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Kalin Yanakiev as a Writer of Αποστυφα? : Remarks on the Essay "Дебат върху теодицеята" (A Debate on Theodicy)

Studia Ceranea : journal of the Waldemar Ceran Research Centre for the
History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe 4,
219-231

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach
dozwolonego użytku.

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**KALIN YANAKIEV AS A WRITER OF APOCRYPHA?
REMARKS ON THE ESSAY *ДЕБАТ ВЪРХУ ТЕОДИЦЕЯТА*
(*A DEBATE ON THEODICY*)**

In his essay *Дебат върху теодицеята* (*A Debate on Theodicy*), Kalin Yanakiev focuses on one of the thorniest problems in Christian theology, namely, God's responsibility for evil. A well-known academic, Yanakiev, has been an indefatigable champion and proponent of Orthodox Christianity, which he has been preaching to the Bulgarian elites since the 1990s, framed in an agonistic format which brings to mind Harold Bloom's idea of anxiety of influence¹. Arguably, Yanakiev's thinking is perhaps marked by the same kind of narcissistic fear that a poet might feel at the idea of being derivative; if that is indeed the case, Yanakiev's anxiety-inducing intellectual ancestor would not be Shakespeare, or even Orthodox Christian theology as endorsed by the Church councils; after all, his argument that God plays a certain part in human suffering is deeply rooted in Christian theological reflection². Why, then, does Yanakiev predicate his argument on fanciful interpretations of Dostoevsky but remains conspicuously silent about his own philosophical and theological inspirations? Could it be that Yanakiev's version of theodicy, which he insists is Christian in nature though based on a certain interpretive *swerve* (*clinamen*), is in fact unorthodox or apocryphal? And if that is the case, what exactly do we mean by that?

The literature of the subject defines apocryphal texts as narrative texts which for various reasons remain outside the canon, revealing things which are otherwise undisclosed or not stated clearly, but which satisfy certain epistemological needs of the reader³. Consequently, an apocryphal text is not a stand-alone creation, and its precise position within the orthodoxy-heresy spectrum will often depend on highly complex and ambiguous relationships with the biblical canon. Those read-

¹ Cf. H. BLOOM, *The Anxiety of Influence*, New York 1973.

² J. SZYMIK, *Teologia współcierpienia Boga*, *ŻD* 49, 2007, p. 75–84; IDEM, *Passibilis? Impassibilis? Jezus Chrystus – Bóg współcierpiący*, [in:] *Holocaust a teodycea*, ed. J. DIAŁOWICKI, K. RĄB, I. SOBIEJAJ, Kraków 2008, p. 95–105.

³ Cf. D. SZAJNERT, *Mutacje apokryfu*, [in:] *Genologia dzisiaj*, ed. W. BOLECKI, I. OPACKI, Warszawa 2000, p. 137–159; M. ZOWCZAK, *Apokryf jako próba wiary*, [in:] *Nie-złota legenda. Kanoniczność i apokryficzność w kulturze*, ed. J. EICHSTAEDT, K. PIĄTKOWSKI, Ożarów 2003, p. 45–75.

ers who are not familiar with the canon will be unable to make the distinctions required not only to understand the full semantic content of the apocryphal text, but even to recognise it or place it within the relevant network of ideas and references, a situation which results in a certain powerlessness or ineptitude on the reader's part. This is the case also (or perhaps especially) when the apocryphal text in point has a doctrinal message.

Published in his *Философски опити върху самотата и надеждата* (*Philosophical Essays on Solitude and Hope*), Kalin Yanakiev's essay is not an apocryphal text in the strict sense. However, some of its characteristics would seem to put this in the category of (post-)modern theological apocrypha⁴.

Obviously, the idea that God is somehow responsible for the evil experienced by human beings only makes sense within the ontological assumptions of monotheistic belief. In polytheistic religions we find none of the intellectual distress produced by the paradoxes of Judaism or Christianity, where the experience of evil powerfully undermines and brings into question the belief in a single, almighty and merciful creator deity⁵. Jerzy Nowosielski (1923–2011), a Polish religious painter, philosopher and Orthodox Christian theologian, makes an insightful remark about the lure of Manichaeism (a dualist variant of polytheism) which Christianity has never quite shaken off:

I find the phenomenon of suffering so terrifying that I simply cannot make sense of it, but somehow I must, in the same way that classical writers of antiquity, creators of Gnostic mythologies or mediaeval Manicheans made sense of it. [...]

I believe that the war waged on Manichaeism by orthodox Christianity had at a certain point reached a dead end. Quite simply, a mistake had been made. Manichaean cosmogony offers a highly powerful, logical and suggestive vision; panicked and fearful of this power, orthodox Christians reacted to this problem in a manner that was too hasty, too superficial. Instead of honestly and thoroughly getting to the bottom of the problem and its truth (like the Cappadocian Fathers did in the case of the Trinitarian controversy), the entire problem was shunted aside, concealed and left in the dark. But in doing so, to use a Freudian concept, the problem was pushed down into the subconscious. And this is where it remains, occasionally making itself felt and launching new offensives, especially at times of religious revival. This is unsurprising since the problem had never been solved in its time, no dogmatic vision has ever been provided to resolve it.⁶

⁴ In this I rely on a typology proposed by F.M. Starowieyski, cf. his *Wstęp*, [in:] P. BESKOW, *Osobliwe opowieści o Jezusie. Analiza nowych apokryfów*, trans. J. WOŁAK, Kraków 2005, p. 5–8.

