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Dostoevsky's Christianity

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Abstract. The article refutes the widespread view that Dostoevsky's Christian beliefs were strictly Orthodox. It is proved that Dostoevsky's religious and philosophical searches' central tendency is the criticism of historical, ecclesiastical Christianity as a false, distorted form of the teaching of Jesus Christ and the desire to restore this teaching in its original purity. Modern researchers of the history of early Christianity find more and more arguments in favor of the fact that the actual teaching of Jesus Christ is contained in that religious movement, which the church called the Gnostic heresy. The exact philosophical expression of the teaching of Christ was received in the later works of J.G. Fichte, whose ideas had a strong influence on the Russian writer. Like Fichte, Dostoevsky understands Christ as the first person who showed the possibility of revealing God in himself and gaining divine omnipotence and eternal life directly in earthly reality. In this sense, every person can become like Christ. Dostoevsky's main characters walk the path of Christ and show how difficult this path is. The article shows that Dostoevsky used in his work not only the philosophical version of true (Gnostic) Christianity developed by German philosophy (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel), but also the key motives of the Gnostic myth, primarily the idea that our world, filled with evil and suffering, is created not by the supreme, good God-Father, but by the evil Demiurge, the Devil (in this sense, it is hell).

Keywords: Orthodox Christianity, true Christianity, Gnostic Christianity, J.G. Fichte, the identity of God and man, Gnostic myth, the idea of immortality

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Христианство Достоевского

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Аннотация. Опровергается популярное мнение о том, что христианские убеждения Достоевского были строго православными. Доказывается, что главной тенденцией религиозно-философских исканий Достоевского является критика исторического, церковного христианства как ложной, искаженной формы учения Иисуса Христа и стремление восстановить это учение в его исходной чистоте. Современные исследователи истории раннего христианства находят все больше аргументов в пользу того, что истинное учение Иисуса Христа содержится в том религиозном течении, которое церковь назвала гностической ересью. Точное философское выражение учения Христа получило в поздних работах И.Г. Фихте, идеи которого оказали сильное влияние на русского писателя. Достоевский, как и Фихте, понимает Христа как первого человека, показавшего возможность явить в себе Бога и обрести божественное всемогущество и вечную жизнь непосредственно в земной действительности. В этом смысле каждый человек может стать подобным Христу; главные герои Достоевского идут путем Христа и показывают, насколько сложным является этот путь. В статье показано, что Достоевский использовал в своем творчестве не только философскую версию истинного (гностического) христианства, разработанную немецкой философией (Фихте, Шеллинг, Гегель), но и ключевые мотивы гностического мифа, прежде всего представление о том, что наш мир, наполненный злом и страданиями, создан не высшим, благим Богом-Отцом, а злым Демургом, дьяволом (в этом смысле он является адом).

Ключевые слова: ортодоксальное христианство, истинное христианство, гностическое христианство, И.Г. Фихте, тождество Бога и человека, гностический миф, идея бессмертия

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Dostoevsky has long been recognized as a great writer and a great thinker and philosopher. He is included on an equal footing with the most prominent thinkers of the past in the history of European and Russian philosophy. Researchers

confidently speak of his influence on the most prominent representatives of contemporary philosophy, not just the Russian one, which is more or less obvious, but also Western philosophy — Nietzsche, Bergson, Spengler, Sartre, Camus, and others. Nevertheless, while agreeing on these general statements, philosophers and literary scholars sharply differ from each other as soon as it comes to the specific content of the writer's religious and philosophical worldview.

A key point of divergence is the nature of Dostoevsky's religiosity. Here two polar opinions have long been identified, which cannot be recognized as valid precisely because of their critical reflection of each other. On the one hand, beginning with Bulgakov's classic works *Ivan Karamazov as a Philosophical Type* (1901) and *The Russian Tragedy* (1914), which were published at the beginning of the 20th century, a continuous flow of research has been continuing to this day, proving that all of Dostoevsky's work is a strict and exact artistic expression of the Orthodox, Church teaching. On the other hand, the aforementioned French philosophers J.-P. Sartre and A. Camus found in the texts of the Russian writer the basis for their views, which they defined as atheistic existentialism. Albert Camus, in his analysis of the stories of two of Dostoevsky's seminal characters — Kirillov in *Demons* and the hero of *The Sentence*, a part of *A Writer's Diary* of 1876 — saw in their views a conscious opposition to traditional Christian religiosity [1. PP. 81—86]. Since these characters are portrayed with remarkable penetration and sympathy, showing that Dostoevsky at least partially accepts the truth they proclaim, Camus confidently concludes their author's atheistic convictions.

