

## THE EASTERN ORTHODOX TRADITION IN LIGHT OF F. M. DOSTOYEVSKY *THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV*, AND ITS KEY THEOLOGICAL SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES WITH EVANGELICALISM

**Summary:** *In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Western society has shifted from Christian culture into a culture of almost complete agnosticism or even atheism. This caused the need for unification among the church and the different denominations increased their ecumenical dialogues with each other. In recent times, the Russian-Ukrainian war, blessed by the current Russian Eastern Orthodox patriarch Kirill,<sup>2</sup> has caused some controversies and confusion for Western Christians. Given that, it is interesting and necessary to research Eastern Orthodox Christianity from an Evangelical perspective. Instead of focusing on the current situation, the paper investigates the Eastern Orthodox church in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Russia as described by F. M. Dostoyevsky in the Brothers Karamazov, and gives a comparison the theology of the Orthodox Church and Evangelicalism, followed by a conclusion. To conduct the research, the author's resources were used both from the evangelical movement and from the Orthodox denomination.*

**Keywords:** *Dostoyevski, Brothers Karamazov, Eastern tradition, Christianity*

## ISTOČNO-PRAVOSLAVNA TRADICIJA U ROMANU „BRAĆA KARAMAZOVI“ F. M. DOSTOJEVSKOG I NJENE KLJUČNE TEOLOŠKE SLIČNOSTI I RAZLIKE SA EVANGELIZMOM

**Rezime:** *U 21. veku, zapadno društvo je prešlo iz hrišćanske kulture u kulturu gotovo potpunog agnosticizma ili čak ateizma. Ovo je izazvalo potrebu za ujedinjenjem među*

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2 Various journalists of RFE/RL, “Russian Patriarch Kirill Says Dying In Ukraine ‘Washes Away All Sins’”, Accessed on February 10, 2023 <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-patriarch-kirill-dying-ukraine-sins/32052380.html>

*crkvom i različite denominacije su pojačale međusobne ekumenske dijaloge. U poslednje vreme, rusko-ukrajinski rat, koji je blagoslovio sadašnji ruski pravoslavni patrijarh Kiril, izazvao je određene kontroverze i konfuziju kod zapadnih hrišćana. S obzirom na to, zanimljivo je i neophodno istražiti istočno pravoslavno hrišćanstvo iz evangelističke perspektive. Umesto fokusa na trenutnu situaciju, u radu je istražena istočna pravoslavnu crkva u Rusiji 18. veka kako je to opisao F. M. Dostojevski u romanu „Braća Karamazovi“, i dato poređenje teologije pravoslavne crkve i evangelizam, a zatim sledi zaključak. Za sprovođenje istraživanja korišćeni su resursi autora kako iz evangelističkog pokreta, tako i iz pravoslavne denominacije.*

**Ključne reči:** Dostojevski, braća Karamazovi, istočnjačka tradicija, hrišćanstvo

### Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky

“Unlike many other Russian writers of the first part of the 19th century, Dostoyevsky was not born into the landed gentry.”<sup>3</sup> Because of this Dostoyevsky’s writing was a little bit different than other prominent Russian writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> For instance, “Dostoyevsky was always in need of money”, thus he adopted a “frenzied style” of writing, to meet preset deadlines of his publishers.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it caused him to write less about aristocratic traditions and focus more on the lives of the common people.<sup>6</sup> After school, Dostoyevsky went to study at the Academy of Military Engineering in St. Petersburg, which then was the capital of the Russian empire.<sup>7</sup> Despite his degree in the military, he started writing his first novels which were considered successful by Vissarion Belinsky<sup>8</sup>, “the most influential critic of his day”<sup>9</sup>.

In 1847 Dostoyevsky (age 26) started participating in socialist discussion circles, which later led to his arrest in April of 1849<sup>10</sup>. He and others were sentenced to death by firing squad in Semyonovsky Square, but at the last minute before execution, a messenger arrived with the information that they will be deported to Siberia instead.<sup>11</sup> Dostoyevsky’s exile in Siberia lasted for 4 years, followed by 5 years of required military service.<sup>12</sup> Dostoyevsky later said that in Siberia he experienced the “‘regeneration’ of his convictions”<sup>13</sup>.