⁵ Cf. L. DUPRÉ, *Tajemnica zła*, [in:] IDEM, *Inny wymiar. Filozofia religii*, trans. S. LEWANDOWSKA-GŁUSZYŃSKA, Kraków 2003, p. 334–352; E.H. ГРУБЕЦКОЙ, *Смысл жизни*, Москва 1918, p. 22.

⁶ J. NOWOSIELSKI, *Problem cierpienia w sztuce*, [in:] IDEM, *Zagubiona bazylika, Refleksje o sztuce i wierze*, Kraków 2013, p. 322–323. Polish original: *Zjawisko cierpienia jest dla mnie tak przerażające, że po prostu nie umiem sobie z nim poradzić. W jakiś sposób jednak radzić sobie muszą. Tak, jak radzili sobie autorzy starożytni, twórcy mitologii gnostyckich, średniowieczni manichejczycy. [...]*

Myszę, że zwalczanie manicheizmu przez ortodoksję chrześcijańską w pewnym momencie zabrnęło w ślepy zaułek. Po prostu w pewnym momencie popełniono błąd. W panicznym strachu przez bardzo silną i bardzo sugestywną, logicznie dobrze zbudowaną wizją kosmogonii manichejskiej, zbyt pośpiesznie, zbyt powierzchownie potraktowano jej istotny problem. Zamiast rozgryźć zagadnienie do końca z całą starannością i z całą uczciwością w stosunku do prawdy w nim zawartej (tak jak, na

Coming from a 20th-century thinker who used icons and icon painting in his search for God, this lamentation on a human condition fated to experience a form of existential (though not ontological) dualism⁷ is symptomatic of the lingering (indeed, heightened) anxieties of modernity, starting with the Enlightenment desire to eradicate evil by means of purely human resources, even at the price of discarding religious illusions⁸. Though obviously, as Bronisław Baczko notes:

In itself, the problem of evil... is nothing new; questions about the origin and meaning of evil are essential in every religion. However, evil became a problem for 18th-century rationalistic thought: with the growing sense that the world formed a rational whole it became necessary to explain and justify the existence of evil. This way, ancient questions raised about the Supreme Being were revived in a new form: either the Supreme Being never intended the world to be free of evil, in which case it was neither good nor just, or it was incapable of creating such a world, in which case it is not omnipotent.⁹

Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) made a lasting contribution to this discussion in his writings. In his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697, 1702) as well as in his later works such as *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial* (1703) and *Continuation des pensées diverses* (1705)¹⁰, Bayle doubted whether it was possible to develop a rational argument for a good and omnipotent God, and thus to reject the Manichaean belief that evil was inevitable, Baczko points out¹¹. Bayle's ideas drew a response from Gottfried Leibniz in *Théodicée* (1710), a work in which Leibniz introduced the term *theodicy* and attempted to defend the Judaeo-Christian idea of a good and omnipotent God who took an interest in the Creation. In arguing that God had created the best of possible worlds, Leibniz did not deny the exist-

przykład, Ojcowie Kapadoccy postąpili w przypadku antynomii trynitarnej), odsunięto cały problem na bok, pozostawiono go w cieniu, ukryto, ale tym samym – mówiąc językiem Freuda – zepchnięto do podświadomości. I tym samym on pozostał, i co jakiś czas, szczególnie w chwilach ożywienia myśli religijnej, daje o sobie znać, atakuje. Nic w tym dziwnego, ponieważ we właściwym czasie nie został rozwiązany, nie został „dogmatycznie” właściwie ustawiony.

⁷ Fr. H. Paprocki believes that the tradition of thinking in terms of existential dualism goes back to St. Ephrem the Syrian. For more information on this subject: H. PĄPROCKI, *Świat leży w mocy złego (Jerzego Nowosielskiego wizja rzeczywistości empirycznej)*, http://www.liturgia.cerkiew.pl/texty.php?id_n=144&id=113#_ftn1 [17 X 2014].

⁸ Remarkably, this Manichaean line of descent is at one point discernible even in the work of Voltaire, who failed to solve this problem in his famous *Poem on the Lisbon Disaster* (1755).

⁹ B. BACZKO, *Hiob, mój przyjaciel. Obietnice szczęścia i nieuchronność zła*, trans. J. NIECIKOWSKI, M. KOWALSKA, Warszawa 2002, p. 22. Polish: *Samo zagadnienie zła nie jest [...] nowe, gdyż pytanie o jego źródła i sens związane jest z istotą każdej religii. Stało się natomiast problemem własnym racjonalistycznej myśli XVIII wieku, gdyż im bardziej rosło przekonanie, że świat jest rozumną całością, tym bardziej istnienie zła wymagało wyjaśnienia i uzasadnienia. W ten sposób w nowej formie odżyły pradawne pytania o Istotę Najwyższą: albo nie chciała ona świata bez zła, a wtedy nie jest ani dobra, ani sprawiedliwa, albo też nie mogła stworzyć takiego świata, a wówczas nie jest wszechmocna.*

¹⁰ In his final years Bayle gave a lot of thought to the existence of evil in the world; he did not reach the conclusion that God did not exist but he argued that a rational outlook on the world cannot be reconciled with the religious one.

