mentioned by Ivan Karamazov. However, nowhere in the novel does Dostoevsky/Ivan discuss Islam, one of the three great monotheistic religions. The accent in Ivan's rebellious speech clearly is not about Islamic religion. Ivan describes atrocities against children perpetrated by Turks as much as by Russians! Thompson seems to confuse two not necessarily connected terms! At least in the novel, Dostoevsky refrains from ascribing atrocities to Islam. We should beware of what might be interpreted as islamophobic!

Maria Granik, writing about "The Politics of Love", mentions Chekhov's story *The New Villa* which portrays, as she writes, "the very intense resistance people have to change." As an illustration, Granik quotes in a footnote a phrase by a "former member [?] of the Russian government": "We wanted the best, but it turned out as always." Why does she not name the politician? This was Viktor Chernomyrdin, Prime Minister under Yeltsin in the 1990's. Chernomyrdin, a close collaborator of Yeltsin, died in November 2010 at the age of 72. People associate him with the economic problems of his time. Finally, the reviewer is intrigued by Deborah Martinsen's footnote about the eminent Dostoevsky scholars Bakhtin and Jackson whom she calls "two of Dostoevsky's greatest readers". The reviewer is not sure who is a "great reader," - not to speak of the "greatest"? Martinsen presumably did not base her evaluation on the OECD's PISA criteria, but then on what else?

In summary, the book should stimulate further research of the topics discussed here. We know that "pros" and "contras" are usually indicative of an ongoing dialogue acting as a stimulus for further discussions and, in this case, proving that Dostoevsky's last novel is still offering many aspects to be further investigated. The reviewer wishes the collection many ('great'!) readers!

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Rowan Williams: *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction*. Waco, Texas: Baylor UP 2008. 290 pp.

There has been a chorus of praise for the Archbishop of Canterbury's foray into Dostoevsky criticism. Roman Catholic and Jewish periodicals

have published enthusiastic reviews.[1] Before his death in 2009, Richard Neuhaus, a priest and leading Catholic intellectual, called it "a magnificent contribution to understanding the questions that haunted and drove the world's greatest novelist" (58). The specialized fields of Dostoevsky studies and literary criticism have welcomed the Archbishop's study as an important contribution to their endeavors. Among Slavists and literary critics, the responses have ranged from adulatory (Hillier in *Literature and Theology*, Tucker in *SEEJ*) to positive with some qualifications (Martinsen in *Christianity and Literature*, Miller in *Times Higher Education*, Thompson in *Slavonic and East European Review*). Williams "intermittently achieves what the best literary criticism strives for—smart readings of challenging works," Robin Feuer Miller writes in *Times Higher Education* (46). The "sheer brilliance of his insights," Russell Hillier writes of Williams in a review published in *Literature and Theology*, should be appreciated "as flashes of genius" (116).

Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction propounds what Diane Oenning Thompson, in her review of Williams, calls a "theology of dialogue" (636). Williams indeed elevates a life-sustaining dialogical process to the essence of Dostoevsky's art and spiritual vision and, even more boldly, to the essence of Christian faith. Rather than offering one more review, I've tried to honor this spirit by crafting a dialogue with Paul Contino's reading from a Roman Catholic perspective, and, hopefully, with Williams. I identify several questions that arise from the book as areas for future exchange between Williams and the community of Dostoevsky scholars. If it remains the Archbishop's sole contribution to Dostoevsky studies, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* will have a significant impact on our field. It's to be hoped, however, that this will not be an isolated interjection into our discourse, but instead marks the beginning of a conversation between Williams and members of the International Dostoevsky Society.

This book is not for the uninitiated. Williams draws on an impressive command of Dostoevsky's life, works, and the critical tradition, and assumes that his readers do as well. He plunges immediately into sophisticated explorations of Dostoevsky's enduring enigmas, structuring his chapters around questions that require deft handling of different texts and periods in Dostoevsky's life. The first chapter, for example, illuminates what it might mean to cleave to a "Christ outside the truth" by reading the

[1] See for example Paul Contino, who calls it "one of the very best studies of the greatest Christian novelist" (*America*, p. 25); and Roger Gottlieb's review in *Tikkun*, "Two Beautiful Books" (March/April 2009, vol. 24 Issue 2, p 64-66).

hopes and anxieties animating Dostoevsky's 1854 letter to Fonvizina with elements from later works. The insistence on "the arbitrary element in the human mind" in *Notes from Underground* (17); the repudiation of what Williams calls "voluntarist faith" in *Demons* (22); and the passages devoted to the Grand Inquisitor and Ivan's devil, Williams argues, are intimately linked with Dostoevsky's earlier concerns. New perspectives on the essence of Dostoevsky's Christ-centered spirituality emerge, and Christ's place with "a freedom beyond the systems of the world" in Dostoevsky's creative system becomes firmly established (31).

