

Nationhood and Roots: Dostoyevsky and Weil on National Culture and Europe*

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The relationship between religious, national and wider European or global identity¹ is one of the most disturbing and fascinating questions of the late twentieth century. With the end of National Socialism in Germany and Fascism in Italy, Western Europe was charged with a burst of idealism and hope that never again would the continent be convulsed by the effects of nationalist aggression. The founding fathers of what is now the European Union shaped a clear vision of a Europe whose peoples would proceed towards ever closer union. The means to this end was the integration of the economies of Europe's nation states.

On the other side of the 'Iron Curtain', the official ideology also maintained a vision of an international community, though in this case it was an international community of Socialist countries. In retrospect this internationalism seems merely to have been a glossy veneer smeared by Soviet tanks over a bloc of countries no less nationally self-conscious than their western counterparts. Yet while Russians envied Poles, and Czechs and Slovaks envied Hungarians, the ideal that national identity had been superseded was not entirely fictional. The break-up of the Soviet bloc caught almost everyone by surprise. In these contexts, the development of the European Union and the apparent permanence of International Socialism,² the resurgence of nationalism has been deeply shocking to many.

The roles played by religion in recent forms of nationalism have varied, but have been consistently significant. In some forms of nationalism religious and national identity have been fused together. In the East, the Ottoman practice of treating church leaders as both ecclesiastical patriarchs and national ethnarchs confirmed an already strong association between church and nation. In Russia, after the end of the destruction of Byzantium, Moscow came to be seen as the Third Rome. In 1472 the grand duke of Moscow, Ivan the Great, married Sophia, the niece of the last Byzantine emperor, and assumed the Byzantine title of tsar; these developments involved the conscious acceptance by some in the Russian Orthodox tradition of a Byzantine model of the relationship between church and nation. Metropolitan Ioann of St Petersburg once said that 'if Russia isn't your mother, God can't be your Father'.³ Kallistos Ware has noted that while 'the integration of Church and people has in the end proved immensely beneficial',

this close identification of Orthodoxy with the life of the people, and in

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particular the system of national Churches, has had unfortunate consequences. Because Church and nation were so closely associated, the Orthodox Slavs have often confused the two and have made the Church serve the ends of national politics.⁴

The mode of association between nation and church in the West has differed from that in the East in important respects. In the West the church has sometimes come into direct conflict with the forces of nationalism, for example during the Italian Risorgimento. However, the problems raised by the identification of the interests of nation and church have often been just as acute as in the East. In his evocative book *The Sign of the Cross: Travels in Catholic Europe*⁵ Colm Tóibín eloquently explores the complex interweavings between his personal, Catholic and Irish identities. In his review of the book Richard Tyrell called it ‘an exposé of the power relationship between church and nationalism’. As forceful as any such interweaving is the braying Unionism of Protestant Northern Ireland. In certain circles – liberal, tolerant, europhile – such forms of nationalism are looked on with distaste. But are such views adequate? Is nationalism always bad, or usually bad, or bad only in certain forms? Are there theological resources which could help address these questions?

The *melée* of conflicting ideas and ideologies about the moral weight of nationhood and national identity has engendered few but valuable theological reflections. In particular, Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s contribution to what Keith Clements describes as a ‘true patriotism’ is well documented. In this paper I want to examine the understandings of nationhood and national roots found in Fedor Dostoyevsky and Simone Weil. Both writers, I suggest, provide useful insights into the value and limitations of national identity from a Christian perspective.

Dostoyevsky and Weil are unnatural bedfellows. They lived at different ends of the European continent and inhabited different religious traditions. Revolution and war separated Dostoyevsky’s Russia from Weil’s France. Dostoyevsky was a hedonist, fatally addicted to gambling. Weil was an ascetic, fatally addicted to fasting. Yet their respective theologies exhibit striking similarities. Both believed in the redemptive value of the suffering of Christ and the writings of both manifest a characteristic mystical strain.

