1998

Dostoevsky’s Modern Gospel: Crime and Punishment and the Gospel of John

Priscilla Meyer
Wesleyan University, pmeyer@wesleyan.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://wesscholar.wesleyan.edu/div1facpubs

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Arts and Humanities at WesScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Division I Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of WesScholar. For more information, please contact dschnaidt@wesleyan.edu, ljohanson@wesleyan.edu.
Crime and Punishment: Dostoevsky’s Modern Gospel

Priscilla Meyer
Wesleyan University

As Joseph Frank notes, most commentators “vigorously condemn” the Epilogue to Crime and Punishment. Some find it an artificial appendage unmotivated by the rest of the novel. Frank himself feels that Raskolnikov’s “conversion” is “brushed in too rapidly and perfunctorily to be really persuasive” and therefore “invariably leaves readers with a quite justified sense of dissatisfaction.” More recently others have identified continuities between the Epilogue and the body of the novel and Robert Belknap finds what Mochulsky called a

1 This article takes up ideas first presented by Ralph Savarese in a class lecture on John in Crime and Punishment.


4 Frank, pp. 146-7. As Ralph Savarese points out (private correspondence), this dissatisfaction may ultimately depend on the reader's belief in God and faith in the possibility of redemption or alternatively, on the reader's belief in Literature and its potential for spiritual restoration.

5 Rosenshield, op. cit., chapters 9-10; David Matual, “In Defense of the Epilog of Crime and Punishment,” Studies in the Novel, Spring 1992, v. 24,n. 1, pp. 26-34. As Ralph Savarese points out, however, artistic unity does not itself obviate the charge that the Epilogue is artificial or less credible than the rest of the novel.
“pious lie” to make “good religious sense.”6 In his analysis of the novel’s narrative structure, Gary Rosenshield points out that an account of a “miraculous conversion” can hardly be presented with the same verisimilitude as Raskolnikov’s preparations for the murder.7 He reads the final two pages of the Epilogue (the offensively non-dialogic climax) as a completion of the scene in which Sonya reads the story of the raising of Lazarus to Raskolnikov, as a “fulfilled prophecy.” By the end of the novel, “[t]he raising of Lazarus has become a vital reality for nineteenth-century Russia, and thus for all time.”8

Indeed, Dostoevsky’s entire novel may be read as a modern gospel, in particular, the gospel according to John from which Sonya reads at surprising length to Raskolnikov.9 Dostoevsky translates John into modern dress in order to have the Word made, if not flesh, then at least newly vital; the realism of the first six parts shows Raskolnikov’s miraculous transformation to be possible for any reader. And as we shall see, the Epilogue’s apparently sudden change of tone and focus has its origin in the conclusion of the Gospel of John.10

(Private correspondence).

---

7 Rosenshield, pp. 112.
8 Ibid, p. 116. As will be clear, I agree with Rosenshield’s rejection of Bakhtin’s view of the dialogicity of Crime and Punishment (p. 127).
9 That several of the passages Sonya reads were inserted in the final stages of composition to replace censored material (see Pol. sob. soch., VII, 326) substantiate the importance of John for the novel.
Whatever Dostoevsky’s personal battle for faith may have been, he proclaimed the religious ideas inspiring his new gospel in *Diary of a Writer* (June 1876, Chapter 2, Part 4). He writes of “the true exaltation of Christ...and the ultimate word of Orthodoxy, at whose head Russia has long been standing...One can seriously believe in human brotherhood, in the universal reconciliation of nations, in a union founded on principles of universal service to humanity and regeneration of people through the true principles of Christ.” Dostoevsky calls this the “‘new word’ which Russia at the head of a united Orthodoxy can utter to the world.” 11

Christ is the Word made flesh who brings the “new word” of the New Testament, the idea of Christian love and forgiveness. Raskolnikov represents a parody of this ideal: he wants to utter a “new word” by means of murder, by assuming the power of life and death that properly belongs to God, as Sonya tells him.12 Dostoevsky leads Raskolnikov through a series of events that parody moments in the life of Jesus as recounted by John in his Gospel. Michael Holquist has argued that Raskolnikov’s tale is made up of two distinct kinds of narrative, the detective story in historical time and the “wisdom tale” conceived in eternal time, which must be made to merge to complete Raskolnikov’s story.13 These levels may also

---

be seen as Tynyanov’s original text and its parody, in which John is the original “wisdom tale” and Raskolnikov’s odyssey a grotesque mockery of the ideal path revealed to us by the “genuine image of Christ.” Only when the two tales merge in the Epilogue and “the second level becomes visible through the surface of the work” can the reader finally see past the parody to its high purpose.