3 Saul G. Morson, “Fyodor Dostoyevsky.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 7, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Fyodor-Dostoyevsky>, accessed December 14, 2022.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Britannica, T. Editors of *Encyclopedia*. “Vissarion Grigoryevich Belinsky.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 7, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vissarion-Grigoryevich-Belinsky>, accessed December 14, 2022.

9 Morson, “Fyodor Dostoyevsky.”

10 Ibid.

11 Morson, “Fyodor Dostoyevsky.”

12 New World Encyclopedia contributors, “Fyodor Dostoevsky”, *New World Encyclopedia*, [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Fyodor\\_Dostoevsky&oldid=1082666](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Fyodor_Dostoevsky&oldid=1082666), Accessed December 14, 2022.

13 Morson, “Fyodor Dostoyevsky.”

## Regeneration

Though it's hard to find exact resources that would expand on the subject, I would like to give my interpretation of what convictions were regenerated. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most of the parts of continental Europe started entering the modern world. One of the aspects of modernity was the freedom to believe in any ideology you want. The process of modernization in Russia was slower due to many factors. Dostoyevsky was born into a conservative family with strict Eastern Orthodox upbringing. But in his late twenties he “eventually joined a related, secret group devoted to revolution and illegal propaganda. It appears that Dostoyevsky did not sympathize (as others did) with egalitarian communism and terrorism but was motivated by his strong disapproval of serfdom...”<sup>14</sup>. Like many young people, Dostoyevsky was trying to find answers to solve problems in society like serfdom. But it is clear that though he was interested in communism at first, later he became a devout Eastern Orthodox. Most likely, the regeneration in Siberia was the catalyst that forced Dostoyevsky to make a strong stand with Christianity and conservative beliefs. “The conclusion of philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev is: “I personally know no more profoundly Christian writer than Dostoevsky...” and asserts that Dostoevsky “loved Christ consumingly...”<sup>15</sup>

## After Siberia

1857 Dostoyevsky married his first wife Maria Dmitrievna Isayeva and came back to live in St. Petersburg, where he continued his career as a writer. There he wrote many of his novels as well as his “last and probably greatest novel”<sup>16</sup> *Bratya Karamazovy* (1879–80; *The Brothers Karamazov*). One year later, in 1881, Dostoyevsky died, leaving his legacy in his writings for many generations ahead.

### *Dostoyevsky's favorite philosophical and theological themes*

Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky being well educated and having a lot of different experiences from Siberia and his later travels to Western Europe<sup>17</sup> could write extensively on many different themes. “Literary modernism, existentialism, and various schools of psychology, theology, and literary criticism have been profoundly shaped by his ideas.”<sup>18</sup> In his novel *Notes from Underground*, published in 1864 Dostoyevsky mocks “positivist philosophy” and somewhat “undermines”

14 Morson, “Fyodor Dostoyevsky.”

15 James Townsend, “Dostoevsky and His Theology. ,” OrthoChristian.Com, September 2, 2012, <https://orthochristian.com/51498.html>.

16 Morson, “Fyodor Dostoyevsky.”

17 New World Encyclopedia, “Fyodor Dostoevsky”

18 Morson, “Fyodor Dostoyevsky.”

socialist ideas.<sup>19</sup> In another famous novel, titled *Crime and Punishment* Dostoyevsky extensively tells the story of Rodion Raskolnikov's crime and both moral and physical punishment. Dostoyevsky explores some psychological aspects of what happens in the mind of a person who murders other people.

In the "last and perhaps greatest novel"<sup>20</sup>, *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoyevsky deals with many of his favorite themes and topics. He portrays many diverse characters who have different values and beliefs. Moreover, by analyzing their behavior he shows its correlation with certain values. Through different interactions among his characters, Dostoyevsky was comparing three major ideologies, namely, conservatism, socialism, and liberalism, with one another. These ideologies were the foundation of modern Europe and the roots of nowadays postmodernity. One of the major strengths of the novel is that Dostoyevsky is not explicitly stating what he believes is the best, thus letting the reader decide and judge for himself. In the book, he also deals with sociological issues and asks a big question: who/what will save Russia? The novel is filled with religion and theology. Alyosha being the hero of the novel, whose faith and meekness are obvious, keeps his strong faith in God despite the death of his spiritual mentor father Zossima and the arguments against God from his brother Ivan. Dostoyevsky did not portray the church as being perfect. He showed very well that even within the monastery there can be some people, who can be more destructive to Christianity than any modern philosophies. The Eastern Orthodox church will be the focus of my research in the novel.

