

Speaking of Inquisitions  
From Dostoevsky to GWB

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You know, Sundays were very traumatic for me as a boy growing up in Lebanon — not because of the war, not because of the homework that was due the next day (although that always played a part). But because of church. We were Catholics. We had to go to church. I'm not implying that something unhappy happened between me and my priest. As far as I know I escaped unharmed. The trauma was church itself. And more specifically, the sermon. My God. It was endless. It was as if time stood still every Sunday for ten hours, and I had to listen to that priest declaim endlessly about things that made absolutely no sense to me. It was as if on the Seventh Day God created boredom. I never understood the chore. Sunday is meant to be a day of rest. Let me quote the proof for you. This is out of my Jerusalem Bible translation of the Book of Genesis: "On the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing. He rested on the seventh day after all the work he had been doing. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on that day he had rested after all his work of creating."<sup>1</sup> Notice the repetition: In those 48 words, the word "work" appears three times, in direct contrast to the words rest and holy, which also appear a combined three times. Notice too that there's no mention of church, no mention of trundling it to an hour-long service or pretending to be interested. Not even for the glory of God. Yet Sunday after Sunday, fifty-two weeks a year, church. And there is no vacationing from church, no personal time off to be with the kids, no maternity leave, for God's sake: they bring the chaplain to you at the hospital if you have the bad luck to give birth on Sunday. So I ask you again: Where did this business of Sunday services begin? Evangelicals get all hot and bothered over gay marriage because of a couple of obscure verses in the Bible. Why don't they get all hot and bothered over Sunday services, which are nowhere proscribed, and in fact forbidden by the Bible, if you read Genesis literally? One reason must have something to do with the desire to submit, which is something most religious expressions have in common. In fact the word Islam is Arabic for *submission*. It must have a lot to do with the Arabic

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis, 2:1-3.

word for Republican, because in its present incarnation the GOP is all about submission. Anyway, I gave up church as soon as I was capable of standing up to God, which in my case was my mother.

And yet here we are. You have an excuse. You're Unitarians, the Sufis of Christianity — the eccentrics, the humanists. I was going through your Frequently Asked Questions on your Web site.<sup>2</sup> Yes, you have a one of those famous Web pages called Frequently Asked Questions. Who are Unitarian Universalists? How did the movement come to have such a long name? (Really, these are actual questions). What do UUs believe about God? What about Jesus? What about our Lord and Savior George W. Bush? (No, that last one is my mine, and as you well know I believe he's neither our Lord nor Savior. More like our Sodom and Gomorrah with a smirk.) Your Frequently Asked Questions don't have one asking and answering the Great Mystery of the Age — why Sunday Services. But there is this great question: What do Unitarians believe about the Bible? And here's the answer: "We do not [...] hold the Bible—or any other account of human experience—to be either an infallible guide or the exclusive source of truth. [...] We believe that we should read the Bible as we read other books (or the newspaper)—with imagination and a critical eye." This is very good news, because here today I want to pick a reading from a text I consider rather sacred, and discuss it with you, except that my text is none other than a chapter out of "The Brothers Karamazov," the novel by Dostoevsky. What's unacceptable in other churches is welcome here, and that's what makes this place so wonderful: There is no one source of truth, there are no dogmas, there are no absolutes. There is "imagination and a critical eye."

That happens to be the theme of my talk here today. I titled this talk "Speaking of Inquisitions" because what I'd like to do is examine how, in our daily lives around us today, truth has become an absolute, how dogma is becoming a way of thinking, how absolutes are replacing 'imagination and the critical eye.' Those are all the characteristics of 15<sup>th</sup> Century Christianity during the Inquisition of course, when heresies were literally burned at the stake and truth was whatever the local priest, or the Inquisitor, said it was.

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.uua.org/aboutuu/uufaq.html>

Those are also the characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> Century America, where there seems to be only one way to be patriotic, only one way to be American, and where truth is whatever your local Fox channel, or George Bush, says it is.

Before I get carried away with preaching like a liberal on speed, let me tell you about that chapter by Dostoevsky. I don't doubt that most of you know very well what I'm referring to. It's the famous "Grand Inquisitor" in "The Brothers Karamazov."<sup>3</sup> How this has anything to do with present-day America will become obvious as I go along, even if the way there takes a couple of seemingly unrelated turns.

