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**DOSTOYEVSKY AND NIHILISM**

**PHD THESIS SUMMARY**

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## Summary

The term of *nihilism* appears for first time in Russian culture at beginning of 20th century, where it designated the characteristics of the new mentality of radical view writers group, which denied categorically existing socio-political order. After 1860, within Russian *social thought* (*obščestvennoi mîsli*) of conservative direction it was formed the concept of *nihilism*. Through the term of *nihilism* was designated the ideology, social practice, philosophy of Russian radical *intelligentsia*. Namely by this meaning, the term nihilism spread and was used after 60s (until early twentieth century) in traditionalist circles, conservative or liberal. Nihilism was thus understood as a special characteristic of intelligentsia and this perception of cultural elite of the time was due to uprooting (*bezpochvennichestvo*) this social group of Russian *land* (i.e. the local character, representing the distancing of one's own beginning). One of the significant themes of literature and philosophy of the end of the century consisted in *intelligentsia* identifying with its own radical nihilist philosophy.

Society that reacted actively to the new socio-political and cultural phenomenon was literature. In terms of tsarist authority, imposing censorship, the only partially free place was the one of Russian social thought and ideas. Inside the literary space were discussed and problematized public questions and concerns of the diverse environments: philosophical, cultural, socio-political. Thus, literature integrated and reflected nihilist phenomenon from the immediate reality.

The term nihilism is used in a precise way for the first time in I. S. Turgenev's novel, *Fathers and Children*, published in 1862, thanks to which acquires spread widely. In 1870, Russian writer Nikolai Leskov's novel, entitled *On knives* reflects nihilist phenomenon, which is subject to criticism and ridicule. Other writers such as Aleksei Pisemski, Avenarius Vasily Vasily Avseienko or Vsevolod Krestovski are concerned also by the evolution of Russian nihilism. Nihilist phenomenon is illustrated fully in the pages of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky's novels, who managed to render more generally a precise picture of *Russian nihilist* and nihilism as such. It can be argued that the foundations of the interpretation of nihilism as socio-political phenomenon, related to the work of Dostoyevsky. This allowed the philosophical and social-political interpretation of this phenomenon. Such a perspective on the

Dostoevskyan work was established by the Russian *intelligentsia* of the early twentieth century and popularized through the collection of essays *Vehi (Ages)* (1909) and other independent publications, which has drawn the directions of research and interpretation of the works of Dostoevsky later. Thus, within Russian culture started a whole literature devoted to studying philosophical nihilism as a specific feature of the ideology and philosophy of radical Russian intelligentsia in the nineteenth century. This type of analysis of the Russian nihilist phenomenon took as a basis the work of Dostoyevsky, which was the basis for further studies on nihilism. Dostoevsky has acquired the reputation of a historian, psychologist and the deepest critic of *Russian nihilism*.

The first researcher and critic of Russian nihilism is considered Fyodor Dostoevsky. The image he presents of the Russian cultural elite nihilism in his novels served as a basis for the establishment of traditional interpretation of this social phenomenon in Russian philosophy of XIX-XX centuries. Criticism undertaken by Dostoevsky represented the ground of interpreting tradition of ideology, philosophy and Russian social practice of Russian *intelligentsia*.

The analysis of Russian nihilism in Dostoevsky's novels allowed to Russian philosophers - K. Leontiev, D. Merezhkovsky, Shestov L., V. Rozanov, S. Frank, N. Berdyaev, S. Bulgakov - to reveal themselves the specifics of cultural elite, to give a comprehensive picture of nihilism as a socio-political phenomenon, and most of their research findings were included in the collection of essays the *Vehi (Ages)*.

The subject of nihilism is also present in the European philosophy of the twentieth century, especially because of the interpretation made by Friedrich Nietzsche. But the particular context, as also particular aspects of its development in European philosophy, allows us to sidestep comparative study of the development of subject of nihilism as Eastern versus Western. However, since some philosophers studied the theme of nihilism referring to Dostoevsky's novels, and the conclusions reached are close to the Russian ones, allowed us to make use of the ideas of Albert Camus.