John is emphasized over the first three gospels by Russian Orthodoxy. Characterized by its representation of the human aspect of Jesus, the account of his life focuses on the idea of “down-to-earth salvation which enters the day-to-day journey of human life.” The Gospel demonstrates the connection between God and human life, and maps the stages of believing into life’s stages. Because the Word becomes flesh in Jesus, it entails death; to achieve faith one must embrace death. God’s word works in the inner heart and is then manifested in actions which ultimately lead to community. In the second part of the gospel, despite the treachery and violence surrounding Jesus’s passion, love and the power of life gain ascendency.

It is understandable, then, why Dostoevsky chooses John as text for Crime and Punishment. He reveals but conceals its importance in Part 4, chapter 4 when he has

---

14 Yury Tynyanov, “Dostoevsky i Gogol’ (K teorii parodii)” (Petrograd, 1921), Part I.
15 A Writer’s Diary, p. 525.
16 Tynyanov (English translation), p. 117.
Raskolnikov asks Sonya “where’s the passage about Lazarus?” and she answers “It’s in the fourth Gospel.” 19 The raising of Lazarus is clearly meant to parallel the redemption of Raskolnikov: Jesus raises Lazarus four days after he has been in the tomb; 20 Sonya reads to Raskolnikov four days after he has committed murder 21 (the parallel is clearer when Raskolnikov’s later understanding --“I killed myself”--is taken into account). Here Sonya plays the role of Jesus to Raskolnikov’s Lazarus; through her Raskolnikov begins his day-to-day journey towards faith and community. Hers is the antipode to Raskolnikov’s role of mock-Christ who travesties Jesus, who is God become man, by aspiring to be a man-God.

I Parallels between scenes from the life of Jesus and Raskolnikov

   Crucial moments in Jesus’s life as told by John—a composite passover feast, Jesus’s resurrection, Pilate’s interrogation of Jesus, and Jesus’s third appearance to his disciples—provide the basis for scenes in Crime and Punishment.

   Marmeladov’s wake is a travesty of the composite feasts Jesus attends. Unlike the synoptic Gospels which each encompass one year, John describes three years of Jesus’s ministry, marked by three passovers. In Crime and Punishment, Marmeladov’s funeral feast takes features from several feasts in John, including the three passovers.

   At the first passover, Jesus drives the money-lenders from the temple and says he can rebuild the temple in three days. He is speaking of the temple of his body, which will be resurrected in three days. Dostoevsky gives the metaphor flesh in Sonya, whose earthly body is defiled but whose spirit remains untouched by her sin. While on the one hand this idea is

19 Fyodor Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, trans. Sidney Monas (New York: Signet, 1968), p.318. All page references to the English text will be to this translation.

20 Dostoevsky, Pol. sob. soch., VII, 386.

21 David Matual points this out, op. cit., p. 32.
reinforced by her implicit resemblance to Mary Magdalen, it is also realized by a parallel to Jesus, whose body is crucified but whose spirit is eternal. At her father’s funeral, that division is exploited by Luzhin when he accuses her of theft. Sonya's position as a prostitute makes her vulnerable to his slander in the eyes of the assembled mob; Luzhin plays the role of Judas, planting one hundred rubles in Sonya’s pocket instead of accepting thirty silver pieces from Caiaphas, so that Sonya is put on trial. The feast is Sonya’s “last supper” at which she is to be handed over to the authorities. As Sonya fulfills the role of Jesus, Raskolnikov simultaneously plays that of mock-Jesus: while Sonya undergoes her ordeal, he stands “slozhiv nakrest ruki, i ognennym vzglyadom smotrel na nee. ‘O Gospodi!’ vyrvalos’ u Soni.”