¹¹ B. BACZKO, *Hiob, mój przyjaciel...*, p. 22.

ence of evil, whether metaphysical (corrupt nature), physical (suffering) or moral (sin), but he treated evil as a necessary means to achieving greater perfection, and defended the dangerous gift of free will. Leibniz's essay came to define the horizon of philosophical and theological reflection on the problem of evil, with all the limitations that this entailed.

Later efforts in theodicy produced a range of meandering approaches which cannot be discussed here for reasons of space, but it seems worth pointing out that the problem of evil, as discussed by philosophers and theologians in the second half of the 20th century, contended primarily with the European experience of totalitarian regimes and the Holocaust. However, neither Jewish philosophy nor Jewish theology has been able to come up with a single definitive answer to the problem of the origin and meaning of evil, despite their long and deep-seated tradition of perceiving God as a being that manifests itself in History, and is therefore responsible for its course¹². This stems not only from the fact that Jewish thought does not include the concept of dogma, but also from sheer powerlessness in the face of such tragedy. As Paweł Śpiewak, Polish sociologist and public intellectual, remarks in his foreword to the Polish edition of a volume entitled *Teologia i filozofia żydowska wobec Holocaustu* (*Jewish Theology and Philosophy and the Holocaust*), this sense of powerlessness found some solace in anguished silence, an attitude prefigured by the biblical Job, a figure who attracted much theological attention in the patristic period¹³, and had perhaps the greatest influence on 19th- and 20th-century writers¹⁴. The *Book of Job*, a text whose status in the biblical canon is itself far from unambiguous, makes an important correction to the Old Testament "Adamic" myth¹⁵ by picturing evil as something random, having nothing to do with Atonement, guilt or promise of any kind. The text also fails to provide a satisfactory answer to the human need to know the answer to the question of the origins of evil as tolerated by a transcendent God; all the text does is suggest that people should acknowledge the weak and limited nature of their outlook on the world.

For almost all theologians and religious writers, Job was a major hero, a virtuoso of faith, anger, rebellion and loyalty: Job as one who asks questions and demands answers, and who, when the God of power and mercy reveals his face to him, repents and says to God: *Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth* [40, 4]. Elie Wiesel, a former Auschwitz prisoner, likewise sides with Job who "could choose questions and not answers, silence and not speeches [...]". Yet, the silence of this man, alone and defeated, lasted for seven days and seven nights; only afterward, when he identified himself with his pain, did he feel he had earned the right to question God.

¹² Cf. *Teologia i filozofia żydowska wobec Holocaustu*, ed. P. ŚPIEWAK, Gdańsk 2013.

¹³ E.g. HESYCHIUS, *Homilies on the Book of Job* (5th century), ST. GREGORY THE GREAT, *Moralia in Job* (7th century).

¹⁴ M. STAROWIEYSKI, *Tradycje biblijne. Biblia w kulturze europejskiej*, Kraków 2011, p. 244–248.

¹⁵ P. RICOEUR, *Mit „adamicki” i „eschatologiczna” wizja dziejów*, [in:] IDEM, *Symbolika zła*, trans. S. CICHOWICZ, M. OCHAB, Warszawa 1986, p. 219–263.

Confronted with Job, our silence should extend beyond the centuries to come. And we dare speak on behalf of our knowledge? We dare say: “I know”? This is how and why victims were victims and executioners – executioners? Are we able to understand the agony and anguish, the self-sacrifice for the sake of faith and the faith itself of six million human beings, all named Job? Who are we to judge them?”

We cannot hope to understand what happened by playing with words. “On the contrary. In the words of an ancient adage: Those who know, don’t talk. Those who talk, don’t know. Let us learn to be silent”.¹⁶

Kalin Yanakiev, whose essay on theodicy is the focal point of this article, refuses to remain silent, yet he is also unwilling to get involved in the most vexing controversies of our age. By detaching his argument from history he overlooks the whole complex picture, and ignores the problem of “random” suffering where there is no-one to blame, as in the case of destitution, disease, tragedies or natural disasters. He hardly touches on or downright ignores the problem of sinners suffering. Yanakiev constructs his ideas on God’s responsibility for evil with regard to the special case of innocent children whom God allows to suffer at the hands of people devoid of conscience. His choice of case study is indebted to late 19th-century Russian literature, and Yanakiev’s essay is a kind of paraphrase of one of the best known and most widely commented motifs in Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. Yanakiev focuses on a passage in a conversation between Alyosha and Ivan which forms the prelude to the story of the Grand Inquisitor. However, Yanakiev does not address the poem/legend itself, limiting himself instead to a short, three-page passage from a chapter entitled “Rebellion” (Part I, Book V), which he uses as a motto and leitmotif for his meditations. To quote:

