which one can contemplate on the wall of a convent and in the secret of a cell" (*GD*, 282). Here Evdokimov comes closest to a reading of the icon that Kierkegaard might have interest in. Such principles of 'iconographic expression', he acknowledges, are not direct but oblique, like a refraction (*GD*, 282). A Dostoevskian 'image' may offer an alternative vision, we might say, but not one that comports easily with our established habits of sight. Such an image does not offer the unmediated access we desire, but reveals a certain distance from our own world in refusing to address it on its own terms. Instead, I suggest, Dostoevsky attends to the icon's mode of signification, ever aware of the mediation by which the thing signified is made 'present' to us, requiring for its true contemplation a certain relation in faith to that which nonetheless remains unseen. As a prefatory instance of how this is borne out in Dostoevsky's work, we return

to the theme of memory, which we have encountered already in Sider's discussion of the icon.

Memory

Memory is a central concept in Dostoevsky's work, particularly in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Here, as Diane Oenning Thompson's monograph on the subject demonstrates, remembering and forgetting are at issue from the first to the last words, across the multiple plot-levels she identifies.[3] As Thompson describes it, memories function as "divine signals" in the novel, becoming instruments of both redemption and retribution for its characters. All the redemptive transformations in *The Brothers Karamazov*, she suggests, coincide with arousals of sacred memory.[4] Not surprisingly, this renders exposure to positive models and ideals crucial, particularly through scripture. "In the Orthodox tradition," Thompson claims, "the activation of memory proceeds by an internalization of the sacred texts... One's experiences in the world are then interpreted by this standard. This way they grow in the conscience and are resurrected at critical moments as a realization of what the higher reality is."[5] This is to paraphrase one of the elder Zosima's own discourses, where he encourages his brothers to read the holy texts among the common faithful, especially the children. The memories accumulated at this stage in life are terribly important, he says, "for no memories are more precious to a man than those of his earliest childhood in his parental home, and that is almost always so, as long as there is even a little bit of love and unity in the family" (*BK*, 290). Zosima's

3 See her *"The Brothers Karamazov" and the Poetics of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

4 Ibid., 156.

5 Ibid., 154.

teaching returns in the closing pages of the book, now through the words of Alyosha at the final graveside scene commemorating the life of the boy Ilyusha. "Memory eternal!" all of his young compatriots shout in affirmation, as they part with their friend joyous in the hope of meeting one another again in resurrection (*BK*, 776).

The redemptive function of memory, however, is by no means as straightforward in *The Brothers Karamazov* as all this might make it appear. On the one hand, the mere presence of good memories is clearly no guarantee against perversion, corruption or obliteration. On the other hand, Zosima does admit that precious memories can be salvaged even from within a very bad family, "if only one's soul knows how to seek out what is precious" (*BK*, 290). This complexity is indicated already in the four brothers after whom the book is titled. The story turns on the murder of a father, Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, and explores the involvement of these four sons whom he neglected and abandoned (literally 'forgot about') as children (*BK*, 154). The memory of this childhood works differently in each of them, suggesting the significance of learning to remember well.

For Mitya, the eldest, a precarious childhood at the mercy of repeatedly amnesiac caregivers culminates in an unstable adult character, prone to rage and Dionysian excess, which finally lands him on trial for his father's murder.[6] Yet Mitya's memory still manages to hold profound resources by which he is finally led towards conversion and

6 See Thompson's discussion of Mitya's upbringing, especially her account of the textual references recalling the 'dirty little shirt' of his childhood in the narration of his later crisis. *Memory*, 161-167.

transformation at the moment of his greatest crisis.[7] The middle two sons, Ivan and the illegitimate Smerdyakov, weave from their childhood neglect and rejection a net of resentment which smothers and subverts what encounters they have with sacred memory. They are together most directly responsible for their father's death, and find their own ends in madness and suicide. Though he shares the same upbringing as his brother Ivan, the youngest son Alyosha turns out very differently; he somehow enters adulthood "saturated with memory," particularly of the Christian tradition.[8] He thus becomes something like a cherub or angel to those around him[9], awakening in others their own memories of the sacred word.

Dostoevsky's iconographic vision is comprehensive enough that the theme of memory is present in the novel as a structuring principle of its composition just as much as in its particular narrative contours. In fact, it is worth emphasizing from the outset that the form of Dostoevsky's literature is inseparable from its content, and is itself a crucial part of his literary expression. This intersection of form and content in Dostoevsky's poetics is where memory most clearly takes on the sort of significance Sider ascribes to it in relation to the icon. The importance of memory for Sider lies in its disruption of the present by mediating the past in anticipation of the future. Memory emphasizes that the

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7 See, for instance, Thompson's discussion of forms of affirmative memory in the life of Mitya. She notes particularly his childhood memory of kindness from Dr. Herzenstube, who taught him in German the names of God as Trinity. Thompson assimilates this early memory of "der heilige Geist" with the "guardian angel" to whom Mitya attributes his salvation from his father's murder. Ibid., 117-19.

8 Ibid., 84. Thompson is particularly interested in Alyosha's early memory of being held by his hysterical mother in front of an icon. That this frightening episode becomes a precious sacred memory for Alyosha is evidence of Zosima's conviction that such memories can be created even from very bad family homes.

9 Alyosha is referred to as an angel by Fyodor (*BK*, 25), and Mitya (105) and as a cherub by Grushenka (355) and Ivan (651).

icon mediates something to which we do not have unconditional access, something that must be received in its partiality as an image of the unfathomable.

Dostoevsky, I would argue, was profoundly aware of this connection between memory and mediation.[10] This is suggested by the diverse ways the four brothers mediate their pasts to themselves through memory, but it is also demonstrated in the narrative techniques by which Dostoevsky tells his story. We may point, to begin with, to the role of the narrator in *The Brothers Karamazov*. As Thompson notes, the narrator is a crucial agent of mediation in any imaginative writing.[11] This intermediary capacity is heightened all the more in the case of first-person narrators, like the one who relays the story of the Karamazov family.[12] Though he is scant on personal details, this narrator presents himself as a local witness to events, a familiar of the Karamazov family and its social setting. Temporally, however, the narrator tells the story from a position thirteen years after the 'catastrophe' he documents.[13] This means that the basic resources from which the narrator draws in telling his story are his recollections from that past time; his memories.

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10 As is Thompson: the "distance induced by mediacy is where our topic of memory comes to the fore", she explains. *Memory*, 26.

11 Ibid.

12 Dostoevsky also employed a first-person narrator-character in his major preceding novel *Demons* (also known as *Devils* or *The Possessed*). This narrator is an even more self-conscious participant in the story being told than is the narrator of *BK*. See V.A. Tunimanov, "The Narrator in *The Devils*," in *Dostoevsky - (New Perspectives)*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1984), 145-175.

13 This timeline is mentioned twice in the opening pages of the novel, both in an authorial preface (*BK*, 3) and at the outset of the first chapter (*BK*, 7). The former section, titled "From the Author," is particularly interesting in that it establishes the narrator as, in fact, the author of the novel that follows. "By making him the author of the novel", Thompson suggests, "Dostoevsky encompasses the narrative with a subjective consciousness. His narrator inhabits the whole text as an identifiable person with his own ideas and beliefs about good and evil, God and immortality. And once we have a subjective consciousness we must have personal memory." Thompson, *Memory*, 44.

While this eyewitness testimony does lend the narrative a certain credibility, readers are left with no illusions concerning the narrator's 'objectivity'. He tells the story as he remembers it, fleshing out his account with details gleaned from the memory of others. From the very first book of *The Brothers Karamazov*, this narrator makes his presence known, inserting odd bits of self-referential commentary which pull the reader forward into the narrator's present.[14] Although the subjectivity of the narrative voice does tend to recede into third-person exposition as the story progresses, it reappears from time to time as a reminder of the consciousness through which these events have been passed. This happens most substantively in the novel's final climactic trial scene, recounted by the narrator as a live witness caught up in the excitement with everyone else.[15] Of particular interest here are the qualifications the narrator affixes to his account: "I will say beforehand, and say emphatically, that I am far from considering myself capable of recounting all that took place in court, not only with the proper fullness, but even in the proper order... Therefore let no one grumble," he advises, "if I tell only that which struck me personally and which I have especially remembered" (*BK,* 656). He repeats later on, concerning a moment of particular tension, "I do not remember everything in order, I was excited myself and could not follow" (*BK*, 687).

The narrator's story is generated from a memory as imperfect as any other. What he presents cannot capture the whole of its object, mediated as it is by all-too human

14 See for instance, the first sentence of the opening chapter of *BK*: "Alexei Fyodorovich Karamazov was the third son of a landowner from our district, Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, well known in his own day (and still remembered among us) because of his dark and tragic death, which happened exactly thirteen years ago and which I shall speak of in its proper place" (7).

15 See also Thompson's discussion of the narrator in this scene. *Memory*, 35-36.

recollection. Moreover, this kind of partiality is not a merely accidental inevitability. The narrator also selectively structures his story to particular ends. Right from the start it is clear that this narrator has a hero, the young Alexei Karamazov, and that the biography of this hero will constitute for him a hagiographic enterprise (*BK*, 3).[16] Thompson notes that the generic strictures of hagiography call for the representation of a life in the memory of certain prior models. Such a representation "cannot be dispassionate," she claims, but is "steeped in accents of love and veneration." Indeed, she continues, the narrator regularly works to direct our sympathies in his hero's favour.[17]

I think we are justified in seeing here the principles of 'iconographic expression' to which Evdokimov refers in relation to Dostoevsky. The image being offered is not a portrait in the sense of objective or worldly realism, but calls forth an alternative vision of the real for those with eyes to see it. The significance of memory to this process is twofold: in the first place, the image is always mediated by the memory of the artist, both as personal recollection and as the collective tradition to which he or she belongs. This is why a relation to prior models and ideals remains important. In the second place, the contemplator is called to a work of memory as well, remembering through the image a promised future made present here, though incompletely.[18] For this reason, the iconic image will not communicate automatically or directly to all who approach it. Some will have already obscured the resources of memory by which to engage the image, while

16 The Russian word translated 'biography' in this opening sentence of the novel signifies particularly the life of a saint. See Thompson, *Memory*, 44.

17 Ibid., 45.

18 Thompson notes this additional layer of mediational memory in the hagiographic genre itself, a forgotten literary form which must be revived in the memory of readers. Ibid., 45.

others will reject the mediational incompleteness of its object's presence. Dostoevsky himself was clearly aware of this possibility, allowing in his narrator's preface that a reader might well drop the book after a few pages and never pick it up again (*BK*, 4). Such an image finally requires a certain response in faith to what must be left unsaid. As present to us as the words and actions of his characters often feel, Dostoevsky's narrator persistently refuses his readers the illusion of total access to the story he tells. We are left with something partial, constructed from memory; an image of the past which might speak to the future. The jubilant shouts of "memory eternal!" which conclude *The Brothers Karamazov* are finally a celebration of eternal mediation, by which the reconciliation among a group of ordinary boys becomes an image of resurrection in the world to come.

Bakhtin and Polyphonic Poetics

I embarked on this discussion of memory as an initial demonstration of Dostoevsky's attention to the mode of signification by which his novels 'image' their object. If the iconographic vision Evdokimov attributes to Dostoevsky is built into the structure of his novelistic expression, his interest in memory emphasizes the mediation by which these literary icons communicate; especially through the recollections of a first-person narrator. The narrator's consciousness, however, is not the only level at which this mediation takes place. It also happens in the interplay of individual characters and their respective idealogical worlds. Here I turn to the 20th century Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, whose account of 'polyphony' has become a commonplace in Dostoevsky

scholarship.[19] In a polyphonic novel (and for Bakhtin, Dostoevsky is the first - and perhaps the only? - truly polyphonic novelist[20]) there is no authorial voice that can make final claims or judgments. Instead, the author communicates indirectly in the dialogue between embodied voices which are given a life of their own. These voices, as in Dostoevsky's novels, are given free reign to be who they are to the fullest extent of their characters, even as they conflict with and rebel against their creator.[21] The fundamental feature of a polyphonic novel is thus an idealogical unfinalizability, both within the novel and in calling forth ongoing response from its readers.

One of Dostoevsky's characteristic innovations, then, is to transfer all the descriptions and qualities of his characters into their own fields of vision. Instead of the external features of the hero being at issue, for instance - his appearance, habits, social position - what matters is the significance of these features to the hero himself. "We see not who he is," Bakhtin explains, "but *how* he is conscious of himself; our act of artistic visualization occurs not before the reality of the hero, but before a pure function of his awareness of that reality."[22] There are no insights, descriptions or actions, in other words, unmediated by conscious (or unconscious) representations of them in a character's mind. Self-consciousness itself has become the novel's subject matter.[23] In terms of

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19 See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

20 Ibid., 3.

21 Ibid., 6.

22 Ibid., 49.

23 Taking the hero of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* as an example, Bakhtin points out that there is nothing we can say about him that he does not already know himself. His social group, psychological profile, moral definitions, "all of this, in keeping with Dostoevsky's design, the hero knows perfectly well himself, and he stubbornly and agonizingly soaks up all these definitions from within. Any point of view from without is rendered powerless in advance and denied the finalizing word." Ibid., 52.

Dostoevsky's poetics, this means that there is no room for an independent authorial voice unsubsumed by some narrative subjectivity. Since nothing is allowed to exceed a particular field of vision in this way, the novel must proceed dialogically through encounters with other such fields of vision. As Bakhtin puts it: "*To the all-devouring consciousness of the hero the author can juxtapose only a single objective world - a world of other consciousnesses with rights equal to those of the hero.*"[24]

On the face of it, this reading of polyphonic dialogue seems to sit uneasily alongside the single narrational consciousness through which I suggested *The Brothers Karamazov* is passed. How can the memory of a narrator generate the multiple, self-referential fields of vision whose interaction apparently structures the novel? In the first place, it is helpful to recall that the narrator is himself a character in the novel, with a field of vision as comprehensive as any other. His own subjectivity is distinct from Dostoevsky as author, and so participates in the dialogical encounters by which Dostoevsky's literary art proceeds.[25] Yet it remains the case that these encounters are rendered through the narrator's discourse. Thompson goes some way towards an adequate response in recognizing that narration in *The Brothers Karamazov* occurs in the third as well as the first-person, "while retaining the single node of ... memory through which [is] passe[d] the narration of the novel as a whole."[26] In the 'mimetic' forms of this third person narration, as Thompson calls it, the speech and action of characters are represented directly in the present, and the narrator's presence is at a minimum. "In

24 Ibid., 50. Emphasis original.

25 The narrator's selectivity as regards his memories, his agency in advocating for his hero, is thus in an important sense his, and not Dostoevsky's.

26 Thompson, *Memory*, 27.

Dostoevsky's hands", she explains, "the direct representation of the characters' words becomes an ideal vehicle for creating a dialogic system because it enables him to turn all the great philosophical dialogues over to them."[27]

In the end, it seems unhelpful to make too much of the apparent discrepancies in the narrational approaches Dostoevsky employs. When the narrator's subjectivity slips from view, this is not an indication of some immediate perspective no longer beholden to the vicissitudes of memory or representation. At these moments, rather, the novel opens out into a new subjectivity and takes as its subject matter a new self-consciousness in conversation with others. The ambiguous shifts between the narrator's field of vision and that of the characters in his story only amplify the mediate quality of the image produced. There are multiple layers of representation at play, keeping the author at a certain distance from the reception of his work.

The reality of such an approach, of course, is the ongoing possibility of being misunderstood, the divestment of a certain control over meaning.[28] At the very least, it requires the author to forgo what we might call 'direct' communication in his art. In Bakhtin's terms, Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel refuses authorial 'finalization', the imposition of a last word that puts an end to conversation.[29] This is nowhere clearer than

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27 Ibid., 28.

28 Dostoevsky seems to have been well aware of this himself, especially given the serial form in which *The Brothers Karamazov* was published. He laments in a letter from June of 1879 that "in my novel I've had to present several ideas and positions that, as I feared, would not be much to their [his editors'] liking, *since until the conclusion of the novel these ideas and positions really can be misinterpreted*; and now, just as I feared, it has happened..." Printed in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871-1881* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 434, emphasis Frank's.