#### The Eastern Orthodoxy in *The Brothers Karamazov*

##### ***About the book: key themes, structure, style, and summary of the book***

*The Brothers Karamazov* was written in 1880 in St. Peterburg. The novel was written in the Russian language primarily, but it has been translated into many different languages since. The author, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky dedicated this novel to his second wife, Anna Grigoryevna Dostoevskaya, who most likely made a considerable contribution to the book.

The aim of the book is not made explicitly clear by the author. He does not talk about it in the foreword too. In the novel, he focuses on many different themes some of which include topics in theology, politics, sociology, and psychology. On the top layer, it looks like Dostoyevsky is telling a story about the Karamazov family and their members focusing on a deep analysis of each character's behavior. However, on a deeper level, Dostoyevsky is doing much more: he compares different ideological ideas, applies them to Russian society and individuals, and shows what influence they have on character behavior. After

19 New World Encyclopedia, "Fyodor Dostoevsky"

20 Ibid.

reading the whole novel, I believe Dostoyevsky was intentionally hiding the real purpose of the novel. Though it looks like he wanted that the readers of the novel to think about certain ideological, theological, and sociological problems and let the reader make up their minds on those problems.

The structure of the book is not unanimous and depends on the publishers. Some print it as a whole book, and some, due to its length, divide it into two volumes. The version I read was an electronic edition. It was published by “Youtou” in 2015 in Lithuanian language (translated from the Russian language by Motiejus Miškinis) as two books, *Broliai Karamazovai I* and *Broliai Karamazovai II*, both having 451 and 416 pages respectively. Besides being divided into two volumes, it is also divided into four major parts and each part has three books, so in total there are twelve smaller books in the novel and an epilogue.

Considering the style of writing, Dostoyevsky has authored the whole story in a narrative. The author tells the story as if he has heard it from somebody. He can hide some details by simply saying he does not remember exactly or that he could not hear something. This makes the reader feel that he is reading about true events when it is fiction. The writing is also keenly detailed and descriptive, but easy to read, imagine, and understand.

### *The 18<sup>th</sup>-century Eastern orthodoxy in Russia described in the Brothers Karamazov*

#### **Introduction**

From the very beginning of the novel, Dostoyevsky uses a quote from the Gospel of John 12:24 as an epigraph “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it dies, it bringeth forth much fruit”. It sets a tune of Christianity, motifs of suffering and sacrifice, and the results that come out of it which are seen later in the novel. The main Eastern Orthodox details included in the book are winding around a small monastery, one of its elders – Father Zossima, his favorite spiritual son – Alyosha Karamazov, and some other characters. I will use these characters as an outline to summarize my findings about the Eastern Orthodoxy depicted in Dostoyevsky.

#### **The tradition of the elders in the Russian Orthodox monasteries.**

In the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, a lot of the actions revolve around the Russian Orthodox monastery. From the novel, it is evident that 19<sup>th</sup>-century life in Russian villages and towns centered on these monasteries and churches. Dostoyevsky gives a lot of details about what life in a monastery looked like. There are a lot of aspects to it, but I would like to emphasize that monasteries served

as a place where laymen could come for spiritual nurturing, and younger novices could be disciplined into becoming good monks.