Dostoevsky had a largely unhappy life, including nine years of sheer hell in prison and the army in Siberia. But those years also gelled his spiritual disposition. He was never an atheist, but he would be a man in eternal doubt about the existence of God, the justice and purpose of life, and the uncertainty of truth. All truths. "His faith is moving, full of doubt, uncertain, and ardent," is how Albert Camus described him. In prison, in the military and in his personal life, Dostoevsky discovered that even the cruelest, most brutal man could be kind to a child, just as the sweetest child could be the victim of the most brutal, inexplicable violence. That paradox informed all of Dostoevsky's great novels: There is no fathoming justice without first acknowledging that there are no easy judgments. At some levels, we are all guilty and we are all innocent, we are all capable of being good and capable of being evil, and one way or another we all share some responsibility for other people's evils. We're never islands of virtue or misdeeds. Life would leave black and blue marks all over Dostoevsky, mentally and sometimes physically. But the last thing Dostoevsky had was a black and white outlook on life.

"The Brothers Karamazov" is basically a whodunit. Fyodor Karamazov is the father of three sons, and probably of a fourth one as well, a bastard. The father is a tyrannical man, a drunk, a lout, a lecher and a man hated more or less by most people, including and especially by Ivan, his firstborn. The old man is murdered. It's not clear by who. Suspicion falls on the bastard son, but the three other sons are all implicated. The novel

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<sup>3</sup> My *Brother Karamazov* citations refer to the Constance Garnett translation, Modern Library edition.

culminates in a terrific courtroom drama. The bastard son does indeed turn out to be the murderer. But it's never so simple with Dostoevsky. Ivan confesses that it was his hatred that compelled the bastard son to do the deed. Knowing of that hatred, his younger brother feels guilty for not having done something about it. Justice is not so simple. End of story. I have myself committed a murder here — I have murdered “The Brothers Karamazov” with simplification. You can't reduce one of the great works of literature to 152 words and expect to go to heaven. But I just wanted to set up the only scene that matters to us here: The scene where, about half-way through the novel, Ivan, who is the intellectual heavy among the brothers, goes to his good-hearted younger brother, and tells him about a poem he (Ivan) wants to write. The poem is based on the legend of the Grand Inquisitor. It takes place in Seville in 15<sup>th</sup> Century Spain, in the midst of the Inquisition's darkest period.

These days all we hear about from a certain segment of the population and the media is the violent history of Islam. I don't need to remind you that Islam has nothing on Christianity when it comes to violence for the greater glory of god, and if Christianity was for centuries a carnival of violence, the Inquisition was its Ringling Brothers & Barnum & Bailey Circus: Hundreds of thousands of Muslims and Jews expelled from Spain, and thousands executed. The last prosecution, by the way took place in 1818. As Ivan describes it, his story is set “in the most terrible time of the Inquisition, when fires were lighted every day to the glory of God, and ... wicked heretics were burnt.” The day after almost a hundred heretics have been burnt in front of the Grand Inquisitor, the king, the knights the cardinals and “the most charming ladies of the court,” Jesus Christ appears.<sup>4</sup> He walks among his people. They recognize him. They flock all around him, kiss his feet and the ground he walks on, they weep, they embrace him, children sing his praise. He even has a Lazarus moment, raising from the dead a little girl of seven. At that moment, the Grand Inquisitor appears. He's ninety years old, craggy, tall, emaciated, dried out and death-like. Think of him as Boris Karloff meets Kate Moss in her anorexic period. The Grand Inquisitor is not a happy man by nature. He's revolted at the sight of Christ among his people. But earthly powers belong to him, not to God or the son of god.

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<sup>4</sup> *Karamazov*, pp. 257-58.

The Grand Inquisitor “holds out his fingers and bids the guards to take Him. And such is his power, so completely are the people cowed into submission and trembling obedience to him, that the crowd immediately make way for the guards, and in the midst of deathlike silence they lay hands on Him and lead Him away.” It’s déjà vu all over again for Christ, who’d already been arrested once in that garden fifteen centuries before. You recall, that weekend didn’t go very well for him, and here again, the Grand Inquisitor promises that he’ll be burned like any old heretic. It’s an incredible scene in the book, and I imagine it would move anyone to the core regardless of one’s faith or lack of faith: this is Evil arresting Good, pure and simple.<sup>5</sup>