29 This is the case both ideologically, and in terms of his characters' self understanding. Bakhtin comments on both counts: "Dostoevsky was capable of *representing someone else's idea*, preserving its full capacity to signify as an idea, while at the same time also preserving a distance, neither confirming the idea

in the primary "Pro and Contra"[30] of the novel, Ivan's rebellion in the famous Grand Inquisitor poem and the last discourse of the elder Zosima before his death. Ivan's poem in particular has elicited all manner of controversy and discussion, especially in terms of locating Dostoevsky's own convictions and beliefs. Some have suggested that this section dramatizes the author's identification with Ivan's rebellion (perhaps in spite of himself), his own lack of faith, or at least a tenuous theological mooring.[31] Others have noted the passionate eloquence and undeniable power with which the critiques of Ivan and the Inquisitor are leveled, and remain unconvinced that Dostoevsky's response in the rest of the novel stands up to their challenge.[32]

I would argue that both sides of this problem, the potency of Ivan's manifesto as well as the ambiguity of the response Dostoevsky is able to provide, are related to the

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nor merging it with his own expressed ideology." Bakhtin, *Problems*, 85. In reference to his created subjectivities: "The hero becomes relatively free and independent, because everything in the author's design that had defined him and, as it were, sentenced him, everything that had qualified him to be once and for all a completed image of reality, now no longer functions as a form for finalizing him, but as the material of his self-consciousness." Ibid., 52.

30 Dostoevsky's title for Book Five of *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which Ivan's exposition takes place. Zosima's discourse actually appears in the following book.

31 See for instance William Hamilton, "Banished from the Land of Unity - Dostoevsky's Religious Vision Through the Eyes of Dmitry, Ivan and Alyosha Karamazov," in *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, ed. William Hamilton and Thomas Altizer (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1966), 53-84. For Hamilton, *The Brothers Karamazov* suffers from a fundamental lack of clarity stemming from the author's own identification with, and inability to choose between, the three Karamazov brothers. Dostoevsky is at once a convinced atheist and a convinced believer, and in this it is Ivan (and not Alyosha) who becomes the character we are all finally able to receive.

32 This second, more common concern, has less to do with Dostoevsky's intentions or convictions than his success in the execution of an adequate rejoinder. See for instance Stephen D. Ross, who argues that while Dostoevsky succeeds in demonstrating that there must be an alternative to Ivan, Alyosha is finally too unbelievable to credibly be that. He is not a Karamazov but a saint (or god), and thus not an adequate model. Ross, "The Brothers Karamazov by Fyodor Karamazov," in *Literature and Philosophy: An Analysis of the Philosophical Model* (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1969), 136-174. Derek Traversi's 1937 response to Berdyaev's monograph on Dostoevsky similarly argues that there is a complete discontinuity between Alyosha and the rest of the Karamazov world, rooted in Dostoevsky's gnostic tendency to transcend the sensible. Traversi, "Dostoevsky," in *Dostoevsky - A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Rene Wellek (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), 159-171. This is Hamilton's view of Alysoha as a literary character as well. See "Banished," 73.

authorial poetics we have been exploring in Dostoevsky. The freedom accorded to Ivan in giving expression to his convictions encompasses the whole of Dostoevsky's creative power and ability. Nothing is held back or reserved, in spite of the author's legitimate concerns about misunderstanding. He composed this section quickly, "in a state of exultation" as DeLubac puts it[33], fully engaged in the representation of Ivan's idea. Moreover, Ivan's very relationship to Dostoevsky's vision is ambiguous as well. Ivan is certainly invested with ideas close to the author's own heart, not least of which is the critique of modern progressivism intimated in the link between ethics and immortality which Ivan assumes in his infamous thesis that "all is permitted" in the absence of God.[34] As we will see, Ivan understands that justice animated by Euclidean reason alone cannot help but end in violence or (demonic) tyranny.[35]

If Dostoevsky's dialogical polyphony thus frees Ivan's voice to spin itself out as it will, it also conditions the kind of response that can be mounted in the rest of the novel. The author does not provide a final or irrefutable rebuttal, but offers another vision to be brought into conversation with the first; a conversation which will be negotiated differently by each reader who comes to it. Dostoevsky reflects on these difficulties in an 1879 letter, which is worth quoting at some length. He here responds to his interlocutor's

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33 Henri DeLubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. Edith M. Riley (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1963), 176.

34 DeLubac cites Evdokimov to a similar conclusion, suggesting that with Ivan, Dostoevsky "rebels 'against all optimistic theology, shorn of its tragic element...'" Ibid.

35 This is a familiar theme in Dostoevsky's work. Consider, for instance, the radical atheist 'humanism' (especially as imported from European social thought) at work in the 'Napoleonic' murders of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Classics, 1992). An even closer parallel is the result of 'liberation' from the divine as seen in Shigalev's social formula in the aptly titled *Demons*, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Classics, 1994): "Starting from unlimited freedom, I conclude with unlimited despotism" (402).

identification of "the *most pressing* problem" with regards to continuing work on *The Brothers Karamazov*:

> that I have not yet given the answer to all those atheistical propositions, and that it must be done. Exactly so, and in this all my care and anxiety now reside. For the sixth book, 'A Russian Monk'... is intended as the answer to all that *negative side*. And so I tremble for it in this sense: will it be a sufficient answer? Especially as the answer is not in fact direct, not an answer point by point to the theses previously expressed (in 'The Grand Inquisitor' and earlier), but only by implication. It is presented as the direct opposite of the view of the world stated earlier - but again, not presented point by point, but as an artistic picture, so to speak.[36]

Dostoevsky's trepidation in constructing the sixth book speaks to the open-endedness he knew to characterize the dialogue he was establishing. As an indirect response to Ivan and the Grand Inquisitor, Dostoevsky offers the story of a life (Zosima) and of lives continuing to be transformed (especially Alyosha and Mitya). In place of an argument, as Evdokimov has said, we are given the image of a saint, as if an icon hung on the wall for contemplation. We move now to a closer look at this image, in the context of the pro and contra at the heart the book.

II
Pro and Contra: The Dialogue

Ivan's Rebellion

Ivan's exposition in Book Five of *The Brothers Karamazov* takes place in a dingy tavern where he has met his younger brother, Alyosha. Although they have both been living in the same town again for quite a while, the two brothers have not spent much

36 Letter "To Constantine Petrovich Pobedonostsev", 5 September 1879, reprinted in Jessie Coulson, ed., *Dostoevsky: A Self-Portrait* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 224.

time together. Now on the eve of Ivan's departure, he is eager for an opportunity to become better acquainted with his quiet and unassuming sibling. For his part, Alyosha has been living in the monastery outside of the town, where he has apprenticed himself to the local elder, a monk named Zosima. His elder is on his deathbed, however, and although Alyosha has been running errands in town all day, his troubled soul yearns to return to his master's side. Sensing the calamity soon to befall the Karamazov family, the elder had sent his charge away to be with them, especially brother Dmitri; it was he that Alyosha hoped to find at the tavern. Meeting Ivan instead, Alyosha becomes the audience for the profound expression of his middle brother's struggle with atheistic nihilism.

The particular contours of Ivan's rebellion are significant for our purposes on at least two counts. In the first place, they offer an exposition of Dostoevsky's commitment to dialogical openness in the full and brilliant expression he gives to Ivan's critique. In the second place, however, it becomes clear that Ivan stakes his rebellion on exactly the point at which Dostoevsky's theological sensibilities condition the poetics of his fiction. The offense that Ivan cannot abide turns on a God who enters time instead of ending it, allowing an interim period of suffering and injustice that precedes any harmonious consummation. In fact, Ivan confesses a "childlike conviction" that there will come such a final healing of suffering in an ultimate divine harmony that redeems all villainy; one that reveals the contradictions of this world to be the "pitiful mirage" of man's feeble "Euclidean" mind (*BK*, 235-6). Like any good Christian, Ivan anticipates the trembling of the universe as all creation one day joins in praise, uniting torturer and victim in

confessing: "Just art thou, O Lord, for thy ways are revealed" (*BK*, 244). It is exactly this understanding, however, that Ivan resists in defence of the poor little girl whose time-bound suffering at the hands of her own parents cries out against any "higher resolution." "I don't understand anything," Ivan goes on as if in delirium, "and I no longer want to understand anything, I want to stick to the fact... if I wanted to understand something, I would immediately have to betray the fact" (*BK*, 243). Ivan's commitment to the confines of this-worldly reason is thus bound up with a kind of love for humanity - one that is fully immanent in the here-and-now, disavowing all transcendent or future manifestations of justice for the sake of the innocent.

If Ivan rejects transcendence out of love for humanity, however, he equally understands that such love is impossible in the absence of a transcendent source. In an earlier scene at the monastery, Ivan had claimed that "there is no virtue if there is no immortality" (*BK*, 69-70). He was entirely serious, as the elder recognized, responding to him: "You are blessed if you believe so, or else most unhappy". Now, Ivan begins his 'rebellion' in conversation with Alyosha by admitting that he "could never understand how it's possible to love one's neighbors" (*BK*, 236). Christ's love for people, he goes on, is a miracle impossible on earth. This, of course, is a primary theme of the 'poem' Ivan subsequently recites in response to Alyosha's invocation of the one who gave his innocent blood for all, and can thus forgive all and for all (*BK*, 246). It is exactly Christ whom Ivan is interested in talking about, and he does so through a poem entitled "The Grand Inquisitor."

Ivan presents his poem as something he had made up and memorized a year

previously, for which Alyosha would be the premiere audience. The poem is set in sixteenth century Seville, at the height of the Inquisition, where just the day before "the Cardinal Grand Inquisitor had burned almost a hundred heretics at once *ad majorem gloriam Dei*" (*BK*, 248-49). Amidst the heat of these burning fires, Christ returns to visit his suffering children. As he wanders the streets of Seville, he is immediately recognized by the people, who praise him and implore him for mercy. Christ takes pity on them, healing their ills and even raising a young girl from the dead (*BK*, 251). The Grand Inquisitor, however, recognizes him too. Scowling, he orders the newcomer arrested and locked up in a dungeon. After dark, the Inquisitor comes to his prisoner by candlelight to interrogate him, though it is he who does all the talking. Having been given the power to bind and loose, the Inquisitor claims, he and his kin have arranged on earth what Christ had failed to accomplish in his life. "Why then", he asks, "have you come to interfere with us?" (*BK*, 251).

According to the Inquisitor, Christ's primary mistake was in misjudging the character of the lowly human being. In offering freedom, Christ failed to account for the petty meanness of human creatures which assures their perpetual unhappiness. Though intoxicating, nothing is more intolerable to human beings than freedom (*BK*, 252). In fact, claims the Inquisitor, "man has no more tormenting care than to find someone to whom he can hand over as quickly as possible that gift of freedom with which the miserable creature is born" (*BK*, 254). Left to their own devices, human beings will fight over bread, drenching the earth in blood even to the point of anthropophagy (*BK*, 258). Had Christ truly loved human beings, he would have respected them less and demanded

of them less. He would have known that their human desires for liberty and unity cannot be satisfied together. It is out of a more genuine love for these people, therefore, that the Inquisitor and those with him have taken the terrible burden of freedom upon themselves and offered human beings the 'true' freedom of communion in obedience they crave (that is, happiness), by accepting from the Devil the offer that Christ should have accepted himself fifteen centuries before (*BK*, 257).[37]

Those like the Inquisitor, however, who suffer this unhappiness on behalf of the people, know the truth. They hold the secret not only that they have sided with the Devil, but that "beyond the grave [the people] will find only death" (*BK*, 259). As Alyosha finally recognizes, the Inquisitor's secret is that he does not believe in God! (*BK*, 261). And yet he has not lost a sort of love for humanity, leaving him to deceive the masses in Christ's name, allowing them finally the peace Christ failed to provide. This work, claims the Inquisitor, is too important to be jeopardized by Christ's return, whatever his intentions may be. "Tomorrow," he says to him, "I shall burn you." And the jubilant crowds who praised this stranger just hours before will be the first to heap the coals around his stake.

Like Ivan, the Inquisitor rejects the form of Christ's redemption as a suffering love that refuses to give up on human agency. It may be well and good to turn as Alyosha does to the one who can forgive all on account of his innocent blood, but what of the other innocent blood that is ceaselessly shed in the meantime? By what right does Christ

37 A reference to Christ's third temptation in the desert, whereby political unity is offered at the price of service to Satan. The Inquisitor's whole speech is structured on the temptation account from Matthew 4:1-11.

uphold the dialogical freedom of human existence when humankind itself is the first casualty? This simply requires too much of these poor creatures, asking them to willingly pattern their lives after Christ's abasement as the path to final harmony. The true form of suffering love, for the Inquisitor, has the courage to take the burden of freedom onto itself, and impose the sort of finalization that Dostoevsky so adamently resists. If God in Christ could not bring himself to do this by coming in a glorious display of power and justice, it is the good fortune of the masses that there are those like the Grand Inquisitor who can.

Throughout the Inquisitor's speech, Ivan's Christ remains eerily silent. When his captor eventually falls silent as well, waiting for some word, even a bitter word, in response, the prisoner finally gets up: "suddenly he approaches the old man in silence and gently kisses him on his bloodless, ninety-year-old lips. That is the whole answer. The old man shudders" (*BK*, 262). Opening the door, the Inquisitor hurriedly sends him out: "Go and do not come again... do not come at all... never, never!" he says. As Ivan's poem concludes, its final scene is repeated across a table in the dingy tavern. The breathless teller looks expectantly at Alyosha: "Will you renounce me", he asks, "Will you?" (*BK*, 263). Alyosha returns his gaze in silence, stands up, and gently kisses Ivan on the lips.

These parallel kisses are difficult to account for, not least because of the ambiguous relationship between Ivan and his fictional Inquisitor-creation. In a significant way, both Ivan and the Inquisitor understand what they cannot (or will not)

accept. Their breathless stares towards their implicated interlocutors[38] anticipate some outburst, some attempt at vindication that might silence their own effusive confessions. It is exactly the disappointment of this kind of anticipation, however, that has provoked both Ivan and the Inquisitor to rebellion. Each desires a direct instantiation of divine sovereignty, one that can actually do something about the problem of human suffering and guarantee human happiness. Instead they are confronted with a God become man, the slaughtered lamb whose reign refuses to close the door on human freedom.

Whether the Inquisitor is confronted by him anew in the silent Christ of Ivan's poem, is less clear. This Christ is far from the one represented in the New Testament. Travis Kroeker has powerfully demonstrated the sense in which Ivan's poem is staged as a parodic reversal of its scriptural setting, especially through the gospels and the book of Revelation.[39] In particular, he emphasizes the immediate recognizability of Ivan's Christ in contrast to the divine incognito of the gospel accounts.[40] Of course, it is precisely the hiddenness of Christ's authority that Ivan finds so offensive, the call to order his life according to a power manifested in sacrificial love, which therefore eludes the public visibility that might offer temporal assurances. The kiss of the silent Christ appropriately invites the Inquisitor into the embrace of this love, but the essence of the kisser remains

38 Although the Inquisitor's diatribe is tellingly monological, the prisoner's silence does not keep him from communicating.

39 See Kroeker, "The Inquisition of the Lamb: Dostoevsky, Revelation, and Justice," and "The Third Temptation: God, Immortality, and Political Ethics," in P. Travis Kroeker and Bruce K. Ward, *Remembering the End - Dostoevsky as Prophet to Modernity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 102-110, 184-190.

40 "He appeared quietly, inconspicuously, but, strange to say, everyone recognized him... People are drawn to him by an invincible force, they flock to him, surround him, follow him... The sun of love shines in his heart, rays of Light, Enlightenment, and Power stream from his eyes and, pouring over the people, shake their hearts with responding love. He stretches forth his hands to them, blesses them, and from the touch of him, even only of his garments, comes a healing power" (*BK*, 249).

all too externalized. His miracles and mysteries cannot but compete for space alongside the order the Inquisitor has constructed, and this is a confrontation he will not win; those faithful crowds who shouted hosannas at the visitor's miracles that morning, will be stoking his fire come dawn the next day. The kiss may burn in the old man's heart, but he is not brought to encounter the death by which it might bear fruit.