One particularly interesting aspect of Eastern Orthodoxy in *The Brothers Karamazov* is the elders. In the last chapter of Book I, called “Elders” Dostoyevsky gives a lot of historical background details about the office of elders in Eastern Orthodox monasteries. Dostoyevsky writes that “the institution of “elders” is of recent date, not more than a hundred years old in our monasteries”<sup>21</sup> but in other Eastern Christian traditions it has been established over a thousand years ago. Dostoyevsky explains:

“What was such an elder? An elder took your soul, your will, into his soul and his will. When you choose an elder, you renounce your own will and yield it to him in complete submission, complete self-abnegation.”<sup>22</sup>

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, it is seen that these elders were rare and not every monastery had them. And the elders served much as spiritual fathers and counselors. They were leading younger novices into spiritual maturity as well as counseling Christians in the matters of the secular world (as it was told in Book II, where the Karamazov family had come to the elder to solve family issues). These elders were also sought by many pilgrims from distant parts.

### **Father Zossima – an elder who impersonates Jesus**

One of the key characters that give us a great glimpse into Eastern Orthodox Christianity is the elder Father Zossima. He was sixty-five years old and throughout his life has collected many experiences either as a layman serving in the Caucasus or in the ministry of a monastery. Father Zossima was praised for his humbleness and wisdom not only in the monastery but in the whole wide gubernia region. He is always portrayed as the one who has a zeal for the Lord and always tries to encourage others lovingly and kindly. The way Dostoyevsky described Father Zossima reminds me a lot about the Lord Jesus Christ and what we read about him in the Gospels. I would even dare to say that Father Zossima represents how Dostoyevsky perceived the personality of Jesus.

### **Problems of asceticism in Russian Orthodoxy**

Another interesting detail given in the novel is the tension between Father Zossima and Father Ferapont. Father Ferapont lived in the same monastery, but further from everyone else. He was an ascetic and fasted often: “he ate only two pounds of bread in three days.”<sup>23</sup> “Father Ferapont never went to see the elder

21 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, loc 49.5.

22 Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, 1880. *The Brothers Karamazov* (Translated from the Russian of Fyodor Dostoyevsky by Constance Garnett, New York: The Lowell Press; adapted by Project Gutenberg, 2009 [eBook #28054]), Calibre Library, loc 51.2.

23 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, loc 328.6.

[Zossima].”<sup>24</sup> Later it becomes evident that Father Ferapont either sincerely disagreed with the lifestyle of Father Zossima, or was jealous of all the popularity Zossima had compared to Father Ferapont. After the death of Father Zossima, his corps started smelling and for the people, it was a “sign” that Zossima was not as holy as they thought he was. Father Ferapont entered the funeral ceremony and caused a scene after which people started saying “This is the one who is a saint! This is the one who is a holy man!”<sup>25</sup> while pointing to Father Ferapont. From my reading of the situation it was clear that Father Ferapont wanted to ruin the legacy of Father Zossima and steal his glory. This reminded me so much of how the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus exactly for these two reasons: 1. That Jesus was more popular than they were 2. That Jesus did not live an ascetic lifestyle as they had imagined the Messiah would do. And I believe that Dostoyevsky actually wanted to show that such asceticism as Father Ferapont was practicing, was deceiving and people called him holy, though he did not love the people. And probably Dostoyevsky wanted to rebuke such false ascetics that he saw in the Eastern Orthodox church in his day.

### **The mission of the Russian church**

Another important aspect of the Russian Orthodox church is its mission. I think Dostoyevsky explains what he believes is the mission of the Russian church speaking through Father Zossima. Before his death, Father Zossima gives a speech in which he explains how the whole world is becoming more and more corrupted. Children, who are abused in the factories instead of enjoying childhood, the upper class that follows science and denies God, and various rebellions happening in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe were proofs that Zossima used to show that the world is in corruption. And in the midst of all of this corruptness and hopelessness, Father Zossima tells to the monks around him: “But God will save Russia as He has saved her many times. Salvation will come from the people, from their faith and their meekness.”<sup>26</sup> And then he exhorts the monks by telling to them what is their mission: “watch over the people’s faith and this will not be a dream.”<sup>27</sup> He says that the priests in villages instead of complaining about their little wages should go into the houses of the villagers, gathers children and their parents, and read God’s Word to them. Zossima tells them:

“Let him open that book [Bible] and begin reading it without grand words or superciliousness, without condescension to them, but gently and kindly, being glad that he is reading to them and that they are listening with attention, loving the words himself, only stopping from time to time to explain words

24 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, loc 328.6.

