ROGER B. ANDERSON

Mythical Implications of Father Zosima's Religious Teachings

One of the most perplexing questions in *The Brothers Karamazov* is the manner in which Father Zosima serves as Dostoevsky's spokesman on matters of spiritual faith. Zosima's teachings emphasize humility, a mystical union of man and the world, and undifferentiated love; the key to faith for him is the individual's own emotion, the wisdom of the heart.[1] In keeping with the deeply personal quality of Zosima's message, he teaches in the form of short homilies and stories from his own past. These often lack logical connectives, relying instead on repetition of certain images of nature and mystical community. Malcolm Jones has aptly remarked that Dostoevsky withholds specific guidelines from his seekers of faith, giving only the personal experience of individual characters, which is bound up with the symbolism of their own interpretations.[2]

Because Zosima's teachings are personal and symbolic, they are at odds with logical formulations and intellectual programs. His mystical love inspires awe in those he meets, but he offers no clear means for following or reproducing his insights. He is as mute before ordinary standards of consistency as Christ is before the Grand Inquisitor. The loss is not so great, perhaps, when we remember how the Grand Inquisitor uses the logic of humanistic "love" to advocate enslavement of man through the perversion of miracle, mystery, and authority. Dostoevsky fully realized the difficulties his readers might face in attempting to understand Zosima's message, and he defended the diffuse appearance of his elder's teachings. Moreover, his placement of Zosima's homilies and stories shortly after the Grand Inquisitor's cynical philosophy was intentional.[3]

The most disturbing problem in Zosima's symbolic and fragmentary teachings is the difficulty of labelling them as unambiguously Christian. Zosima's model was a composite of the Orthodox *starets*,[4] but the church was divided in its attitude toward the fictional elder, and many ecclesiastics were less than

1. For a critical review of Zosima's sentimentally based faith, see Nathan Rosen, "Style and Structure in *The Brothers Karamazov*," *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, 1, no. 1 (1971): 252–54. Rosen contends that it is inherently weaker than the Grand Inquisitor's critique against belief. For a discussion of the Grand Inquisitor as victor in his logical attack on Christ and faith for its own sake, see Edward Wasiolek, *Dostoevsky, The Major Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1964), pp. 164–70.

2. See M. V. Jones, *Dostoevsky: The Novel of Discord* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1976), pp. 190–91.

3. In his well-known letter of August 7, 1879 to K. P. Pobedonostsev, head of the Russian church, Dostoevsky emphasizes his anticipation of Zosima as an answer "in artistic form" to the Grand Inquisitor's logical challenge to God (see F. M. Dostoevskii, *Pis'ma*, 4 vols., ed. A. S. Dolinin [Moscow, 1959], vol. 4, letter 694).

4. Dostoevsky used as his model Starets Amvrosii of Optina Pustyn', a contemporary of Dostoevsky with whom he had a short acquaintance in 1878, and Bishop Tikhon of Zadonsk, who lived in the eighteenth century.

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pleased by the comparison.[5] For one thing, Zosima expresses a disturbing tendency, by Christian standards, to worship the earth and all forms of creation as being endowed with holy meaning. George Gibian refers to the elder's sense of the soil as a mixture of Christianity and animism.[6] The Russian critic, R. Pletnev, goes further, writing that Zosima leads us back to the ancient Russian folk image of "Moist Mother Earth" and its antecedents in anthropomorphism and pantheism. He considers Dostoevsky to be close to the *Strigol'niki* heresy, the old Russian practice of confessing to the soil rather than to Christian priests.[7]

We are left, apparently, with a significant contradiction—Dostoevsky's primary spokesman on faith seems too unique and eclectic to fit his own church. But that paradox does not necessarily mean that Zosima's teachings are inconsistent. Perhaps the critical lens through which we have sought to view those teachings needs to be refocused.

I propose that Zosima's spiritual vision is clearer when we view it from the perspective of myth; that is, his teachings represent a cluster of discernible themes—which refer to questions of nature, the related issues of time and immortality, and the notion of the individual's place within his group (his nation or his people)—that are similar in outline and function to motifs common to myth. Zosima's teachings diverge from the specifics of church doctrine. They refer to an older spiritual impulse in man that is fundamental to mythical thought. By adopting this view we are more able to appreciate the symbolic coherence of those teachings than are critics who seek a specifically Christian source for each of the elder's mysterious pronouncements. As a point of departure, then, it is helpful to point out those elements of Zosima's beliefs that differ from accepted teachings of the Orthodox church. After that, we will be able to examine the elder's beliefs in terms of their own symbolic structure.

Zosima's ecstatic attachment to nature and the earth distances him from his church. He calls for his listeners to venerate the soil, to water it with tears: "love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything."[8] In his book on Dostoevsky, L. A. Zander speaks of Zosima's "love for the earth and 'loyality' to it" as allusions to "pagan virtues."[9] Zander uses the compromissary

5. Mochulsky states that "not only liberal criticism, but also those who venerated the 'old monks and prelates,' such as Konstantin Leont'ev, did not acknowledge the Elder Zosima as the ideal of the 'Russian monk.' The image that Dostoevsky created was likewise rejected by the Elders of Optina" (see Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky*, trans. M. A. Minihan [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967], p. 589). In 1886, government censors withheld permission to publish a separate edition of Zosima's biography and teachings on the basis of their subversive potential. For a discussion of the question, see V. K. Lebedev, "Otryvok iz romana *Brat'ia Karamazovy* pered sudom tsenzury," *Russkaia literatura*, 1970, no. 2, p. 124.

6. See George Gibian, "Dostoevskij's Use of Russian Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore*, 69 (July–September 1956): 242.

7. See R. Pletnev, "Zemlia," *O Dostoevskom: Sbornik statei*, 3 vols., ed. A. L. Bem (Prague, 1929), 1:157.

8. F. M. Dostoevskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh* (Moscow, 1958), 9:399. All references will be made in the text following the quoted material; for convenience, the quotes will be in English using the Constance Garnett translation as revised and edited by R. E. Matlaw (F. M. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1976]).