I suspect that something different is at work in the piece of 'literary theft' by which Alyosha repeats this kiss on the lips of Ivan. Alyosha takes up this gesture into a world of dialogical uncertainty, offering himself in love before his brother's rebellion. Unlike the first kiss, this one releases itself in trusting obedience to a divine unknown, marking Alyosha's solidarity with Ivan even in guilt. The youngest Karamazov is still at the beginning of a long spiritual journey, through which he will be formed in a humble love that gives shape to his freedom as a human creature. Already, however, he is able to respond to Ivan's offense with this expression of identification in love, confronting his brother with the penitential divestment in faith by which he might truly receive himself from God.

Alyosha's kiss is, in other words, an early moment of the "artistic picture," the image, by which Dostoevsky hoped to respond to Ivan and the Inquisitor. The answer is not, in fact, direct; not an incontestable point-by-point refutation. Ivan knows that Alyosha's kiss *is* the whole answer, that there is no way to bypass the demand on his own freedom which has compelled him to reject God's world. Absent such a final and determinative establishment of God's justice, however, Ivan is left with nothing *but*

freedom, and so despairingly concedes that "everything is permitted" (*BK*, 263).[41] In a certain sense, of course, Ivan's thesis is not so far from the teachings of the elder Zosima. After all, it is exactly the maintenance of human freedom which makes Christ so problematic for Ivan: freedom that leaves room for the ongoing perpetration of violence and atrocity. Everything is permitted according to Zosima insofar as the rule of Christ leaves human beings with a real agency, unlike the rule of the Grand Inquisitor. For Zosima, however, this agency is most fully expressed in accepting the guilt of each before all others, forgiving all and for all. We turn now to this alternative vision of freedom's flourishing in humble, self-abnegating love.

Zosima's Speeches

Parting ways with Ivan at the tavern, Alyosha hurries out of town to his monastery and his elder. To his great relief, he finds Zosima awake and alert, surrounded by his friends and brothers. Recognizing that he would not survive the night, the elder had called his company around him for some final hours of conversation and teaching. The contents of this final discussion are presented in the novel as a literary whole composed by Alyosha and transcribed by the narrator directly (*BK*, 286). This section functions as Dostoevsky's most immediate response to the challenge of Ivan and the Inquisitor, though

41 There is a certain reluctance in Ivan's concession to this motto. After Alyosha brings it up, "Ivan frowned, and suddenly turned strangely pale. 'Ah, you caught that little remark yesterday, which offended Miusov so much... and that brother Dmitri so naively popped up and rephrased?' he grinned crookedly. 'Yes, perhaps "everything is permitted," since the word has already been spoken. I do not renounce it. And Mitenka's version is not so bad'" (*BK*, 263). Ivan's hesitation, it seems, concerns the love for suffering humanity which prompts his refusal of an ultimate reconciliation to come. Among Ivan's internal conflicts, as we have noted, is this repudiation of innocent suffering alongside the recognition that there can be no morality in the absence of God. Ivan's agreement with Lise that the crucifixion of the poor Jewish boy is 'good' (584), for instance, stands in stark contrast to his earlier case against God concerning the needless suffering of children.

for some it is also the nexus of a critique that Dostoevsky failed to offer a convincing Christian rejoinder.[42] By contrast, I want to highlight the sense in which the structure of this response, in all its potentially unconvincing indirection and ambiguity, is itself a theological move that refuses to end the dialogue by forcing upon it a final authorial word.

I begin with a few comments about the form of Zosima's discourse, starting from the end. I suspect it is no coincidence that the narrator takes pains to remind us of the character of this body of teaching. "I repeat," he says, "it is incomplete and fragmentary" (*BK*, 323). The narrator emphasizes that Alyosha put the document together sometime after the fact, preserving in writing what he remembered of the elder's words. Moreover,

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42 Sergei Hackel, for instance, suggests that Zosima's speeches do not reflect Orthodox theology as much as a nature mysticism with Christian cosmetics. Hackel, "The religious dimension: vision or evasion? Zosima's discourse in *The Brothers Karamazov*," in *New Essays on Dostoevsky*, ed. Malcolm V. Jones and Garth M. Terry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 139-168. (Hamilton argues for something similar, suggesting that neither Dmitry nor Alyosha's conversions are to anything identifiably Christian - "Banished", 58,76-77). In part, Hackel's reading simply overlooks certain textual elements, especially in the hay he makes from his observation that Dostoevsky's 'Christian' rejoinder turns on an immediacy of individual experience with little ecclesial interest. Zosima, he claims, does not seem to participate in services, nor are his sacramental needs at issue. No thought is given, he claims, to the administration of confession, unction or communion before Zosima's death. Hackel, "Religious dimension", 150. Hackel clearly overlooks an earlier passage set the morning before the elder's final night, where Zosima "desired to make a confession and receive communion immediately. His confessor had always been Father Paissy. After the completion of both sacraments, the rite of holy unction began" (*BK*, 163). Moreover, we are told early in the novel that the Karamazov family's mediation session at the monastery was to begin immediately after the late morning liturgy, and particular mention is made of the fact that none of the guests thought fit to attend (*BK*, 34). It is not Alyosha or Zosima, but the other Karamazovs who fail to order their lives by ecclesial disciplines. Hackel's subsequent distinction between Zosima's emphasis on heightened immediacy of individual experience and real lifelong Christian discipline, glosses over the elder's claim that active love "is dearly bought, by long work over a long time, for one ought to love not for a chance moment but for all time" (*BK* 319), not to mention the extended discourse with Madame Khokhlakov on love without immediate vindication (*BK* 55-58). In a more general sense, however, Hackel works with an account of the Christian witness to truth (exemplified in his claim that each layer of mediatory separation from Zosima's words reduces the authenticity and efficacy of his discourse), at odds with the emphasis on mediation and dialogical openness in Dostoevsky that I have been highlighting. See "Religious dimension", 41. In the remainder of this chapter, I try to demonstrate that Dostoevsky's indirect and dialogical poetics is in fact significantly theological, and reflects the kind of iconographic sensibilities I have been arguing for.

the narrator confesses that "whether it was just that conversation, or he added to it in his notes from former conversations with his teacher as well, I cannot determine" (*BK*, 286). The fact that this document is inserted from Alyosha's pen unmediated by narrational retelling, in other words, ought not to deceive us. We still are not offered a comprehensive summa, but the reflections of a dying man cobbled together from the memory of one of his friends.

The network of removes separating readers from the story is telling in itself. The narrator is recounting Alyosha's transcription of what he remembers the elder saying. Zosima himself is reflecting, through his own process of memory, not only on his life, but on the experiences of others removed from us yet again: his brother Markel, his servant Afanasy, the 'mysterious stranger' who confesses to him. Zosima's legacy, this written icon of saintliness, is thoroughly mediated by multiple levels of recollection and composition. It does not confront its contemplator directly, but through negotiations of life and memory that call for ongoing work in conversation. This complex relay of witnesses is a reminder that divine truth is a matter which must be discerned, and not imposed. Moreover, it suggests that such a discourse can never be anything but 'incomplete and fragmentary'; there must always be room for future tellings and responses, conversations and enactments.

This ongoing and unfinalized dialogue, it seems to me, is closely related to Zosima's interest in themes of isolation vs. relationality. He points out that the modern heralds of freedom in the satisfaction of desires (proponents of whatever version of modern progressivism), promise enlightened brotherly communion aided by

technological advancement (*BK*, 313). In an impressive display of prophetic insight into our own time, however, Dostoevsky's elder laments that from this unconstrained freedom people have fallen into slavery, disunity, and finally isolation (*BK*, 314). In serving only their own satisfactions and neglecting service to humankind, they finally find themselves alone. This, of course, is similar to the analysis of human nature Ivan provides through the Grand Inquisitor. As we have seen, he recognizes that unlimited freedom gives rise to conflict, violence and finally unhappiness in the absence of true human unity.

Where the Grand Inquisitor establishes himself as a repository for this freedom, however, upholding human fellowship through the necessary fiction of God's existence, Zosima calls this freedom back to its source in the self-emptying love of Christ. How different from the loneliness of abyssal freedom, he claims, is the so-called 'isolation' of the monk (*BK*, 314). In binding himself to obedience, the monk is liberated from "the tyranny of things and habits," free to encounter others as brothers and sisters. These are the ones who have truly devoted themselves to the love of humankind through the chastening of vanity and pride, Zosima suggests, especially in confession and repentance (an apparent constraint on freedom). These are the ones who live in the ongoing dialogical relationality that characterizes divine truth.

This relationship between confession, repentance and theological communion is a major theme in Dostoevsky's work, and especially here in Zosima's reflections. As the elder's brother Markel once described, sin can be understood as isolation from God's glory in creation, a union that can be returned to in repentance. "'Yes', he said, 'there was so much of God's glory around me: birds, trees, meadows, sky, and I alone lived in

shame, I alone dishonored and did not notice the beauty and glory of it all'" (*BK*, 289). Markel's story of conversion on the eve of his early death is one of three vignettes that Zosima offers in recounting his own process of coming to faith.[43] Each involves a confrontation with sin that provokes confession and repentance before those who had been wronged. Each wrestles with the isolation maintained by untruthful patterns of thought and action, illustrating a renewed capacity to love in repentant self-offering.

It is worth noting, however, that the response these penitent conversions elicit from those involved is by no means straightforward. Although Markel's family rejoices at his transformation, his doctor takes his words to be the ravings of insanity in the final throes of illness (*BK*, 289). Following Zosima's own curious conversion experience as a young cadet, his friends and acquaintances similarly affirm and celebrate his decision while treating him as some sort of extra-rational novelty.[44] Eventually they tire of him, however, especially when his friendship influences a well-respected member of the community to confess a past crime just before his death. "But once he was buried," Zosima recalls, "the whole town rose up against me and even stopped receiving me" (*BK*, 312). The brotherly love of repentant self-offering, it seems, will not always be met in kind. For Dostoevsky, however, this is a possibility that cannot be passed over. The problem with pursuing human unity through the abolition of every constraint to freedom

43 The second vignette concerns the young Zosima's departure from the Cadet Corps to become a monk, after offering apologies and conciliation both to his abused orderly, and to another officer with whom he was to duel (*BK*, 295-301). The third vignette recounts the elder's subsequent relationship with a 'mysterious stranger' struggling with the guilt of a past unconfessed murder (*BK*, 301-312).

44 Informing his fellow officers that he had resigned his commission for the monastery, "all of them, to a man, burst out laughing: 'But you should have told us so in the first place, that explains everything, we can't pass judgment on a monk'" (*BK*, 300).

is that it freezes dialogue in misplaced claims to self-sufficiency, leading to a more profound state of slavery and isolation. Instead, Zosima advocates a penitential posture that acknowledges one's complicity in the guilt of all. Here, the other is always invited to respond, even if there can be no guarantee of what that response will be.

III
Incarnational Poetics: The Broken Icon

Faith and Fiction

At this point the content of Zosima's teaching circles back to the mode of presentation with which we began. The 'artistic picture' Dostoevsky offers in "The Russian Monk" (not to mention the rest of *Brothers Karamazov* more generally) does not constitute a direct response to Ivan and his Inquisitor. Not only is it veiled by layers of mediated memory, but it proceeds through ongoing conversation within the book that must be negotiated by those who come to it. As we have seen, this authorial poetics is all about the question of freedom explored so powerfully in the Grand Inquisitor poem. On the one hand, the freedom of the voices embodied in the novels to continue their dialogue without authorial finalization, and on the other hand the freedom of the reader in relating him or herself to the story. The conversation is allowed to continue in unknown directions, rendering Dostoevsky's artistic vision itself always open to failure and even correction.

Yet for all this necessary ambiguity, such an artistic vision is indeed at work in Dostoevsky's poetics. His letters and notebooks make it clear that he hoped his novels

would communicate certain important convictions, and in his more journalistic writing these convictions are laid out with a sometimes alarming directness.[45] It would be a mistake, therefore, to take the unfinalizability of Dostoevsky's polyphonics to indicate a conception of truth that does not extend beyond the projection of individual wills. It is certainly true that Dostoevsky is a defender of human freedom, especially over against the deterministic social theories of radical thought in his day.[46] His 'Underground Man', for instance, rails against all social convention, demonstrating the pathological capacity of human beings to reject what is 'good' for them, or what conforms to rationally defensible behaviour.[47] At the same time, however, his novels masterfully illustrate the chaos and violence (both social and individual) that result from a naked voluntarism in which valuation is rooted only in the will's absolute freedom.[48] If Dostoevsky's fiction trades in a certain dialogical ambiguity, therefore, this does not indicate a relativistic authorial indifference. In fact, this ambiguity constitutes the crux of Dostoevsky's most cherished beliefs.

This apparent disjunction between Dostoevsky's fiction and the directness of his other writings is worth considering further. It seems to me that the authorial poetics

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45 This is particularly the case in the serial publication *Diary of a Writer* that Dostoevsky put out during the last six years of his life.

46 Leo Shestov latches onto this Dostoevsky, proclaiming him Kierkegaard's 'double' in existential objection to the inescapable necessity of Hegelian speculative philosophy. See Shestov, "Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky." While it is certainly helpful to consider Dostoevsky's work in relation to the Hegelian systems which dominated 19th century European thought (including many of Dostoevsky's Russian contemporaries), I suggest that neither Kierkegaard nor Dostoevsky can be accounted for by straightforward appeals to the irrational and absurd as characteristic of early existentialism. This claim will be developed further in the next chapter.

47 See Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Classics, 1993).

48 This is demonstrated nowhere more powerfully than in *Demons*, particularly through the character of Stavrogin.

which characterizes Dostoevsky's novels has everything to do with his theological sensibilities, indicating a unique relationship between faith and fiction.[49] The connection of ethics to immortality speaks for Dostoevsky to the depth of transcendent reality that undergirds the created order: "God took seeds from other worlds and sowed them on this earth...", as Zosima puts it (*BK*, 320). There is presence beyond the surface of things, and truth beyond the assertion of will. Yet for Dostoevsky, that presence and that truth appear obliquely, never finalized in such a way that ongoing response is negated. They are not imposed directly or forcibly upon the characters of the story. This novelistic 'freedom' in Dostoevsky's work is finally the pattern of divine creation - giving created beings a life of their own, a freedom to will, and thus necessarily the capacity to desecrate the image in which they were made.[50] This is also the pattern of the incarnation - God in the form of the servant, unrecognized, a lowly human being who washes feet and accepts the guilt of each before all.

Against those who complain that the Incarnation is absent from the ostensibly

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49 Rowan Williams' recent book on Dostoevsky makes this claim as well, drawing heavily (if often implicitly) on Bakhtin to argue, with reference to "narrative techniques," that "Dostoevsky can only be the *kind* of Christian novelist he is because he leaves this level of ambiguity about whether faith can offer lasting, sustainable resolution in his narratives." See *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 13. For an interpretation of the theological significance of Dostoevsky's polyphonic poetics on trinitarian grounds, see David Cunningham, "The Brothers Karamazov as Trinitarian Theology," in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 134-155. Cunningham also suggests that Bakhtin's own thought was powerfully shaped by theological and metaphysical convictions bound up with the kenotic tradition of Russian Christianity. Ibid., 140-141.

50 Consider the charge brought against Christ by the Grand Inquisitor: "but did it not occur to you that [human beings] would eventually reject and dispute even your image and your truth if he was oppressed by so terrible a burden as freedom of choice?" (*BK*, 255). Dostoevsky's novels resound with an implicit "of course!" - even as the Inquisitor's Christ maintains a telling silence.

'Christian' teaching of Zosima and Alyosha,[51] I would argue that the whole of Dostoevsky's novelistic method is incarnational. In taking flesh, the Christ Dostoevsky confesses enters the realm of human action and agency, not to overcome it in the direct manifestation of efficacious sovereignty for which Ivan ultimately yearns, but to offer himself in love to human response, even to the point of death. Dostoevsky's own artistic presentation of truth remains similarly hidden, proceeding indirectly through conversations continued both within and beyond his novels. Striving to pattern itself after Christ as image of the invisible God, Dostoevsky's artistic vision opens itself to misunderstanding and rejection, maintaining a crucial distance from the final consummation of what is revealed.[52]

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51 See Traversi, "Dostoevsky," 169.