This poor child of five was subjected to every possible torture by those cultivated parents. They beat her, thrashed her, kicked her for no reason till her body was one bruise. Then, they went to greater refinements of cruelty — shut her up all night in the cold and frost in a privy, and because she didn’t ask to be taken up at night (as though a child of five sleeping its angelic, sound sleep could be trained to wake and ask), they smeared her face and filled her mouth with excrement, and it was her mother, her mother did this. And that mother could sleep, hearing the poor child’s groans! Can you

¹⁶ P. ŚPIEWAŁ, *Milczenie i pytania Hioba*, [in:] *Teologia i filozofia żydowska ...*, p. 58–59. Polish: *Dla niemal wszystkich teologów i pisarzy religijnych najważniejszym bohaterem, wirtuozem wiary, gniewu, buntu i wierności okazuje się Hiob, Hiob, który pyta, domaga się odpowiedzi, a gdy wreszcie Bóg mocy i Bóg miłosierdzia odsłania mu swe oblicze, pokutuje i powiada Bogu: „Otom ja lichy, cóż ci mam odpowiedzieć? Rękę moją włożę na usta moje” (39:37). Elie Wiesel, więzień obozu w Auschwitz, również staje po stronie Hioba, „który wybiera pytania, a nie odpowiedzi, milczenie, a nie przemowy [...] Milczenie tego samotnego i pokonanego trwało siedem dni i siedem nocy; dopiero wtedy, gdy stał się jednym ze swoim bólem, poczuł, że zdobył prawo do tego, by pytać Boga. W porównaniu z Hiobem nasze milczenie powinno sięgać ponad setki nadchodzących lat. Czy możemy pozwolić sobie na to, żeby mówić? Czy możemy twierdzić „Wiem”? Wiedzieć, jak i dlaczego ofiary były ofiarami, mordercy mordercami? Czy zdołamy zrozumieć śmiertelne męki i udręczenie, samopoświęcenie dla wiary i wiarę samą sześciu milionów istot ludzkich, tych wszystkich, którzy nazywali się Hiob? Kimże jesteśmy, by ośmielić się i osądzać? Nie zrozumiemy tego, co się stało, bawiąc się słowami. „Przeciwnie. Jak powiadają starożytni: Ci, którzy wiedzą, nie mówią, ci, którzy mówią, nie wiedzą... Nauczmy się milczeć”.*

understand why a little creature, who can't even understand what's done to her, should beat her little aching heart with her tiny fist in the dark and the cold, and weep her meek unresentful tears to dear, kind God to protect her? Do you understand that, friend and brother, you pious and humble novice? Do you understand why this infamy must be and is permitted? Without it, I am told, man could not have existed on earth, for he could not have known good and evil. Why should he know that diabolical good and evil when it costs so much? Why, the whole world of knowledge is not worth that child's prayer to "dear, kind God"!¹⁷

Yanakiev explains that the motivation behind this choice is personal: he wants to revisit a text that destroyed his faith at a young age, and still continues to vex his religious belief. In a way, *The Debate on Theodicy* is also an attempt on the part of Yanakiev to engage with Dostoevsky and his idea of the "diabolical accident", which Yanakiev makes responsible for his own early religious struggles:

И за да бъда напълно сигурен в това, реших накрая, в дебата върху „казуса“ на Иван Карамазов сам да застана на позицията на непримиримият си опонент, а аргументите в защитата на вярата да влагам последователно в устата на въображаеми богослови. Така, впрочем, щях да изпълня и един дълг към самия себе си. Защото навремето аз бях този, който бе обезверен от доводите и историите на Достоевски.¹⁸

This puts Yanakiev's essay in the category of confessional score-settling – however, he appears to be beating other people's breast rather than his own.

Yanakiev's narrative is not a monologue but a (pretend) dialogue. Dialogues have long been prevalent as a form of religious didacticism, starting with Latin and Byzantine medieval literature (including Slavic religious writing), and continuing in later ages, where the form crossed over to philosophy (cf. Hume's dialogues) and indeed in 20th-century Western mystical literature (e.g. *The Diary* of St. Faustyna Kowalska, or Gabriela Bossis' *He and I*). Mediaeval Bulgarian literature produced a number of apocryphal texts framed as series of questions and answers (e.g. *Слово на Господ а наш Исус Христос, Разумник, Сказание за премъдростта на Григорий, Василий и Йоан Богослов*), and the period of national revival retained the dialogue as one of the preferred forms of communicating challenging content, such as history or visions for the country's future, to relatively uneducated readers¹⁹.

Yanakiev situates his *Debate on Theodicy* within this broader tradition (though without anchoring it to any specific point of reference) by introducing

¹⁷ F. DOSTOEVSKY, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. C. GARNETT, Cricket House Books (1880, 2013) (e-book).

¹⁸ *And in order to reach certainty on this matter I finally decided to take on the part of a dogged opponent in the debate on Ivan Karamazov's case, putting arguments in defence of faith in the mouths of imagined theologians. This way I could also fulfil a certain duty to myself since at one point I had lost my faith under the influence of Dostoyevsky's proofs and stories* (К. ЯНАКИЕВ, *Дебат върху теодицеята*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Философски опити върху самотата и надеждата*, София 2008, p. 109).

