

Dostoevsky – nihilism, art and Christianity¹

Dostoiévski – niilismo, arte e cristianismo

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Abstract

In this paper, the religious question in Dostoevsky's work will be addressed taking two different aspects into consideration. Firstly, the religious context of Russian Orthodoxy, as well as the space occupied by the Orthodox tradition in the Russian intelligentsia during the 19th century. It is in this context that the thought of Vladimir Soloviev are found. He was the one responsible for the first theological reading of Dostoevsky's works under the point of view of Orthodoxy and for the development of a sophisticated interweaving of religion and aesthetics. Secondly, there is an effort for displacing the author from the theological tradition of Orthodoxy and also an attempt to position Dostoevsky's religious thought in the outlook of Modern Nihilism. The paper argues that nihilism enables the birth of a religious vocabulary which is not conditioned by the traditional theological principles commonly linked to Dostoevsky's aesthetic and religious universe. Thus, we understand that it is on the horizon of nihilism and not within the frameworks of a traditional religion that Dostoevsky's Christianity must be interpreted.

Keywords: Dostoevsky. Nihilism. Religion. Art. Christianity.

Resumo

Neste artigo, a questão religiosa na obra de Dostoiévski será abordada levando em consideração dois diferentes aspectos. Em primeiro lugar, o contexto religioso da Ortodoxia russa, bem como o espaço ocupado pela tradição ortodoxa na *intelligentsia* russa durante o século XIX. É neste contexto que se encontra o pensamento de Vladimir Soloviev. Ele foi o responsável pela primeira leitura teológica das obras de Dostoiévski sob um ponto de vista da Ortodoxia e pela elaboração de um sofisticado entrelaçamento entre religião e estética. Em segundo lugar, há um esforço para deslocar o autor da tradição teológica da Ortodoxia e uma tentativa de posicionar o pensamento religioso de Dostoiévski no horizonte do Niilismo Moderno. O artigo argumenta que o niilismo possibilita o nascimento de um vocabulário religioso não condicionado pelos princípios teológicos tradicionais comumente vinculados ao universo estético e religioso de Dostoiévski. Assim, entendemos que é no horizonte do niilismo e não dentro dos quadros de uma religião tradicional que o cristianismo de Dostoiévski deve ser interpretado.

Palavras-chave: Dostoiévski. Niilismo. Religião. Arte. Cristianismo.

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Introduction

Invariably and to a great extent highlighted in theological circles, Dostoevsky's reception was given a confessional intonation. This reception approached a hermeneutic which sought to construe the wholeness of its work as a simple epiphanic metaphor through the lenses of classic (Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant) Christianity. His works were seen as a symbol of faith, which pointed out to a religious view of the world, and it could easily be suitable by the historical orthodoxies of Christianity. Dostoevsky established, in still little explained proportions, the thinking of the Catholic and Protestant intelligentsia of the 20th century. In the first half of the last century, a sophisticated religious intelligence found in Dostoevsky's works a source for translation of Christianity into the modern world. Nicolas Berdiaev, Henri de Lubac, Romano Guardino, E. Thurneysen, and Karl Barth, among others, were part of a scenario of theological reflections which considered Dostoevsky as a prophet who outlined a vital solution to the crisis of Modern Atheism, as well as providing a type of apologetics that sought to answer, on behalf of the Christian faith, the Western spiritual crisis.

Studies on Dostoevsky's relations with religion, especially with Christianity, have a dimension of ambiguity, and a long path of accumulated misconceptions throughout the growth of his critical fortune. Some theological and literary circles are certain that Dostoevsky's religious thinking could be an antidote capable of counteracting the modern aridity provoked by the critics of religion in a Post-Christian world. Berdiaev's (1934) well-known statement, "Dostoevsky knew everything Nietzsche knew and something more." (BERDIAEV, 1934, p. 62), can be taken as a starting point for a type of criticism that considered Dostoevsky a "repository of the spirituality of Orthodoxy" (PATTISON; THOMPSON, 2001, p. 1-27) or a type of paladin of Christianity against the modern secular culture (McREYNOLDS, 2009, p. 5-20).

