

Dostoevsky's Hell on Earth: Examining the Inner Torment of the Underground Man,

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Unlike Dante, who offers a graphic depiction of a material hell in *Inferno*, Dostoevsky illustrates the internal suffering of several characters tormented by their ideas and choices. The Underground Man in *Notes from Underground* (1864), Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* (1866), and Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879) each experience an inner hell caused by their pride, rebellion, and naturalistic worldview. Dostoevsky utilizes both the life and teachings of Elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov* as a moral and philosophical framework to analyze the causes of the brothers' sickness, the essentialness of love, the question of God, and the concept of personal transformation.

In his "Mystical Discourse" Zosima defines hell as the "suffering of being no longer able to love." He describes hell as a spiritual torment, not external but internal. From Zosima's perspective one will experience this anguish both in the present and in a future life. For example, hell is the torment to "rise up to the Lord without having loved, to touch those who loved him—him who disdained their love." If such loveless people were allowed into paradise, their anguish would increase because they would be offered love from the righteous, but

it “would arouse in them an even stronger flame of thirst for reciprocal, active, and grateful love, which is no longer possible” (*Brothers* 322–23).

Therefore, according to Zosima, hell is internal suffering that is a consequence of an individual’s choice not to be humble and charitable. Unlike Dante, who emphasizes physical torture, Zosima questions the need for “material flames.” The spiritual agony suffered is the consequence freely chosen by the proud who rebel against God:

there are those who remain proud and fierce even in hell, in spite of their certain knowledge and contemplation of irrefutable truth. . . . For them hell is voluntary and insatiable; they are sufferers by their own will. For they have cursed themselves by cursing God and life. . . . [They] reject forgiveness, and curse God who calls to them. They cannot look upon the living God without hatred, and demand that there be no God of life. . . . And they will burn eternally in the fire of their wrath, thirsting for death and nonexistence. But they will not find death. (323)

In his novels Dostoevsky shows characters who, being unable to love, experience this inner torment during mortality. He typically portrays their condition as an illness; some may even consider them mad or insane. Dostoevsky describes them variously as sick, fevered, delirious, gloomy, worried, moody, nervous, lonely, isolated, ashamed, fearful, bitter, confused, irritable, crushed, tortured, frenzied, wretched, broken, condemned, etc. Yet, as the astute observer notices, they choose their fate, acting with open eyes and awareness of their suffering. For example, the Underground Man candidly declares his consciousness of his suffering: “I am a sick man. . . . I am a wicked man” (*Notes* 3). In *Crime and Punishment* Raskolnikov murders an old pawnbroker and her sister. Much later, after committing these acts, he admits that “it was the devil leading me. . . . I went into it like a wise man, and that was my destruction. I certainly hadn’t the right to gain power. . . . I did the murder for myself” (360). Likewise, Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov* willingly

chooses to fight against God in open rebellion. He believes that God exists, but he decides to accept neither God's world nor His plan. A. Boyce Gibson classifies Ivan not as an atheist but as an "anti-theist": Ivan "does not deny God, he defies him" (179). Thus, Ivan states:

"I believe in order, in the meaning of life, I believe in eternal harmony, in which we are supposed to merge. . . . And now imagine that in the final outcome I do not accept this world of God's. . . . I have a childlike conviction that the sufferings will be healed and smoothed over, that the whole offensive comedy of human contradiction will disappear like a pitiful mirage, a vile concoction of man's Euclidean mind, feeble and puny as an atom, and that ultimately, at the world's finale, in the moment of eternal harmony, there will occur and be revealed something so precious that it will suffice for all hearts, to allay all indignation, to redeem all human villainy, all bloodshed; it will suffice not only to make forgiveness possible, but also to justify everything that has happened with men—let this, let all of this come true and be revealed, but I do not accept it and do not want to accept it!" (*Brothers* 235–236)

Ivan expresses his rebellion further in "The Grand Inquisitor." Here, Ivan's Inquisitor tells Jesus of his secrets: (1) there is no immortality; (2) we are not with you but with the Devil. Essentially, Ivan says that he knows God exists, but he wants nothing to do with Him. By means of the rhetoric of the Grand Inquisitor, Ivan's scheme has intellectuals ruling the earth and making decisions for humanity. Man has either replaced God or has become God, a permutation of the man-god theory.

