

VARIETIES OF UNBELIEF IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIA

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THE PROBLEM of God occupies a central, if not all-pervading, influence on the writings and lives of most of the well-known figures of nineteenth-century Russia. Indeed, the position or stance before God of such men as Bakunin, Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, Dostoevsky, Herzen, and Tolstoy, to name only a few of the familiar "big men" of Russia's troubled past, graphically, often dramatically, portrays and presages the social, political, and religious disintegration of Russian society.

This brief essay sketches the varieties of unbelief in nineteenth-century Russia through the ideas and writings of nine provocative thinkers. The first triad consists of the "senior Westernizers," Michael Bakunin, Alexander Herzen, and Vissarion Belinsky; the second, of the "nihilists," Nicholas Chernyshevsky, Nicholas Dobrolyubov, and Dimitri Pisarev; the third, of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Vasili Rozanov. An acquaintance, however brief, with these men not only provides background for understanding one of the most fascinating and tension-packed periods of Russian history, but also serves as a helpful inclusion into the entire history of human belief.

MICHAEL BAKUNIN

The colorful, frenzied, and self-contradictory adventurer Bakunin (1814-76) stands out as one of the founders of international anarchism. Harassed by various governments throughout his life for his escapades in revolutionary activities, "his name became a legend, sanctified by his years of lonely and poverty-stricken struggle against overwhelming odds, by his imprisonment, exile, and spectacular escape from Siberia."¹

The eldest of eleven children, Bakunin already in his youth saw himself as a man of action, one destined to dominate others through the force of his own ideas. Resigning after a brief stint in the army in 1835,

¹ Richard Hare, *Portraits of Russian Personalities between Reform and Revolution* (London, 1959) p. 20.

he wrote his father that he was renouncing a career in the civil service to study philosophy. The "father-son conflict" comes out clearly in his father's reply:

I have received your letter from Moscow, and see that your head is still suffering from the same fever, and that your heart is silent. . . . True philosophy consists not in visionary theories and empty word-spinning, but in carrying out everyday obligations to family and society. You neglect these obligations for the pursuit of chimeras, and chatter about some *internal life* which compensates you for the loss of everything else. . . . But meanwhile you do not know how to escape from yourself. The dejection which weighs upon you is the inevitable result of injured self-respect, an idle life, and an uneasy conscience. . . . One way is still open for you to prove that your heart is not quite dead. . . . Efface the past by your obedience, and rather believe your blind—call it what you will!²

Adamant, Bakunin borrowed money from his friends and finally departed for Berlin in 1840, only to move on to Paris and Brussels during the same decade. As Hare puts it so well, "Bakunin's departure from Berlin marked the starting point of his long career as the mendicant monk of a non-existent revolutionary Church, and a reckless conspirator who aspired to lead an international rebel army."³ For his activities in the revolution in Europe of 1848 he was imprisoned, extradited by the Austrian government, and finally returned to Russia, where he was chained to the wall of a cell in the notorious Peter and Paul fortress. When he "confessed" to his own wrongdoings in a long document intended for Czar Nicholas, his sentence was reduced to banishment in Siberia. In 1861 he escaped and returned to Europe by way of Japan, the Pacific, America, and the Atlantic. Once again he resumed his role as instigator of conspiracies, strikes, and uprisings. In later years his feuds and controversies with Marx led to the dissolution of the First International.

In the final analysis it is Bakunin the man, martyr, and sometime charlatan—not Bakunin the philosopher or scientific thinker—who stands out in the annals of history. As Professor Pyziur observes, Bakunin dealt more readily with negations, and of all his attacks he "devoted a disproportionately large part of his reasoning to religious, or rather, to atheistic themes. But in spite of this plethora, there is relatively little which has any value other than that of satisfying

² E. H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (London, 1937) p. 29. ³ Hare, *Portraits*, p. 26.

curiosity."⁴ His own ideas stem largely from those professed by Comte, Feuerbach, Proudhon, and Strauss. He singles out Strauss' *Life of Jesus* as having given him "strong and general excitement" in his confession to Czar Nicholas.

Berdyaeff catches the significant note of Bakunin's unbelief when he says that "his atheism gives the impression not of a rejection of the ideas of God as untrue and harmful, but of a fight against God."⁵ Bakunin's so-called ontological demonstration is probably one of his most pertinent statements on his own unbelief, his antitheism: "God exists; hence man is a slave. Man is intelligent, just, free; hence God does not exist."⁶ Or, to put it more precisely, "If God exists, man is a slave; but man can and must be free, therefore God does not exist."⁷ According to Bakunin, once man accepts the existence of God, he at once admits his own abdication of human reason and justice; for such belief necessarily implies the end of human liberty, culminating in theoretical and practical slavery. Even if God does exist, Bakunin says, "There is only one way in which he might serve the cause of freedom: by ceasing to exist. If God really exists, one must dispose of him."⁸

Bakunin's vehement denunciation of God is based on his concept of authority as practiced in society. According to him, "Every earthly or human authority is supposed to stem directly from the spiritual or the divine. . . . God, or rather the idea of God, is, therefore, the sanctification and the spiritual and moral cause of all slavery in the world. The state is only the younger brother of the church."⁹ Consequently, the masses are conceived as being organized and exploited under the cloak of the divinity by the hierarchical structure of both church and state:

For with God come the different degrees of divine inspiration; humanity is divided into men highly inspired, less inspired, uninspired. All are equally insignificant before God, it is true, but, compared with each other, some are greater than others;

⁴ Eugene Pyziur, *The Doctrine of Anarchism of Michael A. Bakunin* (Milwaukee, 1955) p. 50.

⁵ Nicolas Berdyaeff, *The Origin of Russian Communism* (London, 1948) p. 68.

⁶ G. P. Maximoff (ed.), *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism* (Glencoe, 1953) p. 118.

⁷ Pyziur, *Doctrine*, p. 51.

⁸ Eugeni Lampert, *Studies in Rebellion* (New York, 1957) p. 136.

