ABSTRACT
The first part of the article deals with Dostoevsky’s poetics of *imago Christi* in *The Brothers Karamazov*, i.e. with the intrinsic comparison between the characters of the novel and that special hero of the same novel that is Christ himself. Indeed, the figure of Jesus Christ not only occurs many times in *The Brothers Karamazov*, but the different characters strive towards Christ, are built upon Christ’s *figura*, in the sense Auerbach used this term in his book *Mimesis*. From this point of view, Dostoevsky’s poetics of *imago Christi* fits exactly with the pattern prefiguration–fulfillment, which the Fathers of the Church and their Medieval followers developed and used very often. In the second part of the article, patristic texts from Dostoevsky’s personal library, such as St. John Chrysostom’s writings, are analyzed as a source of *imago Dei* poetics. In particular, both St. John Chrysostom’s *Letter to Monks* and the chapter *Elders* (Chapter V of the Book I of the novel) focus on *starchestvo*, on human ‘inner image’ and on the spiritual enterprise – the so-called *podvig* – that every character of the novel, following Christ, has to fulfil.

1. *Imago Dei, imago Christi*

First, I would like to explain how I have carried out my research. Even if a certain comparison seems to be necessary in this case, I tried to avoid an extrinsic comparison between a theoretical anthropology, as in a treatise, and the Dostoevsky an anthropology, reconstructed from his different fictional and non-fictional texts. I think such a comparison would have been artificial and pedestrian. In fact, I chose only one novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, which is actually very rich from this point of view, and I carried out a different kind of comparison, intrinsic to this novel.

I took advantage of my long research on Dostoevsky’s characters. I believe that the nineteenth century Russian novelists, and particularly Dostoevsky, offered a seminal contribution to the study of the self. Indeed, this is a very different but no less

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accurate contribution from that of a psychologist or of an anthropologist, because the creation of a fictional but realistic character requires an even more exact and faithful understanding of the self than that of a therapist. Thus, my researches on Dostoevsky's characters gave me the hints necessary for the comparison.

Secondly, I would like to explain how the *imago Dei* anthropology of the title projected a year ago unexpectedly became an *imago Christi* anthropology. On this question, I could simply refer to some reliable texts such as *Communion and stewardship: human persons created in the image of God*, where the International Theological Commission again and again explains how 'the created image affirmed by the Old Testament is, according to the New Testament, to be completed in the *imago Christi*'. Likewise, it refers to the Christological nature of *imago Dei*, and shares St. Paul's thesis according to which 'it is Christ himself who is the perfect image of God' (International Theological Commission 2014). Or, more properly, I could refer to Shpidl's *The Spirituality of the Christian East: A Systematic Handbook*, where the author says that 'Christ [...] is the true archetype according to which man is created and recreated; he is “in the form of God” (Ph 2:6), “the image of God” (2 Co 4:4)'. At the end of the same paragraph, he sums up: ‘The entire tradition [of the Christian East] on this point may be summarized by saying that man is in the image of the Word and that he is the image of God through the mediation of the Word. He is therefore “an image of the image”’ (Shpidl 1986, 57).

However, this is exactly the kind of extrinsic approach that I would like to avoid. Therefore, if I began my research work keeping in mind these kinds of texts, the novel itself and Dostoevsky's intellectual biography obliged me to pass from a generic *imago Dei* to an *imago Christi* specific to *The Brothers Karamazov*.

2. Christ in Dostoevsky's intellectual biography

To begin, some references to Dostoevsky's intellectual biography are necessary. If every scholar admits that Dostoevsky's worldview suffered a dramatic change during his detention, it is necessary to add that at his very center this change held Jesus Christ and nothing else. In 1854, just a few days after his release from prison where he could keep and read only the Gospel, the novelist wrote Natal’ya Fonvizina, wife of a Decembrist:

I composed for myself a Credo in which everything is clear and holy for me. That credo is very simple, here it is: to believe that there is nothing more beautiful, more profound, more attractive, wise, more courageous and more perfect than Christ, and what's more, I tell myself with jealous love, there cannot be. Moreover, if someone proved to me that Christ were outside the truth, and it really were that the truth lay outside Christ, I would prefer to remain with Christ rather than with the truth. (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 28.1: 176; Dostoevsky 1988–1991, v. I, 194–195)

