

In addressing this topic—Dostoevsky’s iconic method—I am pursuing an approach that I have long thought about—one that I have suggested to several of my students and from whom I have then benefited. Dr. Dennis Slattery, who now teaches at Pacifica University in Santa Barbara, has published an essay on *The Icon and the Spirit of Comedy in Dostoevsky’s Possessed*; Several of my students wrote papers on the ikon for a conference a conference we held a few years back, when we had an icon show at UD, at which the work of traditional ikon painters was presented, Lyle Novinski spoke, and my entire Russian novel class took part. So, though, the topic is one that I have not really gone into deeply enough, it is one that I have long considered—that I have discussed with colleagues and students in that shared mode of thought that we have been espousing at UD.

I want to try to account for the impelling interior energy of Dostoevsky’s art by considering his method iconic: and I’ll try to explain what I mean in the brief time I have here at the end of a long day full of brilliant comments by students and faculty alike. Without in the least meaning to detract from the theological sense of the ikon (and I would recommend a work by Paul Evdokimov if you are interested in reading something on the theology of the ikon)-- I want to consider its method as a way of the imagination leading to the portrayal of reality given us in Dostoevsky’s novel *the Brothers Karamazov*—a way to

which he himself referred to as a “higher realism” or sometimes “fantastic realism.”

We in the West do not easily understand the ikon. With our imaginations formed by realistic art, we are used to focusing on naturalistic forms--on "whatever is begotten, born, and dies" (in the Irish poet William Butler Yeats' phrase). It is Yeats who has somewhat redeemed the image of Byzantium for us in the West and helped us to understand the sanctity of the iconic image. For him Byzantium was the symbol of that community uniting body and soul in a transfigured unity. In one of his poems, "Sailing to Byzantium, in which he expresses his wish to embark upon a spiritual quest, he invokes the ikons: "O sages standing in God's holy fire/ As in the gold mosaic of a wall /, Come from the fire, perne in a gyre,/ And be the singing masters of my soul./ Consume my heart away, sick with desire/ And fastened to a dying animal, it knows not what it is:/ And gather me into the artifice of eternity./

It is this view of eternity--the spiritual life--as not modeled on natural ideas of things but on an artifice--a form, an arrangement and transformation of matter--that lies behind the art of the ikon. A fiery spiritual flame enables the ikon to burn from within. Its very patterns illuminate reality. It is incarnational. It brings something to being in our souls. But as one of my students put it : the head has to enter into the heart in order to understand icons. One has to allow oneself to be embraced by them.

Kostas Papaioannou [Papyanou], in his book Byzantine and Russian Painting, declares:

"The ikon is the mirror in which the invisible world is reflected; To venerate the ikon is to *identify* with it and receive grace from it through the sympathetic process described by the apostle [Paul], " (II Corinthians, iii, 18): "We who having no veil over our face contemplate as in a mirror the splendour of the Lord, are transformed

into the same image.")

In his book Icons George Galavaris has written of his experience of viewing a collection of icons kept in the basement of the Art History Building at the University of Wisconsin (while the museum that would house them was under construction):

[Entering that "underground realm," he writes,] It was as if I had entered a subterranean Roman vault and was confronted with startling pictures, miraculously preserved. I said "pictures," (he modifies) but actually it was the Holy that appeared in this appropriate setting of semi-darkness. The Holy here had the forms of icons, holy images, panels--windows through which one could see the Heavenly. The faces in the icons were dim, dark, and tarnished; some had suffered cracks, while others had become a feast for worms. And yet the piercing eyes in these faces were so much alive! I dared not touch these treasures for I remembered that, once in a monastery in the East, a monk had told me not to touch a holy icon if my hands were not holy." After he left, he could not rid his imagination of "those melancholy faces which kept staring at [him]."

