Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her... She goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths...¹

Even after Faust we can imagine the nineteenth century going on, full of enthusiasm for the draining of marshes, but after Dostoyevsky's heroes, there is the unforeseeable twentieth century...²

The editors of a recent collection of essays urge us to read Dostoyevsky 'religiously'.³ By this they mean we should explore the polyphonic religious and theological themes embedded in Dostoyevsky's story-telling. I had been fascinated by Dostoyevsky's story-telling before I met Harry Wardlaw, but it was definitely he who taught me to read Dostoyevsky - whom I remember describing as one of the theological giants of the nineteenth century - if not religiously, then certainly theologically. It is therefore a pleasure and a privilege to be able to contribute this small theological reading of Dostoyevsky to a volume in honour of a thinker who, like Dostoyevsky, has grappled with the crisis of modernity and sought to shed light on it by bringing it into encounter with Christ the Wisdom of God.

1. Dostoyevsky and Sophiology

The 'affinity of soul'⁴ between Vladimir Solovyov, the main theorist of the Russian sophiological school, and the novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky, has often been acknowledged. Solovyov's influence on Dostoyevsky has also been noted, especially with regard to the
characterisation and ideas in The Brothers Karamazov. To my mind a more interesting question is that of Dostoyevsky's possible influence on Solovyov and his sophiology. We know that Solovyov's older brother Vsevolod acknowledged himself as having been profoundly influenced in his youth by Dostoyevsky: 'He was my teacher and my confessor; he had a very definite influence on me, and I ascribed deep influence to almost every word he uttered.' It would be surprising if something of this influence had not been felt by the younger brother, who became a regular visitor to the Dostoyevsky household in the winter of 1873, and again after his return from abroad in 1877. There had been very little research done on the intellectual exchange between Dostoyevsky and Solovyov, one commentator even dismissing the idea of it, until the recent book by Marina Kostalevsky. An earlier book by Wladimir Szyłkarski, which was unfortunately not available to me, seems to have championed the idea of Solovyov's influence on Dostoyevsky. A contemporary review by Bernhard Schultz highlights the generic problems in attributing literary influence of one thinker on another, but argues that Dostoyevsky is more likely to have influenced Solovyov. Ellis Sandoz agrees, asserting that 'while Dostoyevsky is sure to have drawn from Solovyov, the principal current runs in the opposite direction.' Sandoz then proceeds to illustrate his position, but (like Schultz) entirely with reference to The Brothers Karamazov, especially the three temptations in the Grand Inquisitor story. I have no argument with this, but want to point to what seems a far more obvious point of influence, the figure of Sophia, or Holy Wisdom, as she appears in various places in Dostoyevsky's work.

The figure of Sophia was already alive and well among the Russian people in the nineteenth century. Wisdom themes also surface in various nineteenth century Russian novelists, 'not least Dostoyevsky.' Some obvious older sources of late nineteenth century Russian sophiology are to be found in the Byzantine veneration of Holy Wisdom, especially in Kiev. Bernhard Schultz refers also to the Russian Sophia-figures, reflecting the influence of Cyril, apostle to the Slavs, back through Gregory of Nazianzen to the affirmation of Christ as the 'Wisdom of God' in 1 Corinthians 1:24. We could also mention the Greek icon of St Sophia, venerated as a historical martyr figure, along with her three daughters, Faith, Hope and Love, which in their Russian forms are themselves popular names. Drawing attention to the role of Holy Wisdom in mediaeval Western scholasticism, especially in Thomas Aquinas and Heinrich Seuse (the author of the Horologium Sapientiae), Schultz tantalisingly suggests the possibility of Dominican influence in Novgorod, where the most famous Russian Sophia-icon is to be found. The Protestant mysticism of Jakob Boehme is another possible source. However, as Paul Evdokimov points out, Solovyov's most important source is his own personal experience. I want to suggest that among the factors that shaped this experience, alongside the Pauline identification of Wisdom with Christ and the cultural environment of Russian piety, were the Sophia figures in the passages from Dostoyevsky to be examined below. While it may be true that Dostoyevsky 'shared little of Solovyov's Sophiology,' the reason may simply be that it was left to Solovyov to develop and make explicit a theme that was already latent and implicit in Dostoyevsky. I want to suggest, in other words, that Dostoyevsky's Sophia-figures may have exercised an imaginative effect on at least two of Solovyov's three mystical encounters with Holy Wisdom, and so worked an influence on his developing sophiological thought.