9. L. A. Zander, *Dostoevsky* (New York: Haskell House, 1975), p. 56.

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term "panentheism" in order to read a Christian corollary into the elder's adoration of the earth. G. P. Fedotov, in his classic *The Russian Religious Mind*, speaks more bluntly of Dostoevsky as a typically Russian expression of pre-Christian attachment to the soil. Father Zosima seems a fitting example of what Fedotov terms "sensual mysticism," "the greatest religious temptation for a Russian will be theism of a sensual (hylozoistic) kind."[10] And Konstantin Mochulsky candidly calls Dostoevsky's elder pantheistic.[11] The specific goal of A. B. Gibson's posthumously published book on Dostoevsky is a Christian assessment of the author. But Gibson is also openly bemused by Zosima's place in such a scheme, and writes: "Not only nature but supernature is glorified without mention of God." Immediately afterward, however, he states that "Dostoevsky's natural approach to God was through his manifestations; at the end of his life through the joy and gladness of nature."[12]

Zosima has a radical and qualitatively different kind of consciousness which directly perceives the secrets of cosmic unity. He preaches an undifferentiated unity that extends laterally without exception, connecting each individual to all other manifestations of existence. Included here are not only all other people, but vegetable life and inanimate objects (rocks and soil) as well. The union also extends vertically to join all forms of existence to God: "It's all like an ocean I tell you . . . pray to the birds too, consumed by an all-embracing love, in a sort of transport, and pray that they too would forgive you your sin. Treasure this ecstasy, however senseless it may seem to men" (p. 400).

Corresponding to Zosima's mystical naturalism is his special attachment to his dead brother Markel. It is the memory of his brother's ecstatic deification of nature and a related emphasis on humility that resound through the elder's later teachings. It is Markel's words to his mother and servants, "Am I worth your waiting on me?" (p. 373) that Zosima recalls just before his duel. He repeats the phrase to himself, thinking of how he has just abused his orderly, who again uses the same phrase when Zosima bows down to him, asking for forgiveness (p. 374). While recounting the story, Zosima again brings Markel's message to life in his teaching of indiscriminate love: "My brother asked the birds to forgive him. That sounds senseless, but it was right" (p. 400). Markel, of course, was not an active member of the church; he did not observe the Orthodox holidays before his illness and he made jokes at the church's expense. Nor is Markel's spiritual enlightenment described as emanating from the church. He attends services "simply for your sake, mother, to please and comfort you" (p. 360). When a nurse wishes to light the icon lamp in his room, Markel does not stop her as he had before. Dostoevsky sidesteps the issue of Markel's identity as a Christian when he quotes him as saying: "Light it, light it, dear, I was a wretch to have prevented your doing it. You are praying when you light the lamp, and I am praying when I rejoice seeing you. So we are praying to the same God" (p. 361). Zosima pointedly refers to Markel, not the teachings of the church, as the cause of his becoming a monk: "For had he not come into my life,

10. See G. P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946 and 1966), 1:56, 63, 20.

11. See Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky*, p. 589.

12. A. B. Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), pp. 195–96.

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I should never perhaps, so I fancy at least, have become a monk and entered on this precious path" (p. 357). Moreover, in the same breath Zosima reveals another mystery—he considers Alesha to be the source of the same spiritual inspiration he attributed to Markel. Zosima's mystical insights into nature, spiritual enlightenment, and the influence of the dead upon the living emerge without reference to the organized church.

Examining Zosima as a representative of the *starets* tradition reveals more specific discrepancies. In 1921, the metropolitan of Volhynia, Antonii Khrapovitskii, suggested that Zosima is an authentic evangelical representative of the Orthodox faith within the *starets* tradition. But Sven Linnér, who has recently discussed Zosima's links to the historical *startsy*, considers this opinion to be oversimplified and a distortion of Zosima's essential teachings. He quotes Konstantin Leontiev's assertion that within the Orthodox tradition, Dostoevsky's religious views, as articulated by Zosima, were "rosy-colored" and inauthentic. Specifically, Leontiev was dissatisfied with Zosima's lack of any "fear of the Lord,"[13] for the elder considers our earthly life joyful rather than a vale of tears, as taught by the church. Furthermore, Zosima reflects none of the rigorous regime of the Christian *starets* as represented by Amvrosii of Optina and Tikhon of Zadonsk, the proclaimed models for Dostoevsky's elder. Amvrosii reflects Orthodoxy's view that earthly life for a monk is a constant battle against his passions; the monk hopes for salvation only in the afterlife, and in fear of the Last Judgment. But, as Linnér puts it: "This certainly differs from the bright hope with which Zosima faces eternity."[14] Zosima preaches celebration in this life, because, if the individual but acknowledges it, paradise is already achieved. In the same vein, there are basic differences between Dostoevsky's elder and Tikhon of Zadonsk. Zosima sees life as part of a great chain linking the individual to eternity, a mythical intertwining of life and death; on the other hand, Tikhon, says Linnér, "looked upon death as the borderline between a life of constantly growing uncertainty and eternal bliss or damnation."[15]

Turning to Zosima's place within the historical *starets* tradition, divergences from the usual mold of Orthodoxy are evident as well. The *starets* institution is itself a development of the Hesychast movement of the early Eastern church.[16] Hesychasm was a special form of mystical asceticism, which took its inspiration from the church fathers of Mount Athos, especially from Gregory of Sinai who lived in the late thirteenth century. The growth of this tradition in Russia owes a great deal to Nil Sorskii, who studied on Mount Athos in the late fifteenth century. He was, as George Maloney says in his book on the subject, the most important Hesychast theorist and writer in Russia.[17] As a spiritual practice, Hesychasm primarily emphasized the heart and the efficacy of sentiment, and minimized the intellect. The mind was to be emptied of all thought, regardless

13. See Sven Linnér, *Starets Zosima in the Brothers Karamazov: A Study in the Mimesis of Virtue* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1975), pp. 95–98.

14. Ibid., pp. 102–3.

15. Ibid., p. 110.

16. See John Dunlop, *Staretz Amvrosy, Model for Dostoevsky's Staretz Zossima* (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1972), p. 19.

17. See G. A. Maloney, *Russian Hesychasm: The Spirituality of Nil Sorsky* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), p. 144.