Raskolnikov is further likened to Jesus at Marmeladov’s wake by the role Jesus plays at two other feasts. The first is the wedding at Cana, where Jesus turns the water into wine. Dostoevsky’s description of the funeral feast begins: “vin vo mnozhestvennom chisle ne bylo, madery tozhe, no bylo vino (6, 291), The description of the food is introduced by the Old Church Slavonic word for edibles: “Iz yastv...bylo tri-chetyre blyuda,” echoing Jesus’s words in John: “yadushchiy Moyu Plot’ i piyushchiy Moyu Krov’ prebyvaet vo mne” (6:56). In John, the word yadushchiy is repeated three more times (6:50, 51, 54). Its association with the crucial doctrine of communion and transubstantiation signals Raskolnikov’s potential for resurrection through the Christian compassion he has shown in providing the money for the funeral feast.

Raskolnikov’s impulsive gift offered at Marmeladov’s last rites evokes both the miracle of turning the water into wine and the miracle of the loaves and fishes that takes place at the second passover in John. Five thousand followers gather around Jesus. His disciple Andrew tells him “there is a small boy here who has five barley loaves and two fishes” (6:10). From these Jesus miraculously provides food for the multitude. It is the small boy aspect of

Fyodor Dostoevsky, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 30 vols., Akademiya nauk, Leningrad 19 72 -1990, vol. 6, p. 303. Citations from the Russian or my translations from it will be indicated in the text by volume and page.
Raskolnikov identified in the mare-beating dream that has the faith and compassion that lead him to provide the wherewithal for Marmeladov’s feast and ultimately make possible his own transformation.

The wake scene is built around the contrast between bodily and spiritual food, the metaphor of the sacrament of the bread and the wine; its grotesqueness comes from the exaggeratedly petty and venal level of the earthly sphere in the context of the subtle presence of the biblical text. Sonya’s mock trial prefigures Raskolnikov’s actual one and is a source of hope: its climax is the exoneration of Sonya and the indictment of Luzhin before the fickle crowd. The outcome reverses the climax of the third passover in John when Judas hands Jesus over to the authorities and the crowd chooses to condemn Jesus to death rather than Barrabas.

II Characters

*Crime and Punishment* is designed in the spirit rather than the letter of *John*. The parallels are fluid, overlapping, and not always clearly marked. *John* is evoked subliminally, for example by giving the patronymic of John (Ivanovna/Ivanovich) to six characters apparently indiscriminately: Alyona and Lizaveta, Katerina, Svidrigailov, and the two German ladies, Louisa at the police station and the Marmeladovs’ landlady Amalia. Dostoevsky twice calls our attention to the patronymic twice at Marmeladov’s wake, first when Katerina Ivanovna dispute’s Amalia’s right to call herslef “Ivanovna” and later when Luzhin thinks Sonya’s patronymic is Ivanovna instead of Semyonovna. In the same way, attributes of biblical personages and markers of scenes from the life of Jesus are not always intended as precise identifications but may be distributed freely.

In *John*, Judas has a kind of double in Simon-Peter who denies Jesus three times before the cock crows.23 Pyotr Petrovich (Q.E.D.) Luzhin plays the role of Peter as betrayer, as we

23 See Brodie, pp. 445, 453, 527.
have seen, when he frames Sonya. His impending betrayal is heralded by one of Katerina
Ivanovna’s irrelevant guests: she tells of how the dying Marmeladov had a cookie in his
pocket for the children in the shape of a rooster. The guest screams “Petushka? Vy izvolili
skazat’ petushka?” Marmeladov too shares aspects of the martyred Jesus, and the drunken
guests as well as Pyotr (Peter) and Andrei (Andrew) betray him by their lack of love and
indifference to his fate, as “rooster” is shrieked twice. The apparently random details of the
scandal scene are designed to carry biblical undertones to maintain our subliminal awareness
of the ideal of compassion against which they are contrasted.

In John, unlike the synoptic Gospels, Peter is redeemed in the final chapter when Jesus
asks him three times if he loves him, and Peter affirms it thrice, balancing his earlier denial. In
Crime and Punishment, Peter’s role as loving disciple is played by Porfiry Petrovich. Peter
means “rock.” So does porphyry, which is a kind of purple granite. Both Luzhin and Porfiry
have the patronymic “Petrovich.” Luzhin’s role as Judas is complemented by Porfiry’s as
Peter: Porfiry could hand over Raskolnikov to the authorities he represents, as suggested by
the “purple” meaning of porfiry, but three times chooses not to.