From the experience of studying and analyzing the works of Dostoevsky, for this paper a particular importance had the writings of Romanian authors such as Ion Ianoși, Valeriu Cristea or Ileana Mălăncioiu. In their work, the theme of Russian nihilism referring to Dostoyevsky's

work is treated in an indirect way. Thus the interest in the topic of nihilism in Russian culture in second half of the nineteenth century cannot be found explicitly in Romanian studies.

**The topicality of thesis** is determined by the increased attention that is paid to the theme of nihilism in the current Russian studies on Dostoyevskyan work; the necessity to investigate the concept of nihilism, the doctrine of nihilism, as well as highlighting the significance that Russian nihilism had as socio-political and cultural phenomenon; the requirement to establish a relationship between the work of Dostoyevsky and nihilist phenomenon.

The study of *nihilist* phenomenon in Russia in started in the nineteenth century and is deepened during the twentieth century. Most works, studies, monographs and articles consulted for this paper were drawn from the standpoint of literary criticism, of culture, philosophy and theology. The lack in Romanian culture of philosophical fundamental studies on the topic of nihilism and Dostoyevsky's significance in treating this topic allows us to say that, so far, it has not been addressed an important *issue*: research of Dostoevsky's novels from *Russian nihilism* perspective.

**The purpose** of our research is to clarify the concept of *nihilism* and to analyze how it was reflected in Dostoevsky's work, i.e. the sense Dostoevsky gave to this *phenomenon*. To achieve this *purpose*, we set the following **objectives**: research and analysis of the works that explored the theme of *nihilism* from different perspectives; tracing the origin of this term and what doctrine of nihilism consists of; recording the factors that favored the emergence and the development of nihilism in Russian cultural space and specificity of nihilism in Russia; Dostoevsky's writings analysis from the perspective of nihilism point of view; revealing nihilism's *determinations* and *consequences* of this phenomenon from the perspective of Dostoevsky.

In this paper, we consider the timing of studies related to Dostoevsky and Russian nihilism theme, which is the current direction of research in this regard, the Russian cultural space. **The methodological basis** of the dissertation is the latest Russian literature, publications of historians of culture, philologists and Dostoyevsky researchers; but researchers'

works that mattered are the ones with a direction of philosophical research, such as: I. Evlampiev, V. Kantor, P. Saprionov, L. Saraskina, E. Egheberg, M. Demin, V. Dmitrieva, E. Fesenko, S. Kibalnik, A. Korcinski, N. Soloduho, T. Sidorova, A. Şirineanţ, V. Varava, etc.

**The novelty of the theme** is given by the effort to interpret Dostoevsky's novels through the theme of nihilism and by recording the Russian peculiarities and specifics of nihilism.

The characteristic features of the studied concept determined the need to use multiple general **methods** - description, observation, analysis, synthesis. I used also conceptual, etymological and interpretative analysis methods through literary, theological, ethical and philosophical sources.

The **theoretical** importance of the paper consists of the contribution to the analysis of Dostoevsky's novels through the theme of *Russian nihilism*; of highlighting Dostoevsky's role on interpretation and critics of nihilism; and also of the opportunity given by research results and their use to develop other directions of analysis on Dostoevskyan thematic.

**Thesis argument.** The development of the thesis focused on two key moments: Russian nihilism on the one hand, and its expression in Dostoevsky's novels maturity, on the other hand. According to Dostoevsky's vision, whose design must be located within a Christian ethic, *Russian nihilism is identified with atheism and inevitably converges towards socialism*.

Originally, Russian nihilism is indebted to Christianity. More exactly: Russian nihilism perverts the Christian idea in order to assert itself. Russian nihilism represents the premise that made possible to establish socialism in Russia by radical and extreme methods. Nihilism's foundation has its origins in Christianity, in its ethics. Nihilistic doctrine come to be known and manages to assert itself due to denial of another doctrine, the Christian one, which it wants to substitute. In fact, according to the philosophy of Dostoyevsky, *Russian nihilism and socialism*, are only two representations of the same image.

