

Title: *The Meek One* as an Icon

Author: Olga Stuchebrukhov, University of California, Davis

Dostoevsky's novels are full of icons. However, it is not so much the icons *in* Dostoevsky's works, but rather Dostoevsky's works as icons that present a truly fascinating topic for discussion, turning the notion of an icon into a key to his artistic methods. In light of this approach, one can argue that Dostoevsky purposefully models his novella, *The Meek One* (1876), after an icon. In his polemic with Leskov apropos the meaning of realism in *The Diary of a Writer*, which begins with Leskov's *The Sealed Angel* (1873), Dostoevsky criticizes what he calls Leskov's "spiritual materialism," praising his factual knowledge of Russian Orthodox teachings and rituals, but blaming him for missing the spirit of those teachings. Placing *The Meek One* in the context of this polemic helps one realize that, instead of using an icon merely as the main causal unit of the plot, as does Leskov in *The Sealed Angel*, Dostoevsky shifts the icon as an object into the background, following instead the main metaphysical and aesthetic principles of Eastern Orthodox iconography throughout the novella. The symbolism of an icon permeates its structural, stylistic, and ideological levels, fusing them into a well-balanced artistic unity. Examining *The Meek One* through the prism of the Eastern Orthodox philosophy of the icon helps one understand and appreciate this unity more fully.