While Solovyov works preeminently as a philosopher, he sees philosophy as ancillary to religion. Though abstract thinking is useful and necessary, he hesitantly gives preeminence to what he calls 'intellectual intuition.' This he explains as 'grasping an idea in the fullness and integrity of its actual objective being, [by] uniting with it inwardly and essentially.' Abstract or rational thinking he sees as a 'transitional state of mind' between sense perception and true intellectual intuition. Solovyov's epistemology privileges artistic creation from the outset as the highest form of knowing because, as he puts it, in artistic creation 'ideas and images...appear' to the mental vision all at once, in their inner wholeness. This will incline him to listen more carefully to artists, including novelists, than even to the recent German philosophy he holds in such high esteem and whose Hegelian idiom he borrows. In a passage Dostoyevsky would undoubtedly approve, Solovyov connects this 'intellectual intuition' to what he calls 'organic thinking,' as opposed to 'mechanical
thinking. Where mechanical thinking is the preserve of the ‘so-called educated or enlightened people’, organic thinking ‘belongs, on the one hand, to the true philosophers, and on the other, to the masses of the people’.20

Anna Dostoyevskaya’s reminiscences give a warm and intimate picture of Solovyov’s early visits to the Dostoyevsky home,21 as well as the developing, though not uncritical,22 friendship in the late 1870s. In June 1878 Solovyov accompanied Dostoyevsky on his visit to the monastery at Optina, after the death of the Dostoyevskys’ infant son Alyosha and ten years after the death, also in infancy, of their first daughter, Sofia.23 The following year, on 30 October, Solovyov delivered a surprise birthday gift – a photographic reproduction of the Sistine Madonna.24 Anna Dostoyevskaya and Fyodor Dostoyevsky attended Solovyov’s public defence of his doctoral thesis in April 1880. Finally, Solovyov, ‘conspicuous for his anguished face’,25 was one of the speakers at Dostoyevsky’s funeral at the Alexander Nevsky Monastery in January 1881.

2. Two encounters with holy wisdom

The significance of the names of Dostoyevsky’s characters in general,26 and of the name Sophia – of which Sonia is the Russian diminutive – in particular, has been noted by various commentators.27 I want to look at two encounters with Sophia characters who at significant points in their stories read from the gospels – two encounters, in fact, with Holy Wisdom. But these two women are not proclaimers of the Word, at least not in any conventional sense.28 Each of them is in a real sense also an embodiment of the Word, an incarnation of Holy Wisdom. They must at least be considered possible sources for Solovyov’s theme that he developed in the Lectures on Divine Humanity, delivered between 1878 and 1881. Dostoyevsky attended29 the first of this lecture series, on 26 January 1878, and continued to attend the series ‘conscientiously’. In them, Solovyov was to develop his sophiological christology, and indeed they contained the germ of all of Solovyov’s mature thought.30 These lectures were to have a profound influence on the succeeding two generations of Russian intellectuals. But Dostoyevsky had already created the two Sophia-figures we will examine below.

Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov, of Crime and Punishment,31 and Stepan Tromlovich Verkhovensky, of The Possessed,32 are both closed to the wisdom of self-awareness. Both are encountered by Holy Wisdom, not because they seek her, or because they can in any sense be called ‘worthy of her’, but solely by God’s grace. And both come through this encounter to know themselves, and see through their own previous self-deception. Crime and Punishment and The Possessed were written in 1866 and 1871–72 respectively, both before the beginning of Dostoyevsky’s friendship with Vladimir Solovyov. Dostoyevsky could not have been influenced by Solovyov at this stage. If anything, the influence is more likely to be the other way, and in fact the second of Solovyov’s own three formative mystical experiences of encounter with Holy Wisdom, at the British Museum in 1875, comes two years after the beginning of his friendship with Dostoyevsky.