Taking that into consideration, basically no doubt is found with regards to how close the relationship between Dostoevsky and Christianity was. His creative resignification of symbols derived from the Christian vocabulary is outlined by the substantial presence of some characters that pervade his work, such as Father Zosima, who appeared in *The Brothers Karamazov* (2011) as a subversive portrait of a Russian starets. The figure of Zosima, the aesthetic type of the Russian monk forged by Dostoevsky, is an expression of the author's religious and positive type. It allows us to have a reflection that leads to the questioning of ownership carried out by a theological and philosophical intelligentsia of Christianity, who hastily recognized Dostoevsky as one of their own and placed him as an icon of a literary aesthetic who held unmistakable theological content. Therefore, the days that followed the release of *The Brothers Karamazov* (2011) made it clear that the religious type forged by Dostoevsky transcended infinitely the walls of the convent, as well as the limits of the Russian Orthodoxy.

In this paper, the religious question in Dostoevsky's work will be addressed taking two different aspects into consideration. Firstly, the religious context of Russian Orthodoxy, as well as the space occupied by the Orthodox tradition in the Russian intelligentsia during the 19th century. It is in this context that Vladimir Soloviev's thought can be interpreted. He was the one responsible for the first theological reading of Dostoevsky's works under an Orthodox point of view², and for the development of a sophisticated interweaving of religion and aesthetics. Secondly, there is an effort for displacing the author from the theological tradition of Orthodoxy, in which there is also an attempt to position Dostoevsky's religious thought in the outlook for Modern Nihilism. Nihilism, to use the definition given by A. Badiou, understood as a "rupture of the traditional figure of the bond, unbinding as a form of being of all that pretends to be of the bond" (BADIOU, 1999, p.

² Although it is a fundamental point, the paper will not call into question whether Soloviev represents or not the core of Russian Orthodoxy. Our point here will be Soloviev's appropriation of Russian orthodoxy in his three speeches on Dostoevsky.

55)³, enables the birth of a religious vocabulary which is not conditioned by the traditional theological principles commonly linked to the aesthetic and religious universe of Dostoevsky. Thus, it is on the horizon of nihilism and not within the frameworks of a traditional religion that Dostoevsky's Christianity must be interpreted (SUDARIO-CABRAL, 2018).

1 Dostoevsky and orthodoxies of Christianity

The relation between Dostoevsky's work and religion, mainly Orthodox Christianity, was, from a very early stage, an issue that brought along significant debates. The Russian *intelligentsia*, represented such names as Konstantin Leontiev, Vladimir Soloviev, Nikolay Mikhaylovsky, Vasily Rozanov, Sergei Bulgakov, among others, engaged in a heated discussion about the status of faith and the religious content that could be drawn from Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky's work. The reception of his work in the early years followed by his death left us with a fortune made by diverse coloration interpretive. It brought together several ideological voices which projected and recognized in Dostoevsky's work the most positive theological content, as well as the most complex religious anarchism, or even the most merciless denial of the Christian god.

Vladimir Soloviev, in his *Three Speeches in Memory of Dostoevsky*, (SOLOVIEV, 2003, p.1-28) delivered between 1881-1883, provided the first intellectual effort that contributed to placing Dostoevsky within the framework of Orthodoxy, considering his work an essential part of the theological thinking, and of the Russian ecclesiastical universe. Soloviev was part of what became known as the Russian Religious Renaissance. It ended up being the most prominent religious