52 The interaction between Ivan and Smerdyakov, which begins immediately after the scene at the tavern, appears to cast suspicion on this reading of hiddenness, indirection and distance. Fyodor's murder, as it turns out, can be traced back to a certain indirection of speech by which Ivan and Smerdyakov fail to communicate with one another. Ivan maintains a fatal distance from his own ideas, blind to their enactment in the person of Smerdyakov. This is particularly the case in terms of Ivan's claim that 'all is permitted', but certainly not only here. After reciting his Grand Inquisitor poem, Ivan demures: "But it's nonsense, Alyosha, it's just the muddled poem of a muddled student who never wrote two lines of verse. Why are you taking it so seriously?" (*BK*, 262). Alyosha, however, astutely recognizes that this distancing is deceptive. "How will you live," he asks, "is it possible, with such hell in your heart and in your head?" (263). It is not until long after the murder that Ivan confronts what he should have recognized all along, that Smerdyakov was just carrying out his implicit instructions, and that he himself was the real murderer (*BK*, 627). For his part, Smerdyakov conducts his negotiations with Ivan in a similarly veiled manner: "Smerdyakov kept inquiring, asking certain indirect, apparently farfetched questions, but why - he never explained, and usually, at the most heated moment of his questioning, he would suddenly fall silent or switch to something quite different" (*BK*, 267). On the face of it, this oblique or even silent speech conspires to evil in a manner at odds with the indirection of Christ's incarnational presence. What is the difference between Smerdyakov's silence and the silence of Alyosha's kiss in response to his brother's rebellion? The answer, I think, turns on the relationship between visibility and vulnerability. Ivan's refusal of ownership over his ideas, his refusal to take responsibility for their enactments, is a withdrawal into a hiddenness that protects him from true dialogical vulnerability. He fails to make himself visible in such a way as to elicit genuine (and potentially discomfiting) response. What returns to him through Smerdyakov is an equally calculated invisibility designed to absolve them both of responsibility for what is about to happen. By contrast, the incarnational distance between the visibility of Christ's flesh and the invisible God is exactly an acceptance of dialogical vulnerability, an openness to being seen and spat upon. In the visibility of flesh, Christ embraces an even more radical responsibility - not just for himself, but for all.

It seems to me that this account of Dostoevsky's 'incarnational' poetics shares resonances with the Kierkegaardian reading of the incarnation explored in the previous chapter. For Kierkegaard, as we noted, Christ does not make himself so unambiguously present as to negate the importance of one's relation in faith to that which remains hidden. Christ appears incognito, mediated indirectly through the contradiction of the God-man. Insofar as Evdokimov takes issue with Kierkegaard on the strength of incarnational directness, then, he falls away from his master's best insights. For both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, there are no shortcuts into faith. One must pass through the crucible of doubt, as Dostoevsky liked to put it, confronting an uncertainty not unlike the offense that guards the entrance to Kierkegaard's 'essentially Christian'.

It is here that we can return to a discussion of the icon in relation to Dostoevsky's novels, an icon as indirect as Kierkegaard's communication of faith. Rowan Williams offers a profound reading of this Dostoevskian icon in the final chapter of his monograph on the Russian author.[53] As Williams argues, the broken image remains the true icon in Dostoevsky's novels. Such an image offers a narrative context lending communicative significance to human activity, "without simplifying the tensions of the actual world."[54] The character of the icon, then, recapitulates the explorations of freedom and authority at the heart of *The Brothers Karamazov*. On the one hand, the icon constitutes an unexpected inbreaking of divine grace, disrupting seemingly endless cycles of evil or violence and vindicating an authority that can make sense of human life. On the other

53 See Williams, "Sacrilege and Revelation - The Broken Image," in *Dostoevsky*, 189-226.
54 Ibid., 200.

hand, its presence in an ambiguous world of endless dialogue means that this authority is always vulnerable to resistance and repudiation.[55] If Dostoevsky depicts the saint as a sort of image to be hung on the wall (Evdokimov's claim), Williams is clear that such an image is neither passive nor coercive. Rather, it constitutes an invitation into a dialogical world, calling forth response that makes of the icon "something that we can [never] *finish* with, interpretatively or imaginatively."[56]

For Williams too, this iconographic structure is predicated on the kenotic movement of the incarnate Christ, the self-withholding and voluntary absence of an author become a character. "When that authorial self-emptying is represented," however, "it is in the form of an image that is, inevitably, caught up in the processes of seeing and not-seeing, understanding and not-understanding, reverence and contempt, like all other phenomena in the world, which are all vulnerable to being made sense of in diverse ways."[57] This is why the broken image is the true icon. It is in the nature of images to be capable of desecration, offering themselves as they do to the response of the beholder. The readers of Dostoevsky's novels are finally left to their own negotiations with the image in its ongoing dialogues, left to relate themselves one way or another in the absence of a final theoretical solution.[58] Dostoevsky's icon does not provide a "rhetorical push" into faith, as Kierkegaard might put it.[59] It cannot establish itself by the charm of some "universally compelling attraction," but becomes known instead "by its endurance

55 Ibid., 218.
56 Ibid., 207.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 215.
59 See Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 49.

through disruption and defilement."[60]

Cana of Galilee

I conclude this chapter with an instance of this iconographic sensibility played out at the end of the immediate narrative arc in which the pro and contra of Ivan and Zosima's speeches takes place; the same instance of iconic transfiguration so celebrated by Evdokimov. If Dostoevsky's response to Ivan lies in the actuality of lives transformed, both within the novel and in those who receive it, Alyosha's experience of transfiguration is a crucial first encounter. His experience of grace mediated by the earthly passes through the dialectic of faith that such a paradox of mediation ought to provoke. In this, his encounter recapitulates the theological structure of both faith and fiction that Dostoevsky assumes.

The body of the elder Zosima provokes two very different responses in Alyosha over the course of the day following his death. Despite popular belief that a saint would be spared the bodily corruption of decomposition, Zosima's corpse begins to stink almost immediately after his passing. At first, Alyosha is scandalized by the natural corruption of the body, devastated that such a saintly life was not more justly rewarded by God.[61] The boy had loved Zosima ardently, and was convinced that his death would bring glory to the monastery as one in whom resided the secret of renewal that would finally establish the truth on earth (*BK*, 31). In Alyosha's heart, however, the path to this eternal harmony could not justly pass through putrefaction. Alyosha takes offense at the mean and

60 Williams, *Dostoevsky*, 208.
61 See *BK*, book 7, chapter 1 - "The Odor of Corruption," 327-337.

corrupted form of the divine witness, and experiences a crisis of faith. The critical point is that the divine is not revealed for him directly; that is to say, without passing through the possibility of refusal.

Before Alyosha would be able to accept the corrupted body of his elder as an icon imaging divine joy amidst the earthly, he would need to experience something of a conversion away from triumphalistic visions of glory and towards a penitential recognition of his own baseness. This is exactly what happens in Alyosha's encounter with Grushenka, the seductive and mysterious woman by whom the shifty Rakitin aims to consummate Alyosha's crisis. The visit begins in character as Grushenka fawns over her guest, hopping on Alyosha's lap and putting her arms around his neck (*BK*, 348). Yet the press of her body does not elicit the response in him that any of them might have expected. Frozen in his place, Alyosha recognizes that the wells of his heart's grief had been washing away any lust in him. Instead of the fear he had previously felt for this "horrible" woman, he begins to experience towards her simply a "remarkable, great, and most pure-hearted curiosity" (*BK*, 349). All of this is swirling in Alyosha's heart when Grushenka is told for the first time of the elder Zosima's death. She suddenly jumps up and crosses herself, exclaiming: "Oh, Lord, I didn't know... but what am I doing now, sitting on his lap!" (*BK*, 351).

Expecting, and even desiring, some untoward encounter with this paragon of worldly temptation,[62] Alyosha encounters instead a gesture of deference to his grief at

62 Alyosha is well aware upon agreeing to go to Grushenka's that she had long desired to "pull his little cassock off" (*BK*, 80).

Zosima's death. "Did you see how she spared me," he exclaims, "I came here looking for a wicked soul - I was drawn to that, because I was low and wicked myself, but I found a true sister, I found a treasure - a loving soul..." (*BK*, 351). Finding a jewel in what he took to be muck, Alyosha is confronted with his own worldly sensuality, and awakened to the possibility of grace revealed from within the form of corruption.[63] By the time he finally returns to the monastery, Zosima's body no longer wounds Alyosha's (now chastened) pride. Instead, it becomes the occasion for a profound encounter with the one who came to take part in exactly this world of mundane realities, turning water into wine that the joy of poor peasants may not end. "He became like us out of love" (*BK*, 361), Alyosha hears Zosima say, making reference to the incarnation of Christ. Earlier, the flesh Christ assumed had offended Alyosha's desire for a direct manifestation of divine justice, laid bare as it was in the decay of Zosima's body. Now, however, this movement of divine abasement inspires in him a penitential joy before the created world. Alyosha rushes outside enraptured with the beauty of the earth and convicted of its "living bond" with the higher heavenly world which sustains it. He kisses the ground, watering it with his tears, asking and offering forgiveness "for all and for everything" (*BK*, 362).

The pattern of Alyosha's response to God's image in the world, I suggest, can help us make sense of Dostoevsky's own attempt to express divine truth in his art. Like any icon, 'The Russian Monk' cannot establish its vision without reference to the one who apprehends it. That would be to arrest all movement and end the story. Instead, Dostoevsky presents his readers with an image, and invites a response. As he understood,

63 In this sense, Grushenka herself may be a sort of iconic figure.

however, that response may well be offense. An icon can always be spat upon, as Fyodor threatens to do in demonstration to his pious second wife of its powerlessness (*BK*, 137). For Dostoevsky, however, it is this very vulnerability in openness to ongoing dialogue that allows for the renewal of true human sociality. This is why repentance, confession and obedience are so important to his vision of monastic communion over against the true isolation of unconstrained and technocratic individuals. This is also why Dostoevsky's theological rejoinder to Ivan's rebellion cannot but be indirect and unconvincing to those like the scandalized Alyosha who look for the sort of glory that might silence the critics once and for all. This 'authorial indeterminacy' is not an indication of faithlessness or failure on Dostoevsky's part, but the outworking of a theological commitment that requires the possibility of misunderstanding and rejection, not unlike God's self-revelation in the form of Jesus Christ.

Dostoevsky knows that his 'icon' must still be received by those who gaze upon it, taken up by faith into new lives in the present time. This is the 'second novel' that Dostoevsky's narrator refers to in his preface to *The Brothers Karamazov*, and the main one as far as he is concerned. "Having acquainted himself with the first story," he says "the reader can decide for himself whether it is worth his while to begin the second" (*BK*, 3-4).[64] Like the first story, the one Dostoevsky provides in *The Brothers Karamazov*, any

64 This interpretation follows that of P.Travis Kroeker and Bruce K. Ward. See Kroeker's "Prophecy and Poetics" in *Remembering the End*, 28. The meaning of this passage has been roundly debated, but the rest of the literature is remarkably unified in taking the narrator's claims at face value and positing a planned sequel to *The Brothers Karamazov* that was left unrealized at Dostoevsky's death. Unfortunately, this missing sequel has led some commentators to read the indeterminacies of the first novel as accidental elements to be resolved in the unwritten conclusion. For Valentina Vetlovskaya, for instance, "it follows that without the second novel much in the first cannot be entirely comprehensible. It is

icon elicits a moment of awareness in those who view it which confronts one with a choice. It is always possible, as Dostoevsky well understands, that one could put the book down after the first few pages and never pick it up again. But to those who do read it and relate their own lives by the venture of faith to God's self-communication in this created vessel, Dostoevsky's work becomes what it is: human action open to God's action, an icon of divine glory.

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essential, therefore, that we seek out and consider elements which might provide some clue to the overall structure of the two novels." See "Alyosha Karamazov and the Hagiographic Hero," in *Dostoevsky (New Perspectives)*, ed. Robert L. Jackson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1984), 206. This interpretation leads Vetlovskaya to predict that in the second novel, the hagiographic path of Alyosha's redemption would figure much more unequivocally (226). Victor Terras' interest in art and fiction leads him to the more interesting conclusion that whatever Dostoevsky's intentions, this 'second novel' is "an unknown and unknowable entity... a fiction yet to be created and in effect as indeterminate as life itself." See "The Art of Fiction," in *Dostoevsky (New Perspectives)*, ed. Robert L. Jackson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1984), 203. In the end, whether or not a sequel was planned seems not of decisive significance to me. Rowan Williams is right to note the explicitly unfinished and open-ended character of the conclusion to *Crime and Punishment*, and argue that "the same uncertainty holds, in a far more obvious way, for Alyosha Karamazov - and to some degree this would have been so even if Dostoevsky had lived to complete a future stage of the narrative." Williams, *Dostoevsky*, 114. Whatever Dostoevsky's future intentions, his narrator's comments beg for additional levels of interpretation, especially in the context of the novel's incarnational and iconographic poetics.

CHAPTER THREE

LOVE FORMS A HEART: KIERKEGAARD, DOSTOEVSKY AND THE INDIRECT ICON

I
Amidst the Temporal: Love's Iconic Form

I suggested at the outset of the first chapter that the disparity between Kierkegaard and Evdokimov on the question of erotic love is best addressed in terms of differences in attitude towards the icon. For Evdokimov, Kierkegaard's grim austerity neglects the joyous inbreaking of iconic illumination made possible through the divine image in humanity as affirmed in the Incarnation. This bridging of the human and the divine through Christ makes true communion possible in God, transforming human love into a prophetic figure of redemptive harmony. Kierkegaard's primary concern here would be with the directness of this iconographic movement, inspiring as it does an infinite passion by virtue of the image's luminous splendor. Such splendor, for Kierkegaard, is known to us only through the lowliness of the abased one, effecting a 'halt' before the contradiction of the God-man that pre-empts direct access to faith's love. Any attempt to bypass this obstacle leads not to faith but to admiration, and so not to Christian love but to pagan self-love. Thus Kierkegaard distinguishes between a love of erotic attraction that turns back to itself by the middle term of admiration, and the true love of neighbor that imitates in self-denial the God who is ever love's rightful middle term.

My argument, however, is that attending to Kierkegaard's conceptions of love and faith need not entail a wholescale dismissal of the icon. Part of my interest is thus in

exploring the possibility of a theological re-thinking of the icon beyond Evdokimov that might create a space for Kierkegaard within iconographic discourse. This is where I have suggested that Dostoevsky makes a helpful conversation partner. Enlivened by the same world of Orthodox sensibility as Evdokimov, his fiction manifests an incarnational (and so iconographic) structure with profound connections to Kierkegaard's thought. The communication of faith for Dostoevsky proceeds as indirectly as for Kierkegaard, confronting each reader anew with the broken image of Christ in the world and inviting a relation in faith that passes through the possibility of offense. Kierkegaard's emphasis on the abasement of Christ in the incognito finds expression in the dialogical openness of Dostoevsky's fiction, as it offers itself in vulnerability to free and ongoing response. What Dostoevsky offers, as I have suggested, is something like an indirect iconographic encounter that trades in a very Kierkegaardian account of the movement of faith.

This final chapter, then, returns to the theme of love in order to explore further what such an icon might mean for both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky. In the case of the former, a major question remains concerning the status of created particularity. As Evdokimov complains, Kierkegaard's repudiation of preferential love seems to lead to a position of fatal abstraction from earthly reality. If Christian neighbor-love is set so radically against the messy world of human loving and desiring amidst the concrete particularities of created life, perhaps the charge of a dualized docetism is not so far off after all. We suddenly find ourselves in the caricatured world of Kierkegaard the irrational theorist of the absurd, of the 'leap' into a faith totally disconnected from the 'real

world' below which calls for a radically subjective act of groundless choice.[1] This is a world into which Dostoevsky has been dragged at times as well, often by offended critics of his 'saintly' characters.[2] Though I will not be concerned here to engage these sorts of readings directly, I do think that this discussion of the icon goes some way towards reconceptualizing the work of both Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard in other directions. Created form may indeed bear iconographic potential in ways that resist flight into some realm of pure spirit, but not directly such that the partiality of its representation is effaced. Only in confronting the offense of this incompleteness, in fact, the paradoxical abasement of the Son in the form of a servant, is it possible to relate oneself in faith to such earthly reality as image of the eternal.