Sonia Semyonova Marmeladova, the central female character of Crime and Punishment, has been rightly called the warmest, most tenderly drawn female character in all Dostoyevsky’s novels.33 She is the expression of the gospel claims that what is impossible for human beings is possible for God, that it is to the children of God that the reign of God is revealed, and that the prostitutes will go into that Kingdom before the righteous.34 Sonia’s vulnerability is her strength as she stands up to Raskolnikov’s alternating utilitarianism and Napoleonic hybrids – both variants on the ‘Great Idea’ of modernity.35 Sonia, when she speaks, speaks with clarity and authority, and these qualities in turn come from her having ‘the mind of Christ’.36 There is nothing foreign or forced about this – Sonia’s Christlike quality is her own most authentic personality.

The decisive passage, the turning point in the novel, is Sonia’s reading to Raskolnikov the story of the raising of Lazarus. Raskolnikov has been taunting Sonia about her faith:

‘And what does God do for you?’ he asked, probing further into her mind.

She was silent for a long time, as though unable to answer...
of the Jews which came to Mary and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.

This, though he does not yet realise it, is the anticipation of Raskolnikov's own resurrection from among the dead. That resurrection does not begin to take effect for another two hundred pages. That is the theme of the novel's epilogue, which reads like the beginning of a new novel.

"Siberia. On the banks of a broad, deserted river stands a town, one of the administrative centres of Russia. Here, where Sonia has followed him, Raskolnikov is 'a convict of the second class'.

'But that', Dostoyevsky concludes his novel, '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 hitherto unknown reality.'

And what has happened to reach this point of regeneration? It is the long torturous story of Raskolnikov's inner struggle and growing self-awareness, of Sonia's demand that he 'Go to the crossroads, bow down to the people, kiss the earth... and proclaim to the whole world: I am a murderer.' What has happened is Raskolnikov's public display of humility before the mocking crowds in the Hay Market, with Sonia standing back, watching but trying not to be seen. She is the wisdom woman of Proverbs 8, standing at the crossroads - though she no longer needs to cry aloud. Her message has been heard. Raskolnikov's first attempt to go to the police is pure melodrama. He is about to confess, when the more pressing news of Svidrigailov's suicide comes in. Providentially (it would seem) given a way out, Raskolnikov takes his leave and starts to descend the stairs, when he again catches sight of Sonia standing in the street, 'pale as death' at his apparent capitulation to self-interest. Raskolnikov turns back and reenters the police station. Softly and distinctly he makes his confession:

'It was I... I who killed the old woman money-lender and her sister Lizaveta with a hatchet and robbed them."

The assistant superintendent shouted something. People came running from all directions.

Raskolnikov repeated his statement.
In the closing pages of The Possessed, Sophia Matveevna Ulitina reads three passages to the dying Stepan Nikolayevich Verkhovensky. Verkhovensky, an old liberal who has spent the past fifty years in isolation from practical life has set out, on foot, on the open road that goes nowhere and everywhere, on a final pilgrimage carrying the banner of the Great Idea. By a combination of accidents he finds himself travelling with a young Crimean War widow who now sells Bibles to support herself. Verkhovensky, increasingly fascinated with the younger woman, catches a fever and grows delirious. After hearing her read the Sermon on the Mount, he refuses a visit from the doctor but asks: 'read me a bit more, anything you like, the first thing your eye falls upon.' Here she opens to the letter to the Laodiceans in the Book of Revelation. Verkhovensky understands the passage as relating to himself and his past. Yet he has still not given up on the 'Great Idea.'

'That — so that's what you've stumbled upon in your book!' he cried, sitting up, his eyes sparkling. 'I didn't know that great passage! Did you hear that? Rather cold, rather cold than lukewarm, rather than only warm. Oh, I'll prove it to them!'

Verkhovensky, in his final delirium, is clutching at straws. He takes comfort in the fact that John the Divine seems to prefer a cold and outright rejection over any lukewarm religious adherence. He clings to his Great Idea, which he is so foolishly determined yet to prove to those who reject it.

Finally Verkhovensky makes a third request. After hearing the call to perfection in the Sermon on the Mount and the rejection of the lukewarm, Verkhovensky asks to be confronted with the division of good from evil, and its consequence:

'Now I want you to read me that passage about the swine,' he said suddenly.