¹⁹ *Възрожденски диалози*, ас. et ed. М. БРАДИСТИЛОВА-ДОБРЕВА, София 1985, p. 5–35.

two speakers engaged in a dialogue. On the one hand, we have an “ethical subject”, a seeker who poses difficult questions and can be identified with the author; on the other hand we have a collective subject who represents tradition, which in Orthodox Christianity is understood to be the vehicle of theological Truth. Nameless and depersonalised, Yanakiev’s “holy fathers” and “theologians” try and come up with explanations of God’s responsibility for evil in such a way as to keep them compatible with the teachings of Orthodox Christianity, but also to make them acceptable to the questioning self (who I choose to refer to as the “ethical subject” owing to his personal axiological affiliation). Their arguments amount to a summary of patristic and Leibnizian theodicy, and they fail to convince their interlocutor, who acts as a guide to the meanders of anonymous theological and philosophical thought, passing value judgements on individual interpretations, and dismissing what he sees as false theses. The speaker’s conscience is not modified by the bankrupt notions of God’s innocence; he dismisses the arguments which say that evil could be a necessary precondition for greater good, or that human freedom, though risky, could in itself have major value. He similarly rejects the argument that there might be a divine economy of redemption, with heavenly rewards supposedly awaiting those who have suffered. The ethical subject repeatedly counters the rather jejune and unconvincing arguments of the nameless theologians with the image of the impotent and despairing child, which Ivan Karamazov used to persuade his pious brother Alyosha. The image serves as a kind of visual rebuttal to the repeated and unsuccessful attempts to justify God’s ways, which we recognise as symptoms of the helplessness of Christian theodicy. In Yanakiev’s essay the ethical subject repeatedly tries to examine God’s conscience, repeatedly bringing into question the very point of the world which the Creator had allowed to exist (p. 145–162). His own heart and conscience (two concepts which make frequent appearances in the essay) prompt him to declare for nothingness and nonexistence as the only sure guarantees against suffering. This moral gesture (which is also nihilistic and demonic) is an expression of a rebellion against the Creator, a reaction which, incidentally, is hardly new or unrecognized in European philosophy over the past three centuries, particularly beginning with Nietzsche.

However, Yanakiev shies away from engaging specifically with the non-religious reflection on the subject which was driven by 20th-century history, philosophy and theology. Nor does he make any specific references to Orthodox Christian reflection on theodicy, a subject probably most fully addressed in the philosophical writings of Evgeniy Trubetski, particularly in *Смысл жизни* (1914, followed by editions and 1918 and 1922)²⁰, and in Pavel Florenski’s theological work *Столп и утверждение истины. Опыт православной теодицеи*, (1914, published in English by Princeton University Press as *The Pillar and Ground of Truth: An Essay*

²⁰ He devoted a whole chapter to the problem of theodicy, cf. http://odinblago.ru/trubeckoi_smisl/orhttp://azbyka.ru/vera_i_neverie/o_smysle_zhizni/Trubetskoj_Smysl_zhizni-2g-all.shtml[17 X 2014].

in *Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, 1997), even if both texts were written in the 1910s, before humanity could experience the full horrific onslaught of 20th-century totalitarian violence. However, this violence had in fact been prophesied by Dostoevsky, whose thought Yanakiev also fails to address adequately (or even reliably). Although Yanakiev's essay is built around a passage from Dostoevsky, his argument fails to address that passage within the broader context of Dostoevsky's work, or even within the context of the various meanings generated by *The Brothers Karamazov*. Yanakiev reads and interprets the text, which he regards as unsettling, in isolation from Dostoevsky's thought, whose fiction he portrays as having a pernicious, corrosive influence on religious faith²¹. In contrast to Dostoevsky's tragic courage, Yanakiev uses the image of the suffering child as an essentially sentimental motif, overlooking Dostoevsky's powerful reflections on the "possessed" civilisation which came unmoored from the religious idea that had held it together, or on the metaphysical falsehood of ideologies promising an "earthly paradise"²². By refusing to engage with the problem of metaphysical evil, Yanakiev can resolutely stick to his original dichotomy between childhood/innocence/suffering on the one hand, and maturity/guilt/inflicting suffering on the other, a dichotomy which is intellectually suspect at best, and downright false at worst.

In a good illustration of Yanakiev's selective treatment of Dostoevsky, his motto, taken from Dostoevsky, tellingly breaks off at a certain point in order to leave out the next sentence spoken by Ivan Karamazov: *I say nothing of the sufferings of grown-up people, they have eaten the apple, damn them, and the devil take them all! But these little ones!*

Karamazov's imprecation on "grown-up people" who are guilty of eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge is a paraphrase of the Adamic myth which, as Louis Dupré points out, was a reinterpretation of the original dualistic Babylonian creation myth to make it conform to the idea that a good God has absolute power over the essentially good creation²³. From the viewpoint of the myth of the Fall, evil is seen as a historical fact caused by man after the creation; a kind of regression, a going back to the pre-historic chaos. The idea behind the myth of the Fall is for people to accept suffering and imperfection, and it symbolises the way every person feels responsible for evil²⁴. Ivan Karamazov's sentence, which Yanakiev leaves out, throws this responsibility into high relief by not only accepting the idea of metaphysical evil entailed in the original sin, but actually introducing a dichotomous division of humanity into grown-ups, who are "justly" condemned to suffer in hell, and innocent suffering children, an idea which sounds downright

²¹ For Dostoyevski's message cf. the interpretation by Leo Shestov: L. SHESTOV, *Dostojewskii Nietzsche. Filozofia tragedii*, trans. et acc. C. WODZIŃSKI, Warszawa 1987.

