

**DOSTOYEVSKY'S CHRISTIANITY:
EMANUEL SWEDENBORG'S CONTRIBUTION**

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INTRODUCTION

For no man has a religion from himself, but through another, who either himself or by communication from others knew from the Word that there is a God, that there is a heaven and hell, that there is a life after death, and that God must be worshipped in order that a man may become blessed (DP 24).

If this is a valid statement, then one wonders how Fyodor Dostoyevsky had such a deep, intensive faith, which he expressed in his stories. Many attributed Dostoyevsky's faith to the shock of his mock execution on Dec. 22, 1849 in Petersburg (for participation in the Petrashevsky circle). Many also see Dostoyevsky's passionate writing as just an expression of a true Slavophile. I would like to present yet another view, which is based on the fact that in Dostoyevsky's library several translated books were found that were written by the 18th century theologian, Emanuel Swedenborg.

Further support for the argument that Dostoyevsky read Swedenborg's works was Dostoyevsky's friendship in the 1870s with the Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev. Soloviev not only called Swedenborg "a real man" (many considered him simply a mystic, as D. Chizhevskij described in the article "Swedenborg and the Slavs" 1956, 270); but understood Swedenborg's doctrines thoroughly enough to write an encyclopedia entry about him, published in the *Brockhaus* series in 1900.

These sources to Swedenborg's works may help explain the markings Dostoyevsky made in his New Testament, mainly in the Gospel of John (see Kjetsaa 1984), along with several religious themes found throughout his works. I would like to examine several of Dostoyevsky's ideas, especially in his extraordinary book, *The Brothers Karamazov* and his short story, "The Dream of the Ridiculous

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Man." Though Dostoyevsky wrote highly philosophical stories all of his life, there are several passages in these two works which may have Swedenborgian origins. In the 1975 article, "Dostoyevsky and Swedenborg," Czeslaw Milosz discussed the apparent theological borrowing by Dostoyevsky in his book *Crime and Punishment* from Swedenborg's book, *Heaven and Hell*. This paper will examine briefly Milosz's findings, and then proceed to analyze other passages in Dostoyevsky's works.

HEAVEN AND HELL IN *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT*

... love of self, as a central theme, appears in *Crime and Punishment* in two forms, the one represented by Raskolnikov, who gradually becomes aware of its power, the other by his double, Svidrigailov, who has nothing to learn, for he knows his evil nature and has a feeling of eternal damnation (Milosz 1975, 308).

Here Milosz defines the basis of Dostoyevsky's novel, *Crime and Punishment*, as the "love of self." The "love of self" can be explained as not only an attitude of a man, but also as a quality of his life, so that all of his actions are performed only for his personal gain, reputation, or honor. Both Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment* represent this type of man. But this is not an original type of character—throughout the history of literature selfish men have been portrayed. What makes this book so unique is that the selfish man (Raskolnikov) attempts to become a "superman," an idea which the German existentialist philosopher Nietzsche developed. The superman (in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) is a man who is able to transcend the ordinary man's guilt and inhibitions, and become master of his instinctive drives. His power, stemming from a "radical subjectivity," is not bound to ordinary morality, especially that taught by Christianity.

Thus, in *Crime and Punishment*, the murderer, like a "superman," believes he may transgress societal laws by committing a crime that, in his mind, was performed for the greater good of society. In this story, the "love of self," or the exertion of the will of a man against the laws of society, has been magnified into a theory similar to existentialism: man alone determines the law and decides his fate without acknowledging his Creator—or as the famous French existentialist Jean Paul Sartre said, "Hell is other people" (from "Existentialism Is Humanism," 1946 essay).

The opposite of existentialism would be a belief that God guides a man's life if man will let Him, and that man is to live a life of service to his neighbor (meaning both society and country in the higher sense). In *Crime and Punishment* Dostoyevsky depicts the results of an existential action (or an action that leaps over the bounds of society). The murderer Raskolnikov believes his euthanasia to be "for the greater good"; however, Raskolnikov's torment after committing the crime demonstrates the fallibility of the "superman" theory. But since avarice is also a possible motive for the crime, Dostoyevsky complicates the story and adds depth to the psychology of the crime.