Dostoevsky's writings show the sufferings of individuals (e.g., Ivan and Raskolnikov) who try to live with this foundational philosophy or worldview. Their idea that they are superior to others in intellect, refusing to recognize God as God and believing that there is no immortality, places them in a position to act as gods or rulers over others. Consequently, they do not value human life, which in turn leads

them to amorality and murder. In essence, at the core of this worldview is pride. According to C. S. Lewis, pride is the “utmost evil”; “it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.” Pride revels in contest: “Pride is essentially competitive. . . . It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest” (94–95). Raskolnikov’s idea that there are extraordinary men who have the right to exercise power over ordinary men equates with pride. Raskolnikov dared to believe that he was one of those extraordinary men, opting to seize power by shedding the blood of another whose life, in his opinion, had no value or purpose. This concept of being above the rest fits the Underground Man as well; he proudly proclaims, “I’m more intelligent than everyone else around me” (*Notes* 9). As Victor Terras explains, pride is also

Ivan’s cardinal sin. It vitiates his many positive qualities, turning them to sin. On an intellectual level, it leads him to postulate that his human (“Euclidean”) reason is sufficient to master life. On a psychological level, it causes him to value his personal independence above all. Smerdiakov, in his character sketch of Ivan, says that his main care is “not to bow to anybody.” (*Karamazov* 51)

This lack of humility stems from a reliance upon reason and intellect, causing problems for these three characters. Ivan, for example, cares only about intelligence. “And intelligence by itself,” according to Eliseo Vivas, “is the source of all evil, and ultimately of despair. This is one of the things that Dostoevsky knew with the same certainty that Ivan knew that he was because he thought” (78). Terras observes that “those who pursue the truth rationally, trusting their human reason, are led into error. Truth will come to men through intuition and inspiration. The distance from the truth of each character in the novel is measured by the power and quality of his—or her—imagination” (*Reading* 136). Consequently Ivan, the Underground Man, and Raskolnikov struggle with madness and insanity. Dostoevsky uses Lebeziatnikov to explain that their madness and suffering stem from “‘a logical mistake,

an error of judgment, an incorrect view of things'” (*Crime* 365). Because these men have chosen to rely on a naturalistic worldview and depend too heavily upon reason and logic, they experience a hell in their hearts and minds.¹

Dostoevsky stresses the consequences and gravity of the choices his characters make. As Raskolnikov vacillates between whether to confess or commit suicide, he knows he must make a decision. But his indecisiveness causes continual anxiety and agony of mind: “[t]here was nothing poignant, nothing acute about it; but there was a feeling of permanence, of eternity about it; it brought a foretaste of hopeless years of this cold leaden misery, a foretaste of eternity ‘on a square yard of space’” (*Crime* 367). Ultimately, Raskolnikov’s struggle is with his own conscience.

Another major symptom of the suffering of Dostoevsky’s characters is that they are miserable. Zosima perceives that people are created for happiness, which comes through obedience to God’s commandments on earth (*Brothers* 55). While the Underground Man, Raskolnikov, and Ivan have gifts of logic and reason, they know nothing of happiness. After realizing, for example, that his godless, naturalistic worldview influenced Smerdyakov to murder Fyodor Karamazov, Ivan feels tremendous guilt and anguish, which lead him to confess publicly that he is a murderer. Then, he states that he would “‘give a quadrillion quadrillion for two seconds of joy’” (687). Zosima’s likely response to Ivan would

¹Naturalistic worldview refers to the idea of philosophical naturalism, which Phillip E. Johnson defines as the belief that since “nature is ‘all there is,’” then man is on his own. Man “created God—not the other way around,” and “God exists only as an idea in the minds of religious believers” (7–8). Vivas uses similar terminology, declaring that what gives Dostoevsky’s novels “their depth and makes him one of the great thinkers of the modern world is that while positive science and naturalistic philosophy were straining to reduce man to purely naturalistic terms and to deny his metaphysical dimension in empirical terms, Dostoevsky was rediscovering that dimension in empirical terms which gave the lie to the modernists by reinvoking ancient truths whose old formulation had ceased to be convincing. With Kierkegaard, therefore, he was one of a small number of men who helped us forge the weapons with which to fend off the onrush of a naturalism bent on stripping us of our essentially human,

be, “No, you must give all that you have, including your heart. At this point, you could not bear even two seconds of joy.”

