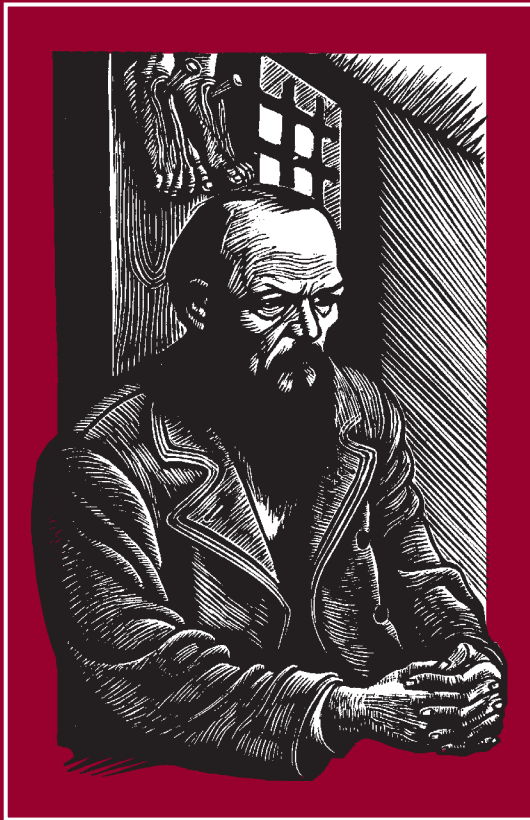


# THE GOSPEL IN DOSTOYEVSKY

Selections from His Works

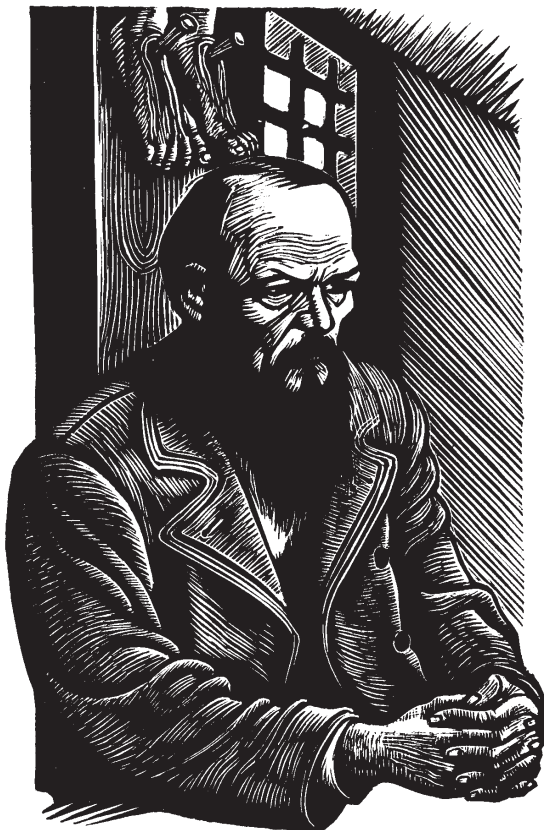


ILLUSTRATED BY FRITZ EICHENBERG

Introduced by J.I. Packer,  
Malcolm Muggeridge & Ernest Gordon

# THE GOSPEL IN DOSTOYEVSKY

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# The Gospel in Dostoyevsky

## *Selections from His Works*

Introduced by J.I. Packer, Malcolm Muggeridge,

& Ernest Gordon

*Illustrated by Fritz Eichenberg*



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DOSTOYEVSKY IS TO me both the greatest novelist, as such, and the greatest Christian storyteller, in particular, of all time. His plots and characters pinpoint the sublimity, perversity, meanness, and misery of fallen human adulthood in an archetypal way matched only by Aeschylus and Shakespeare, while his dramatic vision of God's amazing grace and of the agonies, Christ's and ours, that accompany salvation, has a range and depth that only Dante and Bunyan come anywhere near. Dostoyevsky's immediate frame of reference is Eastern Orthodoxy and the cultural turmoil of nineteenth-century Russia, but his constant theme is the nightmare quality of unredeemed existence and the heart-breaking glory of the incarnation, whereby all human hurts came to find their place in the living and dying of Christ the risen Redeemer. In the passages selected here, a supersensitive giant of the imagination projects a uniquely poignant vision of the plight of man and the power of God. If it makes you weep and worship, you will be the better for it. If it does not, that will show that you have not yet seen what you are looking at, and you will be wise to read the book again.

*Regent College, Vancouver*  
*J. I. Packer*



## *Foreword*

LIKE SO MANY of my generation, I first read Dostoyevsky's novel, *Crime and Punishment*, when I was very young. I read it like a thriller, with mounting excitement. Later, when I came to read Dostoyevsky's other works, especially his great masterpiece, *The Brothers Karamazov*, I realized that he was not just a writer with a superlative gift for storytelling, but that he had a special insight into what life is about, into man's relationship with his Creator, making him a prophetic voice looking into and illuminating the future. I came to see that the essential theme of all his writing is good and evil, the two points round which the drama of our mortal existence is enacted.

Dostoyevsky was a God-possessed man if ever there was one, as is clear in everything he wrote and in every character he created. All his life he was questing for God, and found him only at the end of his days after passing through what he called "the hell-fire of doubt." Freedom to choose between good and evil he saw as the very essence of earthly existence. "Accept suffering and be redeemed by it" – this was Dostoyevsky's message to a world hurrying frenziedly in the opposite direction, seeking to abolish suffering and find happiness. Since Dostoyevsky's time, the world has known much trouble and found little happiness, and so may be the better disposed to heed his words.

