Dostoevsky and Christian Agnosticism

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IN 1844, at the age of 23, Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote his first novel, **Poor, Folk.** It is the story, told in their letters to each other, of the futile love of an improverished little old clerk, Devushkin, for an equally poor, but young and innocent girl, Barbara. They hope, somewhat wistfully, and struggle as they can, for a future—perhaps together; but Barbara's spiralling poverty and the old clerk's helplessness, compel her at last to accept the attentions of a well-to-do-lecher who had seduced her in her childhood. It was a remarkable and powerful first novel. J. Middleton Murry calls it, "one long sob of pain, inflicted by a senseless power which had not the wit to choose a worthier antagonist to crush."

Why should a young man resign his army commission to write such a book? He was asking, of course, the question of theodicy: why, in a world created by a loving God, should a gentle girl be so numbed by wretchednss that she becomes unfeeling of the pain of one who loves her, and accepts listlessly a degradation which once horrified her? Why should the poor old thing who loves her be pecked almost to insanity—not having been created man enough either to rebel or to accept, but merely to exist under it all? Neither of them has the fibre even to **question!** Barbara writes to Devushkin, "God knows whether I shall be happy, but my fate is in His holy, His inscrutable hands," Devushkin returns a pathetic little homily on the good purposes of the Divine Creator. But Dostoevsky was questioning! And this is the point of the book: to put, urgently, the problem of the meaningless power of a hurt that reduces two human beings to something less than human.

Dostoevsky himself was raised in the midst of pain. His father was a second-rate staff doctor in a Hospital for the Poor, a stern and bitter man who had once trained for the priesthood, but who had run away from seminary. The boy, throughout his childhood, was exposed to the unbelievable sufferings of Russia's diseased and maimed poor; then first his nurse, and afterward his mother, wasted before his eyes, and died in the swift havoc of tuberculosis. During the latter's terminal illness, his father, never a stable man, disintegrated from fear and grief, even — in that fantastic inverted way with which readers of Dostoevsky's novels are familiar—accusing his dying wife of carrying on an affair! Then, when Fyodor was sixteen, his father was murdered. Half-mad, the old man bought an estate, took a peasant girl as his mistress, and proceeded to drink himself stupid, and to work off his fury on his serfs. One day four of them stood their ground, poured vodka down his throat until he could no longer breathe, and crushed his genitals to make his death painful. Dostoevsky was acquainted with pain.

His first book (the writing of which, incidentally, plunged him into a deep neurotic illness) was a single question, the question of God, Euripides' ancient question, "Do the gods indeed rule over us, or are we the sport of chance?" It is the thesis of this paper that this question, which tormented Dostoevsky all his life and hardly ever left him alone, drove him gradually to experience God only as an absence, as a terrible blank

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at the center of things. This was not in a conscious way, but below the level of his opinions and his beliefs. Dostoevsky's atheism did not rise, either from materialism (by which God is denied on the ground that reality is the sensible world, and man does not have sensory experience of God because God does not exist); nor form rationalism (by which God is denied on the ground that human reason, alone, is the arbiter of knowledge, and that on this basis God is a gratuitous hypothesis); nor from some form of immanentism, like Marxism, which "starts from the principle of consciousness and stops at the reality of human nature"; nor from a reverence for value, a la Voltaire, whose comment was, "Je ne suis pas Chretien, mais c'est pour t'aimer mieux." Dostoevsky's a-theism did not even arise from a conscious pessimism in face of the problem of evil, as it did with Schopenhauer. Its terror for Dostoevsky — and perhaps, in that it is widespread now, for many 20th century men, including surely, many churchmen — lies in its unconscious nature. Dostoevsky would have been the last, and the angriest, to have admitted to atheism.

In all his direct, journalistic, or polemical writings (for example in the **Diary** which he wrote for newspaper publication) he was stridently, and often shrilly, a theist. This kind of statement occurs, again and again: "Hasn't there been preserved in Orthodoxy alone, in all its purity, the Divine image of Christ?" — "Make [a] child acquainted with the Gospel, teach him to believe in God, and that in the most orthodox fashion . . . You will never find anything better than the Savior, believe me." And so on.