'What did you say, sir?' Mrs Ulitin said. For some reason she was frightened by his request.

'About the swine — why, it's in this book all right — les cochons. I remember about the demons going into the pigs and getting drowned, the lot of them. Read me that passage, please.'

I'll tell you why later. I want to remember it verbatim. Yes, I want it word for word.'

Sophia Matveyevna quickly finds the Lucan passage — quoted in full, as the author reminds us, as the epigraph to the whole novel — and reads it aloud. Verkhovensky's response is an experience of revelation — of seeing himself and his life clearly for the first time.

'My dear,' Mr Verkhovensky said in great agitation, 'savvez-vous, this is a wonderful, an extraordinary passage and it has been a stumbling block to me dans ce livre, all my life ... so I remember the passage from when I was a boy. But now, an idea has occurred to me, une comparaison. Ah, so many thoughts keep crowding into my head:

Verkhovensky is recognising himself, like the madman in the gospel story, as possessed — not by Legion, but by his 'Great Idea.'

'You see, it is like our Russia. Those devils or demons coming out of the sick and entering into the swine — they are all the festering sores, all the poisonous vapours. all the fifth, all the demons and petty devils accumulated for centuries and centuries in our great, dear, sick Russia ...'

'It's us, us and the others — my son Peter and those around him; and we'll hurl ourselves from the cliff and into the sea and I'll be the first perhaps, and all of us, mad and raving, will drown and it will serve us right because that's all we're fit for. But the sick man will recover and sit at the feet of Jesus and they will look at him in surprise:

What we have here is a genuine revelation, albeit one that does not simply spring from nowhere: it is touched off from within the tradition, by the reading of the scriptures. Indeed, it is a reading from the word by one who embodies the Word. Verkhovensky, the old Idealist, after declaring himself lost, dies repenting and 'in an odour of sanctity.' But only after he has looked the demons in the face. Dostoyevsky, as Boyce Gibson puts it, 'means to suggest that the liberals of the 1840's, including himself, have a good deal to
answer for. For they have fathered the next generation of devils, the anarchists and terrorists of the 1870s. The encounter with Sophia Matveevna at the end of The Possessed is a 'pin-point of light' in what is otherwise perhaps the darkest of all Dostoyevsky's novels. 'Sophia Matveevna', writes Diana Thompson, 'is the eponym and literal bearer of divine wisdom.' Dostoyevsky is announcing not the end of the Great Idea, but its transformation, its transfiguration 'grounded in an orientation towards the eternal.' The formerly possessed man remains, sitting quietly at the feet of Jesus.

Both Raskolnikov and Verkhovensky are in some sense possessed. Both are confronted by a Sophia-figure (and their personal names, Sonia and Sophia, are by no means irrelevant) who reads from the gospels, and thereby announce the good news, if it can only be heard. This moment in each case carries a liturgical allusion: Sophia is the acclamtion used to introduce the gospel reading in the Orthodox liturgy. In both passages, modern secular humanity is confronted with a wisdom that is both older, and younger, than the pretensions of modernity.

3. Sophia as a Christ-figure

Dostoyevsky, it has been noted, does not ask the God-question directly, but indirectly by asking the anthropological question. God is apprehended through the encounter with the human: apprehended, that is, christologically, incarnationally, and in an embodied form. 'The peculiar quality of Dostoyevsky's apologetic lies' according to Vyacheslav Ivanov, 'in the urge, not to found the love of Christ on belief in God, but to arrive through Christ at the certainty of God's existence... The hidden transcendent reality of God is attested by the directly perceived earthly reality of Christ.' Both Crime and Punishment and The Possessed are, as Boyce Gibson puts it, stages in the development of Dostoyevsky's anthropology, in which he examines the alternatives to a Christian view of humanity, before 'turning the spotlight on Christian anthropology itself.'