Dostoevsky seems to have understood this aspect of nihilistic doctrine. For Dostoyevsky, *nihilism, atheism and socialism are doctrines that implies each other*. The conclusion that

Dostoyevsky illustrates in his novels is that *nihilistic doctrine to permit the subsequent installation of socialism in Russia*. And this observation finds its argument in the concrete reality of Russia of XIX-th century, which allows us to speak of a nihilist *phenomenon*, not just a simple doctrine. The term of *nihilism* comes to designate Russian radicalism in general.

**Key words and phrases:** the concept of *nihilism*; doctrine, phenomenon, elite, culture, radicalism, revolutionary, anti-hero, transfer, values, principle, tradition, inculture, interiority, contradiction, duality, divinity, existence, philosophy, schematism.

**Approval of research results** materialized in the debates that took place during national conferences, cultural events dedicated to Dostoevsky in Russian Cultural Center (UBB) and annual conferences of the Doctoral School of Philosophy of Babeş-Bolyai University.

**Publications on the thesis topic.** There were published three articles on thesis topic.

## **Contents of thesis**

The **Introduction** presents the *motivation* for choosing the topic and its *topicality* argument. It formulates the main *purpose* and *objectives* of the research. It's formulated the theme to be defended.

**Chapter I. What is nihilism?** In Chapter I is presented the origin and meaning of the term of *nihilism*, origins pointing to 1733, when the term is recorded for the first time. It is used in a philosophical sense by Fr. H. Jacobi (1799) and interpreted by A. Schopenhauer, W. Hamilton and consecrated by Fr. Nietzsche. After 1862, when I. Turgenev's novel, *Fathers and Children*, is published, nihilism comes to designate political and intellectual movement which affirmed in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century, which aimed transformation of the social structure of the country, positioning itself against Russian traditionalist conservatism.

If Nietzsche is the one who conceptualized nihilism on philosophical plan, Dostoevsky novels illustrate the new mentality of the younger generation. As interpreted by Dostoyevsky,



nihilism requires above all the denial of a divine order or divinity as such, nihilism thus being criminalized and identified with atheism.

Subchapter **I. 3. Russian intelligentsia and her offspring** presents the context that determines Dostoyevsky to reflect the image of nihilism in his novels. It's presented the socio-political and cultural context that favored the emergence and rooting of nihilist doctrine in Russian space, that has come to constitute a real social phenomenon. They identified public interest topics that concerned the period: the theme of the development model of the country (Western or local), the necessity of return of the Russian intelligentsia to people and its ideals.

These themes favored the segregation of both society and intelligentsia. Based on the options of ideology, intelligentsia was split into two groups: Westernizers and Slavophiles. Since the Russian people is the depository of orthodoxy, as said by N. Berdyaev, contradiction that was established between the people and the elite of the time bore with it a religious disposition. Religious inclination can be traced both at people and *the intelligentsia*, also at the nihilists. Three features define Russian cultural space: religious susceptibility, moral asceticism and dogmatism. Based on the combination of these features into a whole, cultural elite of the 60s is distinguished by action and radicalism.

Defining themselves as atheists, members of intelligentsia oriented their efforts towards social transformation in order to achieve a society characterized by justice, equality and welfare. These ones, such names as N. Chernyshevsky, N. Dobroliubov and D. Pisarev, came either from ecclesiastical families or graduated theological seminary. This significant aspect explains why new members from among intellectuals asserted themselves as atheists, but carried with them the *messianic idea* of transforming the Russian reality and of achieving an ideal society. Having a religious inclination, they kept dogmatism and Christian asceticism. Denying the existing social order, whose foundation was represented by Christian ethics, they received the nickname nihilists.

**Russian nihilism specifics and features** are the subject of Subchapter I. 4., it is caught the distinctive note of nihilism as the phenomenon is manifested in Russian space. It's noted the special role that it is assigned to literature from the late nineteenth century, which problematized the main topics of public interest of the time, including theme nihilism.

It reflected how nihilism forms its own doctrine and the role that N. Chernyshevsky, N. Dobroliubov, D. Pisarev had in this regard. Chernyshevsky's novel, from 1863 *What is to be done?*, marks the appearance of nihilistic novel (illustrated by A. Korcinski), which will represent a genuine manual for action for the public with revolutionary views.