Dostoyevsky, who normally stayed as far away as possible from museums and art galleries, paid a special visit to the Museum of Art in Basel to see a painting, "Christ Taken Down from the Cross," by Hans Holbein the Younger. He had heard about this

picture, and what he had heard had greatly impressed him. His wife Anna in her diary described Dostoyevsky's reaction to seeing the original:

The painting overwhelmed Fyodor Mikhailovich, and he stopped in front of it as if stricken... On his agitated face was the sort of frightened expression I had often noted during the first moments of an epileptic seizure. I quietly took my husband's arm, led him to another room and made him sit down on a bench, expecting him to have a seizure any minute. Fortunately, it didn't come. Little by little Fyodor Mikhailovich calmed down, and when we were leaving he insisted on going to take another look at the painting that had made such an impression on him.

Anna's own reaction was one of revulsion. She writes of the painting that, contrary to tradition, Christ is depicted "with an emaciated body, the bones and ribs showing, the hands and feet pierced by wounds, swollen and very blue, as in a corpse that is beginning to rot. The face is agonized, and the eyes are half open, but unseeing and expressionless. The nose, mouth, and chin have turned blue."

The reason that Anna was so horrified was that Holbein's picture shows the body of Christ in a state of decomposition. On the other hand, as far as Dostoyevsky was concerned, the picture's fascination was precisely that it *did* show Christ's body decomposing. If his body was not subject to decay like other bodies, then the sacrifice on the cross was quite meaningless; Christ had to be a man like other men in order to die for men. In other words, at the incarnation, God did truly become a man.

Dostoyevsky was a truly prophetic figure, plunging down frenziedly into his kingdom of hell on earth and arriving at Golgotha. He had a tremendous insight into the future and foresaw the world we have today. He also proclaimed the coming

of a universal brotherhood brought about, not by socialism and revolution, but by the full and perfect realization of Christian enlightenment.

In the serener circumstances of his last years, Dostoyevsky's essential love of life and joy in all God's creation found a surer expression than ever before. "Beauty," he makes Dmitri Karamazov say, "is not only a terrible thing, it is also a mysterious thing. There God and the devil strive for mastery, and the battleground is the heart of men."

I continue to marvel at the chance – if chance it was – whereby the works of one of the greatest Christian writers of modern times should have continued to circulate in the world's first avowedly atheistic state – Dostoyevsky's devastatingly penetrating exposition of sin and suffering and redemption. Supposing one were asked to name a book calculated to give an unbeliever today a clear notion of what Christianity is about, could one hope to do much better than *The Brothers Karamazov*?

*Malcolm Muggeridge*

## *Introduction*

THIS BOOK OF EXCERPTS from the writing of Dostoyevsky begins, very rightly, with “The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor,” from *The Brothers Karamazov*. This is the high point of the stories he incorporates into his novels and essays. They are similar to the parables told by Jesus. They provide the reader with a practical illustration of a universal truth that can be described in no other way. “The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor” is a superb parable of human existence. It raises the great, or cursed, questions so characteristic of Dostoyevsky’s passion for the *living* gospel. Only in the light of the gospel is the complexity of human existence made understandable, purposeful, and hopeful. Without it there is no meaning to the daily round of human life.

One might expect the Legend to be narrated by a believer. It is not. It is a prose poem composed by Ivan, the Karamazov brother who is the rationalist and the man of “the Euclidean mind.” He, like the believer, is passionately involved in the gospel but in terms of its rejection, because it does not conform to his logic or his demand for “justice.” He cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is. The only logical thing left for him to do is to return his ticket to existence. But to whom is he to return it? “And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man, I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It’s not God that I don’t accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return him the ticket.” Thus the idea of God is essential even for someone who is trying passionately to deny him.

Alyosha, the believing brother, understands this tormented position and classifies it as rebellion, the rebellion of the disbeliever, who must have “justice.” If he cannot have it, then he has no recourse but to destroy himself. In analyzing his brother’s position Alyosha is describing man after the fall, man in rebellion against God, man seeking to be as God. Thus sin is not passive but active; not simply a failure to obey God’s command, but a deliberate refusal to obey; indeed, an act of defiance.

Ivan, in telling “The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor,” is thus telling his own story. He rebels against God’s ordering of creation and denies the effectiveness of Christ’s redemption. His Euclidean mind rejects the reality of God, man, and nature because it does not measure up to his formula of justice. Although he agonizes over the suffering of innocent children, he does so nevertheless, not from his love of them, but rather from his idea of its injustice. He confesses, “I never could understand how one can love one’s neighbors. It’s just one’s neighbors, to my mind, that one can’t love, though one might love people at a distance.” “One can love one’s neighbors in the abstract” (page 24). Such is the position of the Grand Inquisitor. For love of humanity he has assumed the burden of its freedom, a freedom too great for the people to bear. In assuming this burden he has chosen the way of the three temptations, which Jesus rejected for the sake of freedom. Thus he tells Jesus, “At last we have completed that work in thy name...Today people are more persuaded than ever that they have perfect freedom, yet they have brought their freedom to us and laid it humbly at our feet” (page 6).

