The Brothers Karamazov in the Prism of Hesychast Anthropology

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Introduction: The Brothers Karamazov, The Elders and Hesychasm

It might seem that everything that can be written on Feodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* has already been written long ago, but nevertheless everywhere in the world this novel continues to be studied and discussed again and again. There is no contradiction in this. We know that people will always turn to *The Karamazovs* and similar cultural phenomena, not so much for making great new discoveries about these works, as for getting help in discovering and understanding themselves. Such is the role or maybe even definition of truly *classical* phenomena: they are landmarks in the world of culture, which people of any time use in order to determine their own location in this world.

Any time and any cultural community address classical phenomena in their own way. They put their own questions to these phenomena, the questions that are most essential for them and for their self-determination. Choosing my subject, I would like to choose it among these essential questions: *What is important in The Karamazovs for our time, for present-day people?* The present-day situation, both Russian and global, social and cultural, tells us that the focus of these problems is concentrated in what is happening to the human person: in anthropology. Cardinal changes are taking place, which diverge sharply from classical anthropology. Man shows strong will and irresistible drive to extreme experiences of all kinds, including dangerous, asocial and transgressive ones. In such a situation, anthropological reflection is activated most intensively, hence it is the *anthropology of The Karamazovs* that comes to the foreground in the relation of modernity to Dostoevsky's main novel. In no way was it always like this. The Russian Silver Age, plunging into Dostoevsky deeply and enthusiastically, looked in his works for metaphysics and theology, for prophecies and social and

religious projects. Now such interest belongs to the past. Today we are interested, in the first place, in Man's image or anthropological model embodied in the novel.

But how can one extract an anthropological model out of a novel? We cannot draw any conclusions about personages of The Karamazovs and their anthropological meaning by means of a naïve reading that turns directly the contents of the text. It is necessary to turn to its poetics and understand the principles of its writing. The main characteristic of the discourse in Dostoevsky's novels is its personalized nature. Dostoevsky's texts are made up of many sub-discourses, each of which is the voice of a definite person, of a definite human consciousness:

Personage (person) = consciousness = voice = personal discourse,

The cosmos of the novel consists of personal discourses, which are its only and universal building element. Each personal voice-discourse develops freely and autonomously of all the others, although not in isolation from them, but interacting and communicating with them. The world of Dostoevsky's novels has the nature and structure of Mikhail Bakhtin's famous concept of "polyphony", or many-voiced dialogue of free and equal persons-voices, a concept perfectly adequate to Dostoevsky's novels.

One important observation needs to be made explicit: the novel itself gives us a guiding thread for the work of reconstructing and interpreting its anthropology. It is directly evident that there is an instance in the world of the novel which is endowed with special authority and special ethical and axiological prerogatives. It enters the novel already in its introductory exposition entitled "The Story of a Certain Little Family". Its chapters are devoted, in consecutive order, to the father Karamazov and his three sons; but after these chapters there follows unexpectedly one more chapter, "The Elders". It contains a description of a monastery and its highly revered ascetics, The Elders, who practice monastic labors, and "see and listen to whom the pilgrims thronged in their multitudes… from all across the land"

(14,26; 41).[1] But why are "The Elders" included in "The Story of a Certain Little Family", a special part of the book in which voices-persons have not yet entered and only the Story-Teller depicts a starting panorama, giving also a moral estimation of it? As the Story-Teller stresses, the Elders possess higher spiritual and moral authority; hence their presence *inside* "The Story of a Certain Little Family" shows clearly that there is an instance of spiritual and moral judgment included in this history, and this instance is embodied in the Elders. It is worth noting that the location of this instance corresponds exactly to the Bakhtinian concept of outsideness (*vnenakhodimost'*): the monastery and the Elders are outside the city, but not far from it, at the distance of direct communication and influence. This is how the novel starts, and then its composition demonstrates once more the special role of the Elders: Book VI, "The Russian Monk", which ends the first half of the novel, is devoted to them entirely. This key book, situated in the very center of the novel,[2] is almost entirely withdrawn from the action of the novel and devoted to ascetical texts, the life and homilies of the Elder Zosima. This compositional device establishes the status of the Elders as the status of a higher spiritual, evaluative, and moral authority.

In a quite straightforward way the novel describes in what Elderhood consists and what the root of the special status of Elders is. The Elders are endowed with the gift of seeing into the inner reality of everybody who comes to them, they are wise and experienced representatives of the Orthodox ascetic tradition of *Hesychasm*. In Dostoevsky's time this tradition was flourishing in Russia (although its Greek name was not widely used at the time), and Russian Elderhood, which meant that well-tried and usually old hesychast monks served as spiritual counselors and teachers to the laity.

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[1] I quote *The Brothers Karamazov* in the English translation by David McDuff (Penguin Classics, 2003). The bracketed figures give the location of the quotation first in the Russian original (in the *Complete Works* edition, the first figure being the volume and the second the page number), and then in the translation.

[2] This book has a key place not only in the compositional, but also in the ideological structure of the novel: sending "The Russian Monk" to the editors, Dostoevsky wrote: "I consider this Book VI as the culminating point of the novel" (Letter to N. A. Lyubimov, Aug. 7th, 1879).

This was a new phenomenon.