The ikonik way is the way of beauty: "beauty will save the world--two kinds of beauty," as Dostoevsky wrote in his notebooks. He thus indicates the enigma of beauty--the fact that beauty too is fallen, that we cannot trust it, that man can find beauty in Sodom, as Dmitri sorrowfully admits. But, as Dostoevsky commented in his notebooks to the Devils, "The world will become the beauty of Christ. "Man strives on earth for an ideal which is contrary to his nature. Both of these remarks shed light on the particular kind of beauty that the ikon manifests--its essentially transfigured beauty, its merging of artistic and religious visions.

As Seemee Ali wrote in an essay, the very flatness of the ikon--its lack of perspective--speaks of its reflecting back to the viewer, rather than the viewer entering the reality of the picture, as in Renaissance art. At the same time, I would add, the ikon is an aperture, an opening into the invisible

spiritual realm—an aperture through which light streams upon the viewer from another world. But the ikon is not a symbol; it is a transfiguration. From time to time, however, there have been iconoclastic movements within Christianity, based on an interpretation of the Old Testament commandment to make no graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. The theological definition of the icon came after "the ordeal by fire" in Byzantium when, at the end of the 5th c. AD in a movement of iconoclasm, church paintings were forbidden and destroyed. This was the salutary shock that forced the Church to rethink and purify its doctrine. In the 7th C there was a redefinition of the theology of the icon: St. Germanus and St. John Damascene established the orthodoxy of the icon by defining iconoclasm as a manifestation of Monophysite transcendentalism, which denied the incarnation and with it Christ's mediation between earth and

heaven. The "Great Schism" between Eastern and Western Christendom occurred in 1053; after which time occurred the great epoch of the ikon, both in Greece and in surrounding countries, particularly Russia, which had adopted the faith from Constantinople in 988.

The Particular Task of the Ikon Artist:

In Russia the ikon took on even greater depth and meaning. The most important monument to the Byzantine art of the eleventh century is at Kiev, "the Byzantium of Asia," the city described as "the rival to Constantinople and the finest ornament of the Greek world": the mosaics and frescoes of St Sophia. Three other large Kievan churches are decorated with Byzantine mosaics. Kiev fell in 1240, and for almost two centuries the whole of Russian territory lay under the Mongol yoke. The brilliant urban civilization of Kievan Russia collapsed; the buildings fell into ruin

and artistic activity was interrupted, save at Novgorod and Pskov, protected from the disaster by their geographical situation. Then, at the same time that Russia was throwing off the Mongol yoke, Constantinople fell to the Turks: 1453. The Emperor Frederick III declared that with the loss of Constantinople mankind had lost the true resting place of letters and learning."

In Russia, it was in the North that the famous schools of icon painting were formed. The 14th c witnessed the slow rise of the principality of Moscow. At this point began the idea among Russians of Moscow as "the Third Rome" and the Russian sense of destiny for the whole world.

Russian painting reached its peak about 1350 to 1450.

And ikon painting declined after Peter the Great opened his window upon Europe, and the stylizations of the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries were wafted in. It was not until the nineteenth century that icon painting again flourished.

Russian culture developed a peculiarly iconic stance; but we need to recognize other strains within what Berdyaev has called "the Russian soul." Russian Christianity, from the time we know of it, contained three major tendencies: the iconic, the monastic, and the apocalyptic. (Greek: *eikon*, image; *monastes*, a solitary; *askesis*: to exercise: one who practices austerity, extreme rigor and self-denial. Monasticism: organized asceticism; *apocalypsein*: to uncover)

The iconic expresses the holy through beauty and the eye; the monastic, or ascetic, through silence and the hearing of the word; the apocalyptic, the expectancy of a breaking in of eternity upon time, entailing a renunciation of culture, the choice of exile, wandering, homelessness, looking toward an end time, with a

tendency to a fanatical splitting off into sects. I wish to concentrate on the iconic model, which culminates, in literature, in the novels of Dostoevsky.