The freedom to which the Grand Inquisitor refers is the freedom of illusion. At best it is an idea and no more than that. Thus he believes himself to be justified in giving the masses bread in exchange for their soul. The mystery of his ideology replaces

the divine mystery. By means of it the people assume that the bondage enforced by “the sword of Caesar” is indeed the freedom they seek.

The tragic irony of Ivan’s situation is thus reflected in the image of the Grand Inquisitor. Both of them understand the mystery of the gospel as the mystery of divine/human freedom, yet they cannot accept it. They are in bondage. In rejecting the deliverance offered to them in the God-man they have chosen to be the man-God; the man who rules the Tower of Babel, or any tyranny in any time and in any place. It is on this note that the Legend ends. Jesus, whom the Grand Inquisitor has condemned, kisses “his bloodless, aged lips.” “The kiss glows in his heart, but the old man adheres to his idea” (page 19). For the sake of his idea he condemns Jesus who is the Word become flesh. The passion of his Euclidean thinking leaves him with no alternative.

Dostoyevsky raises the question about the gospel: What is it? The answer is that it is the good news of our deliverance. St. Paul’s great affirmation in Galatians 5:1 is the triumphant note of freedom achieved for us in and by Christ, “For freedom Christ set us free.” This is not just an idea invented by scholars. It is the costly action of God in his freedom. This freedom has awful consequences. We have the freedom to defy the living God who has created us. What we term the Fall is an act of freedom. It is a negative freedom, however; it is that of rebellion. This is our condition without God – rebels who are driven by pride to assume what they imagine to be the power of God over others. We claim the freedom to sin, but we are unwilling to assume its consequences. We turn to Satan for justification, as the Grand Inquisitor (or Ivan) did. He is their invention as the justifier of their rebellion. These are the Grand Inquisitor’s words: “The wise and dread spirit, the spirit of self-destruction and nonexistence,

the great spirit talked with thee [Jesus] in the wilderness.” For both him and Ivan the miracle is not our Lord’s rejection of the three temptations, but their own invention and preservation of them. They are “the whole future history of the world and of humanity” (page 7). They represent the choice of human pride, the original sin.

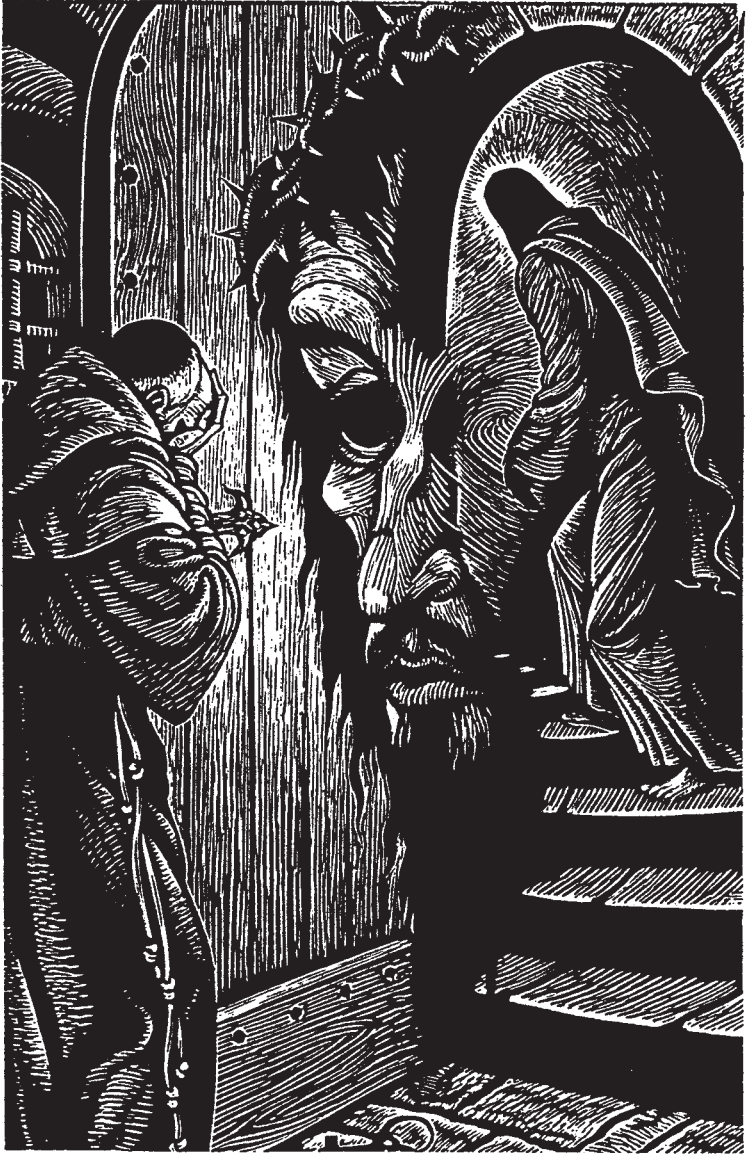
Although humankind has chosen to rebel against God, God has not rebelled against it and all its members. His love will not let them go. Makar presents this truth, “I’d be frightened to meet a truly godless man...I’ve never really met a man like that. What I have met were restless men, for that’s what they should really be called...They come from all classes, even the lowest...but it’s all restlessness” (page 209). This restlessness describes the situation of all who were called to be pilgrims on the way to the eternal city but have lost their way because they have lost sight of their destination. They have, therefore, given away their inheritance and lost their destiny, like the Prodigal Son. God, however, is there! He has made us for himself!

