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The Dynamic of Belief and Unbelief as Developed in Dostoevsky Crime and Punishment and its Relevance for Contemporary Life

Santiago García Pintos

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**“THE DYNAMIC OF BELIEF AND UNBELIEF AS DEVELOPED IN
DOSTOEVSKY *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT* AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR
CONTEMOPARY LIFE”**

A thesis by

Santiago García Pintos, SJ

presented to

The Faculty of the
Jesuit School of Theology
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Abstract

A laudable piece of writing often generates significant movements within the reader, sometimes even altering one's approach to reality. This thesis is a study of the Russian novel *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. My overall conclusion is that the classic offers a first-hand vision of God's presence in our everyday reality. Through the work Dostoevsky proposes a God who is present to the poor and acts in a special way through them. Even in the most miserable of contexts, God is seen as present and active in the lives of the suffering and the outcast. From this analysis I attempt to demonstrate how such quality literature, such as that exemplified in *Crime and Punishment*, can impact the reader in such a profound way that she or he is moved to alter their approach to God and neighbor. I create, finally, a dialogue between the novel and a concrete reality in a poor area of northern Argentina. The concepts of Mother Earth, Icon, and Silence are engaged to show that these common aspects of mestizo life in northern Argentina can inspire contemporary people to find God in the ordinary. Some Latin American liberation theologians, similarly, such as Gustavo Gutierrez, provide key insights into the role of the poor in salvation history and the invitation to participate in

this redeeming process. This thesis can therefore be characterized as an adaptation of the theological method “See-Judge-Act”, my own rendition here ultimately taking shape as Read-Reflect-Apply.

Prof. Eduardo Fernández, SJ, Director

Date

Introduction

Only what on earth do I want here? Yes, to read!

--Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*

When I was a teenager, I read the novel *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. The first edition of this work was published in 1866, being one of the most transcendental and influential novels in the western society. The novel develops two fundamental ideas: the transgression of moral and social laws, based on the assumption of human freedom, and the subsequent and inevitable submission to those laws. These ideas were unrolled under the guise of a crime and through the guilt that tortures Raskolnikov, the main character.

From that time until now this book has inspired me to investigate many questions about contemporary life, especially questions about rationalism, politics, social responsibility, and more importantly, about the dynamic of belief.¹ I am convinced that a good piece of writing can impact the human heart and move readers to grow and deepen their appreciation of reality. Literature has the power to influence us; it can create, modify, and change concrete reality.

¹ When I say 'contemporary life' I consider the human being under the influence of modernity, technology, and living in big cities. I prefer not to make explicit reference to postmodernity. This philosophical concept is complex and difficult to define. There are different currents of thought about postmodernity, trying to dialogue with them would be an effort that is not necessary for this work. However, I will include in this thesis some authors who develop their reflections on postmodernity. These authors help situate me how I define 'contemporary life.'

Consequently, I plan to approach the dynamic of belief in the novel, attempting to discover some characteristics, problematics, and questions that Dostoevsky posed in the middle of the nineteenth century that continue to face us in our twenty-first century.

In my attempt to approach the reality of belief in Dostoevsky, I will focus, in the first chapter, on *Crime and Punishment*, taking account of some literary devices within the novel. I will refer to other works of the author only as they are necessary for my purpose. In addition, it is important to note that in some parts of the thesis I will do a thorough study of the novel, and in some parts the novel will be an inspiration, or a starting point, to develop a topic.

In this effort in chapter two, in theological terms, I dialogue with the work beginning with incarnation theology, which is the backdrop for Dostoevsky, coming from an Orthodox background, and liberation theology, specifically from Latin America. These two approaches will help me address what I see as the problem of the believer, and the place of suffering, poverty, and marginalization in the process of encounters with God.

Dostoevsky implies that negative experiences associated with our ability to love deeply affect and determine our relationship with God and with the rest of humanity. There are other angles from which we can take this affirmation; a positive experience of love does not necessarily ensure a good relationship with God, but I will illustrate some approaches in which Dostoevsky presents the conflict of God in relation to our personal difficulties and our story. A resulting rational justification against God is a consequence that forces us to abandon our relationship with God and deny our religious dimension. This is the situation-problem that I will address and is unrecognizable in a quick reading

of the novel. This scenario is also quite present in our contemporary society. As an example, we can compare the religious practices of peasant and rural populations, which are still very alive, with the disbelief and religious indifference of the big cities, which is clearly under the influence of modernity.

To show the message that the novel offers to contemporary life, I will include some contemporary authors, especially from the fields of philosophy and anthropology, that will help me create the bridge between what *Crime and Punishment* offers to the reader and some observations that I can verify in today's life.²

I believe that my delving into this work will help to elevate the religious dynamic of the novel and develop an appreciation of the main character's movement (Raskolnikov) from negation, a conviction of the absence of God, through transformation to the possibility of belief, the true message of the author.

In addition, on a practical level I think that it will provide me, again, with more concrete tools to understand some problems in contemporary life, often involved in self-involved and narcissistic dynamics that make a transcendent dialogue impossible.

Finally, in the third chapter, I will examine the novel in the context of a mestizo population living in the northern section of Argentina. This examination will help to shine a light on and reveal what that culture and lifestyle is offering to contemporary life, an example of humanization and closeness to God.

² For example, I include authors such as Byung-Chul Han, Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Nietzsche and Carl Jung.

Dostoevsky presents the city as a system itself.³ I will also say that the forest in Boquerón (the community that I will describe) is a system itself. Starting from the novel and taking drawing on writings to help depict Saint Petersburg as a system, I create a dialogue with Boquerón, trying to show how this system propitiates spaces to recognize the presence of God. In fact, I draw a parallel between the novel and this population.

In this area of the world one can find that many of the situations which Dostoevsky describes in his fiction are lived in the concrete reality of the people. In their lives, they not only experience misery and poverty, but also the incarnational presence of God.

One of the difficulties I encountered is that, other than one, descriptive historiographical study, there are no academic works about Boquerón. Therefore, the challenge is to provide a description of Boquerón which would consequently allow me to create a dialogue with *Crime and Punishment*.

It is necessary to develop a new sensibility, a different way of reading, one in which the most important message is hidden, the process being more important than the conclusion. Because this kind of situation occurs in every-day life, Dostoevsky creates this proper dynamic of making God present and through his description of reality challenges us to find God in our lives. Thus the questions are as follows: according to the novel, what are the characteristics of the contemporary religious human being? What is Dostoevsky saying about contemporary life in terms of our relationship with God? What

³ In this sense Benjamin Saxton observes, “Dostoevsky uses characterization, visual space, and the city of Petersburg itself to create a substructure of religious iconic imagery that is ‘hidden.’” Carol Apollonio, “Dostoevsky’s Religion: Words, Images, and the Seed of Charity,” *Dostoevsky Studies* 13 (2009): 105.

can we say about God acting in our contemporary life? And, finally, based on my analysis of the novel, how is Boquerón a model for contemporary life?

With these questions in mind, I demonstrate that in the difficulties of believing in God there is a distortion of hope and love and that in this difficulty God continues to assist human beings through the principle of incarnation. Dostoevsky expresses this principle as an insistent force of the love of God present in the offering of Christ. Likewise, I will show the importance of the poor and their misery as elements that point out an essential place where incarnation offers us the grace of God and God's communication. The description of the misery, pain and poverty that the author illustrates in the novel, together with some tenets of the theology of liberation, subsequently, offers an approach to the concrete reality of what transpires in the process of finding God. At the same time this description is a way of communicating what God wants to tell us, even when we might not want to hear it.

Chapter 1

We Have Been Hurt in Love, Yet, We Hope

Forgive me, Lord: I have died so little!

--César Vallejo, *The Black Heralds*

Crime and Punishment, the title of the novel, refers to a crime. It means that the first approach at the novel can be a detective one. However, behind this first approach, questions arise in the reader about God in the midst of the drama of poverty, crime, and a modern society that doubts the existence of God.

Therefore, conversion, faith, belief, conscience—are among many the topics that we can find in *Crime and Punishment* around the problematics of God and of the human being before God. Dostoevsky presents these topics clearly, and although much has been written from the inspiration that the author has given us, it is not easy to extract from the novel the notion of what Dostoevsky understands when referring to the experience of faith and the presence of God in this world. As a consequence, I must ask myself, does Dostoevsky have the intention of showing God? If the answer is yes, then what God? What are the problems faced by a human being who approaches God? What is God's dynamic of communication with the person?

I will therefore cite a number of observations that describe the dynamic of belief and unbelief and some characteristics of God throughout the novel, specifically aspects that allow me to answer my question about God and Dostoevsky's ideas about God and God's relationship to human being. For this purpose I will rely on the text itself,

including specific passages and outside commentary on Dostoevsky's approach to the problem of faith.

Without pretending to be exhaustive in this first chapter, I will divide my work into four sections. In the first section, I will describe the relevance of childhood in the dynamic of belief and unbelief in Raskolnikov, the main character. In the second section, I will illustrate how Raskolnikov unconsciously searches the presence of God in his life; he needs God, but he rebels against God. That concrete analysis of this process (I will further call it the Raskolnikov process) will help to make some observations relevant to the problem of faith in contemporary life. In the third section, I will point out the place that reason (in modern terms) plays in the process of trust and distrust in God. Finally, in the fourth section, I will discuss how God communicates with the human being and some characteristics of God according to Dostoevsky.

Is Our Childhood Relevant in Our Relationship with God?

The crime that Raskolnikov commits opens the door for us to approach several dimensions of the human being. There are many factors that allow us to approach the complex reality Dostoevsky describes in *Crime and Punishment*, and I believe that the author points out situations that are true in our twenty-first century.⁴ A very important dimension that is described in the situation of Raskolnikov is his situation as to whether

⁴ Dostoevsky reports the beginning of individualism, the difficulties of the human being to assume pain and contingencies, the distrust of institutions and the apathy of the human being before God. Cassedy discussed this behavior at length and shows connections between several works by Dostoevsky and contemporary life. Taking the example of *Crime and Punishment*, for Cassedy the root is in the 'extraordinary man'. "Raskolnikov's extraordinary man is meant to behave, in obedience to a principle that has nothing to do with good and evil." Steven Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion*, Stanford University Press. (Stanford, 2005), 131. I believe that the extraordinary man disappeared in contemporary life; what remains is the consequence of a human being who behaves without interest in good and evil.

or not he is a believer. As a backdrop, Dostoevsky presents the question of the existence of God and the difficulty of recognizing God as a principle that governs an established order in which the human being is a creature.

From that situation Raskolnikov has developed a concept of life and reality without God. The narrator describes this characteristic at the beginning of the novel as a way for the reader to understand what he will face: “And yet it would seem that his analysis, in the sense of a moral solution of the question, was concluded; his casuistry had the cutting edge of a razor, and he could no longer find any conscious objections in his own mind.”⁵ However, his affirmation is weak, yet from this he acts. “But in the last resort he simply did not believe himself and obstinately, slavishly groped for objections on all sides, as if he were driven by some compulsion.”⁶ One can cite additional references which are simple statements that seem to have no solid foundation, but it is the situation in which Raskolnikov finds himself, and from these thoughts he builds a social theory that supports a principle of self-sufficiency and superiority.

Underlying these statements are the real motivations and reactions of Raskolnikov. If I consider some aspects of his childhood, I discover different facets of his relationship with God that make us suspect that there is an original distortion making him act in a way that is contrary to the affirmation of faith. The first reference appears in the letter that his mother sent to him at the beginning of the novel. At the end of the letter, she describes Raskolnikov’s religious attitudes: “Do you pray to God, Rodia, as you used

⁵ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, Norton Critical Edition. (New York: George Gibian, 1964), 67.

⁶ Ibid.

to do, and do you believe in the mercy of our Creator and Redeemer?”(37). In this statement, we have an indication of a past relationship to God “as you used to do”; in his background, God is not totally absent. He comes from a religious context in which he has grown up and which he has decided to refuse. His mother goes beyond this simple fact, giving us some clues that help us to understand the depth of little Rodia’s relationship with God: “Remember, my dear, how, when you were a child and your father was still alive, you lisped your prayers at my knee, and remember how happy we all were then!” (37). This seems to be the sign of a fruitful beginning in his relationship with God, a child praying in the company of his parents. There is a belief in religion that children should begin to communicate with God as early as possible. This familiarization opens the doors to a life of more natural transcendence and a more fluid communication with God.

However, there is something that hurt Raskolnikov at some point. There is something that caused him to rebel before God. His mother tells us “how we were happy then.” Is this an indication that now they are not happy? Of course we know that they are not longer happy. But what is the reason Raskolnikov despises God? Is it the death of his father, misery, poverty, loneliness, a bad experience in the Church, or alienation in the big city? The real causes are not described in the novel, but I can intuit them from the previous questions. We know that Raskolnikov considers the image of God with which he has grown up is not an answer to his anguish.⁷

Thus, Raskolnikov is immersed in an inverted spiral in relation to his childhood. He is immersed in a dynamic of isolation and denial of what he received when he was a

⁷ Perhaps this experience is present in us all, and a necessity toward mature dynamic of faith. The difficulty is in radically rejecting and disconnecting our life as a process to encounter God.

child. His mother says in her letter: “you are everything to us; all our hope and trust is in you” (36-7). But he does not know who he is and he judges himself, he dehumanizes and forgets his ties to his relatives, “Perhaps I am still misjudging myself... Perhaps I am still a man and not a louse, and I was in too much of a hurry to condemn myself” (403-4). While his mother evokes a happy childhood “when we were happy,” he cannot resist the present and is repulsed by “everything”: “A new and irresistible sensation of boundless, almost physical repulsion for everything round him, an obstinate, hateful, malicious sensation, was growing stronger and stronger with every minute” (105). Finally, this state of general rejection of his origins leads him to deny before God the possibility of communicating and contradicts the scene described by his mother in which he had prayed as a child. ““Oh, Lord, at least let it be over soon!’ He could almost have knelt down and prayed, but he laughed at his own impulse; he must put his trust in himself, not in prayer” (88).

At the same time, and admirably, his mother also says: “I am afraid, in my heart, that you too may have affected by the fashionable modern unbelief. If that is so, I will pray for you” (37). If we read the letter closely, we discover a break in the narrative in that expression. Because Raskolnikov’s mother is a simple woman of simple expressions, this statement of “fashionable modern unbelief” seems out of context. It is more an affirmation of academics who have a wide knowledge of the cultural reality of the moment. This conclusion seems to represent an incursion of Dostoevsky himself trying to show the problem in which Raskolnikov has immersed himself.⁸ His intention seems to

⁸ It is curious that two translations into Spanish propose that “I fear that impiety has infiltrated you” (“*Temo que la impiedad, tan fuerte hoy en el mundo, se haya infiltrado en tu alma*”) (Editorial Porrúa ed. 2008, p. 35) or “that you would have contaminated yourself with that fashionable disease called atheism” (“*Sentiría en el alma que te hubieras contaminado de esa enfermedad de moda que se llama*

be explicit; Raskolnikov's mother shows the tension of "mercy of our Creator" vs. rationalism (modernity). According to Cicovacki,

Dostoevsky is convinced that Raskolnikov's alienation is not the primordial state of affairs, but rather a result of the modernity way of life.... We are not born strangers but become alienated in the course of our artificially lived lives.... Raskolnikov operates on two levels: one full of contempt for life, the other quite capable of generosity and compassion. We recognize an intrinsic incongruity between the 'theoretical' Raskolnikov and the 'spontaneous' Raskolnikov, between the transgression and the person who commits it.⁹

Accepting modernity as proof of adulthood is an excuse; Raskolnikov has to recover his childhood (in the sense that Jesus says to enter the Kingdom of God): "remember when you were a child... you lisped your prayers". This observation is an invitation to pay attention to the connections among self-sufficiency, narcissism, and the refusal of God; modernity understood as an absolute and totalizing system makes Raskolnikov lose the capacity for wonder, open mindedness and hope.

Early in the story before committing his crime (Book 1, Chapter 5) Raskolnikov's dream is again an important event that shows us the disconnection between his childhood with God and his negation of faith. Moreover, the dream points out the possibility of the restoration of his faith. In this dream Raskolnikov is seven years old and he is going to the church and cemetery with his father to visit the grave of his grandmother and his baby brother. But on the road to the church they find a violent

ateísmo)" ("Alianza, 1985, p. 38). The original version in Russian says: "Боюсь я, в сердце своем, не посетило ли тебя новейшее модное безверие? Если так, то я за тебя молюсь." Original version seems to be more near to "fashionable disbelief", a unique phrase to Dostoevsky.

⁹ Predrag Cicovacki, *Dostoevsky and the Affirmation of Life* (Routledge, 2017), 79.

incident which occurs outside a tavern. They see a very weak horse carrying a heavy load unable to move. A crowd of drunken peasants, angered by the situation, attacks the horse with sticks and whips, killing him. Raskolnikov, indignant, tries to stop them, but his father prevents him. Finally, “he put his arms round his father.... He tried to draw a breath to cry out and woke” (56).

Antony Johae suggests that “Raskolnikov’s history is mirrored in his dream: a return to the Christian faith (symbolized by his walk to the church and cemetery with his father) is interrupted by the murder of the pawnbroker (represented in the dream by the killing of the mare outside the tavern).”¹⁰ As one learns in psychology, especially in psychoanalysis, dreams are representations of wishes, fears and aspirations that are unconscious. These representations are manifested in the dream through symbols.¹¹ In Raskolnikov’s dream, the church and the murder of the horse seem to be two contrasting sides within him. There is in him a struggle between his background faith and the possibility to transgress. A religious reminiscence and his desire to a return to his faith is enunciated: “He loved this church with its ancient icons, most of them without frames, and the old priest with his trembling head” (52). Johae also mentions the importance of the crosses and the little icon that Sonya exchanges with one of the women Raskolnikov kills. These real objects have the function of generating an archetypal figure with the

¹⁰ Antony Johae, “Towards an Iconography of Dostoevsky’s ‘Crime and Punishment,’” in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, Cambridge University Press. (Cambridge, 2001), 173.

¹¹ I can mention, as a general inspiration, “Dream of Irma’s Injection”. Inspired in this dream, Freud developed his theory about the connection between dreams and desires. In this dream he points out that all of the displacements shift blame for Irma’s suffering to other people; they represent the dreamer’s (Freud’s) wish that he is not to blame for Irma’s condition. This the dream expresses a wish-fulfillment by shunting off responsibility and “guilt” to others and declaring Freud himself “innocent”. This is a dream of exculpation. We can find that in “The Interpretation of Dreams.” (Sigmund Freud and James Strachey, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Penguin London, 1973).

experience of God in the Church and the cemetery from his childhood. This symbolic connection is like an archaic calling that invites him to return; the desire is latent in him, but he must make it conscious. This interpretation of the dream is, according to Johae, a sort of prediction or prophecy. “It is also highly significant in terms of the protagonist’s individual history.... Images may have been embedded in the text as a symbolic prefiguration of Raskolnikov’s ultimate return to the faith of his childhood” (174). On the other hand, as we said, Raskolnikov is passing the limits of God’s denial, and he feels the urge to test that transgression. In the dream, as I said, the peasants represent Raskolnikov himself; they forget all piety. The owner of the animal says several times “She’s mine, isn’t she?” (54) as a statement of arbitrary and cruel appropriation of the animal makes us think of a person who does not perceive its limits and does not respect the limits of reality. Raskolnikov is testing his freedom and shows his rebellion against God, a God whom Raskolnikov does not perceive as a loving Creator. Horrified by the sadistic spectacle, the child inside is trying to stop the transgression but cannot. According to Johae these two unconscious powers push Raskolnikov. The process is already underway. “His walk to the church where he used to go with his parents is interrupted by the killing of the old mare... and in so far as there is a paradigmatic similarity between them, the dream does appear to anticipate the sequence of events that are recorded in Raskolnikov’s history.”¹²

¹² Johae, “Towards an Iconography of Dostoevsky’s ‘Crime and Punishment,’” 183.

Raskolnikov's Searching of God

Returning to my earlier thoughts, I said that Raskolnikov has been hurt in his faith and this wound remains open as a characteristic of contemporary life. When I say that he has been hurt in the faith (we have been hurt in the faith), I do not mean that he has been tempted or that he has been examined by God and has not passed the test. When I refer to this situation of manifesting affliction before the possibility of considering ourselves as believers, I point out that something external to ourselves and something external to God has broken the communication with the Divine. Cicovacki states that “Raskolnikov’s murder – and crime in general – is the result of an unhealthy environment. Terrible external circumstances with life in a metropolis.”¹³ Cicovacki points out to the city as one of the factors that affects Raskolnikov, but I think we could speculate that there are other elements that have a devastating influence on him. It is not about finding the causes of his crime; such an analysis is reserved for specific situations. The important thing to retain is the externality of the breakdown in faith. One can find this breakdown in many references that the narrator introduces throughout the novel describing reactions of Raskolnikov, driven by something beyond him, something that he cannot describe, but that is present as a mechanism that drives him. I am going to show three different pieces of evidence on that.

First, at the time of confessing the crime to Sonya, Raskolnikov says, “I needed to experience something different, something else was pushing me along” (402). In this situation he is talking about doubts of his humanity, but this “something else” is present in the novel almost as a constant reminder of the emptiness Raskolnikov feels and cannot

¹³ Cicovacki, *Dostoevsky and the Affirmation of Life*, 85.

describe.¹⁴ How do we know that “something else” is the absence of God? Dostoevsky leaves to the reader the interpretation of several expressions, for example, “something else,” with the intention of urging the reader to make a personal effort to interpret.