Further, Zosima might also remind Ivan of the essentials of love. Dostoevsky’s literary cosmos contains, as its law, the heart of Christianity, that is, charity. When asked to summarize His teachings, Jesus said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:37–39). Through Zosima Dostoevsky places this standard before his characters, allowing the reader to judge: those who choose to love and receive charity are saved, while those who choose neither to love nor receive charity suffer the torments of hell.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky portrays Ivan as a lonely man, one who does not develop any close relationship with any other character. Ivan neither loves nor accepts love from others. Since he does not want to accept charity in any form, he thus seems to reject Christ’s offer of charity, that is, the Atonement for all mankind. “[S]ome people” whom Ivan “loves sometimes” are dear to him (230). But love is not just a “sometimes” proposition. Love, expressed as a commitment to a spouse, family member, or friend, is more permanent. In essence, Ivan does not love; he does not care about anyone else. Alyosha asks Ivan how he thinks the situation will end between their father Fyodor and brother Dmitri, and Ivan snaps, “What have I got to do with it? Am I my brother Dmitri’s keeper or something?” (*Brothers* 231) Even when Ivan should show concern over whether Dmitri is truly guilty of the murder, he exhibits very little interest in or compassion for the plight of his brother.

Furthermore, Ivan tells Alyosha that he does not know if he ever loved him. Ivan’s behavior is cold, distant, and detached. During a conversation with Alyosha at a tavern, Ivan decides that he will get acquainted with Alyosha “‘once and for all,’” remarking, “‘You seem to love me for some reason, Alyosha’” (229). Later, while telling Alyosha the Grand Inquisitor “poem,” Ivan again acknowledges the lack of feeling in his soul towards Alyosha: “‘Be angry! I do not want your love,

for I do not love you'” (257).

The one hope for softening Ivan's heart is Katerina Verkovtsev. As in *Notes from Underground* and *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky uses female characters in *The Brothers Karamazov* as a means of offering hope of salvation to men with hardened hearts. But Ivan suffers a crushing blow to his heart. Realizing that Katerina has been using him as a tool for revenge against Dmitri, he tells her that he is “unable to forgive” her and that he wants neither thanks nor gratitude from her (191–93).

Similarly, Raskolnikov is a man who “loves no one and perhaps never will” (*Crime* 88). Not only is he unable to love, but he abhors being loved: “He looked at Sonia and felt how great was her love for him, and strange to say he felt it suddenly burdensome and painful to be so loved. Yes, it was a strange and awful sensation” (363). The *Underground Man* also reasons that since he has “descended from an ape,” “virtues” and “obligations” do not exist. Therefore, his own body's needs, cravings, appetites, and survival are all that matter (*Notes* 13). When he states that man will not “knowingly want anything unprofitable for himself,” he does not consider the concept of charity as an option (28). From their naturalistic worldview, these characters cannot comprehend the concept of charity in a universe ruled by self-interests.

Thus, the Christian way makes no sense to the scientific man, for the Christian responds, “not my will, but God's will be done,” and God's will is that “ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12), a concept contrary to the law of nature that has no need for charity, as Luzhin explains in *Crime and Punishment*:

“‘love thy neighbor,’ what came of it? . . . It came to my tearing my coat in half to share with my neighbour and we both were left half naked. . . . Science now tells us, love yourselves before all men, for everything in the world rests on self-interest. You love yourself and manage your own affairs properly and your coat remains whole.” (131)

Yet Luzhin marvels at the increase in crime. Dostoevsky seems to ask here how one can expect anything but an increase in crime when the naturalistic perspective of self-interest is considered the correct way to think and live.

From a naturalistic perspective the notion of loving anyone other than oneself is just not “sensible” (*Notes* 30). Charity or active love is not what the Underground Man has in mind. After admitting that he is incapable of loving Liza, he defines his view of love as being a “right, voluntarily granted by the beloved object, to be tyrannized over.” He sees it as a “struggle” or battle that starts with “hatred” and ends with “moral subjugation” (125). Such a view allows for all types of mental, emotional, and physical abuse, adultery, and a relationship devoid of affection or kindness and based on lust and carnal satisfaction.

In like manner Raskolnikov cannot accept charity from others. After being whipped on the bridge by a coachman for falling down in the street, he accepts money from an old woman who says, “‘Take it my good man, in Christ’s name’” (*Crime* 101). But after taking it, he throws the money into the river; then, “it seemed to him . . . he had cut himself off from everyone and from everything at that moment” (102). His actions and subsequent thought symbolize his inability to accept the charity offered by Christ either directly through the Atonement or indirectly through others’ acts of kindness. After suffering an inner hell, Raskolnikov surrenders, confessing that he committed murder, but until the final two or three pages of the novel Raskolnikov shows no sign of repentance. He still manifests the same symptoms of the sickness described earlier, and he does not understand why he turned himself in, why he must sacrifice; in short, he is still proud.

