



Motto: "In the face of such icons as the Vladimir one, it is easiest to understand why the veneration of the Mother of God plays such an exceptional role in the history of Christianity... Mankind in the image of the Mother, grieving for the crucified Son, saw the most complete embodiment of that element of the spirit, which is called love and only love and which knows neither the law of justice, nor the law of retribution - no laws, except the law of pity and compassion" - Aleksandr I. Anisimov(*)

Excerpted below are a few thoughts from two spiritual guides: Fr. Rafail Noica, and St. Seraphim of Sarov. They seem to us to illuminate certain important aspects of *The Brothers Karamazov* and conversely. They help us see the theme of Filial Piety as one of the Commandments, understood in a wide, ontological, spiritual and practical context. And how, in the end, the heart

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of Spiritual Fatherhood is really akin to Wise Motherhood, and conversely (compare the final excerpts below with the relevant introductory remarks and Dostoevsky paragraphs given [here](#)

). This, we feel, is where the Brothers Karamazov (and Dostoevsky in general, and Mujik Marey, and many other stories in the _

*Dostoevsky for Parents and Children*_

collection in particular) crucially touches on, or points to, the heart of St. Seraphim of Sarov.

And yes, even of St. Ambrose of Optina, perhaps the most "Motherly" of all the Optina Elders.

Even if the essential correctness of Dostoevsky's most competent critics is otherwise granted, and he leaves to his readers important blanks to fill in and homework to do...

- □ Fr. Rafail Noica on Filial Piety:

"Saint Paul draws our attention that the commandment to honor your father and your mother, of the ten commandments, is the first commandment with a promise. What promise is that? That your days may be many in the land that the Lord your God will give you (...) What is the connection between honoring my parents and the many days I hope to spend on this earth? I don't know either, but I'll tell you the little that I've begun to understand: my life is FLOWING from my father and my mother, BUT IT'S NOT THAT "IT HAS FLOWN", and THAT'S IT, now, mine are in the other world and, I hope, they're fine, BUT IT GOES ON FLOWING... to dishonor father and mother is not only a moral abomination, because those who gave me life, I now reject them; it is an essential abomination - cut the thread of life! – and the great trick of the modern devils was just that, to tear the family apart, and maybe that is one of the reasons why there is so much sickness, although science has progressed unbelievably... because the life energy is no longer working in us – I don't know how!... we're talking spiritually, it's a secret... we should know and if I were a more educated person I might know, one of the Fathers probably talked about it... but that's all I understood and I think it's enough to start a good understanding. It's always the case in the Church... you know that I told you in one or more sermons that we shouldn't stop at the moral level, it's a good but primitive level of repentance, that is, of our longing for eternity. The essential level, i.e. being, i.e. life is what matters and the Church speaks to us about Life, not about correct behavior or behaviorism, patterning and so

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on... So, to dishonor parents is to cut the thread of life to a degree, between us and the One who gave us life, God after all, through our parents (...)" (minimally revised automatic translation

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Romanian original

[here](#)

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- Moralism (the "Euclidean" path) is not enough:

God's commandment is not something that God morally expects us to fulfill: because He knows that we cannot fulfill it, because it is not a moral commandment, but it is a revelation [of] what God Himself is. God's command is the divine life that we cannot touch in any way, but we can cry: Lord! Lord, I love your commandment, but you see that I cannot live it, as Fr. Sophrony used to say: "Come, You, and dwell in me, and work in me what is beyond the power of man." God's command is God's confession to Adam, because Adam, understanding - may the Lord give us eyes within our understanding so that we can see the beauty of that Face, so that we can no longer resist not being like this and then let a prayer be raised from us, be it [even] hopeless, a hopeless hope, so to speak, that God will give to us. And God will give! And as I told several people last year, some young people from abroad: when you feel that it is so difficult to reach some divine virtue, know that it is not difficult, it is impossible; your nature confesses to you, gives you inner testimony that that word is impossible for you; but from our God, we should expect nothing less than the impossible! Nothing less than the impossible, because if our God is God, then the impossible is what we expect from Him and what only He can do, for to Him nothing is impossible. And that impossible thing, for the love and for the power of God, you will see it working in you; and I pray to God that He may receive this word and as an encouragement of your faith - from a little believer who knows what little faith means - and as a prayer for me and for you. So God's command is a divine revelation to intoxicate us, to sweeten us with the beauty of His face, to attract us to His Kingdom. But it is an impossible thing and this impossible thing, for the love of God and for his omnipotence, we expect to see him working in us. (idem, excerpted from the original Romanian posted [here](#))

