

Law of love and law of violence



Lev Tolstoy

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By Lev Tolstoy

‘And fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body.’ (Matt., X, 28)

Because of the perversion of the Christianity, the life of the Christian people have become worse than of the pagans.

The reform of evil that exists in life must begin with a denunciation of the religious lie and the establishing of religious truth within each individual person.

The sufferings involved in an irrational life lead to an awareness of the necessity of rational life.

None of the wretchedness of either humanity or the individual is useless, for it always leads humanity, albeit in a roundabout way, to the only activity for which man is destined: self-perfection.

PREFACE

‘And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d. But he that does truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.’ (John, III, 19–21)

‘There is no greater unhappiness than when a person starts to fear the truth lest it denounce him.’ (Pascal)

The glory of the good lies in their consciences and not in the mouths of other people.

I write what I am writing simply because, knowing the only thing that can free the people of the Christian world from the terrible physical sufferings, and more importantly, from the spiritual corruption into which they are submerging themselves ever deeper, I, as I stand on the edge of the grave, cannot be silent.

It must be apparent to all thinking people of our times, not only to the Russian people, but to all the Christian nations of the world, that with the continually increasing hardship of the poor and luxuriant living of the rich, with the struggle of all against all, revolutionaries against governments, governments against revolutionaries, enslaved nationalities against their oppressors, struggles between States, between East and West, together with the progressive development of armaments devouring the strength of the people with its refinement and depravity, this sort of life cannot continue, and that if the life of the Christian peoples does not change it will inevitably become ever more wretched.

This is clear to most people but, unfortunately, they frequently fail to see the cause of this disastrous situation and are still less able to see the means of salvation. A number of very different circumstances are given as the cause, and the most varied means of salvation are suggested. And yet there is only

one cause and one means of salvation.

The reason behind this disastrous condition of the Christian nations is the absence among them of a higher understanding of the meaning of life, of a faith common to all, and the guidance for conduct that follows from it.

The cure for this calamitous situation is neither fantastic nor artificial, but extremely natural. It lies in the people of Christendom adopting the superior understanding of life that was revealed to them nineteen centuries ago and which is still relevant to the present age, together with the guidance for conduct that flows from it: in other words the Christian teaching in its true meaning.

Chapter 1

One of the most obtuse superstitions is the superstition of educated people is that a human can exist without faith.

True religion is the establishment of a relationship between man and the infinite life that surrounds him, and which binds his life to this infinity and guides his actions.

If you feel that you have no faith, you must understand that you are in the most dangerous position in the world, in which only man can find himself.

People can, and do, live the rational and harmonious life natural to man only when they are united by their understanding of the meaning of life; in other words by a shared understanding of the meaning of life that satisfies the majority of people equally, and in the guidance for conduct that follows from it. But when the inevitable happens (which must happen since the explanation of the meaning of life and the resulting guidance for conduct is never finalized but becomes continually clearer) – when it happens that the understanding of the meaning of life, having become more precise and definite, demands a code of conduct that differs from before, while the life of the people, or of nations, continues as before, then their lives become discordant and impoverished. And the disparity and impoverishment continue to increase so long as the people fail to assimilate a religious comprehension and code of conduct appropriate to their times, but continue living according to guidance originating from a former, now outdated, understanding of life, and moreover try to adopt a religious outlook appropriate to the times by inventing an artificial understanding of life that might justify their way of life, but which no longer corresponds to the spiritual demands of the majority of them.

This has been repeated many times in history, but never, I believe, has there been such discord between people's way of life and their outdated religious explanation of life's meaning and resulting guidance for conduct, as there is now among the Christian nations who have not accepted the Christian

doctrine revealed to them in its true meaning, but who live and continue to live their previous pagan existence.

I think this discord in the life of the Christian nations is particularly great because the explanation of the meaning of life that Christianity brought to men's consciousness went far beyond the lifestyle of those who adopted it. The consequence of this was that the resulting guidance for conduct was too contradictory, not only to people's habits, but to the whole mode of life of the pagan nations who accepted the Christian teaching.

This led to the striking disparity, immorality, impoverishment and folly of the way of life of the Christian nations.