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of whether the thought was good, bad, or neutral (*Amerimnia*).[18] Detachment from the world and indifference to its pursuits were the goal. Even harmless thoughts were considered the devil's temptation, which could keep the Hesychast from concentrating on God. Detachment from worldly matters (*Hesychia*) was the starting point. *Nepsis* (sobriety and watchfulness) was the intellectual activity by which thoughts, passions, and mental images were purged from the Hesychast's consciousness. Solitude and silence were the primary means to this end. To help in such ascetic practices, mournful contemplation of one's own death and the awesome Final Judgment (*Penthos*) were basic.[19]

The Hesychasts held the Neoplatonic view that thoughts, passions, and sensory experience exist in the mind independently and cannot be entirely expelled by the individual. To achieve freedom from these, the Hesychast focused on the wisdom of the heart. Subordinating the mind to the heart and making the heart guardian of all thought were central to both traditional Hesychasm and Nil Sorskii.[20] Spontaneous weeping was highly prized as a spiritual gift, a mark of special divine grace; the gift of tears became the key to all ascetic activity. Tears were important in two ways: First, they spelled release from the ordinary (worldly) workings of the mind, subordinating them to the custody of sentiments; second, tears opened the supplicant to a special awareness of this life as unavoidably sinful and necessarily filled with grief. Spontaneous weeping linked the Hesychast to the mournful human state of original sin and Adam's fall, resulting in a potent form of humility that placed the Hesychast squarely in the center of the human dilemma of broken communion with God. Nil Sorskii emphasized that weeping delivered man from eternal fire and other punishment. The ultimate blessing of weeping was a joyful reestablishment of union with God and a sense of removal from this world. However, contact with the Divine was achieved only through grief and admission of man's inevitable failure to avoid sin. The gift of tears was actively sought by the Hesychast; it was to be prayed for while striving to keep the mind free of thoughts about worldly matters. To this end, certain meditative practices were followed as a regimen. In addition to the more common ascetic practices of silence, fasting, and prayer, the Hesychast devoted himself to the constant repetition of the Jesus Prayer (or one of its accepted variations): "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me." Like the Hesychasts of the Mount Athos tradition, Nil Sorskii suggested the practice of slowing the breath and calming the heart beat. These bodily functions were to be aligned with the cadence of the prayer for long periods of time, often to the point of physical exhaustion.

Nowhere in Zosima's teachings do we encounter the Jesus Prayer or the idea of a monk renouncing the secular world. Instead, Dostoevsky's elder repeatedly exhorts his followers to become involved in the lives of their secular brethren. His memories of his own spiritual growth uniformly refer to personal details and influences from outside the church (such as his brother, his orderly, the duel, or the murderer who has long, mutually influential talks with Zosima). Zosima insists that his listeners partake actively in the lives of the simple people, both by teaching them the gospels and, just as important, by sharing their identity

18. Ibid., p. 115.
19. Ibid., pp. 120, 124, 126.
20. Ibid., p. 104.

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as members of the Russian *narod*: "The salvation of Russia comes from the people. And the Russian monk has always been on the side of the people. We are isolated only if the people are isolated" (p. 394). Thus, in contrast to the Hesychastic tradition of seeking salvation through solitude and withdrawal from the secular world, Zosima's repeated message to the monks is that salvation lies in active love and involvement in the outside world. He issues his famous command to Alesha (in book 2, chapter 7) that he leave the monastery and participate fully in secular life, yet he simultaneously ascribes an important spiritual destiny to the young Karamazov. The incident is symptomatic of the leader's special and highly untraditional vision: whereas Orthodox Hesychasm sought to separate the secular from the sacred, Zosima seeks to weave them into one fabric. Unlike Hesychasts, Zosima preaches that there is no material hell: "They talk of hell fire in the material sense. I don't go into that mystery and I shun it" (p. 404). Even more unusual is the elder's understanding of heaven. Dismissing the basic doctrine of the Last Judgment and personal salvation after death, Zosima verges on heresy when he declares that heaven is contemporaneous with man's earthly life: "and we don't understand that life is paradise, for we have only to understand that and it will at once be fulfilled in all its beauty, we shall embrace each other and weep" (p. 375). Moreover, Zosima charges his followers to "water the earth with the tears of your joy and love those tears. Don't be ashamed of that ecstacy, prize it, for it is a gift of God and a great one . . ." (p. 403). He sees tears as a sign of celebration and joy; the Hesychasts emphasized tears as acknowledgment of grief and sin in this life. Zosima espouses tears as a joyful link between man and a harmonious cosmos in the here and now. Tears for him join temporal life to heaven through ecstacy; on the other hand, even Nil Sorskii considered that tears were penance for sin and that renunciation of this life was a necessary burden.[21]

The liberties Zosima takes with traditional Orthodox doctrines are noted and emphasized by other characters in the novel. Several monks are either suspicious of or hostile to the elder's unusual religious views. Father Ferapont and the traveling monk from Obdorsk are clearly presented as examples of perverted and overly formalized asceticism, and their aversion to Zosima elicits the reader's sympathy for the elder's virtues. These two aberrant monks are not alone in their criticism of Zosima, however. Many of the most respected ascetics in the monastery condemn several of Zosima's spiritual practices: "His teaching was false; he taught that life is a great joy and not a vale of tears"; "he did not recognize material fire in hell"; "he was not strict in fasting"; " 'he abused the sacrament of confession,' the fiercest opponent of the institution of elders added in a malicious whisper" (p. 415). Earlier in the novel, this charge of improper confession was also brought against Zosima by Fedor Karamazov. The early decomposition of the elder's body, of course, is testimony to many that Zosima had strayed far from the regular teachings of the church, that the rapid corruption of his body revealed his spiritual "corruption" while alive.

Zosima's constant modification and loosening of Christian doctrine, which were discussed above, raise the question of what constitutes the elder's spiritual

21. Maloney attributes to Sorskii "the necessity of weeping for our sins in order to receive forgiveness in this life before the general judgment when tears will be useless to remit our sins" (Maloney, *Russian Hesychasm*, p. 133).

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vision. Christianity teaches man to seek the meaning of his life and his world through specific theological dogmas (such as the Trinity, the virgin birth, grace, salvation, the Resurrection, and so forth), tenets which are instruments of mediation standing between man in his world and a higher order of existence which is called God. In this sense, man's behavior and actions take on meaning and are judged in terms of values that are above and outside his natural world. Myth, as Richard Chase has phrased it, is different from religion, in that it conceives of the sacred as raw "voltage," which is immanent in the natural world.[22] Since myth regards the ordinary world as already filled with preternatural significance, it tends to have a much looser conception of creeds, ecclesiastical categories, and definitions of the spiritual than does developed religion.