However, both solutions to the problem of Dostoevsky's religiosity, using only one layer of his ideas, are difficult to recognize as correct. The writer's religious views' most indisputable quality is their strange inconsistency, hosting the combination of incredibly different, almost opposite beliefs. Not only Dostoevsky's characters, but he himself in *A Writer's Diary* and manuscript texts not intended for the eyes of others, demonstrates both adherence to faith, and, as it seems, in its quite traditional forms, and a resolute criticism of church tradition.

The solution to the writer's religiosity must be sought on a path that runs between these two positions, that is, between atheism and the traditional Orthodox faith. However, this raises the question of what this *in-between* means. Dmitry Merezhkovsky gave an incredibly famous interpretation of Dostoevsky's work in this spirit. Comparing the religious worldviews of the two Russian writers in his book *L. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky* (1903), Merezhkovsky calls Tolstoy "the visionary of the flesh" and Dostoevsky "the visionary of the spirit." Merezhkovsky prophetically predicted the necessity of uniting their religious truths in a single and final religion of the Holy Spirit, the one of the Third Testament, which will replace historical Christianity, outdated and not meeting the needs of modern humankind [2]. Merezhkovsky considers this coming anticipation, but only vague one, to be Dostoevsky's most important prophecy. Considering that Dostoevsky himself failed to realize this prophecy fully, Merezhkovsky attempted to bring it to its logical conclusion. Joined by Zinaida Gippius and Dmitry Filosofov, he "founded" the

religion of the Holy Spirit in 1908 [3. PP. 108—109]. This dramatic but not very deliberate action casts doubt on the correctness of Merezhkovsky's religious attitudes, and it also casts doubt on his interpretation of Dostoevsky's work.

In effect, Dostoevsky was so far ahead of his time that none of his closest contemporaries even came close to understanding his best works. Only early 20th-century philosophers started unraveling Dostoevsky's insights, but they still failed to express them clearly and definitively. To uncover the great writer and thinker's ideas, one must turn not to his ordinary interpreters and critics but equally great ones. Merezhkovsky was right when he tried to make sense of Dostoevsky's religious quest by comparing him with Leo Tolstoy and F. Nietzsche. Many perceptive readers of their works have noticed some deep "kinship" of these great personalities.

Leo Tolstoy entered the history of Russian philosophy and social thought because of his original ideas and apparent opposition to the Orthodox Church and historical Christianity. At the same time, Tolstoy emphasized that his efforts were aimed not at creating some new religious doctrine, rather at restoring the doctrine of Jesus Christ in its original form, that is, at *returning to the authentic Christianity*, in relation to which historical, ecclesiastic Christianity is a *recent distortion*. Thereupon, Tolstoy even denied the essential novelty of his religious-philosophical writings, claiming that he was merely summarizing those quests which many of the significant religious figures of mankind before him had carried out.

Church representatives and Orthodox personalities tried and are still trying to portray Tolstoy as a marginal figure in Russian thought, arguing that his religious position is far removed from the dominant trend of Russian religious philosophy. While this view is quite common, it disaccords with reality. A careful and accurate analysis of Tolstoy's late religious-philosophical teaching shows that both in its original principles and its most important results, it corresponds to all Russian religious thought's premier aspirations. Incredibly vivid is the coincidence of the contours of the philosophical concepts of Tolstoy and Vladimir Solovyov since the system of the latter is considered to be the most thorough and full-fledged expression of the tradition of Russian professional philosophy [4]. Solovyev conveyed quite directly and plainly the foremost sense of his aspirations, which coincided with Russian philosophy's general aspirations when he delivered a lecture *On the Decline of the Medieval Worldview* in 1891. Whoever reads its transcript is carefully realizing that by *medieval worldview*, Solovyev means church, historical Christianity, which categorically does not correspond to the new European and Russian culture and has long been a factor that hinders the spiritual development of European humanity. Like Tolstoy and many Russian and European thinkers before him, Solovyev recognizes the urgent need to restore authentic, original Christianity, radically distorted throughout the time.

