NUMBER SYMBOLISM IN THE STORY OF SONYA

Among the many symbols in the Bible, numbers play an important role both thematically and structurally. Exegetes from antiquity to the present have studied the symbolic meaning of numbers in the Bible. As Shimmel points out, the Bible itself is "a mine of numeric interpretation."¹ Many writers who explore biblical values and motifs employ numerological codes borrowed from the biblical text. This is certainly true of Dostoevsky. It is not surprising that such codes are present in Dostoevsky's works, but it is surprising that scholars and critics, who unanimously agree that one of Dostoevsky's primary influences was the Bible, have not offered an extensive interpretation of the symbolic codes of numbers in his works.

This article will look at the way in which numerological codes inform the function of the novel's heroine, Sonya Marmeladov, in Crime and Punishment. The numbers present in the story of Sonya represent parallels between her and Jesus with particular reference to his crucifixion and resurrection. While the numbers themselves have an esoteric symbolic meaning, here they are also clues for understanding Sonya's life in the light of Christ's passion, suggesting the fundamental relationship that exists between the Sonya story and the story of Jesus. Through the use of these biblically symbolic numbers, Dostoevsky identifies his heroine as a savior and an innocent victim who suffers on behalf of others.

While the story of Lazarus is the key allegory applied to Raskol'nikov's story, the three-years public life of Jesus is the key to Sonya's story. There is no doubt that Sonya is the savior who resurrects Raskol'nikov from the tomb of the "inertia of materialism" and leads him to God. Sonya is not only a savior for her Lazarus-Raskol'nikov, but also carries the yellow card, her prostitute's identity card, a mark of her sacrifice for her family, just as Jesus carried his cross for humankind.² In the notebooks Dostoevsky has Marmeladov saying that Sonya suffered for "an evil and consumptive stepmother" who

used to beat her, “for someone else’s young children” and for himself, “a swine, a beast.” Just as the cross stands for Christ’s loving sacrifice, the yellow card stands for Sonya’s. In turn, this suffering and active love for others will reward her with “resurrection” and eternal bliss. Although the cross was the instrument of Christ’s death, it also represents the symbolic promise of new life. The yellow card represents the death of Sonya’s innocence and the redemption of her physical innocence, in the same way that, as Knapp notes, “the cross stands for both Christ’s death and his resurrection.” In the Epilogue we are told that both Raskol’nikov and Sonya are “resurrected.” In Raskol’nikov’s case, his resurrection means the recovery of his spiritual health. In Sonya’s case, resurrection means the recovery of her physical innocence, since she never “fell” spiritually. In this sense, she recovers her innocence. Sonya, the embodiment of Christian love, is a teacher. She instructs Raskol’nikov in Christ’s great commandment, “You shall love your God and love your neighbors as yourself” (Luke 10: 27), by being an example of such love herself. Her meeting and conversations with him set him on the right path, which is the path of redemptive suffering. Love, as Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov* says, “is such a priceless treasure that you can redeem the world by it and expiate not only your own sins but the sins of others” (Fedor Dostoevskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 10 vols. [Moscow: Gos. Izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literature, 1957], 9: 68). Jesus’ love saved the human race and won him the glory of resurrection, just as Sonya’s love saves Raskol’nikov and makes her a co-participant in the miracle of his resurrection. Sonya’s passivity in the face of adversity, such as her prostitution, her refusal to defend herself against Luzhin’s false accusation of theft, and Raskol’nikov’s attack on her faith in their second meeting in chapter 4, part 5 is reminiscent of the passivity of both Job and Christ. And the choice between Svidrigailov’s and Sonya’s road is reminiscent of the choice between the devil’s offer of worldly temptations, which lead to eternal damnation, and God’s world with its necessary suffering, which leads to eternal life. Svidrigailov’s suggestion of running far away and going to America turns out to be

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5. It is noteworthy that the two other Dostoevskian characters Shatov and Kirilov in *The Possessed*, who also have an American association (they actually lived there) meet a dreadful end. Shatov is murdered and Kirilov commits suicide. It could also be pointed out that being anti-American is a mark of the reactionary Slavophile, while Progressives like Nekrasov or Chernyshevsky are pro-American.