25 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, loc 681.8.

26 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, loc 638.4.

27 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, loc 638.4.

that are not understood by the peasants. Don't be anxious, they will understand everything, the orthodox heart will understand all!"<sup>28</sup>

This is the mission of the church according to Dostoyevsky. It is to go to the common people, to their homes, and bring the Gospel to them.

### **Alyosha Karamazov – an ideal Christian disciple**

Alyosha Karamazov, the third-born son, is portrayed as a very pietist and devoted Christian. In the foreword of the book, Dostoyevsky calls him the hero of his novel, though Alyosha Karamazov does not have any supernatural abilities, nor overcomes any great challenges. Probably the reason why Dostoyevsky calls him a hero is that Alyosha loves every imperfect character without judging them, and by doing so, he changes the lives of those people. A great example of that is the change that happened in Grushenka's (Agrafiena Aleksandrowna) heart when Alyosha called her: "a true sister, I have found a treasure—a loving heart."<sup>29</sup> According to Dostoyevsky's descriptions of Alyosha, it looks like he represents an ideal and true follower of Jesus Christ in the Eastern Orthodox church. Alyosha is involved in all the major parts of the book, and it appears that his presence brings peace and stability to everyone around him.

It is important to note that Alyosha had a close relationship with Father Zossima. He even lived in his cell. And Alyosha took Father Zossima as a great example in many areas such as spiritual maturity and faith, hope, and love for people. Alyosha was basically a disciple of Father Zossima which parallels Jesus and his disciples. It seems that Dostoyevsky portrays how important it is for older Christians to teach and disciple the younger ones in how to follow Christ. In summary, the example of Alyosha shows the image of a follower of Christ in the Russian orthodox church and the importance of spiritual mentorship.

### **Rakitin – a false Christian**

Another intriguing character in the novel is Mikhail Osipovich "Misha" Rakitin. In the novel, he is described as "A Seminarist-Careerist"<sup>30</sup> who though living as a monk in a monastery and professes to be a Christian, acts exactly oppositely. Dostoyevsky describes him in the following passage:

"She regarded Rakitin as a most religious and devout young man. He was particularly clever in getting round people and assuming whatever part he thought most to their taste, if he detected the slightest advantage to himself from doing so."<sup>31</sup>

28 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, loc 587.0.

29 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, loc 712.1.

30 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Part 1: Book 2, Chapter 7: A Seminarist-Careerist.

31 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, loc 662.5.



Instead of looking for opportunities how to build up others, he tried to take advantage of others. For instance, because he envied Alyosha, he agreed to help Grushenka to “corrupt” Alyosha. Eventually, his plans fail but then he continues to try to seduce Madame Khokhlakov for money and participates in promoting socialist ideas. I believe that Rakitin serves as a warning from Dostoyevsky that not everyone who says to be a Christian is a Christian. He reminds me of Judas the Iscariot because Rakitin would betray others for his own benefit. By adding him to the novel Dostoyevsky shows that sometimes the fiercest enemies of the church are not from the outside but from the inside.

## **Major theological similarities and differences between Russian Eastern Orthodox tradition and Evangelicalism**

### *Major similarities according to my findings*

#### **Scripture**

In the novel, the importance of Scripture is seen everywhere. Just as Dostoyevsky started the novel with John 12:24, there are plenty of references, parallels, or allusions to other stories from the Bible which are either seen by the reader or used in the conversations between the characters themselves. Spiritual leaders such as Father Zossima, and Father Paissy, or young Christians like Alyosha all held a high view of the Bible.<sup>32</sup> There is a subsection called “(b) Of the Holy Scriptures in the Life of Father Zossima” in which Father Zossima reaffirms the importance of knowing the Scriptures, and reading the Bible to yourself and others. Protestant believers can easily relate to Father Zossima’s convictions about the Scriptures.

According to the article: “Evangelicals and Orthodox: Crossing Paths and Crossing Swords”<sup>33</sup>, and my own experience in various evangelical churches, the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture is of common ground to both churches. Nevertheless, Archpriest Andrew Stephen Damick from the Orthodox church explains that there is a key distinction in how they interpret the Bible.<sup>34</sup> He remarks that evangelicals tend to interpret the Scriptures from a personal point of view, while Orthodox interpret the Scriptures primarily in the context of the church.<sup>35</sup>

32 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, loc 682.4, 1136.0.

