

STARETS ZOSIMA IN THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV: A STUDY IN THE MIMESIS OF VIRTUE. By *Sven Linnér*. Stockholm Studies in Russian Literature, 4. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1975. 237 pp. \$14.75, paper. Dist. by Humanities Press, Inc., Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey 07716.

Linnér's new book is as stimulating as his previous work, *Dostoevsky on Realism*. Half of the present work deals with the problem of why Dostoevsky did not depict Zosima realistically even though that was his intention. In a penetrating comparison of Zosima with Bishop Tikhon in *The Possessed* ("Stavrogin's Confession") Linnér points out that Tikhon is a complex character with strengths and weaknesses, while Zosima—lacking the scars of spiritual temptation and battle—is so morally perfect as to be more than human, his inner harmony symbolized by his unchanging smile. The difference is attributable to the fact that Tikhon is realistically drawn from the lives of Russian holy men whereas Zosima's prototype is Western, not Russian: he derives from Rousseau's cult of the heart and from the Christian humanism of the Catholic bishop Myriel in Hugo's *Les Misérables*. Furthermore, if Zosima strikes modern readers as two-dimensional it is because we no longer believe that purity, innocence, and virtue are attainable, nor do we have the close knowledge of the New Testament that made Zosima convincing to Dostoevsky's contemporaries. In any case, concludes Linnér, the perfect saint—one without any weaknesses—may appear in life but not in realistic fiction. (I have offered elsewhere another explanation: that Dostoevsky deliberately simplified Zosima to make him the antithesis of the Grand Inquisitor in the ideological debate that sets the stage for the main action of the novel.)

The second half of Linnér's book is devoted to Fedorov's limited influence on Dostoevsky (concerning Dostoevsky's interpretation of the Resurrection), and to a fascinating study of "life versus the meaning of life" which, according to Linnér, is more fundamental to *The Brothers Karamazov* than God, *narod*, or church. Like Tolstoy in *War and Peace*, Dostoevsky counterposed *feeling*, which is life-giving, to *reason*, which negates life and leads to suicide. But feeling—love of life—embraces a feeling for Sodom as well as for the Madonna; it has no ethical attributes. And if reason is evil, how can any society be organized? Without an organized society how can crime and suffering be eliminated? Dostoevsky offers only the inadequate admonition, "Humble thyself!" Linnér claims that Dostoevsky at his deepest level was a pessimist; despairing of gradual social change and opposed to revolution, he fled into a utopian dream of spiritual transformation without knowing how to make the state disappear.

This censure may be true but it is, in a sense, irrelevant. At his deepest level Dostoevsky was a novelist rather than a social thinker. As a novelist, and perhaps as an epileptic, he specialized in the apocalyptic mode. It may be that the very fact that his solution to the problem of suffering was religious and individual rather than social—and thus no realistic answer to Belinskii and Ivan Karamazov—goaded him into writing increasingly ambitious novels to justify God's ways to man.

In emphasizing the life-theme Linnér has opened up a fruitful approach to Dostoevsky. The relation of the life-theme to freedom needs to be further explored. Linnér's book—honest, thoughtful, original—deserves the attention of everyone concerned with *The Brothers Karamazov*.

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