Yet it is quite clear that, for Dostoevsky, God was dead; the place that God had taken in his life was empty. Kirillov, a character in a later work, **The Possessed,** acts for a dozen other major characters in Dostoevsky's novels, when he divides history into two parts: "from the gorilla to the annihilation of God, and from the annihilation of God" . . . thereafter.

It is an elementary fallacy to assume as the author's own the words he puts into the mouths of his characters: it overlooks his dramatist's feeling for tension, for one thing. And, too, Kirillov was out of his mind. Then why should we not rather take Dostoevsky at his word, when he wrote directly, on his own behalf, constantly affirming his faith? Why prefer the words of a character to those of its creator?

Yet I do so prefer. In an art work, the artist is expressing the deepest level of his being; his creative genius, at the profound center of his imagination, speaks, is it were, **through him. It is,** of course, censored and shaped by reason, craftsmanship, conscious convictions, etc., but its burden is not so much what the artist thinks, as what his deep self thinks through him. A work of art — a poem, a painting — is the result of its creator's musing, in which his unconscious may reveal itself; Jung asserts that here, "as in dreams, the psyche tells its own story"; and Rilke, who knew it from experience, witnesses that "the signal for the uprising in his heart will be given willingly by a messenger who does not know what he is doing."

The direct, public utterances of Dostoevsky, while they represent what, at one level of his being, he sincerly believed and thought, do not give expression to his deepest level of responses. That these achieve life in the crucial creations of his imagination. It would appear that he hardly was aware, in one mode, of what he did in the other. Although he was conscious of self-division, he was not conscious of the particular demonstrations of it he was offering in the two forms of his literary output: the polemic, and the poetic. Whenever he stopped creating and began declaiming, he revealed how little he understood, at that level of his life, what he did at the deeper level. As a novelist

he was a haunted, perplexed, profoundly honest man; as a journalist, he was an unctious, pontifical, even hypocritical bore. The creative works give evidence of the distress of a man who was progressively separated from the supporting myths and symbols of earlier generations, and particularly from the unifying symbol of God.

Poor Folk was his first deep awareness that this unifying symbol was disintegrating.

His next book, interestingly enough, traces the collapse of a personality, under the unconscious, suppressed pressures to rebel. It is called **The Double.** It is purely a "horizontal" book, with no explicit, nor implicit, "religious" dimensions. But there had been nothing in literature before Dostoevsky, and perhaps nothing since, which handled schizophrenia more effectively. If that which unifies life is felt as an absence, what is more natural than schizophrenia?

From 1850 to 1854 Dostoevsky — following his arrest for conspiracy, and his celebrated mock-execution — existed as a convict in Siberia. It was a matter of hanging-on to a freezing, stinking life. He became epileptic; he was hated by his fellow convicts; he was ostracized by his family. It was like living in an icy coffin. Seven years later he published a description of the experience, under the title "The House of the Dead." It ends as follows:

> The fetters fell off. I picked them up. I wanted to hold
> them in my hand, to look at them for the last time.
> I seemed already to be wondering that they could
> have been on my legs a minute before.
> "Well, with God's blessing, with God's blessing!" said
> the convicts in coarse, abrupt, voices . . .
> Yes, with God's blessing! Freedom, new life, resurrection from the dead . . . What a glorious moment.

What weight to place on this peroration is doubtful. The book is a rare instance in the Dostoevskian corpus of that grey area between pontifical journalism and creative work. There is in it no sense of vertical dimension., either "up," or down into the depth of what life in the house of the dead might mean — there is little of ultimate concern here. The question of God, the importance of faith, or any reference to his own commitment or lack of it, are handled in the flat abstract manner which bespeaks numbness about such issues. Clearly, "God" had not been a living entity in the house of the dead.

In 1861 Dostoevsky published his first major post-Siberian novel, **The Insulted and Injured.** It has little to commend it, compared with the later works. But it bears the marks of the Siberian experience. The one unforgettable character, Vadkovsky, is a cold-blooded, cruel, "Siberian" man, in whose dealings with the numerous other characters of the book, most of whom are innocent or weak (or both). Dostoevsky struggles with the question of what happens when a man chooses self, utterly, and comes in contact with meek people. Will the meek inherit the earth? When they offer Valkovsky their other cheek, and yield him their cloak as well as their coat, will it heap coals of fire on his head? The answer is "No." It is Valkovsky who triumphs. When do the weak benefit somehow from their chastening? Dostoevsky always treasured this possibility, knowing it was a great Christian answer to the problem of theodicy. Because he treasured it, he tested it, over and over.