Second, according to Wil van der Bercken, “*Crime and Punishment* is essentially a Christian novel, it is treated in non-Christian terms.... It is introduced quasi accidentally when Raskolnikov suddenly asks Sonya to read from the little Bible, which he finds in her room.”¹⁵ Raskolnikov is preparing his confession to Sonya, and in the middle of that awkward moment he asks about the text of the resurrection of Lazarus as a way to turn his hope to God, who is latent in him. Once again, the reference to his participation in the church during his childhood surfaces. “Where is that about the rising of Lazarus? Find it for me, Sonya... Read! I want you to!” He insisted: ‘You used to read to Lizaveta!’” (312-13). This passage may be an indication of the possible spiritual resurrection of Raskolnikov, which seems to take place rather ambiguously in the final pages of the novel. Likewise beneath this desire to read the passage of Lazarus hides the pain that Raskolnikov carries from his negative experience of God. Throughout the novel we find many references to Raskolnikov’s fighting against the idea of recognizing the existence or action of God. “‘Perhaps God does not exist’ answered Raskolnikov, with malicious enjoyment. He looked at her and laughed” (308). The question is, if he is not interested in this issue, why does he waste so much time on this? This seems to be a sign

¹⁴ Bullivant reflects that wherever conscience is astir, wherever human being is alive and looking for an answer to life, seeking to be generous, there is God, (...) those people, who believe that they do not believe in God but who unconsciously believe in Him, because the God whose existence they deny is not God but something else”. Stephen Bullivant, “A House Divided Against Itself: Dostoevsky and the Psychology of Unbelief,” *Literature and Theology* 22, no. 1 (2007): 18.

¹⁵ William Peter van den Bercken, *Christian Fiction and Religious Realism in the Novels of Dostoevsky* (London: Anthem Press, 2011), 27.

that something in him has been unresolved about God; he does not feel comfortable when the question about God arises. Indeed, Raskolnikov in his monologues and his dialogues with other characters protects his privacy, protects his wound by speaking superficially. In this dialogue with Sonya he begins to open himself and shares his fears, risking and trusting the pain that afflicts him. It is the opening to a new dialogue dimension. As Lauren Winner points out,

In the topography of Christian prayer, petition may be the space where the self of the person praying is most overt. Thus petition offers the possibility of intimacy: Something close to my real self (or at least, what I perceive my real self to be) is now revealed before God. Of course, God already knows my real self, better than I will ever know it. The intimacy that follows my petitions is made possible not by God's new knowledge of me but by my new availability to God.¹⁶

Third, the fact that Raskolnikov decides to read a passage of the Gospel may be the sign of a more objective search for God rather than from aspects that have hurt him. In other words, Raskolnikov seeks the presence of God in a text, not in concrete situations (events of his personal life, family, liturgy, thoughts), he is seeking God in something that allows him to access God, something different from what he has suffered in his life. "Raskolnikov is spiritually dead, and only a miracle overruling natural, psychological law can save him. It is this knowledge which prompts him to ask Sonya to read him the Raising of Lazarus."¹⁷

¹⁶ Lauren F Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin* (Yale University Press, 2018), 47.

¹⁷ Irina Kirillova, "Dostoevsky's Markings in the Gospel According to St. John," *Dostoevsky and the Christian tradition* (2001): 47.

Finally, the psychosomatic factor is also an indication of the pain produced by the background of doubts about God. The narrator and Raskolnikov himself describe the different physical, emotional, and psychic discomforts that he endures throughout the novel; his soul expresses outwardly that anguish that remains in his unconscious. “Goodness, he’s still asleep!’.... He raised himself with an effort. His head ached; he stood up, took a few steps, and fell back on the sofa again.... ‘Are you ill or what?’” (64). There are many of these kinds of physical references accompanied by an existential-religious problematic that Raskolnikov experiences. These physical manifestations are symbols of a general lack of resolution. And this discomfort not only expresses a difficulty; Raskolnikov has become a slave to this wound of the soul, a wound that he shows through his body and the representation of his room as a tomb of Lazarus. “You’ve been in my wretched little hole, of course, you’ve seen it.... But do you know, Sonya, that low ceiling and cramped rooms crush the heart and the spirit?... If Nastasya brought me food, I ate it; if not, I let the day go by without asking, on purpose out of spite!” (400). It is important to note the claim that this psychosomatic and spatial situation described by Raskolnikov affects “the heart and the spirit.” It means there is “something else”, and Raskolnikov realizes that his situation has to do with the life of his soul. In this sense, it is important to say that for Dostoevsky the meaning of “life” is inseparable from “faith.” He extracts his notion from John’s Gospel.¹⁸

¹⁸ As we can see in the study of the Dostoevsky scholar Irina Kirillova, “Dostoevsky’s markings emphasize again and again that belief and life – a ‘living life’ (*zhivaiia zhozn*) and life eternal were inseparable linked. Life was not possible without faith – a conclusion Dostoevsky came to after much travail, through a transcendental belief in life eternal did not come easily to him. These markings testify to the conclusion he *does* eventually come to... This group of markings culminates in the near complete narrative of the Raising of Lazarus – central to both *Crime and Punishment* and Dostoevsky’s personal faith.” Ibid.

From that tomb and with his dejected body Raskolnikov cries out because he has been wounded in his faith. It is a manifestation similar to the one that Edvard Munch illustrates in his painting “The Scream”¹⁹ or Jesus on the cross crying out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk. 15: 34).²⁰

The Trap of Reason in the Process of Finding God

One of the factors that conditions the opening to the religious dimension in Raskolnikov is reason. Using reason to approach reality can be a very important tool. But when we absolutize reason as the only way to understand reality, our point of view is limited, and we fall into a trap. This difficulty is found in several of his internal dialogues in which the reader perceives that reason is enclosing him more and more and is leading to a process of isolation. The narrative presents this clearly: “I have been tormenting myself.... A new and irresistible sensation of boundless, almost physical repulsion for everything round him, an obstinate, hatefully, malicious sensation, was growing stronger and stronger with every minute.”²¹

Raskolnikov has developed an ideology,²² which has served to explain reality exclusively through reason. Thus, I can say that he is intoxicated by reason, immersed in

¹⁹ In his diary Edvard Munch, in an entry headed “Nice 22 January 1892”, Munch wrote: “I was walking along the road with two friends – the sun was setting – suddenly the sky turned blood red – I paused, feeling exhausted, and leaned on the fence – there was blood and tongues of fire above the blue-black fjord and the city – my friends walked on, and I stood there trembling with anxiety – and I sensed an infinite scream passing through nature.” Shelley Wood Cordulack and Edvard Munch, *Edvard Munch and the Physiology of Symbolism* (Fairleigh Dickinson Univ Press, 2002), 42.

²⁰ Holy Bible, *The New American Bible* (New Jersey: Catholic Bible Publishers, 1970).

²¹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 105.

²² The ideological development of Raskolnikov is found in his references to the article written that he titled “About Crime”, in some dialogues with other characters and also in the detective plot of Porfiry who tries to unfold, not only the crime of Raskolnikov but the ideology that is behind this act.

internal reflections that limit his life; he takes refuge in reason. This behavior is a consequence of the wound and the paralysis that Raskolnikov suffers, as described in the first section. The anguish that the wound produces is transformed into a behavior, a rational attitude that does not allow him to access his feelings and traumas. As a result, he resorts to reason as refuge from his wounds. In this sense, Cicovacki, explaining the etymological meaning of “Raskolnikov,” observes the division that operates in him from the absolutization of the intellect. “We recognize an intrinsic incongruity between the ‘theoretical’ Raskolnikov and the ‘spontaneous’ Raskolnikov, between the transgression and the person who commits it.”²³

Why this compulsion? How do I explain this behavior? In his disorder, Raskolnikov wants to prove his humanity. “I went along like a wise man, and that is just what brought me to destruction!... I asked myself ‘Am I a louse or a man?’”²⁴ He tries to discover his dignity as a person. Is it dignity deserving love? Is it dignity as a transcendent being? Is it the dignity of the children of God? As a result of the difficulty of accessing his authentic inner self, he takes refuge in reason, providing a structure of argumentation and justification that keeps him “safe.” Reason becomes not a cause but a consequence. Reason is not the cause of his convictions, nor of his difficulties to communicate, nor is reason the cause of his doubting faith. Reason is the consequence of

²³ Cicovacki, *Dostoevsky and the Affirmation of Life*, 79.

²⁴ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 401.

the state in which he has remained; reason is a way of proceeding, it is not a way of being.²⁵

The Russian religious philosopher Vladimir Soloviov points out the risk of reason. In his criticism of French rationalism he reports the need for an interlocutor, for a dialogue to be able to construct thought; extreme rationalism does not construct, does not propose a real communication or an alterity. In addition, Soloviov, a member of Dostoevsky's circle, offers us a thought from a Russian point of view, which brings us closer to what I try to describe with the Raskolnikov process.

Therefore, when reason comes forth against the actuality of life and knowledge with a consciousness of its own supreme right, it finds in life everything strange to itself, dark, impermeable, and cannot do anything with it; for, abstracted from all content, changed into an empty concept, reason naturally cannot have any power over actuality. Thus the self-elevation of human reason, the pride of the mind, at the end inevitably leads to its downfall and abasement.²⁶

At this point Soloviov tries to describe a society according to Christian truth, specifically describing Godmanhood.

²⁵ K. Mochulsky in his study about the novel, points out that the work can be seen as a tragedy divided in five parts and this tragedy shows us Raskolnikov's internal struggle and process against himself. "A new level of consciousness has been reached: the idea is beginning to take on substance. Nonetheless the hero cannot reformulate his entire being in one stroke. Reason embraces the new 'idea', but 'nature' continues to live within the framework of the old moral order. Little by little the abstract dream seizes possession of his consciousness. 'Nature' struggles with it in desperation, is horrified by it, strives not to believe in it, pretends that it does not know it. In order to weaken its resistance, the author introduces the motif of sickness...Thus by his very example Raskolnikov proves the reasonableness of his theory." Konstantin Mochulsky, "The Five Acts of Crime and Punishment," *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*. Trans. Minihan, Michael A. Princeton (1967), 247.

²⁶ Soloviov, Vladimir, *Lectures on Godmanhood*, trans. Peter Peter Zouboff (London: Dennis Dobson LTD, 1944), 203.

Beyond this specific proposal, and returning to what I extract from Raskolnikov, Soloviov points out in his criticism of rationalism that an excess of reason does not allow the divinity to act in society, in the person. In other words, there are three elements in humanity that determines humanity, the divine, the material, and that which binds both together, the reason. The lower elements are reason and the material that operates to act with the third element, the divinity. Raskolnikov is trapped by the spiral of self-elevation that reason offers him, a clear example of his reduced capacities, and thus he severs himself from other dimensions of his humanity and the possibility of opening up to a dialogue with God.

As a way to reinforce the postulate of reason as an element that intoxicates Raskolnikov, we must consider the course of the “double” that Dostoevsky intentionally creates for his main characters in most of his novels. Sonya has her double in the person of Dunya, and Raskolnikov has one of his doubles in Svidrigaylov, who represents the darkest side of Raskolnikov, a sort of incarnation of the extraordinary man and the worst that he represents. On the other hand, Raskolnikov has his double in Razumikhin. But in this case he represents the good in Raskolnikov. Razumikhin is a generous soul, with social concerns and sensitivity to the pain and misery of people. But like Raskolnikov, he is caught in the trap of reason. In fact his name means reason.

Razumikhin, in his desire to build a more just and more fraternal society, is an absolutely autonomous and free subject but disconnected from the environment and the context; as an inspiration for modernity, he as the subject is the only one responsible and

the only owner of his actions and the consequences.²⁷ In the discussion that Razumikhin and Porfiry hold about crimes and socialism, Razumikhin illustrates his utopia but, he shows his reveals the weakness of his argument. “They explain everything by the ‘deleterious influence of the environment’ --and that’s all.... The living soul demands life, the living soul will not submit to mechanism.”²⁸ Porfiry perceives the weakness of Razumikhin’s argument, and he points it out: “No, brother, you are mistaken: ‘environment’ means a great deal in crime, I assure you.”²⁹ Razumikhin remains mired in his position, locked in his inability to recognize that reality is broader and more complex than what he describes. “I know that, but tell me this: a man of forty assaults a ten-years-old girl --was it his environment that made him do it?” ‘Well perhaps it was, strictly speaking,’ remarked Porfiry with astonishing authority; ‘a crime against a little girl may very well be explained by ‘environment’.’³⁰

As I said, Razumikhin has good intentions but cannot escape the trap of reason and cannot avoid ideological arguments that prevent him from seeing humanity as a larger and unabated mystery. In connection to the “doubles,” Raskolnikov and Razumikhin must rediscover the Other; they must open their personal perceptions and

²⁷ Here Dostoevsky tries to make a critique of nihilism and socialism through Razumikhin. We can find a reference against nihilism and socialism in his letter to Katkov. “Frauds and foul people there are many among them. But all those high school students, schoolboys of whom I have seen so many, converted to nihilism so purely, so selflessly in the name of honor, truth, and true welfare. They are defenseless against these absurdities and accept them as if they were perfection itself. Sound science of course will eradicate it all... The poor little people are convinced that nihilism gives them that full manifestation of their civic and social reality and freedom.” However, in that scene of the novel, Dostoevsky also shows the reduction that Razumikhin has made of reality.

²⁸ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 245.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 246.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 264.

reflections to the reality that is always bigger than what their minds can comprehend. Cicovacki illustrates this difficulty that operates as a principle of utility that blinds the human being and does not allow him to see the other as a person. “He has to relearn that other people are not extensions of his self, not mere projections of his psyche, but human beings with lives and concerns of their own. The underground man never manages to relate to another human being except through power relationships, and Raskolnikov has to relearn how to establish authentic interactions with other persons.”³¹

The previous quote places us, once again, in the isolation that Dostoevsky presents in the human being enclosed in reason and in the constant relearning that must be done to avoid the risk presented by life in the great cities of modern societies and the forgetfulness of the Other. Mindful of this I must highlight the affirmation in the letter of John: “For whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God, whom he has not seen.” (1Jn: 4, 20) I observe in this affirmation of John’s letter a clear symptom in Raskolnikov: he is completely blind to society and his difficulty in recognizing the Other does not allow him to open his heart to dialogue with God. Razumikhin calls himself an atheist and at this point he is very close to Raskolnikov’s position; there is something in both that keeps them blinded and does not allow them to accept the incomprehensible mystery in the world that overcomes them.

Raskolnikov identifies the trickster of self-absorption caused by the excess of reason; his compulsion to construct his theory of reality slowly moves him away from the objectivity that the reality of others offers him. In the third part of the novel, Raskolnikov

³¹ Cicovacki, *Dostoevsky and the Affirmation of Life*, 78–79.

torments himself for the crime he committed. It is at this moment that he realizes that the rational construction that he built is connected with aspirations and frustrations that are deeper than a simple rational exercise. “The old woman was only a symptom of my illness.... I wanted to overstep all restrictions as quickly as possible.... I killed not a human being but a principle.”³²

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman helps us to understand from a contemporary point of view the statement made by Raskolnikov. Bauman, in his study of what he calls “the liquid modernity,” observes the dynamics of the subject that forgets interaction with other people and develops a life of extreme individualism. He points out that a consequence of ‘solid’ modernity now focuses on the subject as ego.³³ In this sense I can say that contemporary society is a consequence of what Raskolnikov was; maybe we are Raskolnikov but without the pretense of being an *extraordinary man*. “When our dreams and hopes for a better life are concentrated entirely on our own egos, and are reduced to a tinkering with our bodies or souls there are no limits to our ambitions and temptations, and so for the ego to grow, all limitations must go.”³⁴ According to Bauman, we are a society of hunters; we hunt, always and everywhere. In other words, we are convinced of our purpose, and the difficulties we find along our paths are only obstacles that we must overcome; no one can tell us that we are wrong, no one can tell us that the difficulties are insurmountable. We resolve everything from our personal convictions.

³² Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 264.

³³ Bauman calls ‘solid’ modernity the era in which reason is established as a paradigm of society and the industrial revolution begins.

³⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Culture in a Liquid Modern World* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 26.

People search only for urgent and overwhelming occupations which can stop them from thinking solely about themselves, and for that reason they make their goal some attractive object which can charm and seduce them. People wish to escape the need to think of their ‘unhappy condition’: this is why we prefer the hunt to capture; the goal itself would not save us from thinking of death and the miseries distracting us, but hunting does so.³⁵

Raskolnikov lives in this anguish and his unhappiness leads him to impatience and despair. “I do not want to wait for the ‘common weal’. I want to have my own life, or else it is better not to live at all.”³⁶

The consequences of this implication of putting our trust in God are devastating. Our spiritual life and our possibility to generate a dialogue with a God who does not necessarily manifest through categorical language and whose presence involves many dimensions of the human being seem to be far from the suspicion and self-sufficiency that Raskolnikov creates. Thus, by perceiving Raskolnikov’s dynamics and observing our contemporary life, it seems that our private concerns and efforts are reduced mainly to avoiding pain, our uncertainties, and our failures. What place do we give to the unknown God? What capacity do we have to recognize our finitude and to perceive eternity?

Cassedy describes the rupture of Raskolnikov and proposes two possible paths of interpretation. It is important to briefly examine these two interpretations because we can combine both ways to better understand the difficulties that this presents in Raskolnikov’s relationship with God.

³⁵ Ibid., 27–28.

³⁶ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 264.

Raskolnikov has many clashing “voices” to justify his crime; he employs two theories for that. The first is utilitarian, the one we read about in the encounter with the student at the beginning of the novel. “In exchange for one life, hundreds --why, it’s just plain arithmetic!”³⁷ The other theory is the “extraordinary man.” Raskolnikov argues that humanity is divided into a majority of ordinary people and a tiny minority of extraordinary people. Cassedy adds that, the “extraordinary man”, a defensive Raskolnikov disjointedly explains, ‘has the right... that is, not the official right but he himself has the right to permit his conscience to step over...’ certain obstacles, and solely in the case where the fulfillment of his idea (sometimes salutary, maybe, for all humankind) requires it.’³⁸

While Cassedy states that there is an utilitarian language, an “extraordinary man” language, he also observes the language of a pious Christian.³⁹ Everything is mixed in Raskolnikov, and what seems to be an elaborated theory culminates as a total disarticulation.

I certainly see this disarticulation in contemporary life. It is difficult to make a generalization, but what was a rational elaboration and an answer to reality for Raskolnikov, in contemporary life has become an unconscious way of life. In other words, utilitarianism in people’s relationship with God has extended to these days; we are

³⁷ Ibid., 62.

³⁸ Cassedy, *Dostoevsky’s Religion*, 109.

³⁹ “Raskolnikov is also something of self-sacrificing Christian... he impulsively leaves money for the impoverished Marmeladov family, unthinkingly comes to the aid of molested girl, and continually recoils in horror from his own criminal plans. Later he kisses Sonya’s foot, telling her that he is bowing down “to all human suffering”, and then asks her to read the New Testament story of the raising of Lazarus” Ibid., 110.

willing to abandon our relationship with God in pursuit of our concrete and personal interests, forgetting the transcendence and connection of our lives with an “other” who dialogues.

Similarly, I identify the “extraordinary man” in our culture. It is true that the “extraordinary man” as presented by Dostoevsky was real in Europe as personified by people like Hitler, Stalin, and some other authoritarians. In Latin America the “extraordinary man” was present until the decade of the 90s, and in some countries we continue see “extraordinary man” behavior in leaders who claim superiority over the rest of the people.

However, in our contemporary life the pretense of superiority described by Dostoevsky through Raskonnikov has almost disappeared; what remains is a human being only interested in his personal fulfillment, without empathy and without consideration for the rest of the people. But before God our behavior is that of the “extraordinary man.” We feel self-sufficient and think that we have the right not to be determined by any deity, we distrust spiritual manifestations, and we suspect transcendent affirmations because they distract from our personal schemes. Therefore, we discard the dialogue of what is presented differently, in the name of what is different, creating difficulties for ourselves. Bauman, in reference to contemporary life, presents us with his perception of the root of this difficulty, he writes: “Once upon a time, we blamed our unhappiness on the management of the day - God. We concurred that He ran the business badly. We sacked him and appointed ourselves managers.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Bauman, *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*, 26.

As we can see, the self-sufficiency that infects Raskolnikov has also created consequences for the contemporary human being. But this rupture is not a creation of modernity; the particularity of modernity is the exclusivity of reason as an argument against God (as I saw it is not a cause but a consequence). This break with God that I identify in Raskolnikov has the same dynamics as the rupture of Adam and Eve. The importance of the story of Creation does not lie in its moral message or in the doctrine of sin; for the purposes of this work the most important observation is the dynamic of rupture that is generated between the human being and God.

In the Book of Genesis we find that there exists in the human being a pretense to put oneself in God's place. In Genesis 3: 5 the snake says, "God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods." The human being refuses to be a creature and denies a relationship with God, thus developing the pretense that we have no ties with God. It is to say that humanity does not have limits and does not have an origin. The Lord asks us to maintain the dignity of being children before him. "God walking about in the garden at the breezy time of the day" (Gn 3: 9) is the time when people finish their labor. In the Hebrew context it is the meeting time, the time for sharing life with others.⁴¹

⁴¹ Then "God ask him: Where are you?" (verse 9). The question could mean "I cannot recognize you, something is changed in you". It means that Adam is escaping the presence of God. God does not refuse his communication; it is the human who deforms his relationship with God and the human beings with themselves. Adam and Eve decide to destroy what there is of God in them. Adam cannot tolerate his mistake and feels uncomfortable with himself, "I was naked" (Gn 3:10). "Who told you that you were naked?" (Gn3: 11). It is important to know that the book of Genesis is one of the last in the Old Testament. The allusion to "naked" is accepted as a symbol. According to Hamilton V.P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: NICOT, 1990), 134–150. It has two meanings. First, the human being has nothing in this world (the possession is arrogance). Secondly, the question could mean Why do you say that? Do we have secrets? Is it important? Why do you feel ashamed before my presence?

Similarly, and almost without realizing it, Dostoevsky introduces, in the midst of the chaos in which Raskolnikov finds himself before God, the soft presence of the divinity that approaches the human being at the end of the day. At the background of a sunset, the narrator introduces a presence that goes beyond the concrete events of the novel. Through the image of the sunset Dostoevsky opens us to a contemplative view. Especially striking is the importance that the narrator gives to light in the sunset for this detail awakens peace and repose. For the reader, the sunset, becomes a moment when the drama of the story stops and a small space of synthesis opens, one in which God shows his hidden beauty and goodness. “It was a warm, fresh, bright evening; it had cleared up in the morning. Raskolnikov went to his lodgings; he made haste. He wanted to finish all before sunset.” (496)

The Religion of Love According to Dostoevsky

Taking into account the difficulties observed in the process of faith, does Dostoevsky present us a God who appears to encounter us? What dynamics does the novel offer to a contemporary human to discover the presence of God? The following section will reveal that the novel as a whole shows that God comes to meet humanity through love. This statement is supported by the novel, and by many other of his works.