Vyacheslav Ivanov, in his study on Dostoyevsky (Ivanov 1966, 16), described the multi-layered problem of the murder committed in *Crime and Punishment* as primarily a metaphysical battle between the individual will and the will of God. Thus by committing a premeditated murder, Raskolnikov expressed the highest form of "love of self." Secondly, Ivanov described the crime in terms of a "pathology of passions," such as what emotions drive the man to commit the crime? Was it guilt toward his mother, anger, avarice? Lastly, Ivanov examined the puzzle of the "whole net of apparently accidental occurrences... that life casts about the victim, the chain of actions and combination of circumstances whose causality inescapably conduces to the crime." Again, the existential dilemma is presented: does the environment make the criminal (was he destined to commit the crime?), or does the criminal create the environment?

But the importance of the story in *Crime and Punishment* is not just questioning the selfish motives of Raskolnikov (or even delineating the polyphonic voices of the novel as M. Bakhtin did), but to debate whether or not it is permissible to transcend laws of society for a select few "supermen." Can the decision of life and death be placed in the hands of men? If so, then is the Providence of God overruled—that Providence which, in Swedenborgian terms, guides man's every action and bends it toward good. And does this power of authority represent the extremity of "love of self"?

The love of self and the love of the world and their "delights" are what constitute hell, according to Swedenborg. By living according to his selfish loves and desires, a man will gradually find himself in company of people with similar "loves." Hence, as Swedenborg explains in *Heaven and Hell*, a man's environment and physical appearance will gradually "correspond" with his loves: he makes his own hell. In the system of correspondences that Swedenborg developed were symbols of things in the natural world, which represented

states in the spiritual world. Therefore, the descriptions in *Crime and Punishment* of "spiders, tarantulas, [and] scorpions as symbols of evil return so persistently in Dostoyevsky's late works that they deserve the appellation of correspondences" said Czeslaw Milosz (1975, 309).

Milosz theorizes that Dostoyevsky purchased a copy of *Heaven and Hell* during his stay in Germany in 1865, since by that time it had been translated (1862) and was being published in Leipzig. But it is possible that Dostoyevsky obtained a copy in St. Petersburg, since it was to be sold there in 1867 (*Intellectual Repository* 1973, 78). This is more likely Dostoyevsky's first exposure to the book, because he "as late as 1875 did not seem to know Aksakov" (Kjetsaa 1984, footnote 13). Yet in January, 1876, he published an article on Spiritualism (Dostoyevsky 1949, 190-196), after which he was invited to attend a seance held by Aksakov (Dostoyevsky 1986, letter no. 500). These seances, as described in detail in Aksakov's *Razoblachenie*, were attended by a group of scientists, headed by the renowned chemist Mendeleev. They attempted to expose the fraudulence of spiritualism. Both Dostoyevsky and his friend, the philosopher Soloviev, reacted negatively to the seances, as can be seen in their diaries and articles.

Because of his meeting with Aksakov (who translated *Heaven and Hell*), as well as the newly developing friendship with the philosopher Vladimir Soloviev (who eventually wrote an encyclopedia entry on Swedenborg), Dostoyevsky began developing clearer ideas of the afterlife than he had previously imagined or depicted in his writings. He wrote in 1877 (after the seance visits):

My whole trouble is that I, too, cannot believe in the devils; this is really a pity, since I have conceived a very clear and most remarkable theory of spiritism, but one exclusively based upon the existence of devils: without them, my whole theory comes to nought of its own accord (Dostoyevsky 1949, article entitled "A Little Word on Report of Scientific Committee on Spiritual Phenomena").