The analyses presented here form a significant contribution to the Bakhtinian school of Dostoevsky interpretation. Midway through the book, Williams reflects back on the structure of his argument. We have seen, he writes,

> how in Bakhtin's reading of Dostoevsky the author's absence as author mirrors God's relation with creation, and we have seen how Dostoevsky's own authorial strategies experiment with various ways of securing the absence of an authorial last word or even a dependable authorial perspective (172).

The ethical implications of such a mode of authorship, Williams explains, remained less developed in Bakhtin, and it is here that he stakes his territory. "What is emerging with greater clarity," he explains, "is how this mode of authorship is to be understood as a modeling of the ethical vision contained within the novels" (172).

Williams emboldens an initial Bakhtinian vision by avowing the specifically Christian nature of such authorship and ethics. His "most revolutionary discovery," Ralph Wood writes in a review published in *Touchstone*, "is that Dostoevsky's fiction is open-ended and dialogical *because* it is Christian. His novels are inconclusive (though not relativistic) in ways that reflect God's own inconclusive actions in the world" (31). Williams argues that Dostoevsky's novels articulate a compelling "theology of writing" (46) in which

> the specific work of the novelist becomes theologically significant. Dostoevsky works on the basis that the novelist is able to show in some degree what divine creation might be like: that is, by creating a world in which the unexpected and unscripted is continually unfolding, in which there is no imposed last word. (234)

This "deeply Christian version of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism in Dostoevsky," Miller points out, would have been enriched by consideration of Vyacheslav Ivanov's contributions to Dostoevsky

studies (46). Although Williams presents his project as an extension of Bakhtin, his interpretation of Bakhtin is not entirely uncontroversial, and will hopefully provoke further discussion and comparison to the pioneering work of Caryl Emerson and Gary Saul Morson.

A. N. Wilson, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, has characterized the book as a form of "theological apologetics" (3). This form produces some problems, most significantly a neglect of the literariness of the texts under discussion and a failure to engage with the insights of some prominent Dostoevsky scholars. Williams does engage with other Dostoevsky readers; but, as Thompson notes, many "have been overlooked" (739). She cites Jostein Børtnes; I would add (in addition to Emerson and Morson) Deborah Martinsen and Robin Feuer Miller.

What we witness in *The Idiot*, Williams writes, ". . . is not the outworking of a theological strategy but the effect that the writing itself has upon the original purposes of the writer" (xx). This is indeed convincing, but the work of Miller and Morson should be engaged here. When Williams writes that *The Brothers Karamazov* demonstrates mature faith resulting from "the relentless stripping away from faith of egotistical or triumphalistic expectations," the absence of Morson's voice from the discussion is striking (10).[1] Williams makes a truly exciting contribution to our understanding of the sacred in Dostoevsky. He zeroes in on the relentless, often disturbing subjection of the holy to degradation in the novels, and explains that this is a key dimension of Dostoevsky's Christology: "the essential vulnerability of the incarnate image of the holy," he argues, stems from "the image of the self-emptying God" (224). His thought-provoking analyses of *why* images of the sacred are subjected to humiliation in Dostoevsky will hopefully result in fruitful dialogue with Martinsen's investigations of shame.

Just how Russian Orthodox the spirituality manifest in Dostoevsky's writings might be remains subject to debate. Williams weighs in here, emphasizing Russian Orthodoxy. Critics who attempt to limit the significance of Western and/or literary influences on Dostoevsky frequently resort to generic violence, reading his texts as something other than literature, and Williams is no exception. As Thompson has observed in connection to Williams's reading of Alyosha's "Life" of Zosima, more "consideration of genre, of formal structures is called for" in his study,

[1] Morson is selectively cited, largely to contest his reading of *The Brothers Karamazov* as offering a theology of the Holy Sprit. Morson is oddly missing from discussion of what Williams, in language that inevitably calls Morson's work to mind, calls "prosaic" goodness (23).

and this is apparent in his attempts to claim Dostoevsky for Orthodoxy (739). He catalogs some examples of what he claims was Dostoevsky's "conscious use of traditional Orthodox material," and concludes from this that

> "[. . .] the degree of dependence in Zosima's teaching upon non-Orthodox sources—St. Francis, the bishop in *Les misérables*—seems less important (though not negligible) in the light of the evidence of such a conscious use of traditional Orthodox material" (205).

This is odd reasoning. Is a (putative) reconstructed authorial intent the measure of significance in a literary text? We are dealing with novels, after all, and not theological treatises, where the reconstruction of authorial intention might be more relevant. And one can muster at least equal evidence of (to some degree probably conscious) heavy, intense borrowing from Western and literary sources, as fine Dostoevsky scholars in both Russia and the West have shown.

By joining the debate as to the Russian and Orthodox nature of the spirituality manifest in Dostoevsky's novels, Williams opens the way to further dialogue: more discussion of *what's at stake* in this matter seems called for. A conversation about why this issue—Dostoevsky's Russianness and Orthodoxy—is a matter of concern to many in Russia, Europe, and North America would be interesting, and Williams's participation in this discussion would be welcome. I join Paul Contino in pointing to the enthusiastic reception of Dostoevsky among Roman Catholics as evidence of what Paul calls the artist's "ecumenical potentialities." Dostoevsky clearly activates dimensions of Christian experience that transcend the Russian Orthodox Church.