But is it really? What follows is an astounding, one-sided confrontation in Christ’s prison cell: Christ says nothing. The Grand Inquisitor grills him, lectures him, destroys him by essentially turning the tables on him and his goodness and saying: You gave people freedom. But you overestimated them. They can’t handle freedom. Or to quote Jack Nicholson’s famous words in “A Few Good Men,” *they can’t handle the truth*. “Instead of taking men’s freedom from them when you had the chance,” the Inquisitor tells Christ, “you made it greater than ever! Did you forget that man prefers peace, and even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil? Nothing is more seductive for man than his freedom of conscience, but nothing is a greater cause of suffering. [...] So that in truth, you yourself laid the foundation for the destruction of your Kingdom, and no one is more to blame for it.” And for fifteen centuries the Church has been cleaning up after you, the Inquisitor tells Christ, reestablishing a sense of order and expectation among the flock, among these “weak and vile” creatures who want nothing more than bread and circuses, safety and certainty. They want to be told what to believe, who to believe, and how to believe. The last thing they want is to figure it out for themselves. So the church has corrected Christ’s work and “founded it upon *miracle, mystery* and *authority*. And men rejoiced that they were again led like sheep, and that the terrible gift that had brought them such suffering was, at last, lifted from their hearts.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 264-66.

That's Dostoevsky for you. He doesn't take sides, by the way. Every one of his characters is convincing and compelling, and he never tells you who's right, who's wrong, who's even closer to the truth. It's up to you to decide: And of course most of us can't stand that freedom. We want to be told, which is just the problem: that desire to be told is what leads us into temptation, into deals with the devil, into submission and loss of freedom, whether we're good Catholics in 15<sup>th</sup> century Spain or vile liberals in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

I'm going to shift gears pretty radically here. Let's move the scene from the Inquisition to the smoking ash-heap that was Ground Zero on September 14, 2001, at 4:40 p.m. to be precise. That was the setting where President Bush had his "Bullhorn Moment" atop that charred firetruck at Ground Zero. We all remember it, because it was the one image the White House made sure to splash on all the magazine covers and all over the television news for a long time after that. It began as the most unscripted moment of the Bush presidency. Bush hadn't planned to speak there. At least that's what we're told. He landed at the Wall Street Heliport and boarded a 55-car motorcade, the largest motorcade ever to accompany a president, because this was, after all, the beginning of the cult of George Bush, and drove down to Ground Zero. The plan supposedly was that he'd just tour the place. But once down there he came face to face with the emotion of the firefighters who were yelling things like "Whatever it takes," and "don't let me down," and then broke out in chants of USA, USA.<sup>7</sup>

That morning, a 69-year-old retired firefighter called Bob Beckwith left his Long Island home and strolled down to Ground Zero to have a look-see. Legend has it that "At first, his family dissuaded him from going to Ground Zero, but after Beckwith discovered that one of his colleague's sons was one of the hundreds of firefighters missing, he [supposedly] put on his old uniform, strapped on his helmet and went to join the rescue efforts."<sup>8</sup> I say *supposedly*, because the famous White House pictures of Beckwith that day show him in a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt—not quite a uniform.<sup>9</sup> At any rate,

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<sup>7</sup> Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (Simon & Schuster, 2002), pp. 69-70.

<sup>8</sup> "Then & Now: Bob Beckwith," CNN, Sept. 7, 2005, <http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/09/07/cnn25.beckwith.tan/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> See [http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/images/20010914-9\\_p7365-23ajpg-515h.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/images/20010914-9_p7365-23ajpg-515h.html)

Beckwith was digging around for survivors when he got word that the president was about to speak. He climbed on top of a charred fire engine to see where that might happen. Just then Karl Rove happens to approach, asks him if the firetruck is a safe place to be, asks him to jump up and down on it to make sure, and says Bush will speak from there. As I told you a moment ago, the Bush team supposedly hadn't planned for a speech, but the crowd wanted one. So at 4:40 someone puts a bullhorn in Bush's hand and leads him next to Bob Beckwith. And there went the president's arms around the old firefighter's shoulders. By the way, in 2001 there were about 1.1 million firefighters in the country, a good majority of whom tended to vote Democratic. In New York City, where the vote is hugely Democratic anyway, firefighters are overwhelmingly so. But miracle of miracle, it just so happened that Bob Beckwith was a diehard Republican. Go figure. That was not to be the only miracle of the day.