Where then is the Christ figure in Dostoyevsky's work, that gives access to the reality of God? Guardini sees the Christ-figure in Myshkin, the central figure of The Idiot, but Boyce Gibson correctly argues that Myshkin is too disembodied a figure to be successfully and truly Christlike. Boyce Gibson prefers to see the Christ-figure in the Christ of the Grand Inquisitor story, a figure who Guardini considers, correctly in my opinion, too detached from everyday life to be real. Alyosha Karamazov is a more likely contender, though even here there are problems, and a newer interpretation would argue that Alyosha is best seen as Christ-like only as a member of his family, in which the three Karamazov brothers together form an imago trinitatis. Nina Straus argues that in Dostoyevsky's work, it is often a woman who appears as a Christ-figure: the image of a woman as a Christ-figure who redeems a "fallen" man, while simultaneously confronting him with her feminist advocacy of sexual equality. Straus unfortunately fails to pursue this insight in relation to the Sophia figure. Her comment on Myshkin as being 'suffused not with the Father's spirit, but with Sophia' betrays an insufficiently robust image of Sophia. Straus's frequent references to Sonia Marmeladova as a passive 'female holy fool' supports her tendency to assimilate the figure of Sophia into the passive Madonna-image, which she contrasts to the emancipated 'new woman' of Dostoyevsky's Petersburg of the 1860s. This assimilation does justice neither to the Sophia-tradition, nor to the specific Sophia figures in Dostoyevsky's works.

Dostoyevsky's Image of Christ is to be seen preeminently, I think, in the two Sophia figures we have looked at here. Other Sophia characters elsewhere in his writings would also be worthy of consideration if space allowed. Both point to Christ the Wisdom of God. Both are examples of Dostoyevsky's 'Sophian vision', as Zander calls it, and this is essentially a christological vision. But there is a fine distinction to be made here, and it is illuminated by Solovyov's distinction between the Logos and Sophia.

If we distinguish in the absolute in general between the absolute as such (that which absolutely is) and its content, essence or idea, we will find the former directly expressed in the Logos and the latter directly expressed in Sophia, which is thus the expressed or actualised idea. And just as an
Sophia, in other words, is the Logos actualised in bodily form, not simply 'once for all', but again and again in the ongoing life and experience of the Christian community. The desire of the Logos is to be embodied, and this, Solovyov would seem to be saying, occurs constantly in the Sophia-figures of this world. Solovyov expresses his christology through his sophiology, and the most obvious immediate source of this idea for Solovyov is in the Sophia-figures of Dostoyevsky's novels.

Sophiology was, according to Schultz, always methodologically more 'artistic and intuitive... than discursive'. It should not surprise us that it might draw on literary as well as philosophical sources. Although it is set out in the language of Hegelian philosophy, its more immediate sources are the Sophia icons of the eastern church and, I suggest, the Sophia characters of the novels of Dostoyevsky.

There is a difference though. Dostoyevsky never romanticised the Sophia figure in the way Solovyov arguably, and his followers clearly, did. There is a romanticism to be seen in some of Dostoyevsky's commentators – Guardini and Zander, for example – which does not quite ring true to Dostoyevsky himself. Neither Sophia Ultina nor Sonia Marmeladova is romanticised by Dostoyevsky. The first is a widow who supports herself by door-to-door book selling, who has the strength of character to confront Verkhovensky with his own lifelong self-deception. The second is a prostitute, with the strength of character to resist Raskolnikov's feverish illusions about himself. True, they are both 'meek ones' (Guardini) or 'humble ones' (Zander), but this meekness never means non-resistance, and this humility never means acquiescence. It may mean a certain vulnerability in each of them, but it is never weakness – in fact there is an enormous enduring (which again does not mean 'long-suffering') toughness about these two wisdom women. In this sense Dostoyevsky perhaps stands closer to our post-Romantic age than some of his mid-twentieth century commentators. One reason for this may be that Dostoyevsky's anthropology is, as Nina Straus argues, a gendered anthropology, with Crime and Punishment the novel where Dostoyevsky discovers for himself and works out the politics of gender.