Dostoyevsky seems to be indicating that man without God is nothing. The background for his writing is that of nineteenth century secularism. The Enlightenment had surpassed the Reformation to affirm as truth the idea of a godless cosmos, in which the state is supreme and its subjects have lost the dignity of the divine image. Erich Fromm was correct in stating that the intellectuals got rid of God in the eighteenth century and of man in the nineteenth. Dostoyevsky reminds us, however, that God and man cannot be destroyed by this idea. Perhaps two of the darkest rebels are the old father Karamazov, who represents the collective sin of Russia, and Stavrogin in *The Possessed*, who is the second generation rebel and revolutionary. Like Lenin and his successors, Stavrogin had come to the position of assuming

# FAITH IN GOD

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## *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*

*This “prose poem” from The Brothers Karamazov is probably the climax of Dostoyevsky’s religious confessions. It is put into the mouth of Ivan Karamazov, who refuses to recognize God although he admits God’s existence.*

“HE CAME SOFTLY, unobserved, and yet, strange to say, everyone recognized him. The people are irresistibly drawn to him, they surround him, they flock about him, follow him. He moves silently in their midst with a gentle smile of infinite compassion. The sun of love burns in his heart; light and power shine from his eyes; and their radiance, shed on the people, stirs their hearts with responsive love. He holds out his hands to them and blesses them and a healing virtue comes from contact with him, even with his garments. An old man in the crowd, blind from childhood, cries out, ‘O Lord, heal me and I shall see thee!’ and as it were, scales fall from his eyes and the blind man sees him. The people weep and kiss the earth under his feet. Children throw flowers before him, sing, and cry hosannah. ‘It is he – it is he!’ all repeat. ‘It must be he, it can be no one but he!’ He stops at the steps of the Seville cathedral at the moment when the weeping mourners are bringing in a little open white coffin. In it lies a child of seven, the only daughter of a prominent citizen. The dead child lies hidden in flowers. ‘He will raise your child,’ the crowd shouts to the weeping mother. The priest, coming to meet the coffin, looks perplexed and frowns, but the mother of the dead child throws herself at his feet with a wail. ‘If it is you, raise my child!’

#### 4 *The Gospel in Dostoyevsky*

she cries, holding out her hands to him. The procession halts, the coffin is laid on the steps at his feet. He looks with compassion, and his lips once more softly pronounce, ‘Talitha cumi!’ and the maiden arises. The little girl sits up in the coffin and looks round, smiling with wide-open wondering eyes, holding white roses they had put in her hand.

“There are cries, sobs, confusion among the people, and at that moment the cardinal himself, the Grand Inquisitor, passes by the cathedral. He is an old man, almost ninety, tall and erect, with a withered face and sunken eyes, in which there is still a gleam of light. He is not dressed in his gorgeous cardinal’s robes, as he was the day before, when he was burning the enemies of the Roman Church – at this moment he is wearing his coarse, old monk’s cassock. At a distance behind him come his gloomy assistants and slaves and the ‘holy guard.’ He stops at the sight of the crowd and watches it from a distance. He sees everything; he sees them set the coffin down at his feet, sees the child rise up, and his face darkens. He knits his thick grey brows and his eyes gleam with a sinister fire. He holds out his finger and bids the guards take him. And such is his power, so completely are the people cowed into submission and trembling obedience to him, that the crowd immediately make way for the guards, and in the midst of deathlike silence they lay hands on him and lead him away. The crowd, like one man, instantly bows down to the earth before the old inquisitor. He blesses the people in silence and passes on. The guards lead their prisoner to the close, gloomy vaulted prison in the ancient palace of the Holy Inquisition and shut him in it. The day passes and is followed by the dark, burning, breathless night of Seville. The air is fragrant with laurel and lemon. In the pitch darkness the iron door of the prison is suddenly opened and the Grand Inquisitor himself comes in with a light in his hand. He

is alone; the door is closed at once behind him. He stands in the doorway and for a minute or two gazes into his face. At last he goes up slowly, sets the light on the table and speaks.

“Is it you? You?” but receiving no answer, he adds at once, ‘Don’t answer, be silent. What can you say, indeed? I know too well what you would say. And you have no right to add anything to what you have said of old. Why then, are you come to hinder us? For you have come to hinder us, and you know that. But you know what will be tomorrow? I know not who you are and care not to know whether it is you or only a semblance of him, but tomorrow I shall condemn you and burn you at the stake as the worst of heretics. And the very people who have today kissed your feet, tomorrow at the faintest sign from me will rush to heap up the embers of your fire. Know you that? Yes, maybe you know it,’ he added with thoughtful penetration, never for a moment taking his eyes off the Prisoner.”

“I don’t quite understand, Ivan. What does it mean?” Alyosha, who had been listening in silence, said with a smile. “Is it simply a wild fantasy, or a mistake on the part of the old man – some impossible confusion?”

“Take it as the last,” said Ivan, laughing, “if you are so corrupted by modern realism and can’t stand anything fantastic. If you like it to be a case of mistaken identity, let it be so. It is true,” he went on, laughing, “the old man was ninety, and he might well be crazy over his set idea. He might have been struck by the appearance of the Prisoner. It might, in fact, be simply his ravings, the delusion of an old man of ninety, over-excited by the auto-da-fé of a hundred heretics the day before. But does it matter to us after all whether it was a mistake of identity or a wild fantasy? All that matters is that the old man should speak out, should speak openly of what he has thought in silence for ninety years.”