However, there is another side of the hesychast tradition. This is the tradition of a community united on the basis of a certain practice: starting from the 4th century and up to now, the hesychast tradition is occupied exclusively with creating and then keeping and reproducing identically the practice or the spiritual art of "Noetic Practice" (*praxis noera*, in Greek), a holistic practice of man's complete self-transformation, in which an adept of the practice, advancing step-by-step, ascends to *theosis*, the union with God in His energies. For reaching its goal, this anthropological practice should have a precise plan and method, which means that it should be based on reliable anthropological knowledge. The knowledge needed should embrace all levels of human constitution, thus forming the main body of a certain full-dimensional (though not philosophical) anthropology. What is more, since the goal of the practice, *theosis*, represents the "surpassing of the natural" (a formula used by Orthodox ascetics), i.e. the actual transcendence of the human being, this anthropology should in some part go beyond the usual anthropological discourse restricted to empiric man, in order to become *meta*-anthropology. Thus we see that the hesychast tradition must have its own anthropology, which includes elements of a meta-anthropology.

Coming back to Dostoevsky, we draw from this fact our next conclusion or better, working hypothesis. As we have seen, the hesychast tradition has a special place and status in the world of *The Karamazovs*; the spiritual and ethical positions of the novel are hesychast-influenced and hesychast-oriented. Among other readings, and not excluding them, the anthropology of *The Brothers Karamazov* must admit a hesychast reading. This is the main idea of the article but now it must be substantiated.

Hesychast anthropology in brief

Hesychast anthropology conceives Man not as some constant and static nature, but as a being which changes itself and its nature radically, striving towards a union with Christ. It describes the self-realization of (hesychast) mankind as a process of his successive self-transformation. This transformation involves not the essence of mankind (Hesychasm does not use this concept at all), but his energies. Man is treated as an energetic

formation, an ensemble of energies of all kinds, somatic, psychic, and intellectual, and hesychast practice is the process of a special, guided transformation of this ensemble. It is directed to the union with Divine energy. The main tool for this transformation is the art of noetic practice, the core of which is the unceasing repetition of the Jesus prayer. The entire spiritual-anthropological process has a specific energetic and personal character; its course is always open to the possibility of breakdown, stopping, falling back to preceding stages, etc.

As for the structure of the process, its principal feature is its division into well-defined steps. The first text describing systematically all the steps of the practice had the title "The Ladder of Paradise" (7th century). Each step of the hesychast Ladder corresponds to a certain type of man's energetic configuration. An ascetic in the course of the practice must: achieve a configuration needed, secure its maintenance, and carry out its transformation into the next, higher configuration.

Although the essence and goal of hesychasm (as of any other spiritual practice) is the self-transformation performed by an individual (the ascetic who concentrates completely on his own inner reality) this individual transformation cannot be achieved in isolation, exclusively by means of an isolated individual consciousness. The goal can be achieved only if the practice follows certain strict and intricate rules, a rigorous method (in Byzantium one of the names for the hesychast practice was exactly "The Method"). The creation of the method, instruction in it, and checking-up on the correct following of the ascetic experience cannot be carried out individually, they can only be produced by the community of all those who cultivate this practice. A community that elaborates the hesychast method preserves and translates it identically from generation to generation and it checks the true nature of any experience obtained in the course of the practice. This community constitutes the *hesychast tradition* and thus the hesychast practice (as well as spiritual practice as such) can live and be carried out only in the bosom of an ascetic community of a spiritual tradition and hence its experience is not just individual but also communal and conciliatory (*soborny*, in Russian). These conciliatory aspects of Hesychasm are important for Dostoevsky, as we shall see.

The principal building blocks of the spiritual-anthropological process

are several and we will address them in turn:

Spiritual Gate (*metanoia*, conversion and repentance). Entering the ascetic way is a unique spiritual-anthropological act. It implies a "change of mind", a sharp change of the inner reality of a person and of the orientation of its strivings from the "world" towards God. This act initiates spiritual ascent. Hesychasm considers the participation of Divine grace a necessary component of this step and develops a vast economy of repentance. In Dostoevsky's world the role of repentance is very important too. The economy of repentance is one of the principal points of hesychast influence on his work and his anthropology.

Unseen warfare (the struggle with the passions). From the hesychast anthropological viewpoint, passions follow cyclic patterns, reproducing themselves, and they serve as traps for man, making him incapable of changing himself and ascending the Ladder. Thus the very first task of the ascetic practice includes the uprooting and removal of the passions. The hesychast seeks to drive out the passions and arrive at *dispassion*: freedom of passions, complete rejection of them into the one's inner reality. But hesychast dispassion, in contrast to the same concept in the Stoics, does not mean the suppression and extinguishing of the world of human emotions. On the contrary, as Maximus the Confessor taught, the energies of passions should be "converted from evil to good", transformed into energies of love. When passions are defeated, the hesychast reaches ***hesychia***: the state, which gave its name to all the tradition and practice, one of "sacred silence", tranquility, quiet concentration and integration. Now the vector of the hesychast's principal attention changes its direction: main efforts can now be devoted not to struggling worldly forces, but to the acquisition of Divine grace and union with Christ in the Spirit.

Approaching the final goal, the meta-anthropological ***telos*** of hesychast practice brings forth first elements of actual changes of fundamental attributes and predicates of man's mode of being. Empirical data show that the changes starting at higher stages of the practice involve, first of all, man's perception. In this phenomenon, called the "opening of feelings", a radically different sense perception begins to be formed, which is called "noetic feelings" (*noera aisthesis*) and it is thought to be capable of perceiving man's meeting with the Divine being. "Noetic sight" enables the

practitioner to contemplate the Taboric Light, an experience thought to be identical to that of the Apostles in the event of Christ's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. But even this experience of the higher stages of ascesis is only the approach to *theosis*, the fullness of which is made accessible for men in an eschatological horizon.