The similarities between them are equally evident in their reflections upon national culture, its value, and its relationship to Christ. Both Dostoyevsky and Weil argue that national culture, language, values, and a properly understood nationalism are not antithetical to any higher good, but the best, perhaps the only way towards universal human fellowship. Secondly, for both, such cultural values and identity have a spiritual, indeed divine, centre which offers an alternative to either nationalistic or more universal ideologies which rely on human resources alone.⁶

Dostoyevsky, Nationalism and Europe

Fedor Dostoyevsky was a profoundly religious writer. His early novels blended Dickensian social comment with a Gogolian love for the Russian peasant. Following his arrest in 1849 Dostoyevsky’s novels took on new qualities. A sadistic prison commander had staged a mock execution before reading out a letter commuting Dostoyevsky’s sentence to Siberian imprisonment. Four years as a convict had a profound impact on his writing. His epilepsy was greatly aggravated. His encounters with fellow convicts and their psychology added new elements to his writing. He abandoned his admiration for members of the Russian intelligentsia who, like

Turgenev, looked to Europe as the source of inspiration. He developed a Christianity which involved worshipping Christ essentially because he was worshipped by the Russian people. In writing about the Russian people, Dostoyevsky found himself writing about Christ. In several of his later novels a key role is played by the very distinctive Russian religious figure of the *starets*, the saintly elder. In *The Devils* Bishop Tikhon hears Stavrogin's awful confession. In *The Brothers Karamazov* Father Zosima is Alesha's mentor. As A. Boyce Gibson has demonstrated, Dostoyevsky's religion was the engine driving his novels.⁷ Dostoyevsky's religious views have everything to do with his understanding of national identity and his attitude towards Europe.

In 1880 a statue of the poet Pushkin was unveiled in Moscow. It was the first statue to a Russian writer to have been erected, and the occasion became a festival for lovers of Russian literature. It also became a stage on which was played out a dialogue between the representatives of two leading perspectives amongst the Russian intelligentsia. Ivan Turgenev delivered a lecture extolling Pushkin's virtues on behalf of the Westernisers, those who believed Russia's future lay in looking unequivocally towards Europe. Dostoyevsky spoke for the Slavophiles, those who believed in Russia's capacity to be the progenitor of its own destiny. Dostoyevsky's 'Pushkin Speech', the foreword he wrote for its publication, and a subsequent rebuttal he wrote to a critic of his speech, together comprise a fascinating argument.⁸

Dostoyevsky's Pushkin speech makes four key points. Firstly, Dostoyevsky argues that Pushkin was the first to diagnose a sickness in Russian society, namely that so many of its intellectuals had become rootless Europeans, detached from the 'soil' of their own culture. Secondly, Dostoyevsky continues, Pushkin's greatness lay in his discovery of a pure moral beauty in the Russian soil, the spirit of the people.

Now the whole truth must be said: not in our present civilisation, not in the so-called European culture (which, by the way, never existed with us), not in the monstrosities of European ideas and forms only outwardly assimilated, did Pushkin discover this beauty, but he found it in the spirit of the people alone.⁹

Thirdly, however, Pushkin was also capable of a truly universal human sympathy which led him not only to the heart of his native Russians, but to an understanding of other nations also:

the Russian soul, the genius of the Russian people, is perhaps among all the nations the most capable of upholding the ideal of a universal union of mankind, of brotherly love, of the calm conception which forgives all contrasts, allows for and excuses the unlike, and softens all contradictions.¹⁰

Shakespeare, great as he was, argues Dostoyevsky, could not write about anyone but the English. Even Othello is, beneath his skin, really an English gentleman. 'The greatest of European poets could never so powerfully embody in themselves the genius of a foreign, even a neighbouring people ...'¹¹

Fourthly, finally, and for our purposes most interestingly, Dostoyevsky argues that this capacity for universal sympathy is a truly Russian characteristic. Thus, he concludes: 'Our aspiration after Europe, in spite of all its infatuations and extremes, was not only right and necessary in its *basis*, but also popular; it fully coincided with the aspirations of the national spirit itself, and was without doubt ultimately a higher purpose also'.¹²

To real Slavophiles, Dostoyevsky concludes, the aspiration of the Westernisers towards European culture is perfectly understandable. They are expressing the universal sympathy of the Russian people.¹³ However, and the coda is at least as significant as the main clause, the Westernisers ultimately suggested that Russia must 'necessarily lose its individuality in a slavish imitation of Europe'.¹⁴