Love and Its Fruits

If this particular reading of iconographic movement characterizes the pattern of faith for Kierkegaard, it also structures the reflections he offers in *Works of Love*. I will point us first to the opening discourse of this text, "Love's Hidden Life and its Recognizability by its Fruits" (*WL*, 5-16). The interplay here between hiddenness and recognizability is key to the sort of iconographic sensibility I am interested in. That it is legitimate to speak of something like iconographic mediation in this context at all is affirmed early on as Kierkegaard reflects on the problem of self-deception: "What is it, namely," he asks, "that connects the temporal and eternity, what else but love, which for that very reason is before everything and remains after everything is gone" (*WL*, 6).

1 For a theological re-reading of Kierkegaard that helpfully identifies current scholarship resisting the disengaged irrationalist caricature in its various forms, see David Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

2 See the discussions above in notes 32 and 46 of chapter two.

From the outset, Kierkegaard's concern is with the relation between the human and the divine, and the extent to which the chasm between them might be bridged. As we are reminded in the prayer that prefaces these discourses, however, this love that so connects temporality with the eternal is none other than God; "you who are love," and the "source of all love in heaven and on earth" (*WL*, 3). Kierkegaard's trinitarian invocation of this God emphasizes in each person the movement by which love empties itself in crossing this threshold. He addresses himself to the God of love, "who spared nothing but in love gave everything," to the Savior and Redeemer, "who gave yourself in order to save all" and to the Spirit of love, "who take[s] nothing of your own but remind[s] us of that love sacrifice."

Because of this divine self-giving by which the temporal and the eternal are connected, love can be known in temporality by its fruits.[3] And the fruit which identifies the love that Christianity speaks of is characterized by this, "that it has within itself eternity's truth" (*WL*, 8). What joy this entails for Kierkegaard, such a blessing of "exuberant life" where eternity's truth is somehow made temporally visible by fruits that simply cannot be concealed (*WL*, 11). Yet the flip-side of love's recognizability in its fruits is an essential hiddenness that reveals itself *only* in its fruits as external manifestations in the form of something else. Love has its source, claims Kierkegaard, in a person's innermost being, an elusive and secret origin which itself has its source ever more deeply and unfathomably in God's love (*WL*, 9). The paths of this love cannot be traced directly back to their secret origin, which withholds the joy of its blessedness from

3 An image Kierkegaard takes from Matthew 7:16.

those who brazenly turn to grasp it. "Just as the quiet lake invites you to contemplate it but by the reflected image of darkness prevents you from seeing through it, so also the mysterious origin of love in God's love prevents you from seeing its ground" (*WL*, 10).

Kierkegaard thus offers in the fruits of love a helpfully ambiguous account of eternity amidst the temporal, one in which the visible markers of eternity direct attention to its ultimate unfathomability in a hiddenness too deep to penetrate. Yet the ambiguity of love's fruit goes further still. As visible as this fruit may be, its recognizability is neither immediate nor amenable to temporal calculation. "In other words," Kierkegaard claims, "just as love itself is invisible and therefore we have to believe in it, so also is it not unconditionally and directly to be known by any particular expression of it" (*WL*, 13). In fact, there is not one single work which we can unequivocally claim to demonstrate love in every instance. More important than the particular work is the spirit in which it is done - a question not of *what* one does, but of *how* one does it. Good works done in an unloving or self-loving way cease to be works of love at all. On the other hand, this also means that love can be recognized in fruits that vary widely. Any objective circumstance could potentially be invested with eternity's truth and become the visible fruit of love's work. Kierkegaard, it seems, is far from denigrating the value of created particularity.[4]

Recognizing love by its fruits, as a result, is not a straightforward process. It

4 Michael Plekon makes a similar observation in an essay entitled "Kierkegaard the Theologian: The Roots of His Theology in *Works of Love*," in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*, ed. George Connell and C. Stephen Evans (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992). "Contrary to so much of his caricature" Plekon claims, "Kierkegaard is not anti-human, nor at all opposed to creation, to this world" (11). Plekon tries to emphasize the continuity of Kierkegaard's thought with the theological tradition of the church by highlighting the oft-neglected 'affirmative' elements of his theology, particularly the trinitarian, incarnational and christological thrust of his work. This also leads him to identify an iconic element to the relationship between God and the human person, particularly present in *Works of Love*.

defies the collection of lists or examples that might hasten one's initiation into love's secrets. As Kierkegaard claims at the close of this section, "like is known only by like; only someone who abides in love can know love, and in the same way his love is to be known" (*WL*, 16). For this reason Kierkegaard is at pains to emphasize that love not only proceeds from the heart, but actually *forms* the heart (*WL*, 12). Only one whose heart has been formed by love will be able to discern the 'how' that makes of a work love's fruit. Only one whose heart has been formed by love will be able to relate herself to her own works in love such that they might *become* love's fruit. The ambiguity of love's fruits, this hiddenness that accompanies love's recognizability, occasions the problem of self-deception with which Kierkegaard begins. Such deception is offended at the impossibility of immediate assurance of love, and works to protect itself from love's deceptive uncertainty by refusing to be taken in (*WL*, 5). In doing so, however, it deceives itself by refusing to believe what is, in fact, true. Such deception is all the more dangerous in presuming itself secure from all deceit; what is required instead is a truthful openness to love's uncertainty by which the heart itself might be formed in love.

To speak of this in terms of iconographic movement again, the fruits of love function as images of eternity's truth, making visible that which connects temporality with the eternal. As images, however, love's fruits become recognizable in an essential distance from the unfathomable hiddenness of love itself. In other words, their visibility is manifest through a relation in faith to that which finally remains hidden from temporal assurances. This is the occasion for offense that Kierkegaard insists must be confronted in the movement of faith; the moment at which the image is beheld in its temporal

opacity, as in the reflected darkness of the quiet lake. The blessedness of not being offended, of recognizing the image in faith as the fruit of love, requires of the beholder a heart being formed by the same love to which Kierkegaard entrusts his reflections, the God of love whose kenotic self-emptying makes of all temporal particularity a possible icon of the eternal.

II
Eternity's 'Proof': Beyond Reciprocity

A similar relationship prevails for Dostoevsky between love and the iconic potential of material reality. In the previous chapter, my interest in Dostoevsky centred on the iconographic structure of his novelistic communication. I tried to suggest that the 'image' he offers for contemplation proceeds not by some final and irrefutable encounter with Christ's exalted sovereignty, but in the ambiguity of ongoing dialogue to which it vulnerably opens itself. Dostoevsky's response to the rebellion of Ivan and his Inquisitor, as a result, is not an argument but a story; an account of lives being lived, and of ongoing transformations anticipated, begun, and sometimes aborted. In the following sections we turn our attention to some of these lives, particularly in their struggles with relations of love. Here, as for Kierkegaard, the love by which the earth is connected to 'other worlds' is experienced by those whose hearts are being formed by love towards the self-emptying of love itself in the incarnate God. We begin by returning once more to the teachings of the elder Zosima.

Active Love

Early in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the troubled family of Fyodor Pavlovich gathers at the monastery to meet with the elder in the interest of mediating a dispute between the eldest son Dmitri and his father. While waiting for the company to assemble, however, Zosima is visited by the young widow Khokhlakov who confesses to be suffering from lack of faith. Her doubts concern the immortality of her soul and life after death. Her mechanical childhood faith has passed, and now she lives in fear that death may be the final end. "What, what will give me back my faith," she asks, "how can it be proved?" (*BK*, 56). The elder's response is among the novel's first articulations of Dostoevsky's theological vision. He suggests the experience of 'active love', a tireless pursuit of selfless service to one's neighbors. Such a life would not constitute a 'proof' of anything, but Zosima affirms that through it one can become convinced.

On the one hand, this is a profoundly iconographic account of coming to faith. One comes to believe by encounter with earthly creation, experiencing eternity through the finite body of another. And yet, this movement towards faith is anything but direct. Unlike the widow's idealized dreams of undertaking such service, real active love receives no immediate vindication. It is rather "labour and perseverance" (*BK,* 58), immediately negated if done in pursuit of praise. As for Kierkegaard, such a return of love to oneself by the middle term of admiration is a constant danger that must continually be negotiated. Madame Khokhlakov confesses her need for this kind of repayment in praise, acknowledging her breaking point in the sting of ingratitude towards her 'loving' efforts (*BK*, 57). Even such confessions, however, as Zosima cautions, can be

pulled back into this movement: "if you spoke with me so sincerely just now in order to be praised, as I have praised you," he reminds her, "then of course you will get nowhere with your efforts at active love" (*BK*, 57). Here again, the issue is one of self-deception. Zosima counsels Khokhlakov above all to avoid the lie, especially to herself. This kind of self-deception would lock her into a cycle of self-love in the pious presumption of her humble contrition.[5]

Madame Khokhlakov's desire for immediate repayment in praise is related to the movement from abstraction to engagement with the concrete particularities of earthly reality. It is one thing to love humanity in general, but quite another to love individual people. Proximity and duration confront one's love with the unglamorous banality of its particular objects. Zosima relays an anecdote concerning a doctor whose feelings of great love for humanity run aground at just this point: "In twenty-four hours I can begin to hate even the best of men," the doctor laments, "one because he takes too long eating his dinner, another because he has a cold and keeps blowing his nose" (*BK*, 57). Love in dreams is quick and rewarding, a noble sacrifice to be watched and praised. Real active love, however, trades in the messiness of earthly particularity that offends sentiments of human justice and nobility.

So far from proof of immortality is this experience of active love, that it will eventually bring one face to face with the horror of seeming to have moved only farther

5 Though this is a slightly different form of self-deception from that which Kierkegaard discusses at the outset of "Love's Hiddenness," it figures heavily elsewhere in *Works of Love* - particularly in his critique of complacent habit in Christendom. See especially his reading of the parable of the sons and the vineyard from Matthew 21: at least the son who says 'no' to his father does not labour under the illusion of doing the father's bidding (*WL*, 92).

from the final goal of assurance. The only cure for doubt, claims Zosima, passes through despair and offense at the unattractive form of the divine image. Only here, where the cure seems worse than the sickness, can faith be ventured. "At that very moment," predicts Zosima, "you will suddenly reach your goal and will clearly behold over you the wonder-working power of the Lord, who all the while has been loving you, and all the while has been mysteriously guiding you" (*BK*, 58). The movement of faith does pass through the concrete particularity of created being, even when its form does not provide an immediately compelling witness to eternal life. In fact, Zosima is clear that such particularity only facilitates this movement when one is confronted by its distance from eternity. In the end, it is not the immediate satisfactions of active love that might convince one of eternal life, but the formation of a heart by love which can finally relate itself in faith to eternity's truth as revealed in the earthly.

Fyodor Pavlovich

Ironically, the ingratitude Madame Khokhlakov fears from the would-be objects of her love is given its most profound manifestation by Dostoevsky in a character who is sitting in the next room while she speaks. The Karamazov father, Fyodor Pavlovich, is a depraved sensualist, egotistical and consummately manipulative. Given to obsessions with money and women, he is an insufferable human being whose own self-loathing manifests itself in abuse of his neighbors. As such, he represents a profound occasion for offense at the elder's Christian vision. In Fyodor, the reality of loving the particular earthly individual comes to a head. How is one not to be offended by his irreverent buffoonery and greedy corruption? If, as Kierkegaard claims, love builds up by

presupposing love in the other (*WL*, 216-217), how could one possibly presuppose love in a man like Fyodor?

The family's audience with the elder offers an early example of the old Karamazov's antics, as well as an occasion for Zosima to demonstrate how his vision of love might be brought to bear on relations with such a person. Fyodor bursts into the meeting in full force, playing off of his prideful companion Miusov to disturb and scandalize the assembled company. He adopts the role of buffoon for himself, fabricating a tragic pathos that delights in expounding on its own self-destructive tendencies, as played out in a series of inappropriate jokes and anecdotes. In the sacred space of the elder's cell, this sort of irreverence was simply unheard of, causing great distress amidst the attendant monks. When Zosima finally speaks, he diffuses the situation with a renewed offer of hospitality: "'I earnestly beg you, too, not to worry and not to be uncomfortable,' the elder said to [Fyodor] imposingly. 'Be at ease, and feel completely at home.'" But the elder also pinpoints with remarkable accuracy the root of Fyodor's unrestrained behavior. "And above all do not be ashamed of yourself," he continues, "for that is the cause of everything" (*BK*, 43). Just like Madame Khokhlakov, Fyodor makes an exaggerated display of conviction by the elder's words: "it's as if you pierced me right through and read inside me," he exclaims (*BK*, 43). Instead of quieting himself in humility before the truth, however, Fyodor continues to draw attention to himself, loudly reflecting on his own insecurities and throwing himself on his knees before the elder.

Zosima sees through these posturings as well,[6] counseling Fyodor to avoid such "verbal incontinence," including the same self-deceptive lies against which he warns the widow.[7]

The important point to notice is that Zosima refuses to take offense at the scandal that is Fyodor Karamazov,[8] even as the old debaucher unrepentantly profanes a holy site others only enter "with the deepest reverence" (*BK*, 42). He continues to offer hospitality to his guests, caring for their spiritual maladies with patience and grace. It is this kind of 'active love', as manifested in the relation to Fyodor with which he is currently engaged, that Zosima discusses with Madame Khokhlakov on the porch of the hermitage. The ingratitude she fears, the difficulty of loving the particular other, warts and all, is exactly what Zosima addresses in tending to the scandalous behaviour of those inside who have requested his aid. Instead of taking offense at Fyodor's antics, the elder is able to relate himself in faith to the image of eternity's truth within his guests, in spite of their irreverence At the height of the shouting match that ensues in his cell, Zosima interrupts the hostilities with a gesture that surprises everyone. Rising and stepping forward, the dying monk carefully lowers himself to his knees and bows deeply – first to Dmitri, but then to the whole company as well. "'Forgive me! Forgive me, all of you!' he said, bowing on all sides to his guests" (*BK*, 75). The elder humbles himself before this unsightly part of God's creation, passing beyond the offense that would keep them from

6 In the literal as well as metaphorical sense, as he entreats Fyodor: "Do get up from your knees and sit down, I beg you, these posturings are false, too..." (*BK*, 44).

7 Even here, however, Fyodor continues to prattle on in response, first confessing to a life of lying and then dissembling again in order to further embarrass Miusov.

8 As the elder takes leave of the Karamazov assembly to attend to other visitors, we are told that "Alyosha was breathless, he was glad to get away, but he was also glad that the elder was cheerful and not offended" (*BK*, 45).

iconically illuminating God's presence in the world.

This is not to say that the elder avoids critical words or difficult truths, however. He wastes no time in cutting to the heart of Fyodor's ailment, confronting him with his own self-deception and inability to love. Zosima draws a connection between the lies Fyodor tells himself and the perverse pleasure he gains from taking and exaggerating offense (*BK,* 44). Both the lies and the offense are on display in the Karamazov father as he renews his quarrel with Dmitri once the eldest son arrives at the meeting. Fyodor begins with the issue of inheritance money on which their dispute ostensibly turns, but he quickly comes to insult Mitya's character, landing on his relationship to Grushenka as the deeper site of their rivalry. Having provoked his son's ire and venom, Fyodor hides behind a facade of wounded love, feigning offense at Mitya's lack of respect for his poor parent.[9]

Eventually, however, Fyodor's voracious appetite for offense turns from his son to the attendant monks in the elder's cell. While trying to defend the honour of his beloved Grushenka (and insodoing, ironically, finding common ground with his embattled son), he accuses the monks of an impious works-righteousness. "You are saving your souls here on cabbage and you think you're righteous!" he says. "You eat gudgeons, one gudgeon a day, and you think you can buy God with gudgeons!" (*BK*, 74). This accusation, however, is exactly what Zosima interrupts with his penitential bow to his

9 We are told in the middle of Fyodor's tirade that: "Old liars who have been play-acting all their lives have moments when they get so carried away by their posing that they indeed tremble and weep from excitement, even though at that same moment (or just a second later) they might whisper to themselves: 'You're lying, you shameless old man, you're acting even now, despite all your 'holy' wrath and 'holy' moment of wrath'" (*BK*, 73).

quarrelsome guests. The important point here is that Fyodor's deceitful love of offense keeps him from seeing in the monastic brothers the image of eternity's truth before which Zosima bows in the form of the Karamazovs. As saintly a figure as the elder may be, he will not mediate a direct encounter with truth for one like Fyodor whose heart jumps at the occasion for offense.[10] Conversely, however, even such an offensive character as Fyodor can mediate this encounter indirectly for Zosima, whose heart has been formed by love to move penitentially through the offense of love's particular objects.