Leaving aside the paradox of Dostoevsky's expression, which has allowed scholars to build a library of interpretations, the Christological basis of Dostoevsky's faith is clear here – or, more precisely, the importance of the person of Christ himself for the writer. The paradox, here and elsewhere in Dostoevsky's works, is that he draws a
distinction between Christ and his teachings (the truth). In his 1873 Diary of a Writer, in a passage where he remembers Belinsky, he draws the same distinction:

There remained, however, the radiant personality of Christ himself, which was most difficult to contend with. Belinsky, as a socialist, was absolutely bound to destroy Christ’s teachings; to label them false and uninformed philanthropy, proscribed by contemporary science and by economic principles. Still there remained the most radiant image of the God-man, its moral unattainability, its marvelous and miraculous beauty. (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 21, 10; Dostoevsky 1993–1994, v. I, 128)

A consideration at the end of the story Vlas published on the Diary of a Writer some 20 days after the previous one shows how this distinction was paradoxical in Dostoevsky.

We hear that the Russian People know the Gospels poorly and that they do not know the fundamental principles of our faith. That’s true, of course, but they do know Christ and they have borne Him in their hearts from time immemorial. There can be no doubt of that. How can one have a genuine conception of Christ without religious instruction? That’s another question. But a heartfelt knowledge of Christ and a genuine conception of Him are fully present. It is passed on from generation to generation and has become a part of the People’s hearts. Perhaps the only love of the Russian People is Christ, and they love His image in their own fashion, that is, to the point of suffering. Above all else the People take pride in the name “Orthodox” – namely, those whose concept of Christ is truer than any others. I repeat: there is much one can know unconsciously. (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 21, 38; Dostoevsky 1993–1994, v. I, 164)

But, let us leave here the consideration of Russian people as a ‘God-bearing people’ – indeed, a crucial point of Dostoevsky’s worldview – and let us focus on the imago Christi poetics in The Brothers Karamazov.

3. Dostoevsky’s poetics of imago Christi

While the image of Christ (obraz Khrista) cannot be found in the works written by Dostoevsky before his arrest (1849), it becomes a leading theme after his release from prison (Kirillova 2011, 19–20). A number of scholars have already noticed that ‘the focal point of his [Dostoevsky’s] vision is ultimately the image of Christ’, writes Robert Louis Jackson (1966, XIV); ‘For Dostoevsky there is only one axiological criterion – the image of Christ. For the writer, he is the incarnation of the “positively” or “perfectly” beautiful man’, Müller adds (1998). Although correct, these statements are too trivial for the scope of this paper. Let us consider, in fact, some concrete Dostoevsky’s pages where Christ himself becomes one of his characters. Jesus appears in the account of Lazarus’ resurrection in Crime and punishment, mysteriously pops up at the end of Versilov’s dream (The adolescent), and is depicted in Holbein’s The body of the dead Christ in The idiot. Moreover, in the Notebook of this novel, the main hero, prince Myshkin, three times is called “prince-Christ”. This is how the author himself explains the subject of the novel:

The main idea of the novel is to portray a positively beautiful person. There’s nothing more difficult than that in the whole world, and especially now. All the writers, and not just ours, but even all the European ones, who ever undertook the depiction of a positively beautiful person, always had to pass. Because it’s a measureless task. The beautiful is an ideal, and the ideal – both ours and that od civilized Europe – is far from
having been achieved. There’s only one positively beautiful person in the world – Christ, so that the appearance of this measurelessly, infinitely a beautiful person is in fact of course an infinite miracle. (The whole Gospel of John is in this sense; he finds the whole miracle in the incarnation alone, in the appearance of the beautiful alone). (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 28.2: 251; Dostoevsky 1988–1991, v. III, 17)

However, the figure of Jesus Christ occurs mainly in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Let us consider how many different pictures of Christ appear in this novel, beginning with the *Epigraph*.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

John 12: 24 (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 5; Dostoevsky 2002, 1)