There were aspects of European life and culture that Dostoyevsky valued, and from which he believed Russia could learn. 'Please understand', he said, however, 'that we are guided by Europe, by her science, and by Peter's reforms, but not by the spirit of the people at all ...'.¹⁵ Uniquely in Russia, Dostoyevsky believed, 'the ideal of the people is Christ'.¹⁶

Dostoyevsky's speech, if he himself is to be believed, stimulated many responses, both positive and negative. One wit, according to Dostoyevsky, suggested that the ultimate aim of the Slavophiles was to rebaptise all Europe into the Orthodox faith.¹⁷ As the speech was delivered, Turgenev, at a complimentary mention of his work, stood up and blew Dostoyevsky an affectionate kiss. One critical response, however, rankled with Dostoyevsky so much that he published an acerbic reply more than twice the length of the original Pushkin eulogy. Gradovsky had challenged Dostoyevsky to accept the European gift of the Enlightenment. As far as sciences and crafts were concerned, Dostoyevsky agreed that Europe was a useful source, and that Russia should be grateful. But, he continued,

by Enlightenment I understand ... that which is literally expressed in the very word: Enlightenment – a spiritual light which shines upon the soul and illumines the heart, which directs the mind and reveals to it the way of life. If this be so, then allow me to observe that for this enlightenment we have no need to go to western European sources because of absolute self sufficiency (not the absolute lack) of sources in Russia. ... I assert that our people became enlightened long ago, by taking into its eternal soul Christ and His teaching. I may be told that it has no knowledge of Christ's teaching, because no sermons are preached to it. But this is an empty objection. It knows indeed everything that it needs to know, though it cannot pass an examination in the catechism. It came to know this in temples where for centuries it had heard prayers and hymns which are better than sermons.¹⁸

Not only was Russia enlightened in this sense, Dostoyevsky believed: it was also, perhaps uniquely in Europe, enlightened by Christ. The death of God, or the eclipse of the Christ-light, as Dostoyevsky put it, was not caused by science as the Liberals asserted. 'The western Church herself,' he contended, 'distorted the image of Christ, changing herself from a Church into a Roman State, and again incarnating the State in the form of the Papacy.'¹⁹ Protestantism, he added, had taken giant strides into atheism and a 'wavering, fluid, fickle, instead of an eternal, morality'. Dostoyevsky, at least balanced in his disgust for all western forms of Christianity, did accept that there were still many Christians in the West.²⁰ Nevertheless, Dostoyevsky insisted, 'She is on the eve of ruin, your Europe, of a general, universal and terrible catastrophe'.²¹ The source of the ruin, he added, would be the disillusioned fourth estate which was already knocking on the doors of privilege and power. It is a remarkable prediction, in part because of its prescience, in part because of its striking blindness. Dostoyevsky's words presage a twentieth century of European wars and of dramatic social change. Accurate as an Old Testament seer, he understood the significance of proletarian discontent; but in locating this conflict in Western Europe

alone, Dostoyevsky overlooked the looming cloud over his own backyard.

Some aspects of Dostoyevsky's argument in *The Pushkin Speech* are less than appealing. How can one evaluate whether he is right that Pushkin alone of all European writers has a truly universal sympathy for other peoples? Is it not simply national self-aggrandisement to suggest that this quality exists as a national quality amongst the Russians alone? It is not difficult to see how the basic melody of Dostoyevsky's argument could be transposed into national arrogance, though we may be disposed to tolerate some such discordances in a writer's eulogy for his literary hero.

According to Janko Lavrin, Dostoyevsky's message in the speech 'was not so much Russia against Europe, but a spiritual and cultural approach to both, or a possible integration of them, in the name of a unique and united humanity'.²² Dostoyevsky believed that the contrast between Slavophile and Westerniser had become an artificially sharp either/or:

Yes, beyond all doubt, the destiny of a Russian is Pan-European and universal. To become a true Russian, to become a Russian fully (in the end of all, I repeat), means only to become the brother of all men, to become, if you will, a universal man. All our Slavophilism and Westernism is only a great misunderstanding, even though historically necessary.²³

He concluded that the comedic multicultural identity of Europe's bourgeoisie and intelligentsia simply could not be taken seriously as the natural or proper form of human unity.