The God of Dostoevsky infuses into the human heart the teaching that we are in a state of mutual dependence with the rest of humanity; God inhabits this situation with his love. This is manifested especially through the generosity of those who can lend their lives to the service of others and also through the suffering of the innocent.⁴² In

⁴² “Through the suffering of the innocent” does not mean that God provokes suffering, but that it is present in a special way in suffering. From that we recognize the principle of Incarnation, particularly in the Russian context.

contemporary life it is difficult for us to recognize the presence of God as I have presented it. We want a God to solve our personal problems, but we cannot open ourselves to God's invitation that God's evident presence is through love, compassion and, charity. C. G. Jung, talking about the dynamic of faith and holiness, observes the difficulty that the Western person has to open oneself to trusting God and to discover it from His beckoning. "Everything happens apparently outside the sphere of his will, and these happenings are contents of the unconscious. Contemporary man and his science are unable to say anything more than this, for it cannot, by an act of faith, overstep the limits appropriate to his nature."⁴³

In *Crime and Punishment* one recognizes many characteristics of God. Throughout the novel God is a backdrop, observing and sensing. God reveals, remembers, reminds, evokes. God beckons to us. Furthermore, throughout key moments God speaks the language of life that life cannot speak, and much more. These actions of God remind one of Heidegger's description of God in relation to conversion and religious experience in postmodernity, calling God "the last god" in an attempt to disassociate God from the metaphysical and conceptual ideas of God, which enclose the mystery of God. "The last god *essentially occurs* in the intimation, in the intrusion and remaining absent of the advent as well as of the absconding of the gods that essentially occur as having been [*gewesend*] and of their concealed transformation. The last god is not the event itself

⁴³ Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Western Religion*, vol. 11 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 48.

and yet is in need of the event as that to which the one who grounds the 'there belongs.'"⁴⁴

Dostoevsky realizes that there are aspects of God that escape us, characteristics which we cannot access, and that the human being is unable to understand the infinity of God. Therefore, in *Crime and Punishment* God presents himself as what cannot be determined; nevertheless, "there God is." God moves through the event, transforms the human heart when the person opens himself/herself to the indetermination of God. Neither Pulkheria Raskolnikova (Raskolnikov's mother), expressing an experience of God restricted to religious piety and fulfillment, nor Raskolnikov and his pretense of classifying human beings into ordinary and extraordinary men, forgetting that there is a higher principle he cannot encompass and before which he must kneel, can experience God. Both are far from the God that Dostoevsky offers us; both are unable to recognize the advent of God. God brings the "other beginning"; God is "the last," as Heidegger adds. "The last god is not the end; the last god is the other beginning of the immeasurable possibilities of our history. For the sake of this beginning, the previous history must not simply cease but must instead be brought to its end. The transfiguration of its essential basic position has to be carried by us into the transition and the preparation."⁴⁵

From these arguments, I propose some beckonings that answer the question, what does God transmit to human beings, what does God show to us, to what does God invite us?

⁴⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)* (Indiana University Press, 2012), 324.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 326.

I

One find in the novel a constant presence of God, almost imperceptible, a passive principle of God. In this regard Wendy Wiseman recognizes Sophia as an element present in Dostoevsky's novels. According to her, Sophia is one of the keys to understanding the theophany proposed by the author. "Sophia as the World Soul is the passive principle of creation, the embodiment of divinity in materiality, the body of God... she is God's 'other', his object of activity, his eternal expression that, like speech, is his own self-manifestation that brings him out of 'abstraction' and into revelation."⁴⁶ This beckoning is pertinent to contemporary life, especially because the contemporary subject has lost the ability to recognize the environment as a whole that talks and offers its material conditions to help the human being, a sort of backdrop of generosity. I will come back to this idea of Sophia and the earth in chapter three.

On the contrary, Dostoevsky consciously presents God as a God of the earth, in other words, a God who speaks through nature as a mother who protects and at the same time seems to be hidden within the tumult of the city. The clutter and chaos of St. Petersburg is a twofold symbol. It represents the state of society with all of its inequalities, prejudices, and deficits. But it also represents Raskolnikov's delirious, agitated state as he spirals through the novel toward the point of his confession and redemption. He can escape neither the city nor his warped mind. From the very beginning, the narrator describes the heat and "the odor" coming off the city, the crowds, and the disorder, and says they "all contributed to irritate the young man's already

⁴⁶ Wendy Wiseman, "The Sophian Element in the Novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49 (2005): 169.

excited nerves.”⁴⁷ Indeed, it is only when Raskolnikov is forcefully removed from the city to a prison in a small town in Siberia that he is able to regain compassion and balance, an important suggestion of Porfiry: “you need air.”⁴⁸ As a result, God has a presence that reminds humans that everything they receive has been given to them by the Creator; God reminds human beings of their poverty and dependence on Him. With this, one sees the importance of reconciling with the earth in the confession of Raskolnikov’s crime. “He knelt in the middle of the square, bowed to the ground and kissed it with pleasure and joy.”⁴⁹ Likewise, the connection with this God of the earth and nature can be found in sunsets:

Bending over the water, he gazed mechanically at the last pink flush of the sunset, at the row of houses growing dark in the gathering twilight, at one distant attic window on the left bank, flashing as though on fire in the last rays of the setting sun, at the darkening water of the canal, and the water seemed to catch his attention. At last red circles flashed before his eyes, the houses seemed moving, the passers-by, the canal banks, the carriages, all danced before his eyes.⁵⁰

In the sunset the narrator introduces a presence that goes beyond the concrete events of the novel. Through the image of the sunset Dostoevsky opens us to a contemplative look. Especially striking is the importance that the narrator gives to light in the sunset, for this detail awakens peace and repose.⁵¹ For the reader, the sunset becomes a moment when

⁴⁷ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 24.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 441.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 505.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁵¹ George Gibian points out that importance in his article. “Sunshine, light in general, and air are positive values... ‘the room was full of sunshine: the incense rose in clouds; the priest read...’ Sunshine is again associated with beauty, calm, and religion.... The sun is a pleasant for a man in good spiritual health” *Ibid.*, 584.

the drama of the story stops and a small space of synthesis opens, one in which God shows his hidden beauty and goodness. “It was a warm, fresh, bright evening; it had cleared up in the morning. Raskolnikov went to his lodgings; he made haste. He wanted to finish all before sunset.”⁵²

In *Crime and Punishment* God is present accompanying the internal states of the characters, objects, smells, colors, and time. “He woke feeling bilious, peevish, and irritable, and gazed round his little room with loathing.... The yellowish dusty wall-paper peeling off the walls gave it a wretchedly shabby appearance.”⁵³ Here the writer describes Raskolnikov’s unpleasant state upon his first meeting with Marmeladov. The observation I make is that Dostoevsky dedicates time to this to provoke in the reader the feeling that Raskolnikov is inhabited by something, by someone. I recognize this change in the perception of reality in other episodes. It is a combination of a psychological state and the presence of God that is developing in the character; by involving the character and the reader in the situation, God is communicating.

Similarly, it is difficult to measure the perception of God in time through the novel. But if we look at the novel as a whole, we realize that time has different rhythms; chronology is not our compass. There are episodes in the novel that are lengthy and the reader perceives that a long period of time has passed. As an example, the planning of the crime and its execution take place in a little more than one day; however, the reader has the perception of several weeks. On the other hand, the reader may perceive that there is a brief time in which facts and situations seem to pass too quickly. Dostoevsky provokes

⁵² Ibid., 496.

⁵³ Ibid., 25.

these different perceptions according to the intensity and drama of the actions. Therefore, I observe a presence of God moving as invisible and mute through time, as though waiting in those moments of conflict for the human being to assume his weakness. In other words, when Raskolnikov moves away from the process of redemption and acceptance of his crime, time passes more slowly. This is the reader's perception. Although not easy to formulate this concept of the presence of God, St. Augustine has written about this in *Confessions*. “And, therefore, unto the Word co-eternal with You, You at once and for ever say all that You say; and whatever You say shall be made, is made; nor do You make otherwise than by speaking; yet all things are not made both together and everlasting which You make by speaking.”⁵⁴ In Part Four the reader realizes that time moves faster for Raskolnikov and Sonya and slower for Dunya. She is stuck, her kindness does not allow her to take charge of her life; she has not yet felt the offer of freedom that God offers her. Unlike her. Raskolnikov and Sonya has unfolded a dynamic of complicity and commitment in which God is clearly present. “The candle-end had long since burned low in the twisted candlestick, dimly lighting the poverty-stricken room and the murderer and the harlot who had come together so strangely to read the eternal book. Five minutes or more passed.”⁵⁵

II

Some objects have a symbolic meaning that evokes the presence of God. The cross is clearly one. The cross that Sonya gives to Raskolnikov before he goes to the

⁵⁴ Francis Joseph Sheed and Michael P Foley, *Confessions* (Hackett Publishing Company Incorporated, 2006), XI, 7, 9.

⁵⁵ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 315.

police station to confess is an important symbol of redemption for him. Throughout Christendom the cross has symbolized Jesus's sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Raskolnikov denies any feeling of sin or devoutness even after he receives the cross; the cross symbolizes not that he has achieved redemption or even understood what Sonya believes religion can offer him but that he has begun on the path toward recognition of the crime that he has committed. For the reader it is a reminder that evokes the person of Christ in the process of redemption.⁵⁶

III

Taking into account my last statement, God is beckoning us in the dynamics of incarnation in the reader when the author creates situations in which characters depict God through the reading of some sacred text or some text that has a religious connotation. Eric Ziolkowsky takes this affirmation of *incarnation* from the Russian literary scholar and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, and this helps me to introduce my intuition about the call of God in our novel.

The interdependence, the 'interrealisation' of what lies beyond man's experience and the process of incorporating that into his existence.... This creative life is called incarnation (*encarnacion*) which is closely akin to what Bakhtin has in mind when he speaks of the sway that quotations as 'authoritative' and

⁵⁶ On a personal note, in Latin America, while I believe that excessive importance is given to sacred objects as an opportunity to encounter God, I have come to understand that these kinds of amulets represent the message that a person is in process with God. In particular, I remember an indigenous community in Mexico in which women spent a lot of time weaving their clothes with drawings that represented the states of mind they were going through and their messages asking God to transform their lives.

‘internally persuasive’ utterances have upon the ‘ideological becoming of a human being.’⁵⁷

The text has the ability to configure, to mold the reader. Those who read it can look at life through the eyes of literature, and the experience of God can be possible through what the reading conveys. Therefore, one can say that there is a presence of God, always current, in *Crime and Punishment* because Dostoevsky presents a possibility, a dynamism that operates as a backdrop that can transform the reader; the encounter with God can happen through reading. Ziolkowski points that out taking inspiration from Castro. “The traditional themes of literature are not fused with the living experience of those themes; the book then becomes not only a book, but it also becomes the reader who has incorporated its poetic material into his very life.”⁵⁸

In *Crime and Punishment* the gospel is presented as an inspiration; the incarnation becomes explicit. It is through this book that the Word is conveyed to the reader. As we already learned, this inspiration is taken from the passage of the resurrection of Lazarus in which the novel hints at the process of resurrection, hope, and trust in God that the reader following Raskolnikov’s process can initiate. “The incarnate God is present as miracle-worker in the Lazarus story which is read aloud, while the human protagonist, the listener who recalls having read this tale ‘a long time ago’.... When I was at school, seems already to have begun incarnating an incitement he may recall (consciously or unconsciously) from elsewhere in the Gospel of John.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Eric Jozef Ziolkowski, “Reading and Incarnation in Dostoevsky,” *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition* (2001): 161.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

It is at this point that we move beyond what Ziolkowski illustrates. In *Crime and Punishment* the incarnation of the reader is not only through the appropriation of what the gospel presents in the voices of the novel's characters; incarnation as a process of eruption of God in the life of the reader is possible because of what the reader discovers in the characters themselves. In other words, beyond the police plot that we could follow in the novel, we find the intention to provoke an "awakening" in the reader through situations described in *Crime and Punishment* (poverty, injustice) and also to provoke a rejection of some characters (Raskolnikov, and in a certain sense, Svidrigailov) or to provoke identification with other characters (Sonya). This dynamic seeks the transformation of the reader, possibly a mimesis. That is, the reader will follow what he receives as an inspiration and will reject (as a teaching) that which sets one apart from God.

Following this reasoning, incarnation in *Crime and Punishment* is far from the Aristotelian principle of "art is imitation of life" and is closer to the contrary idea.⁶⁰ That is, life imitates art, a statement proposed by Oscar Wilde.⁶¹ Thus Dostoevsky tries to impregnate life, what the reader does, based on what he reads; life imitates art because in art (*Crime and Punishment*) the Word is expressed, and then the Word moves into the street and transforms life.

⁶⁰ It is an Aristotelian aesthetic concept. Aristotle called the imitation of nature as the essential purpose of art. The word derives from the Greek μίμησις (mimesis) and can also be translated as "imitation". This concept is developed in "Poetics" and "Politics" by Aristotle Stephen Halliwell and others, *The Poetics of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary* (UNC Press Books, 1987).

⁶¹ "Paradoxically through it may seem, it is none the less true that life imitates art far more than art imitates life" Oscar Wilde, *Decay of Lying* (Alma Books, 2018).

IV

The beckoning that God shows through the relationship between love and faith are evident in Dostoevsky; God is love and invites us to live in God's love through faith. This statement is supported if we make an approximation to the works of Dostoevsky in relation to their marks and personal notes on the Johannine tradition (Gospel and Letters). Irina Kirillova offers observations that are almost of a statistical nature on Dostoevsky's personal notes on John. This study allows us to discover Dostoevsky's personal convictions and the projections he makes about his works and characters.

There is a direct correlation between the Christological thrust of St John's Gospel, Dostoevsky's lifelong veneration of Christ and the numbers of markings. This is all the more significant in that the image of Christ for Dostoevsky was not stable, clearly defined, unchanging image.... The markings in the Gospel are all the more valuable in that they enable us to check and validate – through their refraction in his writing – the nature and thrust of his spiritual reflection which organizes his fictional universe, his concept of man and of man's relationship with God.⁶²

In the religiosity of Dostoevsky there is a strong presence of the binomial faith-life and God-love. Faith implies a person's life; moreover, faith is life for those who receive it.⁶³ And faith needs life as a component; trust brings hope that we are in the

⁶² Kirillova, "Dostoevsky's Markings in the Gospel According to St. John," 42–44.

⁶³ "Dostoevsky's markings emphasize again and again that belief and life – a 'living life' (*zhivaia zhizn'*) and life eternal were inseparably linked. Life was not possible without faith – a conclusion Dostoevsky came to after much travail, though a transcendental belief in life eternal did not come easily to him. These markings testify to the conclusions he *does* eventually come to (...) In *Crime and Punishment* this promise is refracted in psychological terms which encode its spiritual significance. Raskolnikov is spiritually dead, and only a miracle overruling natural, psychological law can save him. It is this knowledge which prompts him to ask Sonya to read him the Raising of Lazarus." Ibid., 47.

hands of a Being who is Creator and that Creator will provide everything for us. Thus, faith becomes listening, listening to the life that God gives us. At the same time, confessing the existence and presence of God entails the affirmation of love; God is present in the Other.⁶⁴ The face of the Other is a theophany. In other words, the other is sacred.⁶⁵ Kirillova points out that God's relationship with humanity through love is seen in Dostoevsky's study of John and what drives him to underline the figure of a kenotic Christ through some characters. "This leads on very naturally to the last group of markings, those relating to the teaching on love which is so central to Dostoevsky's redemptive vision, which illuminates *Crime and Punishment* through the figure of Sonya and the salvation held out to Raskolnikov."⁶⁶

A major issue here is that Dostoevsky introduces all these categories under the "incarnational mode." It means God is under the dynamics of silence, in serene eruption, as a mode of invitation, as beckoning.⁶⁷ As a result, in Dostoevsky it is clear that his relationship with God is shown through personal notes (John's Gospel and letters);

⁶⁴ It sounds like Levinas pointing out the invitation to recognize the voice that is saying "the Other precisely *reveals* himself in his alterity not in a shock negating the I, but as the primordial phenomenon of gentleness" E Levinas, "Totality and Infinity Duquesne University Press," *Pittsburgh PA* (1969): 150.

⁶⁵ Again, Kirillova points out that Dostoevsky takes the God-love-other relationship in Juan's tradition. Let's quote a fragment of the first letter of John that helps us to understand this in depth. "A new commandment I give you unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." (13:34) According to Kirillova these verses create a theology of love which is behind the Dostoevsky's works.

⁶⁶ Kirillova, "Dostoevsky's Markings in the Gospel According to St. John," 49.

⁶⁷ This means that the emphasis is not only on the uniqueness of the historical Jesus as the unique locus of the incarnation. Incarnation is a mode of communication that God proposes to humanity and that transcends the historical Jesus. David Cunningham picks up this idea and expresses it from his observations in Dostoevsky. "In the East, where the distance between God and humanity has somehow been recognised as more obviously apparent, the language of *theosis* has a very prominent place; and the incarnate Christ is never understood in merely 'historical' terms." David S Cunningham, "The Brothers Karamazov as Trinitarian Theology," *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition* (2001): 146.

however, this is not evident in his works. Why? Because the incarnational principle is like a pedagogy that acts as a medium between God and the reader.⁶⁸ Pyman points that out, “The reader is involved in the author’s perception of his protagonist’s absolute need for Redemption.”⁶⁹ It is necessary to move through the process; “the process, not the solution, is the point: words cannot provide an ultimate answer.”⁷⁰ Only in this way do we open ourselves to the love of God and His trust; we have to do the unraveling process because in opening and working on our being, we also unravel and open our own lives. Thus, we and our circumstances are before God, in front of His proposal of love; in the love of God we discover ourselves and discover others as another ‘I’. We must experience that process. That is God’s beckoning to our contemporary life.⁷¹ These days we care about results, efficiency, and precision, and are far from accepting that the process is more important than the result, that trust is deeper than one’s ideas, and love is stronger than individuality. In this sense, Rowan Williams in his *Tokens of Trust* invites us to open up to the transcendent presence of God: “bad religion is about not trusting God, trying to avoid God even outwitting him.... God is to be trusted as we would trust a

⁶⁸ “Dostoevsky imparts this longing for the experience of repentance as a turning about towards the light of God and a rejoicing in this Earth ‘as in Heaven’. Even when this remains only readiness (Shatov’s ‘I will believe in God’) then ‘readiness is all’” Avril Pyman, “Dostoevsky in the Prism of the Orthodox Semiosphere,” *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition (Cambridge Studies in Russian Literature)* (2001): 111.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Apollonio, “Dostoevsky’s Religion: Words, Images, and the Seed of Charity,” 27.

⁷¹ Cunningham says that “according to Florovsky, Dostoevsky believed that ‘the ultimate source of all social ills is the spiritual disintegration and dissociation of human life, the decay or decrease of brotherhood among men’” Cunningham, “The Brothers Karamazov as Trinitarian Theology,” 150.

loving parent, whose commitment to us is inexhaustible, whose purposes for us are unfailingly generous.”⁷²

Therefore, it is necessary that at the beginning of the Twenty-First-Century we experience the process, sharpen our sensitivity to discover the incarnational pedagogical process (pedagogy of God), in which God is beckoning that we discover God’s love.⁷³

Finally, God offers his love to humanity under the mode of the Trinity. The incarnational principle is not only the incarnation of Christ, or a presence of God that transforms history impersonally. God is Trinity because God is relationship; God is communication and service to the creation. Cunningham, taking the classic affirmation of the Trinity as a relation, points out this evidence in Dostoevsky in the form of an invitation to the modern human being.⁷⁴ “The central point of focus is not individual consciousness, but *subsistent relationality*. According to this perspective, there are no fixed essences, but only fluctuations and displacement; personhood is thus not

⁷² Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (London: Presbyterian Publishing Corp, 2007), 7, 19.

⁷³ When I say ‘pedagogy of the incarnation’ I mean that, besides the fact that the Incarnation is a revelatory presence of God for humanity (and it is a whole category in itself) it involves learning. It means that God proposes a ‘modus operandi’ and through this learning, and through a comprehension and discovery in this way, the human being grows and becomes more human, discovering God in that search. In this sense, we can take an inspiration from the secretary of Ignatius of Loyola who describes, “*Ignatius was following the spirit, he was not running ahead of it. And yet he was being led gently, whither he did not know... Little by little though, the road was opening up before him and he was moving along it, wisely ignorant, with his heart placed very simply in Christ*” (Jerome Nadal, *Dialogi* 17, FN II, 252).

⁷⁴ In reference to the individuality of contemporary life, it is important to note that at this time the subject is conflicted between belonging to a society and remaining in their individuality. According to Simmel, the trap in this postmodern life is in the concept of “fashion”. “Fashion is a particular form of life, which seek to ensure a compromise between a tendency towards social equality and a tendency towards individual separateness.” Georg Simmel, *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 301. In this dilemma between the social and the individual, the subject is deceived and distracted by “fashion” and a communitarian God who invites him to live from trust, seems to the subject as an attack on freedom. Thus the subject prefers to experience absolutely individual forms of spirituality, without the “invasion” of the other.

‘individuality’, but is exhaustively constituted by relations to others.”⁷⁵ Starting from Bakhtin’s statement, there is a ‘radical communality’ in Dostoevsky’s fictions; this feature is more than simply an assertion about the nature of humanity; it is also an assertion about the nature of God. “Indeed, the very term that I have employed to describe Dostoevsky’s alternative to Western individualism – ‘subsistent relationality’ – calls forth the Christian doctrine of God, and the traditional claim that the hypostases of the Trinity are – ‘subsistent relations.’”⁷⁶

As I have said, in Dostoevsky God presents his proposal of love, but God presents it as ‘beckoning’, as if God is passing by. And returning to Heidegger I can say that the Trinitarian God of Dostoevsky is “the last God,”⁷⁷ a God without categories and conditioning. It is only God in his offering from person to person. “Here the twilight or passing is the condition for a new beginning, in which attending to the passing of the last god and attuning oneself to the ground of being goes hand in hand. Humanity and divinity are intimately interrelated, and both are related to being: God overpowers man, and man surpasses god in immediacy.”⁷⁸ It is Trinity who dances herself and who invites the entirety of Creation to dance in communion.