Jesus is here at the same time the author of these words and the one to whom these words refer. Christ is the one who, like grain, dies, abides alone and, with his resurrection, bears much fruit. Secondly, Jesus appears, mysteriously and silently, in Book V, Chapter V, *The Grand Inquisitor*, and for the third time in the eschatological banquet depicted in the chapter *Cana of Galilee*. Apart from these three clear occurrences, there are many other quotations, allusions and references to Jesus Christ in the novel. The mention of ‘the only sinless One’ – единый безгрешный – at the end of the chapter *Rebellion*, can be considered one of these references. Here Christ is presented as ‘the being who could and would have the right to forgive […] everything, forgive all and for all, because he himself gave his innocent blood for all and for everything’ (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 224; Dostoevsky 2002, 246). In the novel, Dostoevsky puts these words in Alyësha’s mouth, but it is quite interesting how in the corresponding *Notebook* the Inquisitor reverses Jesus’ title.

The kingdom.

You rejected the kingdom, and we had to accept it; if it will cost the blood of entire generations, then, the only guilty one is you.

They sing of you: you are the only one, the only sinless one, but I tell you: you are the only sinner! […] You rejected the authority of miracle, and we had to fight in order to fit it and if there is just one sinner, that’s you. I shall burn you. (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 15, 233–234)

Apart from ‘the only sinless one’, the pages which introduce the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* present a new Christ, different from the one of the *Legend*. I refer here to Christ proclaiming his second coming with the words of Old Church Slavonic Bible: “Behold, I come quickly. Of that day and that hour knoweth not even the Son, but only my heavenly Father” as he himself declared while still on earth’. (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 225; Dostoevsky 2002, 247). Then, Ivan describes the waiting for Christ in a dramatic way, stressing the third person singular ‘he’.

Mankind awaits him with the same faith and the same tender emotion. […] The tears of mankind rose up to him as before, they waited for him, loved him, hoped in him, yearned to suffer and die for him as before… And for so many centuries mankind had been pleading with faith and fire: “God our Lord, reveal thyself to us”, for so many centuries they had been calling out to him, that he in his immeasurable compassion
desired to descend even before then, he had visited some righteous men, martyrs, and holy hermits while they were still on earth, as is written in their lives. (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 224–225; Dostoevsky 2002, 247–248)

A quatrain from Tyutchev follows, where the King of Heaven in the form of a slave blessing walks the entire earth, then the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor with Christ’s second coming is presented.

Yet Christ, God’s Word, appears also in the chapter Of Holy Scripture in the Life of Father Zosima, where the old monk tells about his meeting with a young man moved to tears by ‘the beauty of this world of God’s’, by ‘its great mystery’ in a ‘bright, still, warm July night’:

— Each blade of grass, each little bug, ant, golden bee […] witness to the divine mystery, they ceaselessly enact it. […] Look at the horse […] or the ox […]: it is even touching to know that there is no sin upon them, for everything is perfect, everything except man is sinless, and Christ is with them even before us.

— But can it be that they, too, have Christ? – the lad asked.

— How could it be otherwise – I said to him, for the Word is for all, all creation and all creatures, every little leaf is striving towards the Word, sings glory to God, weeps to Christ, unbeknownst to itself, doing so through the mystery of its sinless life. (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 267–268; Dostoevsky 2002, 294–295)

4. Christ, the hero who brings to their fulfillment other Dostoevskian heroes

The above quotations have introduced us to the intrinsic comparison between the characters of The Brothers Karamazov and that special hero of the same novel that is Christ himself. In a word, they introduced us to Dostoevsky’s poetics of imago Christi. In The Brothers Karamazov mankind awaits Christ, loves Christ, hopes in Christ, yearns to suffer and die for Him, and the whole of creation, every single beast and leaf strives towards Christ/God’s Word. Moreover, in The Brothers Karamazov, the characters themselves strive towards Christ, are built upon Christ’s figura, in the sense Auerbach used this term in his book Mimesis. From this point of view, Dostoevsky’s poetics of imago Christi fits exactly with the pattern prefiguration–fulfillment, which the Fathers of the Church and their Medieval followers developed and used very often. The corn of wheat of the epigraph, which is the graphic announcement of Christ’s death and resurrection, is exploited again in the novel. It is applied to characters’ destinies such as those of Mitya Karamazov and Mikhail (the mysterious visitor). Moreover, as many scholars have already shown, there are many characters that repeat the threefold death-and-resurrection pattern of the epigraph in their transformative arch. The initial condition of dryness (the corn of wheat alone and infertile), the hero’s sacrifice (its fall and death), the final restoration of order (the abundant fruit of the sacrifice). In fact, characters repeat these steps either by means of a literal falling down to earth like the grain (Zosima and Alyësha), or quoting what Christ said during his passion and death (The mysterious visitor, who repeats ‘It is finished’, Sovershilos’ [Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 282; Dostoevsky 2002, 311]). In
the novel, this path is clearly a path from hell (Mikhail), from the kingdom of drunkenness, debauchery, and bravado (Zosima), from social and moral isolation (Markel, Mikhail) to paradise (Markel, Zosima, Mikhail), from rebellion against God to communion with God, the others and cosmos (Alyësha).

