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The Ferapont Paradox
Orthodox Hesychastic Practice and the Poetic Structure of
The Brothers Karamazov

by Peter Gregory Winsky

Abstract

This article examines how Orthodox Hesychasm shapes the poetics and narrative structure of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, particularly in light of the early critical debate between Leont'ev and Rozanov regarding Dostoevsky's fidelity to institutional Orthodoxy. It argues that an antinomial approach to Orthodoxy, represented by the paradox of rigid dogmatism and piety in Fr. Ferapont and his engagement with the self-practice of spiritual ascent, provides deeper insight into Dostoevsky's worldview and the structure of the novel. Central to this analysis is Dostoevsky's vision of Higher Realism, which is conveyed through both the positive and heroic portrayals of Orthodox ideals and the satirical critique of its misapplications through fanaticism. By situating the novel within this dual framework, the study highlights the pivotal role of Orthodox principles in shaping its thematic and aesthetic complexity.



Keywords: Dostoevsky, orthodox hesychasm, minimal religion, Konstantin Leont'ev, Vasily Rozanov, apophaticism



The Ferapont Paradox

Orthodox Hesychastic Practice and the Poetic Structure of *The Brothers Karamazov*

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Introduction

The question of the orthodoxy of Dostoevsky's Orthodoxy in his post-Siberian texts, and particularly in *The Brothers Karamazov*, continues to perplex scholars. Despite his constant defense of his faith, Dostoevsky's works still draw accusations that his depiction of the life of the Church is too moral, lacks representations of liturgical life, and generally adheres too closely to secular trends rather than the reality of late nineteenth century Russian Orthodoxy. Is it possible, however, that Dostoevsky faithfully represented Orthodoxy in his work without recounting the liturgical and monastic traditions? Despite overwhelming engagement with secular and non-institutional religious trends and ideologies, Dostoevsky's texts are not only faithful to, but dependent upon Orthodoxy as the foundations of the author's realism "in a higher sense."¹ To demonstrate the relationship between Dostoevsky's worldview and his poetics, I will trace the foundations of Orthodox monastic traditions as coded into the gloomy, rancorous, and fanatical Father Ferapont. Despite his aversion to eldership, Ferapont illuminates Dostoevsky's commitment to institutional Orthodox practice, albeit subtly. Dostoevsky creates what I call the 'Ferapont Paradox': a simultaneous lionization and denunciation of institutional Orthodox theology and practice which antinomically points towards Dostoevsky's epistemological, ontological, anthropological, and poetic philosophies. I utilize the correspondence between Konstantin Leont'ev and Vasily Rozanov regarding Dostoevsky's Orthodoxy, which exposes the roots of the synthesis between the fear of God and the active, Incarnational love preached by Zosima, in order to shed light on the crucial role the spiritual practice of hesychasm plays in Dostoevsky's work. Reading Ferapont through

1. F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 30 vols., vol. 26, *Khudozhestvennye proizvedeniia*, ed. F. M. Fridlender et al. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972–90), 65. Henceforth citations for volumes of these texts will be written as Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* (volume number).

the lens of Leont'ev and Rozanov's discourse grants a nuanced understanding of the harsh yet necessary institutional elements of Orthodoxy as presented by Ferapont and allows for a deeper appreciation of the originality and complexity of Dostoevsky's poetics.

There are abundant charges in critical and scholarly engagements with Dostoevsky's work, and particularly in discourse surrounding *The Brothers Karamazov*, that Dostoevsky is separated from or that he even explicitly rejects the traditions and practices of what Malcolm Jones terms "institutional Orthodoxy."² Jones writes

Dostoevsky consciously and repeatedly chose to reveal his glimpses of salvation by means of a narrative structure that might have almost been designed [...] to destabilize and to subvert them. [...] He could have restored the semblance of control by choosing omniscient narrators. [...] Or he could have given his 'saintly' characters an aura of imperturbability and spiritual peace that protected them from worldly shocks and human cynicism.³

Jones implies that a lack of concrete literary or liturgical inter-/sub-textual linkages with an institutional Orthodox position, or granting any control over the chaos of the novel to this institution, obligates a reading of "minimal religion" in *The Brothers Karamazov*—essentially implying that only minimal religion shapes its poetic structure.⁴ This claim presupposes that minimal religion is truer to Realism because it prioritizes individual experience over dogma and tradition in its "direct impact of lived, personal experience."⁵ However, just as institutional contexts do not negate personal elements of a religious experience, Dostoevsky's verisimilar depiction of the world does not mean that he rejects or subverts dogmas and traditions.

2. Major critical works which have discussed a the question of institutionalized religion in Dostoevsky include Malcolm Jones, *Dostoevsky and the Dynamics of Religious Experience* (London: Anthem Press, 2005); Sven Linner, *Starets Zosima in The Brothers Karamazov: A Study of the Mimesis of Virtue* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1975); Gary Saul Morson, "The God of Onions: *The Brothers Karamazov* and the Mythic Prosaic," in *A New Word on The Brothers Karamazov*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004); Diane Oenning Thompson, *The Brothers Karamazov and the Poetics of Memory* (Cambridge, Cambridge University press: 1991); Mark G. Pomar, "Alesha Karamazov's Epiphany," *Slavic and East European Journal* 27, no.1 (1983); Valentina Vetlovskaya, "Alyosha and the Hagiographic Hero," trans. Nancy Pollak and Susanne Fusso, in *Dostoevsky: New Perspectives*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson (New York: Prentice Hall, 1984); George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson, eds., *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Of particular interest is the recent study of the Orthodox roots of Zosima in the context of the Rozanov/Leont'ev correspondence in Alexander A. Medvedev, "The Elder Zosima as a Renovation of Orthodox Tradition (K.N. Leontiev and V.V. Rozanov's Polemic about the Novel by F.M. Dostoevsky 'The Brothers Karamazov')," *Journal of Siberian Federal University. Humanities & Social Sciences* 3 (2018).

3. Jones, x–xi.

4. For more on "minimal religion" see Mikhail Epstein, "Minimal Religion," in *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture*, ed. Mikhail Epstein, Alexander Genis and Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover (New York: Berghann Books, 1999).

5. Jones, xi.

The Leont'ev/Rozanov Analysis

The minimal religion Jones sees in Dostoevsky is precisely the "personal Christianity," of which Leont'ev accused Dostoevsky in his article "On Universal Love" and, more pointedly, in his correspondence with Rozanov. In these texts Leont'ev addresses the transgression of prioritizing "harmony," over the "fear of God" (*strakh Bozhii*), which is the source of "religious wisdom" according to the teachings of the Orthodox monastic spiritual practice.⁶ By stressing fear over love, Leont'ev posits a rejection of the reality of lived experience and the mystical spirit of the Church, and claims that a lack of fear leads to "*transcendent* (not earthly, beyond the grave) *egoism*."⁷

For Leont'ev, who was living out the end of his life at Optina Pustyn, institutional Orthodoxy and its mystical elements were non-existent in the works of Dostoevsky. Rather, he claimed Dostoevsky's Christianity was driven by a devotion to secular, particularly German idealist and socialist, conceptions of morality and love. Leont'ev's perspective was that this trend was widespread in Russian literature of the late nineteenth century and was especially problematic in Dostoevsky's work. His view was couched in the context of institutional Orthodoxy, and, in this sense, he lends support to Jones' proposition that Dostoevsky functions outside the boundaries of the institutional church.