33 Mark Elliott, “Evangelicals and Orthodox: Crossing Paths and Crossing Swords,” *Evangelicals and orthodox: Crossing paths and crossing swords*, 2001, <https://www.eastwestreport.org/articles/ew09401.html>.

34 Damick, Andrew. “5 Differences Between Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism.” *The orthodox faith*. <http://theorthodoxfaith.com/>, June 5, 2017. <http://theorthodoxfaith.com/video/5-differences-orthodoxy-evangelicalism/>.

35 Ibid.

The article summarizes it in the following: “The question of, “What does this mean to me?”, while it’s important, my own opinion, my own sense of what it means, is not the most important thing for me as an Orthodox Christian.”<sup>36</sup>

### **The Church’s mission**

Another key similarity that was clear to me was the church mission. Evangelicals tend to take “The Great Commission” found in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 28 as the foundation for the church mission. Evangelicals have a strong focus on evangelism and discipleship with the means of going to the people.

Regarding the Eastern Orthodox tradition, I thought that they have no interest in going out to the people. But according to Dostoyevsky speaking through Father Zossima, priests and monks should go to the houses of the people and read the stories of the Scriptures to them.<sup>37</sup> This reminds me of evangelism. And the way elders in monasteries spiritually mentor younger novices reminds me of discipleship in the evangelical church. Also, the Orthodox Church has “a missionary heritage rich with inspiration for contemporary missiology.”<sup>38</sup> All this leads to conclude that both Evangelicals and Eastern Orthodox have a lot in common concerning the church’s mission as evangelism and discipleship.

### *Key differences*

#### **Liturgy**

Each church has its ways of conducting spiritual practices which can commonly be called church liturgy. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, there are several scenes where the reader can observe the rich liturgical inheritance of the Eastern church. In my opinion, one of the greatest liturgical scenes in the novel was the burial ceremony of Father Zossima. There were constant Scripture reading, singing of hymns, visiting of people and everything happened in order set by tradition. And such liturgy is not meant to be just plain gestures, but each part has a deep spiritual meaning. Andrew Stephen Damick says that: “Orthodox Worship is Liturgical, Evangelical Worship Tends not to be.”<sup>39</sup> While evangelicals tend to worship the Lord more through prayer, songs, and especially preaching, most of the worship that takes place in Orthodox churches is liturgical.<sup>40</sup>

36 Andrew Damick. “5 Differences Between Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism.” The orthodox faith. <http://theorthodoxfaith.com/>, June 5, 2017. <http://theorthodoxfaith.com/video/5-differences-orthodoxy-evangelicalism/>.

37 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, loc 587.0.

38 Mark Elliott, “Evangelicals and Orthodox: Crossing Paths and Crossing Swords,”.

39 Andrew Damick. “5 Differences Between Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism.”

40 Ibid.

## Salvation

The last interesting difference that I have researched is the concept of salvation. One of the key aspects of evangelical theology regarding salvation is that it comes from God's initiative and it is only possible to attain faith alone in Christ alone. Another key emphasis among the reformers was that justification of the person before God happened at the moment of conversion. Andrew Damick explains that for Orthodox believers, it is a life-long process. He summarizes it in the following:

“For us it's a process that begins with the work of God in us and with baptism, with the sacraments, with the grace of God in us. We're given all the tools that we need to engage in the long term process of salvation, which is ultimately a work of God, but is only done with our cooperation.”<sup>41</sup>

Professor of Systematic and Historic Theology Robert Letham in his book “Through Western Eyes: Eastern Orthodoxy: A Reformed Perspective” suggests that the Eastern Orthodox Church “affirm what Protestants call “justification by faith” (pp. 249-52)<sup>42</sup> but it happens through *theosis* “(understood as union with the Trinity through Christ and the Holy Spirit)”<sup>43</sup>.