⁹ Pyziur, *Doctrine*, p. 51.

not only in fact—which would be of no consequence, because inequality in fact is lost in the collectivity when it cannot cling to some legal fiction or institution—but by divine right of inspiration, which immediately establishes a fixed, constant, petrifying inequality. The highly inspired *must* be listened to and obeyed by the less inspired, and the less inspired by the uninspired. Thus we have the principle of authority well established, and with it the two fundamental institutions of slavery: Church and State. . . .¹⁰

Any body of doctrine, then, that attempts to foster this “slavery” of man is to be repudiated, and theology, the discipline supposedly supporting this type of thinking, becomes “the science of the divine lie.”¹¹

Fear, according to Bakunin, instinctive fear, gave birth to religion, and this basic concept must be understood before religion can be eradicated from the minds of the majority of men. Men go to church out of fear, Bakunin says; they go “in order to stupefy themselves, to forget their misery, to see themselves in their imagination, for a few minutes at least, free and happy, as happy as others, the well-to-do people.”¹² Given a human existence, he says, men will stop believing, cease going to church, and at the same time dispense with their disdain for their own earthly existence. For Bakunin, real human existence means the end of the Church and the state. “The abolition of the Church and of the State must be the fundamental and necessary condition of the real emancipation of society.”¹³ All that smacks of dogma, doctrine, or authority is condemned by Bakunin in the name of liberty and humanity. Anything that speaks of a hierarchy of power or authority detracts and degrades man. “To proclaim as divine all that is grand, just, noble and beautiful in humanity is tacitly to admit that humanity of itself would have been unable to produce it—that is, that, abandoned to itself, its own nature is miserable, iniquitous, base, and ugly. Thus we come back to the essence of all religion—in other words, to the disparagement of humanity for the greater glory of divinity.”¹⁴ With these conceptions of God and religion, Bakunin’s moral imperatives inevitably led to an aggressive, belligerent attitude to all things divine.

¹⁰ Edie, Scanlan, Zeldin, and Kline (eds.), *Russian Philosophy* 1 (Chicago, 1965) 418. (Hereafter cited under Edie alone.)

¹¹ Pyziur, *Doctrine*, p. 45.

¹² Maximoff, *Political Philosophy*, p. 120.

¹³ Edie, *Russian Philosophy* 1, 412 (“The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State”).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 416 (“God and the State”).

ALEXANDER HERZEN

Alexander Herzen (1812-70), the true founder of Populism, was the illegitimate son of Ivan A. Yakovlev and went by the name of Herzen or "child of the heart" instead of his father's name. Graduating from the University of Moscow, like Bakunin he disappointed his father's wishes, in this case by declining the opportunities of a military career to study philosophy. Arrested for supposedly antigovernment activities in 1834, he was sent to jail in Moscow and later exiled. During this time he served as a government clerk in Perm, Vyatka, and finally in Vladimir, where he married the illegitimate daughter of one of his uncles.

Transferred to St. Petersburg, he met Belinsky and began to publish his own ideas on the necessity of political action. For a second time he was exiled, this time to Novgorod, only to be allowed to return to Moscow and continue his literary activities under the watchful eye of the police. Incensed, however, at the injustices he had suffered and witnessed first hand, he resolved to leave Russia. He found the opportunity fortuitously in 1847, after his father had died and left him a huge sum of money. Herzen then left Russia for good.

Besides his many articles and pamphlets, one of Herzen's most important literary pieces was his novel *Who Is to Blame?* under the pen name of Iskander, which he used for the rest of his life. When he settled in London in the early 1850's, he began the journal *The Bell*, in which he directed his revolutionary followers in Russia. By this time, however, his ideas of revolution had mellowed due to the failures in Europe, where the revolutions had in effect destroyed themselves. Never happily adjusted in his role as an *émigré* wandering through France, Italy, and England, Herzen wrote an explanation from Paris in 1849 to his friends as to why he could not return to Russia:

An insurmountable repugnance and a strong inner voice, a prophetic voice, forbids me from crossing the borders of Russia, particularly now when the monarchy, exasperated and frightened by all that is going on in Europe, redoubles its fury in suppressing every intellectual movement, and brutally curtains off sixty million people from mankind liberating itself, barring out with its black, iron hand, covered with Polish blood, the last ray of light faintly illuminating a small number of them. No, my friends, I cannot cross the boundary of this kingdom of darkness, arbitrariness, silent torpor, secret murders, gagged torture. I shall wait until the

power, weary with fruitless efforts and enfeebled by the resistance it has provoked, recognizes *something* in the Russian individual worthy of respect.¹⁵

At the birth of his son in 1839, Herzen still indicated his belief in God by writing that "God entrusts this tiny creature to me, and I shall direct it towards God."¹⁶ But as Zenkovsky points out, a year later Herzen felt quite otherwise. Though Herzen passed through the changing experiences of various philosophies of unbelief, he still apparently had some respect and reverence for the New Testament. In *My Past and Thoughts* Herzen says: "I do not remember that I ever took the New Testament into my hands with cool feeling—and this stayed with me throughout my life; at all ages, in various circumstances I returned to a reading of the New Testament, and each time it brought peace and mildness into my heart."¹⁷

Like many of his fellow intellectuals, Herzen became well acquainted and was deeply influenced by the philosophers and social thinkers of the West. He ran through the familiar gamut of Hegel, Comte, Vogt, Feuerbach, Proudhon, Saint-Simon, and other French Utopian Socialists. These were his spiritual leaders. According to Masaryk, Vogt was responsible for Herzen's position on materialism, while Comte played an important role in Herzen's identifying Catholicism with Christianity, and Feuerbach "brought enfranchisement from mysticism and mythology."¹⁸ Belinsky played the role of John the Baptist by bringing Herzen a copy of *The Essence of Christianity* while in exile at Novgorod.

Though Herzen viewed mythology, the Church, and religion all from one and the same viewpoint, and in spite of the fact that he was an advocate of materialism and atheism, it would be more accurate, as both Berdyaev and Lampert point out, to say that he was a "humanist sceptic," since he followed "more in the sceptical vein of eighteenth-century Voltairism."¹⁹ In contrast to Bakunin, Herzen's "materialism and atheism were not a religion."²⁰

¹⁵ Warren B. Walsh, *Readings in Russian History* 2 (Syracuse, 1963) 319.

¹⁶ V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy* 1 (London, 1953) 284.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

¹⁸ Thomas Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia* 1 (London, 1955) 340.

¹⁹ Edie, *Russian Philosophy* 1, 277.

²⁰ Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea* (London, 1947) p. 61.