In Dostoevsky's work, we find a desire to restore authentic Christianity in no less severe form than in Tolstoy's, except without deliberate criticism of the church. The rigidity of censorship, especially the ecclesiastical one, has to be borne in mind

in Dostoevsky's time. Dostoevsky was able to say everything he wanted. He became a thinker who expressed the primary aspiration of Russian philosophy in the most radical and profound form so that even in our day, few are yet able to appreciate the courage and innovation of his prophecies about the fate of Christianity.

Only in the twentieth century do historians and philosophers finally begin to understand what the teaching of Jesus Christ genuinely was, when and by whom it was distorted in history, replaced by a false church teaching, which is more a modernized version of Judaism than *Christianity proper*. Understandably, the process of replacing one doctrine with another could not have been instantaneous, and for a long time, the two doctrines co-existed and fought over the minds of men. However, at some point, for the sake of final triumph, the church had to outlaw the proponents of the original, unadulterated Christian doctrine. Here we need to pay attention to a defining feature of Christianity in comparison with other world religions. Only Christianity has a strictly defined heresy concept, meaning that free discussion of the original principles of doctrine is strictly forbidden, and believers are ordered to submit unconditionally to the church's authority. This proves most distinctly that the church did not rely on tradition and the teachings of the founder of the new religion in its struggle with its dominant opponents, but that it had to use the state's power and authority. The notion of heresy was needed to silence once and for all those who continued to be faithful to the precepts of the Master. The hypothesis that it was in *heresies* that we should look for the true original Christianity was first justified in Walter Bauer's famous 1934 work *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* [5] (for an account of contemporary arguments in favor of this position, ref. [6]).

The first heresy, the memory of which survives in history, tells us what true Christianity, the undistorted teachings of Jesus Christ, really was. As early as 180 A.D., the first work that sharply criticized the "wrong" Christians appeared: Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*. Let us think about this paradoxical fact. There is still no canon of fundamental Christian texts, not even a hint of dogma, Christians are still a marginal and persecuted religious community in the Roman Empire (Irenaeus himself died a martyr's death during the persecution of Septimius Severus), yet the Roman Church is already concerned about the fight against *heresies*. One may wonder, how was it possible in that era to distinguish a heretic from a non-heretic if there were no clear criteria for distinguishing the essence of doctrine?

Furthermore, such criteria obviously could not exist due to the lack of canon and dogmatics. According to church tradition, the answer to this question is given by Marcion of Sinope's story, the first and most dangerous heretic in history. The most important fact from his biography, which fortunately has been preserved in history, is that in 144, he accused the Roman Christian community that the Roman hierarchs were interpreting Jesus Christ's teachings in a distorted way¹. Therein lies

¹ In support of his position, he presented the ancient Gospel of the Lord, which formally looks like an abridged version of the Gospel of Luke. Tertullian and Epiphanius of Salamis, the famous critics of Marcion of Sinope, who wrote polemical works against him (the former half a century after

the answer to the question posed above. The first heretics were those who remained faithful to the precepts of Christ and accused the rapidly gaining church of radically distorting his teachings.