Finally, however, Raskolnikov does change. But, as Gibson argues, in Raskolnikov’s case “it is not the love of God which takes hold of him” (102). Once Raskolnikov shows even an inkling of love for Sonia, then his own “frame of reference” is changed. “Only then does he begin to see the possibility (no more than that) of a Christian future,” possibly sharing Sonia’s convictions (91). Inasmuch as love is the law of Dostoevsky’s cosmos, one sees that if Raskolnikov can

begin to love someone other than himself, there is hope for his soul, for that love can expand to include a purer love, an active love, a love for God, and a love for humanity. Terras observes that

Dostoevsky is fascinated by passions that seem to be a manifestation of a metaphysical yearning for an absolute, for something that defies reason—in a word, the Eros of Plato's *Symposium*. Eros has many forms: the earthly lust of Fiodor Pavlovich Karamazov, who dies longing for Grushenka, Dmitry's sensual but more exalted "aesthetic" love, Ivan's cold intellectual passion, Aliosha's spiritual *agape*. (*Reading* 38)

Beyond providing opportunities for his characters to love others, Dostoevsky also shows them struggling with the question of God's existence, that is, whether to believe in a Divine Power and accept that Power's plan. For example, Ivan wrestles with the question, but indecisively, at least initially. Zosima identifies the conflict, perceiving that Ivan has not yet determined which side he is on: "This idea is not yet resolved in your heart and torments it. . . . The question is not resolved in you, and there lies your great grief, for it urgently demands resolution'" (*Brothers* 70). Zosima seems to urge Ivan not to be lukewarm, thereby courting biblical punishment: "Oh that I were that you were cold or hot. But if you are lukewarm, I will spew you out of my mouth" (cf. Rev. 3:15–16). Likewise, Raskolnikov is advised to "[s]eek and ye shall find. This may be God's means for bringing you to Him. You've lost faith. . . . Find it and you will live. Think it over . . . and pray to God. . . . [W]hat you need . . . is a definite position'" (*Crime* 395–397).

While in his ramblings the Underground Man does not directly bring God into discussion, he does want to find someone or something to blame:

there is no object to be found, and maybe never will be; that it's all sleight-of-hand, a stacked deck, a cheat, that it's all just slop—nobody knows what and nobody knows who, but in spite of all the uncertainties and stacked decks, it still hurts, and the more uncertain you are, the more it hurts! (*Notes* 14)

The Underground Man is looking for a “primary cause.” Finding none, he blames uncertainty for his inability to act or change (16–18). Dostoevsky seems to be arguing through the lives of these characters that sooner or later man must choose whether to accept or reject God.

For if there is no belief in virtue, immortality, or God, then every act is permissible. This is a major theme in *The Brothers Karamazov*, as it is in *Crime and Punishment*. One of Raskolnikov’s obstacles is that he does not believe in a “‘future life’” (*Crime* 251), that “‘perhaps, there is no God at all’” (279). Raskolnikov’s mind is so distorted with the idea that “‘all is permitted’” that he does not consider killing a person as a crime: “‘I didn’t kill a human being, but a principle’” (238).

Even so, Marmeladov offers Raskolnikov faith in personal redemption and forgiveness from God, even as he schemes to kill the old woman. Before Raskolnikov commits the crime, Marmeladov declares to him that God “‘will pity us Who has had pity on all men, Who has understood all men and all things, He is the One, He too is the judge’” (20). Once he decides to surrender, Raskolnikov receives help from God’s angel, Sonia, who follows him to the police station, helping him find courage to confess. Sonia forgives Raskolnikov for killing her friend, Lizaveta. In fact, Sonia gives Raskolnikov Lizaveta’s Bible. As the novel ends, he holds this Bible as a symbol of the forgiveness of others and the redemption of himself.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Terras suggests that “the notion emerges that any form of human truth (legal, psychological, empirical) is irrelevant to the absolute truth, which is God’s” (*Reading* 144). The way to obtain the knowledge of God’s truth is through deeds of faith. Zosima says that “[o]ne cannot prove anything here, but it is possible to be convinced” (*Brothers* 56). How does one become convinced? “‘By the experience of active love,’” says Zosima. “‘Try to love your neighbors actively and tirelessly. The more you succeed in loving, the more you’ll be convinced of the existence of God and the immortality of your soul’” (56). Significantly, for Dostoevsky a belief in the existence of God redeems the successful character—not Ivan, Raskolnikov, nor the Underground Man—but one such as Alyosha, who does choose to follow Zosima’s wise counsel: “struck by the conviction that immortality and

God exist, he naturally said at once to himself: 'I want to live for immortality, and I reject any halfway compromise'" (26).