It seems to me that this feature of Dostoevsky’s poetics can now be taken for granted. Undoubtedly, many of his heroes are Christ-like, khristopodobnye (Ghini 1988; Kirillova 1991, 60–74; Kasatkina 2004; Kantor 2008). Tat’yana Kasatkina analysed The adolescent, I myself studied Brothers Karamazov heroes. This acknowledgement reveals some lack of initiative, however. Since Dostoevsky himself three times in the Notebook names Myshkin ‘prince-Christ’, every Anglo-Saxon scholar admits now that Myshkin is a Christ-like hero, whereas, they do not dare interpret The Brothers Karamazov in a figural way because there are no explicit references in its Notebook.

Granted the figural structure of Brothers Karamazov characters, I would like to underline that this Christ-likeness is not absolute. On the contrary, it is the result of a process, of a spiritual enterprise, a podvig, to use the right Russian word.

I think the meaning of the expression ‘anthropology of imago Dei in The Brothers Karamazov’ is now clearer. Imago Dei means that the characters have the image of Christ as a point of convergence and as a term of comparison. They try to conform to that same image, that we can find inside the novel itself. Therefore, the following expressions from the Karamazov Notebook are perfectly consistent with these principles of Dostoevsky’s poetics.

The image of God in man. […]

He [the only sinless One] was the image of the man. […]

Keep the image of Christ and if it is possible draw it into yourself. […]

What is life? To define yourself I am, I exist. To be similar to the Lord, saying: I am that I am, but already in the wholeness of the entire creation. (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 25: 243; 244; 248; 247)

Christ is the image of God in man. And the image of Christ has to be kept and drawn into oneself. Christ-like characters do exactly this: they keep the image of Christ and try to draw it into themselves.

5. Christ, God, and man

This reference to Christ, this figural perspective, does not hinder Dostoevsky’s ‘full realism’ (‘With full realism, to find the man in a man’). On the contrary, this perspective only permits a ‘realism in a higher sense’ (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 27, 65), a primordial, true realism (Fanger 1967, 215–216). Regarding realism, let us observe how Dostoevsky presents his heroes as a whole, with their corporal, social and inner dimensions, and how he avoids an angelical, only spiritual description. Alyësha’s first portrait, where his red cheeks are associated with his realism (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 24; Dostoevsky 2002, 25), is a good example of the novelist’s purposes:

If I manage it, I’ll do a good thing: I’ll force people to recognize that a pure, ideal Christian is not an abstract matter, but one graphically real, possible, standing right before our eyes and that Christianity is the Russian Land’s only refuge from all its evils.
I pray God that I manage it. (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 30.1, 68; Dostoevsky 1988–1991, 89)

This sensational unity of the person, which reaches its climax in Jesus Christ, God incarnated and God-Man, can also be found in The Brothers Karamazov. Here, while calling the resurrected Christ ‘our Sun [...] awful in his greatness before us, terrible in his loftiness’, Zosima declares that Christ himself ‘became like us out of love’ (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 327; Dostoevsky 2002, 361); and in the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor Christ shows up in Seville ‘in the same human image in which he had walked for three years among men fifteen centuries earlier’ (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 226; Dostoevsky 2002, 248).