IV. A. The Iconic Mode

In the very choice of a faith Vladimir of Kiev recognized the power of an iconic beauty; it is said that emissaries to centers of the four main religions of the world--Muslims, Jews, Latins, and Greek--came back with a tale of unearthly beauty they had witnessed in St. Sophia, the great cathedral of the Orthodox faith in Constantinople. "We did not know whether we were in heaven or on earth, for on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men, or we cannot forget such beauty." On the basis of their testimony, without knowing the beliefs of the Greek Orthodox faith, Vladimir

selected that religion for his people. The tales of early Christians contained in the Kievan Chronicle are of saints transformed by the life of Christ into iconic images themselves: Boris and Gleb, who stood, witnesses to the reality of Christ, and allowed themselves to be hacked to pieces; the Old Believers; not wishing to allow an ancient spiritual liturgy to be changed; the yurodivy, those "holy fools" who were willing to be fools for Christ and to witness his image to the world.

The tale is told of St. Seraphim of Sarov that, in a conversation with one of his disciples, a man named Motovilov, after he had just defined the goal of Christian life as the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, Motovilov asked St. Seraphim to explain the meaning of the state of grace. "I looked at him and was seized with fear," the disciple wrote, "because he appeared to be clothed with the sun."

Not only did M. feel a great peace in his soul, but

participated in his senses in the experience; he saw a blinding light and felt an unusual heat, and smelled perfume. As the theologian Paul Evdokimov explains, "The experience as told in this story is not an ecstasy which takes those who have it out of this world but rather an anticipation of the transfiguration of the whole human person. The role played by the senses is the most striking element of the story for, as Evdokimov points out, what is presented here is not the elimination of the senses nor their replacement with a new organ of perception, but their transfiguration. By means of the Incarnation, the spiritual and the corporeal have been reunited. The patristic tradition, as Evdokimov points out, emphasizes that the Kingdom of God is manifested through the forms of this world, so that beauty is preparing the world to become the "new earth."

B. The Monastic Mode

Along with this essentially transfigurative religion, representing the understanding of the logos through the senses, primarily the eye, there went the religious strain that sought the perfection of life through the Word, the sense of hearing, a deeply spiritual monasticism. There were the "seekers of silence," who moved away from civilization and were yet followed by it: the monks who practiced a severe asceticism so that life might be a hearing of the word. As recluses, these sought a holy life of prayer and simplicity; The movement of the poustinniki, or solitaries, the spiritual revival associated with the name of St. Sergius of Radonezh is another essential aspect of the 14th c. Russian Renaissance. In 1340 Sergius built a hermitage and a small wooden church in the depths of a forest north of Moscow. Such were the beginnings of the Troitse Sergiev Lavra, the richest and most celebrated of all Russian monasteries. His example stimulated

contemplative vocations in prodigious numbers
Over 150 monastic foundations are recorded for the period between 1340 and 1440. It was in these solitudes, in the midst of forests stretching as far as the eye could see, that the Russian ideal of sanctity was formed. Sts. Sergius, Cyril and Nil Sorski are first in a line of ascetic custodians of the deepseated life forces, uniting the tragic sense of sin with the bliss of the earthly paradise regained.

C. The Apocalyptic

And then there were the wandering monks, pilgrims who practiced the hesychastic prayer, the simple repetition of a single petition, permeating themselves with prayer, so that they themselves became the living word of Christ. Further, the arch-priest Avakkum, an Old Believer, wandered across Russia with his followers, preaching the end of the world.

These basic tendencies are to be found in the

two great giants of Russian literature:
Dostoevsky's vision and method are iconographic;
Tolstoy's essentially ascetic and monastic. Both
have something in them of the apocalyptic (but
we shall have to develop this mode on another
occasion.)

"Judge the Russian people, " Dostoevsky
wrote in his *Diary of a Writer*, "not by those
vilenesses which it so often commits, but by those
great and sacred things for which, in its very
vileness, it constantly longs. Judge it not by
what it is but by what it longs to become." The
Russian people long for the saintliness and
simplicity of the monastic way and for the
transformation of the earth, which is the iconic
way.