As a reaction to the dilemmas of the era, but also as a response to the cultural challenges in such a socio-political climate, Dostoyevsky embodies in his novels *figures of nihilism* and presents throughout the route of the human which denied the order built on Christian values. The outcome imagined by the author can be represented only by crime.

In this respect is analyzed Rodion Raskolnikov character's experience from the novel *Crime and Punishment*. Following a brief comparative exposure, the characters Raskolnikov and Bazarov (*Fathers and sons* of I. Turgenev) shall be pursued in parallel, conclusion highlighting that both relating to the nihilistic doctrine as a new type of consciousness. In **subchapters I. 6 - I. 10**. Rodion Raskolnikov's case is analyzed in detail, being reconstituted his whole nihilist journey - from pecuniary motives, ideological foundation, the role of investigator in awareness of the offense committed, the point of confession to Sonia, to the relation of the type of the nihilist and the type of the *new man*.

Through this figure the novelist illustrates the budding nihilist character, which opts for a radical transformation of his reality, and this transformation is undertaken through unresolved murder. Murder becomes Dostoevsky's (un)natural image of operating radical nihilism. And regarding Raskolnikov's there can be three characteristics that identify Russian Nihilism: the atheism, the asceticism, the apocalypticism.

**Chapter II. The novel *The Idiot*.** The beginning of the chapter evokes the meeting between Dostoyevsky and several representatives of emigration and Russian anarchism (reminded by Dostoevsky's biographer, L. Grossman), something that is meant to emphasize that Dostoevsky set up his own conception of nihilism not only through reading but also from direct experience with the main exponents of this trend. It's stressed the role that Dostoevsky gave to tradition, the dynamic way that the novelist understood the transmission of values. The development of the image of *superfluous human* into the one of *poor human* can be traced

through Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin character's experience and other Dostoyevskyan heroes (aspect noted by A. Tarkovsky).

Myshkin character image is opposite to the *nihilistic group* in the novel, which is why it is important that it is the role of the prince in this context. Three hypostasis of the character are relevant in this respect: the quality of *yurodivy* of Myshkin, the *pedagogical* function and his attribute of *foreigner*. Of these three the first catches the attention, the *yurodivy* one, as Myshkin wasn't known in Romanian culture and which is detailed in subchapter II. 3. **Myshkin: the idiot or the fool. Yurodivy.** The meaning of Dostoevsky's *yurodivy* that he used (in the original) to describe Myshkin is pursued through such writers as J.-C. Larchet or L. Saraskina. Prince Myshkin's *yurodivy* state is complemented by the attribute of being a *foreigner* and the *pedagogical* function (aspects developed by A. Scrima and I. Mălăncioiu).

In contrast to this perfect embodiment of Myshkin nature emerges nihilistic characters picture: Ippolit Terentiev, Antip Burdovski, Doktorenko, Keller etc. Subchapter **II. 7. Antip Burdovski or hidden nihilism** exposes a figure far less studied, the character Burdovski. The image of Burdovski and the nihilistic group that accompanies him does not sent only to some representatives of *contemporary youth of most radical positivism* (idea expressed by Dostoevsky in correspondence with A. Maikov). The hypothesis advanced by S. A. Kibalnik and supported by L. Grossman reveals that Dostoevsky encoded in the biographical details of his heroes biographical details of the life of Max Stirner. Stirner's work was familiar to Russian novelist, Dostoevsky himself dedicated a lecture to the work of Stirner, *The unique and its personality*, when he participated in Petrashevsky group in 1849. The *nihilist group's* claims to Myshkin's in the discussion that takes place between them, appears the name of P.-J. Proudhon and ideas characteristic to European anarchism. From data presented in the text, it is clear that Dostoevsky knew well enough anarchist *principles*.

The conclusion that can be affirmed asserts the impossibility of existence of *perfect human*, Prince Myshkin, as no Dostoevsky's positive characters can be saved, being imbued with nihilism. Nihilism from the novel *The Idiot* reflects the mood of man engaged in a hopeless limit situation, thus condemned to seek further moral law.