If one accepts hesychasm as valid paradigm of human constitution, then the question arises about the limits of this anthropology, the sphere of its validity. At first sight, in describing human beings in reference to the steps of the practice, connecting even the human constitution with this practice, hesychast anthropology is restricted to a small community of adepts cultivating this practice; this implies that it is a very narrow and specialized anthropological conception of limited interest to mainstream anthropology. However, it turns out to be of much more widespread and of greater importance. The hesychast tradition plays a special role in the life of Orthodoxy, representing an instance of higher spiritual and moral authority. This role includes also what could be called the *function of an anthropological model and reference point*. In every Orthodox society some circle of people is likely to emerge, for whom the integral way of life created by the tradition (*bios hesychastos*, the "hesychast life") becomes the model and reference point for their lives. They do not become "full-time adepts" of Hesychasm and members of the hesychast tradition, but nevertheless they adhere to the "hesychast life" in various degrees and forms: they adopt its attitudes and values, learn some elements of its school of prayer, assimilate some of its behavioral patterns, etc. In short, they conform to the tradition and are orientated towards it in their way of life, both inner and outer. Thus one can say that they *realize anthropological strategies,* that they *adhere* to hesychast anthropology. In this way, a community or stratum adhering to the hesychast tradition is formed.

On the ground of this "adhering stratum", the sphere of hesychast anthropology and its social and cultural validity may expand. But how big is this stratum? Its scale depends on a multitude of factors, religious and historical, cultural and social, and in different periods and domains of Orthodox civilization, it has changed in the extreme. For us it is important to note that there were exceptional situations, when the "adhering stratum" grew up so much that it included a considerable part of society, with

contributions of all social layers. In these situations the tradition experienced vigorous development, accumulated powerful creative energy and acquired wide and strong influence in society, it "went out into the world". We could call such special periods "hesychast renaissances". The most important of them were two, in Byzantium in the 14th century and in Russia around the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries.

Thus the time of Dostoevsky, as well as the time of his main novel, is a period of hesychast renaissance in Russia. The "hesychast life" was then an important spiritual and cultural factor in the life of Russian society, and *The Brothers Karamazov* can be read as one of the principal cultural facts which proves this. As we shall see, the *anthropokosmos* of the novel belongs to the adhering stratum of the hesychast tradition.

The anthropokosmos of the novel in a hesychast perspective

According to the hesychast vision of man, each of the persons-voices is constituted through actualizing its relation to God in synergy, through the ontological unlocking of itself. Such unlocking is reached through the process described as "the Ladder", a spiritual-anthropological process. Thus, in order to interpret the anthropokosmos of *The Karamazovs* in the light of hesychast anthropology, we should consider each of its voices "against the back-cloth of the Ladder", i.e. in its relation to the stages of spiritual (and holistic) self-transformation. In the hesychast perspective the structure of the anthropokosmos as a whole is seen in its own way. The view in this perspective is contrary to the view of the Story-Teller and structures the anthropokosmos not by the narrative (syntagmatic), but semantic (paradigmatic) principle, which implies that its description must not start from the plot-center, "the family", but from the meaning-center, "the Elders". However, the entire anthropokosmos is presented to the reader by the voice of the Story-Teller, whose mediation can in no way be avoided.

The Story-Teller. This voice cannot have a constitution in our sense: the Story-Teller is not acting, he does not implement any anthropological strategies or practices. But he can and does have his own position and views, which means that our problem is not withdrawn, but only somewhat reduced: we have to describe the relation to the hesychast world not of his full-dimensional personality, but only of his views.

His connection with this world is seen already in the composition of his narration: after all, it is to him that the above-mentioned compositional device belongs and which affords the hesychast tradition the status of spiritual and moral authority. He presents the reader with a concise and competent exposition of the phenomenon of Elderhood, both in its history and spiritual essence. Undoubtedly, he is not just an expert on Elderhood, he also believes firmly in its spiritual truth and force: "the Elderhood is… tried and tested, thousand-year-old implement for the moral regeneration of mankind from slavery into freedom" (14,27; 43). His unshakable devotion to the Elderhood and its values is very clearly witnessed by the manner in which he tells the episode about "a putrid smell" from the body of deceased Zosima: all his account (14,295-305; 423-437) is dotted with emotional expressions of indignation and disgust to the address of the monks, who started to abuse and calumniate the deceased Elder. This devotion is in no way blind and unreasoned. In connection with the same episode, he shows spiritual maturity and discernment in his attitude towards Hesychasm: unhesitatingly, he calls a "fanatic" the zealous ascetic Ferapont, the opponent of Zosima, representing the typical figure of a monk cursing furiously all worldly life. The scrupulous attention paid by him to this "seductive" episode proves that he sees the Elderhood and Hesychasm in their real character, being far from idealizing them uncritically. After this episode the narrative comes back to Alyosha, and a special digression gives a penetrating analysis of his state of mind and the crisis in his consciousness (14,305-307; 438-440). Here the spiritual portrait of the Story-Teller becomes even more well-defined. He possesses knowledge and understanding of the human soul and personality and the laws of spiritual life are open to him; these qualities make him an ally of the Hesychasts, who develop a keen vision of inner reality.