Thus, from Aksakov's seances, from Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*, and by his friendships, Dostoyevsky was able to imagine hell as not simply a place of torment and punishment, but as the result of evil desires in a man's heart. Thus, devils were only people, not a special class of beings. By his deep, psychologically intense writing style, Dostoyevsky showed that "man makes his own hell"; that is, he

plays an active part in determining whether he will go to heaven or hell by his choices. As Swedenborg explained:

... infernal fire means every lust for doing evil that flows forth from the love of self, this fire means also such torment as exists in the hells. For the lust from that love is a lust for injuring others who do not honor, venerate and worship one-self. ... When such lust is active in everyone in society, and is restrained by no external bond, such as the fear of the law, and of the loss of reputation, honor, gain, and life, every one from the impulse of his own evil rushes upon another; and so far as he prevails, subjugates the rest and subjects them to his dominion ... (HH 573)

Swedenborg's teaching on hell was unique because he taught that hell was a place of spiritual cold and darkness—opposing the old Christian idea that hell was simply a place of fire and brimstone torment—because:

... infernal fire or heat [corresponding to the lusts of selfish loves] is changed into intense cold when heat from heaven flows in; and those who are in it then shiver like those seized with chills and fever, and are inwardly distressed; and for the reason that they are in direct opposition to the Divine... (HH 572).

Thus, one might try to say that Dostoyevsky's knowledge of passages such as these from Swedenborg are why he depicted the surroundings of his characters in such dark, mysterious tones in order to reflect a hellish inner torment. But this would be making assumptions on the intent of the author, and not be respecting his great talent. Therefore, let us turn to another of Dostoyevsky's stories to see if there are stronger ties with Swedenborg's works.

"The Dream of the Ridiculous Man"

The question posed in Dostoyevsky's story "Dream of the Ridiculous Man" was that if a man was to commit a crime on another planet, would he still feel the guilt of it when he returned to earth? In the beginning of the story, the narrator contemplates suicide as a result of a nihilistic attitude that was building inside of him:

It seemed clear to me that life and the world in some way or other depended on me now. It might almost be said that the

world seemed to be created for me alone. If I were to shoot myself, the world would cease to exist... the whole world would dissolve as soon as my consciousness became extinct... ("Dream of the Ridiculous Man" pt. 2).

In the story, the narrator roughly refuses to help a pleading little girl, and upon returning home, falls asleep and dreams:

Suddenly a familiar and unbelievable nostalgic feeling shook me: I saw our sun! I know it couldn't be our sun, the sun that gave birth to our earth: I knew we were infinitely far from our sun, but somehow everything inside me knew that this sun was exactly the same as the other, its copy, its double..."Are such duplications possible in the universe?" I asked. "Is this the law of nature? And if that star is earth, can it really be like our earth—wretched, yet eternally dear to the hearts of her most ungrateful children?" ("Dream of the Ridiculous Man" pt. 3)

A dual sun—what does it mean? Why did Dostoyevsky have his nihilistic narrator dream in such a manner? Dostoyevsky created many characters that had their "doubles" in his novels (beginning with the 1846 novel, *The Double*), but this passage also demonstrates his use of dual imagery. Swedenborg's theological principles were also constructed on a system of duality, called "correspondences," which demonstrated how the natural world mirrors the spiritual world. But unlike Dostoyevsky's, Swedenborg's correspondences were mainly a means for understanding the Old and New Testaments, whereas Dostoyevsky used correspondential images as a literary device.

If we use Swedenborg's correspondences as a key to the above passage from Dostoyevsky's story, then we can explain the duality of suns as a reference to the natural sun and the sun of the spiritual world. Swedenborg explained that in the spiritual world the Lord's Divine Love and Wisdom radiate from Him in the form of heat and light, so He appears like a sun.

So if the above passage from "Dream of the Ridiculous Man" was based on some of Swedenborg's ideas, then does the story contain other borrowings? Compare the following texts:

I couldn't see how they could know so much when there was no indication that they had any knowledge of the achievements of our modern science. But I soon realized that their knowledge fed upon different revelations than ours and that

their aspirations were quite different . . . Their understanding was of a higher order and deeper than that provided by our science. Science tries to explain what life is in order to teach us how we should love; they didn't need science to tell them how to live—they knew by themselves. ("Dream of the Ridiculous Man" pt. 4)

In *Heaven and Hell*, the wisdom of the angels is described:

... their speech is the speech of wisdom; for it flows directly and spontaneously from the thought, and this from their affection, so that their speech is thought and affection in external form. Hence there is nothing that withdraws them from the Divine influx, and nothing external intrudes from other thoughts, as with man in his speech. (265-266)