³ The use of Badiou's formulation here has a didactic purpose. The rupture of the *traditional ties* appears in Dostoevsky's works as a fundamental diagnosis. The fossilization of the traditional concept of God, the rootlessness caused by the loss of the sense of community, as well as the alienation of all sentiment of nature offered the nucleus of Dostoevsky's perception of nihilism. The Nietzschean typologies can be found *avant la lettre* as a sign of *rupture of the traditional ties* in the various temperaments which composed Dostoevsky's literary universe after the appearance of *Notes from Underground*. It is important to note that nihilism does not appear in Dostoevsky's work as a univocal concept. The nuances of meaning are quite diverse, and their presence is reflected in different types, such as Alyosha and Ivan Karamazov. The perception of nihilism as the terrain on which Russian modernity flourished appears in his work through an unprecedented philosophical formulation and the traditional denomination of the young radicals of the 1860s as nihilists, provided by the label printed by Turgenev in *Fathers and Sons*, does not exhaust the concept and its role in the gestation of Dostoevsky's ideas. We can affirm that with the publication of *Fathers and Sons*, in 1861, *What Is to Be Done?* in 1863, and *Notes from Underground*, in 1864, one can see the literary translation of the philosophical-religious and aesthetic scenario of the Russian modernity as an experience of deepening nihilism.

intelligence of a movement that produced a sophisticated framework of writings that sought to systematize the tradition of Orthodoxy and provide it with greater foundations. The absence of a theology similar to the scholastic tradition of the Latin Church, which is legally and rationally systematic, prevented the constitution of an orthodox Christianity body of theological doctrines from being sufficiently strong to settle in the Russian intellectual scenario up to the end of the 19th century. The discussion about the existence of an Orthodox "patrimonial heritage" capable of shaping a great narrative of historical, religious, and cultural discernment of Russia was a motif that crossed the *intelligentsia* of the 19th century. It was expressed in the pessimism towards the Russian religious past that we find in the *Philosophical Letters* of Tchaadayev, in the set of texts that gave form to the Slavophile controversy, and even in the intellectual exercises of the renewal of Orthodoxy, which found in Vladimir Soloviev its most sophisticated expression.

The flourishing of the orthodox theology in the 19th century encountered the foundations of their spiritual and theological discernment in the oriental patristic tradition, represented by significant figures such as Macarius of Egypt (4th century), Evagrius Ponticus (4th century), Simeon New Theologian (11th century), alongside the tradition of the hesychast saints (which received a definitive systematization with the publication of *The Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* by Gregory Palamas). The Russian Orthodoxy gained a definite and rich texture with the revival of Monasticism and the cultivation of the Hesychast spirituality and the Philokalia, more precisely developed in the monastery of Optina. The Optina Pustyn Monastery became the fruitful ground which gave life to the Russian religious revival, being transformed into a space of pilgrimage for a tormented Russian intelligence, as well as into the barn for the development of fundamental theological content of Orthodoxy. The hesychast prophecy of the Optina starets, expressed through the monastic vocation of Serafim of Sarov, appeared in the 19th century with an authenticity that aroused the interest of a spectrum of men seeking spiritual direction, amongst them Gogol, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. In a period intellectually penetrated by German Romanticism, especially in the Slavophile universe, Optina represented a retreat to the thought of

the Church Fathers, together with the Philokalia tradition, which offered an alternative path to the cultural universe of Western Modernity (DESSEILE, 1997). Noteworthy is the observation of Olivier Clément (1978, p. 119) that mentioned Serafim of Sarov as an "exact contemporary of Hegel and Novalis" and whom represented a Christianity sensitivity that resisted the "circles of immanence" posed by Western ideologies. For Clément, Serafim was the role model and the message of deification through grace in the face of the Western self-deification.

The controversies which surrounded the reception of Dostoevsky's work in the early years following his death are quite illustrative of the essentially polyphonic character of his works. This character was definitively demonstrated through Bakhtin's thesis during the second half of the 20th century. In his booklet "Our New Christians," Konstantin Leontiev interpreted Dostoevsky's Christianity as a type of humanitarianism deprived of any truthful mystical substance. Overall, it was a mixture of sentimentality and humanism that was not rooted in the revealed content of faith that distinguished true Christianity. In classifying Dostoevsky's work as an expression of "a cruel talent," Mikhailovsky declared his opinion as contrary to Leontiev's, offering the starting point of a significant critical fortune that found in Dostoevsky the most radical elements of a kind of modern anti-humanism.

