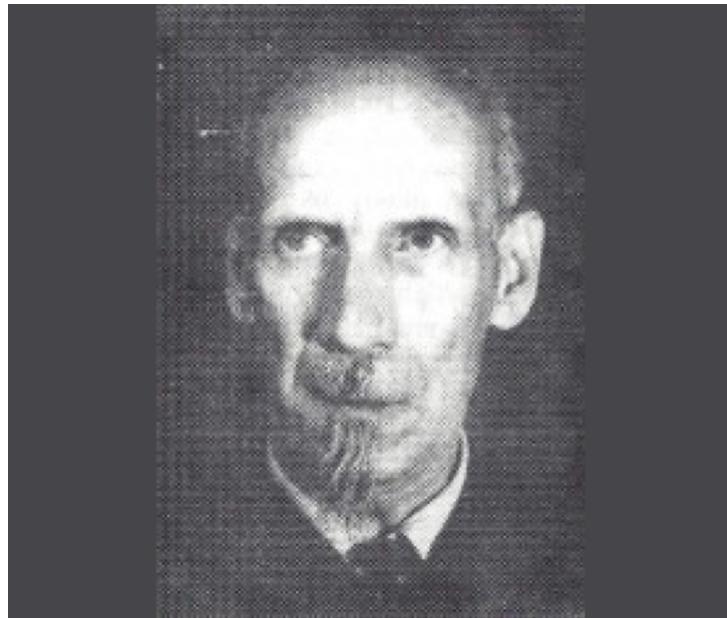


Weep! by I. M. Andreyev

A True Story of Evil in NYC & The Christian Social Ethic

There once appeared in one of New York City's newspapers a small article entitled "Child-killer." This article stated that in a little hotel on West 84th Street there occurred a frightening event, a horrible crime—a mother beat to death her two-year old son. The brief details recounted in the article only magnify the horror of this cruel act. And what were the details? This time, even the lover of the woman, a person with a lengthy criminal record, could not bear the weeping and sighing of the tortured child. He fled the room and asked a person in the elevator to call the police. When the police arrived the child was already dead, yet the mother was continuing to beat him. The sight of the boy was so horrible that even the police, accustomed to all sorts of crimes, "were not able to bear the sight of the little body," which appeared to be nothing more than "one massive wound," according to the article. During the interrogation the mother-murderer, a young twenty-nine year old woman, showed no sign of repentance.



No one has ever written with such striking power about the innocent suffering of children as Dostoyevsky. For this reason, Michaelovsky called him a "cruel talent" and the critic Aikenvald tagged him with such epithets as "persecutor and martyr," the "Ivan the Terrible" of Russian literature, and the "Great Convict"; he characterized the creative way of Dostoyevsky as "an ecstatic procession," "an astonishing world." Only the might of Dostoyevsky's pen and the keenness of his artistic imagination could delve into the frightening depths of the human soul and thereby enable the whole world to see, understand, and experience such an event as that which happened in New York City. Though we do not

possess Dostoyevsky's power of genius for describing suffering, perhaps we can employ his artistic, psychological, and realistic method to depict realistically and clearly the crime committed and to understand the meaning of it. Let us try to recreate and record with our weak and imperfect words the actual chain of events. It is not a nightmare, but something far worse, for it really occurred: the body of an innocent, tortured child lay dead in a New York City morgue and in the archives of this morgue one can find a record of the medical examiner's autopsy report.

One is not likely to die from a simple beating; to kill a living person one must destroy the functions of the major organs. Even a body mangled in a car accident may continue to survive for many hours, but this child was dead even before the police could arrive. The autopsy report provides a long and dry account of the external and internal damage: the little boy's nose was not only broken, but disfigured; his baby teeth had been knocked out, and instead of eyelashes, only dark blue blisters remained. His face had been so pummeled that it was hard to distinguish it from the back of his head, which also was battered and bruised. His lungs and kidneys had hemorrhaged, and his bladder was lacerated. Nearly all

of his tiny ribs were broken, and his spine had been broken in several places. His stomach was full of the blood he had swallowed, and so too his throat, which no doubt caused him to choke during his last shuddering wails. Much else is recorded in the report, but this staid account of the brutal damage inflicted on the young child amply screams out to us the true nature of the event...

When the baby was beaten for something, he merely began to cry and was then beaten more forcefully because he cried, so then he began to scream and the beating increased because he screamed, then he was screamed at in order to silence him, threatened to be killed if he did not stop screaming; and though the little one did not understand what it meant to kill someone, he did comprehend that he must be quiet in order to stop the beating... Looking with fear upon his "mother" and struggling to stifle his sobs, he began involuntarily to shudder with quaking spasms. The expression of his suffering face contorted into a tortured grimace... Then his "mother" began to scream furiously at him to stop "giving her such a look." (Yes, yes, this same thing happened with other children who were first beaten because they cried, then screamed, then made a face, then sighed.) She beat him not only with her fists (it is impossible with only one's fists to turn a body into pulp, to break a back, to destroy internal organs), but with anything she could reach - maybe a milk bottle, a hammer, whatever she could grab. Or then again maybe she took him by the legs (he was only two years old) and beat his head against a table, a bed, a sink, a stove... maybe she trampled him with her feet. And all these tortures she continued even after his infant soul had departed from his little body.