> "We shall have to work out our future happiness by suffering," Natasha cries to Vanya, . . . "Everything is purified by suffering . . . Oh, Vanya, how much pain there is in the world!"

But is anyone purified by suffering? No one in the whole book. It ends meaningfully only for the selfish, the thoughtless, and the shallow. Everywhere else is the hurt of the insulted and injured.

All the hurt is without meaning. It is not that Dostoevsky abandoned the quest for its meaning. He would not accept any simple, Sunday-school solution. Whatever answer there might be would have to come through a furnace.

His next notable work was one which many regard as the first modern novel, **Notes from the Underground.** Its rights to that claim — in which I concur — need not concern us, except in one regard. Its world is a world without God. It is set in the "underground" of man's life — under the floorboards of his rationalizing and his conceptualizing and his convictions, down in the depths. It lays open to the light, secret places of the human soul not revealed before —cruel places, of ungodly self-will and godless splitting. Here is buried alive, skepticism, deformity, nihilistic rebellion, impotence, a sick hunger for freedom-and-masochism. Here is modern man — the part of us deep below our surface beliefs, successes, prestige, self-esteem, down in the dark, is buried, but very much alive.

It is a masterly work, a classic. Vivas, for example, claims he cannot think "of any important phenomenological datum furnished by Freud which escaped the observation" of Dostoevsky here. This was years before Freud. It also is another struggle of its author with God. For example, the man in whose "underground" the work is set seems to be what he is because he has been starved of true affection: he does not know what love is. Then perhaps when he is touched by its healing warmth, the jagged contradictions will melt? This is the Gospel, isn't it? So Dostoevsky brings love to bear and a tender, innocent grace, too. For a moment it seems there might be healing. But then the underground man sullenly and brutally rejects the girl who offers him both — half-realizing what he is losing, but half-knowing that if he has the chance over, he will probably commit the same hurt. He is left snarling and convulsing beneath his floorboards; and Dostoevsky has twisted another turn into the problem of theodicy, the question of God.

In the scope of this short paper, I can obviously do no more than allude, as I have to the earlier works, to the four major novels of Dostoevsky, **Crime and Punishment, The Idiot, The Possessed,** and **The Brothers Karamazov.** But I can perhaps say enough to carry forward the argument.

The main plot of **Crime and Punishment** focuses upon what happens when a man, Raskolnikov, exulting in his freedom to choose between good and evil, but disjunct in his will and reason, chooses an inauthentic relation to life, commits two murders, and then because of the pain in his soul, thirsts for atonement, and finds it in Christian love. Our interest is in the three solutions to the problem of theodicy which Dostoevsky tests in the novel. Hurt is central to the story. What is the effect in terms of suffering, of a terrible crime upon the soul of the man who commits it? But, alongside this, Dostoevsky also places a family which is gradually exterminated by pain: The Marmeladovs, by far the most excruciating embodiments of hurt in Dostoevsky's long gallery of suffering. But there is more: there is Svidrigailov. It is as though Raskolnikov's hellish guilt and the Marmeladov's slow tortures are not enough to contain the question. It must be written in the blackest letters Dostoevsky could write, so he created Svidrigailov. Perhaps there had never before in literature been a man like Svidrigailov; he is the incarnation of evil. He is so evil he has passed beyond the distinction between good and eveil.

In face of these three dimensions of Dostoevsky's infliction, the author tests three hopes for an answer to theodicy: compensatory immortality, the supernal value of suffering, and salvation through love-in-Christ. The first possibility, compensatory immortality, is most movingly ineffectual. Marmeladov,

confessing drunkenly but with deep sincerity to Raskolnikov, in the slum gin-mill, cries,