Interestingly, Dostoyevsky in many of his writings talks about redemption through suffering, which, in fact, correlates very well with the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of long-term salvation. James Townsend in his research on Dostoyevsky's theology on salvation reaffirms this: “There is one theme under this rubric, however, which is so pervasive in Dostoyevsky's writings that it cannot be ignored. That is the topic of salvation through suffering.”<sup>44</sup> J. Townsend explains how the same redemption through suffering that is seen in characters like Dimitri and Ivan Karamazov is seen in Raskolnikov from *The Crime and Punishment* and Stavrogin from *Demons*. Nicholas “Berdyayev declared, ‘Dostoyevsky believed firmly in the redemptive and regenerative power of suffering: life is the expiation of sin by suffering’.”<sup>45</sup> Dostoyevsky seems to side with the idea that salvation comes through long-term suffering and repentance. This is a key theological difference between Eastern Orthodox and Evangelical views on salvation.

41 Ibid.

42 Donald Fairbairn. “Payton's ‘Light From the Christian East: An Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition’ and Letham ‘Through Western Eyes: Eastern Orthodoxy: A Reformed Perspective’ - Book Review.” Erskine Theological Seminary, Due West, South Carolina, November 2007. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1376&context=rec>.

43 Ibid.

44 James Townsend “Dostoyevsky and His Theology.” OrthoChristian.Com, September 2, 2012. <https://orthochristian.com/51498.html>

45 Nicholas Berdyayev, *Dostoyevsky* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 95. Footnote from James Townsend “Dostoyevsky and His Theology.” OrthoChristian.Com, September 2, 2012. <https://orthochristian.com/51498.html>

## Conclusion

In this paper, I researched the biography of F. M. Dostoyevsky, Eastern Orthodox tradition in light of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and its key theological similarities and differences with Evangelicalism. While looking into his biography it was obvious that Dostoyevsky was living in times of constant change in the world. One of the key moments of his life was a mock execution which was followed by 4 years of deportation in Siberia. In my reading of the event, it was in the labor camp where Dostoyevsky experienced the regeneration of his Christian convictions which followed him and his writings till the end of his life.

Dostoyevsky in his lifetime published many periodic press publications and wrote a few extensive novels. In most of his novels, Dostoyevsky focused on his favorite themes, which include: theology, sociology, theodicy, and early psychology. He had a sharp opinion on some of the issues that he saw in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russia and he used fictional characters from his novels to share his ideas with the public. One of the greatest novels in which he wrote extensively about his favorite themes is called *The Brothers Karamazov*. It's also his last novel, published a year before the author's death.

In the novel, Dostoyevsky gives a lot of details about the Eastern Orthodox church in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Russia. He describes life in a monastery and many traditions of the Eastern Church. He explains the formation of elders and their influence on the Russian church and society. He gives a portrait of Jesus in Father Zossima and idealizes the Christian lifestyle in Alyosha Karamazov. Nevertheless, he shows that the church is corrupt. Dostoyevsky also illustrates that threats to the church do not always come from outside, but often from its people like praise-seeking ascetic father Ferapont and selfish Rakitin.

Furthermore, I have researched and found that both Scriptures and the Church mission are something Evangelicals and Eastern Orthodox believers can find in common. There is a similar emphasis on both evangelism and discipleship, but it takes different forms in each of these traditions. In my paper, I researched two areas of difference, namely liturgy, and salvation. While both Evangelicals and Eastern Orthodox Worship God, the main worship in the latter church happens through theologically rich liturgies. In soteriology, evangelicals take the stance of immediate justification, meanwhile Eastern Orthodox view it more as a lifelong process, and Dostoyevsky's writings are full of "redemption through suffering" theology.

After the research, I realized that the Eastern Orthodox church in some of its doctrines and especially in the writings of Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky have much more in common with Evangelicalism than I thought. I think it is important to understand this so evangelicals could facilitate more love and compassion for our Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters who might be struggling in the current political crisis between Russia and Ukraine.

It was a brief study based mainly on one of Dostoyevsky's novels. If the reader of this paper finds either Dostoevsky himself or topics the theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church of interest, then I would recommend studying more of Dostoevsky's writings and reading articles listed in the Bibliography of this paper.

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