Thus, myth weaves the sacred into the texture of ordinary life, into the here and now. This distinguishes it from teachings of the organized church, through which we confront the duality of temporal, as opposed to sacred, planes of life. Surely Zosima similarly mixes the sacred and the temporal in his teachings about heaven and hell as being part of this life, in his adoration of all existence as being holy, and in his admonition to partake in all of life as spiritual practice. Philip Wheelwright, a prominent contemporary critic of myth, speaks of the immanence of the sacred in the natural world as the "transcendental tenor [which] looms darkly behind the scene as something vague, inarticulate, yet somehow of tremendous, even final, importance and consequentiality."[23] Myth predates organized religion in man's cultural evolution, and has remained too elastic to serve as an explanatory instrument in any developed theological or philosophical sense.[24] Similarly, Zosima's homilies seem more suggestive and evocative than the more organized teachings of Orthodoxy.

Myth is productively approached as a psychological process, a state of mind in which symbols of cosmic order and their role in man's life are displayed through images. As a starting point of our discussion, Alan Watts's definition of myth can be profitably cited: "Myth is to be defined as a complex of stories . . . which, for various reasons, human beings regard as demonstrations of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life."[25] The potential for human action within this all-embracing scheme of things is the key issue. As Northrop Frye has phrased it, myth brings together some sacred order of mysteries that holds a place for human experience and action.[26] The creator of myths is one who intuits the symbols and images of how sacred forces pertain to his society's own experience; he is the point of contact between sacred and temporal planes for his group and keeps before his people a continuous blending of the two within their own lives. William Righter makes the same point when he terms myth a primary human level of consciousness in which man-as-character

22. See Richard Chase, *Quest For Myth* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1949), pp. 69–70.

23. Philip Wheelwright, "The Semantic Approach to Myth," in T. A. Sebeok, ed., *Myth: A Symposium* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p. 167.

24. See Chase, *Quest For Myth*, p. 78.

25. Alan W. Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1953), p. 7.

26. See Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), p. 33.

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participates directly in a cosmic order of explanation.[27] Modern, rational man, however, is often unwilling to acknowledge the very myths that organize his basic assumptions about life. It is convenient to maintain that mythical thought has long since been rejected as a mode of thinking, that its mysteries are mere superstitions which have been supplanted by scientific objectivity and philosophical (or theological) explanation. Zosima seems to suggest that archetypal images of total union filled with sacred mystery continued to hold their special attraction for nineteenth-century man. Seeking evidence of a mixture of his own finiteness (the factual, temporal) with some immutable order (the sacred) is basic to man. The human need for myth is constant; it is the forms of expression that are variable.

The view of Zosima's faith as mythical is necessarily geared to the network of images he provides. There is no developed explanation of his mysteries. As in myth, those images are themselves parts of the divine order and are to be participated in directly, without explanation.[28] The constituent parts of Zosima's message are his emphasis on nature, his understanding of time and immortality, and his enigmatic idea of the group and its organic national identity. Each component contributes to his message of holistic union and simultaneously repeats that union through integrated symbols. Myth provides a framework for treating Zosima's teachings separately, while allowing an appreciation of how those teachings fit into a major principle within the novel.

Zosima develops his vision of faith within the context of nature. He speaks of watering the soil with tears of ecstacy; of venerating birds, rocks, and trees; of blessing the sun each morning and evening. He says life is a garden sown by God, and whatever grows "lives and is alive only through the feeling of its contact with other mysterious worlds. . . . Water it [the soil] and it will bring forth fruit" (p. 401). For him, human participation in nature's harmony is an integral part of religious faith, it is heaven realized on earth. The central symbol linking human life to transcendent harmony is the elder's repeated image of the kernel of wheat. (The key word here is harmony and its implication of continuity and stability.) The wheat kernel decomposes in the earth and, by its dissolution, produces new life: "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). Zosima's focus on the generation of life from death is a fundamental symbol of fertility in world mythology; it is present in the first Egyptian solar myths (which also use the image of the grain of wheat in reference to Osiris), in Slavic myths referred to by Fedotov and Sokolov,[29] as well as in the Christian reference of John 12:24. Decomposition and the apparent death of nature each year intensify man's sense of his own death. Frye speaks of myth as a means of displacing primal psychological preoccupations by symmetrical and archetypal forms (usually vegetative symbols), which can then be worked out in a satisfying manner,

27. See William Righter, *Myth and Literature* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 39.

28. See Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), p. 31.

29. See Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 1:18–19; and Ju. M. Sokolov, *Russian Folklore*, trans. C. R. Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1950), pp. 165–69.

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one that entails the overcoming of death through life's cyclic repetition.[30] Man's fear that nature's physical death, and his own, might be permanent has been a persistent terror throughout the ages, and it has traditionally been allayed through nature's return to life in the spring—the kernel of wheat.

For Zosima, too, death is not an end but part of a greater repetitive process; life is not lost at death but reemerges in new forms, both in the vegetative cycle and in each human generation. In myth and for Zosima, the kernel of wheat implies the principle of rebirth and continuity of human life, albeit in altered form. As the elder says, once an event occurs, it continues to have an impact on all existence. The death of Markel, for example, was not an end but the humus out of which Zosima's own faith had grown: "I was young then, a child, but a lasting impression, a hidden feeling of it all, remained in my heart, ready to rise up and respond when the time came. So indeed it happened" (p. 363). He considers Markel "alive," not only in his own life, but in Alesha's spiritual development as well: "He appeared first to me in my childhood and here at the end of my pilgrimage, he seems to have come to me again. It is marvelous, fathers and teachers, that Aleksei, who has some, though not a great, resemblance in face, seems to me so like him spiritually, that many times I have taken him for that young man, my brother, mysteriously come back to me at the end of my pilgrimage, as a reminder and an inspiration" (p. 358). The decomposition of Zosima's body upon his death is particularly interesting in this regard, for it re-creates precisely what nature does each autumn (the time of year of the elder's death). He not only decomposes in physical terms but, like Markel, he "fertilizes" the lives of those who follow him, especially Alesha's. What we have, then, is three generations of human life—Markel, Zosima, and Alesha—each of whom is linked to the same spiritual insights. It is clear that there is no end to the spiritual energy that flows through each of them; it does not die any more than nature dies at the end of its cycle. All life, natural and human, reappears in new forms as part of the same generative process. The denial of death in man and nature has always been the essence of the mythology of the sun and fertility, reflected in Persephone, Adonis, Osiris, Moist Mother Earth, and so forth. In regard to the latter, Fedotov writes: "In Mother Earth, who remains the core of Russian religion, converge the most secret and deep religious feelings of the folk. Beneath the beautiful veil of grass and flowers, the people venerate with awe the black moist depths, the source of all fertilizing powers, the nourishing breast of nature, and their own last resting place."[31]

Zosima's exhortation that people unite in spiritual love is an appropriate restatement of what man has always considered a constant in nature—the undifferentiated blending of the seasons, of life within death. The willingness to dissolve as a temporal individual and to join nature's cycle of perpetual regeneration in new forms held great attraction for traditional man as it does for Zosima. Mother Earth, a cliché that Viacheslav Ivanov sees as a guiding principle in Dostoevsky's fiction, has been a common denominator for mankind since the beginning.[32] Zosima's special vision of nature as pertinent to the

30. See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. 139–40.

31. Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 1:12.