Through the characters in his novels, Dostoevsky poses thought-provoking questions: what is the purpose of a life without God; what is the reason to change one's human nature; what is the foundation or purpose for living; if there is no God, no immortality, no virtue, and no love, why live? As Raskolnikov finally asks, "What had he to live for? . . . Why should he strive? To live in order to exist?" (*Crime* 466), Alyosha poses a similar question to Ivan when he asks, "How will you live, what will you love [people] with?" (*Brothers* 263). But if Alyosha and other characters demonstrate the effect of belief in God, then Dostoevsky suggests that his other characters are free to change, since he clearly opposes determinism. But do they? First, they must believe that repentance or change is possible. The Underground Man struggles with this obstacle, describing it as "the ultimate wall," because he believes that

you will never change into a different person; that even if you had enough time and faith left to change yourself into something different, you probably would not wish to change; and even if you did wish it, you would still not do anything, because in fact there is perhaps nothing to change into. (*Notes* 8)

He has given up hope that change is possible. He says he is "crushed by inertia" without having a primary cause or meaning in his life (17). He admits the need for certainty, "for in order to begin to act, one must first be completely at ease, so that no more doubts remain" (17). He is a character who has opportunities to change but chooses not to. At several points he could have repented. After eliciting Liza's pity, he sheds tears and cries in her arms. But this is not a permanent change of heart because he still does not know how to love and reverts to "feeling[s] of domination," "possession," and "passion" (124). He fails again when he terminates his desire to beg for her forgiveness. Ultimately, he loses her completely, yet had he wanted to find her, he could have.

While the Underground Man chooses not to humble himself and change, a spiritual death and renewal do occur in the final pages of *Crime and Punishment*, beginning when Raskolnikov follows a prompting that he cannot explain: “How it happened he did not know. But all at once something seemed to seize him and fling him at her feet. He wept and threw his arms round her knees” (471). Even though Raskolnikov fails to recognize what is happening to him, the reader does not. Love renews Raskolnikov, a love he feels in his heart and receives from Sonia. Joseph Frank even maintains that Raskolnikov becomes a part of the story of Lazarus with Sonia acting as a symbolic Mary Magdalene figure (131). Clearly, Raskolnikov “had risen again and he knew it and felt in it all his being” (*Crime* 471).

Although the novel ends before readers see the finished product, they do glimpse in Raskolnikov that change is possible; it may be gradual, but it is possible. But for Dostoevsky, the key is to be on the right path: “what ultimately matters is a man’s heart, while deeds, accomplishments, and his success in the world are irrelevant before God,” says Terras (*Reading* 140). Repentance may be the greatest miracle, for it signifies a change of heart: who can explain where the seed of desire comes from? But the individual must first have faith, as Dostoevsky clarifies: “It is not miracles that bring a realist to faith. . . . In the realist, faith is not born from miracles, but miracles from faith. Once the realist comes to believe, then, precisely because of his realism, he must also allow for miracles” (*Brothers* 25–26).

Still, some readers may deem the conclusion of *Crime and Punishment* unsatisfying because they do not see a radically changed nor repentant character. Raskolnikov does not do any great deeds, and he does not even bother to open Sonia’s Bible nor read its pages. Frank states that after completing *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky wanted to portray a regenerated Raskolnikov, “creating a highly educated and spiritually developed member of Russian society who conquers his egoism and undergoes a genuine conversion to a Christian morality of love” (147). But the best Dostoevsky offers is the hope that Raskolnikov may continue in the path he has finally begun:

He did not know that the new life would not be given him for nothing, that he would have to pay dearly for it, that it would cost him great striving, great suffering.