Soloviev's discourses on Dostoevsky emerged in this context and sought to correct Dostoevsky's interpretations which displaced him from the constitutive universe that shaped his art, that was, according to Soloviev, Orthodox Christianity: "the idea that inspired all his activity. " (SOLOVIEV, 2003, p. 13). Vladimir Soloviev's *discourses* sought to systematize the wholeness of Dostoevsky's work by understanding it as an aesthetic-religious expression of the essential core of both Theology and the Russian Orthodox Church. Through sophisticated theological hermeneutics, alongside the withdrawal of a range of religious antinomies underlying Dostoevsky's thought and work, Soloviev's discourses undertook a systematic reflection on some theological elements considered the substance of Dostoevsky's Art, interpreting them as an aesthetic expression of the

formal elements of the Orthodox Church. Throughout the three discourses, a clear theological systematization that interpreted the content of Dostoevsky's Art as an extension of Soloviev's own religious synthesis was found. The discourses assumed the existence of a "positive religious ideal," achieved in maturity and after a difficult and long struggle (SOLOVIEV, 2003, p. 11), that was able to withdraw all the antinomies prevalent in Dostoevsky's own trajectory. This "ideal," according to Soloviev, would point out to the "universal truth" found embodied in the Church, and Dostoevsky, the prophet who rose "above the dominant tendencies of social thought," appeared alongside those who proclaimed a religious harmony of a "truly Christian and Orthodox" faith.

Marina Kostalevsky's (1997) analysis of the three discourses considered, although not enough, that Soloviev reflects not only Dostoevsky's sphere of ideas but also Soloviev himself (KOSTALEVSKY, 1997). The discourses have the clear purpose of reclaiming Dostoevsky's memory and subsuming his art into the theological architecture of Orthodoxy. Soloviev (2003), in his "note in defense of Dostoevsky," written in reply to Leontiev, stated that Dostoevsky would have no difficulty in recognizing that "Christ is known not otherwise, but by the church," and that, "in truth, only by loving and serving the church it is possible to serve the people themselves and humanity." (SOLOVIEV, 2003, p. 202). In order to place Dostoevsky's work within the theological forms of orthodox Christianity, Soloviev's reflection is included amongst extensive examples of *Post-mortem* baptisms of thinkers known to be displaced from the traditional and theological core of Christianity. Although Soloviev claims that he had not been concerned with Dostoevsky's personal life nor carried out a literary criticism of his works in the foreword to his speeches, it is evident the absence of elements capable of balancing his syntheses. Mikhailovsky's (1978) criticism was not unfair when he highlighted the absence of criteria in Soloviev's reading, considering that the discourses pose themselves as "the fording of a river from pole to pole and the gracious leaps from one pole to next without any thought about reinforcing them in some way and binding them together." (MIKHAILOVSKY, 1978, p. 9). The identification of Dostoevsky as a mere religious type who underwent a form of religious fideism in

relation to a traditional religion fails to take into consideration the living materiality of his art and the antinomic principle of his religious world view.

2 Nihilism, Art and Christianity

Dostoevsky visited the Optina Pustyn Monastery in June 1878, accompanied by Soloviev. Soon after the visit, Dostoevsky began writing *The Brothers Karamazov* (2011). It was due to his proximity with this religious universe, together with an aesthetic appropriation of some elements of his monastic experience in Optina, that the author built some of his positive types, such as Father Zosima, the Russian religious type, who took up a central role in the novel. Dostoevsky's portrait of the monastic universe played a significant role in deconstructing the negative stigmas that loomed over the religious type in Russian society, especially among Westernized intelligence. In Book VI of *The Brothers Karamazov* (2011) with regards to "the Russian monk and his possible significance", the following reasoning was found:

Father and teachers, what is the monk? In the enlightened world the word is nowadays pronounced by some people with a jeer, and by others it is used as a term of abuse, and this contempt for the monk is growing. It is true, alas, it is true, that there are many sluggards, gluttons, profligates and insolent beggars among monks. Educated people point to these: "You are idlers, useless members of society, you live on the labor of the others, you are shameless beggars". And yet how many meek and humble monks there are, yearning for solitude and fervent prayer in peace. These are less noticed, or passed over in silence. And how surprised men would be if I were to say that from these meek monks, who yearn for solitary prayer, the salvation of Russia will come perhaps once more. For they are in truth made ready in peace and quiet "for the day and the hour, the month and the year". Meanwhile, in their solitude, they keep the image of Christ fair and undefiled, in the purity of God's truth, from the times of the Fathers of old, the Apostles and the martyrs. And when the time comes they will show it to the tottering creeds of the world. That is a great thought. (DOSTOEVSKY, 2011, p. 270).