For Herzen, Christianity was a fruit that never ripened, the followers of Christ never became Christlike, at least not in sufficient numbers, and pagan customs eventually got to them; too many barbarian aspects rubbed off onto them. To Herzen's way of understanding, "Christianity has remained a pious hope. Now, on the eve of death, as in the first century, it comforts itself with heaven, paradise; it would be lost without heaven. To instill the idea of a new life is an incomparably harder task in our age. We have no heaven, no 'God's abode.' Our abode is a human one and has to find its fulfilment on the soil on which everything real exists, on the earth."²¹

Herzen, like Bakunin, has some strands of the God-man, master-slave relationships in mind. He asks: "What did the first Christians preach and what did the mob understand? The mob understood all that was unintelligible, all that was absurd and mystical; all that was clear and simple was beyond their grasp; the mob accepted everything that put chains on the conscience, nothing that liberated human beings."²²

Making reference to the lack of Christlike concern in those who purported to be the representatives of Christ in Russian society of his own day, Herzen implies that these groups have, practically speaking, abdicated their function in history by betraying the people's trust and respect:

Apart from the Tsar, only the clergy are capable of having any moral influence on Orthodox Russia. The higher clergy are the sole representatives of ancient Russia within the administration. The clergy have never shaved off their beards, and through this very fact have remained on the side of the people. The people have complete faith in anything they are told by a monk. However, the monks and the higher clergy, for all their talk about being dedicated to matters not of this world, are almost entirely indifferent to the people. The village priest has lost all influence on account of his greed, his drunkenness, and his close association with the police.²³

Though Herzen struggled with the problem of God and religion, he concluded that both were an illusion that obfuscated and put a damper on all human progress and freedom.

²¹ Alexander Herzen, *From the Other Shore and The Russian People and Socialism* (Cleveland, 1963) p. 89 ("Vixerunt!").

²² Herzen, *From the Other Shore*, p. 113 ("Consolatio").

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 181 ("An Open Letter to Jules Michelet").

VISSARION BELINSKY

As we move into the 1840's, the new proponents for "the liberation of the people" changed in some of their principal characteristics. Whereas the leaders of political and social reform of the first three decades came largely from the landowning aristocracy, the men of the forties more often came from plebeian stock, from the *raznochintsy*, the sons of priests, merchants, and freed serfs. The acknowledged voice of this heretofore uninfluential section of society was V. Belinsky (1811-48) or "Vissarion the Furious," as he was dubbed.

Belinsky's grandfather was a priest; his father, according to Hare, "was a drunken provincial doctor who envied and hated his son's intellectual gifts and missed no opportunity to bully and humiliate him in every way. His mother appears to have been an irritable, empty-headed woman, indifferent to her son's fate, but permanently soured by her husband's failure to rise higher in the social life."²⁴ Vissarion escaped the intolerable situation in his home and community, only later to be expelled from the gymnasium in Penza for truancy and again after three years at the University of Moscow for allegedly "poor capacities and no application." It seems, however, that this was only a pretext for the school authorities to discharge the unwanted rebel who was advocating freedom from the strictures of Russian society.

Although he was overburdened with crippling illnesses and an overly intense writing schedule, Belinsky became the brilliant literary critic of his day through his well-known reviews and articles. His judgment had much to do with the success or failure of the novelists and poets of his era. *The Telescope*, *Moscow Observer*, *Annals of the Fatherland*, and *The Contemporary* were the literary vehicles in which he became the literary guide of his time.

Belinsky, like his own intellectual contemporaries, was influenced by the philosophies of Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Saint-Simon. Like Herzen he became an "anthropologist," and passionately struck out at the inhumanity and injustice of his own day. His keen sensitivity to the excessive suffering of his fellow man, the classical problem of evil, drove the idea of God out of his world view. "My God

²⁴ Richard Hare, *Pioneers of Russian Social Thought* (London, 1951) p. 39.

is negation! In history," Belinsky said, "my heroes are the disrupters of the old—Luther, Voltaire, the Encyclopaedists, the terrorists, Byron (*Cain*), and others. Intelligence now stands higher with me than reason, and that is why I now prefer the blasphemies of Voltaire to the authority of religion, society, anything or anyone."²⁵

Two accounts, one by Herzen, the other by Turgenev, illustrate the poignancy of Belinsky's indignant protest against the lack of straightforwardness and intellectual honesty. Herzen recalls that on one day in

Passion Week he went to dine with a writer and Lenten dishes were served. 'Is it long,' he asked, 'since you have grown so devout?' 'We eat Lenten fare,' answered the writer, 'simply for the sake of the servants.' '*For the sake of the servants?*' said Belinsky, and he turned pale. 'For the sake of the servants?' he repeated and rose. 'Where are your servants? I'll tell them that they are deceived, any open vice is better and more *humane* than this contempt for the weak and uneducated, this hypocrisy in support of ignorance. And do you imagine that you are free people? You are to be bracketed with all the tsars and priests and slave-owners. Good-bye, I don't eat Lenten fare for the edification of others, I have no *servants!*'²⁶

Turgenev describes the time when a heated controversy was reaching its climactic peak and someone interrupted to ask if they should not have something to eat. Belinsky shouted back: "We have not yet decided the question of the existence of God and you want to eat."²⁷

The best account, however, which gives a clear insight into the character of Belinsky and his attitude toward the Orthodox Church, his anti-eclesiastical spirit, is his famous "Letter to Gogol." Herzen describes it as "a piece of genius," and it was clandestinely circulated all over Russia. A major charge brought against Dostoevsky when he was arrested in 1849 was that he had read the letter during a session of the Petrashevsky Circle.

The letter originated from Europe, where Belinsky was attempting to find a cure for his illnesses, and was a reply to Gogol's *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*. Since it is a highly significant literary work, it is quoted at length here:

Therefore you failed to realize that Russia sees her salvation not in mysticism, not asceticism, not pietism, but in the successes of civilization, enlightenment and hu-

²⁵ Edie, *Russian Philosophy* 1, 310-11 ("Letters to V. P. Botkin").

²⁶ Walsh, *Readings* 2, 326 ("Vissarion Grigoreyevich Belinsky").

²⁷ Berdyaev, *Russian Idea*, p. 39.

manity. What she needs is not sermons (she has heard enough of them!) or prayers (she has repeated them too often!), but the awakening in the people of a sense of their human dignity lost for so many centuries amid the dirt and refuse; she needs rights and laws conforming not with the preaching of the church but with common sense and justice, and their strictest possible observance. . . . And at such a time a great writer, whose beautifully artistic and deeply truthful works have so powerfully contributed towards Russia's awareness of herself, enabling her as they did to take a look at herself as though in a mirror—comes out with a book in which he teaches the barbarian landowner in the name of Christ and Church to make still more. . . . And you would expect me not to become indignant? . . . Why, if you had made an attempt on my life I could not have hated you more than I do for these disgraceful lines. . . . That you base such teaching on the Orthodox Church I can understand: it has always served as the prop of the knout and the servant of despotism; but why have you mixed Christ up in this? What in common have you found between Him and any church, least of all the Orthodox Church? He was the first to bring to people the teaching of freedom, equality and brotherhood and set the seal of truth to that teaching by martyrdom. And this teaching was men's *salvation* only until it became organized in the Church and took the principle of Orthodoxy for its foundation. The Church, on the other hand, was a hierarchy, consequently a champion of inequality, a flatterer of authority, an enemy and persecutor of brotherhood among men—and so it has remained to this day. But the meaning of Christ's message has been revealed by the philosophical movement of the preceding century. And that is why a man like Voltaire who stamped out the fires of fanaticism and ignorance in Europe by ridicule, is, of course, more the son of Christ, flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, than all your priests, bishops, metropolitans and patriarchs—Eastern or Western. . . . Does not the priest in Russia represent for all Russians the embodiment of gluttony, avarice, servility and shamelessness?²⁸