⁷⁵ Cunningham, “The Brothers Karamazov as Trinitarian Theology,” 140.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷⁷ At the beginning of this section I introduced the importance of “last god” as a contribution to understand the presence of God in Dostoevsky. Heidegger’s idea of “last God” fits with Dostoevsky’s theology (if we can talk about theology), but it is necessary to add here a more complete idea about that, because according to my perspective, Trinity in Dostoevsky “is the last of the last” “What is last is what not only needs the longest ante-cedence [Vor-läuferschaft] but what itself is the most profound beginning rather than a cessation, the beginning which reaches out the furthest and catches up to itself with the greatest difficulty. What is last is therefore withdrawn from all calculation and for that reason must be able to bear the burden of the loudest and most repeated misinterpretation. How else could it remain what is surpassing?” Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*, 281.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 292.

In *Crime and Punishment* the references to the Trinity are not explicit. Dostoevsky wants to implicitly present the action of the Trinity and, therefore, does not place the three persons in relationship although there are references to Jesus Christ on several occasions and a few references to God the Father. As an example, I infer in the dialogue between Raskolnikov and Marmeladov that the latter ends his interlocution by invoking “Thy kingdom come.” (21) This invocation can be interpreted as an allusion to the Father.

However, I discovered the Triune God of Christian faith throughout the novel. The Triune is a principle that invites the opening of the human being; it is the wisdom of recognizing that we depend on God and on each other. In this sense I find this principle in the invitation that Sonya makes to Raskolnikov to kneel on the ground and recognize his offense on a cosmic scale. It also refers to Razumikhin in his authentic desire to build a more just and inclusive society and to Porfiry in his search for truth.⁷⁹

The Brothers Karamazov is a novel written after *Crime and Punishment* in which Dostoevsky presents the question of the love of God in a more explicit way. Father Zosima, in his depth and spiritual wisdom, gives us a synthesis of the Trinity’s love for the world and the invitation that the Triune God makes to the human being.

⁷⁹ Cunningham in his work on the Trinity in Dostoevsky proposes the thesis that the three brothers Karamazov represent the Trinity. This also enriches our reflection on what happens in *Crime and Punishment* where the characters also show hidden traits of the Trinity. Let’s see what Cunningham says about it. “Here we asked to consider the rather outlandish claim that the Karamazov family bears the image of God. It is comparatively easy to believe that God might be manifest in one particular, historical, ultimately good human being. But that God might be manifest in the *Karamazov* family, with all its faults and failings, and that we are called to love *them* and bear responsibility for *them*: this is the true scandal of the Trinity, and that which Dostoevsky most thoroughly underscores in his work.” Cunningham, “The Brothers Karamazov as Trinitarian Theology,” 146.

Love man also in his sin, for this likeness of God's is the height of love on earth. Love all of God's creation, both the whole of it and very grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love animals, love plants, love each thing. If you love each thing, you will perceive the mystery of God in things. Once you have perceived it, you will begin tirelessly to perceive more and more of it every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an entire, universal love.⁸⁰

In this chapter I have explored some reasons that *Crime and Punishment* offers to understand better some of the problems of belief or not. Moreover, I have illustrated some characteristics of God that can help the person to comprehend the place that God has in the novel and that can help to comprehend better the dynamic of God in contemporary life.

Dostoevsky has explicitly intended to present God in the novel, the God of Christianity. Biblical references play a central role in the conversion process of Raskolnikov, especially the resurrection of Lazarus; Christ is explicitly mentioned as part of this process. In different moments God acts through different characters, especially Sonya. Next chapter will offer a more completed reflection. But God does not have an explicit primary role in the novel; God does not have an "official" manifestation, and Dostoevsky intentionally does not include the Church as an institution. As a consequence there is an 'atmosphere' of God. In other words, God inhabits the story, dwells in the drama, and points out the direction to follow. At the same time, in the last section I have shown that God, who according to Dostoevsky is 'hidden', is a God of love. Taking into account that God acts in the novel through poverty and misery, I observe a sort of

⁸⁰ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 275–276.

epiphany, an inspiration to go deeper in the dynamic to describe God and the process of belief. Therefore, in the second chapter I will create a connection between the novel and theology of liberation trying to describe the presence of God as an epiphany especially present in the poor. As a consequence, the novel will not be the center of my reflection but an inspiration to illustrate how God is acting in contemporary life through the poor.

Chapter 2

The Importance of Recovering the Other: Incarnation in the Poor and the Suffering in *Crime and Punishment*

Paradoxically, it is among those who most intimately know the power of death
that we find the most stubborn faith in the power of life and, therefore,
in the power of the God who is the source of life.

--Orlando Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular
Catholicism*

In the previous chapter, I presented the problematic of God in the novel.
Basically, I divided my reflection in two different studies. First, I described the dynamic
of “breaking” the relationship with God in the first three sections. And second, I proposed
in the last section some observations about the presence and action of God in the world.
At the end of the chapter, I observed that God is especially presents in the poor and in
times of misery.

As a consequence of the above, I can say that the God of Dostoevsky, in his silent
journey through humanity, lives in a special way in the poor and suffering. The insistent
description that the narrator makes in *Crime and Punishment* about misery and poverty
seems to be a whim, but along with this remains the question about the presence and
action of God in the daily life of so many suffering people. However, the key that
Dostoevsky offers us to approach the abyss that seems to exist between suffering and

God is that the Trinity is suffering; one of the divine persons suffered in the flesh.¹ God is responsible for humanity, and the suffering of the poor is to be close to the passion of Christ.

To go deeper in my reflection, in this chapter I will develop the importance of the poor and those in misery as places of epiphany. In the first section, I will point out the relevance of suffering in the novel through Sonya, Marmeladov, and the young drunk lady. In second section, I will enunciate the importance of the Incarnation in the Orthodox tradition as a way to understand better the pedagogy of God through the poor. In the third section, I will reflect on the importance of the poor according to liberation theology in Latin America. Finally, in the last section, I will introduce the concept of ‘grotesque’ as an observation in the novel that can help contemporary life to approach the mystery of God in a deeper way.

Suffering and Poverty in Crime and Punishment

In the novel there is a strong insistence on the acceptance of suffering as something that comes from God. “Do you, Rodion Romanovich, know what some of these people mean by ‘suffering’?... simple suffering is necessary-- the acceptance of suffering, that means, and if it is at the hands of the authorities, so much better” (436).² A first approach to the reality of suffering appears as a certain path to redemption and wisdom; there is something about the dimension of pain that must be accepted, something

¹ “Dostoevsky defends this notion as well, emphasizing a kenotic Christology in which innocent suffering is actually redemptive. It can redeem precisely because it is paired with forgiveness.” Cunningham, “The Brothers Karamazov as Trinitarian Theology,” 149. Ibid.

² Paraphrasing Cassedy, it is important to mention that this quote is in a reference to Mikolka who made a false confession to murder. He is one of “these simple minded religious zealot” -Porfiry says- a “schismatic” (a member of the schismatic movement of Old Believers).

of the mystery of life that only touches a human being through situations of much suffering.

In any case, understanding the presence of God in suffering is not a simple concept in the novel. Throughout the story, the reader finds characters tortured by suffering, unable to respond to life and to whom pain seems to be the only possible reality. The case of Marmeladov (an unusual character) seems to be one that is most disturbing when it comes to characterizing God as suffering, and it also gives us some clues to clarify this point. Marmeladov paraphrases the “Judgment of the Nations” described in chapter 25 of Matthew. In this interpretation, Marmeladov understands that God offers special mercy for those who have suffered much. It seems that suffering is a form of “purification” of the soul and is the privileged instrument through which God prepares those people who can access the fullness of life, and “He will stretch out His arms to us, and we shall fall at His feet and weep, and we shall understand... Lord, Thy kingdom come.”³

The justification for more pain is the perception of a God who becomes closer through suffering because God pays special attention to people who are suffering. God heals through suffering. This is the reason for the insistence and clarity of this dimension-
-man surrenders to God in suffering. God is not within suffering; God acts through suffering.⁴

³ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 21.

⁴ Other Christian concepts teach that God is within suffering, God is suffering with the person. But in *Crime and Punishment* God is with the one who suffers and uses that suffering to reveal the truth and God’s grace.

This grace of God in the novel is seen clearly in what the author wanted to show with the similarity of the Judgment of Nations, as I mentioned, that we find in the Gospel of Matthew. Dostoevsky resorts to this passage of the Gospel through the misery that Marmeladov suffers. I see that he tries to maintain the same literary and narrative form proposed by the evangelist in Matthew 25, but Dostoevsky distances himself from the message to show a movement to a God more compassionate than the evangelist proposed in the Gospel.

Similarly, there is an explicit intention of Dostoevsky to maintain the form of the text in the Gospel but to change the content in a radical way; *Crime and Punishment* shows a God more compassionate and closer to the poor than does the Gospel. Why is this passage of the Gospel so important? Because the Judgment of the Nations is the act in which God manifests himself clearly. This manifestation in Dostoevsky comes through compassion and absolute mercy to the poor and miserable; what God has to show humanity in a radical and absolute way is His love.

Dostoevsky uses the narrative form of the Last Judgment but addresses it not to the righteous who had the task of building the kingdom of God but to the poor and lowly, even the criminal. Marmeladov is not a righteous man; he is a poor man. How can Marmeladov perceive the compassion of God if he is not a righteous man? In chapter two of part one we have an approach to this radical change introduced by Dostoevsky.

The modifications in the text are intentional and are not simply a distortion caused by Marmeladov's drunkenness. Why can one say that it is Dostoevsky and not Marmeladov who proposes this God of suffering and love? Although the characters have different ideas about the compassion and the place that God occupies in their lives, when

the reader reaches the epilogue, he identifies a connection between what Marmeladov says, what some more sane characters utter, and especially what Raskolnikov experiences as the compassion of God. As an example, inspector Porfiry questions, “perhaps you ought to thank God; how do you know that He is not sparing out just for that?”⁵

We can compare lines from Matthew 25 to excerpts from *Crime and Punishment*. In Matthew 25:34 the king (Jesus) invites those who hear his words: “Come, you who are blessed.”; in *Crime and Punishment* the invitation is “come, I have already forgiven Thee” (Mt 25:21). Those called in Matthew are “righteous” (25:37); in contrast, Marmeladov says, “All men” (21).

Matthew mentions that the promise of God is “the kingdom prepared for you” (v. 34), while to the poor ones Marmeladov says, “He will forgive us” (Mt 25:21). When Jesus speaks of those who receive help, they are called “hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked” (Mt 25:37), but Marmeladov goes further: “drunkards, weaklings, infamous” (Mt 25:21). In Matthew, a separation of people is established according to their stations in life: “He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left” (Mt 25:33), while Marmeladov groups them, “He will forgive them, the good and the evil” (Mt 25:21). This last statement is more forceful and radical than the difference proposed in the Gospel. Finally, in Matthew the king in thanksgiving says, “you did for me” (Mt 25:40), but in *Crime and Punishment* it is the king himself who extends compassion, “He will stretch out His arms to us.”⁶

⁵ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 441.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

Therefore, the love of God is possible in our lives because there are people who take responsibility for others. The dynamic of God's love is present in those who recognize that in the silent presence of God there is an invitation to embody of God's presence and love. A. Bem, in his comment about guilt and the presence of God in *Crime and Punishment*, shows us that responsibility is necessarily connected with the affirmation of God.

Only by taking part in the suffering of this world is the return from unbelief to belief in Christ possible. Again, we can see here Dostoevsky's intention of showing the deep meaning of his conception of "true life," as opposed to the world of phantasy and phantoms.... The participation in human suffering is also of greatest significance. Only he who is "truly alive" suffers. Outside life there is no suffering, there is only seduction and imprisonment of the soul by dark forces, by demons, by doubles, or as the last stage, petrification of the spirit, the soul's coming to resemble "inorganic stone."⁷

In our contemporary life, we no longer feel responsible for others. Instead, we focus exclusively on our own interests.⁸ From where can I propose a responsibility towards the other in our contemporary life? Why is it so important to Dostoevsky that the poor and the miserable are an epiphany? Perhaps the answers lie in a link between Dostoevsky, the Orthodox tradition, and the theology of liberation in Latin America.

The Incarnation in Orthodox Tradition and the Importance of Sonya as a Backdrop

Curiously, as a consequence of the crime that Raskolnikov commits, a path of redemption and the possibility of an encounter with God opens for him. This salvation becomes clearly possible through Sonya and all that she represents to him in their mutual

⁷ A Bem, "The Problem of Guilt in Dostoevsky's Fiction," *Crime and Punishment* (1975): 122.

⁸ "The narcissistic subject never manages to set any clear boundaries. In consequence, the border between the narcissist and the Other becomes blurry. The world appears only as adumbrations of the narcissist's self, which is incapable of recognizing the Other in his or her otherness -much less acknowledging this otherness for what it is." Byung-Chul Han, *The Agony of Eros*, vol. 1 (MIT Press, 2017), 2.

communication. Sonya is a poor young woman, outside of the system and a victim of injustice, forced to prostitution.

There are at least four encounters between them that are especially significant for Raskolnikov and in which Sonya unfolds all the incarnational dynamics that God wants to offer him. The first meeting takes place at the tragic funeral of Marmeladov. The scene is full of pain and grief, and the atmosphere of devastation shocks the reader. However, what happens at the funeral implies a special presence of God, which is very important for the process that is beginning in Raskolnikov. In these moments, the narrator seems to invite us to open our senses to contemplation.

At the funeral with this first appearance of Sonya, the connections between the resurrection of Lazarus and the role of Sonya, as a person who brings the Incarnation of God, seem to be clear. In the Gospel we read: “So the sisters sent word to him, saying, ‘Master, the one you love is dying’” (John 11:2), and the narrator in *Crime and Punishment* says to us, “At that moment Polenka, who had gone for her sister...” (177). After a long anguish for the sisters, the one who can give them hope arrives: “When Martha heard that Jesus was coming...” (John 11:20). In a similar way, the long-awaited Sonya finally arrives for Katerina’s consolation, “Polenka went to her and said; ‘She is coming’” (177). The above references seem to show the preparation for this relevant moment. The narrator generates anxiety in the reader, and as if in a state of despair, the reader wants Sonya to arrive recognizing that her presence is so special for that moment.

Katerina Ivanovna (Marmeladov’s wife) flew into a passion.... “You might at least leave people to die in peace!” she cried to the crowd; “what sort of side-show do you think you’ve found?... Show some respect at least for the dying!”.... the lodgers one after another, began to press back towards the door, with that strange inward glow of satisfaction which is always found, even among his nearest and

dearest, when disaster suddenly strikes our neighbor, and from which not one of us is immune, however sincere our pity and sympathy. (173-74)

In the human drama, in a moment of absolute solitude where all are morbid spectators of our complete devastation, God appears. At that moment, Sonya enters to destroy the devastation with her compassion. Why is this moment important? Where is the relevance of Sonya's appearance?

First, this is the first time Raskolnikov has seen Sonya, and the narrator has prepared this moment with references to Sonya for more than 150 pages. Actually, it is the narrator who describes her, but the reader learns of that description from the perspective of Raskolnikov. The reader expects Raskolnikov, the main character, to know Sonya. We know that something important will happen between them. Why does the narrator describe Sonya from Raskolnikov's perspective and invite the reader to open the senses to contemplation? As the text illustrates at the beginning of the latter's accident, Raskolnikov is totally committed to the fate of Marmeladov. This commitment touches and involves the reader.

"I know him, I know him!" He cried, pushing to the very front.... "He lives here, close by, in Kozel's house. Get a doctor at once; I will pay, look!".... The police were pleased to have learnt the identity of the injured man. Raskolnikov gave his own name and address as well, and urged them, with as much vehemence as though it were a question of his own father, to carry the unconscious Marmeladov to his own room. (170)

Then, in the house, Raskolnikov remains on the scene but with a passive attitude. It is as though in a contemplative attitude he has relinquished his role as protagonist and left leadership to Sonya. As a result, Raskolnikov becomes an observer along with the reader who acquires the same position.

In addition, when Raskolnikov leaves the house after Marmeladov's death, Dostoevsky makes what appears to be a final confirmation of what Raskolnikov and the reader have contemplated and indicates the importance of Sonya in that scene. I recognize that in the dialogue between Polenka and Raskolnikov: "Who sent you?" It was my sister Sonya' answers the little girl, with a still more cheerful smile. 'There, I knew it was your sister Sonya.'... 'Do you love your sister Sonya?' 'I love her better than anybody!' said Polenka with great firmness" (181).

Secondly, the narrator develops an environment (Rowan Williams says "geographical narrative") in which Sonya appears. The action taken by Sonya and her sudden appearance establish the coordinates of what she herself will develop moving forward: unfold the compassion and implicitly show Christ, the hidden character.⁹

What do Raskolnikov and the reader contemplate? The narrator of *Crime and Punishment* describes Sonya as a simple girl, someone who goes unnoticed, yet at the same time in that simplicity the reader understands that the writer is presenting someone who is important in the scene and in the entire novel. "Out of the crowd, noiselessly and timidly, appeared a young girl, and her sudden appearance was strange in that room, in the midst of poverty, rags, death and despair" (177). Sonya, like Jesus during the baptism

⁹ Paraphrasing Hans Urs von Balthasar, a Swiss theologian, says that in the process of incarnation God calls humans for a mission; those humans must respond to this call. Taking account of *Crime and Punishment* I reflect saying that several characters in the novel have this kind of representation (Marmeladov in spite of his drama, Razumikin in his desire to help, Dunya in his kindness, Porfiry in spite of his insidious questions, among others). All of them at different times reveal an explicit religious and spiritual message that I can connect with this basic mission which Dostoevsky wishes to offer with the intention of revealing the grace of God. But in a special way Sonya is this hidden assumption that communicates Christ through concrete characteristics; Dostoevsky uses Sonya to make the presence of Christ in history. Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. 1: Prolegomena*, vol. 1 (Ignatius Press, 1988).

in the Jordan (Mt 3:13-15), in the encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4), or in the walk with the disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24:36-49), has the double meaning of being someone who is not noticeable: “She cast down her eyes, took a step across the threshold and stood inside the room, but still very near the door.... she stood in a shadowy corner” (177-79). At the same time she is the one who is central to the action. “Sonya uttered a feeble cry, ran forward, put her arms round him, and almost swooned in that embrace. He died in her arms” (179). As Apollonio points out, quoting Frank Kermode, Dostoevsky’s texts yield their secrets to readers as “insiders.” In this, Kermode suggests that the religious messages of a text will come to those “who already know the mysteries. There is seeing and hearing, which are what naive listeners and readers do; and there is perceiving and understanding, which are in principle reserved to an elect.”¹⁰

In Sonya we see this double nature of divine compassion in which opposing behaviors act together to reveal God.¹¹ It is the tension of opposites that compose the paradox “thus the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Mt 20:16). In paradox is where the revelation of God and human experience of faith take place. Cassidy points that out, and he goes further, proposing a system in Sonya’s compassion. Sonya has the “truth” of religious revelation on her side --the thesis (Sonya’s position) is thus

¹⁰ Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*, vol. 35 (Harvard University Press, 1979), 2–3.

¹¹ “The former interpretive strategy is ‘carnal’ and focuses on the part (the facts): the latter is ‘spiritual’ and focuses on the whole (the Truth). It is the reader’s choice whether or not to commit to the “suspension of disbelief” - or, to put it more strongly, to the belief” Apollonio, “Dostoevsky’s Religion: Words, Images, and the Seed of Charity,” 25.

compelling within its own system-- and finally religious revelation rests on faith, which is independent of reason, and the absence of logical coherence is in its very nature.¹²

Raskolnikov senses that Sonya embodies this ‘truth’ and trusts it. Although he remains absorbed in himself, he opens his heart to the desire to approach God and asks Sonya to read the gospel to him. It is in this scene that Sonya shows her prophetic dimension before Raskolnikov. Along with Apollonio, mentioning Bakhtin, one of the most important commentators of Dostoevsky, I can state that the narrator presents double-voicedness as a key: Sonya voices her own message using the voice of others, in this case the gospel.¹³ “He had expected this. She was approaching the moment of the greatest, the unheard-of miracle, and was filled with immense triumph. Her voice rang like a bell with the power of triumph and joy. Her eyes had grown dark, and the lines of print danced before them, but she knew the passage by heart” (314). At this moment, the narrator presents a description of Sonya that seems to break with the simple account of events. Sonya mimics herself in something that is not herself and the narration points out “the moment of the great”, “immense triumph,” “power,” “by heart.” These qualifiers give the reader the sense that we are witnessing a different presence. Sonya seems to know that triumph, that great triumph, and there is a powerful presence that has the feeling of eruption and change in the story, particularly in the life of Raskolnikov. If we consider the episode in which Sonya reads Lazarus’s resurrection to Raskolnikov and take into account their emotional states and their reactions, does not the reader have the

¹² Cassedy, *Dostoevsky’s Religion*, 103.

¹³ “By doing so they transcend their own isolation. Readers can join in the dialogue by recognizing the quoted texts and retrieving their meanings in their new, novelistic text”. Apollonio, “Dostoevsky’s Religion: Words, Images, and the Seed of Charity,” 28.

feeling that she is telling the story as if she were the protagonist of the passage, that is, Jesus himself? Before this presence, Raskolnikov asks for help, like Martha to Jesus next to the tomb of Lazarus: “I have come to you because I need you” (316).

The redeeming proposal that Sonya shares and proposes to Raskolnikov has a direct relationship to the action; it is not simply the reading of a gospel passage but rather a part of her reaction to life. Her experience of compassion integrates a spiritual dimension that I identify her link with Jesus and in other situations such as the exchange of crosses with Lizaveta; above all, we recognize the incarnational action in the connection that Sonya makes with a concrete reality of misery. Reconciliation and service to others must be present in life, beginning with a restoration of our relationships with humanity and then with all creation.¹⁴ Wendy Wiseman, describing the Sophian element in Dostoevsky’s novels, points out this necessity of restoration. “Every crime against humanity is a crime against the Earth and the Enchanted Bride.... It is sacrilege on a cosmic scale and threatens her with abandonment and oblivion.”¹⁵ Sonya is the bridge for the process of reconciliation that Raskolnikov initiates, and in some ways she also represents the principle of Mother Earth (the Enchanted Bride) who tirelessly looks for Raskolnikov.