So there was President Bush with Bob Beckwith, ready for his "Bullhorn Moment." Karen Hughes, the president's friend and image maker, was there, and as Bob Woodward described it in one of his books, "absolutely beaming. This was an amazing moment, she thought—eloquent, simple, the perfect backdrop, a moment for the news magazine covers, the communications hall of fame and for history." She was right. That's exactly what the moment turned out to be. Now, the "speech" has taken on the massive proportion of something like the Iwo Jima memorial in Washington, D.C. You know the one I'm referring to, the replica of the famous picture by Joe Rosenthal that shows the five Marines and a medic hoisting the American flag on top of Mount Suribachi at the beginning of the battle of Iwo Jima. Clint Eastwood has just released a movie based on the whole story. That's the most famously iconic moment of World War II, the kind of moment that just about won the war in the eyes of the American public, once they saw the picture. But that moment, too, was a fake, a hoax of sorts. The flag that was hoisted atop Mount Suribachi in that famous picture was actually a replacement flag for a much smaller one that had been hoisted there by another set of Marines two or three hours earlier. Except that James Forrestal, the Secretary of the Navy who was with the troops that day off shore, didn't like the fact that the original flag was so small. He wanted a big,

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massive one (and wanted the smaller one as a souvenir).<sup>10</sup> So they put up the bigger flag, and created the kind of myth the Marines and the country have been milking ever since. Nine years later the legend had grown as massive as the bronze Marine Corps War Memorial by Felix Weldon that went up across the Potomac, “on the west flank of Arlington National Cemetery.”<sup>11</sup> That thing is thirty-two feet tall, the flagpole is seventy-eight feet long, it’s as tall as a five-story building, and it’s the “largest piece of bronze statuary in the world.”<sup>12</sup> That’s to tell you what happens when the country sets its sights on reinventing history. I shudder to think what’s going to be made of Bush’s “Bullhorn Moment,” although we already have a hint: it’s been immortalized at the presidential wax museum near Mount Rushmore. Interestingly, in those two figurines Bob Beckwith appears with a big fat firefighters’ patch stitched to his shirt. He had no such patch that day at Ground Zero. But you can always rely on the replicators of American history to create myths every stitch of the way.

The Bullhorn Moment has, in fact, grown to proportions as massive and as mythical as the Iwo Jima memorial. All from 136 words that the president spoke on top of that firetruck. I’m not saying that the length of a speech has anything to do with its quality. (I’m living proof right here: we’ve gone what, 20 minutes? And I’m still not making a lick of sense). The Gettysburg Address is all of 278 words long, and it really did change the course of American identity and purpose. What I’m proposing to you is that those words Bush spoke at Ground Zero did the same, but for a different reason, and obviously with a different purpose. The two speeches are worth comparing here because they have so much in common in some perverse ways, and yet provoked such enormously divergent results.

The Gettysburg Address was, as Garry Wills described it, “a new birth of freedom.” Eight thousand Americans were killed at Gettysburg, remember. As Wills wrote, the people who left Gettysburg after Lincoln’s address “walked off from those curving

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<sup>10</sup> James Bradley with Ron Powers, *Flags of Our Fathers* (Bantam, 2000), p. 207.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Kammen, *Visual Shock* (Knopf, 2006), p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

graves on the hillside, under a changed sky, into a different America,”<sup>13</sup> an America made stronger and more free by Lincoln’s interpretation of a Constitution he remade in the image of the Declaration of Independence, but without its former shackles. American history is almost always studied in two parts: pre-civil war and post-civil war, for good reason. Gettysburg is the Great Divider. But I see the division in another way: Pre-Civil War America is Old Testament America. It is the America of vengeance be mine, of eye for an eye, of a God never so forgiving as punishing. It is more the America of the Puritans than the Universalists, more the America of Inquisitions than tolerance, especially if you happened to be Indian, black, or one of those immigrants who hadn’t yet been accepted as part of humanity. Post civil war America is New Testament America—a more forgiving and generous America. It is Lincoln’s America as Thomas Jefferson willed it, but never managed. I’m simplifying and idealizing a lot of course, and even the New Testament has its problems. I mean, St. Paul is all New Testament and frankly the guy can be unbearable to live by. He’s more Dr. Phil than Jesus Christ, and the era of lynching and Indian genocide really geared up after the Civil War. But I hope you get the sense of what I’m saying: The United States has been a changing idea because of specific events and often because of the words and deeds of specific people. Gettysburg was one such deed. President Bush’s speech at Ground Zero was another. But where Gettysburg was “a new birth of freedom,” Bush’s speech at Ground Zero was the opposite. The people who heard Bush at Ground Zero walked away with their hearts full of something primarily angry, vengeful, primeval. At Gettysburg, 15,000 people walked away wanting to rebuild a country. At Ground Zero, people walked away looking to burn down something, to get back at someone. Their sense of superiority had been offended. It was a return to pre-Gettysburg America, to Old Testament America, to the America of the Battle Hymn of the Republic.