Drawing on his experiences and monastic studies on Athos and at Optina, Leont'ev claims that Dostoevsky's presentation of Christianity was completely incompatible with dogmatic Orthodoxy. Leont'ev's praise of a priest who rejected Zosima's call to universal love, referring to him as a "*survivor* of Dostoevsky," highlights the extreme danger that Dostoevsky's Orthodoxy represented, in his perspective. In the same letter to Rozanov, he writes that:

In Optina *The Brothers Karamazov* is not recognized as a truly Orthodox text, and the elder Zosima does not resemble Father Ambrose in either his teaching or his character. Dostoevsky described only his appearance, but he made [Zosima] speak in a way that was completely opposed to how Ambrose did, not at all in the style in which he expressed himself. For Fr. Ambrose *church mysticism* was strictly before all else and only then did he apply morality. For Zosima (through whom Fyodor Mikhailovich himself speaks)—morality [was primary], love, love, etc., and then mysticism, but only very weakly.⁸

In Leont'ev's fanatical devotion to the orthodoxy of Orthodoxy there was no room for a living religion outside the walls of the monastery. Salvation could only be found within its ramparts, living the rigorous, dogmatically strict lifestyle of spiritual warfare. After all, this monastic

6. V. V. Rozanov, *Sobranie sochinenii v 30 tomakh*, ed. A. N. Nikolyukin (Moscow: Respublika, 1995), vol. 3: 334. All translations are mine. Certain words have also been presented in the original Russian when appropriate for context. All emphases are in the original texts except where noted.

7. *Ibid.*, 334.

8. *Ibid.*, 337.

mode was his personal life. As Sergei Bulgakov relates, Leont'ev's fierce defense of Orthodoxy, and particularly the *most stringent* elements of its practice on Athos and at Optina, led him to a sort of Nietzschean decadence:

In Leont'ev's religiosity, two features should be particularly emphasized: its depth and seriousness, along with its particular coloring. ... Orthodoxy became for him a personal *podvig* [*spiritual struggle*], of heavy chains imposed on an impulsive mind and passionate will, as sackcloth for pacifying lust. And the more painfully these chains cut, the more exhausting the *podvig* was, the more significant and authentic his religious comprehension became. Therefore, his observations of Athos and Optina are so truthful and wish. ... However, it is only possible to use Leont'ev's writings as a source for the comprehension of Orthodoxy in the context of his own personal coloring. While blaming his contemporaries, Dostoevsky, Vl. Soloviev, and in part Tolstoy, as preachers of "rosy" Christianity due to the fact that they "keep silent about one thing, ignore the other, and completely reject the third," Leont'ev himself was undoubtedly guilty of the same. Christianity is many-sided and diverse, and within certain limits it gives scope to personal nuances, even presupposes them. Dangerous deviations appear only when [the personal nuances] are identified with the supra-personal essence of Christianity, and Leont'ev, intolerant, exclusive, fanatical, undoubtedly sinned in this.⁹

Leont'ev's "deviation"—assigning the most severe elements of Orthodox monasticism to all Orthodox practice—mirrors Dostoevsky's Fr. Ferapont. This Pharisaic element, or *prelest'* ("spiritual delusion"), entails taking a personal *podvig* assigned to one person by an elder and applying it to all Christianity.¹⁰

This personal *podvig* leads Leont'ev to claim that outside rigorous spiritual practice, there is no real Orthodoxy, and therefore it does not exist in *The Brothers Karamazov*. This fanatical rigorism parallels the scholarly conclusion that institutional Orthodoxy is not present in the novel. Strangely, in both contexts, there seems to be tacit agreement that because one strain of institutional Orthodoxy is not present, or if it is vilified, it negates institutional Orthodoxy's presence in the novel. Furthermore, scholars tend to agree with Leont'ev, at least with the claim that the practices of Zosima are not Orthodox. Jones again provides the best example of the trend:

9. S. N. Bulgakov, "Pobeditel'—Pobezhdennyi," in *Konstantin Leont'ev: Pro et Contra. Antologiii*, book 1 (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo Gumanitarnogo Instituta, 1995), 385–6.

10. For more on the importance of *prelest'* as "spiritual delusion" in Dostoevsky's works see Peter Gregory Winsky, "Dostoevsky through the Lens of Orthodox Personalism: Synergetic Anthropology and Relational Ontology as Poetic Foundations of Higher Realism" (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2021), 183–6, Proquest ID: Winsky_ucla_0031D_19734.

We have already referred to [Alyosha's vision of Cana] more than once, but it is worth quoting it again in the full light of Epstein's model [of Minimal Religion] and we shall note, as we have before in a different context, that all but token references to Orthodox ritual and traditional Christian doctrine has been suppressed; perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that, though channeled through it, Alyosha's religious experience has been liberated from Orthodox ritual and traditional Christian doctrine, at a moment when it might be expected to overwhelm him, at a moment when a performance of that ritual and a proclamation of that Gospel coincides with a profoundly emotional religious experience that seems to cry out for such an interpretation.¹¹

The claim that Zosima, Alyosha, and Ferapont are "liberated from Orthodox ritual and traditional Christian doctrine" is tenuous at best, especially considering that their entire formation and existence is shaped by and predicated upon their belief in that very system and practice, which becomes evident through a more rigorous analysis of the interplay between liturgical/ dogmatic elements of institutional Christianity and the necessary personal quality they contain.

The Split between Institutional and Personal Christianity

Turning to the monastic anthropocosmos of the novel—its spiritual and symbolic center in the monastery—one quickly finds both institutional and minimal religion/personal Christianity. The most obvious source for these categories is Zosima. He lives within the monastery, practices the monastic mode of spiritual growth toward theosis and partakes of the sacraments. And although Dostoevsky makes clear in his notebooks and letters that Zosima was not meant to be a mimetic depiction of any living monastic, he is both within and a product of institutional Orthodoxy despite also existing outside its stringent legalistic strains.

On the one hand, Dostoevsky wants to depict a positive image of institutional Orthodoxy. He wrote to Mikhail Katkov about the foundations for the character of the retired Bishop Tikhon in *Demons* who would then metamorphose into Zosima:

There will be bright faces [as well as gloomy ones in the novel]. Generally, I'm afraid that I don't have the strength to do much. But for the first time I want to touch on one category of people who haven't been touched on in literature. I take Tikhon of Zadonsk as the ideal of this type of person. ... I will compare him to the hero of the novel. But I'm very afraid; I have never attempted it, but I know something about this world.¹²

11. Jones, 133.

12. Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* XXIX (1), 142.

When Dostoevsky mentions the "one category of people who haven't been depicted in literature," he is referring specifically to the type of monastic in the world that Tikhon of Zadonsk represents—a true monastic. On the other hand, Dostoevsky wants to represent someone that was not the type of stringent priest he knew and despised in Siberia, but rather a depiction of the institution and liturgical reality personally and in the world. The first to notice this desire to break free of the shackles of rigorous, fanatical monasticism and institutionalism was Rozanov, who, in his response to Leont'ev, expressed the truth of Dostoevsky's vision of Tikhon in both *Demons* and *Brothers Karamazov*:

There appeared, for example, a type of monk—the rector of the [monastic] institution—who simply is not aware of his own personal life, personal interest; who lives among his disciples precisely like a father among children. If this type did not correspond to the type of Russian monasticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Leont'ev's words), then maybe, and even probably, it corresponded to the type of monasticism of the fourth to ninth centuries. That's what Leontiev did not take into account, the "new key" of the harp that consisted in the tone of meekness, replacing the tone of indignation, contempt, and mockery.¹³

Rozanov's defense of Dostoevsky's monastic and institutional Orthodoxy allows for an apophatic analysis of Orthodoxy in the texts.

An apophatic analysis, in this context, is meant not in the sense that the liturgical and monastic elements are beyond positive knowledge or definition, but rather in the sense utilized by S.L. Frank to discuss the nature of reality: "The true import of [Pseudo-Dionysius'] 'mystical theology' was not mere negation of earthly conceptions as applied to God, but a certain unity or combination of affirmation and negation, transcending the habitual logical forms of thought."¹⁴ In Dostoevsky's Orthodox characters, the lived, experiential elements of the liturgical and monastic become syncretic with the institutional and dogmatic in a way that transcends the boundaries of simple correlative modes of analysis. Therefore, when reading the positive figures of Christianity in Dostoevsky's novels, as well as the fanatics like Shatov or Ferapont, we must look for that which is not *explicitly* or *positively* expressed. These elements are often glossed over or ignored by scholars because the living liturgical and monastic elements do not satisfactorily fulfill the expectations of readers who are either outside of or too rigorously legalistic about the dogmatic and ecclesiastic structures because they are an antinomic synthesis of both. Scholars, in this sense, often look for Leont'ev's vision of Orthodoxy, and when they do not find it, claim there is no explicit Orthodoxy.