In the polyphonic ideological discourses of Dostoevsky's novels, taking under consideration Bakhtin's concept, the religious type will appear alongside others as "a great thought" (*мысль великая*). There are scarcely any doubts about the fact that this "great thought", mediated by the author's creative imagination, will be not only amongst the sources of his anti-nihilism, but also provides key elements for the construction of a particular type of religious aesthetics. The

creative appropriation of the Christian vocabulary found in Dostoevsky's works is part of a concept of art that is not directly linked to a positive theological content. On the contrary, it presents itself as an aesthetization of a religious type displaced from the authoritative core of tradition of Christianity and, in turn, devoid of the foundations of a traditional type of religion. The appropriation of the Christian vocabulary by Dostoevsky refers and surpasses the sophisticated relation between religion and art found in German Romanticism from Herder to Novalis. The religious type, as "a great thought", appeared as the expression of the intricate connections between religion and art, thus, being the receptacle of a singular aesthetic ideal. In this relationship between religion and art, the Christian religious type appeared as the distinctive element of a rooted aesthetic activity, inseparable from the idea of *sobornost* and nationality, which sought to confront the aporias of a condition and an era irremediably nihilistic.

Although the distance between Dostoevsky's work and Soloviev's theological syntheses is evident, the interpretations made by the latter cannot simply be dismissed for mentioning crucial elements for understanding his religious thought. Soloviev's speeches bring up considerable insights into the status of religious art, as well as to the place held by the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* (2011) in the Russian 19th century aesthetic and religious constellation. In fact, it is known that the idea of a religious art had come alongside Dostoevsky since his return from Siberia, thus, becoming the center of his discussions, together with the romantic critic Grigoriev, for an aesthetic that transcended the materialistic reductions of a superficial type of realism. In Russia of the 19th century, Dostoevsky's works stood out due to their particular religious tonality, and also because they could be interpreted as an aesthetic expression of a tormented spiritual search. Soloviev's interpretation brought up to light what he acknowledged as the "traits of a future religious art," in which Dostoevsky would act as one of the pioneers. Soloviev's testimony was significant as it shed light, through an inherently didactic discourse, on Dostoevsky's place in the 19th century Russian artistic constellation, as well as on the specificity of a religious art that distinguished itself from European aesthetics, and from materialistic reductions of a type of realism. Despite being

subjected to a worldview, and to a metaphysics that sought to elaborate a synthesis of Science, Philosophy and Religion, Soloviev's reasoning assisted us think about a genealogy of the relations between religion and art in Russian literature. In Soloviev's view,

In humanity's primitive days, poets were priests and prophets, the religious idea controlled poetry, and art served the gods. Then, when life became more complex, when civilization based on a division of labor appeared – art stood apart and was separated from religion [...] There appeared priests of pure art, for whom perfection of the artistic form became the chief concern, apart from any religious content [...] Today's artists cannot and do not want to serve pure beauty, to create perfect forms; they search for content. But alien to the previous religious content of art, they turn wholeheartedly toward current reality and put themselves in a slavish relationship to it doubly: first, they attempt to copy phenomena of this reality slavishly; and second, they attempt just as slavishly to serve the topic of the day, to satisfy the public mood of a given minute, to advocate a popular ethics, thinking to make art useful through that. Of course, neither the one nor the other of these goals is attainable. In the unsuccessful pursuit of only apparently real details, the actual reality of the whole is lost; and the striving to join extrinsic instructiveness and utility with art, to the detriment of its intrinsic beauty, transform art into the most useless and unnecessary thing in the world. (SOLOVIEV, 2003, p. 3).