Fathers and Sons

On the one hand, Alyosha's relationship to Fyodor offers an example of this kind of love that does not take offense but continues in love for one who remains the father. He has experienced his father's debauchery and wild-living, and though he does not approve he continues to maintain loving relations with him.[11] After the debacle at the monastery, for instance, Alyosha returns along with Ivan to their father's house for dinner. In the middle of a drunken conversation repudiating the existence of God, Fyodor looks up and notices his youngest son. "Wait, wait, wait, my dear," he says, "one more little glass. I offended Alyosha. You're not angry with me, Alexei? My dear Alexeichik, my Alexeichik?" "No, I am not angry," Alyosha responds. "I know your thoughts. Your heart is better than your head" (*BK*, 134). Alyosha continues to presuppose some love in

10 Even Zosima's perplexing gesture of deference to Mitya and the rest of the family, which is felt so deeply by some, fails to turn Fyodor from his old habits. He makes as if to refuse an invitation of lunch with the Father Superior on account of shame at his behaviour, but then cannot resist showing up late and indulging in a final scandalous appearance.

11 "Coming to his father in his twentieth year, precisely into that den of iniquity, he, chaste and pure, would simply retire quietly when it was unbearable to watch, yet without the least expression of contempt or condemnation of anyone at all" (*BK*, 19).

his father, refusing to relinquish him as one permanently lost.

For Kierkegaard, this presupposition of love is the means by which works of love build up love in another. Unable to implant love in his father, as only the Creator can do, Alyosha's available option is "to control himself in order continually to presuppose love. In this way he draws out the good, he loves forth love, he builds up" (*WL*, 217). Remarkably, Alyosha's quiet presupposition of love in his father does seem to have borne some fruits in the up-building of Fyodor's love.[12] We are told that within a short time of Alyosha's return to his father's town, Fyodor was "hugging and kissing him terribly often, with drunken tears and tipsy sentimentality, true, but apparently having come to love him sincerely and deeply, more than such a man had, of course, ever managed to love anyone else (*BK*, 19). Alyosha's arrival, moreover, "seemed to affect [Fyodor] even on the moral side, as if something woke up in this untimely old man, something that had long been stifled in his soul" (*BK*, 22). In particular, Alyosha's devotion inspires him to send a thousand roubles to the monastery in order to have services said for his first wife, the memory of whom the old man had long since tried to banish (*BK*, 23).

Yet the burden of Dostoevsky's vision with respect to love for undeserving fathers does not lie with Alyosha alone. The thrust of the story, in fact, draws us to the experience of another brother - the very one whose feud with his father became so heated in the elder's cell. In the two days following this confrontation, the noose of Mitya's

12 Alyosha's presupposition of love in his father is of a piece with his assumptions more generally about the people he encounters, in a sense very much in line with Kierkegaard's description of the task: "Alyosha was sure that no one in the whole world would ever want to offend him, and not only would not want to but even would not be able to. For him this was an axiom, it was given once and for all, without argument, and in that sense he went ahead without any hesitation" (*BK*, 101).

desperation tightens further, and relations between he and Fyodor collapse entirely. Both father and son wait obsessively for a move from their mutually beloved Grushenka, which would finally indicate her choice of one of them or the other. For Mitya, the situation is further compounded by the financial pressure of a debt to his former fiancé coupled with the need for capital in order to run away with Grushenka once she declared herself his. The required sum, however, was the object of his dispute with Fyodor over inheritance money, and to make matters worse, this same sum was being offered by the old man to Grushenka as incentive to choosing him. In their final encounter, an enraged Mitya had burst into Fyodor's house in pursuit of Grushenka, severely beating his father in the process. When Fyodor is found murdered a short time later, few are surprised that all the evidence seems to point to his eldest son.

As convinced as the locals are of Mitya's guilt, however, many also clamour for his acquittal; particularly the society ladies enamoured of the 'new ideas' and modern progressive spirit.[13] Nowhere is offense at the requirement of undeserved love more starkly apparent than in Dostoevsky's account of this popular sentiment surrounding Mitya's trial. The defense attorney, a famed lawyer from the capital named Fetyukovich, masterfully plays to this sense of enlightened rational decency. Though he builds a compelling case by casting doubt on each bit of the prosecution's evidence, the climax of his defense presumes Mitya's guilt and works to absolve him of blame for his apparent actions. Half-way through Fetyukovich's concluding speech, his tone changes and everyone in attendance has the sense that "what he would say now was the most

13 See for instance *BK*, 657.

important of all" (*BK*,741). It is surely ridiculous to punish Mitya for parricide, Fetyukovich begins, because no father has in fact been killed. Fyodor Pavlovich was by no means a true father, bestowing none of the love or favours that fatherhood demands (*BK*, 742). "Love for a father that is not justified by the father is an absurdity, an impossibility," claims Fetyukovich (744). This is a situation that calls for enlightened sensibilities, he says. Fatherhood ought not to be decided by such mystical definitions as might be able to include a parent like Fyodor Karamazov. Instead, he suggests, "let the son stand before his father and ask him reasonably: 'Father, tell me, why should I love you? Father, prove to me that I should love you'" (*BK*, 745). If the father can offer such proof, then he is in fact a father, and the structures of normal family life can legitimately be expected to obtain. If he cannot, however, then the son is free of any such obligations.[14] Such a son cannot truly be held accountable for his actions, and ought to be given the benefit of whatever rehabilitation might be possible. The prosecutor, for his part, assumes nothing fundamentally different about the demands of filial piety. He simply arrives at the obverse conclusion that even in such cases, crimes must be punished and social structures protected for the good of society at large.

How markedly different is the summons to active love that Zosima leaves with Madame Khokhlakov. Though couched in platitudes of social compassion, Fetyukovich and his many supporters in the courtroom can only say with the devious Rakitin that everyone loves for some reason (*BK*, 353). The notion that one ought to love a father

14 Early in the novel, Mitya reflects on his relationship to his father in a similar way. Hoping to receive from Fyodor the all-important three thousand roubles that would save him from ruin, Mitya shouts to Alyosha: "For the last time I give him a chance to be my father. Tell him that God himself sends him this chance" (*BK*, 120).

beyond what he ostensibly deserves is a scandal and an offense to such 'enlightened sensibilities'. Fyodor Karamazov is the stumbling block, the obstacle that guards the approach to the essentially Christian, as Kierkegaard has it. No less obstinate and miserly for bearing the divine image, he remains the father, remains the neighbor "whom you shall love."

Though it is not clear how exactly Mitya would relate himself to the memory of his father in particular by the time of his trial, it is obvious that the defense strategy is fundamentally at odds with the 'new man' that arises in him following the fateful night of Fyodor's murder. At the most basic level, Fetyukovich is wrong in assuming that Mitya did, in fact, kill his father.[15] The accused continues to maintain throughout the trial that he is not guilty of his father's blood. Yet Mitya does not avoid the assumption of guilt itself. Unlike the defense attorney's vision of forensically determined relational obligation, Mitya wants to take real responsibility for his life and its consequences. "'I plead guilty to drunkenness and depravity', he exclaimed, again in some unexpected, almost frenzied voice, 'to idleness and debauchery...'" (*BK*, 661).[16] This 'new man', however is not characterized only by a renewed sense of responsibility for his own life. In a conversation with Alyosha before the trial, Mitya employs a formulation very similar to that of the elder Zosima, associating the 'new man' inside of him with the recognition that "everyone is guilty for everyone else." Whether in freedom or hard labour, he realizes, there remains the call to life and to love. Regardless of his own innocence in his

15 Before his trial, Mitya laments that his lawyer "doesn't believe a pennyworth of what I say. He thinks I killed him, can you imagine?" (*BK*, 593).

16 See also Mitya's final statement (*BK*, 750).

father's death, Mitya yearns to take responsibility for all, lovingly building up in love until those who suffer are resurrected into new life (*BK*, 591).

Mitya's ongoing renewal and transformation is a movement towards the kind of active love that Zosima demonstrates, confronting through his trials the scandal of an undeserving father who yet remains the father before him. This is why Rowan Williams claims that Mitya is the most profoundly iconic figure in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Zosima's bow to his "great future suffering" (*BK*, 285) offers veneration to an image that will be broken in its awareness of evil, yet will nonetheless remain answerable to the deeper reality it so partially reveals.[17] The posture of penitence in love before the particular other thus marks the appropriation of iconic significance, in addition to indicating the brokenness of the settings by which iconic presence is revealed. Mitya's journey towards the 'new man' that arises in him is thus difficult, and by no means direct. It involves a wounding of pride and a painful confrontation with the offense of worldly injustice. Of particular importance for our purposes, however, Mitya's journey also passes through the love of a particular other in erotic attachment; the birth of the 'new man' is bound up with a new kind of love between Mitya and Grushenka. In the following section, we look more closely at Mitya's journey itself, particularly during the crucial night of Fyodor's murder. In the process, we will explore the extent to which Dostoevsky might be willing to account for love of a particular beloved in terms of iconic movement. First, however, we return once more to *Works of Love*, and to Kierkegaard's own engagement with the particular beloved.

17 Williams, *Dostoevsky*, 201.

III
Truth and Beauty: Loving the Beloved

Preference and Particularity

If, as I have suggested, Kierkegaard is misread in criticisms of his supposed tendency towards a spiritualizing abstraction from created particularity, it will be necessary to return to his distinction between Christian love of neighbor and pagan, erotic, preferential love. It is exactly the repudiation of preferential love, it seems, that negates the earthly particularities by which we are drawn to a body, and so to that body's loving creator. What are we left with in love of neighbor but a disembodied love for all with no real purchase on anyone in particular? Does this kind of love not break the bond between heaven and earth, and with it the work of Christ as God incarnate? On Kierkegaard's reading of the Incarnation, however, the hiddenness of Christ's incognito establishes that bond indirectly, through a scandalous contradiction that belies any direct evocation of eternity. There remains a distance between love and love's fruits, in other words, one that cannot be navigated with reference to the appearance of the fruit alone. Love also forms the heart to see love in its fruits, a heart that does not take offense at the form of contradiction, but relates itself in faith to love's hidden depths.

The problem with preferential love is that it elides this distance between appearance and essence, assimilating that which attracts to the absolute. This is a problem because Christ in abasement is not God in appearance. Kierkegaard's concern with such love, in other words, is not that it has been sullied by the earthly, but that it will pass over the presence of God in the form of the lowly servant. The point, in fact, is to

uphold the value of all created particularity by unhooking its iconic investment from its immediate capacity to attract or compel. Not only does preferential love return to its source in self-love, loving only that in the other which is like oneself, but it remains enslaved to the externality of its object. When its beloved changes, perhaps losing those charms that first drew the lover to her, preferential love does not have the fortitude of independence to continue loving. This is why Kierkegaard advocates for a love secured from change in the ultimate eternal change whereby it becomes a duty (*WL*, 32). Such Christian love as the commandment requires[18] is thereby liberated from dependence on any change in its object, free to love even when the other no longer loves in return.

If the command safeguards the earthly in the eternal change from preference to duty, it also reveals the failure of preference to relate itself to eternity through its love at all. Kierkegaard claims that spontaneous love is always in a state of despair.[19] This despair may be revealed only when such love encounters loss or misfortune, but these moments only demonstrate that it has already been in despair all along, even in its happiness. This is because despair is related not to the loss of the beloved, but to the lack of the eternal; it results from the attempt to relate oneself with infinite passion to a particular something. For Kierkegaard, then, preferential love despairs because it cannot make that iconographic movement from the temporal to the eternal. It manifests a misrelation whereby the lover's infinite passion is caught up in its beloved, never attaining through love a relation to eternity. The only security against despair is thus to

18 Kierkegaard is reflecting on Matthew 22:39, where Jesus reiterates the law's commandment: "You shall love the neighbor as yourself."

19 See discussion in *WL*, 40-42.

"undergo the change of eternity through duty's *shall*" (*WL*, 40). Only in the command to love the neighbor does the 'particular something' become the occasion for a relation in love to that hidden, eternal source.

For Kierkegaard, as a result, the pagan love of preference is not co-extensive with love of the particular. He is clear that giving up preferential love does not mean ceasing to love the beloved. "If in order to love the neighbor you would have to begin by giving up loving those for whom you have preference, the word 'neighbor' would be the greatest deception ever contrived. Moreover, it would even be a contradiction, since inasmuch as the neighbor is all people surely no one can be excluded..." (*WL*, 61). To give up loving the beloved would be to fall back into the structure of preference; one cannot love the neighbor in contrast to anyone else. Instead, love for the neighbor blindly loves every human being as the lover loves the beloved (*WL*, 69). Yet this blindness does not function by doing away with all particular distinctives. Christianity certainly sees this diversity. "With the calmness of eternity it surveys equably all the dissimilarities of earthly life," Kierkegaard says, "but does not divisively take sides with any single one" (*WL*, 70). Love of neighbour does not simply render all people the same, but it does work to love all dissimilarity equally.

This indifference to worldly differences is not a flight from concrete particularity, but an expression of love's freedom from slavery to externality. Unlike erotic love and friendship, the quality of neighbor love is defined by love itself, and not by its object (*WL*, 66). That is to say, Christian love takes God as its middle term, instead of the preference that turns back in admiration to love of self (*WL*, 58). "Only by loving God

above all else," claims Kierkegaard, "can one love the neighbor in the other human being" (*WL*, 58). The priority of loving God, by which God becomes the third party in any loving relationship, is the same change of infinity by which love is made a duty. The heart that loves purely is thus first and foremost a heart bound without limit to God. Only after such infinite boundedness, Kierkegaard claims, can talk about freedom in love begin (*WL*, 149). Far from encouraging an otherworldly disregard for the created order, the God-relation eternally secures love for the particular from the shifting sands of earthly appearance.

Elsewhere Kierkegaard uses the language of conscience to name the priority of God in every relationship.[20] The movement of conscience expresses the infinite change of Christianity; not in terms of external conditions, but in terms of an inwardness that changes everything while outwardly leaving things basically the same (*WL*, 138). The inwardness of conscience resists investing eternal significance unconditionally in any particular earthly forms, just as there are no such forms that can unconditionally be recognized as love's fruits. Conscience is thus the 'how' by which a given action can become the fruit of love, engaging as it does the God-relation which eludes calculating attempts at external identification. Because Christ's kingdom is not of this world, Kierkegaard suggests, "it wants to be present everywhere but not to be seized" (*WL*, 138). Attempts at seizure would take particular externalities to allow an unconditional access to the essence, employing far too direct a relationship between the image and that which it represents. This, however, is the pathology of preferential love. It grasps at the form of

20 See "Love is a Matter of Conscience" (*WL*, 135-153).

the particular beloved, investing an infinite passion in what can only be an occasion. If love is made a matter of conscience, however, then the God-relation becomes the middle term in love and all such objectification of the beloved's particularity is discarded.