32. See Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life: A Study in Dostoevsky*, trans. N. Cameron (New York: Noonday Press, 1960), pp. 55 and 77.

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human sphere holds the key to spiritual release from death. Nature is the womb of life for the elder, not its grave. Nevertheless, there are characters in the novel who cannot or will not accept a mystery that entails their personal dissolution, and Dostoevsky uses them as a counterpoint to Zosima's notion of faith. As a result of the elder's death, the town and monastery alike anticipate miracles. Such predictability, a longstanding *topos* in saints' lives, would be most soothing. For them, miracles are events that alter the natural process (a pleasant odor from the corpse or a halt to putrefaction altogether, for example). They would have nature's rhythm subordinated to their own static measurements of proof. They deem "unseemly" the very heart of Zosima's vision of faith—the decomposition of one life from which new forms might grow. Here again the kernel of wheat is a touchstone for understanding the necessity of dissolution and the question of process and repetition in the vegetative cycle. Even in death, Zosima demonstrates that man gains spiritual faith by yielding his individuality to the whole of nature, not by demanding that nature adjust to his personal system of temporal expectations.

The expectation of proof as a prerequisite for faith directs our attention to the Grand Inquisitor and to Ivan. The Grand Inquisitor judges man to be weak, that is, if there is no promise of immortality, mankind cannot believe. Ivan had earlier embellished this idea in "Why is Such a Man Alive," in which he maintained that virtue is impossible without a guarantee of immortality. Madame Khokhlakova phrases the same central proposition in purely personal terms when she says in "Woman of Little Faith": "I only believed when I was a little child, mechanically, without thinking of anything. How, how is one to prove it?" (p. 73) In each of these cases, the compression of faith into a syllogism is inherently egocentric and limited. In order to be real, things have to make sense to the intellect on its own terms. Ivan sees this level of thought as rectilinear. The individual's isolation within his own logical standards emerges as a crucial ontological issue in the novel. But, as Roger Cox has pointed out in his study of Zosima, the elder maintains that the experience of love cannot be contained within such limits.[33] Love simply bonds man to man and man to nature. The experience of the broad sense of community provides a firmer basis of reality in the novel. Active love refers to the primacy of feeling and subordinates the lesser faculty of intellect. For Zosima, the experience of love is real in and of itself, it is an irreducible basic aspect of life. Logic, on the other hand, necessarily stands outside experience and can only interpret reality within the narrow limits of its own propositions. Logic is thus restricted by its own powers of observation. It can *describe* active life, but it cannot, by itself, *participate* in that life; it cannot live. Consequently, those who deduce from Zosima's decay a sign of his spiritual failure are excluded from the organic harmony of nature and the elder's teachings on love. They are also subject to barbed satire in Dostoevsky's description of their shallow intellectual pride. Desire for palpable proof among the educated class only reinforces the view held by the Grand Inquisitor—that modern man is terribly weak when it comes to overcoming his own secular limitations in matters of faith. The simple people, whose lives keep them in constant contact with the

33. See Roger Cox, *Between Earth and Heaven: Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and the Meaning of Christian Tragedy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), pp. 202–4.

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soil and its seasons, are portrayed as understanding Zosima's lessons and drawing strength from nature and elder alike (see, for example, "Peasant Women Who Have Faith" in book 2).

Zosima's emphasis on the vegetative cycle implies a special relation to time. As he blends life and death within his ideal of faith, he also blends the usual notions of past, present, and future into one repeating entity. For Zosima, each moment can reveal the sacred, and, therefore, ordinary concepts of "past" or "future" lose their meaning. The elder is an example of what Joseph Campbell has described as a primary quality of myth—the special capacity of the mind to perceive a transcendent secret which is timeless and which holds all life together, regardless of its temporal frame.[34] Graphic examples of Zosima's special understanding of time occur as he retells the story of Job: "the greatness of it lies in the very fact that it is a mystery—that the passing show and the eternal verity are brought together in it. In the face of the earthly truth, the eternal truth is accomplished" (p. 365). He speaks of a sacred mystery that, once revealed in time, becomes unchangeable, applicable to all future moments in its original potency: "And Job's praising the Lord serves not only Him but all creation for generations and generations, and forever and forever . . ." (p. 365). The present and future for him, then, repeat a single process of contact between divine revelation and human awareness. We are again reminded of the elder's intriguing remark about the presence of heaven now, all around man if he could only realize it, rather than sealed off in some future condition. Throughout, Zosima insists on a special, undifferentiated union of states (whether it be life and death or temporal categories), whereas logical man seeks to keep those states separate.

Zosima's freedom from linear time is one of the basic preoccupations of myth. As Frank Kermode has succintly phrased it, the notion of cyclical time is a primary vehicle of the human imagination for handling the question of immortality.[35] By associating human action with the mystery of nature's yearly cycle, says Kermode, man overcomes the idea of his own disappearance in time. Mircea Eliade, who has written extensively on the question of the conception of time in myth, considers that time is outside history in mythical thought, it is repetitive, a reflection of some unchanging cosmology.[36] To speak of one's life as a series of events terminated by death is unacceptable and absurd for myth. Thus, for Zosima, the sacred referent of one's temporal life is not diminished by death, but goes on. Speaking of those who might refuse to listen to his homilies he says: "And if they are not saved hereafter, then their sons will be saved, for your light will not die even when you are dead. The righteous man departs but his light remains. Men are always saved after the death of the deliverer. . . . You are working for the whole, you are acting for the future" (p. 403). Berdiaev seemed to have addressed the same issue when he wrote:

34. See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 17.

35. See Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending, Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 77.