## 6 *The Gospel in Dostoyevsky*

“And the Prisoner too is silent? Does he look at him and not say a word?”

“That’s inevitable in any case,” Ivan laughed again. “The old man has told him he hasn’t the right to add anything to what he has said of old. One may say it is the most fundamental feature of Roman Catholicism, in my opinion at least. ‘All has been given by you to the pope,’ he says, ‘and all, therefore, is still in the pope’s hands, and there is no need for you to come now at all. You must not meddle for the time, at least.’ That’s how they speak and write too – the Jesuits, at any rate. I have read it myself in the works of their theologians.

“‘Have you the right to reveal to us one of the mysteries of that world you have come from?’ my old man asks him, and answers the question for him. ‘No, you have not; so you may not add to what has been said of old, and may not take from men the freedom which you exalted when you were on earth. Whatever you might reveal anew will encroach on men’s freedom of faith; for it will be manifest as a miracle, and the freedom of their faith was dearer to you than anything in those days fifteen hundred years ago. Did you not often say then, “I will make you free”? But now you have seen these “free” men,’ the old man adds suddenly, with a pensive smile. ‘Yes, we’ve paid dearly for it,’ he goes on, looking sternly at him, ‘but at last we have completed that work in your name. For fifteen centuries we have been wrestling with your freedom, but now it is ended and over for good. Do you not believe that it’s over for good? You look meekly at me and do not deign even to be wroth with me. But let me tell you that now, today, people are more persuaded than ever that they have perfect freedom, yet they have brought their freedom to us and laid it humbly at our feet. But that has been our doing. Was this what you did? Was this your freedom?...

“The wise and dread spirit, the spirit of self-destruction and non-existence,’ the old man goes on, ‘the great spirit talked with you in the wilderness, and we are told in the books that he “tempted” you. Is that so? And could anything truer be said than what he revealed to you in three questions and what you rejected, and what in the books are called “the temptations”? And yet if there has ever been on earth a real and stupendous miracle, it took place on that day, on the day of the three temptations. The statement of those three questions was itself the miracle. If it were possible to imagine simply for the sake of argument that those three questions of the dread spirit had perished utterly from the books and that we had to restore them and to invent them anew and to do so had gathered together all the wise men of the earth – rulers, chief priests, learned men, philosophers, poets – and had set them the task to invent three questions such as would not only fit the occasion but express in three words, three human phrases, the whole future history of the world and of humanity – do you believe that all the wisdom of the earth brought together could have invented anything in depth and force equal to the three questions which were actually put to you then by the wise and mighty spirit in the wilderness? From those questions alone, from the miracle of their statement, we can see that we have to do here not with the fleeting human intelligence but with the absolute and eternal. For in those three questions the whole subsequent history of mankind is foretold, as it were, gathered together into one whole and uniting in them all the unsolved historical contradictions of human nature. At the time it could not be so clear, since the future was unknown; but now that fifteen hundred years have passed, we see that everything in those three questions was so rightly divined and foretold and so truly fulfilled that nothing can be added to them or taken from them.

## 8 *The Gospel in Dostoyevsky*

“Judge yourself who was right – you or he who questioned you then. Remember the first question; its meaning, in other words, was this: “You would go into the world, and are going with empty hands, with some promise of freedom that men in their simplicity and their natural unruliness cannot even understand, that they fear and dread – for nothing has ever been more unbearable for a man and a human society than freedom. But see you these stones in this parched and barren wilderness? Turn them into bread, and mankind will run after you like a flock of sheep, grateful and obedient, though for ever trembling, lest you withdraw your hand and deny them your bread.” But you would not deprive man of freedom and rejected the offer, thinking, “What is that freedom worth if obedience is bought with bread?” You replied that man lives not by bread alone. But do you know that for the sake of that earthly bread the spirit of the earth will rise up against you and will strive with you and overcome you, and all will follow him, crying, “Who can compare with this beast? He has given us fire from heaven!” Do you know that the ages will pass, and humanity will proclaim by the lips of their sages that there is no crime, and therefore no sin; there is only hunger? “Feed men, and then ask of them virtue!” That’s what they’ll write on the banner they will raise against you, with which they will destroy your temple. Where your temple stood will rise a new building; the terrible tower of Babel will be built again, and though, like the one of old, it will not be finished, yet you might have prevented that new tower and have cut short the sufferings of men by a thousand years; for they will come back to us after a thousand years of agony with their tower. They will seek us again, hidden underground in the catacombs, for we shall be again persecuted and tortured. They will find us and cry to us, “Feed us, for those who have promised us fire from heaven

haven't given it!" And then we shall finish building their tower, for he who feeds them finishes the building. And we alone shall feed them in your name, declaring falsely that it is in your name. Oh, never, never can they feed themselves without us! No science will give them bread so long as they remain free. In the end they will lay their freedom at our feet and say to us, "Make us your slaves, but feed us." They themselves will understand at last that freedom and bread enough for all are inconceivable together, for never, never will they be able to share fairly between them! They will be convinced, too, that they can never be free, for they are weak, vicious, worthless, and rebellious.