**Chapter III. Demonism, Nechayevism, Shygaliovism.** This chapter is centered around several major Dostoevskyan themes: the conflict between generations; existence of *double* ideas and danger of idea absolutization; determinations of nihilism, which expression can be not only negative, but indifference; relationship between nihilism, atheism and socialism.

As shown by K. Mociulski, Dostoevsky learned first-hand about the case of the revolutionary Sergei Nechayev. This case represents one of the fundamental reasons the novel structure. Based on the works of D. Pillat and L. Saraskina, it was found that the first references to Dostoevsky in Romania are closely linked Nechayev's person, and this is due to Zamfir Ralli-Arbore. Basically, the first mentions in Romanian culture on Dostoevsky's name refers implicitly to the theme of Russian nihilism, to the social movements in this space, as well as to novel *Demons*, that reflects nechayevistic phenomenon of the early 70s.

Piotr Verhovenski's nihilism, Stavroghin's or Shatov's, is the result of lack of education and reference points that parents ought to give the younger generation. Nihilism is setting precariously placed in a reality characterized by uprooting (*bezpocivennosti*), where the moral foundations are totally lacking. Parents' generation in the novel - exponents of liberalism and the high ideas - is made accountable by the author for the fact that it allowed the establishment of nihilistic mentality.

Based on the works of P. Sapronov, A. Camus, L. Saraskina and I. Kristeva it is tracked the individual nihilistic experience of the characters in the novel. Thus, through the Stavroghin's character are depicted features of nihilism such as: denial of his aristocratic origins; Eros perversion; impossibility among options of conflictual ideas - between atheism and the existence of deity. Stavroghinian indifference, like that of Ivan Karamazov, is presented as another factor of his nihilism.

One of the central ideas resulting from analysis of the novel refers to the danger of absolutization of the idea, a situation that is typical for both Kirillov and for Shatov. Shatov's character experience reveals a specific situation of Russian Nihilism: *gods' substitution* inevitably leads to dogmatism, to sharing a single idea that is overrated. Kirillov's exercise of

self-check, expression of will's arbitrariness represents the culmination of idea absolutization. Its conception about the state of delusion that characterizes the human world, about the need to overcome the fear of death by asserting their own will of man-god, ends in suicide as an expression of nihilism to the extreme.

In case of Piotr's Verkhovensky character is revealed another characteristic of nihilism, namely imposture. His imposture places nihilism in a broader context and signals the existence of a historical nihilism in the Russian space, which refers to the false Czar Dmitri I. Nihilism as a manifestation of a generalized destruction is shared by Verkhovensky the son, but based on theory Shigalyov, the destruction of the old order appears to be only a first step.

One of the interpretations allowed by the read of *Demons* relates to the identification of nihilism, atheism and socialism. This Dostoyevskyan idea reflects the specificity of Russian nihilism, asserting itself as *atheistic messianic apocalypticism*. Reflected in the pages of the novel, this idea is expressed through characters Piotr Verhovenski, Stavroghin and Shigalyov. Shigalyov's theory, based on the idea of destruction of social organization, ends desire to restore the rule of an ideal society characterized by equality, justice and welfare. To achieve this utopia, however, nihilism in its radical form uses any means: full control of society, spread of espionage, education level lowering, terror and murder.

The idea of nihilism and socialism association is the them discussed in subchapter **III. 7. Socialism and Christianity**, that has its own Dostoyevskyan utopia. Here it is traced the development of ideas and development of Dostoevsky's own conception of human existence. As a former member of the Petrashevsky group, Dostoevsky shared ideas of utopian socialism between 1847-1849. After the Siberian experience, Dostoevsky's transformation of vision meant denying socialist past and sharing nature of Christian socialism. Understanding nihilism fundamentally as denial of God's existence and socialism as an attempt of establishing an organization with coercive character, Dostoevsky adheres to the idea of *pochvennichestvo* (*autochthonism*).