"Ah, please don't!" "Don't talk this way!" "It is impossible to listen this..." Will not many readers began to cry out with these words? But if it is impossible to only "listen" to what occurred, can you imagine what the tortured child went through? People have become deaf to suffering. They either do not listen or do not want to listen to what is not a nightmare, but an accomplished fact. *And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold* (Matt. 24:12) says the Holy Scriptures about the last times of the world's history. This is what is happening now. If even the lover of this woman, a criminal, could take pity on this innocent, tortured child, going so far as to allow himself to be arrested again, how is it possible that we Christians do not show a deeper, limitless compassion for him? To be able to have this deep compassion we have to at least morally experience the suffering of this innocent child. Through such pity for this child we can strengthen our love, that compassionate love so necessary for all of us, but which has been sadly extinguished.

Orthodox people! Compassionate Orthodox people! Do not be afraid to clearly imagine the awful reality of this infanticide, for it is a sign from Heaven! Our faith and love in our Savior is so weak, our deep and conscious awareness of the suffering He endured for our sins so feeble that only a very few of those who venerate the Holy Shroud of Christ on Holy Friday of Passion Week appreciate (and then only for a fleeting moment) the awesome act of redemption of Our Lord; and without this awareness it is impossible to appreciate the profound meaning of Golgotha.

Let us recall Ivan Karamazov's question concerning the suffering of children. To this day many Christians continue to ask the same question. Ivan Karamazov went so far as to judge God Himself for allowing the innocent suffering of children. And now many people even in this concrete case of infanticide are prepared to murmur against God and exclaim "Where is God? How could He allow an innocent child to suffer so?" What an extreme aberration of mind and heart to think and talk like this! How can one grumble against God Who created human beings with free will so that they might receive eternal blessings, and after their fall into an essentially unforgiveable sin (which resulted in evil, suffering, and death) redeemed sinners with His innocent suffering and His innocent Blood?

This is surely not some abstract God we blame, but Christ-God Who was crucified for our sins and Who is saving us from eternal death with His innocent sufferings. Try to bring your accusations and your charge before the Burial Shroud of Christ on Great Friday and you will begin to sense your fatal mistake. As you stand before Christ's sepulcher, your lips will be silenced and your tongue will cleave to the roof of your mouth. This same idea is found in Dostoyevsky! Pure Alyosha in justifying the innocent suffering of children reminds Ivan of Christ—No! It is not God but we ourselves that we must reproach for the evils surrounding us. One for all and all for one we are all guilty before one another—this is the essence of the Christian social ethic. We are all guilty before the face of this little tortured lamb found on West 84th Street in New York City. Since we are all sinners we create evil and our evil becomes a part of the world's treasury of evil. This evil coalesces into a huge energy of evil which seeks vessels of graceless bodies to pour itself into, and when it finds them, it will be incarnated in them and they will do great acts of evil. We are all brothers and sisters. All mankind is one large family and this tortured infant is our brother and his “mother”-killer is our sister. In her evil act is found a drop of the evil found each one of us. Nekrasov wrote the following poem about a fallen woman:

*Before we judge her
And decide her fate,
Let us call her and ask her,
What led you to this life?*

This twenty-nine year old “mother”-killer once had a mother who nursed her, fed her, and raised her; from her childhood to the day of her dreadful act she lived among us, her brothers and sisters who lived along side her. Did we, brothers and sisters, do everything we could do and were obliged to do to not let her, who was also once an innocent child, commit this present crime? Let each one of us consider himself.. What were you doing on the evening when this unbelievable but very real act was carried out? Indeed perhaps it was your sin, your depravity, your malice that provided the last drop of evil necessary for this child-killer's vessel of evil to overflow? This is how we must understand these matters if we are to call ourselves real Christians.

Weep brothers and sisters! Do not be ashamed of this weeping! Compel those around you to weep with horror, with pain, with pity over the tiny, innocent, long-suffering one, in order that we might understand our own guilt in the suffering of the Savior Himself and of the suffering of every innocent child, whose martyr's blood mingles with the holy Saviour's blood and cleanses the sins of all truly repentant sinners. Weep! Let these tears be the ones to fill the font in which God will baptize the infant-martyr, who most probably was not baptized, and who was anointed not with Holy Oil but with his innocent infant blood. Weep! May your tears be a fountain of another energy, an energy of goodness, battling with the energy of evil, and with its power saving at least one more child from innocent suffering and at least one more criminal mother from unforgivable sin. May these tears arouse many who are indifferent and simply pass by those criminal mothers in the making, still only beginning to walk and to mouth their first words. Do not be ashamed to weep with tears of sorrow, compassion, and repentance!

*by I. M. Andreyev
Translated from “Orthodox Moral Theology”
(Appendix A, pp.31-34)
Originally published in “Orthodox Life” March-April 1993; <https://orthodoxlife.org/>*