²² H. PAPROCKI, *Wolność i zło*, W 2000, 3, p. 34.

²³ L. DUPRÉ, *Inny wymiar. Filozofia religii*, trans. S. LEWANDOWSKA-GŁUSZYŃSKA, Kraków 2003, p. 346.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 349.

daemonic. Yanakiev rejects atonement as the motivation entailed in the myth of the Fall, were atonement must be made for other people's sins, simply by virtue of being part of a corrupted natural world:

Аргументът пък, че по силата на общата солидарност в първородния грях се допуска дечицата да страдат заради греховете на родителите им, аз – заедно с Иван Карамазов, сметнах за съвършено несъвместим за съвестта, противоречащ не просто на Божията, но и на най-елементарната човешка справедливост. Макар че, признавам, аз срещнах този аргумент да се промъква тук-там дори у светите отци, за мен той си остана и неприемлив, и дори бих казал – нехристиянски.²⁵

In keeping with the Orthodox tradition of theodicy, which does not accept the doctrine of the original sin as a hereditary “sin of nature”²⁶, Yanakiev incidentally reveals another problem with his reflection on theodicy: his ethical subject not only does not feel any shared responsibility for the evil committed by others, but it also never internalises the act of evil. As a result, evil, whether moral or metaphysical, always remains external to the ethical subject. What determines the personality of the ethical subject (the essay's narrator, the author's speaking self) is obviously a tender conscience, a fruit of the Holy Spirit and a divine remnant present in people. Perhaps this kind of thinking contains traces of the exclusivist gnostic typology of people, where evil was thought to be the preserve of the soulless *hylics* – people who, unlike the perfect and spiritual *pneumatics*, could never hope to attain true knowledge. Paradoxically, this interpretation reinforces the closing chords of Yanakiev's essay, stylised as a quasi-mystical revelation experienced by the ethical subject.

И ето – в този пределен момент аз като че ли внезапно съзирам пред вътрешния си взор проблясък. Сякаш след всички богослови, с които нараненото ми сърце се бори, желаейки да бъде успокоено, пред мен се явява един последен лик. Той е строг, безкомпромисен, но същевременно благообразен – всеразбиращ и дори усмихващ се с някаква особена, много особена снисходителна усмивка. Той не започва да ми възразява, а напротив, казва ми открито и направо:

- Разбира се, ти си напълно прав да не можеш да се примириш по никакъв начин, че дечицата преживяха своите страдания. Ти си напълно прав, нежелаейки и не-можейки нито едно от възможните „основания“, според които страдания на дечицата биха могли да се обяснят и да се оправдват. Ти си прав, че няма нищо, което може да утеши и да ни примири с това което се е случило. Ти казваш товаот сърце и то е толкова ясно за съвестта ти, че би било истинско кощунство да се правят опити да му бъде възразявано.²⁷

²⁵ Like Ivan Karamazov, I find it impossible to argue, in good conscience and elementary human equity, that it is admissible for children to suffer for the sins of their parents through a shared involvement in the original sin. Admittedly, I have come across this argument here and there in the writings of the holy fathers, however I find it unacceptable as being, so to speak, un-Christian (К. ЯНАКИЕВ, *Дебат върху...*, p. 106).

²⁶ J. MEYENDORFF, *Teologia bizantyjska*, trans. J. PROKOPIUK, Warszawa 1984, p. 185–186.

²⁷ And here, at this decisive point, my inner eye suddenly sees light. It is as if a last face followed all the theologians my wounded heart has struggled with in search of solace. This was a stern person,

By using the trope of a conversation between a disciple and an anthropomorphised God/Christ, Yanakiev strives for a quasi-mystical effect. Although he does not claim to have actually experienced a revelation, the suggestion is there. Treated this way, God reveals to the ethical subject the supernatural origins of human conscience, and the resulting right of people to unconditionally reject innocent suffering; the narrator hero is then introduced to the mystery of divine presence in people and, consequently, God's participation in innocent suffering with Christ as its hypostasis. The typological affinity between that passage in the essay and Job's conversation with God seems obvious. Rather than agree with his theologically correct "advocates", God chooses to side with Job, a martyr and God's most stubborn opponent. Although Yanakiev does not cite, or comment on, the *Book of Job*, he imitates the dynamics of that biblical text to ultimately transform the *Old Testament* trope of a quarrel with God in order to bring it in line with the message of the *New Testament*. In this quasi-mystical passage in the narrative, the paradoxes inherent in the metaphysical order of the world are abolished by Christological logic. Faith provides the solution to the aporias that vex the rational mind. Yanakiev's guide to Christian theodicy emerges with a supposedly clinching argument to justify God's ways: God participates in the suffering of the least among us, and hastens to sustain his Creation:

Представи си: Бог и това малко дете. И Бог бърза, бърза, за да пострада за него, бърза да се жертва за него. Бог бърза – каквото и да сторим на „едного от тия най-малките“ – страда-ние, мъчение, убийство, - Нему, Нему да го сторим – Той да умре, за да освободи от смъртта детенцето. Да, свръх възможното е дори да се помисли Жертвата на самия Бог – на Абсолют-ния – за нас, за нашето детенце, за „най-малкия“. [...]

