THE PROPHESIES OF
DOSTOYEVSKY AND TOLSTOY

REG NAULTY

In The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoyevsky has the Elder Zossima say:
For today, everyone is still striving to keep his individuality as far apart as possible, everyone still wishes to experience the fullness of life in himself alone, and yet instead of achieving fullness of life, all his efforts merely lead to the fullness of self-destruction, for instead of full self-realisation they relapse into complete isolation... For he is used to relying on himself alone and has separated himself as a self-contained unit from the whole... [However] true security of the individual does not lie in isolated personal efforts but in general human solidarity.1

Writing in 1880, Dostoyevsky has the Elder Zossima predict that the period of extreme individualism has some time to run, and then 'the brotherhood of man' would arrive.
The Sixties (i.e. the 1960s) were a huge explosion of the tendency regretted by Fr. Zossima. Sex, drugs, revolt against authority, and renewed interest in anarchism, were all present. I remember attending public lectures on anarchism as a philosophy at the Australian National University in the late Sixties. The 2014 Edmund Campion lecturer Rev. Dr. Wilson [Bill] Miscamble gets it exactly right:
...we can now see as a key driving force of the 'Sixties Revolution'—namely individualism and atomisation. Emerging from The Sixties came an ethos of personal liberation, sexual freedom and self-fulfilment.2

The anarchist tendency keeps on resurfacing in one of the most persistent changes emanating from The Sixties, the transfer of sin from individuals to institutions, which is itself a declaration of anarchism— institutions are a threat. In Australia, there has been a succession of local institutional villains ever since: the Department of Main Roads, the Tasmanian Hydro, the Australian Wheat Board, the Department of Immigration, and the banks. As well, of course, there are the international anarchist endeavours, notably that child of The Sixties, Julian Assange, doing his best to unsettle the U.S. Government. The latest ongoing target, which must be deeply satisfying to the anarchist mind, are the Churches. The onslaught on institutions is aided and abetted by the media who, if there is any disaster or catastrophe, leap out to identify an institutional suspect, often that anarchist bete noir, the police force.

However, there was another movement coming out of The Sixties which carried the seeds of re-construction, and that was the spirituality movement. At first blush, it looks like a clear instance of the Zossima syndrome, since spirituality is personal, individual and private. One recalls The Beatles doing meditation under the tutelage of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. What could be more solitary than meditation? And, if it is combined with the subjective idealism of Shankara, it is. But in the West, it is used for recreation in the best sense, for re-collecting our scattered selves for more concerted action in the world, though it can go deeper. If it does, it may help fill the spiritual vacuum which sex has flooded into.

In 1893, Tolstoy, like Dostoyevsky, a religious man, also made a prophecy about the Kingdom:
A time is already coming, when the principles of equality [the brotherhood of man, the community of property, and the non-resistance
to evil by violence] will appear just as natural and simple as the principles of...national life do now.3

He was partly right. Communism was coming, and it did come not long after, in 1917. But communism neither believed in nor practised non-violence. In fact, it used violence on a scale never seen before: communism constructed a vast slave labour system which drove people brutally, and turned Russia into a vicious police state.

Tolstoy was mistaken about what was 'already coming'. He thought it would be wonderful; instead, it was horrible. It is still too early to say whether Dostoyevsky was right or not. Neither of them foresaw the very good things that were just around the corner: repeated breakthroughs in medicine, comprehensive health care systems, mass tertiary education, support for national minorities, the multiplication of open societies, men on the moon, the amazing universe discovered by science. However, the Zossima tendency still has life; recall the US Congress's near self destruction in the recent past, and its continued obstruction of the US President. Even so, constructive tendencies may yet prevail.

REFERENCES
2. Rev. Wilson Miscamble. CSC. Catholics in

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.

And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table.