13. V. V. Rozanov, "Russkaia tserkov'," in *Pravoslavie Pro et Contra* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo Gumanitarnogo Instituta, 1906), 337.

14. S.L. Frank, *Reality and Man: An Essay in the Metaphysics of Human Nature*, trans. Natalie Duddington (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1966), 40.

Through a synthetic, antinomic, and apophatic analysis, we find what is "missing" from *The Brothers Karamazov*: the explicit liturgical context of Orthodoxy and the personal spirit of hesychastic monasticism. To refute Jones' proposition that the text only contains personal experience and nothing institutional, Bulgakov's claim in *Unfading Light* is instructive: "every authentic, living religion knows its own objectivity and rests on it—it deals with Divinity, utters YOU ARE to it. ... Therefore, there is absolutely no need for everyone in their personal experience of faith to have *the whole* content of a given religious doctrine."¹⁵ Following Bulgakov, this analysis concludes that simply because the whole content of a dogmatic structure is not present does not mean it is not there, or that it is impersonal in its content. The same response can be given to Leont'ev's charge that there is no solid ground of monasticism in the novel; hesychasm can influence the text without being explicitly depicted, much less to be institutional. Ferapont, and his closeness to Leont'ev, explicitly expresses these institutional elements. The rigid structure of monasticism is present in the text and vital to its central moment—the Wedding in Cana. Therefore, rather than rehashing the abundant analysis of "rosy" love and harmony in Zosima, this analysis prioritizes the centrality of Leont'ev's fear of God. Despite the obviously antagonistic and problematic qualities that arise in Ferapont's fanaticism, the foundation upon which that fervor stands is not rejected or abandoned, but the *prelest'* is exaggerated in order to highlight the underlying elements of the hesychastic tradition.

We must then determine if Ferapont is a representation of Orthodox monasticism, positive or otherwise. Linda J. Ivanits remarks: "Commentators have almost unanimously perceived Ferapont as evil. Most studies have considered him an unhealthy, somewhat comic double looming behind the saner figure of the charismatic elder, and at least one study has specifically linked him to the devil."¹⁶ Even if Ferapont is evil, he could still represent institutional Orthodoxy, one who resembles the rigid type of Russian, and particularly Siberian, priests who, according to Aleksandr Vrangeli and Nikolai Lossky, Dostoevsky particularly loathed:

Baron Vrangeli, describing his correspondence with Dostoevsky in Siberia between 1854–56, says: "We spoke little of religion. He was rather pious, but went to church rarely and did not love priests, particularly Siberian ones. He spoke of Christ with delight." Dostoevsky disliked Russian priests for quite a long time afterwards.¹⁷

15. Sergii Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012) 105, 187.

16. Linda J. Ivanits, "Hagiography in *Brat'ja Karamazovy*: Zosima, Ferapont, and the Russian Monastic Saint," *Russian Language Journal* 34, no. 117 (1980): 110.

17. Nikolai Lossky, *Dostoevskii i ego khristianskoe miroponimanie* (New York: Izdatel'stvo imeni Chekova, 1953), 66.

Dostoevsky's feelings make Ivanits' interpretation of Ferapont as a critique of rigid clericalism highly plausible. If Dostoevsky truly despised such priests and their dogmatic rigor, Ferapont could be read as satire, suggesting the author's rejection of this institutional fanaticism.

But Dostoevsky's polyphonic artistry allows for truth to exist as antinomy, using contradictory truths to reveal deeper realities of higher realism. Therefore, we should approach Ferapont as if through a glass, darkly, in the context of antinomic apophaticism, or as Carol Apollonio contends, as a reversal or negation:

Dostoevsky communicates his religious message in ways that are artistically consistent, though complex. A trope of reversal or negation is at work—the more appealing or seductive the arguments or images on the surface of the text, the more likely it is that they are false—not in a primitive factual sense, but in the sense that their seductiveness leads away from the truth. Conversely, an ugly or dirty surface may very well serve as a conduit to revelation.¹⁸

Taking this advice on reading religious themes and applying it to Ferapont exposes Dostoevsky's poetic mastery in creating a paradox in institutional and personal Christianity.

Dostoevsky's Relationship to and Representation of Institutional Orthodoxy

To unearth this subversive reading of both the text and Dostoevsky's relationship to Orthodox ontological and anthropological trends, we should read the ugliness of Ferapont and his fanaticism not as a blight eclipsing the foundations of institutional Orthodoxy, but rather as a perverse lionization of positive institutional Orthodox practice. And while Dostoevsky's hesychastic foundations in Ferapont do not excuse or justify the problematic elements of the antagonist, the hesychastic monk illustrates the paradoxical nature of ideology and practice and highlights the value of Orthodox theological praxis. By reading Ferapont's monastic practice as one which parallels and inverts Zosima's rather than contradicting it, it becomes clear how his, and institutional Orthodoxy's, role in the structure and scope of the novel is just as vital as Zosima's and "minimal" religion.

Both monks are practitioners of the hesychastic method, the system of spiritual ascension cultivated throughout the history of Orthodoxy. Sergei Khoruzhii describes hesychastic practice as "the tradition occupied exclusively with creating and then keeping and reproducing identically the hesychast 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

18. Carol Apollonio, "Dostoevsky's Religion: Words, Images, and the Seed of Charity," *Dostoevsky Studies*, New Series, vol. XIII (2009): 24.

His energies."¹⁹ This mode of spiritual practice is based, in part, on the teachings of Isaac the Syrian and John Climacus, and is central to the soteriological and eschatological visions of Orthodoxy.

Dostoevsky was well aware of the hesychastic tradition—if not explicitly through its teachings then at least through his exposure to it throughout his life, including his frequent visits to monasteries with his mother during his youth, his readings, and his trip to Optina with Vladimir Soloviev. There is significant textual evidence of Dostoevsky's awareness of the writings and teachings of Isaac and Climacus, as well as the most widely available contemporary source on Mt. Athos, *The Legend of the Pilgrimage and Journey through Russia, Moldavia, Turkey, and the Holy Land of the monk Parfenii of the Holy Mount Athos*. For example, in the notebooks to *Demons*, Shatov claims to have read the *Tale*: "I once read the book by the monk Parfenii about his travels on Athos—how the monk Nikolai had the gift of tears—and here you are, the monk Nikolai, who has the gift of tears."²⁰ What's more, this "gift of tears" is mentioned frequently in Hesychast texts, including the seventh step in Climacus' *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, as well as in *The Ascetical Homilies* of Isaac the Syrian.

Furthermore, Dostoevsky paraphrases another step of *The Ladder* in the same notebooks when he writes "An angel never falls ... the person falls and arises," which N.F. Budanov, in the commentary to the notebooks, claims is most likely reproduced from memory, rather than the direct source: "The expression goes back to the aforementioned text *The Ladder*. Dostoevsky inaccurately (obviously from memory) quotes a saying from the ladder that he liked."²¹ Despite the fact that it is unclear whether Dostoevsky knew that the gift of tears and process of spiritual regeneration were explicitly hesychastic, he was clearly aware of these elements as steps toward the Orthodox goal of theosis—which is the hesychastic process.