When the church had not yet become a sufficiently influential organization in the pagan Roman Empire, it was hardly in grave danger of various alternative Christian communities busy developing their versions of the original doctrine, however exotic they might be. However, those who claimed that they were the Truth, the Way, and the Life revealed by Jesus Christ, and who accused the new church of betraying Christ and his Way, were a deadly peril to it. If the ordinary believers in their masses doubted the succession of the church hierarchs from Christ, their authority and the church's very existence would end. The peculiar phenomenon of heresy born at the same time as orthodoxy (the church tradition attributes the beginning of the Gnostic heresy to the first century) shows clearly that it is not heresy at all, but the original, true Christianity, whose authentic testimony the church later tried to destroy completely. The fact that the fourth century was the last century in which this *heresy* became widespread is also quite natural. Not long after Christianity became the state religion, the church got into its hands a powerful apparatus of power and, above all, silenced those who continued to insist that it was they who carried the Truth revealed by Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, the doctrine did not disappear; it became a purely intellectual trend and was preserved and developed in original philosophical systems. The first such system emerged as early as the ninth century, in John Scotus Eriugena's *The Division of Nature*. Further on, a succession of great Gnostic thinkers followed, as if transmitting to one another an oath of allegiance to the actual teachings of Jesus Christ. We may mention Joachim of Fiore, Meister Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa, Jakob Böhme, Gottfried Leibniz. But the final understanding of the tragic duality of Christianity and the final realization of the necessity of restoring its ancient, valid version for the salvation of European culture came at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries in German philosophy. J.G. Fichte expressed the meaning of the historical opposition between orthodox and Gnostic (authentic) Christianity, especially clearly in his later religious-philosophical writings.

For the first time, Fichte makes it clear that there are two versions of Christianity in history, and it is the one associated with Gnosticism that the German philosopher considers the true one, developing the teachings of Jesus Christ — as they are outlined in the Gospel of John. "There are in our opinion two very different forms of Christianity: — the one contained in the Gospel of John, and the other in the writings of the Apostle Paul; to which latter party, the other Evangelists, for the most part, and particularly Luke, belong" [8. P. 107]. As has already been

Marcion's speech, the latter two centuries later), accused him of sacrilegious desecration of the sacred text. However, modern scholars have proved Marcion right in his dispute with the Roman Church based on careful textual analysis. In reality, Marcion's Gospel of the Lord is indeed an ancient text, based on which the Gospel of Luke was created no earlier than the middle of the second century [7].

mentioned, genuine Christianity posed menace to the church's gaining power. Therefore, the institute vehemently persecuted its adherents, and almost at all periods, there were very few of them among people: "According to our opinion, <...> Christianity has never yet attained a general and public existence in its purity and truth, although it has, at all times, attained a true life, here and there, in individual minds" [8. P. 210]. This means that Christianity (genuine Christianity!) has not yet revealed its real, providential significance in history. "But Christianity, and particularly John, stands alone and isolated, as a wonderful and inexplicable phenomenon of Time, without precedent and without succedent" [9. P. 383]. Nevertheless, Fichte believes that it has yet to become a powerful spiritual force, and only when this happens will civilization overcome all the negative trends in its development and have a chance for a prosperous future.

The primary distortion that has been introduced into the original, true Christianity in ecclesiastical tradition, according to Fichte, is that the Jewish idea of the Fall has been introduced into the latter; as a result, man has been understood as a radically sinful and imperfect being, separated from God, unable to discover in himself the divine capacity for creation. In contrast, the teaching of Christ in its original, undistorted form is based on the principle of the inseparable unity, even *identity*, of God and human. "An insight into the absolute unity of the Human Existence with the Divine is certainly the profoundest Knowledge that man can attain. Before Jesus, this Knowledge had nowhere existed; and since his time, we may say down even to the present day, it has been again as good as rooted out and lost, at least in profane cognition. Jesus, however, was evidently in possession of this insight; as we shall incontestably find, were it only in the Gospel of John, as soon as we ourselves attain it" [9. P. 390]. In this sense, Jesus is not a unique being, perceived as "God incarnate." Being originally human, he managed to reveal a unity-identity with God and to make it useful in his life. Jesus is unique only because his life's work is preserved in history through the testimony left by his disciple John. All the people after him can no longer doubt that they too have precisely the same opportunity to reveal God in themselves and to become divine beings entirely like Jesus. As Fichte argues, every person is an original *guise* of God, and only insufficient will, desire, and inner freedom prevent people from becoming as visible a manifestation of God as Jesus was. "Now God also dwells originally, likewise in a peculiar Form, in all other surrounding Individuals, notwithstanding that he remains concealed from most of them in consequence in their personal, individual Will, and their want of the highest Freedom, and thus is not actually manifested either in themselves or in their conduct towards others" [9. P. 459].