It arose because the men of the Christian world, having accepted beneath the guise of Christianity a Church teaching which in its basic tenets differs from paganism only in its lack of sincerity and artificiality, very soon ceased to believe in the teaching and did not replace it with another. Thus the people of Christendom, having systematically liberated themselves from belief in the distorted Christian teachings, have finally reached the position in which they now find themselves wherein the majority of people have no explanation of the meaning of life: in other words, no religion, faith or common code of conduct. The largest section of the people, the working class, while externally following the old Church religion, no longer believe in it and are no longer guided by it; they simply cling to it out of habit, tradition and a sense of propriety. However on the whole the minority, the so-called educated classes, have either consciously ceased to believe in anything, or pretend, as some do, to believe in Christianity for political motives, or like the minute minority, sincerely believe in a teaching that is incompatible with life and lags behind it, and try to justify it through all sorts of complicated sophistries.

This is the chief and singular cause of the persisting state of misfortune in which today's Christian nations find themselves. The miserable situation is worsened by the fact that, since this state of non-belief has already persisted for such a long time, the members of the Christian world for whom the position of non-belief is advantageous (all the ruling classes) either unscrupulously pretend to believe in something they do not believe in and

cannot believe in, or else (and this is particularly true among the most corrupt of them, the scholars) they openly preach that the people of our time have absolutely no need of any explanation of the meaning of life, or of faith, or of any code of conduct resulting from it, and that the only fundamental law of life is the law of evolution and struggle for existence, and therefore human life should and must be guided only by human passions and desires.

The reason behind the misery of the people of the Christian world is the unconscious lack of faith of the masses, and the conscious denial of faith by the so-called educated people of the world.

Chapter 2

‘Man possesses a certain tendency to believe that he is not seen when he sees nothing, like children who close their eyes in order not to be seen.’
(Lichtenberg)

People of our times believe that the absurdity and cruelty of our lives, with the insane wealth of few and the embittered poverty of the majority, and the arms and wars, is seen by no one and that nothing prevents us from continuing such a life.

Wrong does not cease to be wrong because the majority share in it.

People of the Christian world, having accepted under the guise of Christian teaching a perversion of it compiled by the Church, which replaced paganism and at first partially satisfied people by its new forms, have ceased with time to believe in this perverted Church Christianity, and have finally reached the point where they are left without any kind of religious understanding of life, or guidance for conduct resulting from it. And since, without this understanding of life and behavioural guidance common, if not to all, then to the majority of people, human life is bound to be irrational and wretched, the longer such an existence continues among the peoples of the Christian world, the more irrational and wretched their life becomes. And today life has reached such a level of irrationality and wretchedness that it cannot continue in its previous forms.

The majority of the working people, deprived of land and consequently of the possibility of enjoying the fruits of their labor, hate the landowners and capitalists who hold them in servitude. The landowners and capitalists, knowing how the workers feel about them, fear and detest them and hold them in servitude with the help of organized governmental force. And as the situation of the workers continues to deteriorate, their dependence on the rich increases; and as the rich grow richer their power, fear and loathing of the working populace increases in equal proportion. And there is the same steady increase in the arming of nation against nation, and the expenditure of more

and more of the servile worker's labor on land, water, submarine and air forces, with the sole purpose of preparing for international wholesale killings. And these killings has been, and are, committed, and cannot but be committed, since all the Christian peoples (not individually, but as nations) are united in States that hate both one another and the other non-Christian States, and are prepared to attack one another at any moment. Moreover, there is not one large Christian State which, following some unnecessary patriotic tradition, does not hold one or several smaller nations in its power against their will, compelling them to participate in the life of the larger State they hate: Austria, Prussia, England, Russia, France, with their subject nations: Poland, Ireland, India, Finland, Caucasus, Algeria, etc. Thus, apart from the growing hatred between poor and rich and between the large nations, there is an ever-increasing hatred between the oppressed nations and their subjugators. What is worst of all is that all this hatred, which is so contrary to human nature (as for instance between the larger nations and between the subjected and the subjugators), is not only not condemned like all other malicious sentiments between people, but, quite the opposite, it is praised and elevated as laudable service and virtue. The hatred of the oppressed workers for the rich and powerful is extolled as love of liberty, brotherhood and equality. The hatred of the Germans for the French and the English, and of the English for the Yankees, and of the Russians for the Japanese, etc., and vice versa, is considered the virtue of patriotism. Likewise, and even more highly valued, is the patriotic hatred the Poles have for the Russians and Prussians, and the Prussians for the Poles and Finns, and vice versa.