"You promised them the bread of heaven, but I repeat again, can it compare with earthly bread in the eyes of the weak, ever sinful and ever ignoble race of man? And if for the sake of the bread of heaven thousands and tens of thousands will follow you, what is to become of the millions and tens of thousands of millions of creatures who will not have the strength to forego the earthly bread for the sake of the heavenly? Or do you care only for the tens of thousands of the great and strong while the millions, numerous as the sands of the sea, who are weak but love you must exist only for the sake of the great and strong? No, we care for the weak too. They are sinful and rebellious, but in the end they too will become obedient. They will marvel at us and look on us as gods because we are ready to endure freedom and rule over them – so awful will freedom seem to them.

"But we shall tell them that we are your servants and rule them in your name. We shall deceive them again, for we will not let you come near us again. That deception will be our suffering, for we shall be forced to lie. This is the significance of the first question in the wilderness, and this is what you rejected for the sake of that freedom which you exalted above everything.



Yet in this question lies hidden the great secret of this world. Choosing “bread,” you would have satisfied the universal and everlasting craving of humanity – to find someone to worship. So long as man remains free he strives for nothing so incessantly and so painfully as to find someone to worship. But man seeks to worship what is established beyond dispute, so that all men would agree at once to worship it. For these pitiful creatures are concerned not only to find what one or the other can worship but to find something that all would believe in and worship; what is essential is that all may be *together* in it. This craving for *community* of worship is the chief misery of every man individually and of all humanity from the beginning of time. For the sake of common worship they’ve slain each other with the sword. They have set up gods and challenged one another, “Put away your gods and come and worship ours, or we will kill you and your gods!” And so it will be to the end of the world, even when gods disappear from the earth; they will fall down before idols just the same. You knew, you could not help knowing, this fundamental secret of human nature, but you rejected the one infallible banner which was offered you to make all men bow down to you alone – the banner of earthly bread; and you rejected it for the sake of freedom and the bread of heaven. Behold what you did further. And all again in the name of freedom! I tell you that man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find someone quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which the ill-fated creature is born. But only the one who can appease their conscience can take over their freedom. In bread there was offered you an invincible banner; give bread, and man will worship you, for nothing is more certain than bread. But if someone else gains possession of his conscience – oh! then he will cast away your bread and follow after the one who has ensnared his conscience.

In that you were right. For the secret of man's being is not only to live but to have something to live for. Without a clear conception of the object of life, man would not consent to go on living and would rather destroy himself than remain on earth, though he had bread in abundance. That is true. But what happened? Instead of taking men's freedom from them, you made it greater than ever! Did you forget that man prefers peace and even death to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil? Nothing is more seductive for man than his freedom of conscience, but nothing is a greater cause of suffering. And behold, instead of giving a firm foundation for setting the conscience of man at rest forever, you chose all that is exceptional, vague, and enigmatic; you chose what was utterly beyond the strength of men, acting as though you did not love them at all – you who came to give your life for them! Instead of taking possession of men's freedom, you increased it, and burdened the spiritual kingdom of mankind with its sufferings forever. You desired man's free love so that he should follow you freely, enticed and taken captive by you. In place of the rigid, ancient law, man must hereafter with free heart decide for himself what is good and what is evil, having only your image before him as his guide. But did you not know he would at last reject even your image and your truth if he is weighed down with the fearful burden of free choice? They will cry aloud at last that the truth is not in you, for they could not have been left in greater confusion and suffering than you have caused, laying upon them so many cares and unanswerable problems.

“So that, in truth, you yourself laid the foundation for the destruction of your kingdom, and no one is more to blame for it. Yet what was offered you? There are three powers, three powers alone, able to conquer and hold captive forever the conscience of these impotent rebels for their own happiness – those forces

are miracle, mystery, and authority. You have rejected all three and have set the example for doing so. When the wise and dread spirit set you on the pinnacle of the temple and said to you, "If you would know whether you are the Son of God, then cast yourself down, for it is written: the angels shall hold him up lest he fall and bruise himself, and you shall know then whether you are the Son of God and shall prove then how great is your faith in your Father." But you refused and would not cast yourself down. Oh! of course, you did proudly and well, like God; but the weak, unruly race of men, are they gods? Oh, you knew then that in taking one step, in making one movement to cast yourself down, you would be tempting God and would have lost all your faith in him, and would have been dashed to pieces against that earth which you came to save. And the wise spirit that tempted you would have rejoiced.

"But I ask again, are there many like you? And could you believe for one moment that men too could face such a temptation? Is the nature of men such that they can reject miracles and at the great moments of their life, the moments of their deepest, most agonizing spiritual difficulties, cling only to the free verdict of the heart? Oh, you knew that your deed would be recorded in books, would be handed down to remote times and the utmost ends of the earth, and you hoped that man, following you, would cling to God and not ask for a miracle. But you did not know that when man rejects miracles, he rejects God too; for man seeks not so much God as the miraculous. And as man cannot bear to be without the miraculous, he will create new miracles of his own for himself and will worship deeds of sorcery and witchcraft, though he might be a hundred times over a rebel, heretic, and infidel. You did not come down from the cross when they shouted to you, mocking and reviling you, "Come down from the cross and

we will believe that you are he.” You did not come down, for again you would not enslave man by a miracle and craved faith given freely, not based on miracle. You craved love freely given and not the base raptures of the slave before the might that has overawed him forever. But you thought too highly of men therein, for they are slaves, of course, though rebellious by nature. Look round and judge: fifteen centuries have passed; look upon them. Whom have you raised up to yourself? I swear, man is weaker and baser by nature than you have believed him! Can he, can he do what you did? By showing him so much respect, you did, as it were, cease to feel for him for you asked far too much from him – you who have loved him more than yourself! Respecting him less, you would have asked less of him. That would have been more like love, for his burden would have been lighter. He is weak and vile. What though he is everywhere now rebelling against our power, and proud of his rebellion? It is the pride of a child and a schoolboy. They are little children rioting and barring out the teacher at school.