*Autochthonism* was rather an attempt to sketch the outlines of a *uniform idea*, a socio-political program that would reconcile *Slavophiles* and *Westernisers* group. Being skeptical about the transformation of Russian reality through revolutionary methods, Dostoevsky outlined

his own sociopolitical perspective in the pages of his novel and that time publications, or the personal notes. Thus, Dostoevsky puts against socialism his own Christian utopia of spiritual unity, brotherhood between the oppressors and the oppressed on the basis of the Christian ideal. Dostoyevsky claimed that due to *universal resonance*, due to characteristic availability of the Russian people to understand other peoples, this first will contribute to their spiritual reconciliation, it will show them the way to universal brotherhood, which should lead influence of ideals of the Church. Maintaining their political utopia of unity of the people with the monarchy, Dostoevsky's attention was directed mainly to the Russian people. Appealing to the revolutionary youth to give up *nihilism*, in order to approach the *spirit* of the people, Dostoevsky rather manifested his concern for the moral state of society than to maintain social order. To achieve its objective, however, Dostoevsky believes they were only allowed methods of persuasion, not those of constraint.

**Chapter IV. Nihilism and karamazovism.** Ivan Karamazov is recognized as an authentic nihilist example, the one who rebels (A. Camus) against divine order, Ivan was also the one that makes explicit nihilist creed - *everything is permitted*. This chapter looks at the nihilistic novels less addressed or remained unknown, distancing himself slightly from the classic interpretation of the novel and its characters.

In this novel Dostoevsky reinterprets the theme of paternal responsibility, and each character is made accountable for their own actions or ideas they share, idea advocated in subchapter **IV.I. Smerdyakov or Ivan?**

Karamazov family illustrates the human condition which is in an exceptional situation: the old laws were suspended, no new ones have been identified and this condition following nihilism is called *karamazovism* (V. Rozanov). In this context, in order to understand Dostoevsky's nihilism Ivan seeks sources other than the philosophical, so nihilist creed expressed by Ivan recalls the myth of the fall (I. Mălăncioiu), which is the first act of disobedience, when man has opted for its quality of being *nihilist anti-creator* (P. Sapronov).

Subchapter **IV. 2. Ivan Karamazov, Dostoyevsky and his double** reconsiders the theme of duplication through the discussion between Ivan and the Devil. Devil's speech and

ideas are supported by an upside exposure and development of the philosophy of Ivan, which also recalls the conception of Kirillov. The very dialogue that takes place represents nothing besides Ivan's temptation, through which the devil gains power and existence. Resorting to this double image of Ivan, Dostoevsky illustrates through devil's figure the origin of human nihilism.

Critical program undertaken by Dostoyevsky against nihilism and written in the novel represents the theme of subchapter **IV.3. Young writers. Ivan and Alyosha**. Dostoevsky's effort to prove the lack of consistency of nihilism in some other way than ideological led him to use a compositional method. The conflict between two outstanding visions, the atheist and Christian, whose representatives are Ivan and Alyosha is conducted on literary ground. This is clear both from the pages of the novel, and in Dostoevsky's correspondence. The intellectual Ivan, author of several poems that appear in the text, is also a noted publicist affirmed while still a student, standing out also as a talented critic, able to deal with topics as varied as both of social and religious interest. Abbot *The story of the elder as written after the notes of Aleksey Feodorovici Karamazov* is a first and a modest literary attempt of the young man Karamazov.

Typically, the answer to the challenging philosophy of Ivan is considered to be included in the teachings of the abbot Zosima, and this is partly true: the fifth book in the novel contains the moment of conversation between the brothers, Ivan's rebellion and the poem of Great Inquisitor; sixth book, *The Russian monk*, depicts the biography of the abbot Zosima and guidance spoken by him. These pages are part reproductions from the writings of Isaac the Syrian, works known by Dostoevsky. However, the teachings of the monk Zosima's are transmitted via Alyosha who puts on paper whole content of the sixth book. So it's not Zosima who rejects defamation of nihilist Ivan, but Alyosha, who through his literary debut is trying to fight back his brother Ivan. The reply to the fantasies and masterfully crafted speculations of Ivan, to his nihilism and atheism Dostoyevsky illustrates through the modest work performed by Alyosha Karamazov, who reproduces in turn, the Christian guidance of his abbot.

**Chapter V. Interpretation of nihilism at beginning of the early XXth century.** The last chapter of the thesis is centered on the interpretation of the early XXth century of Dostoevsky's work, but also on how the theme of nihilism was discussed further by the first exegetes of it.