What preference fails to see is that in refusing to be seized, Christ's kingdom wishes to be everywhere present. Christianity, Kierkegaard says, wants to "permeate everything with the relationship of conscience" (*WL*, 135). When love is eternally secured in its bonds to God, it is freed to love each and every particular regardless of its temporal condition. In becoming a matter of conscience, love sees the neighbor in each individual, including the enemy as much as the beloved. The key for Kierkegaard is not to conflate these particularities, but to locate them as subsets of a prior identity as human beings, and so neighbors. "Your wife must first and foremost be to you the neighbor; that she is your wife is then a more precise specification of your particular relationship to each other" (*WL*, 141). In other words, even marital love becomes a matter of conscience. Thus, as Kierkegaard notes, it is not so much that Christianity is indifferent to everything in a worldly way but that it is concerned with everything solely in a spiritual way (*WL*, 144). Instead of being indifferent to the beloved or the friend, the Christian loves each spiritually as the neighbor, and so all the more securely for relinquishing divisive attachments to their created dissimilarity.

Who, then, are we to love in particular, as subsets of the neighbor, if not those whose externality conforms to that which we ourselves find lovable? If neighbor love does not abolish the particular differences that distinguish one person from another, neither does it assume that all possible neighbors will remain in equidistant abstraction

from the loving self. We have a duty, in fact, to find people in the world of actuality whom we can love in particular. For Kierkegaard, this task is in one sense an easy one: it is not a matter of endlessly searching for a lovable object, but of finding the once given or chosen object lovable, no matter how he may have changed (*WL*, 159). This is a claim we have encountered already. It is only to repeat that the quality of love ought to be determined according to love itself, and not according to the character of its object.[21] The one fortunate enough to find such a lovable object actually cheats himself out of love by having found someone towards whom he can direct his own love of self. He easily slips into a fantasy-world of his own creation, substituting for a real beloved an imaginary idea of how that person should be (*WL*, 164). Once again, the problem for Kierkegaard comes down to a matter of treating love in terms of calculation and objectification. To love the one you see is to engage her whole-heartedly as the beloved, being sure not to reserve a space outside of love for critique and evaluation.

Yet Kierkegaard is clear that this is not simply to baptize the flaws or defects of the beloved. The earnestness of loving the one you see finds the other lovable in their weakness, but also works with the beloved to overcome her imperfections (*WL*, 164).[22]

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21 "It is a sad but altogether too common inversion to go on talking continually about how the object of love must be so it can be loveworthy, instead of talking about how love must be so it can be love" (*WL*, 159).

22 Dostoevsky dramatizes this claim in Alyosha Karamazov, for whom the movement of faith's love goes through the wild and capricious girl Lise. His relationship with her is a profound exposition of what Kierkegaard means in speaking of the duty to love the people we see. Alyosha's spiritual calling to monasticism in the world is not a movement away from earthly engagement. It is, however, a commitment to love perfectly as opposed to loving the perfect. Lise presents herself to Alyosha in a letter of love, and he quickly accepts to the depths of his being in spite of her instabilities. She is crippled, but her unsteady legs only figure a more profound sickness of the soul. Lise bears a perverse desire for torment and disorder, rooted most basically in her deep sense of self-loathing. She toys with Alyosha, revoking her offer of marriage both out of spite and in order to protect him from her own perceived wickedness.

In other words, love does not require the beloved to change, but in love helps him to become something else. For Kierkegaard, this is finally to return to the theme that God *is* true love, as seen especially in his incarnational self-emptying. "We human beings want to look upward in order to look for the object of perfection," he concludes, "but in Christ perfection looked down to earth and loved the person it saw" (*WL*, 174). To love the one you see is to love as Christ loved, seeing something lovable in each face regardless of its perfections or imperfections. Kierkegaard tells the story of two artists, one who travels the world in vain searching for a person without defect who might be worth painting, and the other who has stayed at home and yet finds no shortage of beautiful subjects to paint. Says this second artist, "I have not found one single face to be so insignificant or so faulted that I still could not discern a more beautiful side and discover something transfigured in it" (*WL*, 158). This discovery of iconic transfiguration has its locus not in the particular subjects, which could well have been the same for both artists, but in "a certain something" brought with him by the second. There is an additional mediation in the person of the beholder which makes of a face an icon of eternal beauty. A conversion

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Alyosha recognizes her sickness however, meeting her outbursts with laughter and compassion rather than offense (*BK*, 580-585).

Lise's fascination with torment leads her to a dalliance with Alyosha's brother Ivan which she flaunts in front of Alyosha in demonstration of her wickedness. She makes Alyosha an instrument of her affair, sending him out with a secret note for Ivan which he dutifully delivers. This is Alyosha's own experience of erotic divestment, releasing all possessive attachment to his earthly beloved even as he earnestly works for her healing. He has understood Kierkegaard's account of the task: not to find the perfectly lovable object, but to find the given or chosen object lovable, and to love her perfectly. He does not require the beloved to change in order to love, but continues in love in order that she may be aided to change. Such a love for someone like Lise is no less an offense to human sensibilities than is the fatherhood of Fyodor Karamazov, yet it marks the movement of the essentially Christian for Kierkegaard as much as for Dostoevsky. On this point I part ways with Rowan Williams, whose otherwise exceptional reading of Dostoevsky can make of Alyosha and Lise nothing more than a fantasy relationship which appropriately fades from the narrative as Alyosha grows into adult maturity. See Williams, *Dostoevsky*, 179.

is required, the formation of a heart in love, that is characterized by the humility of the second artist in his bashful reticence to profess himself an artist at all. This is not to read created form as an interruption to the purity of spirit, but to understand the love that connects the temporal with eternity in terms of God's free self-giving in Christ.

Preference and Pride

On the face of it, this concluding discussion seems somewhat misplaced in the context of the Karamazovs. Mitya in particular has no trouble seeing a certain kind of beauty in the world; his healthy dose of Karamazov 'insect' sensuality has left him with "a whole album of memories" filled with the faces to which he has been drawn (*BK*, 109). In this, Mitya is his father's son. Kierkegaard's description of Christ-like love in finding the one you see lovable, is disturbingly parodied by Fyodor's assertion that even such an "animal" as the nonverbal "stinking Lizaveta" could be regarded as a woman (*BK*, 98). When the poor waif becomes pregnant shortly thereafter, the town suspects that his lack of discrimination may have had sinister consequences. It seems that the Karamazov pathology has less to do with an inability to receive the imperfect as an image, than with a propensity to turn it into an inverted icon of the diabolical. This, we will recall, is why Paul Evdokimov so concerns himself with the ambiguity of beauty in Dostoevsky. While Evdokimov remains convinced that truth is always beautiful, he struggles with the reality that not all beauty is true; the pursuit of a certain kind of beauty (that which remains at the physiological level of 'sexual energy') will lead only to the "eros of destruction."[23] This is why Evdokimov counsels that beauty's ambiguity can be addressed only in a

23 See Evdokimov, *AI*, 37 and *GD*, 210.

religious synthesis by which beauty is reunited with goodness and truth. In other words, there must be a mutual spiritual conversion that engages sexual differentiation at the level of spiritual charisms rather than mere physiology.

There are elements of this analysis that Kierkegaard would certainly appreciate. His account of preferential love is not unlike Evdokimov's description of sexual energies run amok, particularly in their parallel repudiation of externality in favour of a deeper spiritual identity. Moreover, Kierkegaard certainly wants to talk about the ongoing spiritual conversion in love by which one comes to see the other more profoundly as neighbor. Yet for Kierkegaard, as we have seen, the key point is not only that certain kinds of beauty can draw us into untruth, but that the form of truth itself need not appear straightforwardly beautiful. How else is one to make sense of Christ's abasement? We might say, then, that Evdokimov's call for spiritual conversion is not comprehensive enough for Kierkegaard. The Christian heart is called not only to discern the truth amidst the multiple directions of beauty's compulsion, but to love God in loving the particular even when one does not feel compelled by its appearance.

As much as Karamazovian sensuality need not search in vain for the lovable object insofar as its insatiable nature ever finds itself attracted to some new and unexpected form, it is hardly fair to say that Mitya characteristically loves the one he sees. His gaze remains directed by a certain kind of inclination, even if ubiquitous and unconventional. In conversation with Alyosha, Mitya describes his relational history with its countless twists and turns into unexpected places. He speaks allegorically of his preference for "back lanes, dark and remote little crannies," where adventure and surprise

await in the form of "nuggets in the dirt" (*BK*,109). "I loved depravity," he continues, "I also loved the shame of depravity."

Yet Mitya is also attracted to a certain kind of virtue at the same time, characterized most commonly in notions of honour, pride and nobility. This odd pairing takes concrete form in the two women with whom he is erotically linked in *The Brothers Karamazov*. We have already taken note of the perverse triangle Grushenka maintains between the Karamazov father and son, stringing each along with promises and temptations that keep them and their resources in her power. Mitya's complicated entanglements with this woman of "bad behavior," however, develop in the context of a prior engagement to a certain Katerina Ivanovna. This betrothal was built on a similar foundation of deceptions and power struggles, capped by the fatal three-thousand she entrusts to Mitya, fully aware of his inability to keep from squandering it on a petty spree. For Mitya, however, this underhanded strategy to keep her fiancé in her debt is part of the fierce and even noble pride that he finds so compelling in both women. They each have a certain resiliency and strength of character that Mitya associates with the virtue of high-society.

That Mitya's love for these women remains preferential in a truly problematic sense is made even clearer in recognizing that what he loves in them is a mirror of his own character. In other words, the Karamazovian capacity to find beauty in unexpected faces turns back to itself in the admiration of self-love. Mitya's love of depravity and cruelty, his stormy sensuality and base desires, are equally accompanied by a fastidious

sense of honour and nobility.[24] This is why the money given to him in trust by Katerina haunts him so effectively. He is pained not so much by the money spent, however, as by the remainder which he continued to hold in case Grushenka should wish to run away with him. This excess sum marks for Mitya the tipping point between the baseness of a scoundrel who cannot help but squander another's money, and the dishonour of an ignoble common criminal who knowingly steals what is not his. This sequestered money, of course, becomes a crucial piece of evidence in establishing Mitya's involvement in his father's robbery and murder. In his interrogation, however, Mitya refuses to come clean with this information out of distaste for revealing his hovering breach of nobility, much to the detriment of the case for his innocence in Fyodor's death. "I keep silent, gentlemen, because it involves a disgrace for me..." he says to his questioners. "That is why I cannot speak. Because of the disgrace... I'm not afraid of you," he concludes, "and I'm proud before you" (*BK*, 480).

This pride to which Mitya clings marks his "love of depravity" as the admiration of self-love, and indicates its difference from the kind of active love that attends to the depraved as faithfully as to the virtuous. While he finds himself drawn to back lanes and dark crannies, eschewing in some sense the search for the perfect object of love, he does not see the one he encounters there as the neighbor. Consequently, it is Mitya's pride - his pretensions to nobility - that must be crucified in him as the first movements of a conversion to true love of God and neighbor. This is exactly what continues to happen in

24 Says Mitya: "It is a noble man you are speaking with, a most noble person; above all - do not lose sight of this - a man who has done a world of mean things, but who always was and remained a most noble person, as a person, inside, in his depths..." (*BK*, 462).

Mitya through the purifying "torments," as Dostoevsky titles the chapters, that make up his interrogation following Fyodor's murder.

As Mitya sits down with the legal officials who would take his testimony, he is well aware that his position is not equal to those on the other side of the table, and he makes grand gestures of deference to his subordinate roll in the proceedings.[25] Yet in Mitya's mind this imbalance is a mere necessity of circumstance which could be subsumed into a more general understanding amidst such a company of noble and intelligent gentlemen.[26] As the interview progresses, however, Mitya experiences a barrage of affronts to his honour and status, especially through interruptions on matters of "small details," which drive him to distraction. He is repeatedly pushed to empty his soul in undignified ways, to disclose intimate feelings into the cold and indifferent hands of his questioners. Mitya's bared soul is soon accompanied in body, as he is stripped of his clothes to sit naked and shivering, in dirty socks and underwear, before these men who had received him among polite company just a few days before (*BK*, 483-85).

On the one hand, the calculating scientific method employed by the investigators fails altogether to help them understand Mitya's character and intentions, and so to shed light on the truth about his involvement in his father's murder. Every bit of evidence they uncover points to Mitya's guilt in that for which he is truly innocent. Ironically, however, this forensic analysis does push Mitya to confront his very real guilt on a different level. The torments he is forced to endure wound his sense of honour and impugn his

25 "Gentlemen, gentlemen, I do not claim to be equal, I quite understand who I am now, as I sit here before you. A horrible suspicion hangs over me..." (*BK*, 460).

26 "We are three noble men come together here, and let everything with us be on the footing of mutual trust between educated and worldly men, bound by nobility and honour" (*BK*, 467).

pretensions to nobility. Mitya is stripped bare in every sense and left to encounter himself as the lowest of all men. This process comes to a head as Mitya finally divulges the great secret that has worn so greatly on his soul, though his questioners tellingly fail to see in it the significance that Mitya knows it has.[27] He admits that the money with which he was found had been portioned out from that three-thousand belonging to Katerina Ivanovna, making it stolen and him nothing more than a common thief. This recognition, wrestled with privately for days, is now aired as dirty laundry amidst Mitya's society. He is cut down, reduced to nothing before his fellows, and convicted of a guilt more destructive to his pride than the passionate murder of his father could ever have been.[28]

In this moment of vulnerability and brokenness, Mitya's soul is opened to a new form of love no longer returning to himself in prideful admiration. Falling asleep in exhausted resignation after his interview, Mitya has a strange dream in which he sees a devastated village on the cold and desolate Russian steppe (*BK*, 407). He is struck by a collection of peasant women who stand together blankly, unable to care for themselves or their families. A baby cries, and Mitya's heart is suddenly filled with a profound tenderness for this "wee one;" a desire to weep himself, but also to do something to ease the child's suffering, to do what he can that there might be an end to tears everywhere. When he speaks to Alyosha before his trial of the 'new man' that had begun to grow in him, Mitya remembers this "wee one" and associates her with his new desire to attend to

27 See "Mitya's Great Secret. Met with Hisses" (*BK*, 489-499).

28 Mitya claims that his great secret "contains such a disgrace for me as could not be compared even with killing and robbing my father, if I had killed and robbed him" (*BK*, 480).

suffering others in love, even if convicted to life in a labour camp. "It was a prophesy to me at that moment!" he reflects. "It's for the 'wee one' that I will go. Because everyone is guilty for everyone else. For all the 'wee ones,' because there are little children and big children. All people are 'wee ones.' And I'll go for all of them, because there must be someone who will go for all of them. I didn't kill father, but I must go. I accept!" (*BK*, 591). In Mitya's vision of the "wee one", his chastened pride finally allows him to see the other as neighbor and so to love the one he sees - even the convict pounding ore in a Siberian mine. And here, Mitya claims, underground and in the midst of great suffering, they will meet the God of joy; here at the place where love for the neighbor converges with love for God (*BK*, 592).

Making Way and Making Up

As Mitya wakes up from his dream, he hears one final voice that incites him towards the new path that has been laid before him. From somewhere nearby, his beloved Grushenka says: "And I am with you, too, I won't leave you now, I will go with you for the rest of my life" (*BK,* 508). These words ring strangely in the context of relations between Mitya and Grushenka in the days that lead up to the night of the murder. Then, such expressions of commitment would have seemed empty manipulation, and certainly would not have undergirded a mission of active love in the suffering of penal servitude. In the beginning, Mitya's infatuation with Grushenka primarily turns on her "infernal curves," as he puts it (*BK*, 594), compounded by the mimetic desire cultivated by his rivalry with his father. For her part, Grushenka plays into this rivalry masterfully. She toys with both men, keeping them each dangling on the promise of her

affections, and watching with glee as they destroy themselves by their own obsessions. The possibility of financial gain is undoubtedly part of Grushenka's motivation, but more significant for her is the vindication of her own transformation into a powerful woman. Abandoned at the cusp of maturity by an older man who had promised himself to her, the once scared and shy girl has become a force of femininity. She holds these Karamazov men in the palm of her hand, keeping them in relations of possessive desire that buttress her own sense of self.