4. Dostoyevsky and contemporary Theology

Dostoyevsky's genius was, in part, that he looked honestly and discerningly into the heart of darkness that lies within each of us, and within our human culture. He was granted a vision, like Dante's vision of Hell, into the coming century, and he did not return unscathed from the experience. For this reason, Dostoyevsky's characters at times seem to lurk in the shadows of much twentieth century theology. Even if we had not learned it from Dostoevski', says Barth, 'the experiences of our own day have surely taught us that we can no longer have any illusions as to what is dormant even in the heart of the average man... And after Dostoevsky, as Berdyaev put it, we can no longer imagine the nineteenth century going on, full of enthusiasm for the draining of marshes... Something has changed in the cultural landscape, something of seismic proportions. Though the European world – and in the last decades of the nineteenth century that meant the whole world – may have looked secure and self-assured, this self-assurance was in the early years of the new century rapidly to appear increasingly hollow. Dostoyevsky had somehow discerned the crisis of modernity, the end of modernity. This is why Eduard Thurneyssen, writing after the catastrophe had become plain for all to see, could liken Dostoevsky to our expressionists in his prophetic insight into the crisis looming on the horizon of his own age. Behind Dostoevsky's post-modern fascination with the incongruous there is an underlying sense of apocalyptic dread. It would be a mistake to confuse this with mere conservatism. Dostoyevsky's hostility to revolution is not, as Berdyaev points out, the hostility of someone with vested interests
in the old order. Genuine prophecy always sounds a little indecent to those whose minds are closed to its truth,' says René Girard. 'Was it not indecent, in 1871, to suggest that the sincere and politically correct Russian revolutionists would end up with Stalin and Beria?' Rather, Dostoyevsky shares the apocalypticism of the New Testament and the early Christians. And like any true prophet, Dostoyevsky takes no delight in the message he is called to proclaim.

Most theological references to Dostoyevsky tend to focus on a single issue, that of suffering and human evil as the basis for protest atheism, and on a single passage, the conversation between Ivan and Alyosha Karamazov in which Ivan tells the story of the Grand Inquisitor. What I want to suggest here is that Dostoyevsky (by way of Solovyov and perhaps von Balthasar) may have provided an impetus for the emergence of a whole new theme in contemporary theology, that of Sophia or the Wisdom of God. Because there is another side to Dostoyevsky's genius, though not unscathed by his vision of the crisis of modernity, this 'explorer of Hell' refuses to lend death any final dominion. For this crisis is brought into confrontation with Holy Wisdom. In the two passages explored above, it is the Sophia figure who redeems, in each case, the lost representative of modernity.

Paul Valiere argues convincingly that sophiology was intended to be the bridge between Orthodoxy and the modern world. It was, in other words, the late nineteenth century Orthodox response to the problem of Christ and culture. Holy Wisdom for Solovyov was always ill-defined, and so his interpreters have read him in a multiplicity of ways. But in 1935 it was the one of the very few contemporary matters on which the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church in Exile (based at that time in Karlovci, in Yugoslavia) could agree, both issuing condemnations of the sophiology of Bulgakov — and by implication, of Solovyov — in that year. (Perhaps significantly, the following year saw the reemergence, at the Pan-Orthodox Conference at Rhodes, of Palamism as another sort of Orthodox response to the culture of the West). Bulgakov himself, as a member of the faculty of St Sergius in Paris, carried under neither the jurisdiction of Moscow nor Karlovci, and although no condemnation was issued by his own diocese, he was advised to reconsider his views. This strange consensus between these bitterest of opponents saw the effective disappearance of sophiology from the Russian intellectual scene, both within the Soviet Union and in the various Russian émigré communities.

Recent theological recoveries of both the personification of Wisdom and the Wisdom literature have often occurred at the point where theology is most deeply and strenuously engaged with the issues of the contemporary world. So far, however, these newer contributions have rarely if ever drawn on the Russian sophiologists, or even noted their pioneering contribution. The influence of sophiology is also strangely absent in those areas of theology that might be expected to welcome it as an ally. The link between the theological critique of modernity and the Russian sophiological school is to be found in Dostoyevsky.

End Notes

1. The Wisdom of Solomon 6:12–1. I am grateful to Denis Edwards for drawing this passage to my attention.
4. David Magarshack, Dostoevsky (London: Secker and Warburg, 1962) 62. Sophiology, a religious philosophy developed by Solovyov (1853–1900) and several others, was highly influential in Russia and Russian expatriate communities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
8. Wladimir Szykalanski, Solowjew und Dostojevskij (Bonn, 1948).
11. Schultze, 'Hauptthemen der neueren russischen Theologie', in W
Nyssen et al (editors), Handbuch der Ostkirchen, Bd 1 (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1984), 356.