Clearly, Dostoevsky was familiar with the monastic and hesychastic elements from both these textual sources and their praxis in the liturgical cycle. We know that Dostoevsky not only read the lives of the saints and other Orthodox books in his childhood, but his mother frequently took the family to church and would make a yearly five- to six-day pilgrimage to the Trinity-Sergeev Lavra, where St. Sergius of Radonezh applied and instilled the hesychast mode of spiritual practice. And it was to this foundation that he returned in Siberia and brought back with him in both his life and writings. As the narrator, mirroring Dostoevsky's thoughts while in exile, says in *Notes from the House of the Dead*:

I very much liked Clean Week. Those who fast were excused from work. We went to the church that was not far from the prison, two or three times a day. I had not been to church for a long time. The Lenten service, so familiar from my distant

19. Sergei Khoruzhii, "The Brothers Karamazov in the Prism of Hesychast Anthropology," *Institut Sinergiinoi Antropologii Digital Library*, (2008): 4, https://synergia-isa.ru/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/hor_karamazov_boston_2008_eng.pdf.

20. Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* XI, 76.

21. *Ibid.*, and Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* XII, 352.

youth, in my parent's home, the solemn prayers, the prostrations to the ground—all stirred up the long-distant past in my soul, reminded me of the impressions of my childhood years.²²

In these memories of the first week of Lenten services, Dostoevsky reveals not only a childlike connection to the liturgical life of the Church but also a direct connection with the hesychastic tradition as it seeps into the everyday life of the Orthodox believer.

Dostoevsky's appreciation for Clean Week—the first week of Lent, during which the laity engage most closely with the hesychastic tradition through the institutionalized liturgical cycle—is crucial for understanding the Ferapont paradox and its connection to the religious themes in *The Brothers Karamazov*. During the first four evenings of Clean Week, the penitential canon of Andrew of Crete is performed. Dostoevsky was introduced to two key aspects of institutional Orthodox tradition that informed his writing of *The Brothers Karamazov*. The first is the codification of the hesychastic tradition for a non-monastic audience. Andrew of Crete conveys his study and practice of hesychastic, cenobitic monasticism that he learned at one of its principal centers, the Monastery of St. Sabbas in the Kidron Valley.²³ The canon outlines the monastic principles by which an individual assumes responsibility "for all and on behalf of all." Second, the canon incorporates the lives of St. Mary of Egypt and the monk Zosima, both of whom are referenced explicitly and implicitly in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Although Dostoevsky did not possess the texts themselves, the monastic tradition's lived presence during Lenten services profoundly shaped his understanding of their themes, and clearly take shape in the novel. Recognizing this interplay between the personal and institutional aspects of religion is essential when considering how Dostoevsky portrays the practical application of monastic principles in his works.

But there is another layer of value in understanding Dostoevsky's reliance on institutional Orthodoxy to portray a deeply personal engagement with it. If hesychasm is, at its foundation, a tradition of the practical method of achieving spiritual regeneration, cleansing the eye of the heart, and moving the person closer to theosis (the mode of being-in-relation with the Divine), does one need to explicitly follow each step accordingly in order to achieve salvation? According to Khoruzhii, although the practice requires concrete and repeatable modes, the "tradition is a community, united on the basis of a certain practice [...] For reaching its goal, this anthropological practice should have precise plan and method, which means that it should be based on reliable anthropological knowledge."²⁴ He further clarifies how, within the communities in which hesychasm is practiced, a complete engagement with this way of

22. Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* IV, 176.

23. For more on the explicit relationship between the Canon of Andrew of Crete and hesychasm see Krzysztof Leśniewski, "The Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete. Scriptural, Liturgical and Hesychastic Invitation for an Encounter with God," *Vox Patrum* 69 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.31743/vp.3268>.

24. Khoruzhii, 3.

life is not necessary. Even beginning to engage with it brings about a greater awareness of its thrust and telos:

At a first glance, describing human being in reference to the steps of the practice, even connecting the human constitution with this practice, it would connect hesychast anthropology exclusively to the small community of adepts cultivating this practice; which implies that it is an especially narrow, specialized anthropological conception of no value for general anthropology. However, it turns out to be of much wider extent and greater importance. ... Its spiritual and moral authority produces anthropological implications. In any Orthodox society there emerges always some circle of people, for whom the integral way of life created by the tradition (*bios hesychastos*, the "hesychast life") that becomes the model and reference point for their lives. They do not become "full-time adepts" of hesychasm and members of 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. etc. In short, they conform to the tradition and are orientated towards it in their way of life, both inner and outer.²⁵

This understanding Orthodox monastic practice as fluid, flexible, and personal—as paradoxical as that statement might be—is essential to the Ferapont paradox. In the same way in which one does not need to be within the "small community of adepts" to practice the ascetic lifestyle, so too can the reader of Dostoevsky's Orthodoxy engage with the hesychastic qualities of the novel as they can bear it. As one "adopts [the] attitudes and values" of Dostoevsky's Orthodox vision, they move closer to a revelation of the higher reality in the novel, without needing to entering fully into the religious praxis of hesychasm. It is revealed in itself, but focuses more sharply with a proper lens.

When reading Dostoevsky with an eye toward the theological or religiously institutional context, one should take care to remember that he was not writing explicitly theological or liturgical texts.²⁶ However, he wrote for an audience who shares his background and knowledge base—his audience would have grown up with the dogmatic and institutional elements ingrained in them through lived, synergetic experiences rather than as texts or manuals. But they likely wouldn't have an immediate or "adept" grasp of them. Therefore, we should understand that Dostoevsky's writing is more in line with the institutional yet personal hesychast anthropology as outlined above than the dogmatic. He encodes these institutional

25. *Ibid.*, 7.

26. The glaring exception here is the *zhitie* (*life*) of Zosima, penned by Alyosha, in *The Brothers Karamazov*. However, this *zhitie* explicitly trends toward a more literary, non-institutional mode as it is written in the first-person. Typically, *zhitiia* are written from the perspective of the biographer, with the invaluable exception of the *zhitie* of the Archpriest Avakuum, head of the then-schismatic Old Believers movement, which is written in the first-person and penned by Avakuum himself.

elements in the world of the monastery which then expand into the "secular" world of the novel. In this way the institutional "plan and method" of hesychastic practice is located in both worlds, and Ferapont is key to this subtle poetic and moral structure.

The Hesychastic Method and Its Representation in the Novel

Dostoevsky masterfully encodes the spiritual self-practice of hesychasm into his narratives, and specifically in *The Brothers Karamazov*. As one delves deeper, Dostoevsky's inversion of the institutional traditions of Orthodoxy to highlight their significance sharpens into focus. Therefore, it is necessary to "conform to the tradition and [orient] towards it," through an understanding of the steps of hesychastic practice and their representation in *The Brothers Karamazov*.²⁷ Doing so will allow the reader to see clearly that which Dostoevsky has purposefully placed on the edge of their perspective: the Ferapont paradox. John Climacus' *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* offers the most detailed manual on hesychasm, but for clarity, its thirty steps can be grouped into four stages—the *Spiritual Gate* of *Metanoia*, *Unseen Warfare*, *Hesychia*, and *Noetic Vision*—will suffice to allow the general reader more deeply into the circle of "full time adepts."

The first stage, known as the *Spiritual Gate*, emphasizes repentance and the beginnings of an existential change. While many of Dostoevsky's characters, such as Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, experience the beginnings of *metanoia*, only Alyosha and Zosima embody the experience of the *Spiritual Gate* as a mode of being. Isaac the Syrian, whom Dostoevsky explicitly references in multiple texts, defined *metanoia* as the opening of the person to love and perfection and connected it with the gift of tears.²⁸ Dostoevsky's depiction of the gift of tears, which accompanies the penitent as they experience the first level of spiritual ascent, reflects his understanding of this initial stage of spiritual ascent. The first explicit mention of these tears is relegated to the notebooks for *Demons* by Shatov.²⁹ However, Dostoevsky depicts Alyosha concretely experiencing this state following the death of Zosima:

He did not know why he was embracing [the earth], he did not give himself an answer as to why he so uncontrollably wanted to kiss it, to kiss it thoroughly, but he, weeping, kissed it, sobbing and pouring out his tears, and frantically swore to love it, to love unto ages of ages ... What was he crying for? O, he wept in his rapture and for the stars, which shone for him from the abyss, and "he was not ashamed of his ecstasy." It was as if the threads from all these countless worlds of God converged at once in his soul, and [his soul] trembled all over, "touching other worlds." He wanted to forgive everyone, and for everything, and

27. Khoruzhii, 7.

28. As quoted in Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000).

29. See footnote 20.

ask for forgiveness. Oh! not for himself, but for everyone, for everything and for everything, and "as others are asking for me," rang again in his soul. But every moment he felt clearly and, as if palpably, as something solid and unshakable, like this vault of heaven, descended into his soul. Some sort of idea reigned in his mind—and remained, for the rest of his life and to ages of ages. He fell to the earth a weak youth, and arose an unyielding fighter for the rest of his life.³⁰

Here Dostoevsky inverts the first stage of the hesychastic practice, depicting his "full-time adept" Alyosha experiencing its first fruits *after* he has risen up to the higher rungs. In doing so, he displays to the reader the paradoxical or suprarational elements of "higher" realism come to light through the fact that hesychasm is not experienced in a purely linear manner. Hesychasm, and Dostoevsky's project as guided by it, is a fluid state in which the spiritual struggle occurs, sending the reader toward a telos of unifying the world as-it-is with the world as-it-will-be—toward a communion with the Divine.