THE NIHILISTS

Three new men, Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, and Pisarev, typified and announced the beginning of a new era in Russian history during the 1860's. They proclaimed the birth of "new men," the nihilists. One of the most controverted literary works of that decade was Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1861), a novel which proposed to delineate the character of the nihilist along with his goals in life and his means to fulfilment. Though Turgenev was a close friend of both Belinsky and Herzen without ever becoming a radical himself, he was attacked on one side by the nihilists for what they considered his "caricaturization" of themselves, and on the other side by the con-

²⁸ Walsh, *Readings* 2, 335-37.

servatives for painting a too sympathetic picture of these members of the new breed. Actually, Turgenev related that his chief protagonist derived his basic characteristics from a young provincial doctor the author had met and whom he had seen as a new type of man arriving on the Russian scene.

Bazarov, the tragic hero of the novel, is the grandson of a deacon and son of a poor country doctor who epitomizes the "new man" of the sixties in that he sees nature, the whole world, not as a temple but as a workshop. Because *Fathers and Sons* sets the tempo of the times, breathes the aroma of things to come in prerevolutionary Russia, two brief passages are cited here, one indicating the central driving force of the nihilist, the other depicting his attitude towards anything metaphysical, transcendent, or religious:

I've already told you, uncle, that we don't recognize any authorities, Arkady broke in.

We act by virtue of what we recognize as useful, Bazarov added. At the present time the most useful thing is negation,—we deny

Everything?

Everything.

What? not only art, poetry. . . but even horrible to utter. . .

Everything—Bazarov repeated with indescribable composure.

Pavel Petrovitch stared at him. He had not expected this, and Arkady even blushed with satisfaction.

Allow me, though, said Nikolay Petrovitch. You deny everything, or, to put it more precisely, you destroy everything. . . But you must build also.

That is not our business. . . First it is necessary to clear the way.²⁹

Near the novel's end, when the young Bazarov's life is unexpectedly cut short, Turgenev describes the parents' call for the priest and the scene at Bazarov's deathbed:

When they anointed him, when the holy oil touched his breast, one eye opened, and, it seemed, at the sight of the priest in vestments, the smoking incense, the candle before the ikon, something like a shudder of terror passed over the death-stricken face.³⁰

The word "nihilism" had many connotations in mid-century Russia, and it evoked diverse reactions in society. For some it meant anarchy

²⁹ I. S. Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons* (Cambridge, 1955) pp. 46-47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

and the destruction of the established order. For others it represented the loss of shackles binding the populace for centuries. Slonim succinctly describes nihilism's social repercussions: "Horrified mothers and fathers saw girls cut their hair, smoke cigarettes and—the sign of utter perdition—treat males as equals, while boys wore boots and Russian blouses, grew long whiskers, talked loudly without mincing their words and spoke of religion as 'a lot of trash.'" ⁸¹

NICHOLAS CHERNYSHEVSKY

With the sudden death of Belinsky, and since both Bakunin and Herzen had emigrated, the nihilists became the principal fomenters of discussion and action throughout Russia. As an organized force, however, their influence as a movement was comparatively short-lived, not extending beyond the sixties. The avowed leader of this new movement—more by the example of his life than by his writings—was Nicholas Chernyshevsky. His life and works assumed an added importance also because both of his followers, Dobrolyubov and Pisarev, passed from the scene during the heyday of nihilism.

Chernyshevsky (1828–89) came from a generation of priests, his father being a highly respected cleric in Saratov, where Nicholas was born. He discontinued his own seminary program in 1846, preferring instead to study at the University of Saint Petersburg. During his stay there Chernyshevsky pored through the writings of the German idealist philosophers and the English economists, as well as those of Blanc, Fourier, Proudhon, and Feuerbach.

From his youth until around 1848 Chernyshevsky was a "religious man," but during the late forties his faith began to waver. In 1848 he wrote in his diary about the expectance of a new religion: "My heart is agitated and my soul trembles at the thought—I wish to preserve the old one. . . . I do not believe that there will be a new one, and I should be very, very sorry to part company with Jesus Christ, Who is so kind, so dear a person, and one Who loves mankind so much."⁸² Doubt further entrenched itself in the succeeding year, when he read Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. In July, 1849, he wrote: "I myself do not know whether I believe in the existence of a personal God, or

⁸¹ Marc Slonim, *An Outline of Russian Literature* (New York, 1959) p. 82.

⁸² Zenkovsky, *A History* 1, 327.

whether I accept Him as do the pantheists, Hegel or, better, Feuerbach."³³

Again in the early part of 1850 he wrote: "If my repudiation was more courageous, I would become a follower of Feuerbach."³⁴ His hesitancy overcome in the same year, Feuerbach paved the way for Chernyshevsky's materialism, atheism, and socialism. As is shown by his own biography, however, he did not abandon all of his religious education and formation. And as Lampert points out, "His own way of life had the self-dedication and singleness of mind and purpose normally reserved for religion."³⁵

Chernyshevsky's major literary output spans between 1853, when he made his debut, and 1863, when his most important work, the novel *What Is to Be Done?*, was published while he was in prison. In 1854 he began writing for *The Contemporary* and continued this project until his arrest in 1862. Though all his extant works were passed by the censors, he was imprisoned for his part in leading the nihilist movement, and except for about the four last months of his life or for about twenty-five years he was in penal institutions or exile.

What Is to Be Done? was Chernyshevsky's reply to the characterization of the ineffectual Bazarov in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. In this novel Chernyshevsky attempts to describe a "new society" of "new men" that is to come into being. This work and an essay, "The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy," forge the philosophical, social, and ethical foundations of his nihilism and materialism. Chernyshevsky rejects all dualism in man; in his view man is the center of his own being, the source of all unity without any outside spiritual or divisive principles.