But that is the beginning of a new story—the story of the gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new unknown life. That might be the subject of a new story, but our present story is ended. (*Crime* 472)

Although he may appear to be only a minor figure in the story of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the presence of Zosima and his moral philosophy are critical to delivering Dostoevsky's message. At first glance, the biography of Zosima may seem to some readers insignificant in the novel. However, therein is the regenerated man Frank believes Dostoevsky desired to create. As a member of the Cadet Corps, the young Zosima had acquired "many new habits and even opinions," transforming himself "into an almost wild, cruel, and absurd creature" who is "susceptible to everything" (*Brothers* 295). He was involved in a "life of pleasure," "drunkenness," and "debauchery" (296). During this period he was attracted to a young lady. After serving in another district for two months, he returned to find his beloved married. In fact, she had been engaged when Zosima knew her but had never informed him. He "began to burn with revenge" and challenged her husband to a duel (297). The night before the duel, an emotionally charged and angry Zosima took out his vengeance on his servant, viciously striking him in the face several times. Afterwards, Zosima, unable to sleep, experienced a change of heart: "It was as if a sharp needle went through my soul. I stood as if dazed, and the sun was shining, the leaves were rejoicing, glistening, and the birds were praising God. . . . I covered my face with my hands, fell on my bed, and burst into sobs" (298). He knelt before his servant and pled for forgiveness. Later, he asked forgiveness during the duel, tossing his pistol into the trees. Zosima then resigned from his military commission and entered a monastery.

Here, Zosima faces a challenge similar to those confronting the Underground Man, Raskolnikov, and Ivan: a painful, heart-wrenching experience with a woman. But the similarity ends quickly. Unlike the

Underground Man and Ivan, who choose neither to forgive nor ask forgiveness, Zosima's pain eventually leads to a miracle in his heart. Zosima's response to the "sharp needle" in his soul is to fall to his knees and ask forgiveness of his servant. Whereas pride rules the Underground Man, Raskolnikov, and Ivan, humility causes Zosima to choose a new path, as evidenced by his tossing his revolver aside and entering the monastery. He had intended to kill the husband but then chooses not to; he could have continued down a path of bitterness, hatred, and rebellion but determines instead to follow an alternate and ultimately more rewarding cause, not only for himself but also for others he meets, such as Alyosha. Zosima is a character who experiences a change of both heart and direction.

Furthermore, Zosima's teachings provide a moral foundation for Dostoevsky's hero, Alyosha. Because Alyosha shows that he, too, is "susceptible to the temptations of reason, visited on him through his brother Ivan and his friend Rakitin—[the] example [of Father Zosima] leads him back to the truth of God" (Terras *Reading* 140)—he "has the rare gift of empathy with people of all characters and tempers" (140). He exemplifies the "active love" that Zosima emphasized: "Alyosha's heart could not bear uncertainty, for the nature of his love was always active. He could not love passively; once he loved, he immediately also began to help" (*Brothers* 187).

Finally, Zosima's life, according to Vivas, counters Ivan's rhetoric:

The alternative then to the ideal of The Grand Inquisitor is to accept God, freedom, and immortality. To give man freedom is not only to open to him the door of eternal salvation, it is also to open the other door, whose threshold hope cannot cross. You cannot have Heaven without Hell. . . . It is a terrible choice and no one knew more clearly than Dostoevsky how terrible it was: *happiness without freedom, or freedom and hell.*" What is the answer? It is found in Father Zosima, and that means [to accept] our condition as creatures. This calls for love at the heart of human existence. [Because] hell is life without love. (85)

James P. Scanlan comments that “[m]an’s most ‘advantageous advantage’ lies not in free choice as such but in the free acceptance of Christ and His moral message” (75). Dostoevsky’s message through Zosima is to follow Christ’s teaching to love one’s neighbor, exemplifying “altruistic, not egoistic behavior” (75). Using the Underground Man, Raskolnikov, and Ivan Karamazov as examples, Dostoevsky shows the inner hell experienced by those unable to love and unwilling to accept charity. These characters suffer because they have chosen a naturalistic worldview, decide not to love nor accept love, rely too heavily upon their own reason and logic, and willfully rebel against God. Even though they are intellectually aware of their tormented condition, they choose not to change because of their pride and defiant attitude toward God.

In Zosima Dostoevsky succeeds in portraying a reformed, educated character who alters both his direction and philosophy. Zosima embraces and Dostoevsky promotes a Christian morality centered on charity that itself involves both giving and receiving love. Whereas the Underground Man, Raskolnikov, and Ivan Karamazov fail to humble themselves before God and their neighbors, Zosima transforms himself because he decides to humble himself before his servant, his enemy, and his God.

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