Based on studies by researchers such as A. Korcinsky and M. Demin is affirmed the assumption that Dostoyevsky's work was the constituent in the development of Russian culture, starting from the last two decades of the XIXth century and continuing throughout the XXth century. The creation of novelist served as a nucleus for the formation of a vast cultural project developed by his followers.

The role of Vl. Solovyov in setting up this project of professionalizing national philosophy through literature, fixed practically the subsequent development of Russian culture. The premise of literary analysis undertaken by Solovyov is represented by Dostoevsky's work, which by its depth and magnitude, was the focus of the new cultural project..

**V.I. Philosophy and nihilism in Russian culture.** Interest in Russian nihilism theme for analysis and interpretation of this phenomenon is emerging in the early decades of the twentieth century. This line of research was inaugurated by Semyon Frank and Nikolai Berdyaev. S. Frank, in his essay in the journal *Vehi (Ages)* (1909) stated *nihilistic moralism* as essential feature of Russian well-bred man.

Much earlier than the public position of authors of the collection of essays *Vehi (Ages)*, in June 8, 1880, Dostoevsky delivered a speech about Pushkin, which revealed nihilism as a form of denial of domestic origins, an uprooting from native land, characteristic to the Russian intellectual.

N. Berdyaev, who in his *The origin and meaning of Russian communism* supported the *apocalyptic* feature of Russian nihilism insists on the relationship between morality, culture and nihilism, stating that Russian nihilism was a *moral reflection on culture*.

**V. II. Nihilistic moralism.** In this subchapter is presented S. Frank's study from *Vehi (Ages)* journal, *Ethics of nihilism (For a moral characteristic of the Russian intelligentsia worldview)*, which based on Dostoevsky's writings undertake a comprehensive analysis of the Russian intelligentsia nihilism of the 60s. The author tries to identify the causes that favored a close cooperation between cultural elite and radical forms of nihilism. Frank explains why it was possible the denial of the absolute values and the establishment of false criteria of



orientation in space of this culture; who is to blame in this elite for cultural changes; why Russian nihilism has made possible the establishment of a socialist order.

Frank reveals cultural vision deficiency of this elite, reproaching a certain dogmatism to this elite, but also the absolutization of only one law, by which in the cultural vision begins to predominate moral, ie law of *moralism*. Moral criterion is identified as the only way of cultural assessment, social differentiation or human guiding principle.

Intellectuals sought the usefulness, justification or acknowledgment of social moral tendencies. By nihilism, Russian philosopher meant the denial of absolute values. *Russian intelligentsia moralism is an expression and reflection of its nihilism.*

**V. 4. Periods of nihilistic dialectic.** Interpretation of nihilism by Seraphim Rose, in his *Nihilism: The Root of revolution in the modern era*, which lies within Christian ethics, is consonant with Dostoevsky's conception of this phenomenon, so it is discussed in this subchapter.

Nihilism, according to Seraphim Rose has a multiple expression, but its meaning is singular. Nihilism refers to a multitude of disparate phenomena, from which can be distinguished a *nihilistic dialectic*, which targets a specific set of phenomena, several phases or stages of *nihilistic mentality* and thus can be included in a nihilistic *process*. Among the steps that enabled nihilistic doctrine development, Rose calls Renaissance humanism, the Protestant Reformation and French Enlightenment vitalism, socialism, liberalism and realism. All these historical moments represent *underground intellectual movements* nihilism was fed through. These stages should not be regarded as explicitly nihilistic, they were had a collateral, gradually role and to the extent that contributed to the formation and development of the individual. Concomitantly they weakened and allowed some gaps in the classical vision of the human world, its position in the universe.