Dostoevsky's religious views very accurately mirror and repeat the provisions of Fichte's religious doctrine. It is not an accidental coincidence; it can already be considered that Fichte influenced Dostoevsky [10]. In the 1877 draft of *A Writer's Diary*, we find an understanding of Christianity that faithfully reproduces its interpretation in Fichte's philosophy: "Christianity is the proof that God may be

contained in man. It is the greatest idea and the greatest glory of man that he could attain" [11. P. 228]. A statement from the draft to the novel *Demons* has a similar meaning: "Christ came so that mankind might learn that the earthly nature of the human spirit could appear in such heavenly splendor, in reality, and in the flesh, not just in a dream and in an ideal, that it was both natural and possible" [12. P. 112]. For Dostoevsky, Christ appears as a demonstration of a *human's* capacity to appear in *heavenly splendor* (i.e., to reveal the divine origins), which means that he must be understood not as God, but as a man who is no different from all other men. Even more understanding Christ as solely a man comes through in a statement from the 1876 drafts of *A Writer's Diary*: "Christ is God, as much as the Earth could manifest God" [13. P. 244]. Even for Christ, Dostoevsky *denies the fullness of God's manifestation*. Christ, like any human being, has an earthly, i.e., limited, corporeal form. Therefore, when *containing* God, he can embrace Him only within limits set by the earthly nature.

With this interpretation of Jesus' essence, He is an absolute ideal, and every man should strive to fully achieve the likeness to Christ. In the April 1864 manuscript fragment, written the day after the death of the writer's first wife Maria Dmitrievna Isaeva, Dostoevsky reflects on the appearance of Christ as the emergence of "*the ideal of the man in the flesh*." The fulfillment of this ideal, the making of every man fully Christ-like, is indicated by the concept of *Christ's Paradise* and is interpreted as "the ultimate goal of mankind" [14. P. 172—173], the reaching of which will transfer mankind to a supernatural, mystic state of absolute life, devoid of all negative attributes of our mundane existence. That is also mentioned in the statement of one of the *Demons'* characters. It goes in the preliminary manuscript: "Imagine that everyone is Christ — well, would the present staggering, perplexing, pauperism be possible? Whoever does not understand this understands nothing of Christ and is not a Christian. If men had not the slightest idea of the state or any science but were all like Christ, would it be possible that there would not immediately be a paradise on earth?" [12. P. 192—193]. It is not by chance that the hero who has gone the furthest in the direction of being Christlike is Father Zosima, the Elder from *The Brothers Karamazov*. He sees the features of a perfect, heavenly existence in the imperfect earthly reality and calls people to transform the world through the same self-transformation. Zosima grasped: "<...> look around you at the gifts of God, the clear sky, the pure air, the tender grass, the birds; nature is beautiful and sinless, and we, only we, are sinful and foolish, and we don't understand that life is heaven, for we have only to understand that and it will at once be fulfilled in all its beauty, we shall embrace each other and weep" [15. P. 272].

Dostoevsky could have also borrowed the latter belief from the religious-philosophical teachings of Fichte, which are the central theme of his work *The Way Towards the Blessed Life* (as its title itself attests). According to Fichte, an individual embracing true Christianity and living according to it will not only be transformed personally but will see the world transformed into the perfect and good

one (although before the religious conversion, the world may be seen as filled with suffering and evil). "It would be unworthy of our picture of Religion were we still to insist, and set forth specially, that to it there is no longer anything displeasing and deformed in the World, but that all things, without exception, are to it a source of the purest Blessedness. Whatever exists, *as* it exists, and *because* it exists, labours in the one Eternal Life service, and in the system of this development so it must be. To desire, wish, or love anything otherwise that as it is, would be either to desire no Life at all, or else to desire Life in a less perfect manifestation. <...> There is no more striking proof that the Knowledge of the True Religion has hitherto been scarce among men, and that in particular it is a stranger in the prevailing systems, than this, that they universally place Eternal Blessedness beyond the grave, and never for a moment imagine that whoever will, may here, and at once be Blessed" [8. P. 267—268].