This first stage is evident in Ferapont's ascetic dedication as a "great faster and hesychast" (*velikii postnik i molchal'nik*), though his spiritual focus is prone to wavering.³¹ Ferapont's physical feats of spending "full day(s) in prayer" without moving and the keeping of the fast—to the extent that he barely eats *prosphora* (blessed bread) and survives on mushrooms and water—demonstrates the physical act of self-emptying that begins *metanoia*.³² In these exploits he begins the turn from a fallen mode of being for the self to a mode of being-in-relation with the Divine and is able to inhabit other steps of hesychastic practice. As Isaac the Syrian relates in *The Ascetical Homilies*:

Fasting, vigil and wakefulness in God's service, renouncing the sweetness of sleep by crucifying the body throughout the day and night, are God's holy pathway and the foundation of every virtue. Fasting is the champion of every virtue, the beginning of the struggle, the crown of the abstinent, the beauty of virginity and sanctity, the resplendence of chastity, the commencement of the path of Christianity, the mother of prayer, the well-spring of sobriety and prudence, the teacher of stillness, and the precursor of all good works.³³

Fasting aids the ascetic in their attempt to cultivate and sustain repentant *metanoia*. Ferapont finds the precursor in a physical mode, and through it he is able to maintain the rigorous, institutional manner of living the hesychastic method.

This devotion to fasting leads Ferapont to the second stage of hesychastic practice, *Unseen Warfare*—the struggle with the Passions. Spiritual struggle is marked by the awareness of

30. Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* XIV, 328.

31. *Ibid.*, 151.

32. *Ibid.*, 152.

33. As quoted in Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, 85.

personal responsibility for fighting against the internal and external influences that leads a person away from unification with the Divine. Khoruzhii indicates that "the very first tasks of the ascetic practice include the removing and uprooting of the Passions ... then the ascetic proceeds to create 'preventive reaction,' i.e. the suppression of any incipient passion [...] leading him to *dispassion*."³⁴ In this way, *Unseen Warfare* as an internal struggle with egocentric desire is often depicted as a struggle with the demonic. Ferapont's engagements in the novel with both the demonic and the Divine are therefore a representation of his own passions and the temptations of the world around him. His constant awareness of and conversations with little demons, the Holy Spirit, and the "Holispirit" are proof of this step on hesychastic practice.³⁵ In Ferapont, Dostoevsky integrates one of his most common themes, the problem of the overabundance of consciousness, in the mode of institutional Orthodoxy by representing it as not merely a sociological or biological problem, but as the struggle with the Passions. While the reader might be mollified into finding Ferapont's struggle as unremarkable, Dostoevsky is refamiliarizing these issues in the context of the most common state of spiritual existence according to the hesychastic method. Institutional religion is both the solution to and a cause of Dostoevsky's primary concern regarding Russian nineteenth century issues: hyper consciousness.³⁶

Hesychia, the third stage of monastic practice, involves overcoming spiritual attacks and moving into a space of silence and constant prayer. This stage is described as "one of 'sacred silence', tranquility, quiet concentration and integration."³⁷ The practitioner learns to contemplate and pray in silence by overcoming the passions, utilizing prayer to progress further in *Unseen Warfare*. The victory over demonic presences is predicated on silence and fasting, according to Orthodox tradition, based upon Christ's saying that certain demons can "only be driven out through prayer and fasting" (Mt. 17:21).

34. Khoruzhii, 5.

35. Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* XIV, 153–4, 302–304. Konstantin Mochulsky claims that the appearance of the "Holispirit" to Ferapont—rather than the "Holy Spirit"—represents a bastardization of Dostoevsky's "bright Christianity" as represented in *Zosima*. However Orthodox monastic thought does not claim that a misunderstanding of the nature of demons negates the spiritual battle and striving for holiness of a monastic. Rather, Ferapont's vision marks the heatedness of his spiritual battle, as John Climacus, one of the pillars of monastic thought, notes: "An active soul is a provocation to demons, yet the greater our conflicts the greater our rewards" (John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell [London: Paulist Press, 1982], 251). What's more, Mochulsky points to the roots of Ferapont in Father Pallady and other contemporary monks of Optina at the time of Dostoevsky's writings as a sign of Ferapont's non-institutional Orthodoxy (Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, translated by Michael Minihan [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967], 581–2). However, the *zhitie* of the hierdeacon Pallady concludes with a description that is closer to *Zosima* than Ferapont in demeanor. The chronicler notes that strict fasting and silence led Pallady to be amazed by everything in the forest, and that when he would approach trees—much like when Ferapont sees Christ in the trees (Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* XIV, 154)—he would be overcome with the glory of the Divine in nature (*Istoricheskoe opisanie Kozel'skoi Vvedenskoj Optinoj pustyni: Opisanie monastyria*, 4th ed., ed. L. Kavelin [Moscow: Typografiia M.G. Volchaninova, 1885], 240). If Mochulsky's analysis of Komarovich's genealogy of Ferapont is correct, then we have yet another subtle yet potent inversion of institutional Orthodoxy.

36. Dostoevsky calls attention to the problem of hyperconsciousness in the author's footnote to the title of Part I of *Notes from the Underground* (Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* X, 99).

37. Khoruzhii, 6.

Dostoevsky signals Ferapont's engagement with this level of ascetic practice by naming him a "hesychast" (*molchal'nik*). While the Slavonic term differs from the Greek ἡσυχία ("hesychia"³⁸), both imply the concept of sacred silence and the need for it in ascetic struggle. In Zosima's homilies and talks, he repeatedly references monks with the same terms used by the chronicler/narrator to describe Ferapont—fasters and hesychasts (*postniki i molchal'niki*).³⁹ Zosima never speaks of monks without referencing these two elements of ascetic struggle, thereby reinforcing Ferapont's connection to both institutional and personal religion as well as the inverted parallel Dostoevsky creates between the two monks. A similar parallel is created with Alyosha, who is called a "fighter" after he weeps and kisses the earth following his moment of *metanoia* on the monastery grounds.⁴⁰ Herein, Dostoevsky again inverts the monastic process in Alyosha, making him into a spiritual warrior only after he has achieved spiritual silence. Thus, reinforcing the connections between the protagonists journey and the struggle of hesychastic practice, specifically by mirror-imaging the route as presented by Ferapont.