36. See Eliade, *Myth of Eternal Return*, p. 141.

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"The doctrine of fusion with the divine does not mean the immortality of personality but only the immortality of the divine."[37]

The elder contemplates time patiently. He sees each person attaining faith at his own pace: "If, after your kiss, he [the criminal] goes away untouched, mocking at you, do not let that be a stumbling block to you. It shows his time has not yet come, but it will come in due course" (p. 402). Zosima's patience is based on his own past experience: Markel's visions of nature affect him only after several years have passed, during his conversion at the duel. He also, of course, thinks of the past as repeating itself in the future in that Alesha bears the spiritual features he remembers in Markel. In Zosima's mind, time demarcations fade as he dwells on the constant infusion of a single cosmic truth within all time. He feels no haste in reaching a different or improved future; nothing is in danger of being lost. He possesses the knowledge—common in myth—that the present and future will only reveal what has been vouchsafed in the past.

Acknowledging an unchanging sacred mystery in one's temporal life is the irreducible stuff of faith. It brings with it a sense of contact with an order that is absolute, free of ordinary limits. In such a case, the individual's life on earth becomes part of an eternal harmony, freeing him from the dread of his own end. To use Eliade's term, the result is an "overleaping" of time's ordinary limits,[38] with man entering into union with the sacred while still on this earth. Unlike Zosima, however, many characters in the novel are bound to linear time and insist on distinguishing between present and future. Madame Khokhlakova, for example, craves some special satisfaction and fulfillment in the future that she feels is lacking in the present. She is first given to religious zeal, but it must hold out assurance of personal immortality. When her hope for miracles at Zosima's death are "betrayed" and her grasp on immortality seems to slip, she turns away from religion. However, since the present is still dominated by the need for a superior future, she merely turns to another system and continues looking for the same guarantees. Science and liberalism, with their promises to control the future and manufacture a social paradise, come to absorb as much of her enthusiasm as did the elder. She is not alone in her wish to bargain for a special and different future. Although the contexts vary, several characters color their lives in the present with the same anticipation of a qualitatively higher plane of existence. Without some promise of a breakthrough, their lives are in danger of collapsing and, like Madame Khokhlakova, they rush to another convenient system. Rakitin, for example, starts out as a seminarian but quickly switches to science and socialism as better guarantors of the future; he expounds on the coming glories of science when all the chemical and neurological aspects of the brain will be understood. Father Ferapont devotes all of his monastic life to mortifying his body in order to save his soul in the afterlife. His strict fasts and hunts for the devil are meant to gain paradise beyond the grave. The rigidity of his rules, however, leads him into inevitable conflict with Zosima's looser sense of religious revelation as part of the present. Even Father Iosif, the monastery's librarian, struggles to put a

37. Nikolai Berdiaev, *The Divine and Human*, trans. R. M. French (London: G. Bles, 1949), p. 152.

38. See Eliade, *Myth of Eternal Return*, p. 5.

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future-bound interpretation on Zosima's sainthood. He talks of proof that will only be known after the body has been in the earth many years, the bones turning to one color or another, as the true indicator of whether the elder's teachings were true or false. Ivan reduces the human thirst for a guaranteed future life to its clearest principle. His treatise on church and state in book 1 of *The Brothers Karamazov* centers on man's fear of losing his immortality. Through the instrument of excommunication the church and state can threaten him with exclusion from that better future: "If everything became the Church, the Church would exclude all the criminal and disobedient, and would not cut off their heads" (p. 82). Later, the Grand Inquisitor, the embodiment of Ivan's treatise, states more explicitly that most of mankind cannot bear life without the promise of personal immortality and will worship whomever holds its guarantee out to them: "Peacefully they will die, peacefully they will expire in Thy name, and beyond the grave they will find nothing but death. But we shall keep the secret, and for their happiness we shall entice them with the reward of heaven and eternity" (p. 326). Without a promise of a future, life becomes unbearable for the average man: "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" (p. 321). Whether it be false religion, science, or socialism (not far from sorcery and witchcraft for Dostoevsky), the seductive appeal of the placebo of paradise, shut off from the here and now, is the same.

Zosima's special visions of nature and time share a sense of vast union and continuity. Each contains symbols of a broad community in which the individual gains a special kind of identity as part of a single mystical process. That process is revealed in nature's cyclical repetition and in life being reconstituted in perpetually new forms. Time and nature might seem like different issues, but Zosima teaches their unity as cosmic mystery. There is one other modality of this vital union for Zosima, one that was especially important to Dostoevsky toward the end of his life. Zosima dwells consistently on the idea of the individual's identity as inextricably bound with that of his community, the Russian nation. In Zosima's view there is nothing that happens in the group that does not affect the individual; he can do nothing that will not affect the entirety of his group. We are again reminded of the elder's famous reference to life as an ocean in which each individual movement makes a difference to the whole body of water.

The thematic repercussions of mutual ties and responsibility within an expanded sense of community are present throughout the novel and are far too extensive to treat here in any systematic fashion. Our task is to discuss the type of consciousness in Zosima which gives rise to that web of mutuality. Myth is a social phenomenon, an enterprise that takes place as a group effort. The fact of being a member of the group, of sharing its identity, is itself expressive of the continuity that Ernst Cassirer has called an "intrinsic law of myth."[39] Dostoevsky's elder emphasizes the value of integrating one's personal ego with the larger identity of a group, specifically in terms of Russian nationalism. He carries the author's treasured principle of Russians as a chosen, God-bearing

39. Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York and London: Harper and Bros., 1946), p. 15.

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people, serving as a bulwark against the swell of modern Western materialism and "progress." Here the opposition is between the analytical gifts of the Western mind and the synthetic, holistic capacities Dostoevsky ascribed especially to the Russians. The West, says Zosima, prizes individualism and the multiplication of one's own personal desires, with the result that the individual is excluded from group consciousness, a variation on Zosima's special idea of hell: "And what follows from the right of multiplication of desires? In the rich, *isolation* and spiritual suicide . . . men even commit suicide if they are unable to satisfy it [personal desire]" (p. 392). But Russia, says the elder, bears a communal identity and is thus special in the modern world. He assures his listeners that the Russian individual draws his identity from the collectivity of his countrymen: "The salvation of Russia comes from the people" (p. 394); "Salvation will come from the people, from their faith and their meekness" (p. 395); "Equality is to be found only in the spiritual dignity of man, and that will only be understood among us [Russians]" (p. 395).