Let’s not forget that the hymn was written by Julia Ward Howe as a Civil War song to rouse the Northern troops on a mission from God, because the Union armies represented “the coming of the Lord, and their cause [was] the cause of God’s truth.”<sup>14</sup> This is what

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<sup>13</sup> Cited in “The Art of Abraham Lincoln,” by James M. McPherson, *New York Review of Books*, July 16, 1992, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore* (Oxford, 1962), p. 94.

Bush wanted to impart on his crowds that day at Ground Zero, with the small difference that the Union armies had been replaced with the Pentagon's armies. But what did he actually say? The president's famous words were these: "I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon." He was interrupted three times by applause during that simple sentence. The reason he said "I can hear you" was not because Bush is rhetorically gifted, or because he wanted to project an I-feel-your-pain sort of demeanor. He said those words because, in fact, the crowd that had gathered around him *could not hear him*.<sup>15</sup> They told him so. Repeatedly. Through no fault of Bush's, the place was noisy, cavernous, shifty, and his bullhorn could only project so far. But it was in the aftermath of the brief speech, which really was nothing to shout home about, that it was recast in its five-story-high bronze statuary and turned into another Iwo Jima myth. The most unscripted moment of the Bush presidency became its most scripted of all. It was designed that way. It was the culmination of that day's message to America. The day was a very public one for Bush. It was the day he finally came out of the closet as a "war leader" after stumbling so badly in the first 48 hours after the attacks. The coming out party had begun at the Washington Cathedral that morning, where a memorial service was held for the victims of the attacks. Memorial events were happening all over the world, of course, and most of those took on the tone of the words Billy Graham spoke at the National Cathedral: "Difficult as it may be for us to see right now -- this event can give a message of hope -- hope for the present, and hope for the future."<sup>16</sup> In Paris, the bells of Notre Dame echoed through the city. In Bhopal, India, schoolchildren clasped their hands in prayer. Grand Prix racers getting ready for a race in Italy silenced their engines. On Waikiki Beach in Honolulu tourists took part in an Oceanside memorial featuring hula dances that told the story of America's suffering. Even in Teheran, where anti-American chants are like white noise, "thousands

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<sup>15</sup> See the White House transcript of the address at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010914-9.html>

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.sonsserver.com/billy-graham.htm>

of people attending a World Cup qualifying match between Bahrain and Iran observed a moment of silence.”<sup>17</sup>

And what did the congregation gathered at the National Cathedral do? What did Karl Rove plan and the White House image-makers made sure was broadcast to the world? They belted out “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

That was the day everything changed in America. Not on September 11. On September 11 the planes smashed into the buildings and the nation went into shock. It could have gone various ways after that. It all depended on the presidency. Where would we go? Where would be taken? On September 14<sup>th</sup>, we found out. On September 14, George Bush replaced the Constitution and became America’s Grand Inquisitor.

I hope I’m connecting the dots for you better than the FBI did before 9/11. To me, there’s a direct line between what the Grand Inquisitor told Christ in Dostoevsky’s novel, and what the Bush administration has been all about since that day at Ground Zero. To be sure, Bush didn’t stand there or anywhere else speaking like the Grand Inquisitor to us, to the flock. That’s not what we want. We just want the caretaking, the bread and circuses, the shock and awe, and we’ve gotten it in spades. But if there is an overriding doctrine in this White House, it is the doctrine of the Inquisitor, of the one who plays God on behalf of those for whom aspiring to freedom is too much to ask. Imagine, in other words, a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of Dostoevsky’s legend. Instead of the Grand Inquisitor walking the streets of Seville after a day’s burning of heretics, we have George W. Bush walking... well, I’m not sure where he could walk safely in America or anywhere else in the world anymore, but anyway. Let’s imagine him walking in the White House on the way to a good pretzel snack in the Lincoln Bedroom. And who does he encounter there? Not Jesus Christ; Heaven forbid, Bush would mistake him for an Arab terrorist and have him shot on the spot. No, he encounters Thomas Jefferson in the flesh. Thomas Jefferson, come back to see and serve the America of his founding. (I realize that James Madison is the principal author of the Constitution, but I’m choosing Thomas Jefferson for dramatic and