Noetic Vision, the fourth stage of hesychastic practice, is what Khoruzhii describes as the "ontological unlocking of anthropological reality."⁴¹ This stage represents a moment in which the person transcends ordinary modes of consciousness, either sub- or hyper-, and achieve a higher engagement with reality—a cognitive mode of supraconsciousness that surpasses typical perception. This level of spiritual attunement opens the person to reality without linear time or space—an infinitude of timelessness and spacelessness marked by communion with Divine being. This achievement of a moment of authentic being changes the ontological boundaries of the world for the person. In this moment, the transcendent briefly becomes tangible, sensible, open to rational contemplation, and leads to a fullness of the mode of being-in-relation with the world both as-it-is and as-it-should-be.⁴² Through *Noetic Vision* the adept is capable of seeing future events (Zosima's foresight of Mitya's great suffering), a sympathetic and uninhibited mode of autocommunication beyond verbalized communication (Alyosha's compassionate realization of Grushenka's thoughts during their first meeting), or even visions of supra-phenomenal beings. Ferapont's visions of Christ and devils exemplify the latter category of supraconscious perception, and are essential to understanding his complex role in the novel, showcasing Dostoevsky's exploration of spiritual extremism within his literary and moral framework.

38. While the term ἡσυχία is also present in the Russian as *усихуа*, the two are nearly interchangeable. *Молчальник* remains primarily from its use in the Kyiv Caves Paterikon and Dostoevsky most likely uses it rather than the Greek so it would be more familiar to those unfamiliar with non-Slavic Orthodox terminology and tradition.

39. Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* XIV; 285, 298, 301.

40. *Ibid.*, 328.

41. Khoruzhii, 5.

42. For more on the concept of being-in-relation see Christos Yannaras, *Relational Ontology*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press).

It is necessary, however, to first address a major argument against a hesychastic reading of Ferapont. Are not biological or other non-metaphysical reasons for Ferapont's visions more convincing than a religious reading? Some scholars claim that Ferapont's visions are purely natural, or at least a psychedelic state brought on by consumption of mushrooms. Jones, for example, in stating that Ferapont's devils are "hunger induced visions."⁴³ This, and other such claims to non-religious foundations for his visions, implicitly reject the relationship between the institutional monastic practice and a higher mode of consciousness. In claiming that Ferapont's visions are nothing more than physiological manifestations of biological necessity and/or psycho-pharmacological hallucinations critics strip Ferapont of his connection to the anthropocosmos of the monastery—they take him out of institutional Orthodoxy and out of Dostoevsky's circle of positive protagonists. What's more, the claim that Ferapont is on the hesychastic path does not deny the possibility that Ferapont is at times, if not often, on a psychedelic trip caused by the consumption of mushrooms; hallucinating due to exhaustion and hunger; or suffering from a mental or physical disorder that leads him to such visions. Just as Dostoevsky's narrator provides evidence for natural/biological grounds of seemingly demonic incursions into the novel—including Ivan Karamazov's conversation with the devil—there is also sufficient evidence to prove that Ferapont is experiencing *both* natural hallucinations and the end-results of the hesychastic practice. Furthermore, Ferapont's role in the monastery and his fidelity to institutional Orthodoxy are essential to the novel's poetic structure, specifically as it is central to his casting out of Alyosha's demon of *prelest'* during the novel's dénouement.

The application of a critical eye to the Orthodox ontological boundaries of Dostoevsky's texts allows for both an Orthodox reading as readily as it does a materialist or minimalist religious reading. However, there is textual evidence that Ferapont, as a practitioner of the hesychastic method, would experience visions in a real, supraconscious manner. One might argue that Ferapont, as a satire of fanaticism, should or could not reach this state of spiritual progress—Ferapont's fasting and prayer might not have allowed him to reach *Noetic Vision*. Yet visions of the demonic are not only prescribed to the final state of hesychastic practice, they occur also at the most common stage—*Unseen Warfare*. But what good would it do for the poetic structure of the novel to allow such a vile figure to experience supra-sensory visions, whether because of his holiness or his failures? In either case, through *Unseen Warfare* and *Noetic Vision* Dostoevsky is establishing a truth of the ontological boundaries of his texts via an apophatic proof of the existence of a higher realm of consciousness—he is establishing hesychastic practice in the text as an institutional source of Orthodoxy. And while it would be simple for him to establish this Orthodox ontology by repeating the institutional texts or utilizing a hagiographic mode, by posing Zosima's opponent as a ground of truth, Dostoevsky paradoxically creates an even more compelling argument for his understanding of the rightness of the practice of hesychia.

43. Jones, 136.

Ferapont's Institutional Foundations as the Key to the Novel's Central Event

Ferapont, the most fervent embodiment of institutional Orthodoxy in the novel, takes his ascetic practice to extremes, ultimately falling into the spiritual self-delusion of *prelest'*. But his personal failures do not negate his practices or their positive contributions to the value of the hesychastic practice in the text. What's more, his fasting, isolation, and rare attendance at liturgical services should not in any way be interpreted as outside of Orthodox tradition. In fact, monastic saints such as Anthony the Great, Mary of Egypt, and Anthony of the Kyivan Caves Monastery all lived in isolation, mortifying their flesh, fasting, and experiencing demonic invasion; Anthony the great experienced visions of demons, Mary of Egypt communed only twice during her isolation in the desert, and Anthony of the Kyivan Caves was noted by his visitors for his taciturn demeanor and rigorous application of monastic practices. Ferapont, therefore, functions as an inverted-hagiographic figure in the text, mirroring these saints while subverting his spiritual achievement through excessive legalism and fanaticism.

Unlike these saints, however, Ferapont distorts the practice, falling into fanaticism. He becomes so assured of his own righteousness that he becomes the perfect model of satire for what Dostoevsky despised in his encounters with Siberian priests—the Pharisaic application of rigorous legalism as the sole method of spiritual ascent. Ferapont's unwavering self-righteousness transforms him into this satirical figure, critiquing the rigidity of adherents to a solely fear-based form of dogmatic, institutional Orthodoxy. However, just as Zosima's perceived laxity and "rosy" Christianity does not signify a rejection of institutional Orthodoxy, neither does Ferapont's abuse of it undermine it. Ferapont's complex and antinomial role comes into full force during Zosima's funeral. And by interpreting the miraculous stench of corruption through the lens of hesychastic practices, it becomes evident that this the miraculous occurrence critiques not Zosima's righteousness, as Ferapont insists and the majority of the Russian public comes to believe, but the dangers of Alyosha's fanaticism and the others who demand a miraculous sign from God.

Ferapont jubilantly breaks his silence upon hearing the "good" news that "God's judgment is not as man's, and that it has even forestalled nature."⁴⁴ Entering Zosima's cell, he begins casting out demons, which he sees crawling in every corner, and which he interoperates as the demonic manifestation of Zosima's pride, lax monasticism, and worldly love over Godly fear. A surface reading might view this moment as the culmination of the religious satire, exposing the absurdity of Ferapont's fanaticism and the pitfalls of *prelest'*. After all, in the end Zosima is resurrected and his teachings and life are institutionalized by Alyosha, as Rozanov prophesied. Yet, ironically, Ferapont's accusations carry a kernel of the truth. In the Orthodox ontological

44. Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* XIV, 300.

context, the demons of pride and misguided "rosy" Christianity haunt Zosima's coffin—but they belong chiefly to Alyosha as a sign of his own spiritual immaturity.

Ferapont's envy toward Zosima exemplifies a common monastic struggle, reflecting Dostoevsky's nuanced portrayal of institutional hesychastic monasticism. As John Climacus writes in Step 4 of *The Ladder*:

Those living in stillness and subject to a father have only demons working against them. But those living in a community have to fight both demons and human beings. The first kind keep the commands of their master more strictly since they are always under his scrutiny, while the latter break them to some extent of on account of his being away. Still, the zealous and the hard-working more than compensate for this failing by their persistence and, accordingly they win double crowns.⁴⁵

For the *postnik i velikii molchalnik* (*faster and great hesychast*), the struggle is not with external demonic forces alone, but with the demons of communal life—a realm unfamiliar to his as an eremitic monk. Unlike Zosima, a cenobitic monk and elder who is—as Climacus demonstrates—accustomed to the spiritual weight of his own as well as others passions and demons, Ferapont rigidly applies his solitary practices to as dogmatic, universal edict (*ukaz*).⁴⁶ This misattribution of sinfulness to Zosima reflects not a failure of institutional Orthodoxy fails but rather due to his own personal, minimalist abuse of it.