Eternal Blessedness is incompatible with the tragedy of death. No wonder that Fichte denies the essentiality of death. It appears to the German philosopher as an empirical *facade*, only an *external* rupture in the stream of eternal life, which the truly religious person is involved in and distinctly aware of. Fichte finds an example of that understanding of death and human immortality in the Gospel of John's story of the Raising of Lazarus. For there Jesus Christ says: "<...> He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, *hath* eternal life, and is *passed* from death unto life. <...> The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" [9. P. 394] (John 5:24—25; italics by Fichte — I.E., V.S.). Jesus directly rejects the Jewish and Church-Christian concept of eternal life in the kingdom of heaven, beyond the earthly existence. He states that man is immortal and has eternal life precisely as an earthly life, which empirical death interrupts relatively, not absolutely, i.e., only transforms it from one earthly form to another. Here is how Fichte conveys Christ's words: "Union with me is union with the Eternal God and his Life, and the certain assurance thereof; so that in every moment of time, he who is so united with me, is in complete possession of Eternity, and places no faith whatever in the fleeting and illusive phenomena of a birth and a death in Time, and therefore needs no re-awakening as a deliverance from a death in which he does not believe" [9. P. 395].

The same understanding of immortality is distinctive for Dostoevsky. Of course, he could not directly express ideas that radically contradicted church doctrine — it was impossible under the rigid censorship present in 19th-century Russia. Nevertheless, Dostoevsky expressed his idea of immortality through his characters' thoughts and stories: by connecting their judgments on this topic, one can quite unambiguously reconstruct the writer's views. First of all, it is necessary to recall the judgment of Kirillov, who, in response to Stavrogin's question (*Demons*) about whether he has become a believer in "future eternal life," answers: "No, not future eternal, but here eternal" [16. P. 188]. The same Kirillov, replying to Stavrogin's perplexity concerning his decision to commit suicide, explains that he is not afraid of death: "Life is, and death is not at all" [16. P. 188]. More specific and detailed corresponding "model" of immortality based on the idea of the

composition of our earthly universe from a set of relatively independent worlds into which people pass after death from our world, is stated by Svidrigailov (*Crime and Punishment*): "Ghosts are, as it were, shreds and fragments of other worlds, the beginning of them. A man in health has, of course, no reason to see them, because he is above all a man of this earth and is bound for the sake of completeness and order to live only in this life. But as soon as one is ill, as soon as the normal earthly order of the organism is broken, one begins to realise the possibility of another world; and the more seriously ill one is, the closer becomes one's contact with that other world, so that as soon as the man dies he steps straight into that world. I thought of that long ago. If you believe in a future life, you could believe in that, too" [17. P. 221].

The most important thing here is that all these worlds are only relatively, not absolutely separated. They do not divide human life into incompatible and opposing parts (earthly and heavenly), as expected in the Kingdom of Heaven's church doctrine. Dostoevsky clearly emphasizes the close relationship and mutual influence of the different worlds and the different parts of man's "earthly eternal" life. This idea is clearly expressed in the story *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* from 1877 *A Writer's Diary*. After his suicide, the protagonist finds himself in the "afterworld." He is surprised to discover that it is neither "heaven" nor "hell" in the sense of Church teaching, but a world completely similar to our one, only more perfect, mystically transformed by the efforts of people — the very efforts about which Dostoyevsky's mystical heroes, Kirillov and Father Zosima speak. The most important sign of this world's perfection and its inhabitants is the disappearance of the fear of death since death itself is understood by people in its true essence — as a relative boundary between different forms of their eternal life. Inhabitants of the perfect world not only know that after death they have an existence utterly similar to earthly life, but they also keep ties and some semblance of earthly communication with the dead people who have passed into other worlds: "One might think that they were still in contact with the departed after death and that their earthly union was not cut short by death" [18. P. 114].