> "Why am I to be pitied, you say? Yes! There's nothing to pity me for! I ought to be crucified, crucified on a cross, not pitied! Crucify me, oh judge, crucify me, but pity me! And then I will go of myself to be crucified, for it's not merry-making I seek but tears and tribulation. Do you suppose, you that sell, that this pint of yours has been sweet to me? It was tribulation I sought — and have found it! and I have tasted it! But He will pity us who has had pity on all men and all things, He is the One. He is the judge. He will come in that day and He will ask, "Where is the daughter who sold herself for her cross, consumptive stepmother and for the little children of another? Where is the daughter who had pity upon the filthy drunkard, her earthly father, undismayed by his beastliness? And he will say, "Come to me! I have already forgiven thee once . . . Thy sins which are many are forgiven thee for thou hast loved much . . . "And He will forgive my Sonia . . . I know it . . . He will judge and forgive all, the good and the evil, the wise and the meek . . . And when he has done with all of them, then He will summon us. "You too come forth," He will say, "Come forth ye drunkards, come forth ye weak ones, come forth, ye children of shame." And we shall all come forth, without shame and shall stand before him . . . And He will hold out His hands to us . . .and we shall weep, and we shall understand all things . . . (my wife) even . . . she will understand . . . Lord, Thy kingdom come!" . . . There was a moment of silence; but soon laughter and oaths were heard again.

Exactly. It can command only a moment of silence. It may be touching, it may even be "Christian"; but is it the answer? Certainly, in his polemical writings, Dostoevsky made it an answer. In a letter to a philosopher-acquaintance he wrote:

> I must tell you that we, that is, Solovyev and myself, at any rate, believe in a real, literal, and personal resurrection, and that it will come to pass on the earth.

His articles for his published journals assert, time and again, "the necessity and inevitability of a belief in the immortality of the human soul." But it is as if Dostoevsky could only truly test an idea, a belief, a dogma, in a concrete situation. Convictions which he expressed directly, and in the abstract, in his published journal, seem somehow absurd, small, or false. It was as if his deep psyche had to "en-flesh" an idea in a creative situation, before he could honestly try it. Here there is something pathetically unconvincing in Marmeladov's hope. It is unconvincing to Raskolnikov, who rejects it out of hand. It becomes a ghastly caricature in Svidrigailov, who wonders:

> We always imagine eternity as something beyond our conception, something vast, vast! But why must it be vast? Instead of all that, what if it is one little room, like an outhouse in the country, black and grimy and spiders in every corner, and that's all eternity is?

It was unconvincing to Dostoevsky; he could not, at the deepest level, the creative level, accept it. Thus he failed to create its truth in his book.

The theory of the supernal value of suffering proves no more substantial. As with the idea of compensatory immortality, it is not that the solution is rejected once for all; it is tested — harshly — "in the flesh," and is found wanting: but the issue is left open. Raskolnikov's suffering, while, perhaps, it stopped his spiral away from authenticity, and held him — may even have pointed him to his true self — still could not bring him to health. Suffering stops short of being salvific.

There seems offense in even asking the question in regard to the Marmeladovs. What kind of value could suffering possibly have brought to those wretches? It annihilated them in the cruellest possible way. Yet, this is what

the book was to test. In his plans for writing it Dostoevsky had beforehand made it plain: the novel must show "there is no happiness in comfort; happiness is bought by suffering. Man is not born for happiness — man earns his happiness, and always by suffering." He has Sonia, the young prostitute who was doomed by her family's circumstances to humiliation and filth, say, "God sends much unhappiness to him whom he loves very much and in whom he has much hope, so that he may learn and see more for himself, because the quality of people is more obvious in their unhappiness than in their happiness."

But throughout, and in the end, the truth of her belief fails to impress. Does suffering purify? Is it, in fact, any use at all? Raskolnikov asks despairingly at the close, "They say it is necessary for me to suffer! What's the object of these senseless sufferings? Shall I know any better what they are for, when I am crushed by hardships and idiocy, and weak as an old man after twenty years penal servitude?" It is this ambiguity which makes the novel a masterpiece. One senses the real struggle between faith and doubt: this believer-artist could not come to an integrated conviction at both levels of himself. He was struggling for a theodicy which could speak both to his conscious mind, and his nonconscious, his surface self and his deep self. He did not believe it.

The same struggle is exemplified by the conclusion of the novel. Rasckolnikov's response to Sonia's Christly love is his repentance and conversion: he is healed. But the fact is: the conclusion is the weakest part of the book. It is both aesthetically unsatisfying and psychologically suspect. This points to the conflict in the author.
His original notes for the book had this outline:

The end of the novel
Raskolnikov blows out his brains.
Svidrigailov: the most cynical despair.
Sonia: the most unattainable hope.