All this said, we have sufficient grounds for the conclusion: the positions of the Story-Teller, his views and assessments, his spiritual world are oriented towards Hesychasm. In our terms, we surely can place him in the "adhering stratum" of the hesychast tradition.

The Elder Zosima. The service of the Russian Elder combines two sides and two works, inner and outer. He is a far-sighted counselor and spiritual teacher for everyone. He carries this mission tirelessly for hosts of

people of all states and strata. But this outer service is based on a well-defined inner fundament or source. The Elder is an experienced Hesychast, who reached the higher steps of the spiritual Ladder and never ceases the Noetic Practice.

As for the Elder Zosima, he reveals himself not only in his mission of an Elder, in counseling and teaching communion with his visitors, but also in the communion with the closest, inner circle of his fellow-monks, in his parting conversations with them. And the first thing that this vast discourse of Zosima tells us is the following: in all the narrative, including the part addressed to the monks, there is no trace of the fact that the Elder is a practicing Hesychast, cultivating *Praxis Noera*. His homilies say nothing about the hesychast Method, the steps of the Ladder, etc.; the only paragraph on prayer (14,288-289; 412) is not connected at all with the hesychast school of prayer. In the entire section dedicated to Zosima, "The Russian Monk", commentators have unearthed only two connotations to the corpus of hesychast literature, both to Isaac the Syrian and both of not a specifically hesychast character. The main affinities for Zosima's discourse in spiritual literature are provided by works of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1724-1783) and materials from his life.[3] But all this is rather "not far from" and "partly in tune with" Hesychasm than belonging directly and unambiguously to the hesychast tradition. This obvious hesychast "non-canonicity" of Zosima was immediately noticed by Leontiev, and could be called the "Zosima problem": *Can one say that Zosima represents truly and fully the hesychast ascesis?* As if in conformation of the thesis that Dostoevsky's text is essentially an "unfinalizable" dispute, this problem has not been resolved up to today. It is therefore quite natural to resume its principal arguments in the style of the novel itself, as just another "pro and contra".

Contra. The principal doubts with regard to Zosima's Hesychasm I described above. As for the above-mentioned criticism by Leontiev, it

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[3] The connection of "some homilies of Tikhon of Zadonsk" with the "Life" of Zosima was pointed out by Dostoevsky himself in the letter to Lyubimov quoted above. K. Mochulsky found quite a number of other correlations with St. Tikhon (see K. Mochulsky, *Dostoevskii* (Paris, 1980), p. 520-523).

comes down to few short passages in his works:

1) "In 'The Brothers Karamazov' the monks say… completely not the same things as are said in reality by *very good monks* both in Russia and on Mount Athos… there one speaks very little about Divine Office and monastic duties; not a single church service, no public prayers at all… *Not in such way*… one had to write about all this… It would be much better to combine *stronger mystical feeling with more faithful real depicturing*".[4]

2) "The teaching of Zosima is erroneous, and all the style of his conversations is false"; "In Optina 'The Brothers Karamazov' *are not accepted as a "correct Orthodox book"* and *the Elder Zosima does not resemble Father Amvrosy at all, neither in his teaching nor in his character*. Dostoevsky has described only his appearance, but made him *speak* absolutely *not what* he speaks, and not *in the style*, in which Amvrosy expresses himself. In Fr. Amvrosy the rigorous *ecclesiastic mysticism* is *in the first place*, and only after this do applied moral goals appear. In Fr Zosima… moral, "love", etc. is in the first place, while mystics is *very* feeble".[5]

Pro. Objections to the second, more concrete passage of Leontiev's criticism came immediately; they were joined to the publication of Leontiev's letter by its addressee V. V. Rozanov. Rozanov rejected the criticism resolutely, bringing forward two counterarguments. The first of them is decisive for the destiny of the novel: Rozanov points out that "*All* Russia read 'The Brothers Karamazov' and *believed* the representation of the Elder Zosima"[6] - and due to this - the character of Zosima started to exercise real influence on Russian society in its attitude to monasticism, and also to the monastic community itself, in which a "new school of monasticism, a new type of it" started to emerge: the type inspired by the character and preaching of Zosima. But for our subject the second of

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4 K. N. Leontiev. "*Nashi novye khristiane*. F.M.Dostoevskii i gr. Lev Tolstoy", Id. *Collected Works*, vol. 8, (Moscow, 1912), p. 198 (author's italics).

5 Letters to Vassily Rozanov from April 13th and May 8th 1891, Id. *Pis'ma k Vasiliyu Rozanovu* (London, 1981), p. 46 (author's italics).

6 V. V. Rozanov. Note 11 to the letter of K. N. Leontiev of May 8th 1891. Loc. Cit., p. 51 (author's italics).

Rozanov's arguments is more important, since it treats directly the relation of Zosima's type of monasticism to Hesychasm: "If it didn't correspond to the type of the Russian monasticism of the 18-19th centuries (Leontiev's words), then, possibly and even surely, it did correspond to the type of monasticism of the 4-9th centuries".[7] Rozanov was not an expert on the history of monasticism, but his opinions have been confirmed and approved by such an authority on the subject as Fr. George Florovsky. In *The Ways of Russian Theology* he called this opinion "quite right", adding that "Dostoevsky guessed and recognized… a seraphic stream in Russian piety, and prophetically continued the outlined trend".[8]

There are also some other points that should be added to this apology of Zosima. To start with, in the scant discussion of the hesychast Method and all concrete matters of hesychast practice, Zosima is not alone, such being a feature of Russian Hesychasm as such.[9] This general rule has some very important exceptions, like the works by St. Nilus of Sora and St. Theophan the Recluse, but in Dostoevsky's time they were known only to a small circle.