Philosophy sees in him [man] what medicine, physiology, and chemistry see. These sciences prove that no dualism is evident in man, and philosophy adds that if man possessed another nature, in addition to his real nature, this other nature would surely reveal itself in some way; but since it does not, since everything that takes place and manifests itself in man originates solely from his real nature, he cannot have another nature.³⁶

Science was the intellectual discipline par excellence for Chernyshevsky as well as the other nihilists, because they felt it most ade-

³³ Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution* (New York, 1960) p. 135.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Eugeni Lampert, *Sons against Fathers* (Oxford, 1965) p. 166.

³⁶ Edie, *Russian Philosophy* 2, 29.

quately explained man as he was, and because science served man best. Man, in their view, is naturally good and has unlimited capacities for development on his own. This is the underlying motif of *What Is to Be Done?* Though often vague, Chernyshevsky's work laid the foundation for further development and explication in the later revolutionaries of the twentieth century.

NICHOLAS DOBROLYUBOV

Like Chernyshevsky, Nicholas Dobrolyubov (1836–61) came from an ecclesiastical family, and his father was a well-respected priest in Nizhny Novgorod. Nicholas himself was a devout but unpopular seminarian until he left these studies at the age of seventeen to attend the Pedagogical Institute in Saint Petersburg. Apparently his personality never jelled, and he always remained socially maladjusted. His infatuation with numberless women indicates an unsteady search for a place in Russian society. As Lampert describes it:

The passions and indignities of love were part of the most poignant and somber moments in Dobrolyubov's life. He was continuously in love all his life, with one woman after another, but there are no signs that his loves were much more than obsessive hallucinations known to himself alone: when disclosed they drove every woman to flight. Dobrolyubov was uncommonly ugly and sexually unattractive. . . . The later objects of his love cannot be enumerated: they included actresses, wives of his best friends, Chernyshevsky's sister-in-law (Anyuta Vasilieva), Parisian *can can* girls, and Italians from Messina (one of whom he intended to marry). Eventually he got himself involved with prostitutes.³⁷

Dobrolyubov's acquaintance with the ideas of Bruno Bauer, Strauss, Proudhon, Rousseau, Belinsky, and Feuerbach led to the abandonment of his faith. The basic reason for his crisis of faith was, according to Berdyaev, the low spiritual level of Orthodoxy in Russia and the apparent contradiction between the existence of God and the unjust suffering witnessed in his own society.

A disciple of Chernyshevsky, he joined the staff of *The Contemporary* in 1856 and gained a reputation for himself there until his death five years later. Of his essays, "What Is Oblomovitis?" was one of the more significant. In this essay he strikes out at the protagonist of Goncharov's novel, *Oblomov*, for his laziness, his vacillation, lack of will

³⁷ Lampert, *Sons against Fathers*, p. 232.

power, and supposedly social superiority. In Dobrolyubov's view, these were the diseases which cursed the upper classes of Russia.

DIMITRI PISAREV

Dimitri Pisarev (1840–68), the most outstanding exponent of nihilism, was, like Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov, a deeply religious individual in his youth. And like Dobrolyubov, his influence was keenly felt shortly after he had passed his teens; both men had their lives cut short while they were in their twenties. After entering the University of Saint Petersburg in 1856, he joined a group of "religious mystics" who took a vow of perpetual celibacy. Later he had to discontinue his studies because of a breakdown. After two attempts on his own life during a four-month stay at a mental institution, he escaped by jumping out of a window.

With the death of Dobrolyubov in 1861 and the arrest of Chernyshevsky in 1862, Pisarev became the voice of the radical element throughout Russia. His words struck home and echoed the sentiments of his contemporaries. Pisarev expressed the destructive tones of nihilism in September, 1861, when he wrote: "What can be smashed should be smashed. What withstands the blow is fit to survive. What flies into pieces is rubbish. In any case, strike out right and left; no harm can come of it."⁸⁸ In a similar vein he lashed out at the repressive measures of the government: "What is dead and rotten must of itself fall into the grave. All we still have to do is to give a last push and cover their stinking corpses with dirt."⁸⁹ For these attacks Pisarev was incarcerated in Peter and Paul fortress for four and a half years. He was, however, allowed to continue his writing. Though freed in 1866, his career came to an end two years later by drowning in the Baltic Sea.

The talented writer's own position or stance for an empirical theory of knowledge appears in the opening lines of his "Plato's Idealism" (an article appearing in 1861), where he speaks of the "colossal mistakes" Plato made in his *Republic*. Basically, Pisarev says that Plato erred because of his "deliberate contempt of the testimony of experience, and from an overweening desire, common in powerful minds, to

⁸⁸ Edie, *Russian Philosophy* 2, 65.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 2, 62.

extract the truth from the depths of one's own creative spirit instead of examining and studying it in particular phenomena."⁴⁰

"Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism," another essay of 1861, pushes his philosophical stance further, to materialism:

When I see an object, I need no dialectical proofs of its existence: *manifestness is the best guarantee of reality*. When I am told of an object which I do not see and can never see or perceive with my senses, I say and I believe that it does not exist for me. *Impossibility of evident manifestation excludes any reality of existence*.

Such are the canons of materialism, and philosophers of all ages and nations would have saved much time and effort, and in many cases would have spared their zealous admirers fruitless efforts to understand the non-existent, if in their investigations they had not stepped beyond the sphere of objects which are open to immediate observation.⁴¹

To cure the evils of his own day, Pisarev directs his followers to the type of "new man" presented earlier by Chernyshevsky in his novel *What Is to Be Done?* For wherever Rakhmetov appears, the main character of the novel and prototype of the new man, he spreads "bright ideas around" and arouses "living hopes." Rakhmetov is the personification of love, work, and intelligence which develops out of Rakhmetov's dedication to science:

There is in mankind only one evil—ignorance; for this evil there is only one cure—science; but this medicine must be taken not in homeopathic doses but by the bucket and the barrelful. A weak dose of it only increases the sufferings of the diseased organism. A strong dose will bring radical recovery.⁴²

LEO TOLSTOY

Prolific master of fiction, religious thinker, and advocate of non-violent social protest—Mahatma Gandhi being his most famous disciple—Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) will long occupy a prominent place on the lists of world literary figures. Raised by a grandmother and several aunts after the early death of both parents, Count Tolstoy grew up in the aristocratic surroundings of Yasnaya Polyana (Clear Glades) near Tula, a hundred miles south of Moscow. Later he studied at the University of Kazan for several years, but left without obtaining

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 2, 66 ("Plato's Idealism").

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 2, 72 ("Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism").