¹⁴ Again, Cunningham repeats that observation that is present in Sonya as an inspiration. “Dostoevsky believes that it requires us to participate *in* and *with* the lives of others... he insists that human being must learn to be, ‘if we may use Christian terminology, a ‘conciliar person’ a member of the Body of Christ. This implies a movement from the personal, always somewhat egoistic, to the social, in other words, from ‘I’ to ‘we’. Of course, one could read all this as merely a lesson in social psychology, an invitation to break free from the pervasive Western diseases of loneliness and *ennui* and to recognize one’s connectedness to the human race. But something else may be at stake here – a harmony of the personal and the social which is the root of the Christian doctrine of God.” Cunningham, “The Brothers Karamazov as Trinitarian Theology,” 150.

¹⁵ Wiseman, “The Sophian Element in the Novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky,” 172–173.

With the above, one sees the importance of reconciling with the land in the confession of Raskolnikov's crime: "First, bow down and kiss the earth you have desecrated, then bow to the whole world" (403).

Raskolnikov derives profound meaning from his observation of Sonya's ability to take on suffering. This suffering is, in fact, the consequence of the generosity and compassion that shape her life. Throughout the novel Sonya, forgetting herself, assumes the suffering of everyone; "Raskolnikov knew in his heart that Sonya would be with him for always, and would follow him to the ends of the earth" (506). And as the incarnation of God, Sonya accepts the condition that is imposed on her: "Her disillusionment was too grievous. She was, of course, capable of bearing everything, even this, with patience and almost without murmuring."¹⁶ Sonya is described with attributes that connect her directly to the Christ mentioned by Paul: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter" (2:7).

Going to the context of the novel, I can say that the mixture of the Russian incarnational theology that recognizes the silent presence of God,¹⁷ together with suffering as a way of sanctification, shows us the *kenosis* as an attribute strongly present in the Russian tradition. Through the life of the martyrs and through the testimony of the

¹⁶ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 387.

¹⁷ Russell identifies the silent presence of God. He offers an approaching to the idea of humiliation and humility and in his study describes the process of a human's communication with God as apophatic. "The doctrine of self-abnegation does not spring from a diseased psyche but from the Orthodox tradition of apophatic knowledge. It is within that tradition that Dostoevsky's meaning can best grasped. Apophatic knowledge, as Bishop Kallistos Ware explains, is a way of knowing that employs negative as well as affirmative statements, saying what God is not rather than what God is. Through this method human beings can describe God's essence or their own only by a set of assertions and negations which admit the incomplete and distorting nature of the ideas asserted." Henry MW Russell, "Beyond the Will: Humiliation as Christian Necessity in 'Crime and Punishment,'" *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations* (2009): 226.

Bible, the image of the Suffering Savior attracted Russian culture, and this attraction became one of the spiritual riches of the Russian Orthodox Church. “The kenotic character is thus humble, for humility imitates both Christ’s descent from divinity and his comportment on earth. Because Christ, as a corporeal being, suffered in the flesh, we can imitate him by voluntarily accepting suffering.”¹⁸

The importance of the latter from the invitation of God that I discovered at the end of chapter I of “recovering the other” and of the relevance that I perceive the poor have, is that the kenosis of God responds to suffering not only because Christ suffered human pain, but moreover, it proposes a way of monitoring and understanding the poor. “The doctrine of kenoticism is dominant in Dostoevsky’s ‘word.’ It is that every disciple of Christ must suffer in this world, and that all innocent and voluntary suffering in the world is done in the name and for sake Christ... there is a kenotic Christology in which innocent suffering is actually redemptive.”¹⁹

I have already said it, but I repeat it: the suffering of the innocent is redemptive because it is participation in Christ. With this affirmation, I must clarify that it is not a psychologically absurd masochism. Suffering understood and accepted in certain circumstances of our life are part of human existence; they are part of the human being. If we accept suffering in the form of kenosis, it gives us the possibility of being *Alter*

¹⁸ Cassedy, *Dostoevsky’s Religion*, 149.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

Christus (another Christ), and with this we show humanity the epiphany that God has forged through painful circumstances: hence the importance of the poor.²⁰

Finally, Solovyov puts pain and suffering in the incarnational dynamic of Christ.²¹ This dynamic transits through history. Therefore, the epiphany is framed in time and in space; the incarnation is the life and way for humanity. “The Christian view is that the very process of human *historical development* is ‘sanctified’ by the Divine Incarnation in the God-man Jesus Christ. God enters the historical process so as to redeem *natural man*, the First Adam.”²² In that dynamic of full reanimation and transfiguration (Solovyov also uses that term) of poverty and misery, humanity has to believe in the ultimate victory of the Good. This victory is possible from the signs that are present in many people who are suffering and who carry the incarnational message of God. “Man need to believe that good, desirable ends may be achieved by good, morally acceptable means, and that the

²⁰ Coming back to the novel, in the moment of Raskolnikov’s confession to Sonya, she offers him redemption from suffering, “accept suffering and achieve atonement through it—that what you must go” (403). In a similar way Raskolnikov himself, when explaining his concept of extraordinary men who have the right to shed blood, adds that they will suffer for their victims because ‘suffering and pain are inherent in a broad conscience and a deep heart’ (258). Clearly an emphasis on suffering is rooted in the Gospel and is therefore common to all branches of the Christian tradition. But perhaps there is also something particularly Russian in Dostoevsky’s concept of God in which suffering for sins committed seems more important than any effort aimed at the common good. Likewise, I can say that for Dostoevsky the common good is more relevant than the redemptive pain itself, but it appears as a sort of narrative resource to enhance the importance of pain; this disproportion between pain and common good has the intention of showing the clear presence of God in suffering and poverty. This dynamic of accepting suffering shows incarnation; Christ was also born in poverty and his divinity is embodiment in that suffering. I have an open question, how do we understand the acceptance of suffering when it is unfair? We must accept the pain imposed on the poor through the evil of the people? I will answer this question in the next section.

²¹ I cannot affirm that Solovyov totally represents the Russian tradition, we can say that he is a good Orthodox and he feels that. And at the same time he maintained a friendship and a religious-intellectual dialogue with Dostoevsky. For that reason Solovyov gives us an interesting intermediate vision.

²² Jonathan Sutton, *The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov: Towards a Reassessment* (New York: Springer, 1988), 58.

way of love proclaimed by Christ is, finally, the most efficacious means available to us.”²³

In Solovyov, and picking up the Russian tradition, God dwells in humanity itself. And this hope is an invitation to recognize God’s acting in everyday life.

He is here, now - among the arbitrary rush,
In the turbid stream of life’s cares
You grasp the all-joyous mystery:
Evil is powerless; we are eternal; God is with us!²⁴

The Poor as a Theological Place

Throughout the novel, Dostoevsky spend many pages describing extreme situations of poverty and misery. Before this, the reader feels the shock that produces the detailed descriptions that the narrator presents. The anguish, the misery, the pain but above all the evil inflicted by some human beings on others transports us to concrete situations of the real life of people of the 21st century; the injustice that Dostoevsky reports in *Crime and Punishment* has similar characteristics what we find in the big cities of Latin America or in some regions of Africa. It is enough to visit those places to confirm this.

As a result, the reader making connections with what he or she reads and what one can know from current contexts begins to feel shame for humanity: it is the human being who has damaged their own brothers and sisters. In this back and forth reflection,

²³ Ibid., 61.

²⁴ Ibid., 66.

the reader captures that the suffering of the innocent is the consequence of a broken humanity. In the novel, we identify pain and torture in characters such as Marmeladov, his wife, Sonya, and her siblings, among others. But for the purposes of this section, I think it is important to mention the drunken young woman whom Raskolnikov finds on the street.²⁵ She is outraged and raped, she is young, and represents innocence and hope and vitality, but these qualities have been destroyed by abuse and depravity. In a certain sense, she represents that portion of humanity who are victims of pain and irresponsibility. For the purposes of the novel, the scene of the girl is almost irrelevant; the girl is a secondary character and disappears completely after that specific situation. We know nothing about how her story ended. Maybe Dostoevsky wanted to leave her story unfinished with the intention of showing what happens with the life of the poor. Their pain shocks us and challenges us, but they do not stop being anonymous and we are still only spectators, or readers, of the drama that happens far from our lives. How do we understand pain and injustice from the eyes of the God of Dostoevsky?

Here is where I find a common approach between Dostoevsky and liberation theology, but not just any liberation but the theology of liberation in classic terms from Latin America. Both start with the question of the suffering of the innocent, and in both we can find reference to the suffering servant as the one in whom the grace of God is deposited. I have already mentioned this aspect in *Crime and Punishment*. In liberations terms, Jon Sobrino makes a compilation of several authors and his own reflections on the

²⁵ “There, look, she’s quite drunk; she has just come along the boulevard; Heaven knows who she is... More likely somebody made her drunk and abused her. Look her dress is torn; look how it is put on; clearly she didn’t dress herself, she was dressed by somebody else, and dressed by unskillful hands, masculine hands... she is no more than a child. She’s been led astray, that’s right enough. Listen, miss, where do you live?’ The girl opened her tired, bleary eyes, looked dully at her questioners, and waved them away with her hand.” Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 45–46.

suffering servant and shows us the theological importance that this has in the Latin America context today. Paraphrasing Ignacio Ellacuría, Sobrino points out the centrality of this character since the Old Testament. “Our faith allows the poor to move us to extreme indignation, to limitless compassion, and even to radical conversion, which can lead to the ‘option for the poor’ and to living in obedience to ‘the authority of those who suffer.’”²⁶

In the incarnational silence of God in *Crime and Punishment*, the suffering of the poor emerges, and it is shown as the real space of privilege of God.²⁷ Gustavo Gutierrez, considered one of the fathers of liberation theology, describes it clearly. “The ultimate basis of God’s preference for the poor is to be found in God’s own goodness and not in any analysis of society or in human compassion, however pertinent these reasons may be.”²⁸ God has for them a predilection without exclusivities, and this predilection is underlined by the concealment of the revelation of this message to the “wise and important” (Lk 10:21). The entire social order and religious order is overturned and becomes the reverse of what God invites us to. “The poor deserve preferential attention, whatever the moral or personal situation in which they find themselves. Made in the image and likeness of God to be his children, this image is overshadowed. That is why

²⁶ Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Orbis Books, 2015), 50.

²⁷ In *Mysterium Liberationis*, a sort of compendium of the principal concepts of Liberation Theology from Latin America, Roberto Oliveros points out that the option for the poor is in the beginning of Christianity and it is defined as work for the Church. “The manner, the style, the strategy can be none other than that left us by Jesus, who was born who lived, and who evangelized in poverty and in solidarity with the poor.” Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (Orbis Books, New York, 1993), 24.

²⁸ Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Orbis Books, 1987), 13.

God takes his defense and loves them.”²⁹ This statement generates discomfort in our contemporary context.³⁰ And this observation, together with the questions that arise in *Crime and Punishment* from detailed descriptions of extreme poverty and personal and collective chaos, shows that God has been muddied and dirtied in the history of the human being, and God is present in a mysterious way through the poor.³¹ It is not easy for us to accept this behavior of God because it breaks the schemes of our egoism and our schemes of personal merit characteristic to Western society.

The difficulty of maintaining the option is obviously its costliness, but the problem also comes from accepting and maintaining the understanding that a mystery is made present in the poor; some might say, *the* mystery. Historically, ‘reality has broken through’ in them. Theologically, ‘God has broken through’ in them. So, the mystery has broken through. We know it is not easy to accept any mystery, because if we take it seriously and not simply as an enigma, a mystery is unmanageable, especially when it is made present in the poor. Then it is not only unmanageable, but countercultural... But the mystery of God and Christ is being revealed in relationship with the poor of this world, so that by

²⁹ Alfred Hennelly, *Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops. Puebla. Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America. Conclusions* (Orbis Books, 1990), n 1142.

³⁰ In our contemporary life we do not feel comfortable recognizing the place of privilege that the poor have because together with this recognition, God invites us to transform our habits of comfort. “The original term *option for the poor* receives at Puebla the qualification ‘preferential,’ lest any reductionism seem to be countenanced vis-a-vis salvation - as if salvation might be the exclusive possession of one sector or class. But when this meaning is misrepresented, and ‘preferential’ is understood in the sense of an indifference to which perspective is used, that of the rich or that of the poor, then the option for is stripped of its meaning. It is the salvific strategy of Jesus to save everyone *from the perspective of the poor, not of the rich*” Roberto Oliveros, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, 30.

³¹ “Not only that, but if we radicalize the concept, we can say that God can be an ‘object of intellectual persecution’ precisely because of his option. Regarding a God who makes an option for the poor there is a theoretical problem of theodicy: how do we accept the existence of God, and precisely of God who favors the poor, when cruel injustice oppresses them so mercilessly? The suffering and death of the poor have made the question of theodicy problematic from ancient times... The question takes on new life in liberation theology, where poor people are taken as seriously as is God: God the father ended up with many poor children... The problem of the poor is the problem of God” Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays*, 89.

deepening our understanding of the historical figure of the mystery of the poor, we are deepening our understanding of the mystery of God, and vice versa.³²

To better understand the above, it is pertinent that I raise the proposal that Gutierrez develops from his affirmation of the poor as an epiphany. This observation is inspired in Job, a biblical character. His approach helps us recognize the presence of God in pain and God's predilection for the poor. In the Bible, it is evident that God has this predilection and protects the poor, although we do not find an explanation of this affirmation; God loves the poor just because.³³ God does justice to the poor; for that reason, whoever oppresses the poor is far from God. "Mistreatment of the poor causes them to cry out to God, and their cry is heard. Here, the reference to the paradigmatic experience of the exodus is clear, 'I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters' (Exodus 3: 7)."³⁴

This close relationship between God and the poor is the breaking point of the prophetic message for Christianity. "The Lord is ever watchful and ready to hear the voice of the poor, even though attentiveness to them may at times take unobtrusive forms. Job has allowed himself to doubt this concern on God's part."³⁵ Therefore, Job perceives the protection of God. The point in question is not for Job to ask himself if he is a sinner or if he is not; the question is if he deserve the pain he suffers. Job's answer is clear: he

³² Ibid., 20–21.

³³ In *Crime and Punishment* I also observe that God loves the poor but the text does not offer answers. In the intervention of Marmeladov in the tavern he says that God will save everyone who suffers but he does not explain the reasons. It does not mean that is Dostoevsky's thought, it is said by Marmeladov. However, it is an approximation to the text.

³⁴ Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, 47.

³⁵ Ibid.

does not deserve the pain he suffers: “The issue is more specifically the misfortune of an innocent. We are confronted now with the suffering that is unjust.”³⁶ As a consequence, Job knows he is innocent, and this makes the situation more cruel. The arguments of his friends are empty when confronted with Job’s conviction that he feels himself innocent. That reason motivates his rebellion against the justification of his interlocutors. From his rebellion, Job is destroying a religious conception of God that has elements of falsehood. His friends believe in a God who is retributive and punishing, and Job, in his suffering, discovers that God is not as his friends describe God. “If his life has been an upright one, why have poverty and sickness befallen him? Is God unjust in punishing him?”³⁷ That question generates anguish in him. Job does not have an answer for that; for instance, he thinks God is unfair, but he does not affirm that. Gutierrez claims, “What is certain is that his consciousness of being innocent conflicts with the ethico-religious view he too has accepted until now.”³⁸ His friends reproach him for his rejection and his incoherence before God; they try to show him his blasphemy. According to their convictions they are scandalized with his protest of the innocence,³⁹ when proclaiming himself innocent, Job is against God. But they cannot see Job’s true position.⁴⁰ “There is no question then of

³⁶ Ibid., 24.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 25.

³⁹ In *Crime and Punishment* it seems that there is a religious institutional silence before the suffering of the poor. The Church seems to be far from the sufferer, and I say “seems” because it is not easy to affirm this. Carol Apollonio offers many references to the absence of the official religion, as an example she says “the theatrical performance, with all its profane trappings, has wrought the spiritual cleansing that the priest’s service, with all of Russian Orthodox trappings, has failed to provide.” Apollonio, “Dostoevsky’s Religion: Words, Images, and the Seed of Charity,” 31. In addition, we can see at Marmeladov’s funeral that the priest is exclusively ritual, liturgical. He does not demonstrate skills to accompany pain and suffering. From here I intuit a religiosity like Job’s friends. Suffering has no place from the religious proposal that is built from conditions that do not go deep into the soul.

denying God but only of challenging an interpretation of the relationship between human beings and God that bases it on retribution. Job is familiar with the doctrine and had perhaps accepted it in the past. It does not, however, explain his present experience, nor is it in accord with the deepest insights of his faith.”⁴¹

Job reinforces his personal experience against the abstract and disembodied theology of his friends. From his new theology Job tries to understand the action of God; he does not recognize love in the old theology. God has to transit through the conditions imposed by his friends perhaps they feel afraid of being ruined; therefore, they speak from a false security.

His friend’s arguments are like a wheel spinning in air: they do not go anywhere.... Why do they keep arguing, Job will ask (and with him all the innocent sufferers in every age of human history) if they have nothing to say? The question applies to every theology that lacks a sense of the mystery of God. The self-sufficient talk of these men is the real blasphemy: their words veil and disfigure the face of a God who loves freely and gratuitously. The friends believe in their theology rather than in the God of their theology.⁴²

Job’s words are a critique of the affirmation of God outside of the concrete reality of this world, far from compassion. Job seeks, from his human experience, another way to speak and so is silent about God. He never says that God is unjust but questions the basics of the theology of the retribution. Like Job, Sonya never questions the goodness of God, even when Raskolnikov tries to question the goodness of God. “What should I do

⁴⁰ Job’s friends seem to fall into the trap of a relationship with God based on exchange; it is a kind of contract of both parties. We can observe a similar reflection in Raskolnikov’s dialogue with Sonya. “Power is given only to the man who dares stoop and take it. There is only one thing needed, only one- to dare!” Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 401.

⁴¹ Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, 26.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 29.

without God? she said in a rapid, forceful whisper, glancing at him for a moment out of suddenly flashing eyes, and pressing his hand with hers.”⁴³

Returning to our dynamic of belief and disbelief, I say that to approach the God of Dostoevsky and the theology of liberation from Latin America is to believe in the God of solidarity with the poor, is to believe in empathy to alleviate the unmerited suffering of many people that are the other ‘I’. For that reason, Job changes the discourse; he no longer speaks of himself, he speaks of God. That new discourse is rooted in the history of poor. From that experience, God reveals his presence from aspects that are ignored by society and that lead Job to transform his religious practices and his behavior. “This realization, which is partially attained by Elihu (one of Job’s interlocutors) gives him a way of talking about God on the basis of his experience of suffering and injustice. To go out of himself and help other suffers (without waiting until his own problems are first resolved) is to find a way to God.”⁴⁴ “To go out of himself” is the invitation that Raskolnikov receives throughout the novel through various characters. Sonya is the clearest example but also the police inspector and his friend Razumikhim.

If we do not return to a religiosity where we let God be God, if we do not allow God to trace the coordinates of God’s love freely, then Leonardo Boff will be right in his prophetic announcement: “When future generations judge our time they will call us barbarian, inhuman, and shameless, for our great insensitivity to the suffering of our own brothers and sisters.”⁴⁵ We must to return to the God of Sonya, the God of the certainty

⁴³ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 311.

⁴⁴ Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, 48.

⁴⁵ Leonardo Boff, *The Prayer of Saint Francis: A Message of Peace for the World Today* (Orbis Books, 2001), 81.

that God will save humanity through the miserable and dispossessed people; God is good and just. Sobrino puts in relationship the loving offer of God to the poor and the participation of those of us who are not poor in a salvific communication on both sides. Speaking of that, he points out. "Since God desires their salvation and liberation and makes an option for them, our option for their salvation and liberation is an expression of our *deification*. When God opts to allow us to give salvation and liberation to the poor, it shows that we are graced by a God who is scandalously present in them."⁴⁶

The Grotesque as an Icon

To say that the God of Dostoevsky is incarnated in a special way through the poor is not enough. The theology of liberation helps to enunciate better what we find in *Crime and Punishment* through misery, but there is more. The God of *Crime and Punishment* even goes so far as to show his grace in the grotesque and in the morbid as forms of the Incarnation.

Sobrino not only describes the Incarnation of the historical Jesus but puts that in relation to the Incarnation in our time through so many people who are victims. They not only show Incarnation through poverty but they carry that Incarnation in their bodies and in their lives. They carry the marks of something that seems contrary to God. Ironically, they show God through which they carry.

A man of suffering, acquainted with infirmity, taken to his death -by the actions of others- without defense and without justice, despised by all... he is not thought of as a possible savior but quite the contrary; he is seen as a leper,

⁴⁶ Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays*, 19.

condemned, stricken by God and humiliated, and moreover as a sinner. They made his grave with the wicked and counted him among the transgressors.⁴⁷

This description allows us to enunciate in a theological way an observation that in *Crime and Punishment* is only perceived from a close reading.

Here poverty, and extreme poverty, is manifested through the grotesque that acts as a kind of ‘caller’, as an *Atentum Parae* that points out that the spaces in which God is present embrace everything; God is not only a God of perfect and normal and pure people. This statement destroys the idea of a conventional God and shows us that there are parallel processes beyond those established as ‘acceptable.’

To further illustrate the point I am showing, I would like to share a personal note. When I was nineteen years old I accompanied Norberta Cabrera for one year until the time of her death. Norberta was poor among the poor. She was very old, she could not walk, and she lived with her only son who had a disability that prevented him from taking care of himself. They only had one room in an old abandoned factory, without a bathroom or kitchen. The other rooms in the factory were occupied by families who worked collecting garbage to recycle and sell it, a miserable context. Everybody was very generous, but nobody could help Norberta and her son. As they did not have a toilet they relieved themselves inside the room, and since she was a paralytic, both were absolutely careless. Her neighbors left food in the only window that the room had, and she crawled to take it and eat it sharing with her son. The smell that was in the room was -- overpowering. I remember the first time I entered I felt a sense of panic and fear. I thought that something bad could happen to me, and when I saw both of them in that

⁴⁷ Ibid., 4–5.

situation, I thought they could harm me. She tried to be nice to me, but after a few minutes she started to cry inconsolably, and she took my hand that was shaking at that moment. I spent several months visiting them every Saturday until I was no longer afraid to be with them. However, the whole time I was with them, inside me there were a mixture of sensations and feelings. On the one hand, I never ceased to feel uncomfortable in that situation. On the other hand, I had the certainty that being with them was a sacred moment. God became present in it much clearer than in other people; there was something in the morbid and in the ridiculously painful and catastrophic that showed the presence of God. Every Saturday she cried and we prayed together. I started to take her hand on my own initiative, not that I thought it was good for her; I started to take her hand because it was necessary for me. Holding her hand (sometimes urinated and always dirty) was good for me, I felt I was taking God's hand.