Next, it is necessary to note that the discourse of Zosima displays one special characteristic, which creates a bond between the world of Hesychasm and the world of Dostoevsky: the pivotal role of repentance. As said above, the world of hesychast ascesis is penetrated and colored by the atmosphere of repentance, which represents not only the beginning of and gate to spiritual ascent, but also the permanent attitude of Orthodox consciousness. This atmosphere of repentance can be felt in Zosima's ministry. The most intimate connection of Dostoevsky with the element of repentance can be found in the discourse of Mitya, and describing it we shall come back to the subject of repentance.

Finally, there is one more aspect in the subject "Zosima and Hesychasm" pointed out by many authors: the character of this Elder is addressed to the future, and some important trends of the spiritual

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7 Ibid.

8 Prot. Georgii Florovskii. *Puti russkogo bogosloviya.* 3rd ed., (Paris, 1983), p. 302.

9 S. S. Khoruzhii, "Russkii isihazm: cherty oblika i problemy izucheniya" // *Hesychasm. An annotated Bibliography*, ed. by Sergey S. Khoruzhii, (Moscow, 2004), p. 555.

development of Orthodoxy are anticipated in it.[10] Any appellation to the future is always to some extent ambiguous and ambivalent, and we shall still have to discuss Dostoevsky's prophecies; but in this case there is at least one moment of a genuine anticipation. The voice of Zosima and his spiritual style responded to trends of the development of Russian Hesychasm, and even, perhaps, of all the Orthodox Hesychasm of the 20th century. What is more important, they not only responded to trends, but were to some extent creating and forming them: as Rozanov justly noted, at the end of the 19th century, Elder Zosima, Alyosha, and the novel as a whole became well-known in Russian monasticism and turned into real participants of its life, who affected the ways of its development. First and foremost, their influence stimulated the connection and rapprochement between the monastery and the world.

As it appeared gradually, the theme of the going-out of the ascetic tradition into the world, seen as the creation of the "monastery in the world" embodied in the dyad of Zosima and Alyosha, became a strong connecting thread between *The Brothers Karamazov* and the destiny of Hesychasm in 20th century Russia. The next stage of Russian Elderhood, connected with the "Elder in the world" as represented by Fr. Alexiy Mechev and his son Fr. Sergiy Mechev, relied strongly on the ideas of the "monastery in the world; the issue of belonging to the catacomb communities of hesychast orientation in the period of Bolshevik persecution" was an example of this.[11]

But still, like all the *Pro and contra* in Dostoevsky, the dispute on Zosima cannot be closed once and for all. Notwithstanding the arguments listed here, voices of opponents still have a good deal to say, even if passing over in silence the subject of hesychast practice - in Zosima's case the actual underestimation of this practice is much more probable. In his case we can see a real shortage of attention to what is most necessary to a hesychast: the permanent self-absorption into Noetic Practice, the minute and methodical

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[10] "Zosima… is addressed to the future, as a proclaimer of the new spiritual consciousness of the Russian people", K. Mochulski, Loc.cit., p. 522-523.

[11] See on this: S. S. Khoruzhii, "Russkoe starchestvo v ego dukhovnykh i antropologicheskikh osnovaniyakh", Id. *Opyty iz russkoi dukhovnoi traditsii* (Moscow, 2005), p. 41-46.

work of the ascending self-transformation in unceasing prayer. Indeed, all of Zosima's discourse contains no slight allusion to this work, but instead it contains calls to "ecstasy and frenzy", states which are extremely dangerous for an ascetic and very far removed from the key hesychast attitude of "soberness" (*nepsis*, in Greek). A similar underestimation is noticeable with respect to the ascetic tradition, the community, which keeps and translates, through ages and lands, the undistorted experience of the ascent to *theosis*. It is only in the firm standing in this tradition and permanent communion with its teachers and their works that the hesychast experience is acquired; but in Zosima we see practically no traces of this communion. We noted this already, but now we have to add that the underestimation of the role of the ascetic community (constitutive for an ascetic) is connected in Zosima with the overestimation and utopian idealization of another community, the national one. Unfortunately, Dostoevsky made the Elder's voice the spokesman of his own Slavophile utopia, which proclaimed that there can be found the steadfast devotion to Orthodox faith in the Russian people and which predicted a radiant future to this people: "Russia is great in her humility… I clearly see our future: …even the most depraved of our wealthy people will end by being ashamed of his wealth before the poor, and the poor man, seeing this humility, will understand and yield to him with joy… I have faith that it will take place and the appointed season is drawing nigh… The people believe in our way, and the unbelieving activist will achieve nothing among us here in Russia… The people will go to meet the atheist and will conquer him, and there will arise a united Orthodox Russia… this people is a Bearer of God" (14,285-287; 407-409). What can one say today to this vision of the Russian future? Such enthusiastic false prophecies are not found in historical Russian hesychast Elders. Here the fictitious Elder's voice is expropriated by a partisan of the Slavophile party. The un-Christian, and surely un-hesychast utopia of "the people, a Bearer of God" (*narod-bogonosets*) played and still continues to play a bad role in our history, stimulating enthusiastic, and sometimes aggressive and xenophobic religious dreaminess.