"The negative side... is when you often feel like you're struggling, [yet you wonder] how you'll ever get to the end. It is probably the testimony that you are on the wrong path, which really will

not lead you anywhere. [That is] there is a heresy somewhere. You pull to the right where God calls you to the left. I would like to give you a concrete example, but I can't. But the parable is like pulling a cart up a hill and saying: "Of course I can't pull! I don't have much strength and the cart is heavy". Yes, but when you pull against the direction of the wheels, then, of course, you don't move it. But, pull it in the direction of the wheels and, even if it is heavy, something moves. When you start, when you find, when you discover a struggle, a little adjustment in your effort of struggle means that you have started to find the right, the working path. Every time there will be another way out of the heresy you live in. I would just like to show you the signs by which you detect heresy. That is, the fact that it is unworkable, that no matter how much goodwill [you have], it doesn't seem to work, you even feel a kind of despondency, a kind of hopelessness that you will never get there [to the end]. You are probably in trouble, in a way of thinking that I call heretical and for which you must find the right equivalent. And this, you know, is not always the opposite, i.e. [as] industriousness is for laziness. Yes, but otherwise seen, as I was saying a moment ago about greed, man is right when he seeks bread to survive, to live. But the bread of the belly, the daily bread - that helps him to a limited extent - [is not what man is really looking for]. But what is he looking for, and the bread did not satisfy him? He is looking for the Word of God. For the drunkard, alcohol can do him good, it can soothe him to a certain extent, but what is he looking for? He seeks the Spirit. So sometimes we have to look not only for the opposite of what we are doing, but also [to change] the direction. There are many examples that I could give, many that I thought of telling you. Maybe with time, if the Lord wants, or maybe the Lord will tell you. So there is no formula for how to get out, but we must ask the Lord and, in principle, we must try with the priest. But, sometimes, the answer can come to you through a book, through a person, through an incident, through who knows [what]. God has many, many means to open man's eyes, so that we understand. [And] when God answered us, [to make us understand] that he answered us, [because] many times the answer passes under our noses and we don't notice it". (idem, from the original Romanian posted [here](#))

- Fr. Rafail on Wise Motherhood:

Sometimes, Saint Paul also says, [there is] a prayer in which we do not know what to ask or what to pray for and the Spirit of God helps us with unutterable sighs. Sighs that we ourselves don't know why [we have]: something hurts, we need something... Our Maker knows what we want! As the mother with the newborn baby knows... I was amazed many times [when] young women of my age became mothers and, with the baby in her arms - the baby was crying, "screaming"... And at some point the mother says: "Oh, he is hungry, forgive me". She goes and

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feeds the baby, nurses him. After which, the baby "whined" again, and the mother: "Something hurts!" And he turns him face down, upside down, I don't know what, in the end, his stomach "growls" - and... the baby calms down. And after that, the baby screamed again. And the mother says: "Oh, look! He's whimsical!" Oh, mother, how do you know all this? I only hear a baby crying! But maybe I understand my mother more now, because since I became a priest I have also become a mother in a way. But God gives intuition to the mother to understand. The baby only knows how to "scream" when it is not well. And the mother knows what to do. The baby does not need to write a treatise on philosophy to know how to act God who made the mother, God who "invented" the mother, He is more... Mother than anyone else... And our unspeakable sighs, even... our non-sighs, God hears them and collects them in His treasuries. And he knows how to answer us! (idem, taken from [here](#))

- St. Seraphim of Sarov on Spiritual Guidance and Wise Motherhood:

A certain abbot, being by chance in Sarov Monastery, when meeting Fr Seraphim asked his advice on how to direct the brethren. Fr Seraphim gave him the following instruction:

Let every abbot become and remain always in his relation to those subject to him as a wise mother.

A mother who loves her children lives not to satisfy herself, but to satisfy her children. The infirmities of her infirm children she bears with love: those who have fallen into filth she cleans, washes them calmly, clothes them in new white garments, puts their shoes on, warms them, feeds them, looks after them, comforts them, and from all sides strives to pacify their spirit so that she never hears the slightest cry from them; and such children are well disposed to their

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mother. Thus should every abbot live not to satisfy himself, but to satisfy those subject to him – he should be condescending to their weaknesses; bear with love the infirmities of the infirm; heal their sinful diseases with the plaster of mercifulness; raise with kindness those who have fallen into transgression; quietly cleanse those who have come sullied with the filth of some vice and wash them by placing upon them fasting and prayer above the ordinary amount which is set forth for all; clothe them, by instruction and by one's own exemplary life, in garments of virtues; keep constant watch over them; by every means comforting them, and from all sides defend their peace and repose to such an extent that the slightest cry or murmuring will never be heard from them; and then they will zealously strive to procure for the abbot peace and repose. (Translated by Fr. Seraphim Rose)

Note:

(*) Machine translation taken from [here](#). Outstanding art historian, restorer, and one of the forefathers of the recovery of the traditional Orthodox icon, Anisimov was shot on Sep. 2, 1937, on charges of being a "glaring monarchist, fascist sympathizer, and slanderer of Soviet literature and art.

" Cf.

Shirley Glade

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"Anisimov and the Rediscovery of the Old Russian Icons", 2010; also see Irina Kyzlasova, "On Patriarch Tikhon's Blessing of the Work of Cultural Workers in Protecting and Restoring Works of Early Painting", 2009. (Added on Sep. 2/15, 2022.)