Zosima's homilies on community lead to his ideal of Russia as an extended family. A criminal or sinner never loses his identity as a member of the group, any more than his deeds can deprive him of his Russian birthright. The Russian church is a very special union for Zosima, for its authority derives more from the identity of the Russian aggregate than from ordinary theological sources of authority. Certain transcendent implications of community are also evident in Dostoevsky's *Notebooks*, an indication of the novelist's earlier experimentation with the value of the community for Zosima: "If there were brothers there would be brotherhood. And without brotherhood there would be nothing."[40] Both the codified beliefs of church dogma and the emotional bonds of communal worship are features of Christian faith and, more specifically, of Russian Orthodoxy. Zosima, however, is mute on matters of ecclesiastical dogma and directs virtually all of his attention to the emotional experience of communal faith. In his view, the Russian church is first and foremost the body of believers, directed by a sense of their organic union, a union which has definite national overtones. By focusing on the populist aspect of the community, Zosima skirts the issue of codified theological authority. The Russian church and the community of national believers are inseparable. He energetically dissociates his conception of organic union of the Russian faithful from the Western churches which, he contends, "have long ago striven to pass from the lower form, as Church, into the higher form, as State, and to disappear completely" (p. 85). Zosima's emphasis on the individual deriving identity from the "family" of his fellow Russian believers can be seen as an outgrowth of the Slavophile ideal of *sobornost'*, as propounded by Khomiakov in the 1850s. The idea of *sobornost'* does not necessarily clash with the Christian notion of community as part of general Christian belief, even though the historical foundation of *sobornost'*, as a way of thinking, with its focus on the individual's identity being derived from the *mir* or community, was firmly established in pagan Russian culture, as in most traditional and primitive cultures, long before the introduction of Christianity. Indeed, the strength of the collective folk mentality made it easier for analogous Christian models of community to develop. As Zenkovsky maintains,

40. Edward Wasiolek, ed., *The Notebooks For "The Brothers Karamazov"* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 99.

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for Dostoevsky *sobornost'* acquires a heightened value, raising the ideal of national community to a level of mystical salvation that is equal to, and often interchangeable with, salvation in Christ.[41] The dissolution of the individual's ego in the group takes on sacred value for Zosima. In this sense, the elder's teachings on mutual responsibility express the ancient folk tendency toward what Fedotov terms "the deepest religious root of Russian collectivism."[42]

Dostoevsky mixes organicism, a spontaneous return to the masses, with Christian ideals of communal devotion. Dedication of one's individual gifts to the brotherhood of all spells salvation from the pernicious threat of Western individualism: "To attain the highest degree of consciousness and development, to be completely aware of the Self and to refrain voluntarily from *all* of this *for the sake of all*."[43] It is a union which transcends the individual that attracts Dostoevsky. He emphasizes the organicist aspect of religion more than any other.[44] The fact of national, familial union is itself holy for him; it is only a short step from this to a veneration of, and poetic reliance on, Russian folkloric and mythical assumptions that celebrate the collectivity of national identity. Dostoevsky purposely omitted the practical explanation of how to achieve that union in modern Russia, however; he resorted instead to imaginative, visionary projections in poetic form, the most treasured of which come from Zosima and his mixture of ancient folk traditions and Christian moral imperatives about active love.

The question of salvation, of course, resounds throughout the novel. Each of the three legitimate brothers experiences, to some degree, an individualized resurrection. For each, salvation flows from acknowledgment of a common bond with others and from acceptance of broad mutual responsibility as a great mystical truth in life. (Zosima had gone through a similarly harrowing experience with his orderly before the duel many years earlier.) The individual gains insight into the spiritual composition of life through the acceptance of collectivity itself, the organic union of the family on an extended scale.

Although Dostoevsky believed in actual resurrection after death,[45] he also subscribed to the idea that the ability of the living to love in this life was necessary for the resurrection of their forefathers.[46] We do not have to become overly involved in Dostoevsky's eschatology in order to gain insight into Zosima's notion of a mystical community. The elder's lessons on resurrection revolve around his dead brother, what he has learned because of him, and how Alesha is destined to repeat that same mysterious lesson in his own future. The cyclical quality of influence from the dead upon the living is clear. Zosima can pass on faith in love to Alesha only because he received the gift of love from Markel. It is the living who must, by their free choice, participate in or reject

41. See V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 1:431.

42. Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 1:18.

43. B. G. Bazanov et al., eds., *Neizdannyi Dostoevskii: Zapisnye knizhki i tetradi 1860–1881 gg.*, Literaturnoe nasledstvo, vol. 83 (Moscow, 1971), p. 24.

44. See Linnér, *Starets Zosima*, pp. 233–37.

45. For Dostoevsky's specific comments on this topic, see his entry for December 1876 in F. M. Dostoevskii, *Dnevnik pisatelia*, 3 vols. (Paris: YMCA Press, 1946), 2:474–75.

46. See Linnér, *Starets Zosima*, p. 203.

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the miracle of the dead's past love. If they choose to participate, they enter into a community that includes the dead along with the living, and, in so doing, the living return the dead's love to life. If they deny love by emphasizing their individuality, they cut themselves off from their forefathers, for denial of love means rejection of the essence of their dead predecessors. The callous individual who so denies his ancestors destroys the chance for their continued life with the living.[47]

To achieve personal spiritual fulfillment, says Zosima, the individual must acknowledge his identity as a member of the Russian collective and the single body of belief it represents as an organic entity. Again, the essential similarity between members of a family and the nation is clear for Dostoevsky. As Fedotov explains, the direct participation of a dead family member in the affairs of the living refers more to the ancient folk beliefs of the *rod* or gens in Russia than to Orthodox teachings of personal resurrection.[48] If Zosima's vision of spiritual collectivity is understood as reflecting age-old Russian practices, some apparent ambiguities in his teachings gain clarity. The *rod* cult was a Slavic form of ancestor worship. One of its chief practices was the veneration of the departed ancestor at a feast at which the respected deceased was thought to join the living in an atmosphere of celebration. At that time, the dead, hopefully, gave advice to the living as to how to meet the future. Sokolov remarks on the similarities of certain rituals of the ancestor holidays with those of Russian weddings.[49] Alesha's vision of Zosima during the elder's funeral duplicates these folklore *topoi*: Alesha dreams he is at a wedding feast where he shares wine and food with Zosima (now dead but interacting with the novice during the feast), who advises him about his future: "Begin your work, dear one, begin it, gentle one" (p. 399).