Weil and the Need for Roots

The crisis in Western Europe, so accurately predicted by Dostoyevsky, dominated the life of Simone Weil.²⁴ She was born in 1909 and died in 1943. Her early childhood coincided with the First World War. In her student days and early career she was immersed in the ideological conflicts of the French Left. She travelled in and wrote about Nazi Germany and, briefly and clumsily, sought to fight in the Spanish Civil War. She worked for the Free French in wartime London and died because her tuberculosis was fatally aggravated by her refusal to eat more than the ration of those in occupied France.

Weil had left Vichy France in 1942. She arrived in London in the December of that year and was soon employed by the Free French. Her hope had been that she would be sent as an agent into occupied France. Her temperament and her Jewish appearance made this an impossibility. But a former fellow student, well placed in the *Résistance*, arranged a job for her in the provisional Ministry of the Interior. There she was instructed to write a philosophical discussion document on the foundations of a post-war French constitution. This grew into a book, *The Need for Roots*,²⁵ which she subtitled 'a prelude to a declaration of duties towards mankind'. T. S. Eliot, who prefaced its English translation, categorised it as 'prolegomena to politics'. He described Weil as brilliant, humourless, demanding patience of her friends and readers, and as possessing 'a kind of genius akin to that of the saints'.²⁶

The book consists of three parts. The first details the needs of the soul. Weil argues that before the notion of human rights which is dominating the political vocabulary of France should be placed the notion of obligations. Rights, she believes, are effectual only if and when they correspond to obligations. These obligations, Weil continues, correspond to a list of human needs. Some needs are indeed physical:

protection against violence, housing, clothing, medical care, food and so on. But other needs, to Weil equally important, are moral. These moral needs are no more or less earthly than the physical needs together with which they provide the necessary conditions of human life. Weil goes on to list 14 such needs of the soul, including liberty, obedience, responsibility, equality, private and collective property and truth. The first need named by Weil is the need for order. By order Weil means 'a texture of social relationships such that no one is compelled to violate imperative obligations in order to carry out other ones'.²⁷

Such order demands that we give respect to the human collectivities to which we belong: to our family and our nation, for example.

We owe a cornfield respect, not because of itself, but because it is food for mankind. In the same way, we owe our respect to a collectivity, of whatever kind – country, family or any other – not for itself, but because it is food for a certain number of human souls.²⁸

Each such human collectivity is precious, Weil believes, because it is unique. Unlike a sack of corn, for which another sack of corn can always be substituted, the nourishment provided for the soul by a collectivity cannot be replaced. Collectivities are precious because they feed the future as well as the present. What is more, by virtue of this continuity human collectivities act as repositories for the preservation of spiritual treasures, the traditions of its members.

The second part of Weil's book employs the metaphor of roots and rootedness. 'To be rooted', Weil suggests,

is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations of the future.²⁹

Weil identifies three areas in which people experience uprootedness: in the towns, in the country, and in the nation. For our purposes, it is the third of these that is of particular interest. She defines the word 'nation' very simply as 'a territorial aggregate whose various parts recognise the authority of the same state'.³⁰ However,

To posit one's own country as an absolute value that cannot be defiled by evil is manifestly absurd. ... The nation is a fact, and a fact is not an absolute value. It is just one fact amongst other similar facts ... France is something which is temporal, terrestrial. ... A Christian has only one country that can be the object of such patriotism, and which is situated outside this world.³¹

Jesus commanded his disciples to 'hate' father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters. It cannot be acceptable, then, to love one's country in any absolute sense, for the proper object of love is goodness, and 'God alone is good'.³²

For Weil the nation, like culture, is historically contingent. In this sense, according to Eric Springsted, she is a 'pluralist'. However, Springsted adds, 'For Weil, the solution hinges on seeing our history as a matter of being rooted'.³³ Nations are to be respected, but the state is sacred not in the way that an idol is sacred. It is sacred in the way that the most ordinary objects used in religious rituals are sacred: water in baptism, bread and wine in the Eucharist. Everybody knows that these are ordinary, profane objects, but they are nevertheless regarded as holy because they are serving

sacred purposes.³⁴ Weil abandoned her pacifism at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War because she so fervently desired that one side should win that she felt she was already totally morally committed. In *The Need for Roots* she offers the interesting suggestion that those who do not wish to defend their country should not be punished; they should simply be deprived of their citizenship.³⁵