However, the meaning of life in each of the worlds endures: people must, to the maximum extent possible, transform their personalities to the state closest to the ideal set by Christ, and thus transform the world to the state of paradise on the earth. And the more personalities fulfill this "task" that Christ has given, the closer the world will become to absolute perfection. One day in one of the worlds, and then in all of them, this absolute perfection will be achieved, and existence will enter a state of absolute unity, "union," in which people will also merge into a kind of organic whole while maintaining their own identity and relative autonomy within that whole. This ultimate perspective of human and cosmic development is briefly outlined in the story *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, where it is said of the people of the other world, into which the hero found himself after his suicide: "They had no temples, but they had a real living and uninterrupted sense of oneness with the whole of the universe; they had no creed, but they had a certain knowledge that

when their earthly joy had reached the limits of earthly nature, then there would come for them, for the living and for the dead, a still greater fullness of contact with the whole of the universe" [18. P. 114]. Dostoevsky described more clearly the state of the final *universal synthesis* of existence in a manuscript sketch on the death of his first wife. Calling this state "the future, heavenly life", he presents it as a result of the historical development of humanity itself, not as the action of God carrying people into the otherworldly kingdom of heaven: "What is it, where is it, on what planet, in what center, whether in the final center, that is in the bosom of the universal synthesis, that is God? — we do not know. <...> Christ himself preached his doctrine only as an ideal. He himself foresaw that until the end of the world, there would be struggle and development (the doctrine of the sword), for this is the law of nature, because on earth life is developing, and there is existence, full synthetically, eternally enjoying and fulfilling, for which, therefore, "there will be no more time." <...> But if the man is not human, what will his nature be? <...> It is the fusion of the full self, that is, of knowledge and synthesis with everything. "Love everything as yourself." <...> How each self will rise then — in the total synthesis — is hard to imagine. But the living, not dead even to the achievement and reflected in the final ideal — must come to life in the final, synthetic, infinite life. We will be — faces, not ceasing to merge with everything, not encroaching or marrying, and in various ranks (In my Father's house are many mansions). Everything will then feel and know itself for all eternity. But how it will be, in what form, in what nature, it is difficult for man to imagine definitively" [14. P. 173—175].

Thus, in his philosophical views, Dostoevsky followed the tradition of German philosophy (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel), which gave a modern elaboration of Gnostic Christianity's principles. Like any developed religious teaching, Gnostic Christianity contains not only a system of essential theoretical principles for explaining man, which gave rise in history to a profound philosophical tradition called *mystical pantheism* or the *philosophy of pan-unity* but also a *system of myths* that were well known and to which the Church fighters against heresies directed their criticism. It seems natural that having accepted Gnostic Christianity in its philosophical expression, Dostoevsky could not wholly bypass and ignore its mythology. As a great artist, he could not fail to understand the enormous power of myth, which sometimes provides a much more visible and accessible expression of some complex religious truths than long philosophical reasoning (examples of such myths were given in his time by Plato).

Although it is not that simple to spot the influence of Gnostic mythology on Dostoevsky's work, there is already an extensive literature on the subject. The religious position of Ivan Karamazov (his "rebellion") is incredibly vivid in this sense: he acknowledges the existence of God but does not accept the world created, as it is filled with evil and suffering and makes one doubt the goodness of the Creator. There we may behold the famous Gnostic myth according to which the evil

Demiurge Yaldabaoth, begotten by the lowest divine aeon Sophia created our world, rather than the true virtuous God-Father.

In this context, the strange feature of Jesus Christ portrayed by Ivan Karamazov in his *The Grand Inquisitor* poem is not coincidental. Christ himself *does not know for sure* whether he is the son of God [19]. This follows from the description of Jesus' state when he was tempted by the Devil, who lifted Lord to the temple's pinnacle and offered to throw himself down to demonstrate how the angels sent by God the Father would save him. The Grand Inquisitor describes Jesus' condition thus: "*If Thou wouldst know whether Thou art the Son of God then cast Thyself down, for it is written: the angels shall hold him up lest he fall and bruise himself, and Thou shalt know then whether Thou art the Son of God and shalt prove then how great is Thy faith in Thy Father*" [15. P. 232—233; italics by the authors. — *I.E., V.S.*]. In the following words of the Devil, as conveyed by the Grand Inquisitor, there is an even more daring thought: "Thou didst know then that in taking one step, in making one movement to cast Thyself down, Thou wouldst be tempting God and have lost all Thy faith in Him, and wouldst have been dashed to pieces against that earth which Thou didst come to save. And the wise spirit that tempted Thee would have rejoiced" [15. P. 233]. This means that Jesus *is not* the Son of God in a sense implied by Church teaching (i.e., he is not the second person of the Trinity). He is a mere man who has managed to discover the divine depth in himself and to gain some element of divine omnipotence. He understands that doubt or weakness can lead him to lose those elements, and then he will turn into a simple, powerless man. All this corresponds precisely to the understanding of Jesus Christ in Gnostic myth: Jesus appears there as a great prophet and teacher, who for the first time revealed God in himself and urged people to follow his path. It is no accident that Dostoevsky forces his leading characters to do just that — to follow the way of Christ, to try to become exactly like him. This *imitation of Christ* is especially evident in the image of Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*, whom Dostoevsky himself called *Prince Christ* in his plot sketches.