The social service of the government took care of Norberta when she was dying. It was a way of protecting the government from criticism of neighbors. We know that in our contemporary society, one aspires to relate to people without diseases. One wants perfect bodies and the defective and the sick have no authority or possibility to dialogue. We have to escape from those fatalities.⁴⁸ As an observation in the novel, Rowan Williams suggests that "Raskolnikov cannot hear the divine word until he has stopped imagining suffering in this heroic mode and understand his solidarity with Lizaveta, his victim; he

⁴⁸ Nietzsche's last man says, "Health is the new goddess after the death of God: one honors health. 'We invented happiness,' say the last human beings, and they blink." Robert Pippin and Adrian Del Caro, "Nietzsche: Thus Spoke Zarathustra" (2006), 10.

will hear what she has to say on God's behalf only when he literally puts her cross around his neck."⁴⁹

In this sense, Byung-Chul Han, one of the philosophers who describes contemporary life, points out that in our time there is a relationship with the Other from the body based on commercial behavior.

The body --with its display value has-- become a commodity. At the same time, the Other is being sexualized into an object for procuring arousal. When otherness is stripped from the Other, one cannot love --one can only consume.... Today, more and more, dignity, decency, and propriety--matters of maintaining- are disappearing. That is, the ability to experience the Other in terms of his or her otherness is being lost.⁵⁰

The body has become a commodity and the Other is an object. Therefore, if the Other is ugly, horrific, defective, and grotesque, he or she becomes someone with whom I could not associate and is someone that is not part of our concrete reality, we do not really consider that kind of people. The grotesque person is someone with whom I cannot dialogue because what he or she is generates rejection; I do not like it, I do not want it, it does not interest me. In contrast, God insists with his epiphany through the grotesque because God seeks to recover the Other from the destruction of the commercial and the conventional.⁵¹ There is an invitation from God to recognize the human being as he or

⁴⁹ Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2011), 154.

⁵⁰ Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 1:12–13.

⁵¹ In this sense, Saxton reflecting on Flannery O'Connor's and Dostoevsky's Incarnation of God, states that people who have a degree of distortion and suffering possess "the way to holiness, through degradation". Benjamin Saxton, "From the Incarnational to the Grotesque in 'Revelation,' 'Parker's Back,' and Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment," *Flannery O'Connor Review* 10, no. 1 (2012): 99. It seems to illustrate as a kind of protest that God makes to humanity that establishes parameters of normality and ways to find God.

she is. And as we saw in chapter I, the insistent invitation of God is to love the whole humanity.

Therefore, if we consider the Other as horrible and grotesque, there is a distortion in us that includes an inability to love.⁵² Han observes that as a pathology in contemporary life.

Today, love is being positivized into a formula for enjoyment. Above all, love is supposed to generate pleasant feelings. It no longer represents plot, narration, or drama --only inconsequential emotion and arousal. It is free from the negativity of injury, assault, or crashing. To fall (in love) would already be too negative. Yet it is precisely such negativity that constitutes love.⁵³

Human relationships have been reduced to a certain form of pornographication. This is the syndrome of showing and looking and this transcends beyond the sexual act itself; we are not interested in people who are involved in our emotional world. Showing and looking are exclusively superficial aesthetics that forget and ignore other dimensions of the human being,⁵⁴ and that forgetfulness is connected with the forgetfulness of God.

Secularization blinds to the particularity of a phenomenon that can no longer be traced back to religious practice and even stands opposed to it. It may well be that in a museum objects stand “at a move,” as they do in a temple. However, musealization and exhibition are precisely what destroy their cult value and replace it with exhibition value. Likewise, tourism creates “non-sites,” whereas pilgrimage is tied to places. According to Heidegger, the quality that makes human dwelling possible is the “divine.”⁵⁵

⁵² Levinas also reflects on the same path saying: “Love is not a possibility, is not due to our initiative, is without reason; it invades and wounds us.” Emmanuel Levinas, “Time and the Other, Trans,” *Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987) 57 (1987): 88–89.*

⁵³ Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 1:13.

⁵⁴ In this sense Nietzsche proposes, “Learning to see means getting your eyes used to calm, to patience, to letting things come to you... Such learning-to-see represents the first preliminary schooling for spirituality. One must learn not to react immediately to a stimulus, but instead to take control of the inhibiting, excluding instincts... every characteristic absence of spirituality, every piece of common vulgarity, is due to an inability to resist a stimulus.” Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, “Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings” (2005): 190.

⁵⁵ Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 1:31.

Therefore, the grotesque is not possible in the market of supply and demand in which the body is offered. If the grotesque is considered something commercial, it is because from the logic of looking and showing, the grotesque, for sure, is accepted as the object of mockery and contempt.

The damage produced by the grotesque is carried by the person even before God. Winner says that praying to God can be experienced as harm and pain for the one praying.

Petition, in its form, is a recognition of the self as the self really is --a creature, dependent on the Creator. There is, then, an intimate danger to petition: I am placing my desires before God, and in so doing I am rightly recognizing (some of) the limits of my own capacities. Yet precisely in the moment of that recognition I am asserting my will calcifying it, reifying it.⁵⁶

The person who carries in his or her being the horrendous and the stigma cannot even ask God to free him or her from that burden; she or he must carry this by accepting its impossibility, even before God. That was Norberta's experience when she prayed.

It is very important in our time to recover the perception of the Incarnation in the form of the icon. When I say icon, I refer to the exercise of capturing what is below, what is not seen. It is ultimately to recover the ability to contemplate the one we have referred to previously. Dostoevsky invites us to do this exercise. "The superficially visible world is the city environment of slums, dirty street, prostitution --and murder. The invisible world accessed through iconic imagery --which the reader can sense beneath the surface -

⁵⁶ Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin*, 81.

-is the realm of belief, unseen yet palpably present in the form of symbols associated with the icon and iconic constructs.”⁵⁷

Finally, and returning to the importance of the body, the Incarnation comes to value our materiality; Incarnation means that matter matters. And moreover, the deformed bodies of those who unwittingly become the poorest of the poor have a special place in the epiphany of the Incarnation because they are the broken body of Christ. Diane Thompson, describing the importance that Dostoevsky gives to humiliated people through his poetics and the strength that this has for the Incarnation, says, “This carnivalised situation is in complete accord with the Christian spirit; Christ lived among the lowest classes, mingling with sinners, social outcasts, the poor, the downtrodden and humiliated.”⁵⁸

In this chapter, I have paid close attention to recognize the central role of the poor in the economy of salvation and the relevance of suffering, misery, and discrimination in the God of Dostoevsky and the importance to enunciate that for contemporary life. As a result, I have introduced and reflected on the Incarnation, some concept of liberation theology, and the grotesque with the intention to shine a light on what Dostoevsky states in the novel about poverty and misery.

In the following chapter, I will apply some of my reflections of chapter one and two in a concrete reality.

⁵⁷ Saxton, “From the Incarnational to the Grotesque in ‘Revelation,’ ‘Parker’s Back,’ and Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*,” 105.

⁵⁸ Diane Oenning Thompson, “Problems of the Biblical Word in Dostoevsky’s Poetics,” *Dostoevsky and the Christian tradition* (2001): 71–72.

Chapter 3

Boquerón as a Model

I thank you, Father, because you
have hidden these things
from the wise and the intelligent
and have revealed them to the little ones.
--(Mt 11:25)¹

In the previous chapter, I have expanded the claim that in *Crime and Punishment* suffering and poverty have a place of relevance for the God of Dostoevsky; poverty and suffering are an epiphany. In that process, I have taken some reflections from the theology of liberation that has helped me to go deeper into the mystery of poverty as an epiphany. I also have taken into account the Orthodox tradition as Dostoevsky's background. At the same time, I have introduced the grotesque as an element that denounces the difficulty to recognize the action of God in the Other in contemporary life.

In this chapter, and in an attempt to discover the contributions that *Crime and Punishment* makes to our contemporary society in our relationship with God, I will propose Boquerón as a place that represents what Dostoevsky invites us to consider. I will describe some characteristics of the people that inhabit that place (mestizo population from the north area of Argentina), making connections with some characters, situations, and messages that Dostoevsky offers. I will not offer solutions to the problems of Boquerón; on the contrary, I will take that society as a model that inspires postmodern

¹ The Gospel of Matthew uses the Greek word *nepioi* that refers to the semantic domain of words such as infants, small, unimportant, poor, excluded, uneducated.

Western society. Moreover, I will, in some ways, report the damage that Western society has inflicted on Boquerón, in the same way that Dostoevsky reports similar damage in *Crime and Punishment*.

I will introduce some personal testimonies and traditions of Boquerón in order to demonstrate my statements. A Jesuit who is working in Boquerón has recorded seven interviews, and I will include two TV show interviews of people from Boquerón. Also, I will include in my discussion some myths such as *La Salamanca*, *Huachana*, and *Pachamama*, describing and comparing them to the dynamics of the Incarnation of God as we find it in Dostoevsky.

A challenge in my investigation is that there are no academic studies about Boquerón of any kind. The only available document is the historiography that Guillermo Furlong wrote. Therefore, I will try, with this chapter, to inspire other academic fields to investigate Boquerón, or at least, I will write an investigation that allows me to know that culture in academic ways.

I will divide this approach into four different sections. The first section will be about the context of Boquerón, trying to introduce the concrete reality that I am examining. In the second section, I will show the connection between the novel and the context through the idea of Mother Earth. In the third section, I will propose a teenager as a concrete icon in the way that Dostoevsky understands the icon. Finally, I will introduce the importance of silence in Boquerón, and I will explain the connection with silence in *Crime and Punishment* and its relevance for contemporary life.

Context

As a consequence of an incarnational reading of *Crime and Punishment*, we can find connections with concrete realities and begin to recognize the principle of the action of God, which the novel shows, acting in this time and space. The pedagogy of God, which I recognize throughout the novel, awakens in us the mechanism of recognizing God in the reality that now appears as iconic. “Dostoevsky never gives a straight presentation of Christian ideas, never propagating but provoking, making the reader think. That is Dostoevsky’s greatest achievement: he does not force faith on the reader but presents it in such a way that the reader must make a choice.”²

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Saxton observes that Dostoevsky creates the city of Saint Petersburg as a substructure or system itself of religious imagery. Boquerón is a system or a structure itself, where the incarnational dynamic of God is present through what the place is and what the place represents. In this sense, Boquerón is an opening to God and destroys the dynamic of negativity that Buy-Chu Han describes as a characteristic of the contemporary person who negates the presence of the Other and affirms only the positivity of the Own: “The general positivization of the world means that both human beings and society are transforming into autistic performance-machines. One might also say that overexcited efforts to maximize performance are abolishing negativity (it means that Otherness is disappearing) because it slows down the process of acceleration.”³ Boquerón is a seed that shows contemporary life a way of recovering the

² van den Bercken, *Christian Fiction and Religious Realism in the Novels of Dostoevsky*, 3.

³ Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* (Stanford University Press, 2015), 23.

Other and recovering God. People in that area have developed a sense of solidarity, commitment, respect, and closeness to God that are examples to imitate in our contemporary society of big cities.

Boquerón is a very large area located in the northwest region of Argentina, very close to the border with Bolivia and relatively close to the border with Paraguay. Currently about 8000 inhabitants are spread over an area of 45 x 30 miles. According to a study in 2018, Boquerón has the highest index of child malnutrition in Argentina, and the levels of vulnerability and poverty are the most alarming in that country.⁴ There is no electricity, no internet, and the streets and roads are impassable. There is a very precarious hospital with only one doctor and four nurses.⁵ There are only eleven primary schools and only one high school. Not all kids have the possibility to attend the high school or even have the possibility to attend primary school.

The geography is flat and it is a forest. People have their animals in the forest and collect fruit from the trees. During the harvest seasons of cotton, lemon, and beans, the youngest ones go to work away in the big companies to bring money to their families.⁶

⁴ For more information see “Hambre de Futuro” <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/2167126-los-hijos-del-monte-en-santiago-provincia>

⁵ https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_José_del_Boquerón

⁶ In the area there are at least two big agrarian companies. They cut down the forest and planted corn and soybeans. They have already stopped the flow of three branches of the Rio Salado (Salado river) and pressurize people violently to leave their lands. I will provide information about big companies in the next section.

San José del Boquerón is a story of looting and outrage. The abuse towards its inhabitants began before colonial times, and it has extended until today by the big companies that want to seize their lands and destroy their culture.

Paraphrasing the historian Guillermo Furlong, the geographical extension of Boquerón was inhabited by the indigenous *Vilelas*.⁷ The designation of ‘Vilelas’ was named by the Spaniards who gave that name to those tribes, escapees from the massacres at the hands of other indigenous, and later, Spaniards, came together.⁸ In other words, there were many tribes in northern Argentina were peaceful and were incapable of fighting in the war. Therefore, the *Vilelas* were victims of the violence of other indigenous peoples as the *Tobas*, the *Mataguayos*, the *Mocobies* and the *Abinones*. Running away from these tribes, different indigenous ethnic groups came together. A portion of the *Vilelas* asked for help to the Spaniards, who partly massacred them and partly enslaved them.

Thus, today in Boquerón there are people who are descendants of the *Vilelas*, and a few of them have a Spanish background. They speak Spanish mixed up with some indigenous words and expressions. Even they have some cultural behavior that they

⁷ Furlong, Guillermo, and others. *Entre Los Vilelas de Salta*. Academia Literaria del Plata, 1939. (pp. 36-102)

⁸ “Vilelas’ indigenous, name that includes many tribes: which are distinguished by the proper names of: chunupies, pazaines, ataladas, unuampas, yeconoampas, vacaas, ocales, ipas, yeconoaitas and yooes.” (“Indios vilelas, nombre que comprende muchas tribus o parcialidades: las cuales se distinguen con los nombres propios de: chunupies, pazaines, ataladas, unuampas, yeconoampas, vacaas, ocales, ipas, yeconoaitas y yooes.” Guillermo Furlong and others, *Entre Los Vilelas de Salta* (Buenos Aires: Academia Literaria del Plata, 1939), 36.

cannot explain. It sounds like some connection with their ancestors, and their story is lost.⁹

Interviewing several people who live in Boquerón, Repollo Ruiz, one of the most extroverted and talkative interviewees, unlike the rest of the people, tells us:

Queramos o no, somos de la sangre esa.... Yo veo que aquí nadie quiere ser... solo algunos te van a reconocer que somos de la raza esa.... solo algunos te van a decir “yo soy indígena, yo soy hijo de esta tierra y mis abuelos nacieron aquí, y soy descendiente de aquí, de esta tierra”.... pero yo no, yo reconozco que no somos ‘caídos del cielo’ -como han dicho- yo soy de esta tierra... Yo creo que no reconocemos por todo lo que hemos sufrido, porque si decimos que somos indígenas se nota mi dolor. Por eso vas a encontrar gente aquí que te diga “los indios esos de allá,” pero no es así. Tal vez hemos sido perseguidos por el español.... Yo te cuento que mi vida no ha sido fácil, pero gracias a Dios estoy aquí y Dios me da la vida.¹⁰

Repollo Ruiz shows in his dialogue, directly, the lack of identity of the inhabitants from Boquerón and at the same time the cultural wealth that hides behind these people.

⁹ “We have tried to know the etymology of the Vilela language. Neither the annotated chroniclers like Machado, Lozano or Almiron give explanation. Nor have we found words or voices in the words of the Vilela language that explain the meaning and value of that language... that language was undoubtedly indigenous but altered by the Spaniards.” (“*Hemos tratado de conocer la etimología de la lengua vilela. Ni los cronistas antiguos como Machado, Lozano o Almiron dan explicación. Tampoco hemos encontrado en los vocablos del idioma Vilela palabras o voces que expliquen el significado y valor de aquel idioma... ese idioma era indudablemente indígena, pero alterado por los españoles*”) Ibid., 39.

¹⁰ All translations in this thesis are mine. “Like it or not, we are from that nation (indigenous)... I guess, here nobody wants to be (of that nation). Only some of us will recognize that we are indigenous.... Only some will tell you ‘I am indigenous.... I am a child of these lands and my grandparents were born here, and I am a descendant of here, from this place.’ But I AM indigenous. I know that the stork did not deliver us --as people say-- I am from this land.... I believe that we do not always recognize that we are indigenous because that would imply suffering ... If we say ‘we are indigenous’ people will notice our pain. Therefore, you are going to find people from Boquerón that are going to say to you ‘those indigenous’, but that is not the case. Maybe we have been persecuted by the Spanish.... I tell you that my life has not been easy, but thank God I am here, and God gives me life.” In Joaquin Castells, *Repollo Ruiz y Mirta Romero - Santiago Del Estero - Argentina* (Montevideo: BOP TV, 2019), 16:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QbylyWV18A>. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QbylyWV18A> (49:51)

Finally, and as I mentioned, looting, abuse and, difficulties keep afflicting them. Big companies have settled near the area, and they have limited the flow of the river Salado Norte, the river that crosses Boquerón from north to south. In addition to that regrettable intervention, the companies try to take the land of the people. This problem is very complex because there are indications that the provincial government of Santiago del Estero and some members of the national government are involved in an operation of illegal usurpation of the lands of the people who live in Boquerón. Some families have already lost their land violently since 2007, and people have already died because of that conflict. Recently, in October 2018 a man died as a result of a violent attack by a private group of men and a police operation orchestrated by the provincial government. As a consequence, a whole family ran away from their land, and a widow and three young daughters had nothing.

Another problem is the protection of the forest; the large companies intend to make the area a large extension of farming destroying the Boquerón ecosystem.¹¹

*The Mother Earth: Sophia and 'El Monte'*¹²

As I mentioned at the end of chapter I, God is present in time and in the elements of Creation consequently, one can say that God is especially present on the earth. God

¹¹ There is much information about these problems. I just mention some of them.

Fighting against big companies

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISvFAPQXo-o> Tomas Mendez, "ADN: Programa 26/08 2018," *ADN Periodismo Federal* (Buenos Aires: YouTube, August 26, 2018),

Death of a peasant

<https://www.pagina12.com.ar/150557-muerte-en-santiago-del-estero> "Murió el campesino quemado," *Pagina 12*, 23 2018.

¹² It is important to clarify that when we say *Monte* in Spanish that word means 'mount,' but in Boquerón people use this to talk about the forest.

has a presence that reminds human being that everything the person receives has been given to her/him by the Creator; God reminds human beings of their poverty and dependence on God. With this in mind, one sees the importance of reconciling with the earth in the confession of Raskolnikov's crime: "He knelt in the middle of the square, bowed to the ground and kissed its with pleasure and joy."¹³ He detaches himself from his relationship with God through dependence on the earth, "First, bow down and kiss the earth you have desecrated, then bow to the whole world."¹⁴ That was the exhortation that Sonya told to Raskolnikov at the time of his confession. To Dostoevsky the process of recognizing God and returning to the grace of God is intimately united to a reconciliation with the earth. Wiseman points out clearly about the Russian background I see in Dostoevsky and about the explicit intention of introducing a divine element to the earth: "The mythic cult of Mother Earth is the feminized pole of Dostoevsky's religious vision.... She (the earth) is alive, active, transfiguring.... She is the medium of return to divine humanity, to the awareness of mutual responsibility and love that signals the apocalyptic consummation of time and the cosmic process."¹⁵

Dostoevsky express his personal experience of faith through a strong relationship with Jesus Christ, as well as the customs and traditions of common people, including the cult of Mother Earth.¹⁶ This cult was incorporated into the Russian Christian tradition.

¹³ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 505.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 403.

¹⁵ Wiseman, "The Sophian Element in the Novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky," 166.

¹⁶ According to Nikolai Berdyaev in the Russian context, Mother Earth "means not beauty but fertility, it is the supreme virtue of the earth... Earth is the Russian 'Eternal womanhood,' not the celestial image of it: mother, not virgin; fertile, not pure, and black, for the Russian soil is black" Nikolai Berdyaev and Christopher Bamford, *The Russian Idea* (SteinerBooks, 1992), 23.

The influence of peasant and ancestral religiosity are evident in Dostoevsky: “There can be no doubt, for Dostoevsky, the conscious effort to put down roots in his native soil and his native faith.... the way back into Communion with their own people, their own *pochva* (ground, soil).”¹⁷

The recognition of the earth as a channel in which God acts implies that the whole creation of God will be restored in a universal way. This statement is implicit in Dostoevsky’s work but even more clearly in Solovyov: “For Divine grace the whole created, material order may be ‘sanctified.’”¹⁸

I

In Boquerón there are many expressions equivalent to ‘Mother Earth’. As I said, ‘the forest’ (*El monte*) is the most common and accepted words. There are also expressions like ‘the Earth’, ‘The Mother Earth’, ‘Sister Earth’ or, curiously, when some people introduce themselves, they shake hands and say, “My name is I am a child of the Earth.” All of these expressions are simple to associate. However, there is a confusing expression, *Pachamama*. Not all of the people refer to the earth with this Quechua word, but it is part of the idiosyncrasy of the area. As stated in the Introduction, there are no academic anthropological, or cultural studies about Boquerón, which makes it challenging to understand the culture of the area. Yet, it is important to understand the power of the Mother Earth as *Pachamama*, within the indigenous imagination because this word offers a connection between Boquerón and *Crime and Punishment*.

¹⁷ Pyman, “Dostoevsky in the Prism of the Orthodox Semiosphere,” 109.

¹⁸ Sutton, *The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov: Towards a Reassessment*, 77.

Originally, *Pachamama* was a goddess of the Incan and Aymaran mythologies. *Pacha* means ‘earth’ or ‘world,’ and ‘Mama’ means ‘mother.’ It is a female goddess who was fertilized by *Pachamac* (the male and most powerful god), and together they created all that exists. She is independent from the rest of the gods and is considered the one responsible for all creation.¹⁹

However, there are many, diverse interpretations of the *Pachamama*. It is important to mention that the Inca-Aymara culture includes countries such as Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and a region of Argentina. The interpretation and adaptation of the myth of the *Pachamama* is different in each of these areas. Some communities still recognize her as a goddess, while others seem to even have a more monotheistic relationship with *Pachamama*. For other communities, it is a material principle of something that is spiritual.