And to continue Dostoyevsky;

... I couldn't account for their knowledge. They pointed at their trees, and I couldn't comprehend the intensity of the love with which they looked at them; it was as if they were communicating with beings like themselves, (pt.4)

Taking into account that trees in Swedenborg's system correspond to man (or more generally, knowledges of good and truth), and leaves to rational truths (*see Apocalypse Revealed* no. 936), then this passage again refers to the wisdom of men in heaven, or the "children of the sun" as described in part 3 of the story. Here they are gesturing toward trees to indicate the Divine source of their knowledge.

If this whole concept of life after death seems difficult to comprehend, Swedenborg further explained that the soul of a man "rises immediately after death, and he then appears to himself in a body just as in this world, with a similar face, members, arms, hands, feet, breast, belly, and loins, so that when he sees and touches himself, he says that he is a man in the world" (AC 5078). Hence Swedenborg explained that there is a difference in the actual substance of the spiritual body as compared to the physical body (in contrast to the teachings of Descartes, Aristotle, and Leibnitz—see TCR 696). But the soul retains an appearance of a physical body after death, as the preceding quotation reflects.

Throughout "Dream of the Ridiculous Man" Dostoyevsky describes communities of people who love and help each other:

The eyes of these happy people were radiant and their faces were intelligent, expressing the serenity of those who have supremely fulfilled themselves... they seemed to spend all of their lives in perpetual praise of one another. It seemed to be a universal and all-embracing love of each other." (pt. 4)

This passage is similar in many respects to how Swedenborg described heaven—where everyone lives a life of use for the society, and loves his neighbor more than himself. Thus we can see a close parallel between the descriptions from Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* and this short story by Dostoyevsky: again reaffirming that Swedenborg was a source or an "influence" on Dostoyevsky. Let us turn to one of his most renowned masterpieces, *The Brothers Karamazov*, to see if more Swedenborgian ideas can be found.

THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV

Just as Dostoyevsky had struggled with the metaphysics of crime in his earlier works, such as *Crime and Punishment*, he also attempted to understand the metaphysics of the Trinity. Dostoyevsky was quite aware of the paradox of the duality of Christ as seen in the chapter "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" in his *Brothers Karamazov*. Did Swedenborg's teachings on the unity and function of the Trinity influence Dostoyevsky's ideas? It seems highly likely, because Dostoyevsky attended a few of the philosopher Soloviev's "God-Manhood" lectures, as well as being personally acquainted with Soloviev, who had studied Swedenborg extensively. Let us explore how Dostoyevsky may have seen and understood these special Swedenborgian concepts of the Trinity.

In my opinion, the story of the three Karamazov brothers overall may actually represent the Lord's glorification on earth, and the equivalent process of "regeneration" that a man can undergo on earth. Why? First of all, Swedenborg described three degrees of reception of God in man (also in churches and mankind): the natural level, which is the acknowledgement of him in thought; secondly, the spiritual, when the Divine is confirmed according to one's understanding of Him; and finally, the celestial—living accordingly, by one's will. The three Karamazov brothers fit nicely into this structure; let us examine this more closely:

Dmitri—the Natural Man

Dmitri thinks only on the natural/sensual plane about God:

Has it reformed me? Never! For I'm a Karamazov. For when I do leap into the pit, I go headlong with my heels up, and am pleased to be falling in that degrading attitude, and pride myself upon it. And in the very depths of that degradation I begin a hymn of praise. Let me be accursed. Let me be vile and base, only let me kiss the hem of the veil in which my God is shrouded. Though I may be following the devil, I am Thy son, O Lord, and I love Thee, and I feel the joy without which the world cannot stand. (Book 3, Ch. 3)

Dmitri represents the natural level of reception, but also the first "state" in spiritual growth called repentance (the others, according to Swedenborg, are reformation and regeneration). But as the above quotation states, Dmitri repents, but will not be reformed, hence remains a natural man.