The *rod* cult is itself an extension of Slavic agricultural mythology.[50] Zosima's central image of the kernel of wheat "dying" recapitulates not only his own death, but the postharvest period—nature's "death"—during which Zosima dies. The kernel's renewal of life in the spring is, as Sokolov maintains, connected to the power of ancestors to affect a good crop and offer spiritual advice to the living. This is certainly evidence of Zosima's effect on Alesha who grows enormously in spiritual terms after his vision of the elder. Alesha

47. Such theories about the living having a direct responsibility for resurrecting the dead are apparently close to the philosophy of Dostoevsky's contemporary, N. E. Fedorov. N. O. Losskii summarizes Fedorov's main idea: "One must live not for oneself (egoism) and not for the others (altruism), but with everyone and for everyone; this is the union of the living (sons) for the resurrection of the dead (fathers)" (N. O. Losskii, *History of Russian Philosophy* [New York: International Universities Press, 1951], p. 78). Sven Linnér puts the apparent similarity to Fedorov in clear perspective, when he says that Fedorov had in mind a science fiction scheme by which future man would gain such technological control over life and the physical world that he would be able to call the dead back to actual physical life (Linnér, *Starets Zosima*, pp. 199–203). Such notions were basically alien to Dostoevsky's imagination. His references to Fedorov's "scientific" visions undoubtedly have more to do with the author's curiosity about their coincidental resemblance to his own theme than actual influence by Fedorov.

48. See Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 1:16.

49. See Sokolov, *Russian Folklore*, p. 165.

50. Ibid., pp. 168–69.

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is, as most critics point out, the spiritual heir in whom the "kernel" of Zosima's wisdom will next flourish.[51]

Zosima weaves the notion of the individual's immortality within a national collective into the Christian doctrine of personal salvation. The significance of community for the elder is visible in Dostoevsky's notebooks for the novel. Notes for book 6, in which the elder's teachings are concentrated, refer even more emphatically than the novel to the same idea: "History consists in the fact that all will be united . . . the family becomes more encompassing; other than relatives enter into it, the beginning of a new organism begins to develop . . . from an individual organism to a general organism."[52] The inference of ancient *rod* beliefs clarifies Dostoevsky's idea. Fedotov suggests that by sharing ancestor holidays at a common time the village (and, by implication, all of Russia) becomes something of an extended family: "In this procedure all social life is shaped as the extension of family life and all moral relations among men are raised to the level of blood kinship."[53] Fedotov similarly describes the pagan Russian emphasis on the idea of the individual's immortality as meaningful only in terms of the greater entity of his people's immortality: "Russian paganism (as well as the primitive Greek) considered the individual only as a transient moment in the eternal life of the rod."[54] In this sense, Zosima's view of heaven as acknowledged union and hell as the individual's exclusion from his group takes on special significance. The elder clearly states: "Salvation will come from the people, from their faith and their meekness" (p. 291). Zosima's myth, like Russian myth, insists that the individual can gain immortality only by acknowledging the greater spiritual reality of the group. The group is eternal, immutable. The individual, if alone, perishes; but if he becomes part of that group his life goes on as part of the whole, regardless of his own passing. Again we confront Zosima's mystical reference to the kernel of wheat and his special notion of regeneration in life.

The examination of how Zosima's teachings are constituted and the assessment of how they fit together into a coherent whole has shown that, in large

51. The folkloric and mythological implications of the novel are by no means restricted to Zosima. V. E. Vetlovskaia has assessed the structural similarities between Alesha and the third son of Russian folk tales (the wise fool). Moreover, she suggests that the folkloric elements of the third son also correspond to several saints' lives (see V. E. Vetlovskaia, *Poetika romana Brat'ia Karamazovy* [Leningrad, 1977], pp. 194–97). In a related article, she discusses Alesha as a modern literary version of the revered Saint Aleksei Man-of-God. She concentrates on the Russian folk versions of that *zhitie*, in which she finds a combination of the worldly and divine in indiscriminate love (see V. E. Vetlovskaia, "Literaturnye i fol'klornye istochniki Brat'ev Karamazovykh [Zhitie Alekseia cheloveka bozhiia i dukhovnyi stikh o nem]," in V. Ia. Kirpotin, ed., *Dostoevskii i russkie pisateli: Traditsii, novatorstvo, masterstvo* [Moscow, 1971], pp. 345–50). Whereas the typical saint's life emphasizes the separation of daily matters from ascetic devotion, Vetlovskaia says that Alesha, like Aleksei Man-of-God in folk versions of his life, joins the duality into one all-inclusive love. The source of such interpenetration of secular and divine love in the novel itself is, of course, Zosima. Indirectly, then, we have added evidence of a broad folkloric design behind the elder's meaning for the reader.

52. Wasiolek, *Notebooks For "The Brothers Karamazov,"* p. 93.

53. Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 1:16.

54. Ibid., p. 18.

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measure, unity is clearest when we depart from a traditional Christian focus. The elder most certainly reshapes some Christian doctrine (such as the Hesychast doctrine of tears), ignores other tenets (such as the usual ecclesiastical definitions of heaven and hell), and emphasizes still others with a fervor that exceeds conventional church definitions (such as humility and communal identity of the believing body). Although Zosima's teachings do not deny any Christian reference—for it is clear that they do apply—it is more accurate to say that his Christian vision relies in a basic way on mythical elements of Russian folk culture. As a result, to understand fully Zosima's teachings on the sacred we must appreciate the extent to which mythical sources penetrate and color his teachings.

Dostoevsky's elder and the structural constants of myth both perceive a pervasive unity between sacred and temporal planes throughout creation. That unity integrates man with his fellows (his tribe or *rod*), with his physical world (nature and its marvels of the generative cycle), and with time itself (the sacred force that vitalizes all existence with eternal meaning). Zosima conceives of worship, therefore, as an active acknowledgment of the spiritual meaning of his own world and the people who inhabit it. He considers spiritual truths to be revealed and open everywhere, in all aspects of their daily lives. To see others and the physical world as manifestations of the Divine means that all existence is charged with the sacred. To see all things, events, and people as aspects of the sacred means the extension of the notion of union to include the past and future as well as the present, that is, a broader form of pantheism. Markel teaches this to Zosima, who teaches it again to Alesha, who, at the end of the novel, teaches it yet again to the "society of children." The mythical urge toward integration of all factual life within divine meaning is the center of Zosima's message. As in myth, there is no progress toward unity for Zosima; the interpenetration of sacred and temporal is already there and only needs to be acknowledged.

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