It is thus not possible to find a common definition, but among these populations there exists a general affirmation of the *Pachamama* as an extended cultural element. Valencia, an expert in *Pachamama*, observes the following: “*El Aymara, desde el día cuando abre los ojos al nacer hasta el día cuando cierra los ojos al morir, desarrolla su existencia en un mundo maravilloso al cual referentemente denomina ‘Pachamama.’*”²⁰

¹⁹ During the invasion of the Spanish and the persecution of native religions (called at that time “extirpation” of idolatries), the *Pachamama* deity -as a consequence of syncretism- began to be invoked and confused with the Virgin Mary. Actually, in Boquerón there the devotion of *Huachana*, which may be connected to the Virgin Mary. This devotion perhaps is related to *Pachamama*, since *Huachana* in Quechua means ‘Mother of orphans.’ Today, rituals related to *Pachamama*, are practiced mainly by the Quechua and Aymara communities, and other ethnic groups that have Quechua-Aymara influence. That is common in the Andean areas of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, but also in the north of Chile and northwest of Argentina.

²⁰ “The Aymara, from the day he opens his eyes at birth to the day when he closes his eyes when he dies, develops his existence in a wonderful world which he refers to as ‘Pachamama.’” Narciso Valencia Parisaca, *La Pachamama: Revelación Del Dios Creador*, 1998, 97.

All those interviewed in Boquerón said that they do not know the myth of the *Pachamama*, but all do recognize the word and know its meaning to be Mother Earth. In an attempt to find a pattern to the different ideas about the *Pachamama* Valencia proposes a reflection. Paraphrasing his reflection, I would say that *Pacha* is the Mother of everything that comes out of her is life, and everything that comes back to her is alive again. That is why the earth is also used as an element to cure. Plants, animals, and human beings are united to the earth that sustains and protects them; she maintains the balance of life. She is like a mother, but more than that, she is the protector of everything and everyone.

In Boquerón, we find affirmations similar to those of Valencia: people recognize that *Pachamama* is not God, but she has an important place in the grace of God. *Pachamama* is a kind of channel through which God communicates and protects creation. Thus, *Pachamama* is not God; she is a principle as in *Crime and Punishment*.²¹ In Russian tradition, the principle of Mother Earth is expressed through Sophia, who embodies the wisdom of God, that is incarnated in the world. “Sophia is God’s body, the matter of the Deity permeated by the principle of divine unity. Christ who realizes or bears in Himself that unity as an integral divine organism, universal and individual at the same time, is both Logos and Sophia.”²²

²¹ At this point, Raskolnikov mentions to Sonya that he killed a principle. I cannot understand the principle that Dostoevsky says in the same way that I am taking in *Pachamama*, however my intuition is similar. “The old woman was only a symptom of my illness ... I killed not a human being but a principle” Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 263–264.

²² S. L. Frank, *A Solovyov Anthology*. New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1950, 37.

Peteco Carabajal, a musician who was born near Boquerón, composed a song called *El embrujo de mi tierra* (“The Enchantment of my Earth”). The song describes the dynamic of the forest. In this dynamic, the earth has a purpose, and she manifests herself in everything.

*Te voy a contar si quieres
como es la vida en mi pago
la pucha que es un halago
contarte con alegría
perdón por mi fantasía
pero no hay otro Santiago.*

*El cielo tiene ventanas
por donde el sol nos despierta
dejamos la puerta abierta
por la amistad mañanera
y un ritmo de chacarera
te pone el alma de fiesta.*

*Se cuelgan de los tunales
vivos rayitos de luna
como amasando la tuna
pa’ convertirla en arrope
el viento pasa al galope
cuando la noche madura.*

*Has de llevar para siempre
prendida como una estrella
el embrujo de esta tierra
como una de sus virtudes
serán las noches azules
con patios de chacareras.*

*Sonrisa de miel que endulza
tu rostro de arena y barro
es el viejo Mishky Mayu
frescura de mis abuelos
saber y espejo del suelo
de este pago milenario.*

*La guardia salamanquera
se hace escuchar en la siesta
como si fuera una orquesta
de nuestros antepasados*

*que al irse fueron dejando
la afinación de mi tierra.*²³

The earth dialogues with creation itself, and the human being recognizes that principle acting in everything created. Ruben Sosa, who lives in the most isolated area of Boquerón, tells us about it: “*La Tierra es vida y de la tierra vivimos. Siento mucho contacto con la naturaleza y tengo una relación con el monte. Cuando miro un algarrobo por varios minutos comienzo un dialogo con él. Para nosotros la Pachamama es todo. Nosotros vivimos de la tierra y la tierra vive de nosotros.*”²⁴

It’s curious that Ruben says, “the earth lives from us.” There is a communication and a mutual dependence between the Creation and the earth, which is a principle that protects that Creation. Ruben seems to say it in a simple way; however, I discover that the earth involves herself in the destiny of her Creation, and her own realization consists in the accomplishment of Creation; the earth contains and protects Creation, and in it is her realization. Similarly, Kornblatt, describing Sophia from the thought of Solovyov, points out that, “she is a mirror of God’s power and the image of his goodness and can

²³ Translated by my friend Eliana Diaz Heredia. “If you want I will tell you/ how life is in my homeland./ It is a flattery/to tell you the story./The sky has windows,/we leave the door open/ for the morning glory/ and the rhythm of chacarera music will put your soul in festivity./ They hang from cactuses/ rays from the moonlight/ like kneading the cactus/ to cover the late night wind./ Always take with you/ the shine of my enchanted land/ like a bright star of its goodness/ the night blue skies/with patios going to the rhythm of chacarera music./ Smiles of honey that sweetens/ your face with sand and mud/ it is the old man *Mishky Mayu*/ traditions from my ancestors/ knowledge and mirror from this millennial land./ The guardian *salamanquera*/ make itself heard in your sleep/ like if it is orchestra/ from our ancestors/ that when they leaving/ left fine tuning in my land.”

²⁴ “Earth is life for us and we live because of the earth. I feel really connected with nature and I have a relationship with the forest. When I contemplate a carob tree for several minutes, I start a dialogue with him. For us the *Pachamama* is everything. We live from the earth, and the earth lives from us.” From a tape recording of Ruben Sosa by Rodrigo Castells, S.J. on November 29, 2018.

enter into human souls to transform them into God's friends."²⁵ From this perspective, one can say that in this friendship with God, Sophia involves her being. Friendship is a relationship of equality in which both parties are committed, sought, needed, and loved. This dynamic is similar to what is described by Ruben, who also recognizes that the earth lives from him.

Antonio Romero, in tune with Ruben Sosa and with what has been said about Sophia in her friendship and mutual dependence with respect to Creation, tells us:

*Los árboles de la casa de mis padres tienen nombres. Y yo todavía los recuerdo, ellos me recuerdan mi infancia feliz. Mi mamá, que ya es muy anciana, ella me pregunta si los arboles (de nuestra casa) están vivos o no. Yo le digo: "sí, están!" Ellos estaban cuando yo era niño y entonces yo ahora protejo a esa arbolada Yo extraño a los árboles que ya no están.... yo nací y crecí en el monte y a mí me duele (la intervención de las compañías).... Yo protejo al monte, como dicen, es el hermano monte y la hermana tierra, la Pachamama.*²⁶

Thus, Boquerón points out to contemporary life the importance of remaining on Earth; we have to recognize in our connection with the earth the wisdom that dwells in the created and the mutual love that exists between us and the principle acting on Mother Earth. Wiseman recognizes this need when she compares the movements of Raskolnikov and Alyosha (*The Brothers Karamazov*) and claims,

The sacrificial relinquishing of one's isolated, 'demonic' will that marks the entry into communion with Christ appears in incipient form in the figure of

²⁵ Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov* (London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 37.

²⁶ "The trees in my parents' yard have names. And I still remember them, they remind me of my happy childhood. My mother, who is already very old, asks me if the trees (of our house) are still alive or not. I say to her 'yes, they are!' They were there when I was a child, and now I protect them.... I miss the trees that are gone I was born and grew up in the forest and (its destruction by the big companies) hurts me.... I protect the forest, brother forest -as people say- and mother earth, the *Pachamama*." From a u-tube video recording of Antonio Romero by Joaquín Castells, *Antonio Romero -Santiago del Estero - Argentina* (at 22:08 minutes) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q218_nmaWAg

Raskolnikov, and its most mature, cosmic form in Alyosha. In both cases, the movement is literal and actual: weeping, they prostrate themselves on the earth in a cataclysmic moment of conversion, and arise transformed, in the bosom of *Hagia Sophia*, reunited with the soul of the people.²⁷

II

Through Mother Earth (*Sophia-Pachamama*) we identify an invitation to moral behavior, an ethic connection. For instance, when Raskolnikov confesses his crime to Sonya, she points out the seriousness of his action but not only because of his rupture with humanity but also because his bad actions are a rupture with the earth: “First, bow down and kiss the earth you have desecrated, then bow to the whole world.”²⁸

In Boquerón the forest acts with the person according to the actions of that person; if the person is good, then the earth will be kind, if the person acts badly, the earth will repay that evil. Antonio Romero tells us that the earth can take revenge on those animals or people who have been offended or hurt. According to him these earth’s actions can happen when people are alone in the middle of the forest. He tells us that people who know that they have hurt someone are afraid of being alone in the forest because the earth can act. About this, Antonio Romero concludes: “*En el monte siempre pasan cosas raras, siempre que uno va al monte tiene que estar preparado.*”²⁹ However, that fear is not arbitrary; people in Boquerón know that kindness is rewarded by the earth.

²⁷ Wiseman, “The Sophian Element in the Novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky,” 166.

²⁸ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 403.

²⁹ “In the forest, strange things always happen, whenever one goes to the forest one has to be prepared.” Joaquin Castells, *Antonio Romero -Santiago del Estero - Argentina*, 8:42.

Romero adds, “*Yo tengo la conciencia tranquila de que no le hice mal a nadie, y sé que Diosito me acompaña y nunca me va a pasar nada malo en el monte.*”³⁰

There is a clear awareness of good and evil acting on earth. And in the face of evil, the earth acts in order to achieve a balance; the earth does justice with the Creation. “This reconciliation is made possible through Sophia, who is all at once the World Soul, mother of all souls and of material nature.”³¹ Similarly, in *Crime and Punishment*, evil is presented as a possible actor that pushes Raskolnikov to disrupt his life. Here, as in Boquerón, Raskolnikov loses connections with concrete reality and everything becomes adverse in him. It seems that “the world that he desecrated” signals his rupture. The air is heavy for him, he does not want to eat, the presence of other people irritates him, etc. The earth reacts as a clock alarm in the presence of the devil. “By the way, Sonya, when I used to lie there in the darkness thinking of all this, was that the devil confounding me, eh?... Hush, Sonya, I am not laughing. I know myself that it was the devil dragging me alone.”³²

Again, Repollo Ruiz expresses clearly that dynamic acting in the *Pachamama*.

*Existe el espíritu del bosque que protege a los animales de los cazadores....
Nosotros creemos en un Dios que nos da la vida y es el dueño de nuestra alma.
Yo pienso que Dios ha escrito todo en el corazón para que nos vaya bien y (o)
nos vaya mal. Por eso pienso, con mi poco entendimiento, que hay dos cosas: el*

³⁰ “I have a clear conscience that I did not hurt anyone, and I know that God (Diosito) accompanies me, and nothing bad will ever happen to me in the forest.”Ibid., 11: 52.

³¹ Wiseman, “The Sophian Element in the Novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky,” 168.

³² Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 401.

*diablo y Dios. Ahí está el adversario de Dios, el que haga el mal se va con el diablo.*³³

III

The forest is alive; for people from Boquerón the forest is an organism that seems to have life itself. Thus, the Earth is a dynamic system that is always surprising to the human being. Similarly, Ivanov also recognizes the dynamics of Mother Earth as a living organism in Dostoevsky, and also the description of Ivanov reminds us of Ruben Sosa's observation about the mutual dependence Creation-Earth. "Dostoevsky's mystical realism has its roots in the ancient conception of a living Mother Earth... who, conceived as a living entity is dependent upon the final self-destination of man, and is, in her own fashion, aware of this dependence."³⁴

From the previous observation, there is in Boquerón the idea that extraordinary things happen in the forest. There are many legends and stories to tell about people who communicate with the fauna and flora of the forest. Some people from Boquerón call this phenomenon *El latir del Monte* (The Heartbeat of the Forest).

One of the most accepted stories, and one that people always remember, is *La Salamanca*, the name that the Spanish gave to what the people of Boquerón define as a

³³ "There is the spirit of the forest that protects the animals against hunters We believe in a God who gives us life, and our souls belong to him. I think God has written everything in the heart, thus we can do good or do evil. Therefore, I think, with my little schooling, that there are two beings: the devil and God. Whoever does evil goes with the devil." From a u-tube recording of Joaquin Castells, *Repollo Ruiz y Mirta Romero -Santiago Del Estero - Argentina*, 16:09. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QbylyWV18A>

³⁴ Vyacheslav Ivanov, "Freedom and the Tragic Life: A Study in Dostoevsky, Trans," *Norman Cameron (London, 1952) (1960): 45.*

pact with the forest that a person asks to obtain some quality.³⁵ In this ceremony, which can be anywhere in the forest, the person invokes the spirits and the living beings that live on the earth. The beings dialogue with the person and examine her or his heart to verify if that person deserves the quality that she or he asks for.³⁶

In this sense, Peteco Carabajal describes the dynamic of *La Salamanca* in many of his songs. Indeed, he says that he is a musician because *La Salamanca* gave him the ability to play instruments. In his song *Fortuna fama y poder* (“Fortune, Fame and Power”) he describes:

*Buscando la salamanca
hasta los montes llegué
fui pidiendo para mí
fortuna, fama y poder.
La noche envolvió mi sombra
antes del amanecer.*

*Un gallo con plumas de oro
cantando me abrió un portal
allí dentro pude ver
los pájaros despertar*

³⁵ People from Boquerón suggest that the most appropriate name is *La Reunion*, (‘The Meeting’) because people go to that place to learn. In this sense, perhaps the Spanish named that legend ‘La Salamanca’ as a consequence of the connection with wisdom in Salamanca, Spain, and wisdom in Boquerón.

³⁶ I am paraphrasing the testimonies that are found in their complete version in YouTube: Joaquin Castells *Camilo Villalba - Santiago del Estero-Argentina* (Montevideo: BOP TV, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPfq1LKCYS8&t=905s>.

Joaquin Castells, *Antonio Romero -Santiago del Estero-Argentina*. (Montevideo: BOP TV, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q218_nmaWAg

Joaquin Castells, *Repollo Ruiz y Mirta Romero -Santiago Del Estero - Argentina*. (Montevideo: BOP TV, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QbylyWV18A>

Joaquin Castells, *Angelica Sosa -Santiago Del Estero- Argentina* (Montevideo: BOP TV, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7cexelurCbc>.

Joaquin Castells, *Don Gerardo Sosa - Santiago Del Estero - Argentina* (Montevideo: BOP TV, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9RcFiJj4YE>.

*con sus trinos me enseñaron
a sentir la libertad.*

*Yo soy el árbol más viejo
que existe en este lugar
muchos siglos de raíz
me otorgan la facultad
para ser quien te reciba
en ausencia de supay.*

*De lejos se escucha un bombo
Es ocre de atardecer
Pie desnudo un viento gris
Su giro nos hace ver
En el aire hay chacareras
Que regresan del ayer.*

*De a poco fui conociendo
Secretos del socavón
Que no hay planta ni elixir
Que sirvan para el amor
Que hay un tiempo que está unido
Con las memorias del sol.*

*Un hombre incendió su pueblo
enfermo y creyéndose
cuántos más dañan a Dios
y mueren sin comprender
que está en la naturaleza
la excelencia del poder.*

*La fama es la gloria eterna
Que alguna vez sucedió
El dinero puede ser
Tal vez una condición
La fortuna es el tesoro
Que resguarda el corazón.³⁷*

³⁷ Translated by my friend Salvador Najar, Jr. "Searching for the Salamanca/ I ended up in the forest/ asking for fortune fame and power/the night engulfed my shadow/ before the morning./ A rooster with feathers of gold/ crowing opened a portal for me./ Inside I could see birds waking up/ chirping they taught me how to be free./ I am the oldest tree/ that exists in this place/ ancient roots/ gave me the power/ to be the one who receives you/ in the absence of *Supay*./ Little by little I learned/ deep secrets/ that there is no plants and elixir/ that help for love. There is a time that is united/ with the memories of the sun./ A crazy man lit his village on fire/ believing that/ how many more hurt God/ and die without comprehending/ that the excellence of power/ that is in nature./ Fame is the eternal Glory/ that happened once upon a time./ Money could be one of the conditions./ Fortune is treasure/ that guards the hearts."

For instance, Camilo Villalba from Boquerón, after telling his version about *La Salamanca*, concludes, “yo conocí gente que no sabía tocar instrumentos musicales, y de un día a otro sabían. Pienso que eran salamanqueros, hicieron un pacto con el monte y aprendieron.”³⁸ Mirta Ruiz also tells “algunos del pueblo escucharon ruidos en la noche y fueron a ver. Dicen que han visto una cruz bien brillante, toda iluminada.”³⁹ From a strict western, factual point of view, these stories are not credible, but, understood in this context, both Camilo and Mirta understand them as being “magical”, and therefore “true.” For them, the extraordinary facts that some people tell are linked with the communication that Mother Earth has with Creation to help living beings in the progress of their lives. Thus, the connection between *La Salamanca* and Sophia is the search for wisdom; the wisdom that God offers to Creation acts, and it is discovered through the earth that is presents as a principle.⁴⁰ The way that people from Boquerón understand this principle seems to be mythological, that is, reminiscent of a meaning story which may or may not be factual, but for them these events are part of their worldview.

A different version of what they call ‘The Heartbeat of the Forest’, appears in a conversation with Nilo Romero, a fourteen-year old boy. *Hambre de Futuro* interviewed

³⁸ “There were people who did not know how to play instruments, and next day they played one of the instruments. I think they were salamanqueros, they made a pact with the forest and they became musicians.” Joaquin Castells, *Camilo Villalba - Santiago del Estero - Argentina*, 7:31. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPfq1LKCYS8&t=905s>

³⁹ “Some of the villagers heard noises during the night and went to the forest to investigate their source. They claim that they saw a bright cross which was entirely illuminated.” Joaquin Castells, *Repollo Ruiz y Mirta Romero - Santiago Del Estero - Argentina*, 3:14. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QbylyWV18A>

⁴⁰ “Thus it is through Sophia that revelation and creation occur—as preexistent Wisdom, she is the very communication of divinity the ‘disclosure of transcendent.’” Wiseman, “The Sophian Element in the Novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky,” 181.

Nilo to help describe the area's poverty, one to which his family is not alien. Nilo shares his bed with a brother with whom he sleeps back to back. Despite his poverty, Nilo seems to be very intelligent, earning top grades at the Santiago del Estero Province. In fact, the government offered him a scholarship to study in the city.

Nilo developed a relationship with the forest that leads him to dialogue with nature and find in Mother Earth the answers to his life. The Argentine television show, *Hambre de Futuro* reports:

Nilo es un chico tímido y bastante introvertido. De pocas palabras. Se le entrecorta la voz y tose cuando cuenta lo que significa la “represa” (la laguna) para él. “Desde niño que voy. Ahí tengo un pedazo de mi vida, momentos de dolor, tristeza y alegría. Cuando estoy enojado o triste, me voy para ahí. Te sentás, escuchás los cantos de los bichitos y los pájaros y estás mejor”, cuenta este adolescente de ojos achinados.... “Me gustaría que todos los chicos de la zona aprendan a disfrutar del monte”. Para Castells (religioso jesuita), la siesta es el horario mágico para que los chicos puedan ser libres. “Es el único momento en el que los adultos duermen y no les indican tareas a sus hijos. Durante esas horas pueden meterse en el monte, su propio mundo de magia.”⁴¹

Nilo does not mention mythological stories. He shares his personal experience with Mother Earth and how communication with animals and trees manages to change his mood. There is in the story of Nilo a combination between being in the midst of nature and a transformation of his psyche. This combination helps him to figure out what happens in his heart and to see his life from a more wise perspective.

⁴¹ “Nilo is a shy and quite introverted boy. His voice chokes and he coughs when he describes what the lagoon means to him. ‘Since I was a child I went to the lagoon. There I have left a piece of my heart . . . my life, moments of pain, sadness and joy. When I’m angry or sad, I go there. There you can sit, listen to the songs of the insects and birds and then you feel better,’ says the teenager with almond eyes... ‘I would like all the children in the area learn to enjoy the forest’. For Castells (a Jesuit), nap time is magical, for then, children can be free. ‘It’s the only time that adults sleep and do not assign tasks to their children. During those hours they can go into the forest, their own world of magic.’”
<https://www.lanacion.com.ar/2167546-en-monte-santiagueno-tiene-14-anos-es>

Camila Romero as an Icon

The impact that Sonya generates in Raskolnikov comes not from what she says but rather from what she does and how she appears. Even though in some situations she remains silent, sometimes a conscious eloquent silence, at other times she is simply inarticulate. As a result, Sonya fascinates the reader who wonders what she represents and what messages she transmits with her presence. According to Saxton, her particular appearance is a sign of her existence as a living icon, and he quotes Tucker pointing out this characteristic so typical of Sonya, “[She] incorporates the Word in the image, allowing the Word to be expressed while still unuttered.”⁴²

Sonya is an inspiration for Dostoevsky, an invitation to discover the incarnational presence of God as an icon in the life of so many people. An icon has the particularity of containing in itself a message that is always “there,” within reach. Sometimes in our lives we experience circumstances that are inspirational for others and contain in themselves evident epiphanic messages. On the other hand, there are people who by the condition of their lives are in themselves an epiphany; they contain in themselves, always and at all times, hidden messages from God. Their lives, their stories, their circumstances, are always a presence, an invitation and a memory that evokes. That is why they are icons. Their messages that hide God we perceive in the exteriority of those people and also through their interiority. In this sense, Cunningham claims, “Our final task is to understand how the characters themselves bear the imprint of God, and thereby function

⁴² Benjamin Saxton, “From the Incarnational to the Grotesque in ‘Revelation,’ ‘Parker’s Back,’ and Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*,” 106.

as an icon of the Trinity. It is, I have already said, a very human icon; it is therefore beset with all the shortcomings of the created order.”⁴³

It is 5:00 a.m. in Piruj Bajo, a small village in the province of Santiago del Estero, northwestern Argentina. Camila Romero wakes up to go to the bathroom, but she cannot see anything. She gropes on the earthen floor and finds a candle beside her bed. In the middle of the darkness, Camila gets up, leaves her house, and follows the beam of light until she gets lost in the forest to be able to relieve herself behind the bushes.