The ikonic way is the way of beauty: "beauty
will save the world--two kinds of beauty," as
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indicates the enigma of beauty--the fact that beauty too is fallen, that we cannot trust it, that man can find beauty in Sodom, as Dmitri sorrowfully admits. But, as Dostoevsky commented in his notebooks to *the Devils*, "The world will become the beauty of Christ," "Man strives on earth for an ideal which is contrary to his nature."(notebook, early 60s) Both of these remarks shed light on the particular kind of beauty that the ikon manifests--its essentially transfigured beauty, its merging of artistic and religious visions.

Robert Louis Jackson, *The Art of Dostoevsky*: Artistic and religious vision are ultimately one vision, reveal[ing] the same absolute reality. The Holy Spirit, Dostoevsky observes in his notebook to *the Devils*, "is the direct understanding of beauty, the prophetic cognition of harmony and, therefore, a constant striving for it. In turn the artist,

creating an image of beauty, gives intimations of the divine ideal lying beyond man's earthly existence. Art in the deepest sense is, like the Holy Spirit, prophetic, the incarnation of the Word itself, a premonitory symbol of the beauty of a transfigured humanity.

Throughout his novels, Dostoevsky demonstrates the way in which the icon exerts its influence:

the icon burning in the prostitute Sonya's bare room as she reads the Gospel story of the raising of Lazarus to the murderer Raskolnikov; the desecrated ikon in *The Possessed*, where a demonic figure, Peter Verkhovensky, has substituted a mouse for the ikon in the ikonostasis and the distraught young woman Lisa places her diamond earrings in the empty case and bows to the earth before it; the ikons in the monk Tikhon's cell and his own grave ikonic gaze when he confronts the sinful and unrepentant Stavrogin; the maid lighting the lamp under the ikon in Stepan's room just before he makes his fateful speech defending the Madonna.

The iconic is represented in the Gospel Woman, Sophia Ulitim, wholike an icon carries the word of God; the dim room containing Rogozhkin's mother, a figure of the dark madonna; Larya Lebyatkin, with her mirror, her painted cheeks, her fortune telling, and her memory of a lost child; Raskolnikov's vision of the tents of Abraham; the holy family scene with Shatov, Mary, and the child. Etc.

Dostoevsky uses the iconic method even when the actual meaning of his image is not intended to be a reminder of traditional iconic subjects; the way in which the boy who committed suicide is viewed in *The Devils*; the

iconic figure at the end of the Idiot, with the two bridgrooms lying beside the body of the murdered Nastasya; the iconic nature of Nastasya's beauty with Myskin smitten by its profound depth of suffering; Savrogin's face is a mask; Peter's "you are my idol"; etc.

. There are hundreds of such instances in Dostoevsky--and throughout Russian literature, for the ikon is a living part of Russian culture. But Dostoevsky's art is in itself ikonic: through language making images of holy things that remain in the memory and bestow a direct grace on the reader. This iconic mode accounts for Dostoevsky's difficulty (as opposed, say, to Tolstoy) and for our inability ever to state his meaning in a final word.

The Holy Spirit, Dostoevsky observes in his notebook to the Devils, "is the direct understanding of beauty, the prophetic cognition of harmony and, therefore, a constant striving for it. In turn the artist, creating an image of beauty, gives intimations of the divine ideal lying beyond man's earthly existence. Art in the deepest sense is prophetic, the incarnation of the Word itself, a premonitory symbol of the beauty of a transfigured humanity. "

Iconic beauty, then, is not natural beauty, not what we would picture by ourselves, left to our own imaginations.. It does not conform to either our classical or Romantic concepts: it is a revelation, bearing with it a strangeness which is not the mirror of nature but a depiction of a transfigured image. The icon is the answer to Plato's charge against art as imitation three times removed; for as Christ is the ikon of God the Father, and man is the ikon of Christ, so the painted representation (man's handiwork) is an icon of its prototype, and, with no attempt at photographic resemblance, carries with it some of the holiness of its subject. Thus physical matter itself can dwell in a divine milieu. This iconic sense of the transformation of matter can be expressed in painting, in poetry, and in the ways of an entire culture--undertaking that slow transfiguration of the earth

which is the task of the human enterprise.