6. Christ as a mysterious hero

A seminal feature of Dostoevsky’s hero is that he is presented as incomplete and mysterious. This is a general principle, true for Raskolnikov, Stavrogin, Myshkin and the Karamazovs. Their portraits are incomplete, disproportionate and, at the same time, extremely succinct. The characters of these novels consist not only in their outward appearance, they have a profound, mysterious essence, of which Dostoevsky presents only some characteristics, sometimes just one, while all the others are intentionally omitted. On one hand, the character is identical to this seminal feature, on the other, he transcends this feature. Alyësha Karamazov, for example, is portrayed with few characteristics in the introduction from the author and, if the author adds some additional features in the novel, nevertheless he remains a riddle (zagadka) (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 473; Dostoevsky 2002, 527). The other heroes of the novel are no less mysterious. The title of Chapter VII of the IX Book is Mitya’s Great Secret, while the title of Chapter IV of the XI Book refers to Mitya’s Hymn and Secret. The same Mitya sees everywhere only riddles and mysteries: ‘Everything on earth is a riddle [...] God gave us only riddles [...] So terribly many mysteries! Too many riddles oppress man on earth’ (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 99–100; Dostoevsky 2002, 107–108). Mitya calls Ivan ‘a grave’ (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 101; Dostoevsky 2002, 110), Alyësha sees him as “a riddle” (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 209; Dostoevsky 2002, 229). The mysterious visitor keeps his own special secret (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 274; Dostoevsky 2002, 302), while the Grand Inquisitor (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 236; Dostoevsky 2002, 259) and Mitya reveals their secrets (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 15, 34; Dostoevsky 2002, 594). Tayna, sekret, zagadka: The Brothers Karamazov is full of these terms referring to the characters, to God, and to his creation (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 267; Dostoevsky 2002, 294).

Now, if there is a mysterious hero in the novel, a hero whose portrait is completely disproportionate this is the Christ of the Legend of Grand Inquisitor. He appears ‘quietly, inconspicuously’, but, strange to say, everyone recognized him. This could be one of the best passages in the poem, I mean, why it is exactly that they recognize him. Then Dostoevsky presents again mankind waiting for Christ:

People are drawn to him by an invincible force, they flock to him, surround him, follow him. He passes silently among them with a quiet smile of infinite compassion. The sun of love shines in his heart, rays of Light, Enlightenment, and Power stream from his eyes
and, pouring over the people, shake their hearts with responding love. He stretches forth his hands to them, blesses them, and from the touch of him, even only of his garments, comes a healing power. (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 226–227; Dostoevsky 2002, 249)

About the Christ of the Legend, we do not know anything else. As The Brothers Karamazov mysteriously show up at their father’s house, so Christ mysteriously appears in Seville. His portrait is even more enigmatic and disproportionate than Alyësha’s: his only distinctive features, if one might say so, are his quiet smile of infinite compassion and his eyes, concerning which we ignore color and form. Even the Inquisitor who interrogates him has even doubts about his identity: ‘Is it you? You? […] I do not know who you are…’ (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 228; Dostoevsky 2002, 250). If the heroes of Brothers Karamazov hide some secrets, in the Christ of the novel mystery reigns supreme.

7. The isolation of the hero and the openness of Christ

Although peculiar to every character, mystery does not hinder the relational openness of the character himself. The portrait of Alyësha, for example, is really succinct and mysterious, but he is clearly defined as ‘clear-eyed’ and his eyes are ‘bright, deep gray, widely set’. Now, among the 280,000 words of Brothers Karamazov, ‘deep gray’ [temnosereye] and ‘widely set’ [rasstavlennye] are two apax legomenon, i.e. are said only of his eyes, while the other two features, ‘clear-eyed’ [so svetlym vzorom] and ‘bright’ [blestjashchie] eyes (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 24; Dostoevsky 2002, 25), are two characteristics Alyësha shares with his mentor, the old monk Zosima (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 37; Dostoevsky 2002, 40). This is very revealing. We know very little about Alyësha’s outward appearance; however, these few features allow us to link him in a unique way with Zosima: Alyësha is open towards Zosima.