Something changes for Mitya and Grushenka, however, on the night of Fyodor's murder. They experience the beginnings of something very much like the mutual spiritual conversion that Evdokimov wants to speak of, finally seeing each other as the neighbor towards whom love is a duty. For both Mitya and Grushenka, this movement includes a crucial release of erotic attachment to the other. This is the point at which Kierkegaard and Evdokimov map together most closely in their accounts of love. For Evdokimov, engaging sexual differentiation at the level of spiritual charisms is a movement away from possessive attachments towards a love that is "passionately self-less" and radically open to the divine (*GD*, 215). Insofar as he understands erotic inclination to be little more than a preferential love of self, Kierkegaard wants to read true Christian love as similarly self-less, located in the dispossessive love of God in Christ. In relinquishing their possessive claims of erotic attachment, Mitya and Grushenka encounter this divine love in a way that shapes their own love of the neighbour, including the neighbors they become to each other. To trace this conversion in the renewal of their love, we move backwards and begin some hours before Mitya's torments at the hands of

the officials who question him.

We have already taken note in previous chapters of the circumstances in which Grushenka's conversion experience begins. Alyosha's visit to her home, so formative for his own experience, is the catalyst for Grushenka's first steps towards transformation as well. The visit takes place on a night when Grushenka was nervously awaiting further word from her former benefactor, the officer who had abandoned her as a young women for someone else five years before. Now he had returned, and was calling her to rejoin him in Mokroye. Grushenka is clearly conflicted about what to do when Alyosha and Rakitin arrive. The whole matter reminds her of the poor waif of a girl she had been those few years before, and she worries about losing all she has become in the meantime by returning to him. "'He's calling me!' she cried, quite pale, her face twisted in a painful smile. 'He's whistling! Crawl, little dog!'" (*BK*, 357). Returning to this man would mean giving up her power games with Fyodor and Dmitri Karamazov. It would mean opening her heart to the one who had wronged her. She pleads with her guest, "'Deliver me, Alyosha, the time has come; it shall be as you decide. Should I forgive him or not?' 'But you've already forgiven him,' Alyosha said, smiling" (*BK*, 356). Perhaps she has forgiven him, but then perhaps she has not. The change in Grushenka's soul is not immediate, nor is it once for all. She still struggles with desires for vengeance and power. Yet Alyosha's words of love to her have made their mark, and she turns towards a new and uncertain future: "Farewell, everyone! Farewell, Alyosha, my fate is decided... Grushenka is flying to a new life...Maybe I'm going to my death! Ah, I feel drunk!" (*BK*, 357).

Not more than a couple of hours later, Mitya too is on the road to Mokroye, also

reflecting on a certain feeling of drunkenness. His story begins near the same time, in the garden of his father's house.[29] Convinced that Grushenka had deceived him in order to be with Fyodor, Mitya sneaks to his father's bedroom window in order to catch them together. He finds the old man alone, however, and it is only by the grace of God, as he would say afterwards, that he refrains from killing him right there. The wrath directed at his father is absorbed a few seconds later by the servant Grigory, who intercepts Mitya on his way out of the garden. This moment of reprieve from parricide is profound for Mitya, even as Grigory's blood continues to haunt him. Learning from Grushenka's housekeeper that she had fled to Mokroye to rejoin her former officer, Mitya has a moment of clarity. "He stood before her, speechless and pale as death, but one could see from his eyes that he had understood everything at once, everything, everything all at once..." (*BK*, 359). It had never occurred to Mitya that Grushenka might return to this officer. He knew that the officer had been corresponding with Grushenka, but forgot as quickly as he learned. His perverse rivalry with his father had blinded him to anything beyond their own competition. Now jolted from his self-centered presumptions by the unsurprising reality he was nonetheless incapable of anticipating, Mitya leaves Grushenka's house with a new conviction: "I won't interfere, I'll remove myself, I'll know how to remove myself," he says (*BK*, 397).

True to character, Mitya's plan is larger than life. Assembling an elaborate and excessive collection of fine food and drink, he races off to Mokroye after Grushenka; this time not to woo her, but to "make way," as he describes to the coachman Andrei on

29 See "In the Dark" (*BK*, 390-395).

the road. Mitya will supply the feast for the wedding of his beloved to another in one last celebration of joyful living, before taking his own life at the first rays of morning light. In this preliminary deed of death to self-assertion, releasing the erotic object he had sought to grasp, Mitya encounters simultaneously a renewed and transfigured love for Grushenka and for his God: "And never before had such love for this woman, so fatal for his destiny, risen in his breast, such a new feeling, never experienced before, a feeling unexpected even to himself, tender to the point of prayer, to the point of vanishing before her" (*BK*, 410). And Mitya's troubled soul does erupt in prayer: "'Do not judge me, for I love you, Lord!... if you send me to hell, even there I will love you, and from there I will cry that I love you unto ages of ages..." (*BK*, 412). Mitya pleads that he be allowed to "finish here and now with loving," offering himself to the queen of his soul as a truly self-less oblation.

For Kierkegaard, the limit of erotic love is marked by its own self-sacrifice. Enslaved to inclinations and desires as it is, erotic love does not have the power to give itself up for the sake of the beloved, even if it recognizes its own destructiveness to her (*WL*, 273). In racing to Mokroye in order to 'make way' and 'remove himself' before Grushenka, Mitya begins to engage in his own form of active love. This love does not cease to be erotic by the disappearance of his inclinations and desires towards Grushenka,[30] but by their relativization before her as the neighbor. Eternally secured through the God-relation, this love is freed to love the beloved self-lessly in ways that aid

30 Kierkegaard notes that just as Christianity does not want to make changes in externals, it does not want to abolish drives or inclinations either (*WL*, 139).

her to love God in the neighbor. As Zosima promised to the widow Khokhlakov, Mitya's submission before his beloved in an active sacrificial love that ceases to grasp at her possessively blossoms into a renewed experience of love for God. He relates himself in faith to the essentially Christian, choosing not to be repulsed by the offense of a cure more difficult even than his sickness. Only then does the created form of his beloved bear a sort of iconic potential, revealing the divine image through a broken and imperfect face.

Of significance for Evdokimov is the fact that now, once each has given up their claims on the other, Mitya and Grushenka finally encounter each other in the true love of spiritual harmony. Finding herself unimpressed by the renewed acquaintance of her 'former and indisputable one', Grushenka is overwhelmed by Mitya's gesture of self-effacing love. According to Evdokimov, the drunkenness they speak of experiencing that night is that given by the new birth of chaste love in them, even as they continue to bear the marks of evil (*GD*, 214). "We should do it honestly", Grushenka says meaningfully, "and we should be good, not beasts but good... I won't be a mistress to you, I'll be faithful, I'll be your slave" (*BK*, 442). For his part, claims Evdokimov, the "demon of concupiscence" has been struck down in Mitya. Though initially captivated by her physical charms, Mitya is now inspired by Grushenka to more than mere sensuality (*GD*, 214). "Before it was just her infernal curves that fretted me," he tells Alyosha later, "but now I've taken her whole soul into my soul, and through her I've become a man!" (*BK*, 594). Exactly where his love for the beloved one is formed in the depths of his soul, Evdokimov maintains, Mitya discovers the pure source of love for his God.

While helpful, Evdokimov's account of the iconic significance of Mitya and Grushenka's renewed love remains problematically direct. Though he admits that they each continue to bear the marks of evil, Evdokimov is finally too straightforward in his portrayal of their transformation in love.[31] Dostoevsky gives us a much more ambiguous and unfinished account of this movement, one that illustrates the need for ongoing dispossessive relations in faith to objects of love that do not cease to be occasions for offense. Neither Mitya nor Grushenka undergo conversion experiences that are final or once for all. They both continue to wrestle with past demons even in the renewal of their love. In particular, they each struggle with intense jealousy: Grushenka towards Katerina Ivanovna, and Mitya towards Grushenka's former officer.[32] This is not to deny that something has, in fact, changed. The narrator describes a new firmness in Grushenka's eyes in the days before the trial, a "spiritual turnabout" indicated by a new steadfast and humble resolution in her. "In her once proud eyes", he goes on, "there now shone a certain gentleness, although... although from time to time, nevertheless, those eyes blazed once again with a sort of ominous fire, whenever a certain old anxiety visited her, which

31 This is certainly true in the case of Mitya and Grushenka, as I will suggest, but it also applies to Evdokimov's treatment of Alyosha's relationship with Lise Khokhlakov. Reading Evdokimov, one gets the impression that their pathologies are miraculously overcome by the saving power of love, which flowers into a mutual experience of spiritual regeneration. "But love dresses the wounds," he says. "Lise implores her prince, the virile Alyosha, 'save me', and she knows ahead of time that the miracle will happen: 'she will walk, she will dance'. Their love is generous and open, 'we will treat people with the same care as if they were sick'. It is love conceived and lived as a ministry of cosmic charity" (*GD*, 214). No mention is made of Lise's continuing struggles with the demonic, nor her unresolved masochistic self-loathing. The future of their love as a ministry of cosmic charity is by no means settled, and will require a lifetime of committed work in faith which confronts the offense that each remains to the other.

32 This dynamic is present right from the beginning of their new life together. Grushenka's initial effusive expressions of unconditional commitment to Mitya, for instance, are interrupted by an unwelcome reminder of Katerina: "And you can give her back her money, and love me... And not love her. Do not love her any more. If you love her, I'll strangle her... I'll put out both her eyes with a needle..." (*BK*, 442).

not only had not abated, but had even grown stronger in her heart" (*BK*, 563). For his part, the 'new man' in Mitya's soul cannot keep him from quarreling in jealousy with Grushenka over kindnesses to her former officer, who had taken ill after the night in Mokroye (*BK*, 567). Sinful relations of pride, it appears, remain a constant temptation. Each encounter with the other bears its own potential for offense, demanding a renewed relation in faith to love's object.

All of this suggests that indirectness only deepens the potential of iconic encounter. If Kierkegaard pushes Evdokimov on the possibility of sinful refusal at the repulsion of offense, he also pushes him to recognize the divine calling within those things in the world whose beauty is yet veiled by sin. Another way of naming this challenge is to say that the mutuality of the spiritual conversion Evdokimov calls for makes love too dependent upon the transformation of the beloved. According to Kierkegaard, we will recall, true Christian love does not require the other to change, but ceaselessly loves him as he is into new life (*WL*, 172). The eternal change whereby love of neighbour becomes a duty secures love from all temporal changes, even those by which others slide back into old patterns of rivalrous jealousy. Eternity's security, however, is not accessible immediately; it involves a relation in faith to eternity's image in temporal form. The partiality of this image, the distance between the hiddenness of love and the visibility of its fruits, need not indicate a position of fatal abstraction from earthly reality. In detaching iconic potential from an immediate relation to external dissimilarity, Kierkegaard's account of love maintains the iconic status of the whole created order. Relating oneself lovingly in faith to the divine image in creation thus

involves dying to the preference that aims to make this movement directly, by virtue of attraction and inclination.

This pattern of self-less love of neighbour is what the elder Zosima teaches as well. His lifetime of loving service to others continued to form his heart according to the self-giving of God's own love, enabling him to see an image of eternity's redemption in Mitya's broken and horrifying future. This redemption itself is not straightforward nor immediate, and calls Mitya to a painful confrontation with offense at the humiliation and abasement through which his death to prideful preference takes place. If Mitya and Grushenka encounter each other anew in these initial movements of self-less divestment, it is not because they finally gleam with an externally transfigured perfection that pulls the other into the presence of God. It is because their hearts are beginning to be formed in love so as to recognize eternity's image within the broken and the lowly. Insofar as this is the case, we might say that Dostoevsky mediates a Kierkegaardian account of faith's love to Orthodoxy. Not in a repudiation of the icon, however, but in a form of indirect encounter that more truly expresses the structure of iconic presence.

CONCLUSION

By way of a brief summary, I would suggest that my explication of the indirect icon indicates a helpful point of contact between Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky with implications for how each ought to be read in light of the other. In the case of Dostoevsky, this framework makes sense of the dialogical ambiguity that characterizes his fiction, particularly in relation to the theological convictions he was otherwise not shy about expressing. That the Dostoevskian icon is indirect means that his theological and artistic visions are one and the same. If divine truth cannot be communicated directly, cannot be fully expressed in words amenable to immediate apprehension and appropriation, it must be worked out in the context of lives that risk relating themselves in obedient faith to what is seen only incompletely. This can be a difficult and painful process that calls one to relinquish those means by which a direct relation to this truth is sought. Certainly characters like Mitya and Alyosha embody such a kenotic struggle in their own slow and indirect ways, but Dostoevsky also takes it upon himself in composing novels whose meanings remain ever up for negotiation. This is why I have suggested that the 'icons' offered by Dostoevsky through his novels are characteristically broken. His vision of fulfillment in Christ is continually opened to ongoing dialogue and response, made vulnerable to rejection and misinterpretation. The polyphony of Dostoevsky's poetics is iconologically indirect, calling for a relation in faith to an image that always appears at a distance from the decisive splendour of its source.

To speak of the indirect, of course, is to use Kierkegaardian language for the structure of faith, and employing Dostoevsky to consider this indirectness in terms of

iconic movement is also helpful in making sense of Kierkegaard's work. Kierkegaard can only be considered an iconoclast if the icon is taken to be a direct mode of communication by which the fullness of God's presence is made visible on earth to all. I have suggested that for Dostoevsky, however, an icon is a representation, an image mediated by earthly form through which this presence is made incompletely visible. This is the movement that Kierkegaard describes in speaking of love as recognizable by its fruits. As Christ is image of the invisible God, bearing the fullness of God's presence hidden in the form of abasement, so the recognizability of love's fruits bears witness to love's source in the unfathomable fullness of God's being. The point is that this kind of iconic communication is always mediated, emphasizing the "infinitely qualitative distance" between God and the individual human being (*PC*, 128). Such an icon does not offer direct or immediate access to the invisible God, but requires a relation in faith that can make of all created form a possible icon of eternity.

One of the implications of this reading of the icon, I have suggested, is that Kierkegaard's repudiation of erotic love ought not to be subsumed into an account of his iconoclastic disinterest in material reality. The problem with preference is not that it attends to the particularity of created form, but that it finally fails to relate itself to eternity through its love at all. Kierkegaard is concerned with exactly the failure of iconic movement when predicated on a directness that passes over the contradiction of God in the person of Christ. In order truly to love God in loving the particular, one's heart must be formed in the self-abnegating love of God's own abasement such that the divine image might be discerned even in one's enemy. There is no doubt that this is

difficult, but for Kierkegaard it is also decidedly good news. Secured in eternity's 'shall', Christian love is freed to encounter all created particularity in terms of iconic bonds with the God of love. Not directly so as to remain beholden to the charms of externality, but indirectly through earthly mediations by which we see yet only dimly.

On this point there does remain a divergence between Kierkegaard and Orthodox thinkers like Evdokimov for whom human love is a beneficiary of the illuminating directness authorized by the incarnation of God in Christ. That God entered time as an individual human being means for Kierkegaard that we still encounter His glory as mediated in figural and incomplete ways. There are moments at which Evdokimov seems to recognize the consequent partiality of any image, but at others he presses for a clarity of vision that Kierkegaard refuses to grant is already ours. My argument, therefore, is that the 'darkness' Evdokimov discerns in Kierkegaard's works is not finally a failure to experience the inbreaking of iconic grace, but is simply a recognition of the form that grace takes in a world still awaiting the final consummation of its redemption in Christ.

As Alyosha discovers, we do get foretastes of this consummation, glimpses of the joyful wedding feast at which there is new wine and new guests. "Do you see our Sun?" Zosima asks him. "Awful is his greatness before us, terrible is his loftiness, yet he is boundlessly merciful, he became like us out of love, and he is rejoicing with us, transforming water into wine, that the joy of the guests may not end" (*BK*, 361). For Alyosha, however, this moment of iconic illumination passes through the putrefaction of his elder's body, and so through offense at the form of grace as mediated by the earthly.

Moreover, it calls him back into the world as the site in which this vision works itself out. "Begin, my dear, begin, my meek one, to do your work!" Zosima's final summons is heard by Dostoevsky himself, and I suggest that it is heard by Kierkegaard as well. This work is a life of penitence that loves forth love in others, and so relates itself in faith to God's image beneath the veil of sin. Such an icon cannot but be indirect, imaged as it is by

earthly forms that stand infinitely distinguished from their Creator. This distance, however, need not be a cause for despair. For both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, it marks the grace that God's own self-giving love in Christ forms hearts to see God in faith, even where we cannot yet see completely.

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