The general neglect of literary form is linked to another pervasive oversight. Although he is concerned to demonstrate the Russian Orthodox nature of Dostoevsky's religious faith, Williams performs a troubling erasure of Dostoevsky's concrete specificity, of what must be Dostoevsky's inevitable *difference* from himself. In Williams's reading of Dostoevsky, it's as if no temporal, confessional, or cultural differences between them exist. Dostoevsky may indeed be, in Octavio Paz's words, "our great contemporary," but surely his nineteenth-century, Russian spirituality cannot be aligned to that of a twentieth-first century Anglican quite as seamlessly as occurs here.[1] The absence of any significant friction between the visions of the divine and the moral life clearly

[1] Quoted by Miller in Todd (495).

espoused by Williams, and those which he attributes to Dostoevsky, elicits some skepticism.

Williams does identify two significant points of disagreement with Dostoevsky—Dostoevsky's nationalism and antisemitism—but this does not hinder a general melding of their voices. "Williams explicitly disavows Dostoevsky's flawed ethnic chauvinism," Gottlieb writes in *Tikkun*, "but he otherwise inhabits his subject's worldview so fully that I will treat the book's ideas as be-longing to both of them" (64). One is left asking the question: do these ideas really belong to Dostoevsky, or does a powerful reader overpower the author here?

Reading Williams read Dostoevsky might produce for some the uneasy suspicion that Feuerbach was right, that human descriptions of the divine (or another author) tell us a great deal more about the person articulating them than they do about God. The God Williams finds moving through Dostoevsky's writings is one who fulfills some distinctly twentieth-first century, Western longings: this is God as ideal therapist, an endlessly patient facilitator of dialogue leading to healing self-realization for all involved.

Some earlier Christians, the Calvinists, conceived God as he who judged us before birth, before any possibility of choice or action; for Dostoevsky, Williams argues, God is something that withholds judgment upon us even through the transition of death, something that guarantees the possibility of endless self-determination. "This is vintage Rowan Williams," Neuhaus writes, "—an endlessly patient insistence on respect for 'the other' and 'otherness,' a dialogical enmity toward every form of closure, an obligation to keep the narrative open" (Neuhaus 57-58). This insistence on endless dialogue, Neuhaus concludes, "is certainly Rowan Williams. Whether it is Dostoevsky is quite another matter" (Neuhaus 58).[1]

Whether Dostoevsky's writings manifest a vision of God as a quasi-linguistic principle guaranteeing endless dialogue, as Williams believes he can reconstruct from the novels, does indeed remain an open question. The possibility of finding our own spiritual needs met through Dostoevsky's writings, as many of his nineteenth-century Russian contemporaries rapturously found theirs satisfied, should be questioned. Unlike Paul, I do not interpret Dostoevsky's influence on so many other Christians as evidence that Williams is not projecting his own hopes and

[1] To borrow Martinsen's words, "sometimes there is more Williams than Dostoevsky" (321).

desires onto both God and the novelist. It remains to be demonstrated that Dostoevsky's positive reception by Christians around the world has been due to his articulation of the type of faith Williams ascribes to him here. The fact of their success—Dostoevsky's impact on Christians around the world, the Archbishop's on the many enthusiastic readers of his Dostoevsky study—does suggest that they have articulated a vision that resonates with others. This demonstrates the communality of the desires fulfilled, but not the reality of their fulfillment or the accuracy of ascribing their outline to God (or Dostoevsky).

Critical dimensions are lost when we fail to tease out and respect the specificity, the irreducible individuality, of what Dostoevsky's novels show us about spiritual experience and the divine. One thing that's obscured, for example, is the true significance of Dostoevsky's historical-political values for his spiritual vision. Wilson argues—and I fully concur—that here is a real "difficulty" with Williams's dialogical reading of Dostoevsky:

> the difficulty is raised by the strange voice of Dostoevsky himself, not merely in the books but also in the journalism. If there is a lack in Williams's rich book . . . it's not that it fails to refer to Dostoevsky's journalism (there is plenty of ripe reference to *A Writer's Diary*), but that it does not confront the problem which the journalism presents to the 'polyphonic' reading of the novels. (4)

I disagree with Wilson about the level of engagement with the *Diary*: a book length study of Dostoevsky that sets out to win sympathy for the "picture of what faith and the lack of it would *look* like in the political and social world of his day" should, in fairness, include many more references to the *Diary* than can be found here (Williams 4). "The loud-mouthed Slavophile journalist is there in the very texture of the novels," as Wilson asserts, and his presence should form a formidable obstacle to any attempt to claim Dostoevsky as spiritual kin (5). Figuring out how to read the "ever present" journalist and the novelist together remains a pressing task, one to which Williams will hopefully contribute.

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