Ivan—the Spiritual Man

How is Ivan's belief different? Dmitri explains (in Book 11, Ch. 3) that "Ivan has no God. He has an idea. . . . He is always silent. And as for me, God torments me." Ivan is the intellectual, who requires a rational understanding of his belief. Since he does not find one, he is an atheist: "I hasten to protect myself, and so I renounce the higher harmony (pt. 5, ch. 4). Ivan claims that he is unable to comprehend a God that would permit a child to suffer in order for a greater good to be served (thence equating God as "author" of human suffering).

Ivan is visited by the devil in the story, who demands that he confess his beliefs. Ivan will not "repent" of his atheism, but tries to make amends for the consequences of his nihilistic teachings, "All is permitted," to Smerdyakov, the murderer of his father. Hence, Ivan's "reformation" consists of his acceptance of partial responsibility for the crime.

Alyosha—the Celestial Man

In contrast to Ivan, Alyosha is monk-like, a "celestial man." As Father Zossima said, Alyosha "lived a life of active love." Some call Alyosha in this story the Christ-like figure, an analogy that is reinforced by the schoolboys who follow Alyosha like disciples

("about twelve of them" in the Epilogue). However, this allegory is not exact because whereas Christ was crucified, Alyosha was not the one who was murdered in the story: it was the Karamazov father who was murdered.

Alyosha could be compared to the third stage of spiritual growth, which Swedenborg named "regeneration." Why? Though Alyosha may have doubted God at times, he always believed in Him. Hence, his life consisted of deepening his faith, and living a life of love toward others. This process of regeneration is symbolized by the Genesis story, said Swedenborg, where "let there be light" refers to the development of love and faith to God (Genesis 1:16). And indeed, Alyosha felt faith deep in his soul:

... in his rapture he was weeping even over those stars, which were shining to him from the abyss of space ... There seemed to be threads from all those innumerable worlds of God, linking his soul to them, and it was trembling all over "in contact with other worlds." He longed to forgive every one and for everything, and to beg for forgiveness (*Brothers Karamazov* Book 7, Ch. 4).

The Divine Human

Since the real murderer, Smerdyakov, committed suicide, Dmitri was the one who "bore the burden of guilt" for the crime against his father in the story. Dmitri was technically innocent, as was Christ, who "bore the burden of mankind's sins." Here the Divine and Human aspects of Christ in a sense are represented by the Dmitri-/Fyodor relation. Indeed the "natural man," Dmitri, shared many characteristics with his father.

But since the three brothers represent three levels of personality (natural, spiritual, and celestial), then a further elaboration is needed to see the connection of the brothers with the Trinity. Swedenborg wrote that a man's body is from the mother, but the soul is from the father. Thus, Dmitri had the soul of his father, just as Christ, while on earth, had the soul of the Father, according to Swedenborg (because if Christ's soul was from a natural father, He would be a finite being). Christ's "Divine Human" was made part of the Trinity, or "glorified" by "gradually putting off the Human derived from the mother and putting on the Human from the Father," said Swedenborg.

Alyosha (the celestial man) shared many characteristics with his mother, namely epilepsy and physical features. But since "the human from the mother" was gradually "put off" (TCR 102), it is Dmitri, not Alyosha, who parallels Christ's final glorification, or unification of the Trinity. On the other hand, Alyosha could represent the Holy Spirit of the Trinity, because of his "life of active love" toward others. But one of the most important Trinity teachings of Swedenborg is the explanation that Christ "perfected" His Human part to the extent that it became totally spiritual (no body was found in the tomb at Easter), so that "the Human of the Lord [became] Divine, and in Him God is Man, and Man God" (TCR 102).

The Book of Revelation

God took seeds from the other worlds and sowed them on this earth, and planted a garden, and everything came up that could come up, but what He grew lives and is alive only through the feeling of its contact with other mysterious worlds. If that feeling grows weak or is destroyed in you, the heavenly growth will die away in you. Then you will be indifferent to belief and even grow to hate it (*The Brothers Karamazov*).

Thus, just as men can wither in moral wastelands—where there are no concepts of good and evil, no emotional involvements, no belief in God, so also can churches become corrupt. The major part of the Book of Revelation according to Swedenborg (in *Apocalypse Revealed*) concerns this very thing—the perversions of doctrinal matters by churches of Christendom.