Alyosha. He is directly included in the hesychast world, taking part in a basic cell of this world, the dyad Elder-Disciple. Like in Zosima's case, his voice provides no grounds to suppose that he is involved in the

hesychast practice, but now it does not generate a problem: so far he is only a novice and the fact that he is the *beloved* disciple of a *far-sighted* Elder removes all possible doubts: we are sure that he is integrated into the ascetic world in full measure, corresponding to his age and status. What is more, in all the course of the novel Alyosha is demonstrating a rare wealth of spiritual gifts, including even some elements of spiritual vision akin to the far-sightedness of his Elder. But his principal gift is love. The very first sentences about him by the Story-Teller present him as "a lover of mankind", whose soul was "straining unto the light of love". A kind of a special atmosphere of love surrounds him and is radiated by him.

As already said, Zosima and his beloved disciple embody and realize together one of the leading ideas of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the idea of going-out of the "monastery" into the "world", for service to the world on the paths of love enlightened by ascetic experience. Zosima is the initiator of this spiritual movement, but Alyosha is not his tool: the Elder was able to see deeply in him that this is exactly the vocation of this youth, and the way for building-up his true self. Alyosha's way leads into the world, exactly because in his nature he is a born monk, the monastic vows (temperance, chastity, obedience) are completely natural to him. Thus, even being in the world, he cannot avoid to be *other to the world*,[12] and thus: "I think of you like this: you will go out beyond these walls, but in the world you will abide as a monk" (14,259; 370). The ministry of the monk-in-the-world had to be represented in Dostoevsky's next, unwritten novel. However, how it happens in the epilogue of a classic novel, the final part of *The Karamazovs* opens the future a little, showing to us a prototype or, if you wish, rehearsal of this ministry. Alyosha represents here an instructor, a spiritual guide, so to speak, a mini-Elder for a circle of boys on the verge of childhood and adolescence.

Mitya. This is the richest character and the profound hesychast connections in his constitution comes out immediately. Mitya's voice-consciousness enters the polyphony of the novel in Book 3, "Voluptuaries".

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[12] The original Russian word for "monk", *inok*, derives etymologically from *inoi*, "the other" (to all the worldly).

Characterized in advance as "an ardent heart" by the Story-Teller, Mitya is ceaselessly torn apart and tormented by passions. Throughout all the novel he is not just in captivity of passions, but always at their peak, and never is it only one passion, but many conflicting ones: the new great passion for Grushenka, the old, no longer loving passion to Katerina Ivanovna, the hatred towards his father etc. Mitya's world is the world of human passions, in all variations and bends, nooks, and blind alleys: "I went to give her a whipping and stayed. The tempest raged, the pestilence struck, I succumbed to the taint" (14,109; 159). "A monster of cruelty… Even though he's been engaged to be married… has been unable to contain his debauchery" (14,108; 156). "If I throw myself into the abyss I do it straight, head first and heels last" (14,99; 143).

And nevertheless the world of passions is not all of Mitya's world, but only one half of it. One half exactly. When Mitya makes his appearance, there is an incense-bag on his neck (though we do not know about it), and it stays on his neck all throughout the first part of the action, till the "delirium" in Mokroye. The incense-bag contains fifteen hundred rubles, exactly one half of the money appropriated from Katya. Out of three thousand rubles taken from Katya, one half is thrown into the maelstrom of passion, but the other one is sewn up in an incense-bag and carried around his neck, it is with him, right on his chest, permanently, and it does not let him forget about the committed sin of vile action. Thus the incense bag is the repentance of the sinner, the material sign and pledge of his repentance. Having sewn the money into this little bag and having put it around his neck, the sinner effects an act of repentance, and as far as the incense-bag is with him, so is his repentance, he lives with it, in its presence. But even when the incense-bag is torn off and emptied, this presence does not end; in fact, it only intensifies, as the novel tells us: in Mokroye, in all the hours given to the passion, "only one fixed and burning emotion affected him every moment, 'like a burning coal in my soul', as he remembered it later" (14.396; 565). This burning emotion takes the place of the incense-bag. Hence *the repentance is the second inalienable half of Mitya's world*, the ceaseless and relentless inner tune of his existence.

In the finale, preparing to go to penal servitude, he is more than ever in the mood of repentance, he considers his future work in the mines as "a

tragic hymn to God" sung "out of the bowels of the earth by the subterranean folks"; and after the verdict Alyosha tells him: "You wanted to regenerate another man within yourself by means of suffering" (15,185; 969), thus expressing Mitya's emotions by one of the classical formulas of Christian repentance. Thus all the discourse of Mitya has a double structure: it is a combination, parallel presence, and parallel development of the discourse of passion and discourse of repentance. Clearly, both of these components of the constitution of Mitya, his voice and discourse, are elements of hesychast anthropology: the two initial steps of the hesychast Ladder are Repentance and Struggle with passions. Mitya dwells exactly in these two domains of spiritual life; and hence he is, in general, a "hesychast personality", he enters easily into the perspective of hesychast anthropology.