⁴² *Ibid.* 2, 94 ("The Realists").

a degree. In 1851 he entered the army and was sent to the Caucasus, where he began his literary career. Later he took part in defending besieged Sevastopol. Leaving the service in 1856, he traveled in Europe, returned to his estate, married in 1862, and continued what would become a long and eventful literary career.

Commentators usually divide the writings of Tolstoy into two convenient periods: works written before 1878 and after; for it was around Tolstoy's fiftieth year that he was perhaps most seriously disturbed with religious questions, with his inability to find a real meaning to his own life. In fact, he was so strongly tempted to put an end to his life that he disposed of a cord in his room and avoided hunting trips to remove the possible occasions of such temptations.

Tolstoy tells of his "crisis of faith" in *My Confession*, which he wrote in 1879. From this date till his death, he devoted his free time almost exclusively to the explication of his new religious ideas. Though many of these formulations never appeared in any systematic way in his previous works, nevertheless there are passages here and there which always underlay and presage this subsequent development. "The intellectual content of Tolstoy's post-conversion outlook was in many ways a response to earlier influences and a crystallization of former attitudes."⁴³

In his *Confession* Tolstoy traces his problems with faith and his inability to reconcile reason and revelation in the Russian Orthodox Church, a position which eventually resulted in his excommunication on Feb. 22, 1901.

I was christened and educated in the Orthodox Christian Faith; I was taught it in my childhood, and in my boyhood and youth. Nevertheless, when, at eighteen years of age, I left the university in the second year, I had discarded all belief in anything I had been taught.

To judge by what I can now remember, I never had a serious belief; I merely trusted in what my elders made their profession of faith, but even this trust was very precarious.⁴⁴

Tolstoy's own insatiable desire for personal perfection, and his inability to live up to his own, sometimes peculiar, standards, contributed to his difficulty in finding a real meaning to human existence,

⁴³ *Ibid.* 2, 210.

⁴⁴ Stanley R. Hopper (ed.), *Lift Up Your Eyes* (New York, 1960) p. 35.

a persuasive reason to go on living. In his confession, though perhaps a bit exaggerated, he summarizes his bout with sin:

I put men to death in war, I fought duels to slay others, I lost at cards, wasted my substance wrung from the sweat of peasants, punished the latter cruelly, rioted with loose women, and deceived men. Lying, robbery, adultery of all kinds, drunkenness, violence, murder. . . . There was not one crime which I did not commit, and yet I was not the less considered by my equals a comparatively moral man.⁴⁵

He found little spiritual consolation in his difficulties with believers of his own class; in fact, this factor became a stumbling block to the Russian Orthodox Church:

I was not so much revolted by the unnecessary and unreasonable doctrines which they mingled with the Christian truths always so dear to me, as by the fact that their lives were like my own, the only difference being that they did not live according to the principles which they professed. I was clearly conscious that they deceived themselves, and that for them, as for myself, there was no other meaning to life than to live while they lived, and take each for himself all that his hands could lay hold on.⁴⁶

Repelled by the contradiction inherent in the belief of his own class, Tolstoy turned to the *Pensées* of Pascal and also read the writings of Soloviev. When these failed to bolster his anxious state, he began to visit the famous monasteries and churches, discussing and seeking faith from the monks and ascetics. He mingled with the unlettered peasants, hoping to find the secret of life in their wisdom. For a while he seemed to find himself and even began to attend services. But this did not last long, for the peasants' simple faith, mixed with superstition, could not satisfy his rational curiosity. Upon returning from church one day, Tolstoy finally "admitted that he could stand it no longer. The peasants chatting unconcernedly on everyday affairs at the most solemn moments of the service proved to him that their relation to religion was one of complete unconsciousness."⁴⁷

The reason, according to Tolstoy, why superstition existed, why there was so much halfhearted faith, why there were so many nonbelievers, was that nobody really believed the dogmas of the Orthodox Church. And the reason for this very lack of belief was that there was

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁴⁷ Ernest J. Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy* 1 (New York, 1960) 371.

really no reason or foundation for such beliefs. What appalled Tolstoy was the fact that, while teaching conflicting doctrines, each major religion laid a claim to being the one and only true religion. "Clergymen of all the different religions, the best representatives of them, without exception, all told me of their belief that they alone were right and all others wrong, and that all they could do for those who were in error was to pray for them."⁴⁸

For Tolstoy, the true religion was not to be found in any one church of particular creeds, rituals, or sacraments, but in the gospel preached by Jesus Christ. In his view, all churches had distorted the real message and meaning of Christ:

It would seem, therefore, to have been impossible to so distort Christianity as to destroy the consciousness of the equality of all men. But the human mind is ingenious, and it invented, perhaps unconsciously, or half consciously, a new method or *truc*, as the French say, to render the Gospel warning and the clear declaration of the equality of men ineffectual. This 'dodge' consisted in attributing infallibility not only to certain words but also to a certain body of men called The Church, which has the right to transmit this infallibility to other men elected by it. A little addition to the Gospel was also invented,—that Christ when leaving for heaven transmitted to certain men the exclusive right not only of teaching others the divine truth (according to the letter of the Gospel, he transmitted also at the same time the power, not generally used, of being invulnerable to serpents, poisons, and fire), but also of making men saved or unsaved, and, above all, of transmitting this right to other men. And as soon as the idea of the Church was firmly established, then all the Gospel warning for preventing the distortion of the religion became ineffectual. Reason was termed the source of error, and the Gospel was interpreted not as common sense demands, but as those who composed the Church desired.⁴⁹

As Tolstoy's reflections accumulated, writings which all but washed away the traditional teachings of Christianity in their entirety, and with his publishing of the novel *Resurrection* which attacked the liturgy, especially belief in the reality of transubstantiation, the Orthodox Church excommunicated him. In the edict Tolstoy was referred to as "a new false teacher" who was "seduced by intellectual pride." By this time he had rejected all the teachings of the Orthodox Church on the Trinity, the virginity of Mary, all the sacraments, especially

⁴⁸ Hopper, *Lift Up Your Eyes*, p. 102.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 279 ("What Is Religion and What Is Its Essence?").

the Eucharist, and immortality. Jesus, though possibly the greatest teacher in the world, was not, he said, divine:

I regard Jesus as the same kind of man we all are, and I believe it to be the greatest sacrilege and an evident proof of heathenism, to regard him as God. To consider Jesus as God is to renounce God. Jesus I regard as man, but his teaching I regard as Divine, in so far as it expresses Divine truths. I know no higher teaching. It has given me life, and I try as far as I can to follow it. About the birth of Jesus I know nothing, nor do I need to know.⁵⁰