That is not all. All these expressions of malice do not even demonstrate that the life of the Christian nations cannot continue in this direction. These evil sentiments could be incidental, temporary phenomena if among these nations there were some kind of religious guiding principle shared by all. But there is not; there is nothing even resembling a common religious guiding principle among the Christian nations of the world. There is the lie of Church religion, and not just one but various different ones contending with one another: the Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran and so forth; there is the lie of science, again, several different ones contending with one another; there is the lie of politics on both an international and a party level: there are the lies of art, of

traditions and customs. There are a great many widely differing lies, but there is no guidance, no moral guidance, stemming from a religious outlook on the world. And the people of the Christian world live like animals, guided in life by nothing other than personal interests and mutual strife; and they are only differentiated from animals by the fact that since time immemorial animals have kept the same stomachs, claws and fangs, while humanity moves, ever more rapidly, from dirt roads to railroads, from horses to steam, from spoken sermons and letters to the printing press, telegraph and telephone; from sailing boats to ocean liners; from side arms to gunpowder, cannons, machine guns, bombs and bomber planes. And life with telegraphs, telephones, electricity, bombs and aeroplanes, and with enmity between all peoples, who are guided not by some unifying spiritual principle but by alienating animal instincts, and who use intellectual faculties for their own pleasure, is becoming more and more futile and calamitous.

Chapter 3

‘Those who think that there is no other way of governing people than by force, disregarding their reason, do to people what is done to horses by blinding them in order to make them walk around the circle more submissively.

Why does man have reason if he can only be influenced by violence?

The right for violence is not a right, but a simple fact which can only be a right when it does not meet with protest and opposition. It is like the cold, darkness and weight, which people had to put up with until recently when warmth, illumination and leverage were discovered. All human industry is liberation from the power of raw nature; progress in justice is nothing other than a series of limitations to which the tyranny of the mighty must be subjected. Just as the purpose of a medicine is in victory over a sickness, the essence of goodness is in victory over the blind brutality and the unbridled lust of man-beast. In the same way, I always see one and the same law, i.e. growing liberation of a personality and the ascent of the whole creature during its life toward goodness, justice and wisdom. Greedy avarice is the point of departure; rational magnanimity is the point of achievement.’
(Amiel)

‘From the fact that it is possible to submit people to justice by force, it certainly does not follow that it would be just to submit people to violence.’
(Pascal)

Violence produces something only resembling justice, but it distances people from the possibility of living justly, without violence.

The majority of people in the Christian world feel the increasing wretchedness of their condition and, employ the only means of salvation that, according to their conception of life, they consider effective. This method is the use of violence exerted by some over others. Some people, who consider the existing order to be advantageous to themselves, try to maintain this order

through the use of political measures, while others use the violence of revolutionary activity to try to destroy the existing order and erect another, better one in its place.

There have been many revolutions and many suppressions of revolutions in the Christian world. The external forms have altered but the essential structure of the State – the power of a few over many, the corruption, the lies, the fear of the ruling classes for the oppressed, the submission, enslavement, torpor and embitterment of the masses – even if altered in form has not only not diminished in reality, but has noticeably increased and is still increasing. What is now happening in Russia shows particularly clearly not just the aimlessness but the manifest perniciousness of employing violence as a means of uniting people.

In recent times all the newspapers have produced less and less news of things like where and how such and such a cash-box was robbed, assassinations of constables, officers and policemen, discoveries of plots and so on; but in all of them one finds, with increasing frequency, news of executions and death-sentences.

For the last year or two they have been shooting and hanging people ceaselessly; thousands have been strangled and shot. There are also thousands who have been killed and blown apart by revolutionary bombs; but, since the number who have recently been killed by the rulers has grown larger and larger, and the number killed by the revolutionaries smaller and smaller, the ruling classes are triumphant and feel they have won and can now resume their usual way of life, upholding deceit through violence, violence through deceit.