The myth of the creation of our world by the evil Demiurge is evident in *Crime and Punishment*. At the very beginning of the novel, Raskolnikov meets the drunk official Marmeladov, who delivers a monologue about the Last Judgement (!) where all sinners will be forgiven, including those like himself, whom in Marmeladov's imagination the Judge calls with these words: "Swine you are! Of the image of the beast and of his seal; but come, you, too!" [17. P. 21]. The "image of the beast and his seal" is from the *Book of Revelation* of John the Apostle, where he thus denotes voluntary servants of the Antichrist, that is, the most hardened sinners. It seems a strange paradox, since Marmeladov and other *drunkards* (according to Dostoyevsky's definition) like him are a great mass of wholly harmless and suffering people. The mystery of such a responsible naming of ordinary people is solved if we look at the preliminary manuscript version of the same monologue, where Marmeladov utters more expressive words: "We are God's children, we live in the furnace" [20. P. 87]. *Furnace* is hell; Marmeladov claims

that our world is hell. That makes the definition of ordinary people the Antichrist's servants understandable. If our world is hell, then its creator and ruler is the Devil, i.e., the Antichrist, and then all people are indeed servants of the Antichrist, although not everyone grasps that. Here we can guess the notion as mentioned earlier that our world was created by the evil Demiurge, who deceives people by posing as the only God-Creator.

The fact that St. Petersburg, appearing on the pages of the novel, can be called a "hellish city" has already been noted more than once in the research literature. The symbolist poet and literary critic N.Y. Abramovich mentioned this eloquently in his book *Christ of Dostoevsky* (1914) [21]. Dostoevsky uses a variety of artistic devices to create an image of the hellish world. It is worth mentioning that nowhere in his oeuvre is the word "devil" used as often as in *Crime and Punishment*, where it appears almost 90 times (for example, in *The Idiot*, just over 20 times).

Researchers have already noted the presence of other elements of the Gnostic myth in *Crime and Punishment*. Sonya Marmeladova may be perceived as Sophia [22], as that divine essence (aeon) that created the Demiurge who, in turn, created our world. According to the Gnostic myth, Sophia, trying to correct her "cosmic mistake" related to the birth of Demiurge, descends into the world he had created to help people to free themselves from evil and suffering. Yet she is captured by the forces of evil, which turn her into a simple woman (in one version of the myth, they degrade her to a prostitute!). It has also been recorded that many of Raskolnikov's traits and elements of his story hint at his likeness to Jesus Christ [23]. Summarizing all these observations, one can conclude that there is an apparent realistic and socio-psychological plan of depiction in the novel and a *mystical-mythological* one, in which many elements of the Gnostic myth are coherently presented [24].

A consistent expression of one of the Gnostic myth variants can also be found in the novel *The Idiot*, where, as we have already noted above, the main character is the incarnation of Jesus Christ in his Gnostic sense [25].

Thus, the research material accumulated to date allows us to assert with sufficient confidence that Dostoevsky, following the German philosophers of the first half of the 19th century (Schelling and Fichte), consistently developed the modern version of Gnostic Christianity and gave it original philosophical refraction in his work. The fact that Dostoevsky's ideas had a decisive influence not only on Russian but also on Western philosophy and culture in the 20th century proves that his conviction that original, Gnostic Christianity is much more in tune with the modern era and contributes more to the spiritual development of humanity than historical, church-based Christianity, whose dominance over centuries of history was one of the factors that led European civilization to a profound spiritual crisis.

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