In many characters this kind of relational openness is the final result of a path of conformation to Christ. Markel and Mikhail are openly characterized with an initial isolation [uyedinenie] and only once they become Christ-like characters at the end of their figural path, will they open to the others. Indeed, a relational openness was a seminal feature not only of the real Jesus Christ, but also of the fictional Christ of Brothers Karamazov. We have already considered the scene of his first appearance in Seville and his relationship with the people there. We must now add a concrete example of his infinite compassion – the new extraordinary miracle that Jesus performs resurrecting a girl with the words ‘Talita kum’, a new quotation from Gospel. This compassionate openness is also shown in the chapter Cana of Galilee, where Jesus appears with two different but figurally connected images – Jesus as the Gospel character who takes part in the wedding banquet at Cana and Jesus who presides over the eschatological banquet. Dostoevsky clearly underlines Jesus’ joyful relation with people, his oenological joy (to be compared with the Fathers of the Church’s ebrietas spiritalis).

Not grief, but men’s joy Christ visited when he worked his first miracle, he helped men’s joy… He who loves men, loves their joy… […] One cannot live without joy. […] Joy, the joy of some poor, very poor people… […] And the other great heart of the other great being, who was right there, too, his mother, knew that he came down then not just for his great and awful deed, but that his heart was also open to the simple, artless
merrymaking of some uncouth, uncouth but guileless beings, who lovingly invited him
to their poor marriage feast. “Mine hour is not yet come”, he says with a quiet smile (he
must have smiled meekly to her)… Indeed, was it to increase the wine at poor
weddings that he came down to earth? Yet he went and did what she asked. […]

We are rejoicing […] we are drinking new wine, the wine of a new and great joy. […]

Don’t be afraid of him. Awful in his greatness before us, terrible in his loftiness, yet he
is boundlessly merciful, he became like us out of love, and he is rejoicing with us,
transforming water into wine, that the joy of the guests may not end, He is waiting for
new guests, he is ceaselessly calling new guests, now and unto ages and ages. See, they
are bringing the new wine, the vessels are being brought in… (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t.
14, 326–327; Dostoevsky 2002, 360-362)

This relational openness opens the heroes towards other people, but also towards
God. Dostoevsky characterizes this openness as a visit of God, of the Transcendent’s
break-in into men’s lives. ‘God has visited me […] I want to embrace suffering!’
(Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 282; Dostoevsky 2002, 310): this is the clear mark of
Dostoevsky’s hero’s repentance and conversion. As regards Mikhail, a generic social
approval does not come, but his repentance and public confession receive a sanction
from the two moral authorities he recognizes, God and Zosima. As a consequence of
this openness to transcendent life, the former killer is allowed now to open to others
and love them (‘Now I dare to love my children and kiss them’ [Dostoevsky
1972–1990, t. 14, 283; Dostoevsky 2002, 312]). Every inner conversion in The Brothers
Karamazov presents this structure. Often Dostoevsky does not include the psycho-
logical troubles associated with the conversion in the description. It occurs after a
sudden contact with God. Regarding Mikhail, this contact is described as a visit, and
Alyësha too receives a new life after God has visited him in Cana of Galilee – after
the reading of the Gospel near Zosima’s coffin, after his vision of the heavenly ban-
quet, the young man goes outdoors and feels how the heavenly vault descends into
his soul: ‘Someone visited my soul in that hour’ (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 328;
Dostoevsky 2002, 363), Alyësha says, quoting almost literally the mysterious visitor’s
words. I don’t want to force my interpretation by presenting Christ’s openness to his
Father in the novel. I simply notice that, beginning from the epigraph up to the Song
of the Lamb that the “sinless one” quotes from the Book of Revelation, again and
again Dostoevsky presents Christ’s suffering as a fulfillment of his Father’s will (“he
himself gave his innocent blood for all and for everything”).

8. Moral dominion over the psychological self

Another basic feature of Dostoevsky’s character is his stratified consciousness, where
the psychological level, even the unconscious, does not prevail over the moral one.
Indeed, some of his characters show irrational behavior, make their decisions influ-
enced by unconscious biases, for example, unaware of their resentment. However, the
unconscious does not have the last word. In these characters we can distinguish a
superior, moral mind which refuses to be conditioned, overcomes all psychological
pangs and drives the self. In his dialogue with young Krasotkin, Alyësha contrasts
Kolya’s samolyubie with his samoosuzhdenie, i.e. self-love with self-judgement. In
other words the psychological mind of the hero – self-consciousness, self-awareness –
develops into a moral mind – conscience, moral sense of right and wrong – which is able to freely judge the self. “I’m a scoundrel in many ways, Karamazov, I see it now!” (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 503; Dostoevsky 2002, 556), admits the boy at the end of the dialogue.