His reason for the change to an optimistic ending is, I am sure, his struggle for theodicy. Wasiolek comments, "For the moment, Dostoevsky settles the issue by nudging Raskolnikov into God's camp. But Dostoevsky will not be satisfied with his own solution, and again and again he will . . . test his belief that man can be born again into selflessness." This solution, like the others (of indemnification hereafter for pain here, and of the purgative value of hurt), this solution, of healing by Christian love, does not satisfy or ring true, even at a shallow level. Dostoevsky was left with the struggle.

His next novel, and one of his finest, was **The Idiot.** The book provides a significant clue to its author's root problem. It is the climax of a long series of Dostevskian experiments with characterizations of the "meek" type. But it is more than that. In the book he attempted to fulfill a long-held ambition: to create the perfectly good man, a full-scale embodiment of the Christ symbol in a figure of suffering and submission. (If the characterization fails, finally, incidentally—and it perhaps is an impossible task—it is nevertheless among the greatest of such attempts in literature).

The clue elicited from the book is this: there is, clearly, no relation—certainly no depth relation—between the sufferings of the "Idiot," (that is, between the "Passion" of Christ) and ultimacy, in Dostoevsky's theology. He can make no real connection between the Passion-bearer and God. Thus there can be for him no **Christus Victor.** In fact he is led to the same kind of solution as Marcion —destroying the cruel God, Yahweh, in favor of the new God whom the Passion-bearer revealed, namely, love. During the year he was finishing this book, he wrote to a friend:

I have in mind now . . . a big novel, to be called **Atheism** (for God's sake

> this is between ourselves), but before tackling it I shall have to read a whole library, of atheists, Catholics, and Orthdox . . . I have my (principal) character: a Russian, one of our society, getting on in years . . . (who) suddenly . . . loses his faith in God . . . The loss of faith has a colossal effect on him . . . He seeks among the new generation, the atheists, the Slavs and the Europeans, Russian fanatics and hermits, priests . . . and finally discovers both Christ and the Russian soil, the Russian Christ and the Russian God. (For God's sake, don't tell anybody; for me it comes to this; having written this last novel I could die happy—I shall have expressed the whole of myself.)

The book was never written—nor, perhaps, was the deep hope underlying the plan, ever realized. It was rarely out of Dostoevsky's thoughts from this time on. Probably his next major novel, **The Possessed**, was an interruption in his preparation for the book **Atheism**, but if so it would then be one of those great interruptions in the history of literature. Perhaps, though, it is Chapter One of the book. It does carry forward the struggle with his own underground awareness of the absence of God. Kirillov, for example, is "Possessed" by the problem of theodicy. He is convinced that there is so much pain and evil in the world that there cannot be a God. If there is no God, then there is no will in the world greater than man's; yet there is one thing which has dominion over man's mind—fear of death. Surely if one man takes it upon himself to prove his will's supremacy over that fear, he will have established man as god. Will not this be the solution to the problem of suffering?

> He who will conquer pain and terror will become a god Then there will be a new life, a new man; everything will be new . . . man will be god, and will be transformed, physically, and the world will be transformed and all thoughts and feelings. . . .

The reader never doubts that the author was in the struggle with Kirillov; the creation of Kirillov was, physically and mentally, a costly experience for Dostoevsky.

Even more costly to him were the inner polemics of Shatov, who has abondoned socialism (which, he says, "from its very nature is bound to be atheism"), and is "possessed" by religion. But the central character, Stavrogin, sees Shatov's actual beneath-the-surface, struggle, and probes his faith Shatov answers:

> I believe in Russia . . . I believe in orthodoxy . . . I believe in the body of Christ . . . I believe that the new advent will take place in Russia . . . I believe . . ." "And in God? In God," (Stavrogin insists). Not one muscle moved in Stavrogin's face.

This is Shatov's cry of dereliction. It is probably Dostoevsky's too.

It may be fanciful to recall that, of all Dostoevsky's characters, it is only these two, Kirillov, and Shatov, who have made the long journey-and-return over the deep sea (that "favorite symbol of the unconscious, the mother of all that lives,") But could not, indeed, these two speak for the great torments in Dostoevsky's deep self? Of course, any such interpretation would have been vehemently denied by Dostoevsky himself. Hingley points out, as I have insisted from the beginning,

> On the whole Dostoevsky tried to protect his conscious mind from the doubts and conflicts which beset him at the submerged creative level from which his great creative fiction proceeded.