As the highest civil authority in the novel, Porfiry also plays the role of Pilate.
Raskolnikov’s last encounter before going to give himself up is with Porfiry; it is his third
tormenting interview with him.. In John Pilate interrogates Jesus three times, and each time
finds him innocent. Porfiry has a compassionate view of the law and although he knows
Raskolnikov is guilty and must be condemned for his crime, allows him to go free out of faith
in Raskolnikov’s nature. Again, Dostoevsky reverses the cruel aspect of Jesus’s story to
emphasize hope in the capacity of the human spirit to be regenerated.

After his first interview with Pilate, Pilate’s soldiers dress Jesus in a purple
robe (19:2-5) and place a crown of thorns on his head, mocking his alleged
pretensions to position as King of the Jews. Dostoevsky underscores the
ambiguity of man’s judiciary power by giving the police inspector the purple
that points to the contradiction between earthly and spiritual power.
John writes his Gospel to testify that Jesus is the Christ whose spiritual power he contrasts to earthly power. In answer to Pilate’s interrogation, Jesus repeatedly distinguishes divine law from human law ("My kingship is not of this world" [18:33]). Dostoevsky uses John’s Gospel to make the same distinction. He reverses the roles of Pilate and Christ in Porfiry’s interrogation of Raskolnikov; as interrogator, Porfiry is the one who urges the life of the spirit on his unbelieving prisoner. Porfiry asks Raskolnikov “What kind of a prophet are you?” and repeatedly uses the phrase “Don’t you believe?” apparently in its conversational sense, but it becomes clear in the context of the rest of his words that the “belief” also alludes to the problem of faith: he tells Raskolnikov that “perhaps God is keeping [him] for something.” Porfiry says his words sound “as if they were part of a sermon” (6, 251), and tells Raskolnikov that he needs faith. He encourages Raskolnikov to take up his cross in the hope of a future life.

Unlike Pilate with Jesus, Porfiry finds Raskolnikov guilty, but while Pilate nonetheless sentences Jesus to be crucified despite faith in his innocence, in Dostoevsky’s version the interrogator has faith in the guilty one and mercifully releases him. Dostoevsky contrasts the legal aspect of Raskolnikov’s trial and sentencing to divine judgment and mercy as part of the novel’s philosophical argument with the legal reforms of the 1860s and with socialist radicalism. Again Dostoevsky gives his modern gospel a happier outcome: while Jesus is condemned to death, the necessary preliminary to his resurrection, Porfiry is able to persuade Raskolnikov to take steps that allow him spiritual rebirth within earthly life.

III  Raskolnikov’s path to faith

25 Thus it is puzzling why A. Boyce Gibson (The Religion of Dostoevsky, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973, p. 91) calls Porfiry’s position “pure analytical psychology, depending on no religious assumptions.”
Details along Raskolnikov’s path hint at the parallel to the life of Jesus as told by John, often in inverted form. Raskolnikov actually commits the sin of which the Jews accuse Jesus when they say “You, being a man, make yourself God” (10:33). Raskolnikov does this by passing judgment on Alyona Ivanovna, thinking that he benefits mankind by ridding it of the money lender. Jesus, by contrast, says “I come not to judge the world, but to save the world” (12:47). Jesus prepares a whip from cords in order to chase the money-changers from the temple (2:15-16); Raskolnikov sews his axe-loop and binds his fake pledge in twine preparing to murder the money-lender. Raskolnikov’s “victory over the whole ant heap” is an arrogant parody of Jesus’s “I have overcome the world” (16:33). Dostoevsky has Raskolnikov confuse earthly power (physical force, economic power, the intellect) with moral and spiritual power, as emphasized by the convicts’ humility before the frail Sonya.

The cleansing of the temple takes place at Capernaum, the administrative center of Galilee. Svidrigailov calls Petersburg “the administrative center.” In Petersburg, Svidrigailov lives next door to Sonya who rents from the Kapernaumovs. Capernaum is mentioned five times in John (as against seven times total in the three synoptic Gospels); the name means “village of consolation” and is the site of two of Jesus’s miracles: he cures an official’s son without even seeing him (4:46) and he walks on water to Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee (6:17). It is in the synagogue at Capernaum that Jesus preaches that his body is the bread of eternal life. Jesus says that “unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (3:5). This is the text for the positive dimension of the water motif in Crime and Punishment; its complement is the dirty water of the Neva in which Svidrigailov and Raskolnikov contemplate drowning themselves. Of all the books in the bible, water is mentioned most frequently in John, where it is used eleven times, two more times than in Genesis. In Crime and Punishment, Svidrigailov chooses death and shoots himself during a downpour, while Raskolnikov chooses life on the bank of the Irtysh River.