Also, in the cases of Ivan and Mitya’s self-criticism and self-condemnation (‘I am a scoundrel!’ [(Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 255 and 331; Dostoevsky 2002, 280 and 367)]) is a sure sign of the awakening of their moral consciences. A conscience through which the hero becomes aware of himself, judges himself, acknowledges his own psychological conditionings, overcomes them and opens up to a superior mind. Dostoevsky uses some graphical means in order to show this self-criticism, this moral self-analysis on the page, for example, by the use of brackets. This moral dominion over the psychological self has a moment of climax in the novel. I refer to the three temptations of Christ in the desert, that is, to the splendid interpretation that Dostoevsky offers by means of Ivan Karamazov. While this is an important topic, I can only touch on it very briefly in this essay. Note that, if in The Brothers Karamazov a common hero struggles to reach this moral conscience, in the account of temptations Jesus shows a supreme dominion over all psychological and physical conditionings. He shows a real supremacy over temptations and tempter.

9. The podvig

The last feature of The Brothers Karamazov hero I want to consider here is the harsh struggle that takes place in his heart, and which transforms it into an authentic battlefield. Mitya Karamazov explains this point to his brother Alyësha:

Beauty! […] I can’t bear it that some man, even with a lofty heart and the highest mind, should start from the ideal of the Madonna and end with the ideal of Sodom. […] No, man is broad, even too broad, I would narrow him down. […] Here the devil is struggling with God, and the battlefield is the human heart. (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 100; Dostoevsky 2002, 108)

I have already said that a perfect conformation to Christ is a result of a never-ending process, of a spiritual enterprise which comprehends a harsh struggle. This is the so-called podvig, a heroic exploit both in spiritual and in human field, a key term for Dostoevsky’s anthropology. Let us present some examples, beginning with the dialogue between Mikhail and Zosima: ‘Everyone will understand your deed [podvig]. – Zosima explains – If not now, they will understand later, for you will have served the truth, not earthly truth, but a higher one …’ (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 280; Dostoevsky 2002, 308). Mankind as a whole has to fulfill a great podvig, which means to leave his isolation (uyedinenie) and build up a ‘brotherly communion’ (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 276; Dostoevsky 2002, 304), but every single hero has his own podvig: Zosima’s podvig, of course, is a ‘monastic effort’ (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 257; Dostoevsky 2002, 284). Mikhail’s one is the public confession that drives him to ‘paradise’ (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 283; Dostoevsky 2002, 312), and so on. But, if every character has his podvig, far more Christ has his own: it is that great podvig that the Grand Inquisitor and his companion had corrected to mankind’s benefit (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 234; Dostoevsky 2002, 257).
In conclusion, these are the features of *imago Dei* anthropology that we can distinguish in *Brothers Karamazov* characters, features that are largely in common with the ones presented by the document of the International Theological Commission. The characters, bearing a never exhausted mystery, endowed with an integral humanity, open to God and to people, able to dominate their own biological and psychological urges, grow, develop, struggle, draw Christ into themselves, and conform more and more to Christ’s image in the course of a spiritual *podvig*. Moreover, they define themselves in comparison with Christ.

10. Patristic sources of *imago Dei* poetics

The second, and very brief part of this paper deals with Dostoevsky’s sources. The question is from where did Dostoevsky take this anthropology? The Gospel, of course, is a direct source, but can we find some other source apart from the Scriptures?

Let us consider heroes’ *podvig* and their relation with the image of Christ, which the hero finds inside himself and which, at the same time, he has to draw more and more into himself. Shpidlík explains how the spirituality of the Christian East follows Origen’s explanation in relation with the ascent from image to likeness of God: ‘According to Origen’s interpretation, “man received the dignity of God’s image at his first creation” […] but he must acquire the perfection of this likeness “for himself by his own diligence in the imitation of God”’ (Shpidlík 1986, 59). Dostoevsky does not avoid what José Maria Galvan called ‘the matters which “should not have existed” […] suffering, guilt, death’, on the contrary he forces his characters to face them, so that many of his heroes present a ‘broken image of man’ (Galván 2002, 4). However, they can count on the dignity of God’s image, since their anthropology is very close to that of the Eastern Fathers of the Church.