Weil believes, then, that there is a pressing need to change the character of nationalism, to redefine the way we love our country. Her model is Joan of Arc.³⁶ Saint Joan, Weil opines, above all exhibited compassion for her country. For Weil writing in London in 1943 'compassion for our country is the only sentiment which doesn't strike a false note at the present time'.³⁷

The sufferings of one's nation constitute one of the more potent ingredients in the cocktail of modern nationalism. The sufferings inflicted on one's nation by a historical enemy can lead to an emotional sense that the descendants of one's historical enemy are the enemies of one's nation today. It is not only past victories which form a nation's identity, but past defeats: Dunkirk is at least as significant to the British national psyche as D-Day. Remembering the sufferings of the past can easily lead to a ritualisation of national enmities. If what Weil suggests by the phrase 'compassion for one's country' involves nurturing the sufferings of the past there might be little to distinguish her position from those forms of nationalism which utilise past hurts to sustain present xenophobia. But this is not what she means. In both English and French 'compassion' is usually understood as 'pity inclining one to be merciful'; but the Latin origins of the word hint towards a literal meaning of 'suffering with'. Weil believes that by compassionately sharing the affliction of other persons one restores to them the humanity which has been destroyed by their affliction.³⁸ A person who has been turned into an object, a thing, by affliction can be made whole by genuine charitable love. So interpreted, compassion is far removed from triumphalism. We can feel compassion for a person or group, and yet maintain a critical distance from their views or beliefs. One can even feel compassion for individuals or groups whose actions have contributed to their own suffering, just as Bonhoeffer had compassion on Nazi Germany while relentlessly opposing its government. This is surely what Weil meant.

A second critical point is made by Weil in the third part of *The Need for Roots*, in the long section entitled 'The Growing of Roots'. Weil argues that

Above the earthly carnal sphere in which our thoughts habitually move, and which is on every side an inextricable mix of good and evil, there is another, a spiritual sphere where good is only good and, even at the inferior level, produces only good; where evil is only evil and can produce nothing but evil.³⁹

Passing over the Neoplatonism of her thinking, we can see that for Weil the roots one properly sets down in the nation are only penultimate in their value: the only ultimate good to which we must be loyal is God.⁴⁰ Springsted accurately concludes that

We can now see quite clearly what exactly the idea of rootedness itself is meant to convey. It is not simply by having 'roots' in the most general sense in a community that we are nourished, but by that community itself having roots that draw upon the supernatural.⁴¹

However, the question of who defines the nature and content of such 'supernatural' roots remains unexplored by Weil.

Conclusion

Dostoyevsky and Weil share several insights about the relationship between nationhood, religion and identity. Both claim to offer a nationalism devoid of xenophobia. Dostoyevsky is clear that before proceeding towards the goal of universal human fellowship on a European or wider scale we must take proper account of the need to belong. Dostoyevsky believes that Russian intellectuals who have become citizens of a European intelligentsia, happier speaking French than Russian, have lost their roots. They have, as he puts it, 'not developed an individuality. They have not even a national character'.⁴²

Weil's contribution is to offer an interpretation of nationalism that is described as *compassion* for one's country. Hers is certainly a nationalism in which xenophobia is absent. Weil resigned from the Free French shortly before her death because she became increasingly convinced that Gaullist patriotism was becoming a French echo of German nationalism. She knew perfectly well that cultural identity was historically contingent, that French culture was no better or worse than British, or German, or Russian. However, from this acceptance of the pluralism of national identity she did not conclude that because nations are contingent they are also bad. On the contrary, she recognised that human individuals *need* to belong to human collectivities.