Without doubt Kirillov and Shatov are two dimensions of Dostoevsky's deepest affliction, his problem with God. All the characters in the book, with one small exception, move about in a world in which God is dead, with all that means, either in terms of possession by what is not-god, or in terms of living, split and confused, in the experience of God's absence.

Between this novel and his final and greatest work, **The Brothers Karamazov,** Dostoevsky wrote a short story, "Bobok". It is a strange, dark, macabre piece which would fit perfectly with the black humor of today—or, better, in the Theatre of the Absurd. It consists of conversations between corpses in a cemetary. One cadaver, in the last stages of decomposition, is moved to cry "bobok" every six weeks. The rest squabble, and indulge in indecent exposure.

Up to this time the disintegration of the God-symbol had been only implicit. But now, in **The Brothers Karamazov,** it is explicit. Nevertheless, it is not simple and clear: this book, like all the others, is a quest. At the first meeting of the brothers in their father's house, Fyodor Karamazov ask two of his sons "Is there a God, or not?" Ivan replies first:

> "No, there is no God."
> "Alyosha, is there a God?"
> "There is."
> "Ivan, and is there immortality of some sort, just a little, just a tiny bit?"
> "There is no immortality either."
> "None at all?"
> "None at all."
> ". . . Alyosha, is there immortality?"
> "There is."
> "God and immortality?"
> "God and immortality. In God is immortality."

The struggle of the novel had begun. A few years earlier Dostoevsky wrote to a friend:

> The main problem which will be dealt with in all the parts of the book is that which has tormented me consciously or unconsciously all my life—the existence of God.

For one brother, Ivan, God is quite dead. For Smerdyakov, another, there is malicious joy in tauting "No, I'm not a Christian, and I curse my true God." For Dmitri, another, there is only sadness:

> "Why is it all over with you? You said so just now." "Why it is all over with me? Hm . . . The fact of it is . . . if you take it as a whole, I am sorry to lose God, that's why it is."

The symbol for the death of God is the murder of the father. It is an act which all four sons take part: Dmitri makes it possible, Ivan thinks it, Smerdyakov commits it, and Alyosha, who knew it would happen, does nothing to prevent it. The position of the sons is now quite terrible; they are divided, by mutual suspicion and secret guilt; they cease to act like brothers. What worse suffering could there be than this, not that the father rejected the sons, but that the sons killed the father? This might be an ultimate dereliction. It brings upon the murders the terrible guilt of parricide, the primeval sin.

Yet, at the same time the problem of God remained. For Dostoevsky's was no easy or outright atheism. The book remains supremely a struggle with theodicy. In it Dostoevsky opened up all the issues again, like raw cuts, and thrust his pen into the deepest hurts. He drew every dimension of the problem, anew, with urgent genius, and finally made this statement, in the mouth of Ivan:

> (Alyosha) Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but, that it was essential and inevitable to tortrue to death just one tiny creature—a baby (beating its breast with its fist, for instance—) and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth."
> "No, I wouldn't consent," said Alyosha.

One is left with the understanding that Dostoevsky, too, would not consent. This was his problem with God, embellish it how one will: it all comes down to the screams of a single tiny baby. Ivan says, "Too high a price is asked for harmony . . . so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket . . . It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return Him the ticket."

There are obviously many more observations that should be made about Dostoevsky's a-theism. Of these I will refer to only two. I have entitled this article "Dostoevsky and Christian Agnosticism." Both "Christian" and "Agnosticism" are debatable words in light of what I've said. Yet the first I would want to hang on to because, alongside the growing, and unconscious, experience of God-as-absence (in his depths, where it counts!) was a growing love for and reverence for, a wholehearted devotion to, Jesus of Nazareth, as the "Passion-bearer" of mankind, as the Christ-fool, as, indeed, in a strange, unsystematic way, Lord and Savior—albeit, as I have suggested, with no profund relation to ultimacy. I also want to retain the second because at no point did Dostoevsky cease to struggle for God. Here was no cynical atheist, but an agnostic thirsty for God.

His question of God, the problem of suffering, is one which, if it does not already normally burn one's mind, might be one of those questions we ought constantly to raise in our deliberations about God. It helps prevent such deliberations from becoming merely speculation, facile, or unworthy.