Soloviev's assertions shall be interpreted in the context of the artistic and spiritual flourishing of the second half of the 19th century. During that period the most creative reception of the European novel, and the religious and intellectual atmosphere which shaped and trimmed its nihilism were found. The secularization of art and its modern aesthetic splendor found their place in the 19th century Russia through the "priest of art", Turgenev, through whom a "secular salvation poetics" experienced a refined expression (ALLEN, 1992). The religious element found in Dostoevsky's and Tolstoy's works, especially the old Tolstoy, distinguished itself from the pure aesthetics of European art, and opposed to the materialism embodied in, for example, the ideas of young critics, such as Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov. When referring to these last two authors, Turgenev stated that both tried "to wipe out from the face of earth, poetry, fine arts, all the aesthetic pleasures, and to impose mere seminarist principles." (VENTURI, 1960, p. 157). Turgenev's aesthetics, and the crude realism of the generation of intellectuals from the 1860s should be elucidated as distinct casings of the same experience, nihilism, which predisposed the art and thinking of the 19th century Russian intelligentsia.

The fierce conflict between priests of pure art and the materialism of a generation of critics whom, between Shakespeare and a pair of boots, would not hesitate to discard the first, conveys the ideas that gave birth to a particular type of religious art found in Dostoevsky's works.

After relinquishing a history of mystifications, such as those that simply elevated Dostoevsky to a prophet status, it is necessary to understand how the religious vocabulary came up to the scene of the 19th century Russian literature. The intellectual and religious atmosphere found in the 1850s and '60s, in relation to which the traditional ecclesiastical universe was absolutely displaced, witnessed the violence of a state of mind – discovered by Nietzsche, according to Adorno, through "newspaper accounts of terrorist acts in Russia" – which was immortalized by Turgenev in his novel *Fathers and Sons*. Nihilism provided the emergence of a religious vocabulary in literature, being, thus, Dostoevsky, through his great novels, the architect of a religious art that moved away from both the aesthetic indifference of nihilism found in Turgenev and the philistinism in art of the lovers of Science and Utilitarianism. The yearning to make "useful art" found in the works of Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyobov, and Dmitry Pisarev, for example, has been interpreted as an abstract denial in Art and Philosophy, and as an almost blind belief in Science. As considered by Nestor Kotlyarevsky, the rejection of every abstract foundation for life can be seen in the universe of young radicals, as well as an attempt to replace them with a new perspective based upon materialistic and utilitarian principles regarding life and spiritual issues (BARGHO; PISAREV, 1948). D. Pisarev called himself a nihilist and found in Bazarov, Turgenev's complex character, a portrait very close to his own intellectual and spiritual universe, which expressed a scientific and utopian nihilism with religious features that had already been somehow portrayed by Chernyshevsky in his novel *What Is to Be done?* It is important to emphasize that the nihilism found in young radicals differs from the type of nihilism that showed the nuances of an aesthetic universe of authors such as Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky. Tolstoy (1902), in his late work, *My Religion*, sought to differentiate his experience from the content that was commonly associated with the concept of nihilism. Throughout the course of his

long life, for 55 years, Tolstoy acknowledged to have been, "in the proper acceptance of the word, a nihilist, - not a socialist and revolutionist, as is generally understood by the word, but a nihilist in the sense of one who believed in nothing." (TOLSTOY, 1902, p. 7).

Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Dostoevsky had a similar understanding of nihilism, and, although each of them had distinct reactions, the erosion of meaning caused by this "uncanniest of guest" had become decisive for the thought and art of the three writers. The distance taken by Tolstoy from the generation of the young revolutionaries was important because it guided his understanding of the concept of nihilism and also moved him away from the positivism and materialism of young radicals. The religious temperament of the 19th century literature, and the specific religious tone present in Dostoevsky's work should not be interpreted as a simple retreat into a traditional form of religion, it should be seen as the expression of a thought that sought to resist materialistic simplifications by using a sophisticated understanding of the concept of religion and its role in the creation of art. Dostoevsky, by confronting an ideology that thought of existence exclusively in modern and scientific terms, sought to imprint a religious meaning in art in order to combat a scientific nihilism which stated that "there is no floor-sweeper, no toilet-cleaner, who is not infinitely more useful than Shakespeare."⁴ (McREYNOLDS, 2002, p. 95).