The essence of the mistake of all political doctrines, from the most conservative to the most advanced, which has led people to this unfortunate situation, lies in the fact that the people of this world have considered, and still consider, that it is possible, through violence, to unite people in such a way that everyone submits, without resistance, to the same structure of life and guidance for conduct that results from it. It is understandable that people, yielding to passion, might employ forcible methods in order to make

opposing people do what they want. One can use force to drag a person to a place he does not want to go to. (Like animals, people always behave in this way when they are under the influence of passion.) And this one can understand, but the reasoning that says that violence can be a means of provoking people to behave in the way we want them to is incomprehensible.

All violence consists in some people forcing others, under threat of suffering or death, to do what they do not want to do. And therefore those who are coerced will only do that which they do not wish to do while they are weaker than the tyrants and cannot avoid doing it from fear of the threats for not fulfilling what is demanded. As soon as they grow stronger they naturally not only cease to do what they do not want to do, but, embittered by the struggle against their oppressors and everything they have had to suffer from them, they first free themselves from the tyrants, and then, in their turn, force their opponents to do what they regard as good and necessary. It would therefore seem evident that the struggle between oppressors and oppressed cannot unite people but, on the contrary, the further it progresses the further it divides them. It would seem so obvious it would hardly be worth mentioning if it were not for the fact that the age-old lie that violence exerted by some over others can be useful to men and unite them had not been so popularized and accepted mutely as the most unquestionable truth, not just by those for whom violence is profitable, but by the majority of those very people who have suffered and who still suffer the most from it. This deceit has been in existence since long before Christianity, and has persisted until today in full strength throughout the Christian world.

The difference between what existed in ancient times, before the emergence of Christianity, and what goes on in today's Christian world is only that in ancient times the fact that there is no basis to the claim that violence, employed by some over others, can be useful and unifying, was completely concealed from the people; whereas today, the truth Christ expressed so clearly that violence exercised by some over others cannot unite and can only separate people has become more and more apparent. And as soon as people realize that the violence of some over others, apart from being the cause of their suffering, is irrational, those who used to bear their oppression quietly, immediately become provoked and embittered by it.

This very thing is going on right now among inhabitants of all the oppressed nations.

But it is not only the oppressed who are becoming increasingly aware of this truth; the oppressors are also becoming aware of it. Today, not even the most powerful men are convinced that they are behaving well and justly by exerting violence over others. This delusion is being destroyed for both rulers and their opponents. Both parties, although influenced by their position, try through every kind of argument to convince themselves that violence is useful and necessary, while knowing in the depth of their hearts that their acts of cruelty only achieve a semblance of what they want – and that only a temporary one which, in reality, distances them from their aims rather than drawing them closer.

And so, this awareness is becoming ever clearer to the members of the Christian world, and is inevitably leading them to the only conclusion that can help them out of their present miserable position. The way out consists in one thing: in mankind accepting the true meaning of Christ's teaching, which has been concealed from them and which is still unknown to the majority of people, together with the guidance for conduct that flows from it and which excludes violence.

Chapter 4

‘When among one hundred men, one rules over ninety-nine, it is unjust, it is a despotism; when ten rule over ninety, it is equally unjust, it is an oligarchy; but when fifty-one rule over forty-nine (and this is only theoretical, for in reality it is always ten or eleven of these fifty-one), it is entirely just, it is freedom!’

Could there be anything funnier, in its manifest absurdity, than such reasoning? And yet it is this very reasoning that serves as the basis for all reformers of the political structure.’

‘The nations of the earth are trembling and shaking. Everywhere one feels some kind of active force that seems to be preparing for an earthquake. Never before has man held so great a responsibility. At each moment he undertakes more and more important tasks. There is a feeling that something great is about to happen. Before Christ’s appearance the world was awaiting a great event, but nevertheless failed to accept Him when He arrived. Likewise nowadays the world might experience the birth pangs before His second coming and fail to understand what is happening.’ (Lucie Mallory)

‘And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body.’ (Matt. X, 28)

Today the States of the Christian world have not only reached but have surpassed the limit which the States of the ancient world attained before their downfall. This can be seen particularly clearly because in our times every step forward in technical progress not only fails to advance the common well-being but, on the contrary, shows with increasing clarity that all this progress can only increase people’s misery and can in no way diminish it. Yet other new devices might be invented for transporting people from one place to another, submarine, subterranean, aerial and spatial, as well as new methods of disseminating speech and thought; but, since the people travelling from one place to another are neither willing nor able to commit anything but evil, the thoughts and words being spread will incite men to nothing but evil. As

for the increasingly perfected means of exterminating one another, means which increase the possibility of slaughter without putting the user at risk, they only point more clearly to the impossibility of the Christian nations continuing their activities in the present direction.