“But their childish delight will end; it will cost them dear. They will cast down temples and drench the earth with blood. But they will see at last, the foolish children, that though they are rebels, they are impotent rebels, unable to keep up their own rebellion. Bathed in their foolish tears, they will recognize at last that he who created them rebels must have meant to mock at them. They will say this in despair, and their utterance will be a blasphemy that will make them more unhappy still, for man’s nature cannot bear blasphemy, and in the end always avenges it on itself. And so unrest, confusion, and unhappiness – that is the present lot of man after you bore so much for their freedom!

“Your great prophet tells in vision and in image that he saw all those who took part in the first resurrection and that there

were of each tribe twelve thousand. But if there were so many of them, they must have been gods, not men. They had borne your cross, they had endured scores of years in the barren, hungry wilderness, living upon locusts and roots – and you can indeed point with pride at those children of freedom, of love freely given, of free and splendid sacrifice for your name. But remember that they were only some thousands – and what of the rest? And how are the other weak ones to blame because they could not endure what the strong have endured? How is the weak soul to blame that it is unable to receive such terrible gifts? Can you have simply come to the elect and for the elect? But if so, it is a mystery and we cannot understand it. And if it is a mystery, we too have a right to preach a mystery and to teach them that it's not the free judgment of their hearts, not love that matters, but a mystery that they must follow blindly, even against their conscience. So we have done.

“We have corrected your work and have founded it upon *miracle, mystery, and authority*. And men rejoiced that they were again led like sheep and that the terrible gift that had brought them such suffering was at last lifted from their hearts. Were we right teaching them this? Speak! Did we not love mankind when so meekly acknowledging their feebleness, lovingly lightening their burden, and permitting their weak nature even sin with our sanction?

“Why have you come now to hinder us? And why do you look silently and searchingly at me with your mild eyes? Be angry. I don't want your love, for I love you not. And what use is it for me to hide anything from you? Don't I know to whom I am speaking? All that I can say is known to you already. And is it for me to conceal from you our mystery? Perhaps it is your will to hear it from my lips. Listen, then. We are not working with you but

with *him* – that is our mystery. It's long – eight centuries – since we have been on *his* side and not on yours. Just eight centuries ago, we took from him what you rejected with scorn, that last gift he offered you, showing you all the kingdoms of the earth. We took from him Rome and the sword of Caesar, and proclaimed ourselves sole rulers of the earth, though hitherto we have not been able to complete our work. But whose fault is that?

“Oh, the work is only beginning, but it has begun. It has long to await completion and the earth has yet much to suffer, but we shall triumph and shall be Caesars, and then we shall plan the universal happiness of man. But you might even then have taken the sword of Caesar. Why did you reject that last gift? Had you accepted that last counsel of the mighty spirit, you would have accomplished all that man seeks on earth – that is, someone to worship, someone to keep his conscience, and some means of uniting all in one unanimous and harmonious ant heap; for the craving for universal unity is the third and last anguish of men. Mankind as a whole has always striven to organize a universal state. There have been many great nations with great histories, but the more highly they were developed the more unhappy they were, for they felt more acutely than other people the craving for worldwide union. The great conquerors, Timurs and Genghis Khans, whirled like hurricanes over the face of the earth striving to subdue its people, and they too were but the unconscious expression of the same craving for universal unity. Had you taken the world and Caesar's purple, you would have founded the universal state and have given universal peace. For who can rule men if not he who holds their conscience and their bread in his hands? We have taken the sword of Caesar, and in taking it we of course have rejected you and followed *him*. Oh, ages are yet to come of the confusion of free thought, of their science

and cannibalism. For having begun to build their tower of Babel without us, they will end with cannibalism. But then the beast will crawl to us and lick our feet and spatter them with tears of blood. And we shall sit upon the beast and raise the cup, and on it will be written, "Mystery." But then, and only then, the reign of peace and happiness will come for men.

"You are proud of your elect, but you have only the elect, while we give rest to all. And besides, how many of those elect, those mighty ones who could become elect, have grown weary waiting for you and have transferred and will transfer the powers of their spirit and the warmth of their heart to the other camp and end by raising their *free* banner against you. You yourself lifted up that banner. But with us all will be happy and will rebel no more nor destroy one another as under your freedom.

"Oh, we shall persuade them that they will only become free when they renounce their freedom to us and submit to us. And shall we be right or shall we be lying? They will be convinced that we are right, for they will remember the horrors of slavery and confusion to which your freedom brought them. Freedom, free thought, and science will lead them into such straits and will bring them face to face with such marvels and insoluble mysteries that some of them, the fierce and rebellious, will destroy themselves; others, rebellious but weak, will destroy one another; while the rest, weak and unhappy, will crawl fawning to our feet and whine to us: "Yes, you were right, you alone possess his mystery, and we come back to you – save us from ourselves!"