Dostoevsky deliberately complicates the narrative, obscuring the line between spiritual truth and deception—he makes finding the good more difficult for his hero and readers. At Alyosha's lowest, most de-Orthodoxized moment, Dostoevsky offers an Orthodox critique of *prelest'* by satirizing his hero's fanaticism through the comically dogmatic, fanatically devout Ferapont. Dostoevsky's satire, therefore, does not merely target Ferapont but also extends to Alyosha and Zosima's other disciples, exposing their coercive need for the miraculous. The narrative parallels the third temptation of Christ in the desert, presenting Alyosha's crisis of (little) faith. By connecting this scene directly to Ivan's *poema* of the Grand Inquisitor, Dostoevsky scatters unmistakable signs of *prelest'* in the most unexpected places.

The first sprouting of the odor of *prelest'* arises in Ferapont's treatment by Fr. Paissy. Paissy greets Ferapont with contempt—just as Ferapont is treated by scholars who, as Ivanits posits, see him as a minor character—merely fanatical, perhaps evil, yet essential harmless.⁴⁷ Paissy says "Why for have you come, dear father? Why for are you disrupting the services?" He then accuses his monastic brother of egocentric sinfulness, stating "You drive out the unclean

45. John Climacus, 110.

46. For more on *ukaz* and legalism in Orthodoxy in this context, see Rozanov, "Russkaia tserkov'."

47. Ivanits, "Hagiography," 110.

spirit, but perhaps you are serving him?"⁴⁸ While these accusations might seem to condemn Ferapont, they in fact reveal the Pharisaical tendencies of Dostoevsky's heroic retinue.

Dostoevsky brilliantly encodes an intertextual relationship with Matthew 12: 22–7. When Paissy wrong-heartedly claims that Ferapont is serving the devil he directly parallels one of Christ's admonitions. Ironically, it is not Paissy who is acting in the image of Christ. Rather he levels the same egocentric charge at Ferapont that the Pharisees level at Christ. In Matthew, they claim that when driving out demons Christ acts through the power of Satan. Here Christ replies: "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out?" Dostoevsky, contrary to the reader's expectations, places Paissy in the role of the Pharisees—he is accusing Ferapont in the same manner in which the Pharisee accuses Christ. Therefore, Ferapont is not seeing demons because he is sinful, but because he is a great faster and hesychast—he is both the Image and Likeness of Christ, although in an ironic, perverse, realist manner.

However, it is one thing to claim that because he is a great faster and hesychast Ferapont can see demons. But this is not enough to show that Dostoevsky is reifying Ferapont's devotion to the hesychastic practice. He is clearly still a fanatic and incorrectly identifies demons. It is a more difficult question to ask whether or not he might cast them out, as Christ says, "through prayer and fasting" (Mt. 17:21)? Indeed, Dostoevsky positions him to do so, albeit in a delayed and incredibly byzantine manner. Ferapont drives Alyosha from the monastery, his visions of demons frightening Alyosha away from the side of his elder where he enters into his own *Spiritual Warfare*. Alyosha and the reader realize that Zosima was not a transcendent being made of transcendent material, he was human like the incarnate Christ—and particularly like the Christ of Holbein's *Dead Christ in the Tomb*, about whom Dostoevsky said "anyone could lose their faith" due to the horrors of death and decay.⁴⁹ Facing the unbearable suffering of death, even armed with an unshakable faith in the presence of resurrection, Alyosha succumbs to temptation and he flings himself into the abyss of sin. The narrator remarks "He loved his God and believed unflinchingly in Him, although he suddenly murmured against him."⁵⁰ Looking upon the decaying, stinking corpse of the physical incarnation of the Divine makes Alyosha lose his faith, and the reader loses their faith in the novel's authorially proclaimed hero as well. It is this loss of faith that manifests in the demons that Ferapont sees. And when he says "Satan, get thee hence! Satan, get thee hence! ... Casting I cast out," he casts out Alyosha and the reader's hagiographic expectations.⁵¹

48. Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* XIV, 302, 303.

49. Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* VIII, 182.

50. Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* XIV, 307.

51. *Ibid.*, 302.

Ferapont catalyzes Alyosha's *metanoic* turn, marking his first authentic steps on the institutional monastic path to theosis. Neither Zosima's assurances in life, Paissy's compassion at the death of their Elder, nor Alyosha's personal religiosity suffices to dispel his youthful self-assurance and demands on the Divine. Instead, Ferapont's exorcism of Alyosha's devils forces Alyosha to confront his responsibility for the miraculous odor of corruption. His descent into sinfulness begins with his journey to Grushenka—whom he depersonalizes into the demonic personification of lust—in order to destroy his soul, flinging himself into the abyss of *Karamazovschchina*. However, through an inverted hesychastic process, the beginning of his *Spiritual Warfare*, leads Alyosha to a profound *metanoic* state. He recognizes her personhood and love, and reifies the hesychastic active love of Zosima when he tells Rakitin: "You'd do better to look here, at her: did you see how she spared me? I came here looking for a wicked soul—I was drawn to that, because I was low and wicked myself, but I found a true sister, I found a treasure—a loving soul ... She spared me just now ... I'm speaking of you, Agrafena Alexandrovna. You restored my soul just now."⁵² Overcoming his *Spiritual Warfare* he sits in *hesychastic*, humble silence, not forcing the truth on her, but allowing her freely to confront her own sinfulness and make a small *metanoic* turn as well. This moment underscores Dostoevsky's engagement with institutional Orthodoxy—without Ferapont's fear of God, Alyosha could not become the hero Dostoevsky intends. The active love of Zosima can only, at least only in Alyosha's personal space, come *after* the fear of God.

Although Ferapont is so wrapped up in his own *prelest'* that he cannot see his own sins, he is still able to penetrate into the souls of others. He realizes how they have strayed from the active and loving communion—about which Zosima preaches in Chapter 3 of Book VI "From Talks and Homilies of the Elder Zosima"—in the name of the miraculous, or at the very least in the name of Divine justice. Ferapont is able to see the spiritual reality of their *prelest'* manifested as demons due to his direct engagement with the institutional aspects of Orthodox eremitic monasticism—he has cleansed his spiritual eye and obtained *noetic vision* (even if it is imperfectly tuned). But rather than explicitly preaching this point, Dostoevsky uses the actions of an antagonist on the hesychastic path to guide his hero, Alyosha. And while it is Alyosha's realization that he has strayed from the truth of his faith that charge his repentance and the gift of tears with pathos and humiliation, Dostoevsky crafts a moment that feels more relatable and real to the reader, filled with both the personal and lived religious experience but inescapably bound by the context of the tradition and dogmas of the Church in this apophatic and antinomial manner. By dispossessing the reader of a faith in institutional Orthodoxy, paradoxically through the most rigorous and faithful instantiation of it, Dostoevsky is able to produce the dénouement of his poetic and moral project by revitalizing that very corn of wheat, which must die to bring forth much fruit.⁵³

52. Ibid., 318

53. A paraphrase of John 12:24, which is the epigraph to the novel (Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* XIV, 5).

The Paradox of Religious Fear and Divine Love

The Ferapont paradox lies in his unwavering clear devotion to the letter of the law—the fidelity to edict (*ukaz*)—which paradoxically distances him from the liturgical life of Orthodoxy. For both Ferapont and Leont'ev the fear of God blinds them to the living God revealed in Alyosha and Rozanov. Rather than drawing them into union with Christ, it alienates them from Divine, active love. As Hebrews 10:31 declares, fear is meant to drive a person into the hands of Christ "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God!" (*Strashno vpast' v ruki Boga zhivago!*). While fear is a necessary precursor to communion with the Divine, as seen in Alyosha's noetic vision of Cana, Leont'ev and Ferapont fail to embrace the redemptive love that follows.