Rose confirms Dostoyevskyan idea that nihilism is defined as a doctrine based on Christian ethics and standing in opposition to it. Nihilist current is driven only by a contrary opposition, antithetical to another doctrine. This enables understanding of nihilism as an expression of atheism, so is the bearer of a religion, a new ideology. According to Rose, the

denial of Christian ethics or institutions which have their foundation in it, reveals in fact, not a denial of the Christian faith itself, but rather the denial of the authority represented by these institutions, a refusal of submission to such kind of authority. In the political sphere, in the social space or even culture, nihilistic doctrine based its speech on social realities such as *injustice*, *corruption* or *abuse* that appear to justify rebellion and rebellious spirit that animates this movement. In fact, the idea of authority is targeted as such.

In this way, nihilism does not seek to reform or a new form of government, but a whole new vision of the purposes and governance tools, a complete remodeling of the idea of religion and spiritual experience. In other words, the nihilistic movement approach does not pursue a reform or a new form of government, but requires a new view about the purpose and instruments of government, a *complete redefining of the idea of religion and spiritual experience*. In this sense, nihilism wants to be particularly *new*. Interrogation that can be formulated as a result of reflections of Rose on nihilism is: the *new spirit* of nihilism refers to a certain period, is it only one step of a cultural transition or does it entail itself as a permanent reality of man, as a new human which becomes a constitutive feature? The *new spirit* of nihilism is already in progress and the modern era is characterized by an attempt to *complete* nihilism. The fact that Nihilism as a phenomenon is a step that is required to be overcome, that after denying the old idols and human liberation will allow the establishment of another *order*, the *positive* meaning sought *after* and *beyond* nihilism seems to be meaningless. Understanding nihilism as *a necessary means of achieving a goal beyond itself* would be after Rose, an illusion permitted by this doctrine.

**Conclusions.** This doctoral thesis has tried to interpret several Dostoyevsky's novels from the perspective of Russian nihilism; to fix chronologically the theme in other themes developed by Dostoevsky; to present socio-political and cultural context which prompted Dostoevsky to address Russian nihilism theme in his writings; to examine how this issue was reflected by Dostoevsky through his characters; to clarify the meaning given by Dostoevsky to nihilism and the conclusions reached by the Russian author.

One of purpose of the present work was to analyze Dostoevsky's novels in their interpretation of the theme in terms of nihilism. Chapters devoted to the four Dostoyevsky's

novels followed the way Dostoevsky incriminated nihilism and illustrated it through his characters. Nihilism was represented by Dostoevsky as a testimony to the disintegration of human personality, the inability of man to be honest, to be himself, aware of its own existence and its limits. Dostoyevskyan nihilists don't limit to the sphere of reflection, but act according to their own laws. Thus, it can be argued that at Dostoevsky it can be talked about *nihilists* rather than about *nihilism*, because nihilistic doctrine is rather put into practice than developed in a conceptual form.

Theoretically, nihilism accounted to Dostoevsky the establishment of a new type of mentality, dangerous for the further development of Russia by its very lack foundation of ethics, rules or clearly defined coherent socio-politically and culturally program. For Dostoyevsky, nihilism meant first of all denying the existence of God (atheism); a revolutionary, unresolved and incomprehensible journey of transformation of Russian reality by resorting to radical methods (apocalypticism).

Socially, nihilism for Dostoevsky was understood as a moment of rupture within the Russian tradition, a Russian intellectual alienation and uprooting of the specific values of this space, its own origin. Characterized by uprooting (*bezpocivennosti*), Russian intelligentsia was not raised to the challenges of its time. Because it denied the importance of the absolute values expressed within the Christian tradition, the cultural elite was guided by petty motivations, utilities and listed under category of utility and was oriented on social plan, trying to change it by radical methods.

In the context of the increasing controversy between adverse groups, the *Westernisers* and *Slavophiles*, Dostoevsky joined the idea of *autochthonism* (*pocivennosti*) as an alternative model of development of the country. Dostoyevsky was skeptical about the possibility of *overcoming* nihilism through revolutionary methods, which is why he promoted the idea of returning to the Russian cultural traditions enshrined in Christian ethics.

In conclusion, it can be argued that Russian nihilism exerted a strong influence on Russian socio-political reality and culture of the XIXth century, and the result of this influence was felt both in the private sphere of the individual and the family, public and social policy and

in politics. Nihilist phenomenon manifested itself as a demonstrative expression of influencing the socio-political reality in order to conform them to a predetermined social ideal.

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