14. But note Bulgakov's criticism of Boehme (and Berdyaev), on the grounds that the Sophia symbol is not essentially a virgin figure, which might suggest disdain for the flesh, but rather a mother figure (Bernice Rosenthal, The Nature and Function of Sophia in Sergei Bulgakov's Prerevolutionary Thought, in J. Kornblatt and R. Gustafson (eds), Russian Religious Thought (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 164, 169). See also Deirdre Good, Reconstructing the Tradition of Sophia, 14–22.


20. Solovyov, Lectures on Divine Humanity, 90.


23. Anna Dostoevsky, Dostoevsky Reminiscences, 294. The letter Dostoevsky wrote to his wife about this pilgrimage is published (in Russian) in NF Bel'chikova and VF Pereverzeva (editors), Pis'ma FM Dostoevskogo k zhene (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatechestvo, 1926), 233–4.


28. There is a sense in which the Word cannot be proclaimed in a conventional sense in Dostoevsky, whose 'art does not require listening to sermons, for our age cannot tolerate them' (Girard, 137). Diana Thompson in (Pattison and Thompson, Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition, 69–70), citing Bakhtin, offers a reason why our age can no longer tolerate sermons: 'Modern man does not proclaim; he speaks. That is, he speaks with reservations; and Dostoevsky gives expression to his Christian worldview in this modern idiom.

29. This was the occasion of a famous misunderstanding between Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. See Anna Dostoevsky, Dostoevsky Reminiscences, 290–1, 364.

30. Kostalevsky, Dostoevsky and Solovyov, 81.


33. Guardini, Religiöse Gestalten in Dostoevskis Werk, 61.

34. Guardini, Religiöse Gestalten in Dostoevskis Werk, 66.


36. Guardini, Religiöse Gestalten in Dostoevskis Werk, 85.


38. Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, 543.


43. Dostoevsky, The Possessed, 668.

44. Dostoevsky, The Possessed, 670.

45. Boyce Gibson, The Religion of Dostoevsky, 144.


48. Thompson, in Pattison and Thompson, Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition 77. Thompson's very perceptive reading of this whole passage is to be found on pages 77–82.

49. Ward, Dostoevsky's Critique of the West, 180.

50. Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, 96.


52. Vyacheslav Ivanov, Freedom and the Tragic Life: A Study in

53. Boyce Gibson, The Religion of Dostoevsky, 98. Svidrigailov's suicide in Crime and Punishment, is, according to Boyce Gibson's reading of the novel, the logical conclusion of his godless life. Individualism and atheism—the hallmarks of modernity—go together, and both are ultimately self-defeating.

54. Guardini, Religiöse Gestalten, 383.


57. Guardini, Religiöse Gestalten, 180–90.


60. Straus, Dostoevsky and the Woman Question, 62.


62. Zander, Dostoevsky, 60.

63. Solovyov, Lectures on Divine Humanity, 108. Solovyov, in a footnote, is careful to point out he is using the terms 'body' and 'matter' in a distinctive and technical way. Earlier he had also defined 'idea' in distinction to 'concept' (61, fn 3). See also Paul Valliere ('Sophiology as the Dialogue of Orthodoxy with Modern Civilisation', in Kambliat and Gustafson, Russian Religious Thought, 181) on the relationship between Sophia and Christology.

64. I take it this is what Florensky means when he identifies Sophia with created grace. See Schultze, 'Haupthemen der neueren russischen Theologie', 352.

65. Evdokimov, Christus im Russischen Denken, 131.


67. Eg the mystical-chivalric 'order' of Sophia instituted by Solovyov's nephew and others. See Solovyov, Divine Humanity, xii, fn 9.


69. Straus, Dostoevsky and the Woman Question, 22.

70. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1932ff), III/4, 413.

71. Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, 74–75.

72. Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, 60, 74–5, 147, 182. Cf Guardini, Religiöse Gestalten, 285. It is this crisis of modernity, I believe, that George Steiner pinpoints as occurring in Central European and Russian culture and speculative consciousness during the decades between the 1870s and the 1930s as 'one of the very few genuine revolutions of spirit in Western history and which defines modernity itself' (Real Presences