

# Editorial

Dostoevsky's novels continue to fascinate searching minds in the USSR. In a country where religious literature is not plentiful, the ideas embodied in Dostoevsky's characters act as vehicles for Christian truths. The "Pro and Contra" section of *The Brothers Karamazov* containing the novel's central conflict between belief and unbelief, has captivated the mind of a highly intelligent Russian thinker, Grigori Pomerants. In an essay entitled "The Euclidian and Non-Euclidian Mind in the Work of Dostoevsky" (*Kontinent* No. 3, pp. 109-150) he explores the rational level on which Ivan Karamazov functions and the visionary capacity of man, developed fully in Father Zossima. Man attains vision via "a great doubt": in Zen-Buddhist teaching he struggles with a problem, rationally insoluble, hangs above the void in despair; by letting go at this point he breaks through to "insight", where harmony and wholeness of being are experienced. Through this death of the Old Adam "the spiritual lungs of the New Adam" can come to life. The enlightened state can only be reached after enduring the "underground" (see Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*), by breaking loose from inertia, by striving towards the Heavenly "Crystal Palace" (the Kingdom of God) after the Crystal Palace (ideal social structures), created by man's rational mind, has been destroyed.

What is the Kingdom of God? To Pomerants it is found "within us". Unlike the Euclidian mind which divides the world into atoms and then establishes their interconnections according to strict rules, the "iconological thinking" of the Russian Middle Ages sees the world whole and integrates the human personality. In the icon apparent incompatibles are combined: the virgin has the eyes of a widow and the mouth of a young girl; Christ on the cross appears to be about to fly away – thus youth and age, death and resurrection are brought together. So too are the conflicting elements within man integrated when the icon of Christ is formed within man. Christ's love can envelop and transform our inability to love. But, writes Pomerants, this vision of the world and man cannot be attained by the Euclidian mind. The deepest truths are expressed by silence; Christ answers all the Grand Inquisitor's arguments for a tyrannical society by a kiss, not words.

Thus, Pomerants advocates the apophatic way to faith. In an essay "God and Nothing" (*Neopublikovannoe*, Posev, 1972, pp. 188-189) he states that God cannot be apprehended through concepts and images: these must be thrown into nothingness. Words and icons are only "like-

nesses" which must be discarded like a net when the fish has been caught. An icon should be transparent, a window and not a wall, which does not block eternal light but only softens it so that the eyes of man can bear the sight. Man need not live in isolation but can link himself up with the rhythm of the Whole (see "A Very Short Philosophy" in *Neopublikovannoe* pp. 186-187) for he has a "receiver" and a "transmitter". Those who are "linked up" have an aura, Pomerants writes, in which other people find rest and easy breathing. In Pomerants's terms this level of being is the "third level" which he explores in an essay entitled "Three Levels of Being" (*Neopublikovannoe* pp. 73-87). The first level (the rational) and the second level (the emotional) are penetrated by the third level, or spiritual level. According to Pomerants this area of experience is like the pause among sounds where wholeness is found; it is an entry into a new world where the ordinary is miraculous, where one's burden is lightened, where God's law enters the heart. Life on the "third level" is eternal suffering and joy, eternal redemption of sins, grief for wrong done to God. Man must try to find inner resurrection: "Man must die for the icon to be born . . ." All the "my" must be burned so that resurrection can begin: "What rises is not I in something, but someone in me".

The vocation of the "enlightened" man is outlined in "The Man from Nowhere" (*Neopublikovannoe* pp. 123-175). He is a homeless, rootless wanderer and seeker after truth who brings enlightenment to society, awakens it from inertia, fights for conditions in which man can mature fully. Pomerants calls the Soviet intelligentsia "men from nowhere": they must act as the Chosen People, the salt which must not lose its savour, the leaven in the lump. They are to be transformed inwardly and so change their society. This inner transformation involves attaining a stability and balance which is in harmony with the rhythm of the environment. Such balance depends on how work and celebration, activity and contemplation are combined. Work, Pomerants writes, involves human beings as separate individuals, whereas festivals (*prazdniki*) take up the personal, the narrowly circumscribed and integrate it into the whole. Only by developing his contemplative capacity can man receive inspiration and learn how to act effectively. Significantly, he uses Pushkin's poem *The Prophet* to illustrate his point. The poet wanders in the wilderness weighed down with a spiritual thirst. A six-winged seraphim appears to him, and as in Isaiah's vision, opens his eyes, ears, mouth and gives him a burning coal for a heart. He lies as though dead until the voice of God commands the poet-prophet to rise and set alight men's hearts with the word. Such, in Pomerants' vision, is the vocation of the "chosen few" in the USSR.

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