Final Considerations

The simplistic identification of the religious content, which demonstrates theological formulations about Christianity in general, and about Orthodoxy in particular, lies among the major challenges for understanding the role of religion in Dostoevsky's art. The language that defined the content of his art corresponds to a *religious instinct* and a state of mind that absorbed the philosophical consequences of the European nihilism, being articulated from within a nihilistic experience. Dostoevsky had the exact understanding of the historical significance with regards

⁴ These words were written by the critic Alexander Zaytsev (*The Russian word*, 1864, n.3). See Dostoevsky, *Demons*, 1995, part III, chapter, IV: "The whole perplexity lies in just what is more beautiful: Shakespeare or boots, Raphael or petroleum?"

to the "death of God," as well as related to the destruction of the metaphysical content which offered unity to the world. This understanding was the starting point of the religious grammar found in his art. Nihilism, understood as "rupture of the traditional figure of the bond, unbinding as a form of being of all that pretends to be bond." (BADIOU, 1999, p.55) is the principle of openness that brings up a religious vocabulary not conditioned by theological principles and traditional forms of religion. Dostoevsky laid the foundations for a religious art that became the structuring element of his anti-nihilism articulating his thought under the perspective of nihilism, and also as a reaction to the philistinism of a scientific materialism.

G. Florovsky (1972) considered the crisis of the Russian intelligentsia in the 1860s as "a continuation or repetition of the simultaneous shift and crisis in Western thought." (FLOROVSKY, 1972, p. 14). The literary activity of the 1860s generation clearly described what Nietzsche recognized in his Fragment from 1887 as the "eruption of nihilism" in the European culture. Oblomov's laziness, especially when taken up by Levinas in his *De l'existence au existente*, Bazarov's rootlessness, Raskolnikov's fever, and Ivan Ilich's alienation translate the violent outburst of a state of mind that determined the contours of modern life. As a sign of the modern experience of the religion's denial, the Russian nihilism also constituted an element of appropriation of religious vocabulary. According to Florovsky (1972), "unbelief itself is a religious phenomenon and a religious option in the direction of ultimate denial; it is a kind of inverted religion." (FLOROVSKY, 1972, p. 14). Dostoevsky's entire work offers us a peculiar interpretation, and a sophisticated historical insight into the relation between nihilism and religion. In his famous letter to Apollon Maykov, in December 1868, Dostoevsky interpreted the 1860s as a period of "spiritual development," "the last ten years in our spiritual development," (DOSTOÏEVSKI, 2000, p. 409) and identified in his realism the road to the interpretation of the events of those days. As Susan McReynolds (2002) argued, specifically in Dostoevsky's *Winter Notes*, during that period the emergence of a religious vocabulary was witnessed. Furthermore, the evolution of a religious tone in his art must be interpreted in the light of his understanding of the

European nihilism and of the consequences of this phenomenon in the Russian way of thinking. The religious repulsive approach towards London's capitalism and the need for a "spiritual resistance" in order "not to bow down before the fact and not to deify Baal [...]." (DOSTOEVSKY, 1988, p. 37) is the evidence of the constitution of a religious grammar that would soon become the sign of the resistance to nihilism. Dostoevsky's psychological interpretation of the revolutionary and socialist movement of the young radicals showed how the fusion of nihilism and religion enabled a kind of asceticism that shaped the character of a generation extended from Chernyshevsky to Bolshevism (SUDÁRIO-CABRAL, 2019). As Florovsky acknowledged, "Dostoevsky was undoubtedly correct when he identified the major theme of his time as religious" (FLOROVSKY, 1972, p. 14).

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