Is it significant that Weil, a polyglot European traveller, does not mention a wider European culture, fails to consider Europe as a potential human collectivity? It may well be. As a student and teacher Weil had been a fervent socialist and campaigner for workers' rights. Trotsky several times stayed at her parents' home on his visits to Paris. But Weil abandoned direct political campaigning as she became disillusioned by the squabbles of the French Left. For her the internationalism of the Left, which saw nationalism as a shameful bourgeois prejudice, was no better or worse than the xenophobic patriotism of French propaganda in the First World War. Both were forms of propaganda intended to manipulate the unsuspecting worker.

Weil's redefinition of nationalism as compassion for one's country, to which one is rooted, and through such roots one is nourished, deserves serious attention. Above all Dostoyevsky and Weil emphasise the fact that national identity, nationalism, must have spiritual roots. These cannot be created; they are already present. They are contiguous with the past, and vital for survival in the future. Sir Leon Brittan⁴³ observes that some europhiles conceive of the progress towards ever closer European integration as like a bicycle, which, should it ever stop moving forward, must fall over. To mix metaphors horribly: if Dostoyevsky and Weil are right, and if it does not have living spiritual roots in the nation, the bicycle will fall over however fast it travels.

Several important historical developments separate us from Weil's view of nationhood and roots and also from that of Dostoyevsky. On 6 August 1945 Hiroshima was destroyed by an atomic bomb. In 1961 Yuri Gagarin saw the earth from space. More recent visitors to the Mir space station have been able to observe the effects of deforestation, ozone depletion and global warming. Just as much as the rise of air travel, the arrival of the atomic age and the prospect of environmental catastrophe symbolised by the image of our fragile blue planet have given rise to a much enhanced sense of global identity.

In the context of this clearer sense of global belonging, Michael Ignatieff proceeds from the analysis he offers in *The Needs of Strangers* to a differently nuanced understanding of homelessness and belonging. He agrees with Dostoyevsky and Weil that

people need roots. However, he is clear that 'a century of total war has taught us where belonging can take us when its object is the nation'.⁴⁴ In *Blood and Belonging*⁴⁵ Ignatieff spells out his views on nationalism. It is, he suggests, a highly complex phenomenon which can take three forms:

As a political doctrine, nationalism is the belief that the world's peoples are divided into nations, and that each of these nations has the right of self-determination, either as self-governing units within existing nation states or as nation states of their own. As a cultural ideal, nationalism is the claim that while men and women have many identities, it is the nation which provides them with their primary form of belonging. As a moral ideal, nationalism is an ethic of heroic sacrifice, justifying the use of violence in the defence of one's nation against enemies, internal or external. These claims – political, moral and cultural – underwrite each other.⁴⁶

Within this scheme Dostoyevsky and Weil could both be characterised as cultural nationalists, while Dostoyevsky alone could be described as a moral nationalist.

Nationalism in itself is not necessarily bad, as Ignatieff acknowledges. The need to belong to a nation expresses the need of an individual to have roots. Other needs are also important, however: the need for justice; the need for liberty; the need for solidarity. Problems arise, Ignatieff believes, when the nation is perceived to be the only context in which such needs may be met, to the exclusion of all other contexts. This remains true whether such a perception is religious or secular in origin. So many religious nationalisms fail to recognise that national and religious 'belonging' must include openness to the needs of strangers. The theological challenge is to understand national 'belonging' in the context of the need for roots, roots which have a 'spiritual' dimension.

Notes and References

- ¹ Though many of the issues I attempt to explore in this paper are universal, the particular focus is Europe. For a reader on nationalism, including several contrasting definitions, see John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (eds), *Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1994).
- ² Even in the 1980s few anticipated the end of the 'Soviet Empire'. In the mid-1980s, at the zenith of the Solidarity struggles in Poland, Timothy Garton Ash, one of the best informed and best placed British observers, confided pessimistically to his journal that it could only be a matter of time before the Soviet tanks would come rolling in to restore order (Timothy Garton Ash, *The File* (Harper Collins, London, 1997).
- ³ Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen (eds), *Freedom of Religion and Belief: A World Report* (Routledge, London and New York, 1997).
- ⁴ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, revised edition, 1997), p. 77.
- ⁵ Colm Tóibín, *The Sign of the Cross: Travels in Catholic Europe* (Vintage, London, 1994).
- ⁶ I am indebted to Eric O. Springsted for the observation of these two concepts in Weil's thought. See his 'Rootedness: culture and value' in R. H. Bell (ed.), *Simone Weil's Philosophy of Culture* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993), p. 168.
- ⁷ A. Boyce Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoyevsky* (SCM, London, 1973). The later novels are thoroughly moral and religious in content and outlook. In *Crime and Punishment* Raskol'nikov murders an odious moneylender and wrestles with his conscience before voluntarily confessing to the police. The novel ends with the promise of his moral resurrection as Sonya joins him in exile, leaving her copy of the New Testament under his