Now, as a scholar of Dostoevsky I am perfectly aware that there are very few works about the patristic sources that he could have taken advantage of, and that there are real difficulties in this field of studies, as shown by Pletněv, Salvestroni, Rowan Williams, Veliovskaja, and Bulanov. I know that the books of the Fathers that the novelist asked for from his brother after he was released from camp were never identified, and that his first library which should contain some patristic writings was sold by his stepson when he was abroad with Anna Grigor’yevna. Nevertheless, I think that we cannot be satisfied with a simple comparison between Dostoevsky and Isaac the Syrian or Symeon the New Theologian as found in Salvestroni’s works. Other Fathers of the Church should be investigated, such as Mark the Ascetic, St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus, whose names appear automatically in Dostoevsky’s *Notebooks* (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 9, 249).

Therefore, while I leave other scholars to research whether Dostoevsky knew *Dobrotolyubie* – the Slavic version of Philokalia, translated by Paisij Velichkovskij in 1793 – possibly by means of his friend Apollon Grigor’yev or the monks of Optyna Pustyn’, I would like to draw attention to another book published by the Velichkovskij. I refer here to *Vostorgnutye klasy v pishchu dushi* [Chosen works as a soul food], published by Optina Pustyn’ monastery in 1876 (*Vostorgnutye klasy* 1876).
According to Budanova’s reconstruction of Dostoevsky’s last library, the novelist seems to have had only a limited excerpt of this anthology, where only the writings of blessed Ammon and Zosima used to appear (Biblioteka Dostoevskogo 2005, 121). Actually, we do not know whether Dostoevsky had read the entire anthology, in particular, we do not know whether Dostoevsky had read the writing of St. John Chrysostom where he talks about the so-called prayer of the heart, a writing that was afterwards known all over Russia since it was quoted in the Way of a Pilgrim. What is certain is that this writing presents several similarities with Dostoevsky’s Brothers Karamazov. The title of the writing is Letter to Monks and was translated by Paisij Velichkovsky, the father of Russian starchestvo, a monastic way of spiritual direction, and who had his main center in Optina Pustyn’ monastery. Remember that Book VI of Part II of the novel, where the ‘life’ of Zosima appears, is entitled The Russian Monk and that Chapter V of the Book I, entitled Elders [Startsy], unexpectedly introduced in world literature precisely the experience of starchestvo. Zosima is not just a monk, he is a starets. So, in this letter St. John Chrysostom tells the monks how to conform to Christ. ‘I beg you, do not move your hearts away from God, but persevere and keep them always with the memory of our Lord Jesus Christ [chronite ja s pamjatiyu Gospoda nashego Iisusa Khrista vsegda]. […]’ The very act [podvig] of the soul consists in not agreeing with unchaste thoughts, and in not lingering on the ones which the devil, the plagiarist and ancient painter, depicts [obrazopiset] in your hearts. Actually, now the devil depicts [izobrazhaet] images, now instead forms and colors and after all these, faces too’ (Vostorgnutye klasly 1876, 17).

In the Notebook of the novel, apart from the above-mentioned sentence ‘Keep the image of Christ and if it possible draw it into yourself’ [Obraz Khrista chrani i esli vozmozhesh, v sebe izobrazi], there is another quite similar sentence: ‘Keep the image of Christ, since monasteries do keep it’ [Obraz Christa khrani, ibo monastyri khranjat] (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 15, 250).

This sentence has a correlative inside the novel, where the starets says of monks that, ‘in their solitude they keep the image of Christ fair and undistorted, in the purity of God’s truth, from the time of the ancient fathers, apostles, and martyrs’ (Dostoevsky 1972–1990, t. 14, 284; Dostoevsky 2002, 313).

We can then summarize the correspondence between St. John Chrysostom’s Letter to Monks and the novel (Notebooks included).

Now, can we risk assuming that, apart from the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church and particularly St. John Chrysostom were one of the sources of Dostoevsky’s poetics of conformation of characters to Christ? Can we assume that the image of Christ which Dostoevsky’s hero, by means of his podvig, has to draw into himself is the
same image of Christ that Russian monasteries received from the Fathers of the Church and keep as a precious relic?

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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