Capernaum, then, is an appropriate association for Sonya. She offers consolation and miracle by reading to Raskolnikov from John at the Kapernaumovs.’ This is the beginning of
Raskolnikov’s movement toward relinquishing his pride in favor of Sonya’s faith. When Jesus meets Lazarus’s sister Martha, she says “Had you been here, my brother had not died” (11:21). In Crime and Punishment, Marfa Petrovna could say this of her husband Svidrigailov: had he had faith in Jesus, he would not have committed suicide. He had failed to find a redeemer in Dunya; Raskolnikov finds his in Sonya. The parallel correlates physical with spiritual death: as Jesus says to Nicodemus, “He who believes is not condemned, he who does not believe is condemned already” (3:18).

From the moment that Raskolnikov kills Alyona Ivanovna, the tension builds until he confesses. Will he confess? Will he be arrested? A similar tension builds throughout the Gospel of John, generated by the expectation of Jesus’s arrest: “But no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come” (8:20). This is repeated four more times until Jesus says “Father, the hour has come” (17:1). When Raskolnikov visits his mother for the last time, already preparing to give himself up, she says “as soon as I saw you, I thought, well, apparently the fateful hour has come” (497).

From the beginning of the gospel, Jesus knows that he must “drink the cup which the Father has given me” (18:11). Raskolnikov is first offered the “yellow glass with the yellow water” (110) by Nikodem Fomich at the police station when he faints and also by Porfiry who twice tries to get him to drink some water, using the biblical form of the verb ispit’, and then twice using the more normal form, vypit’ (6, 264). On both occasions Raskolnikov refuses to drink. Even after he finally takes up Sonya’s proffered cross and mounts the stairs to the police station for the final time, he again pushes away the glass of water he is offered (511). This suggests that his confession does not complete his passion; he has yet to “drink the cup.”

Raskolnikov’s evidence at his trial contains further parodic inversion of Jesus’s life. When on the third day the stone is removed from Jesus’s tomb, all that remains of Jesus’s earthly self are the linen cloths and the napkin which had been on his head (20: 6), indications of the resurrection of his body. When Raskolnikov’s evidence is investigated, they turn back the stone in the yard on Voznesensky (resurrection) Prospect to find Raskolnikov’s hidden
booty and “several extremely damaged banknotes” (bumazhki chrezvychaino poportilis’) (6, 410). Money in Crime and Punishment is the emblem of earthly power as well as of compassion; here the booty from the murder rots as the unresurrected body rots, while presaging the potential, through compassion, for resurrection of the spirit. Raskolnikov’s Golgotha comes when he confesses to Nikodem Fomich, but Raskolnikov has yet to achieve resurrection. Similarly, in John, it is not the climax of Jesus’s tale when Nicodemus gives Jesus the traditional Jewish burial at the end of Chapter 19. Completion of the miracle of Jesus’s resurrection takes place only in Chapter 21.

IV The Epilogues of John and Crime and Punishment

Chapter 21 of John is conventionally called the Epilogue by biblical scholars. It is unique to John’s gospel and is devoted to Jesus’s actions after his resurrection. The disciples Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael and two others are fishing by the Sea of Tiberias:

Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, “Children, have you any fish?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea. (21:4-8)

Jesus cooks the disciples a breakfast of fish on a charcoal fire:

Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. (21:12-13)

Dostoevsky catches the everyday simplicity of this miracle in the climactic scene of Raskolnikov’s epiphany:
Early in the morning, about six o’clock, he went off to work on the bank of the river in a shed where there was a kiln for baking alabaster and where they used to crush it. Only three prisoners went there. One of the prisoners, accompanied by a guard, went back to the fortress for some tools; the other one was chopping wood and putting it into the furnace. Raskolnikov came out of the shed to the bank of the river. He sat down on a pile of timber by the shed and began looking at the wide, deserted expanse of the river.[...]

Suddenly Sonya was beside him. She had come up noiselessly and sat down close to him. It was still very early,[...]Her face still showed traces of illness. She smiled at him joyfully and tenderly[...]