Ето го разрешението на Иван Карамазовия „казус“ за вярващия. Христос! Друго разрешение няма. Ако Христос е бил разпнат за нас на Кръста и е **понесъл** нашите грехове и страдания, всичко е разрешено и „осанна в всевишних Богу“! [...] Да вярваме никой не може да ни убеди разумно. Защото вярването от християните е свръхразумно. Аз обаче исках да ти покажа не това, че трябва (на някакви логични основания) да вярваме, а че ако вярваме и само ако вярваме в Христа, съмнението на Иван Карамазов е разрешимо. Ако ли не вярваме и при това имаме съвест – нямаме право да оправдаем с нищо този свят, нямаме право да се примирим по никакъв начин с него, както прави Иван Карамазов.²⁸

uncompromising and noble, a person who understood everything, smiling a kind of indulgent smile. He does not argue. On the contrary, he says: - Of course you are right to in your inability to accept the suffering of children. You are right to be unwilling and unable to accept any of the possible "justifications" to explain and elucidate the suffering of children. You speak from the heart and your conscience finds this so self-evident that it would be sacrilege to try and argue with that (К. ЯНАКИЕВ, *Дебат върху...*, p. 168–169).

²⁸ *Imagine God and that small child. God hastens, hastens to suffer for the child, to sacrifice himself instead of the child. God hastens, whatever we do to "the least among us" – suffering, torture, murder – we do that to Him. He wants to die in order to free the child from death. Yes, we are fully justified to think of the Sacrifice of God himself– the Absolute – for us, for our child, for the "least among us".[...] This is a solution of the case of Ivan Karamazov for the believer. Christ! There is no other solution. If Christ was crucified by us, and took on all our sins and suffering, everything is allowed and "Hosanna to the One God!" [...] Nobody can rationally persuade us to believe. Christian faith is supra-rational.*

The crowning point of the long polemic contained in the essay's finale is a glorification of faith in Christ, presented as the only way to accept the world as it is. According to Yanakiev, the absence of such faith makes it impossible to justify the Creator or his Creation. Yanakiev denies agnostics the right to accept the world as it is since, being moral people, they must perforce adopt a dualistic worldview.

This radical thesis is only tenuously aligned with Orthodox Christian doctrine, and it cannot be validly claimed to originate from the religious teachings of Eastern Christianity. Paul Evdokimov sheds some light on this issue in his 2009 book *Une vision orthodoxe de la théologie morale: Dieu dans la vie des hommes*. In discussing the mythological layer in the biblical description of the Fall, Evdokimov emphasises the fact that the first Fall, caused as it was by an intense desire for God's attributes and a longing to know the whole spectrum of possibility present in the created world, took place in the world of pure spirits, i.e. the angelic world²⁹. Evil has no place in the ontological order: it is nothingness, and therefore needs a human being to be able to act. St. Gregory of Nyssa, Evdokimov points out, defined evil as chimerical in nature: God's *fiat* fills everything in everything. Satan's *no* or "anti-fiat" voids everything and vacates everything of everything to create a place of un-likeness or difference. The terrible mystery of Satan obscures the absence of its ontological basis, a horrible nothingness which forces Satan to borrow and usurp being from an entity rooted in God's creative act. The evil spirit latches onto being like a parasite in order to suck its blood and devour it. It couples being with non-being to create an ominous kind of being. Its terrible festivities, which involve the castigations which it inflicts on people, are an earthly foretaste of the hell of people – a place where God is not present³⁰.

When man accepted the invitation to "commune" with Satan by eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge, according to Evdokimov's anthropological vision he committed an act that changed his ontological status to put him in bondage to death. However, Christ reclaimed people for their original destiny, to be with God in God, and for God's friends to have the chance to become deified³¹. The choice between life and death ultimately belongs with the human being.

By way of contrast, Yanakiev's "attempt at theodicy" makes selective use of the mythological biblical narrative, and it shies away from fully engaging with the challenge. In his meditation on evil Yanakiev brushes the first biblical *clinamen* out of sight and ignores Lucifer, a creature originally created as a vessel of God's

But what I wanted to show you is not that we have to, logically, believe, but that if we believe, and only if we believe in Christ, Ivan Karamazov's doubts may be resolved. But if we don't believe, and are endowed with a conscience, we have no fight to justify this world, we have no right to become resigned to it, as is the case with Ivan Karamazov (ibidem, p. 187–188).