“We go to the bathroom behind the trees,” says 14-year-old Camila. In this short sentence, she hides the cumulative dangers to which she is exposed and also shows the absence of government policies to help her. That community and those nearby are lacking in basic needs, and the province has the highest child poverty rate in the country, according to a report by the Argentine government agency, Observatorio de la Deuda Social.⁴⁴

There are so many structural flaws that families do not know where to begin to solve their problems. Camila’s family does not have electricity, nor drinking water, nor gas, nor a bathroom. They do not even have a latrine. As mentioned, these deficiencies expose her to enormous risks for her health and severely limit her quality of life. She is

⁴³ Cunningham, “The Brothers Karamazov as Trinitarian Theology,” 147.

⁴⁴ Santiago del Estero is the most critical province in terms of child poverty. In this province, 22.3% of children have never been checked by a doctor, 47.9% do not have health insurance, 22.9% lives in overcrowded conditions, 6.9% do not have access to water, and finally, 42.5% do not have access to secondary school. Ianina Tuñón and María Sol González, “Aproximación a La Medición de La Pobreza Infantil Desde Un Enfoque Multidimensional y de Derechos,” *Revista sociedad y equidad*, no. 5 (2017).

part of the *hijos del monte* (children of the forest), that generation of teenagers who spend their days in harmony with nature but whose rights in society are not respected.

Camila lives and represents how other young people of her age live; she is the visible face of her particular reality and also the face of many others like her. But more than that, Camila is an icon because in her daily life she demonstrates concrete features of God's compassion. Camila's generosity to the people of her village shows us that there is something in her that is unusual; there is in her a compulsion to forget herself and instead focus her energies on others. Like Sonya, Camila moves silently and almost unnoticed, but as we contemplate her gestures, her worries, and her behavior, we discover through her simple, selfless actions that she possesses a hidden dynamism that transforms reality in a silent yet constant way. Apollonio observes this dynamic in Dostoevsky in the novel: "One can see the act of charity as the 'seed', the origin for a fictional plot. Readers will naturally tend to focus on the disturbing fact of the old woman's death, but in fact the charity is the point."⁴⁵

In practical and concrete terms, Camila has to care for her 90-year-old great-grandmother who is a paralytic and does not have a wheelchair. She has to help her shower, move her, and feed her. She has to provide firewood for her family and help her mother keep the fire burning. She has to provide water for the whole village. These tasks require Camila to travel several miles a day by donkey cart.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Apollonio, "Dostoevsky's Religion: Words, Images, and the Seed of Charity," 33.

⁴⁶ Mention of Camilia's domestic chores appear in Micaela Urdinez's u-tube <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/2167126-los-hijos-del-monte-en-santiago-provincia>.

Ubaldina, her mother, highlights the importance of Camila in the life of the family. “*Ella es la que más ayuda en las tareas de la casa; siempre está cuidando a sus hermanitos y se encarga de traer todo lo necesario para la casa.*”⁴⁷ Also Ubaldina expresses her concern that perhaps Camila will soon have to leave her family. In Pirujá Bajo, women usually get married at the age of 16-18. Ubaldina says, “*¿Qué voy a hacer si Camila tiene que irse de la casa? ¿Quién me va a ayudar?*” The journalist of *Hambre de Futuro* asked Camila if she feels ready to get married, but she remained silent.⁴⁸

A life, an image, or a situation becomes an icon because it contains a hidden message that encloses the presence of God. Dostoevsky urges the reader to open himself to the search for that hidden message.⁴⁹ Why is this important? Because the process of discovering and opening up to new dimensions of what can be superficially perceived is part of what the reader should do. The most important result is not the result per se but the experience of the process. Similarly, Apollonio states that there are different levels of interpretation in Dostoevsky’s texts, and the author intends to provoke this exercise in the reader. Apollonio clearly indicates this process: “Interpretation of Dostoevsky’s works tends to follow either word-oriented or image-oriented (iconic) approaches. That is, the reader may choose to focus on the ‘word’: dialogue, argumentation, discourse,

⁴⁷ “She is the one who helps the most with the housework; she is always looking out for her siblings and provides everything necessary for the house.” Micaela Urdinez, “Hambre de Futuro,” last modified September 2, 2018, <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/2167126-los-hijos-del-monte-en-santiago-provincia>.

⁴⁸ “What am I going to do if Camila leaves our home? Who is going to help me?” Ibid.

⁴⁹ In this sense, Han reports that in postmodern society, “compulsive hypervigilance makes it hard to close your eyes. This also accounts for the achievement-subject’s nervous exhaustion. Lingering in contemplation is a form of closure. Indeed, closing your eyes visibly signifies as much. Perception can arrive at conclusion only by way of peaceful contemplation.” Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 1:40.

denotation, and narrative; or the reader may seek meaning in the image: non-verbal, symbolic images presented through implicit or explicit ekphrasis.”⁵⁰ Camila does not talk much, and she does not have much to say either; that is not the most important aspect in her life. As a result, the second level that Apollonio proposes helps us understand an interpretation of what Camila is and represents.

Paraphrasing Bakhtin from Apollonio, I conclude that there are two axes: the horizontal (word-focus) and the vertical (deeply symbolic messages which transcend what is to be found in words). Apollonio states that these two approaches to the text seem to be irreconcilable; Dostoevsky presents a third way or process that helps us delve more deeply: “No single approach will provide a complete answer, we can benefit from, talking them -word and image- in dialogue.”⁵¹

A consideration of Camila’s life can generate many objective questions about her life situation and her personal difficulties; we can also ask ourselves questions about how she is aware or not of the difficulties that constitute her reality. Beyond the above, which is very important, we may miss her most important traits: her dedication, her love, and what she represents. Only if we transcend the first two approaches can we access in a profound way the mystery that she is. Apollonio captures that dynamic of transcendence and describes it: “If arguments and dialogues never lead to the truth, and if images offer a mystical vision of faith that cannot be explained, the reader still craves a solution to the

⁵⁰ Apollonio, “Dostoevsky’s Religion: Words, Images, and the Seed of Charity,” 25–26.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

‘big question’ of good and evil in God’s world. Dostoevsky offers the hint of such an answer in examples of modest but meaningful action, specifically *acts of charity*.”⁵²

Camila’s acts of charity exist as a sort of backdrop and go unnoticed in a first consideration of the life that she lives. But, as I perceive in Dostoevsky, acts of love are those that sustain the human heart and the tenderness of God in *Crime and Punishment*. In like manner, God is present in Piruaj Bajo through the acts of love of Camila. “The process, not the solution, is the point: words cannot provide an ultimate answer.”⁵³

Let’s stay with the scene. A teenager who since the age of 12 has had to feed and bathe a 90-year-old paralytic woman. Let’s do the exercise of recreating that situation. When *Hambre de Futuro* journalist asks Camila what her dream is, she responds that she would like to have a bathroom for her family and a wheelchair for her great-grandmother. But, what is her dream? Where does Camila express her desire for personal fulfillment? Only at the very end of the interview does she consider herself and says that she wants to be a veterinarian.

The silent charity that Camila personifies is full of a deep meaning very difficult to understand from our contemporary urban context.⁵⁴ Camila does not attend classes

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁴ Here, Han suggests the difficulty of modern and technological culture to deeply discover the Other as a mystery; postmodernity saturates us with information that lacks to develop fantasy. Fantasy is understood as the dimension that helps us to tell the Other in a deeper way. “Today’s computerized high-definition imagery eliminates vagueness and ambiguity. Yet fantasy inhabits space that is undefined. Information and fantasy are opposing forces. Consequently, there is no such thing as an ‘information-thick’ imagination incapable of ‘idealizing’ the Other. The construction of the Other does not depend on whether more or less information is available. Only the negativity of withdrawal brings forth the Other in its atopic otherness. It lends the Other a higher plane of being beyond ‘idealization’ or ‘overvaluation.’ Information, as such, is positivity that leads to a dismantling of the Other’s negativity.” Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 1:37–38.

every day because her teacher cannot always get to school. This difficulty is a blow to Camila's aspirations of being a veterinarian, an addition to her other life difficulties. On the other hand, what young person of her age living in a big city has developed such altruism as Camila's? How many young people are prepared to assume the responsibilities and risks that Camila has assumed? Finally, in how many young people do we find an iconic figure, a hidden but epiphanic message like the one Camila carries? There is something in the forest, something in the misery of those people that facilitates the construction of an icon, and there is something in that forgotten situation that indicates a lesson to modern contemporary life.⁵⁵

Imagine that that it is 7:30 p.m. in Piruja Bajo, and there is no electricity. It is bed time, but first Camila lights a candle before the little image of the Virgin (*la virgencita de Huachana*) asking her to intercede before Jesus. She folds her hands and feels them rigid from using the ax. Camila's mother joins her and both pray together. They pray for her father Alberto, who works very far away at the lemon harvest, for her great grandmother, for her brother who studies in another town, and finally they pray to God asking that Mother Earth provide water, food, and firewood. In another part of the world, in another time, and under different circumstances Paul Celan offers a prayer that can also be Camila's.

Near are we, Lord,
near and graspable.

⁵⁵ "Using the key metaphor for religious faith, Carol Apollonio claims, "All you have to do is remove the external, superficial crust and take a long, close look at the seed itself, without prejudging it, and you might see things in the common people, the likes of which you would never have guessed". Apollonio, "Dostoevsky's Religion: Words, Images, and the Seed of Charity," 31.

Grasped already, Lord,
clawed into each other, as if
each of our bodies were
your body, Lord.

It cast your image into our eyes, Lord.
Eyes and mouth stand so open and void, Lord.
(...)
Pray, Lord.
We are near.⁵⁶

And then we see Sonya. “Her feverish trembling continued.... The candle-end had long since burned low in the twisted candlestick, dimly lighting the poverty-stricken room.”

(315)

The Silence

As I said in the previous section, sometimes Sonya remains in a conscious eloquent silent. It is a silence full of meaning, where the words fall away and the presence of the Other is of primary importance. R. F. Miller, in his study of Dostoevsky, wrote that “words can never fully express a thought.”⁵⁷ In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Christ remains silent before the Grand Inquisitor; this is a sign of protest before the new unjust condemnation. It is also a silence full of presence, willing to accept the sometimes harsh reality and events of life.⁵⁸ Similarly, in *The Idiot*, Skakov identifies silence as an

⁵⁶ Paul Celan, *Breathturn Into Timestead: The Collected Later Poetry: A Bilingual Edition* (Macmillan, 2014), 230.

⁵⁷ Robin Feuer Miller and others, “Dostoevsky and The Idiot: Author, Narrator, and Reader” (1981): 2.

⁵⁸ Saxton, observes this dynamic of silence in his works and doing a comparison between Dostoevsky and O’Connor says: “Here, O’Connor suggestive use of nonverbal communication is reminiscent not only of Sonya, who rarely speaks, but also of the mute Christ of Ivan’ ‘Legen’ who responds with only a silent kiss on the old Inquisitor’s lips.” Saxton, “From the Incarnational to the Grotesque in ‘Revelation,’ ‘Parker’s Back,’ and Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment.” 107.

opportunity to communicate in a more profound manner. Skakov describes Christ's silence as intentional.

In the same manner, Dostoevsky's partial citation of Christ's last words on the cross is not a mere negation or refusal to communicate; on the contrary, it is a positive "passing over in silence" of a solution to the "horrifying riddle" that the mortal reality poses. Silence for Dostoevsky is not about leaving something unsaid—it is about saying something by means of the unsaid.⁵⁹

In Boquerón, silence is presence, and in it meaning is found. It is less important in Boquerón to talk; it is more important to be and stay. The silence in Boquerón brings people to contemplation; life is "there." The circumstances of their lives and their stories do not require language to be understood; their very being and their affection speak for themselves. Silence accompanies us because it allows us to perceive the presence of the Other without the distraction of words. Likewise Sonya in the presence of Raskolnikov.

It is not easy to demonstrate this dimension through writing. However, from the testimonies we recorded, I can observe in Don Gerardo Sosa the use of silence as a tool for staying present to the other. Don Gerardo Sosa did not realize he was being interviewed.⁶⁰ Though his testimony was only eleven minutes after edits, we recorded him for more than an hour and a half. During this time, there were significant gaps of silence. He really wanted to stay "there" with the person who was in front of him.

Coming back to Gutierrez who captures the importance of silence as a spiritual dimension which allows for theological reflection, "When two lovers fall silent and simply remain in each other's presence, they know that they are experiencing love of

⁵⁹ Nariman Skakov, "Dostoevsky's Christ and Silence at the Margins of The Idiot," *Dostoevsky Studies* 13 (2009): 140.

each other at a deeper level. Silence, contemplation, and practice are all necessary mediations in thinking about God and doing theology.”⁶¹ This dimension of silence as a meditation holds true in Boquerón. When a person visits a family in Boquerón, it usually ends with a prayer to God. The prayer is not a moment disconnected from the rest of the visit. Prayer is the end of an entire encounter that was in the presence of God. Prayer is only the space of final reflection.

Once in Boquerón, I was working in a remote region. I had to travel long distances between the parish and the villages. Every day when I returned home, I waved to a family as I drove. One day the father of the family intercepted me and told me: “*Pásese por nuestra casa algún día*” (“come to our home someday”). I told him: “I will be there tomorrow around sunset.” I thought the family would have a specific reason for inviting me to their home, but when I visited the next day, they just wanted to spend time with me. They did not want to mention anything concrete, and we remained silent for a long time, just being there for each other.

When one manages to overcome the discomfort generated by silence, one opens the heart to discover the sacred in the encounter with the other. Again, Gutierrez illustrates that.

The time of silence is the time of a loving encounter with God and of prayer and commitment; it is a time of “staying with him” (John 1: 39). As the experience of human love shows us, in this kind of encounter we enter depths and regions that are ineffable. When words do not suffice, when they are incapable of communicating what is experienced at the affective level, then we are fully engaged in loving. And when words are incapable of showing forth our

⁶⁰ Joaquin Castells, *Don Gerardo Sosa - Santiago Del Estero - Argentina*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9RcFiJj4YE&t=95s>

⁶¹ Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, 14.

experience, we fall back on symbols, which are another way of remaining silent. This is precisely how we proceed in the liturgy; symbolic language is the language of a love that transcends words.⁶²

At the end of our encounter, the family that I visited offered me *mate* (a South American drink) and freshly baked *torta santiagueña* (bread). It was clear that they were waiting for my visit, and they were prepared that to receive me as a guest, as a way to celebrate a type of liturgy.

In our contemporary life, it is difficult to remain before the Other. It is difficult to be silent and open to approach the depths of mystery. Byung-Chul Han points out the difficulty of listening in a deep way, a way in which words disappear. He states, “The ‘gift of listening’ is based on the ability to grant deep, contemplative attention--which remains inaccessible to the hyperactive ego.”⁶³ Nietzsche also describes the importance of recovering passivity as a quality that humanizes society. Boquerón is a model, an inspiration before this difficulty. “From lack of repose our civilization is turning into a new barbarism. At no time have the active, that is to say the restless, counted for more. That is why one of the most necessary corrections to the character of mankind that have to be taken in hand is a considerable strengthening of the contemplative element in it.”⁶⁴

In this chapter, I have explored possible connections between some religious observation in *Crime and Punishment* applied to a concrete reality. I have tried to take the concept of incarnational reading seriously, believing that there are connections between

⁶² Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, 14.

⁶³ Han, *The Burnout Society*, 13.

⁶⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche: Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 133.

the reading that the reader does and the reality that the person has before their eyes. I strongly believe that Dostoevsky has the wisdom to put into words what has already happened in people's lives.

In Boquerón, the presence of God is clearly perceptible. The people who live there have a message to transmit to humanity. I propose three different connections or approaches that inspire contemporary life--Earth, Icon, and Silence.

Clearly, there are more common aspects between *Crime and Punishment* and Boquerón. I cannot cover all aspects in this chapter, and I cannot reduce a concrete reality to connections within a book. The fascinating thing about this reflection is that even though these are such different situations, connections can be made. This is because behind Boquerón and behind *Crime and Punishment* there are human beings searching for concrete answers to the mystery of life--to the mystery of God.

Reflecting on Boquerón with *Crime and Punishment* as a lens helps to add depth to a concrete reality. *Crime and Punishment* is a bridge that starts from a Western discourse and culminates by inspiring reflection on a concrete reality like Boquerón. In this synthesis, the presence of God emerges as an invitation through three concrete dimensions--Earth, Icon, and Silence.

Conclusion

As I indicated in the beginning of this thesis, in the character of Raskolnikov, *Crime and Punishment* presents a self-absorbed human being, one unable to open himself to dialogue with God. As a result of his wounds and the circumstances of his life, to say nothing of modern life in general, he develops an excessive self-affirmation that causes him to cease communication with others, with the earth, and with God.

Given this, Dostoevsky presents God as a backdrop that is always “there”, a God whose gaze is not lost on human beings. This inviting gaze invitation is found in love. Human beings must relearn to love and let themselves be loved. In this relearning, the human being, like Raskolnikov, will discover the presence of God acting in the world.

God is love and shows this love through concrete acts. In the case of *Crime and Punishment* these acts of love occur most notably through poor people and in situations of misery. It is God who invites, points, and proposes. This dynamic of God has a pedagogic mode-- the Incarnation. In other words, God is a God of silence and respects human beings, a hidden God whose presence grows in the human heart, if only given space to act.

God is also a God who has a predilection for the poor and the suffering. *Crime and Punishment* articulates that predilection and displays it most vividly through descriptions of pain and suffering where the question of God and the affirmation of God appear side by side.

The one who represents God, specifically in the poor, is Sonya. She brings to Raskolnikov the good news of God. In this way, *Crime and Punishment* serves as a

bridge which facilitates profound dialogue with other works, especially the works from the theology of liberation found in Latin America. The poor in *Crime and Punishment* are this theology would see as an epiphany, or a theological manifestation. As I have attempted to demonstrate, God's epiphany extends even to the reaches of misery's most hidden corners. God's grace becomes a reality, even in the midst of absolute poverty, because it is in misery, and in suffering, where spaces are created to allow charity to blossom, aspects that Raskolnikov forgot.

In this sense, following Job's example, I say that suffering must be understood and accepted, even when it is grotesque. There is special relevance here for contemporary life. The suffering of others is a wake-up call for those fast asleep in their own narcissism. It is also an opportunity to meet the God of compassion, commitment, and incarnation.

I believe that the God of Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment* is not a God of fiction but a God who is a consequence of the experience of the author. It is the God of my reflections in chapter two. I strongly believe that the God of Dostoevsky can be found in concrete situations in our contemporary life. Thus, I proposed Boquerón as a place where God is an inspiration for Western life. In this sense, and starting from a context in which poverty, pain, and suffering are the backdrop, God is present, according to Dostoevsky's words, through Mother Earth as a principle, through the Icon (I proposed Camila Romero in relation to Sonya, but there are many other people in Boquerón who are icons). Finally, God is present through silence, in contrast to the big cities unable to listen and perceive life with depth. The eloquent silence in *Crime and Punishment* is an invitation to contemplation.

It is important to note that my observations about God in *Crime and Punishment* are not exhaustive: as Dostoevsky knows, God is always greater. Therefore, Heidegger's contribution on the "last God" points out that God is more than we can think and greater than our capacity for reflection. In the same way, Boquerón cannot be reduced to my observations. The people of Boquerón are much more than I can say about them. However, my approach from *Crime and Punishment* helps create a bridge with Western culture and is also an academic reflection that offers opportunities for dialogue.

There are many studies about the religious dimension in *Crime and Punishment*. However, I did not find any about what I call "the wound in the faith" in respect to Raskolnikov's crisis with God. This wound has an important relevance at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The wound inflicted on many people results in the denial of God. This negation is justified from a rational structure that ends up being its own trap. When a person cannot discover the truth of her or his own pain, they deny God, and consequently close themselves to God's offer of love.

According to my pastoral experience with young people, it is common to find emotional blocks and narrow horizons which do not allow them to see their lives from a broader and more deeply human perspective. God often falls into that same narrow category. After my analysis, I think that the next step would be to establish a dialogue with psychology and sociology to establish an interdisciplinary approach aimed at helping to create solutions.

Regarding the relationship between *Crime and Punishment* and the theology of liberation, I believe that my reflection is novel. Unlike its appearance in other theological writings, I did not find specific references to this classic work. Yet engaging the novel's

references to God as epiphany, I have shown its correlations with Latin American theology of liberation. This theology opens a deeper field of contextualization and reflection, one which allows the novel to dialogue with the concrete realities of different contexts.

The method I developed for this study consisted in using the novel as a basis for analysis. Following this analysis, I sought to integrate a contemporary issue and propose a reflection which inspires and transforms that concrete reality. The novel was a starting point, one which led to the theological reflection of a concrete reality. I realize now that my method was an unconscious adaptation of the see-judge-act paradigm and could be reformed as read-reflect-apply.

A difficulty that I found in relating *Crime and Punishment* to Boquerón was the lack of published academic work on Boquerón, the only formal work being a brief historiography written by Guillermo Furlong. As a consequence, the recorded testimonies and the musical material that I collected for the third chapter provide some kind of documentation for the future.

I think that one of the challenges of my work going forward is to continue the reflection of Boquerón from the perspective of other scholarly disciplines, such as anthropology, history, and sociology. In this sense, my thesis would be the first of many. I hope it will inspire others to want to know more about the culture in Boquerón, and I hope it can show our contemporary life a model that allows us to reflect on our relationship with God. This is only one example, a first dialogue, one I hope will be an inspiration for others.

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