What characterizes what I am calling the iconic method? Above all, a certain stylization that works against absolute realism. Dostoevsky sometimes spoke of his style as fantastic; I have elsewhere called it grotesque. It makes use of distortion, of a simplification of line, an almost primitive depiction of emotions and tender feelings; a childlike simplicity. One is aware of it as arrangement, not as occurring in nature; its exaggerated qualities; above all, its intensity. It is recognized by its effect: that it arrests the eyes of readers and forces them to take the image in to their underlying consciousness, where it works from then on as part of their memory and imagination. This marks Dostoevsky's art, along with his polyphonic method, which sets several story lines going at once, counterpointing them among themselves—and along with what Bakhtin calls his “carnivalistic” method: the mixing of the high and the low, the throwing together of groups of characters so that a busy, chaotic action seems to veer out of control—these, along with the pervasive influence of the iconic method—make for a style that radically changes the general course of the novel as art form.

Now I do not mean to imply that Dostoevsky consciously utilized the iconic method. What I am implying is that his imagination was shaped by his absorption of the Christianity of Holy Russia, so much so that even his discussion of contemporary affairs, as pursued in his two stints of newspaper publishing and his *Diary of a Writer*, bore the marks of an encounter with the holiness of the human image as God-bearer.

What one is struck with first of all in the *Brothers* is its sharp, highly stylized portraiture. All his characters are portrayed with the clear outlines and the flat backgrounds of ikons. When the two brothers Ivan and Alyosha come together at the center of the novel, one to attack Christ for his

incompetency, the other silently and ineffectually to defend him, the arrangement is as symmetrical as that of an icon. There are certain scenes in the novel that strike the attentive reader with the force of a spiritual realization, leaving in the memory the sense of an encounter.

Take, for instance, the iconic memory Alyosha Karamazov has of his saintly though tormented mother, of whom Old Fyodor had said, in a kind of infinite extension of his lust, “those innocent eyes of hers slit my soul like a razor.” Alyosha remembers his mother in what is like “a spot of light out of darkness, like a corner torn from a huge picture,” this image implying an entire spiritual realm that this brief glimpse implies.

He remembered one still summer evening, an open window, . . . in a corner of the room the holy image, before it a lighted lamp, and on her knees before the image his mother, sobbing hysterically with cries and shrieks,, snatching him up in both arms, squeezing him close till it hurt,, and praying for him to the Mother of God, holding him out in both arms to the image as though to put him under the Mother’s protection. . . .

Here we have in the two mothers an example of both obraz and bezobraz, the ikon and its desecration—the earthly mother tortured and destroyed by the sensuality and cruelty of her husband, the heavenly mother looking down in that serenity and steadfastness characteristic of the ikon. The child, held up to the holy image to which he was committed by a distraught mother, has the sensation of being looked at; and so do we, the readers of the novel. We have been gazed upon and—if we will allow the image to sink deeply enough into our consciousness, it will stay with us, as it did with alyosha, and change us. For it is the way of the ikonic to effect such a change in the viewer; its target is not simply the aesthetic sense but the very imago dei within the viewer’s soul. This memory has brought Alyosha back just at the time of a crisis in his life, to look for his mother’s

grave, unmarked except for a crude wooden cross put up by a servant. We know of his deep spiritual connection with his mother from this memory and from his reaction to a sacrilege committed by his father. Old Fyodor tells with glee of inciting the young woman to hysteria: he remembers spitting on a holy image just to show her that nothing will happen to him for doing so--and --“Good Lord!” he exclaims. “You’d have thought And then he notices that Alyosha has reacted just as his mother had. “Spit some water on him, Ivan; out of your mouth! That’s what I used to have to do to her.” “Soon after locating his mother’s grave,” we are told, Alyosha entered the monastery and encounters a second iconic presence in the novel, the saintly Fr. Zossima.