Dostoyevsky may have used Swedenborg's teachings as a foundation for the story of "The Grand Inquisitor" and "The Prisoner." For instance, in Dostoyevsky's personal copy of the New Testament, he marked the following passage: "the woman sitting on a scarlet beast full of blasphemy," which according to Swedenborg, refers to the Word being "totally profaned by the Roman Catholic Church."

Dostoyevsky also wrote "obschechelevk" ("the common man") by Revelation 17:11, which signifies that "the Word . . . is the Divine good itself, and that it is the Divine truth, and that it is taken away from the laity and the common people, lest the profanations and adulterations made in it by their leaders should appear and on that account recede." That is, the priests of the churches wanted to keep their congregations in their power, so that Bibles were not permitted for the common man.

In the chapter "The Grand Inquisitor," Dostoyevsky stages a battle between the "Grand Inquisitor" (or the Roman Catholic Church), and the Prisoner (representing Christ). Just as the Grand Inquisitor visited Christ in prison, so does the Roman Catholic church assert power over men by keeping them in mystery about the Bible, and by claiming the authority to issue all sorts of edicts. This domination is also represented in Revelation by "the seven heads are seven mountains where the woman sitteth upon them" (Rev. 17:9). This passage was marked by Dostoyevsky with the word "civilization."

These limitations of the church hierarchy defeat the whole purpose for which Christ came on earth—to give men the liberty and rationality to believe or not. Hence, this also is a type of "anti-Christ," when churches abuse their power so that men are withheld from *internal* worship. Dostoyevsky thus described the Grand Inquisitor as "an old man at the head of the whole army filled with the lust for power only for the sake of filthy goods" (pt. 5, ch. 5).

In contrast to the Roman Catholic beliefs, the Protestant religions, as represented in the Book of Revelations by "the dragon" according to Swedenborg, adhere to Paul's "faith-alone" doctrine. By this doctrine, man is justified by faith alone without the works of the law. This justification allows the free interpretation of the Bible among both the clergy and congregation, wrote Swedenborg; hence developed a type of "situation ethics" in church doctrines that were developed without a basis in a firm set of exegetical laws, such as those employed by Swedenborg.

Finally, Dostoyevsky wrote the word "socialism" in his New Testament by "the beast from the sea." According to Swedenborg, this passage signifies "the reasoning from the natural man, confirming the separation of faith from life" (AR 567). This, I suggest, could be applied to the philosophies of socialism and communism, since they do not include religion in the workings of the state. That is, these systems believe in full separation of church and state: a change from former governments which believed in a theocratic state.

Flowers of Evil

So we can see that there are many parallels between Swedenborg's writings and Dostoyevsky's stories. Since Dostoyevsky did have access to Swedenborg, both from translations and through friends, then it would be fair to say that he consciously and inten-

tionally used Swedenborg's ideas—though I do not want to diminish the power and greatness of Dostoyevsky's intellect. All of his life Dostoyevsky strove toward understanding the Divine, and creating characters to express his innermost struggles. Hence, as Dostoyevsky's character, the Father Zossima, said in *The Brothers Karamazov*: a man's life is a "moment of active living love." And as Milosz elaborated:

A man's life is given to him as a gift of time and space, where love can be exercised. The drama of eternal life resides precisely in the brevity of this encounter with time and space, which soon are no more, and then everything one has lived through becomes part of his interior states. The flames of hell are within the damned and correspond to the quality of their love on earth. [As Father Zossima said], "For them hell is voluntary, and they cannot have enough of it." (Milosz 1975, 317)

Just as the French symbolist poet Baudelaire depicted the immorality of the Parisian masses in his poetry "The Flowers of Evil," so did Dostoyevsky describe men in their moral torments, their "voluntary hells." Yet by drawing portraits of the "flowers of evil," Dostoyevsky succinctly described men in the moral torments, their "voluntary hells." Thus by drawing portraits of the "flowers of evil" in clear (psychological) colors, Dostoyevsky's stories painted realistic expressions which said, "The Kingdom of God is within you."■

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