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<sup>17</sup> “Surrounded By Grief, People Around the World Pause and Turn to Prayer,” by Dan Barry, The New York Times, September 15, 2001.

philosophical reasons: When we think freedom, equality and rights, we think Thomas Jefferson.) So what does George Bush tell the man in the weird costume and the wig? First of course, he tries a very lame joke: “Better not parade down a street in Dallas like that, they might shoot you.” Then Bush tries blaming everything that has gone wrong in his administration on Bill Clinton whoring off the Lincoln Bedroom during *his* administration, and he gives Thomas Jefferson a nickname: Tommy Boy. That doesn’t go over well, either. Then Karl Rove walks into the room with a script, and everything falls in place. And this is what Bush tells Jefferson: He tells him exactly what the Grand Inquisitor told Christ: Your people don’t want freedom. They want us to save them from freedom. They want us to protect them from freedom. They want us to restore the certainties that your freedoms took away. And they have told us: “ ‘Yes, you were right, you alone possess the truth, and we come back to you. Save us from ourselves.’ [...] You lifted them up and taught them to be proud. We have showed them that they are weak, that they are only pitiful children, but that childlike happiness is the sweetest of all. They have become timid and look to us and huddle close to us in fear, as chicks to the hen.”

Bush talks to Jefferson in the past tense, because it has all happened. Look around. He has signed the bills into law, repealed habeas corpus for prisoners, extended the repeal to anyone he decides to declare an enemy combatant. He’s got all the backing he wants for his domestic spying program, he’s got his wars, he’s got his power, unchecked, and he’s got us exactly where he wants us. In submission. The polls show him down, but if that was the case why is Congress still rubber-stamping everything he sends their way, except for a few fake and minor rebellions for show by the likes of John McCain and other bogus mavericks who are only positioning themselves to take over the presidency in 2008? Because when it comes down to it, at heart, the nation is behind him, or at least behind the idea of a president as Grand Inquisitor. If there were another attack tomorrow, he could abolish the Constitution altogether, formally, in a Rose Garden ceremony or on whatever ash-heap would next be in the news, and congressmen would fall over each other to stand behind him. So would probably half the members of the Supreme Court—the sort of five-member half that now crowns someone president, the way the Vatican once crowned emperors. And what are people going to do about it? Most of us will

applaud, because most of us are fearful. There'll be the few rebels among us. There always are. But like the Grand Inquisitor told Christ: "the fierce and rebellious will destroy themselves [or get fired or imprisoned, which is really the same thing], others, rebellious but weak, will destroy one another, while the rest, weak and unhappy, will crawl fawning to our feet and whine to us...: Save us from ourselves."<sup>18</sup>

I should end on a positive note, but unfortunately I can't. It's not that I don't like Hollywood endings. But when I look around, I'm not encouraged by the middle we're in, and fear to imagine what ending we're heading toward. Remember, the Grand Inquisitor had promised to have Christ killed in front of the flock, just to prove to him that, even knowing who was being burned, the people's allegiance belong to the Inquisitor, their true savior—not to Christ. As it was, Christ, who had said nothing throughout the Inquisitor's lecture, stood up and kissed the Inquisitor gently on the lips. The Inquisitor let him go, ordered him never again to return. Dostoevsky then writes a beautiful line about the Inquisitor: "The kiss glows in his heart, but the old man adheres to his ideas." I can't imagine Thomas Jefferson planting a kiss on George Bush's lips, nor George Bush's heart glowing from anything more than a fuse lighting up his next smirk. I *can* readily imagine George Bush telling Thomas Jefferson that he could send him to Guantanamo as an enemy combatant and no one would bat an eye. That's where we are today. And the truth is that Bush isn't the problem. Whoever replaces him may have another name, he may even be of another party. But he'll be just another Inquisitor, because that's what our democracy has been reduced to. "Imagination and the critical eye" are the heretics among us. We may not all be Muslims. We may call ourselves Republican, Democrat, Independent, Catholic, Unitarian, Jewish. But submission is our universal religion. There's never been a better time to be a heretic.

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<sup>18</sup> *Karamazov*, p. 268.