When we first meet Zossima, it is in his cell, where the Karamzov family is waiting to see him. When he enters the reception room, the two monks rise and greet him with a very deep bow. He replies “with as deep a reverence to them, and touching the ground with his fingers, asked each for his blessing. The whole ceremony was performed very seriously and with an appearance of feeling, not like an everyday rite. We are told that Zossima’s face is thin and covered with a network of fine wrinkles, particularly numerous about his eyes, which were small, light colored, quick, and shining like two bright points.”

The elder’s cell, we are told, contains a huge, very ancient icon of the Virgin, with a lamp burning before it. “Near it were two other holy pictures in shining settings, and next them carved cherubim, china eggs, a Catholic cross of ivory, with a Mater Dolorosa embracing it, and several foreign engravings, from the great Italian artists of past centuries. Next to these costly and artistic engravings were several of the roughest Russian prints of saints, martyrs, prelates, and so on.” The elder’s inclusive love is thus made concrete for us in his collection of objects, all brought before the

huge icon of the Blessed Mother for her sanctification of them. When he teaches the monks and Alyosha in his last sermon that one must love everything, not just what one prefers, he is speaking of what he has practiced in his own life. And our view of him is that of a man who in his holiness has virtually become an icon. As Dennis Slattery writes, “The icon promotes an awareness of the bond between the earth and God and bears witness to a hope for redemption, while at the same time it dignifies the actual and the finite.”

Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*: “God became man so that man could become God.”

We have such an movement toward divinization in Zossima’s brother Markel:

But we know the ineffectuality of Ivan’s thought from his failure to create images that can strike into the soul. He has collected stories of atrocities from newspapers—atrocities done to children, of the most harrowing sort—they are torn apart by dogs, stuck by bayonets, beaten: these are his futile attempts to create images with the power to move the soul. But all his images can do is to horrify; they do not burn into the soul with the power of an icon. These are his futile attempts to make icons of images to defeat Alyosha’s image of Christ. And when Alyosha mentions that there is one who has the right to judge, since he too suffered as man, Ivan declares, Ah, the just one. I was wondering when you would get around to him. I have composed a poem about him—and he launches into his allegory about the second coming of Christ—to a village in Spain the 16th century, during the height of the inquisition. He has chosen one of the most infamous chapters in the history of the faith to represent one of the two alternatives open to the human race: either benevolent tyranny or the anarchy of Christ. And his Christ is far from being the stern pantocrator of

the ikons; rather, he is the gentle Jesus of the late 19th and early 30th century picture postcards.

He came softly, unobserved, and yet, strange to say, everyone recognized him. . . the people are irresistibly drawn to him, they flock about him, follow him. He moves silently in their midst with a gentle smile of infinite compassion. The sun of love burns in his heart. Light, enlightenment, and power shine from His eyes, and their radiance, shed on the people, stirs their hearts with responsive love. He holds out His hands to them, blesses them, and a healing virtue comes from contact with him, even with his garments. [a blind old man is healed; the crowd weeps and kisses the earth under his feet. Children throw flowers before him, sing, and cry hosannah. It is He it is He . . . /But there is a dead child that “lies hidden in flowers; /the crowd shouts to the mother, He will raise your child . . . / he looks with compassion, and his lips once more softly pronounce, ‘Maiden, arise!’ and the maiden arises. The little girl sits up in the coffin and looks round, smiling with wide open wondering eyes, holding a bunch of white roses they had put in her hand.” We know by this time that Ivan’s is not the iconic imagination. His fable is Western in feeling, romantic, sentimental. It lacks the hard clear lines of emotional intensity that what I am calling the iconic imagination would give it. Hence, our interpretation of Ivan’s Grand Inquisitor allegory ought not be that the Russian Christ vanquishes the Catholic Grand Inquisitor with a kiss. Rather, Ivan’s sick imagination has lost contact with his roots; he can see no alternatives except two very unpromising ones; he is in despair over his dilemma.