But Mitya is also a Dostoevskian personality! It is exactly on his example that we see clearly that Dostoevsky has his own vision of man, his original anthropology. It is based on anthropological paradigms discovered by the writer himself; and as a result, the "Dostoevskian personality" turns out to be a very specific version of the "hesychast personality". The most important of these paradigms, which gives the key to the constitution of both Mitya and Ivan (as we shall see below), stands out clearly from our description of the double world of Mitya's self-consciousness. As Hesychasm says, the world of repentance and the world of passions stand in opposition to each other, and a man must build a path through them, rejecting one of them and moving further and higher with the help of the other. Mitya does not argue at all with this assessment, on the contrary, he accentuates the polarity of these two worlds even more, contrasting them as the "ideal of the Madonna" and the "ideal of Sodom". At the same time, however, he does not want to leave either of them, keeping a relationship with both poles throughout all twelve books of the novel. *Mitya's state exemplifies the specific structure of consciousness of the "Dostoevskian personality": a dragged-on, suspended stay in two mutually excluding realms*. Man is conscious that he is in a situation of vital decisive choice between two totally incompatible opposing poles, but the moment of the choice, as if in slow-motion, is dragged on for all the time of artistic action. This situation is paradigmatic for Dostoevsky's world. The permanent stay "at the threshold of the decisive choice" appears as a specific mode of

human existence, an anthropological paradigm. The threshold, according to Bakhtin, is always connected with crisis, and hence we can add that Mitya's constitution and mode of existence are characterized by a permanent state of crisis.

Ivan. The basic structure of Ivan's voice is again the paradigm of consciousness-on-the-threshold. The main collision, main inner conflict in Ivan's world is recognized by the Elder clearly in the very beginning of the novel, and his diagnosis corresponds directly to our paradigm:

> …That idea [the idea of immortality] has not yet been resolved within your heart and is tormenting it… This question has not been resolved within you, and therein lies your great unhappiness, for it insistently demands resolution… But can it be resolved in me? Resolved in a positive direction? Ivan Fydorovich continued to inquire, strangely…
>
> If it cannot be resolved in a positive direction, it will never be resolved in a negative one…(!4,65; 95-96).

This is a classical example of a "threshold dialogue". The two incompatible worlds in Ivan's consciousness are atheism and faith. Atheism and faith (the state or feeling of faith) mean, in the first place, the absence or presence of the *fundamental relation* to Other Being, and hence they relate to each other as ontological closedness *vs.* openness of the Self. Ivan's distinguishing trait is his extremely profound and heightened awareness of both positions.

The leaning towards closedness was rooted in him since childhood: "he grew up a rather gloomy lad, closed off in himself" (14,15; 26). But he has also an active leaning towards openness, to life, "the sticky leaf-buds of spring", he is capable of love and by all this he makes a certain initial, starting motion of unlocking himself, or at least "towards unlocking himself". However, reflecting painstakingly upon this second position, he finds it impossible for him to accept it! There arises an ambivalent situation: "acceptance of God -unacceptance of the world", which is very aptly rendered by the formula "return of the ticket". This formula means, as we see it now, that Ivan stays exactly on the threshold: on the threshold of

unlocking himself, on the threshold between the two *ontologically* (for the question is about God) different modes and strategies of human existence. Being suspended on the threshold, he looks for arguments in favor of openness, and he expects support from Alyosha ("I should, perhaps, like to be healed by you" (14,215; 309): here Ivan turns towards the "adhering stratum" of hesychast tradition). Alyosha advances an argument, decisive for Christian consciousness, *argumentum ad Christo*, but it turns out that there is a counterargument in Ivan's possession prepared long ago: *The Grand Inquisitor*. The sense of the famous "legend" is simple to the extreme: yes, if only this world were Christ's world, there would be no need to return the ticket! But there is no place for Christ in this world - and so Ivan stays on the threshold. The crises, which the *ontological* threshold implies, are much more dangerous than all the crises of Mitya's passions.

Thus the constitution of Ivan is the constitution of being-on-the-threshold, and, as distinct from the anthropological threshold, determining Mitya's constitution, it is a meta-anthropological and ontological threshold. The two worlds of Mitya's consciousness are within the area of the hesychast Ladder, but those of Ivan's consciousness are without this area, they precede its start, the Spiritual Gate. Hence repentance is inaccessible to Ivan. The inner motion, which would turn into repentance in the unlocking consciousness, cannot find vent in him, thus producing breakdown. The collisions of Ivan's voice-consciousness are close not so much to ascetic anthropology, as to European philosophy, which in modern times implies making a choice between religious and secularized consciousness. All thinkers in whom the reflection of this choice was complemented with existential and emotional modalities (such as Pascal, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche) turn out to be close relatives of Ivan, whose philosophical discourse is immensely rich.

Postscript: An epileptic coefficient?

Not claiming to exhaust all the hesychast correlations in the anthropology of the novel, it is useful instead to discuss in conclusion a quite different aspect of this anthropology. It is one of those aspects on which so many ignorant and absurd things have been said in former times that we have started to consider the subject banal and somewhat indecent for discussion. I mean the so-called "psychopathologies" in Dostoevsky's

world: the impregnation of his artistic reality, its characters and events, all the texture of its discourse, with variegated manifestations of psychic anomalies; In the first place is that of epilepsy, from which Dostoevsky suffered himself. This old theme is vast and ramified and a thorough discussion would need to go into biographical issues, the writer's personal world, and the worlds of his heroes. Now, I do not plan at all to follow this risky route. I want to make only a few short remarks, drawing attention to rather interesting correlations of poetics, psychopathology, and Hesychasm.