Tolstoy's view of the kingdom of God was limited to the here-and-now tangible world of everyday life. Even God Himself was not "out there" someplace, but in the heart of man. "To live in God's sight does not mean to live in the sight of some God in heaven, but it means to evoke the God who is within you and live in His sight."⁵¹ Though Tolstoy accepted Kant's position that man cannot prove the existence of God, he affirmed His existence. This God, like the other religious concepts of Tolstoy, was opposed to the traditional ideas of God. For his part, "God is that unlimited Whole, of which man acknowledges himself to be a limited part. Only God truly exists. Man is a manifestation of Him in matter, space, and time. The more the manifestation of God in man (life) unites with the manifestations (lives) of other beings, the more He exists."⁵²

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

Of few lives can it be said with more assurance that they were God-haunted or that God's presence invaded their own identity with more tangible force. Around 'the question of the existence of God,' Dostoevsky's novels elaborated their special vision and their dialectic. They raise it now by affirmation and now by denial. The problem of God was the constant impulse behind Dostoevsky's apocalyptic and ultra-nationalist theories of history; it made moral discriminations of the utmost insight a necessary art; it gave the activities of intellect their pivot and tradition.⁵³

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-81), like Tolstoy, was troubled in his life with both the problem of God and the problem of sex. His "spiritual crisis," however, was nothing as radical as Tolstoy's. And through his novels, most notably *Crime and Punishment*, *The Brothers Karamazov*,

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 401 ("On Reason, Faith and Prayer").

⁵¹ Leon Stilman (ed.), *Last Diaries* (New York, 1960) p. 208. ⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁵³ George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky* (New York, 1959) p. 288.

and *The Possessed* (*The Devils*), he recognized the necessity and centrality of the existence of God and the acceptance of redemptive suffering; these were the twin pillars of human, Christian living. These two ideas invade the major works of Dostoevsky. His characters clash with one another, believer and nonbeliever, providing the drama surrounding man's struggle to reach his own destiny. In this brief sketch it can suffice to point out that Dostoevsky not only portrayed but experienced the turbulent yet often calculated existence of the nonbeliever. And perhaps more than any other novelist of the past century, he pointed to the possibilities of solving the problem of God.

Dostoevsky lived a full life, sixty fantastic, tragic-ridden years. After a somewhat joyless youth, he attended the School of Military Engineers in Saint Petersburg, where a fellow student reported that he "always held himself aloof and never took part in his comrades' amusements." Later he became involved in activities deemed reactionary by the czarist authorities, was arrested, given a bogus death sentence, and made the long trek to Siberia. He spent the years 1850-58 in Eastern Russia, in Omsk. For four years he was a prisoner, all more or less recaptured in *The House of the Dead*, and four more years as a prisoner-soldier. As a result of these experiences his health was ruined and he suffered from severe attacks of epilepsy for the rest of his life.

Upon returning to western Russia, Dostoevsky resumed his brilliant literary career. At one point, around December, 1868, he was thinking about writing a work on atheism. He wrote to a friend that he was considering "a huge novel, to be called *Atheism* (for God's sake between ourselves), but before undertaking it I must read a whole library of atheists, catholics, and orthodox believers."⁵⁴ Though this work as such never became a reality, atheists leap from the pages of Dostoevsky's major novels: Kirillov, Raskolnikov, Stavrogin, and Svidrigailov, to name only a few.

Dostoevsky's value to our sketch in this regard, then, comes not from his own personal life (for his life was often as much a contradiction to his own beliefs as Tolstoy's was), but from his drama-packed portrayal of the various types of nonbelief. As Karl Pflieger has put it, we miss Dostoevsky in our century, for "Even today there are no

⁵⁴ Ernest J. Simmons, *Dostoevsky* (New York, 1962) p. 227.

writers to depict the crisis of modern humanism with Dostoevsky's razor-like keenness and explosion of creative power."⁵⁵

VASILII ROZANOV

Like Tolstoy, Vasili Rozanov (1856–1919) was a critic of Christianity and Russian culture. Largely unknown in the West in comparison with the other eight men previously mentioned because of his unique, sometimes bizarre and unmentionable views on Christianity and sex, he does have a definite place in depicting another variety of unbelief in Russian culture. Though some of his work was suppressed by the censors during his life, he died in the good graces of the Orthodox Church.

Rozanov's father died when Vasili was young, and his early days were so loveless that he became a very lonely child. His home life was so deplorable—"throughout our house I can't remember anyone ever smiling"—that it was no exaggeration on his part to mention "that his only reaction to the death of his mother was the realization that now he could smoke openly."⁵⁶ In 1881 he received his degree from the University of Moscow in the Departments of History and Philology. Then for thirteen years he taught in secondary schools in the provinces.

Rozanov was deeply influenced, almost fascinated, by the writings and life of Dostoevsky. Though he never met the famous author, he married Appollinaria Suslova, a mistress of Dostoevsky at one time, supposedly to establish a link between the two. The marriage was a "living hell" for six years, and when she refused to grant him a divorce, Rozanov lived with his common-law wife, Varvara Rudneva.

The Apocalypse of Our Times, *Fallen Leaves*, and *Solitaria* are the three works that made Rozanov's mark in literary circles. Though he was recognized for his talents by his contemporaries, he was considered "psychologically unstable." In the *Apocalypse* Rozanov castigates Christianity and glorifies sex. As for the former,

Everybody has suddenly forgotten Christianity, in a moment—the muzhiks, the soldiers—because it is of *no help*, because it has suppressed neither war nor famine. It just keeps on singing and singing. Like a light chanteuse. 'We have heard you, we have heard. And we have had enough.'

⁵⁵ Karl Pflieger, *Wrestlers with Christ* (New York, 1936) p. 15.

⁵⁶ Edie, *Russian Philosophy* 2, 281.

But it is more horrible than one thinks. It is not the human heart which has corrupted Christianity; it is Christianity which has corrupted the human heart. That is what the roaring of the *Apocalypse* means.⁵⁷

In *Fallen Leaves* Rozanov explains his partiality, in terms of sex, for the Old Testament spirit, to man's fleshy existence. "Christianity has manifested and revealed to the world the inward content of sterility, just as Judaism and the Old Testament have revealed that of fecundity."⁵⁸ In another passage from the same work Rozanov once again contrasts what he sees as the opposed orientation of the Old and New Testament, while at the same time indicating his own neurotic tendencies, fixation on sex.

In *sex is power, sex is power*. And Jews are united with that power, Christians are *separated* from it. That is why Jews gain on Christians.