Receiving bread from us, they will see clearly that we take from them the bread made by their hands to give it to them without any miracle. They will see that we do not change the stones to bread, but in truth they will be more thankful for taking it from our hands than for the bread itself! For they will remember only

too well that in the old days, without our help, even the bread they made turned to stones in their hands, while since they have come back to us, the very stones have turned to bread in their hands. Too, too well they know the value of complete submission! And until men know that, they will be unhappy. Who is most to blame for their not knowing it? Speak! Who scattered the flock and sent it astray on unknown paths? But the flock will come together again, will submit once more, and then it will be for good. Then we shall give them the quiet, humble happiness of weak creatures such as they are by nature. Oh, we shall persuade them at last not to be proud, for you lifted them up and thereby taught them to be proud. We shall show them that they are weak, that they are only pitiful children, but that childlike happiness is the sweetest of all. They will become timid and will look to us and huddle close to us in fear, as chicks to the hen. They will marvel at us and will be awe-stricken before us and will be proud at our being so powerful and clever that we have been able to subdue such a turbulent flock of thousands of millions. They will tremble impotently before our wrath, their minds will grow fearful, they will be quick to shed tears like women and children, but they will be just as ready at a sign from us to pass to laughter and rejoicing, to happy mirth and childish song. Yes, we shall set them to work, but in their leisure hours we shall make their life like a child's game, with children's songs and innocent dance.

“Oh, we shall allow them even sin – they are weak and helpless – and they will love us like children because we allow them to sin. We shall tell them that every sin will be expiated if it is done with our permission, that we allow them to sin because we love them, and that the punishment for these sins we take upon ourselves. And we shall take it upon ourselves, and they will adore us as their saviors who have taken on themselves their sins before



God. And they will have no secrets from us. We shall allow or forbid them to live with their wives and mistresses, to have or not to have children – according to whether they have been obedient or disobedient – and they will submit to us gladly and cheerfully. They will bring to us all the most painful secrets of their conscience – all – and we shall have an answer for everything. And they will be glad to believe our answer, for it will save them from the great anxiety and terrible agony they endure at present in making a free decision for themselves. And all will be happy, all the millions of creatures except the hundred thousand who rule over them. For only we, we who guard the mystery, shall be unhappy. There will be thousands of millions of happy babes and a hundred thousand sufferers who have taken upon themselves the curse of the knowledge of good and evil. Peacefully they will die, peacefully they will expire in your name, and beyond the grave they will find nothing but death. But we shall keep the secret, and for their happiness we shall allure them with the reward of heaven and eternity. Though if there were anything in the other world, it certainly would not be for such as they.

“It is prophesied that you will come again in victory, you will come with your chosen, the proud and strong, but we will say that they have only saved themselves, whereas we have saved all. We are told that the harlot who sits upon the beast and holds in her hands the *mystery* shall be put to shame, that the weak will rise up again and will rend her royal purple and will strip naked her loathsome body. But then I will stand up and point out to you the thousand millions of happy children who have known no sin. And we who have taken their sins upon us for their happiness will stand up before you and say: “Judge us if you can and dare.” Know that I fear you not. Know that I too have been in the wilderness, I too have lived on roots and locusts, I too prized the

freedom with which you have blessed men, and I too was striving to stand among your elect, among the strong and powerful, thirsting “to make up the number.” But I awakened and would not serve madness. I turned back and joined the ranks of those *who have corrected your work*. I left the proud and went back to the humble for the happiness of the humble. What I say to you will come to pass, and our dominion will be built up. I repeat, tomorrow you shall see that obedient flock who at a sign from me will hasten to heap up the hot cinders about the pile on which I shall burn you for coming to hinder us. For if anyone has ever deserved our fires, it is you. Tomorrow I shall burn you. I have spoken.’

“When the Inquisitor ceased speaking, he waited some time for his Prisoner to answer him; his silence weighed down upon him. He saw that the Prisoner had listened intently all the time, looking gently in his face and evidently not wishing to reply. The old man longed for him to say something, however bitter and terrible. But he suddenly approached the old man in silence and softly kissed him on his bloodless, aged lips. That was all his answer. The old man shuddered. His lips moved. He went to the door, opened it, and said to him: ‘Go, and come no more – come not at all, never, never!’ And he let him out into the dark alleys of the town. The Prisoner went away.”

“And the old man?”

“The kiss glows in his heart, but the old man adheres to his idea.”

# REBELLION AGAINST GOD

This is a preview. Get entire book here.

## *Rebellion*

*In The Brothers Karamazov, "Rebellion" immediately precedes "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor." Like the Legend it is told by Ivan to Alyosha Karamazov, his younger brother, who is a novice living in a monastery outside the city.*

"I MUST MAKE you one confession," Ivan began. "I could never understand how one can love one's neighbors. It's just one's neighbors, to my mind, that one can't love, though one might love people at a distance. I once read somewhere of John the Merciful, a saint, that when a hungry, frozen beggar came to him, he took him into his bed, held him in his arms, and began breathing into his mouth, which was putrid and loathsome from some awful disease. I am convinced that he did that in self-laceration, in a self-laceration of falsity, for the sake of the charity imposed by duty, as a penance laid on him. A man must be hidden for anyone to love him, for as soon as he shows his face, love is gone."

"Father Zossima has talked of that more than once," observed Alyosha. "He, too, said that the face of a man often hinders many people not practised in love from loving him. But yet there's a great deal of love in mankind, almost Christlike love. I know that myself, Ivan."

"Well, I know nothing of it so far, and can't understand it, and the innumerable mass of mankind are with me there. The question is whether that's due to men's bad qualities or whether it's inherent in their nature. To my thinking, Christlike love for men is a miracle impossible on earth. He was God. But we are not