²⁹ P. EVDOKIMOV, *Prawosławna wizja teologii moralnej. Bóg w życiu ludzi*, trans. W. SZYMONA, Warszawa 2012, p. 123–124.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 122.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 125.

light, which subsequently committed what Evdokimov refers to as “metaphysical suicide” by shaking off its dependence on the Creator and turning itself into a negation of God’s sign³². Yanakiev reduces the need to explain man’s ontological status and the meaning of evil and suffering (a need which originates from the *Old Testament* myth of creation) to a case study of Ivan Karamazov, a move which misrepresents Dostoyevsky, a writer with a remarkably insightful grasp of the niceties of Orthodox Christian theology, who argued that evil has no foothold in the material world, and that man encompasses both the “abyss of Sodom” and the “ideal of the Madonna”³³.

To Yanakiev, religious faith is not a point of departure for human (self-)pedagogy. Instead, it seems to serve the sole purpose of bringing order to hearts and minds by reconciling people with God, an act which the ethical subject believes has a soteriological aspect, with the proviso that it is not man who finds justification by faith (as stated in St. Paul’s *Epistle to Galatians*³⁴), but God who is justified in the eyes of man.

Yanakiev stops there, without articulating the questions which result from adopting a Christological perspective or attempting to reconcile this idea with the historical experience of humanity. In his radicalism he implicitly rejects the possibility of a non-Christian theodicy. In his approach, humans may only choose between Christ or nothingness, leaving no room for modern Christian-influenced thought which struggles with similar aporias in the wake of 20th-century experience, let alone the reflection of other monotheistic religions. Consequently, Yanakiev’s theodicy is deprived of the truth of experience that takes precedence over speculation³⁵. The role of faith according to Yanakiev is primarily therapeutic.

Yanakiev’s essay, a paraphrase of several sentences from *The Brothers Karamazov* with a handful of unannotated philosophical passages thrown in, is a peculiar text. The dynamic of its discourse forms a parallel to the *Book of Job* with a focal point trained on a single case study, however the overall argument appears to aspire to some kind of holistic conclusion. As such, the essay is something of an oddity or anomaly in modern philosophical/theological thought, a kind of apocryphal treatment which Ewelina Drzewiecka describes as “an epiphany of meaning”³⁶.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 121.

³³ For more information on this subject: L. STOŁOWICZ, *Historia filozofii rosyjskiej*, trans. et ed. B. ŻYŁKO, Gdańsk 2008, p. 185–187.

³⁴ *We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? For if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain God forbid (Gal 2, 15–16, 21).*

³⁵ Cf. J. LEOCIAK, *Doświadczenia graniczne. Studia o dwudziestowiecznych formach reprezentacji*, Warszawa 2009.

³⁶ This is a reference to a concept formulated by Ewelina Drzewiecka in her PhD thesis, *Herezja Judasza. Kracje zdrajcy w bułgarskich parafrazach biblijnych (XX wiek i początek XXI wieku)* [*The*

From the perspective of post-secular research the text belongs to the pre-modern paradigm. In terms of its form of argument³⁷ the essay belongs in the post-modern humanistic tradition, a trend which is prepared to bend or break the rules of academic discourse in philosophy, theology or literature studies. Yanakiev relies on the post-modern mentality where “anything goes” to settle old scores with his own juvenile and naive reading of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and arrives at the idea of election by faith stopping one step short of the idea of predestination... As an intermediary between the reader and the different versions of theodicy which he summarises/interprets, Yanakiev shuttles back and forth between the biblical canon and the thought of the Church Fathers to argue for the supreme truth of the New Testament. As a philosopher, he provokes his readers by rejecting the logic of the rational discourse of theodicy in favour of individual revelation and mysticism, a path traditionally attributed to Orthodox Christianity. The problem, however, is that Yanakiev’s version of theodicy appears to be a selective, deflective treatment, relying on concealment rather than revelation and stopping well short of its own conclusions...

Translated by Piotr Szymczak

Abstract. The article engages with the philosophical and theological notion of theodicy as formulated by Kalin Yanakiev in *Дебат върху теодицеята (A Debate on Theodicy)*, an essay which appeared in Yanakiev’s book *Философски опити върху самотата и надеждата (Philosophical Essays on Solitude and Hope)*, 2008). The article uses the category of apocryphalness to analyse the ideas sparked off in Yanakiev’s work by a passage from Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, along with a series of Yanakiev’s philosophical and poetic images which are interpreted in the biblical and philosophical context. The article also touches on the relationships between Yanakiev’s ideas and Orthodox Christian theodicy.

Keywords: Theodicy, Orthodox Christianity, apocrypha, Bulgarian culture.

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Heresy of Judas: Creations of the Traitor in Bulgarian Biblical Paraphrases, 20th and early 21st centuries] defended on 5 November 2013, University of Warsaw. E. Drzewiecka proposes what she calls a hermeneutic definition of an apocryphal text as an epiphany of meaning. The way she understands it, (post)modern apocrypha develop the potential contained in their ancient counterparts: by concealing the ‘minority’ truths they actually reveal the typical problems of their day, which are crypto-theological in nature.

³⁷ Yanakiev imposes a certain postmodern quality on his style, e.g. by relying on the concept of “the imagined theologians” (К. ЯНАКИЕВ, *Onum za...*, p. 104–109).