Here the *struggle is in the seed*, and not on the surface—and at such a depth that the head feels giddy. The further divorce of Christianity from sex will have as its consequence the increase of the triumphs of Jewry. That is why I so 'opportunistly' began preaching sex. Christianity must even, to a certain extent, become phallic (children, divorce, i.e., putting the family in order and thickening its substratum, increasing the number of families).⁵⁹

Rozanov, the man who claimed that "the atheist is a sexless being," received little sympathy from his wife and children in regard to his preoccupation with the question of sex. His daughter's suicide may indicate that there were other problems in the Rozanov family. Indeed, as Poggioli has pointed out, "contradiction is the very staple of Rozanov's thought."⁶⁰ Rozanov's works suggest the dark figure of Rasputin, both men in their own way symbolizing the decomposition of Russian society in the first decades of twentieth-century Russia.

A BRIEF REFLECTION

The more closely any period of history is studied, the more clearly does it appear that the mistakes and troubles of an age are due to a false spirit, an unhappy fashion in thought or emotion, a tendency in the human mind to be overwhelmed by the phenomena of the time, and to accept those phenomena as the guide to conduct and judgment, instead of checking and criticising them by a reasoned standard of its own.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 2, 287.

⁵⁸ V. V. Rozanov, *Fallen Leaves* (London, n.d.) p. 146.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

⁶⁰ Renato Poggioli, *Rozanov* (London, 1962) p. 61.

⁶¹ John & Barbara Hammond, *The Town Labourer* (London, 1917) p. vii.

In our essay we have briefly sketched or at least suggested the major varieties of unbelief in nineteenth-century Russia. The adherents of unbelief proclaimed the death of God, consciously or unconsciously, in the name of freedom, intelligibility, personal dignity, and progress. While these four general areas or categories may be singled out as the overt or professedly justifying reasons for unbelief, they only suggest the real cause of the denial of God. The problem has roots at a much deeper level.

The problem of evil is far and away the stumbling block confronting the attempt to provide an adequate explanation, to give a rational analysis, of the Russian ferment, of the absence and silence of God in men's minds and hearts. The frantic, often hopeless search for the meaning of life is made evident by the speed with which the Russian intellectuals raced through and discarded so many other men's ideas, the race which ran through the entire gamut of the English, French, and German philosophical schools.

What had man done with his freedom, his intelligence, his desire to build a better world? Perhaps Mani (216-74) was correct? It was useless to struggle against a world that was *de facto* unjust, immoral, and inhuman. How could rational man sustain a serious belief in a good and merciful God, the God of providence and order in the universe?

In conjunction with the problem of evil, Feuerbach's influence was decisive. He had perhaps as much universal appeal to all the Russian intellectuals as any other thinker of the West. And it seemed to many that Feuerbach had the fitting propaedeutic to a new creation, to the birth of new men, in his analysis of God and religion. For "religion is but the expression of man's highest nature, withdrawn from man, become alienated from him and transferred to the transcendental region of another world. Religion has impoverished and despoiled man; the poor man has a rich God."⁶²

The propaedeutic of Feuerbach, moreover, led its adherents where they wanted to go: it heightened the awareness of the radical divorce between men's newborn theories and everyday life, intensified the intellectuals' alienation in Russian society, and led to revolution. The death of God became the propaedeutic to the death of man. The re-

⁶² Berdyaev, *Origin of Russian Communism*, p. 159.

frain from Loustalot's journal in 1789 is of particular significance here, for it became the conscious or unconscious principles of the new breed:

The great appear great in our eyes
 Only because we kneel.
 Let us rise!⁶³

Nihilism, materialism, and atheism became the seedbeds for revolution. The old pessimism gave birth to the blind leap into the optimism of the future, a future that obliterated *all* connections with the past. The breath of fresh air from the West, the inspiration from the other shores, developed into an uncontrollable fury. As Vasili Rozanov acknowledged, "We are dying like clowns . . . because we can respect ourselves no longer, we are committing suicide."⁶⁴

As Barbara Ward has put it so well, "Religion is not abolished by the 'abolition' of God; the religion of Caesar takes its place. And since, for a few men, the need to worship is satisfied in *hubris*, in the worship of the self, the multitudes who look for a god can nearly always be certain of finding a willing candidate."⁶⁵ Berdyaev concurs: "Man is a religious animal and when he denies the true living God he makes himself false gods, images, and idols, and worships them."⁶⁶

When God dies, man takes His place and makes a mess of things. This is one of the most emphatic truths coming from another strand of the Russian experience, from the "God-haunted" Dostoevsky. "He made one profoundly important social truth clear: man cannot organize the world for himself without God; without God he can only organize the world *against man*. Exclusive humanism is inhuman humanism."⁶⁷

"Man is a mystery," wrote the young Dostoevsky. "This mystery must be solved, and even if you pass your entire life solving it, do not say you have wasted your time. I occupy myself with this mystery, since I want to be a man."⁶⁸ That Dostoevsky understood the "dark side" of man, no one can deny, for the personification of evil leaps out

⁶³ K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Holy Family* (Moscow, 1956) p. 111.

⁶⁴ Hare, *Portraits*, p. 293.

⁶⁵ Barbara Ward, *Faith and Freedom* (Garden City, N.Y., 1962) p. 266.

⁶⁶ Berdyaev, *Origin of Russian Communism*, p. 160.

⁶⁷ Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (New York, 1963) p. ix.

⁶⁸ Robert Payne, *Dostoevsky* (New York, 1961) p. 399.

at the reader of his novels. And "because of his knowledge of the mystery of evil, Dostoevsky had a profound understanding of the bases of atheism. No one better than he understood that evil and atheism inflicted the same suffering on faith. Because man's conscience cannot bear evil, and because God seems silent and inactive while the mystery of evil is accomplished—for example, in the despairing suicide of the child in *The Possessed*—therein is the source both of a tragic atheism and of a heroic faith: this is the final choice offered in this world to any man worthy of the name."⁶⁹

According to Dostoevsky, evil in the world is the proof of both freedom and God. Without evil, there would be no option or choice for good. If the world were absolutely good, we would have no need of God. The world itself would be God. To combat the evil we face, to help overcome unbelief, Dostoevsky counsels: "There is only one salvation: make yourself responsible for the sins of mankind. The fact is, my friend—and you will recognize the rightness of this as soon as you sincerely make yourself responsible for all and everything—that you are really responsible to everyone for everything."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Etienne Borne, *Atheism* (New York, 1961) p. 153.

⁷⁰ Gisbert Kranz, *Modern Christian Literature* (New York, 1961) p. 160.