But the most telling detail of Ivan’s mode of representation comes with the miracle his Christ performs:

The sentimentality of the child, the white roses, the showing off to a crowd –these are far from being in one with the Gospel account, and even farther from the austere stylization of the ikons. And indeed they are

entirely unlike the way in which Zossima performs his “miracles” among the peasant women. His way is compassionate, loving, respectful of the person’s privacy. In Dostoevsky’s writings, only those characters who follow the path of selfless love and the harsh and dreadful discipline of self abnegation can manifest the ikonic way.

How different is the image of Markel, Zossima’s brother, whose portrayal is tender without sentimentality. Markel, who has been an unbeliever, changes as his fatal illness progresses:

It was a late Easter, and the days were bright, fine, and full of fragrance. I remember he used to cough all night and sleep badly, ut in the morning he dressed and tried to sit up in an armchair. That’s how I remember him sitting, quiet and gentle, smiling, his face bright and joyous, in spite of his illness. A marvelous change passed over him, his spirit seemed transformed. The old nurse would come in and say, “Let me light the lamp abefore th holy image, myh dear,” And former ly he would not have alloed it andwould have blown it out. “Light it, light it, dear. I was a wretch to have prevented you8r doing it. You are praying when you light the lakpl, and I am praying when I rejoice seeing you. So we are praying to the same God.

Don’t cry, Mother, he would say, “life is paradise, and we are all in paradise, but we won’t see it, if we would, we should have heaven on earth the next day. . . . I was young then, a child, ut a lasting impression, a hidden feeling of it all, remained in my heart, ready to rise up and respond when the time came.

Further obviously iconic portraysls in the novel are : Alyosha’s vision of Cana of Galilee, of the elder at the marriage feast; Ilusha, the sick child, with the sharp and clear outlines of the ikonic method. The emphasis on eyes and faces: Zossima struck his valet in the face,

“another human being made in the image and likeness of God: and the utter draining of the meaning of the ikon in the Grand Inquisitor’s pale bloodless face. The final scene over the stone, where the children gather in symmetry and the harmony that comes at the end of a polyphonic composition when the voices all come together. But one pictures the final scene as an arrangement that could be portrayed in the visual art of the icon: Alyosha at the center, the stone under his feet, the boys gathered round in a communion of love and memory. Do this in memory of me. By the end of the novel, we have come to see memory as iconic: we shape our memories into their sharp penetrating outlines. We allow them to search us; they look at us intently. We grow into their milieu; and if we are fortunate as Alyosha was, a community grows up around us, all of us praising the human race and taking on its burden of sin and redemption, seeing ourselves made in the image of God and seeing others with that iconic imagination that transforms everything into a design.

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The double of the iconic is the sentimental realism of Ivan’s imagination when he attempts to picture the Christ:

Other scenes: the Elder’s decaying body; Alyosha’s vision

Ikons have depth, serenity, grace, flatness. They look at us. They search our souls. Ikons are not marked with any tender sentimentality; they are stern, demanding, they portray serenity, an unflinching regard, intensity.

The figures that are simply banal and realistic in Dostoevsky are those who are of the world: Rakitin, Miusov, Ivan’s devil. The positively anti-ikonic: Smerdyakov.

Dmitri's dream of the dark-faced mother with the crying babe; alyosha's dream of the Elder at the wedding feast; the making of an icon around the burial place of Ilyusha; the dead boy.

Ilyusha's mad, uncomprehending mother. The hysterically proud, buffoonish father. . . rendered so by their suffering love.

The ikonic sees this world as transformed into an image of suffering beauty . . . that only the active love of a Zossima can render bearable.

The Russian theologian Ouspensky:

as Scripture proclaims the words of the divine image, so the icon is an image of the divine word. . . . the icon as an aid to reflection, is rhetorical, mnemonic, and communal . . . it points toward the transfiguration of humanity and the entire visible world . . .