How it happened he did not know, but suddenly something seemed to seize him and throw him to her feet. He embraced her knees and wept.[...]she understood, and she had no doubts at all about it, that he loved her, loved her infinitely. (526-27)

Dostoevsky’s scene of silent recognition at dawn by the shore is modeled on Chapter 21 of John:26 Raskolnikov has accepted the truth of Jesus’s message as represented by Sonya, the “divine wisdom,” just as the disciples recognize the truth of the miraculous appearance, in the midst of their everyday labor, of their teacher after his crucifixion. John’s Chapter 21, like Dostoevsky’s scene, bodes the “dawn of a renewed future, of a full resurrection to a new life” (6, 421). Both epilogues are the necessary completion of their heroes’ sufferings.27


27 The epilogue of The Brothers Karamazov also echoes Chapter 21 of John: Ilyusha’s stone will be the touchstone of faith in the goodness the boys have learned from Ilyusha’s death. After Alyosha’s speech by the stone to “about twelve” boys, he affirms eternal life and urges them to come and eat blini.
John’s purpose is to witness the truth of Jesus’s teaching and identity. He insists on the truth of the events of Jesus’s life: “We know that his testimony is true” (21:24), he writes, and “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ” (20:30).

Sonya takes on John’s role of recorder when she writes letters describing Raskolnikov’s actions in Dostoevsky’s Epilogue. Her letters are “based in solid fact” as she dispassionately describes the gradual miracle of Raskolnikov’s resurrection in Siberia (in a town which, like Capernaum and Petersburg, is “one of Russia’s administrative centers” [513]).

John emphasizes the incompleteness of his account of Jesus’s life in the final verse of his Gospel:

But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one to be written, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that could be written. (21:25)

The final sentence of Crime and Punishment echoes this idea and intonation:

But that is the beginning of a new story, the story of the gradual rebirth of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of his gradual passing from one world to another, of his acquaintance with a new and hitherto unknown reality. That might be the subject of a new story—our present story is ended. (528)

The opening out of the time scale of this conclusion has its precedent in the “reminiscence passages,” as Gary Rosenshield calls them, that appear throughout the first six parts of the novel.28 The narrator tells us what Raskolnikov recalled “afterwards,” “later” on twenty different occasions.29 This echoes the repeated “posle” of Jesus in John: “What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand” (13:7). After Raskolnikov has gained faith, he will recall events with a new understanding.

As the most mystical gospel which nonetheless shows Jesus as human and part of day-to-day human life, John gives Dostoevsky’s “detective thriller” the power it would otherwise

28 Rosenshield, op. cit., pp. 105-111.

29 Rosenshield, op. cit., p. 106.
lack, despite the richness of the many literary, philosophical and publicistic materials that inform it. The omnipresent intonations of John’s gospel maintain the atmosphere of divine potential throughout the intense naturalism of the novel; once the reader is sensitized to the presence of John in the first six books, the Epilogue becomes the inevitable and essential completion of the work.30

Dostoevsky’s tale of murder is a parable for his time designed to turn his contemporaries away from a false view of the nature of man at a time when he felt the intellect was being enshrined at the expense of the human spirit.31 By bringing readers along Raskolnikov’s tortured path, Dostoevsky prepares us to accept John’s message and to view the world of Saint Petersburg that we have experienced at close range in vivid realistic detail from a new, and higher, perspective.

30 This suggests more than the “sidelong approach to a Christian interpretation of man” in Crime and Punishment that is proposed by A. Boyce Gibson (op. cit., p. 102). On the other hand, “[t]he Epilogue could be said to be artificial precisely because of its heavy-handed allegiance to the Gospel of John. One might also say that the reader can sense in the Epilogue Dostoevsky’s own anxiety about redemption...that the Epilogue projects a kind of wish fulfilment onto an otherwise desperate situation" (Ralph Savarese, private correspondence). The present paper makes that debate explicit, indeed possible, by recognizing Dostoevsky’s explicit, if not implicit, intentions.

31 This is the opposite reading of Robert K. Belknap’s, op. cit., p. 286, who suggests that Dostoevsky sought to temper the non-dialogic closure of the Epilogue by opening the novel narratively with the introduction to the story of Raskolnikov’s resurrection.