In a short article by Vladimir Weidle, the following observation can be found: "very striking in Dostoevsky… is a strange, unimpeded character of action and free of hindrance. The laws of gravity are forgotten, everything became weightless: to make a step means to fly for a whole mile forward… a new lightness, the liberation unheard of… we fly, being beside ourselves…"[13] The author himself draws from this subtle observation rather disputable conclusions about the "pure spirituality" of Dostoevsky's world; but for an anthropologically oriented view a different association arises here. Weidle's description presents a splendid characteristic of a certain psychological phenomenon, connected both with Dostoevsky's personality and work: the *world of the aura*, or a specific state of consciousness before an attack of epilepsy. Its most famous description belongs to Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*. In the last moment before an attack, man is visited and overwhelmed by an extraordinary vision: he sees all the world in a state of the highest beauty and harmony, fullness of being, absolute peace and bliss, and he becomes one with this world of bliss, experiencing exactly those sensations which Weidle describes.

First of all, the image of the perfect, paradisiacal being - the image, originating surely in the world of the aura - became paradigmatic in Dostoevsky, appearing regularly in his text. Restricting ourselves to the last novel, we find such a vision of the world in a paradisiacal state in the dying youth Markel, who transmits it to his younger brother; and this brother,

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[13] V. V. Weidle, "Chetvertoe izmerenie. Iz tetradi o Dostoevskom", *Vozrozhdenie* (Paris, 1931), 12.02.1931. Quoted by: *Russkie emigranty o Dostoevskom* (St.-Petersburg, 1994), p. 192.

becoming a spiritual teacher and Elder, in turn, conveys in his homilies the essence of this vision. In *The Idiot*, where the vision of paradisiacal being is connected directly and unambiguously with epilepsy, the question arises naturally about its spiritual truth and value, and the Prince comes out with a whole-hearted apology: "Yes, it's a sickness, but so what?!...". In *The Brothers Karamazov* this vision is free of any explicit relation to epilepsy, so that there is no visible need for its defense or apology. However, it cannot lose its undoubted inner connection with epilepsy, its origin in the world of the aura and its epileptic nature: indisputably, it is *the same* vision as in *The Idiot*, and in all the discourse of the aura in Dostoevsky. And because of this, its estimation from a hesychast perspective can in no way coincide with its unconditional adoption by Zosima. Spiritual tradition denies categorically that visions obtained in states of mental disorder are genuine appearances of Divine reality. The theme of false appearances of Christ, Mother of God, angels and saints or the world of Paradise, the theme of doubtful and dangerous nature of religious exaltation, "ecstasies" and "frenzies" of all kinds (which abound in Dostoevsky's world) is one of the time-honored themes of ascetical practice. But the subject of necessary and rigorous checking of spiritual experience, extremely characteristic of hesychast spirituality, is simply not present in Zosima's discourse.

The common nature of Dostoevsky's poetics, the qualities originating in the world of the aura, can be rendered by the term *hyper-harmony*. Unreal, perfect harmony of the world of the aura manifests itself in magic conformity and coherence, an ideal matching and coordination of all its things and events; it is these qualities that generate miraculous lightness and unimpeded character of action. In the world of Dostoevsky's novels, the texture of human existence includes lots of conflicts, sufferings, and evils but it does not include any gaps, holes, flaws, lacunae, or odd pieces. Here, all ends meet and all people still more so, they meet and enter immediately into a conversation, a dialogue. If we agree with Bakhtin that Dostoevsky's novel is a dialogical novel, an anthropokosmos of voices-consciousnesses, then the main manifestation of the hyper-harmony of this anthropokosmos is its *hyper-dialogism*. The "unimpeded character" of action in this dialogical anthropokosmos means, first and foremost, the unimpeded character of dialogue, which does not know impossibility or failure. This property has a

certain anthropological premise, so to say, *hyper-contactness* of Dostoevsky's personages: at any moment, if it is needed for a dialogue, they notice each other and are oriented to each other. Thus the dialogue establishes itself over all barriers and turns eventually into the dialogue of everybody with everybody, the dialogue which knows no measure, no limits, no restraint.

From our small remarks one can see that the discourse of the aura as well as all the "discourse of psychopathologies" in *The Brothers of Karamazov* finds some reflections in the poetics of the novel. One can guess also that it is these "epileptic" features of Dostoevsky's poetics that are the source of that aversion to Dostoevsky which is characteristic of a number of prosaists with an acute sense for poetics, like Joyce, Nabokov, and others. For Joyce I can answer confidently: Joyce's world and poetics are polar to the world of hyper-harmony, they represent, if you wish, the *world of hyper-disharmony*, a total lack of conformity and coherence: the texture of his work is formed entirely by un-matching and uncoordinated things and events, by gaps and holes, and, of course, by the permanent hopelessness of communication and the failure of dialogue.[14]

Coming back to our main subject, we can ascertain that the anthropology of The Brothers Karamazov, like its poetics (both dimensions of the artistic work being inseparable), includes the "epileptic coefficient". It means, of course, not the plain plot fact that "there are too many of the insane" in the great novel. It is the anthropokosmos of the novel, the polyphony of its voices that carry the epileptic coefficient and assume epileptic complexion. And this coefficient cannot avoid somewhat reducing the dominating orientation of the world of The Karamazovs to hesychasm. This is the concluding Contra to our central thesis about the hesychast character of the anthropology of the novel.

(The text, dated 2008, is has been shortened with respect to the original article, accessible at: http://synergia-isa.ru/?page_id=1402)

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[14] The comparison of the systems of poetics of Dostoevsky and Joyce is made in my book: S. S. Khoruzhii, *Uliss v russkom serkale* (Moscow, 1994). The English translation of this episode: *Joyce Studies Annual*, 1998.