Both Ferapont and Leont'ev share visions of Christ shaped by an overwhelming and alienating fear of Him. Leont'ev's autobiographical reflection in his hagiography "Father Kliment Zederogol'm" published in the November/December edition of *Russian Messenger* in January, 1879, reveals the nature of this fear and isolation:

Now in winter, when I come to Optina Pustyn, I often have to pass by the path that leads to the large wooden Crucifix of the cemetery at the small skete. The path has been cleared, but the graves are covered with snow. In the evening, on the Crucifix, a lamp is lit in a red lamp, and wherever I return at a late hour, I see this light from afar in the darkness and know what is there, near this crimson, shining spot. ... Sometimes it seems meek, but sometimes unbearably terrifying in the darkness in the middle of the snow! ... Terrifying (*Strashno*) for yourself, terrifying for loved ones, terrifying especially for your homeland, when you remember how few people [such as Fr. Kliment] are in it, and how early they die, not having accomplished even half of what is possible for them ...⁵⁴

Similarly, Ferapont's vision of Christ in Chapter I of Book IV in *The Brothers Karamazov* utilizes the same language and tenor: "It happens at night. Do you see the two branches? At night Christ Himself reaches His hands toward me and searches with those His hands for me, I clearly see and tremble. Terrible, o terrible! (*Strashno, o strashno!*)"⁵⁵ Both see only the image of Christ crucified—the fearful inertia of Holbein's *Christ Entombed*. These mortified hands are not the "hands of the Living God," which Alyosha encounters in his noetic vision—the open arms that parallel those with which the Father forgives the Prodigal son. Alyosha is embraced by the arms of an actively loving God, and as Zosima says: "Don't fear him. Terrible

54. It is quite a marvelous coincidence that Leont'ev published this work in this edition of *Russkii vestnik*, which also contains Chapters V-VIII of Book VIII of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Konstantin Leont'ev, "Otets Kliment Zederogol'm, ieromonakh Optinoi Pustyni," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v 12 tomakh* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo "Vladimir Dal' " 2000), vol. 6: 351.

55. Dostoevsky, *P.S.S.* XIV, 154.

(*Strashen*) is His glory before us, fearful in is His heights, but His mercy is infinite, out of love He has become like us and rejoices with us ..."56

In Orthodox theology and Dostoevsky's poetics, both love and fear hold central importance, yet it is love that draws one inward from the "Walls of the Church" without cloistering them to the point of egocentric *prelest'*. Love embraces philosophical skepticism and doubt, nurturing the seed of faith, while fear retreats into rigid dogmatism, clinging to assurance of proper-worship. Love reflects the polyphony of the uniqueness of humanity, created in the Image and Likeness of the Divine, while fear weeps at the tragedy of an ontologically monologic world incapable of freedom and individual beauty. Dostoevsky's vision aligns with institutional Orthodoxy, echoing early Church Fathers like Hermas, who cautioned against overemphasizing fear: "But do you clothe yourself in the desire of righteousness, and, having armed yourself with the fear of the Lord, resist them. For the fear of God dwells in the good desire. If the evil desire shall see you armed with the fear of God and resisting itself, it shall flee far from you, and shall no more be seen of you, being in fear of your arms."⁵⁷ By rejecting the plurality of human otherness in the world, Ferapont and Leont'ev prioritize the egocentrism they claim to despise, to an "evil desire" for a world without freedom and sin.

Dostoevsky recognizes the necessity of the fear of God while highlighting the dangers of excessive fear, particularly its potential to spiral into fanaticism as epitomized in the Leont'ev-Ferapont extreme. In his works, fear as the dominant source of spiritual well-being clearly leads to coercion. As S.L. Frank observes, writing about the anthropological problem of coercion: "[C]ompulsion as such is itself an objectively sinful action, even if it proceeds from a subjectively righteous motive, for it is a violation of the God-given freedom expressive of human personality as akin to God."⁵⁸ "The Grand Inquisitor" provides a vivid portrayal of coercion, particularly as the foundation for the sin of so-called "caesaropapism." And yet Leont'ev, in his correspondence with Rozanov, shockingly wrote that:

After all, I confess that although I am not, of course, completely on the side of the Inquisitor, I am neither on the side of the lifeless, all-forgiving Christ, which Dostoevsky himself invented. Both of these are extreme. And according to the Gospels and the Holy Fathers, *the truth is in the middle*. I asked the monks, and they confirmed my opinion. *The actual* Grand Inquisitor, of course, believed in God and Christ *stronger than* Fyo[dor] Mikh[ailovich]. Iv[an] Karamazov, through whose mouth Fyod[or] Mikh[ailovich] wants to humiliate Catholicism, *is completely wrong*.⁵⁹

56. Ibid., 327.

57. Hermas is cited in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, A. Cleveland Coxe, and Allan Menzies, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), vol. 2: 28.

58. Frank, 184.

59. Rozanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3: 354.

Leont'ev and the Optina Elders fidelity to the Inquisitor may shock modern readers, but Rozanov contextualizes this stance within the broader framework of the fanaticism of idealism prevalent in the late nineteenth century—a force deeply terrifying to Dostoevsky. His footnote highlights the perilous trajectory of such idealism:

We Russians, in general, understand only *the type of Russian faith*, the type of faith of a somewhat carefree and unenergetic person. *The idealists* of the French Revolution began the "terror reipublicae" ["public terror" (lat.)], and *the idealists* of the Christian faith began the inquisition, this "terror fidei" ["terror of faith" (lat.)]. It is amazing that very *serious believers* do not abhor the Inquisition even now! They don't complain that "it happened;" they don't write satires or cartoons of the auto-da-fe. This is their silence, their calmness (among our so liberal times!) it shows that *the idealism of faith* really contains an "inquisitorial moment:" a little more, their eyes will become gloomy, their eyelids will drop, their lips will shrink, and they will say "auto-da-fe."⁶⁰

The danger of the fanatical fear of the living, loving elements of Orthodoxy transforms into an inquisitorial spirit. And it is precisely this jeopardy that Rozanov sees in the necrotic elements of devotion to edict (*ukaz*) that absolutizes legalism over a personal-yet-structured form of spiritual self-practice, such as the hesychasm preached by Zosima.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky confronts his personal struggles with faith while affirming the truths he holds about death, resurrection, and Orthodoxy. Tempering institutional rigor with personal love, Dostoevsky finds resolution to the question of whether or not he will ever see Masha again.⁶¹ The synergetic engagement between institutional Orthodoxy and its personal expression culminate in Alyosha's noetic vision, offering an apophatic yet positive conclusion to the question of the immortality of the soul. By harmonizing the personal experience of divine love with the institutional rigor of Orthodox practice, Dostoevsky invites readers into a transformative engagement with faith—one that transcends rigid dogmatism to reveal the profound potential for spiritual renewal and communion with the Divine. Importantly, Dostoevsky does not demand adherence to institutional Orthodoxy or hesychastic practice as the only path to authentic living—to become a Zosima, a Ferapont, or an Alyosha. Grushenka, in fact, proves that it is possible to achieve *metanoia* through folk practice and belief, through "minimal religion," highlighting the universal nature of Divine love.⁶²

But Dostoevsky's poetic structure requires some measure of institutional Orthodoxy to reach this spiritual vision—a spiritual polyphony played out in secular literature. Hesychastic

60. Ibid., 355.

61. A reference to Dostoevsky's journal entry following the death of his wife, in which he states "Masha is lying on the table. Will I see Masha again?" Dostoevsky, XX, 172.

62. See Morson, "The God of Onions."

practice structures and cultivates the novel's capacity to depict a glimpse of Dostoevsky's truth of higher reality. And unlike his other novels, "higher" realism is seen "no longer as through a glass, darkly," but rather in the full light of noetic vision. Central to Dostoevsky's poetics is the idea that access to higher reality relies on the relational mode of being cultivated through hesychastic practice. For Alyosha, adherence to a structured, institutional practice rejects the legalism that fosters fanaticism—a danger exemplified by both Ferapont and Leont'ev. Through this intricate synthesis of fear, love, and spiritual discipline, Dostoevsky illustrates the path toward genuine communion with the Divine.



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