pillow. In *The Idiot* Dostoyevsky creates Leon Myshkin, a saintly fool, a paradigm of the Russian Christ perhaps, whose name significantly means 'lion mouse'. Myshkin, epileptic like his creator, finally descends into madness. *The Devils*, which centres on a political murder, was instrumental in bringing Malcolm Muggeridge from communism to Christianity. But it is *The Brothers Karamazov* which, in Gibson's words, is Dostoyevsky's 'most ideological creation' (p. 64). The biblical epigraph to *The Brothers Karamazov* presages the glimmer of hope that Dostoyevsky intended would shine through the gory patricide on which its plot turns: 'Verily, verily I say unto you, except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit' (John 12:24). The hero of the novel, Alesha, was Dostoyevsky's second attempt to create a truly Russian saintly fool. The 'parable' of the Grand Inquisitor is one of the best known and most over-quoted passages in literature. The subtext of this profound story is Dostoyevsky's conviction that the church should not be primarily an institution or a hierarchy, but a body of consenting individuals who individual by individual are open to the pervasive will of Christ. Later in the novel Ivan talks with an urbane devil, either real or a symptom of the madness that subsequently engulfs him. It is Ivan's diabolic *Doppelgänger* who speaks the memorable line "'Hosannah" alone is not enough for life. It is necessary that this "hosannah" should be tried in the crucible of doubt' (p. 755). *The Brothers Karamazov* is Dostoyevsky's crucible of doubt.

- ⁸ F. Dostoyevsky, *The Dream of a Queer Fellow/The Pushkin Speech* (Unwin, London, 1972).
- ⁹ *ibid.*, p. 34.
- ¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 36.
- ¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 55.
- ¹² *ibid.*, p. 35.
- ¹³ *ibid.*, p. 38.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 39.
- ¹⁵ *loc. cit.*
- ¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 66.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 41.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 62–63.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 64.
- ²⁰ *loc. cit.*
- ²¹ *ibid.*, p. 86.
- ²² Janko Lavrin, *Dostojevski* (Rohohlt, Hamburg, 1963), p. 151.
- ²³ Dostoyevsky, *The Dream ...*, p. 57.
- ²⁴ For an introduction to Weil's life and work see Stephen Plant, *Simone Weil* (Fount, 1996).
- ²⁵ Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (Ark Paperbacks, London, 1987).
- ²⁶ *ibid.*, p. vi.
- ²⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 9–10.
- ²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 7.
- ²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 41.
- ³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 95.
- ³¹ *ibid.*, pp. 125–26.
- ³² *ibid.*, p. 127.
- ³³ Springsted, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
- ³⁴ Weil, *op. cit.*, pp. 173–74.
- ³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 157.
- ³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 162.
- ³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 165.
- ³⁸ Weil distinguishes suffering and affliction: affliction always involves physical suffering, but also psychological and social hurt. For a full account see Stephen Plant, 'Simone Weil and "the supernatural use of suffering"', *Epworth Review*, due for publication in 1999.
- ³⁹ Weil, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

- ⁴⁰ Compare Bonhoeffer's use of the terms 'ultimate' and 'penultimate' in his *Ethics*.
- ⁴¹ Springsted, *op. cit.*, p. 183.
- ⁴² Dostoyevsky, *The Dream ...*, p. 65.
- ⁴³ Leon Brittan, *Europe: The Europe We Need* (Hamish Hamilton, 1994).
- ⁴⁴ Michael Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers* (Vintage, 1994), p. 139. This is a book which resonates with echoes of the thought of Weil.
- ⁴⁵ Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (Vintage, 1993).
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 3.