Life among the Christian nations is now dreadful, particularly on account of the absence of any kind of unifying moral principle, and the irrationality which, despite all the intellectual advances, degrades them to a moral plane beneath the animals; and, more especially, on account of the complexity of the established lie which hides people from the misery and cruelty of their lives.

The lie supports the cruelty in life, the cruelty demands more and more lies and, like snowballs, they both grow without restraint. But there is an end to everything. And I believe that the end to this calamitous situation of the nations of the Christian world has now come.

The position of the people of Christendom is dreadful, but at the same time it is something that had to happen and could not but have happened, and which must inevitably lead these nations to salvation. The sufferings experienced by the people of the Christian world result from the lack of a religious outlook pertinent to our times and are the inevitable conditions of growth which must lead to people adopting a religious attitude that does correspond to the age.

The world outlook relevant to our times is the understanding of the meaning of life and resulting guidance for conduct that was revealed in its true meaning in the Christian doctrines nineteen hundred years ago, but which has been concealed from men by the artificial and false distortions made by the Church.

Chapter 5

‘From the moment when the first members of the Church Councils said: “We believe in the Holy Spirit”, that is to say, placed external authority above internal, and considered the pitiful deliberations of Councils to be more important and holier than that which is truly sacred to man: his reason and conscience – from that moment commenced the lie which lulls man’s body and soul, and which has murdered millions of human beings and continues its dreadful deeds to this day.’

‘In 1682 in England, Doctor Leighton, an honourable gentleman who wrote a book against the Episcopate, was condemned and sentenced to the following punishment. He was cruelly flogged, his ear was then sliced off, one half of his nose split and then the initials for Disseminator of Trouble were branded on his cheek with a hot iron. Seven days later he was flogged again, although the scars had not yet healed, the other side of his nose was split, the other ear sliced off, and the other half of his cheek branded. All this was done in the name of Christianity.’ (John Morrison Davidson)

‘Christ founded neither a Church, nor a State; he handed over no laws, nor government, nor any form of external authority; but he tried to write the law of God in the hearts of men in order that they might govern themselves.’
(Hubert Newton)

The peculiarity of the position of today’s Christian nations is that they have founded their life on a teaching which in its true meaning destroys that life; and this hitherto concealed meaning is beginning to come to light. The Christian nations built their house not on sand but on ice. And the ice has begun to melt, has already melted, and the house will collapse.

While the majority of people, deceived by the doctrines of the Church, had only a vague understanding of the true meaning of Christ’s teaching, and instead of worshipping their former idols worshipped Christ-God, His Mother, the Saints, bowed to relics and icons, believed in miracles, the sacraments, the Redemption and the infallibility of the Church hierarchy, the

pagan structure of the world could be maintained and could satisfy people. All men alike believed in the explanation of the meaning of life which the Church gave them, and in the guidance for conduct that followed from it, and this faith drew people together. This is how it was until people noticed what was hiding behind the Church faith which had been given to them as the truth. But the misfortune of the Church faith was the existence of the Scriptures, which even the Church recognized as sacred. Despite the efforts made by the Church to conceal from people the essence of the teaching revealed in the Gospels, neither the prohibition of their translation into languages more accessible to the people, nor the false interpretation of them, could extinguish the light filtering through the deceit of the Church and illuminating men's souls as they grasped the enormous truth of the teaching with ever-increasing clarity.

With the spread of literacy and the printing press people began to discover the scriptures and to understand what was written in them, and could no longer, despite all the manoeuvres of the Church, avoid seeing the contradiction staring them in the eye between the political structure supported by the Church and the Gospel teachings. The Gospels directly denied the authority of both Church and State.

And this contradiction became more and more evident until people ceased to believe in the Church religion, and continued, only out of habit, propriety, and partly fear of the authorities, to hold on to the external forms of the Church religion: Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant alike, while no longer recognizing the inner religious significance.

This is what has happened to the overwhelming majority of the working people. (I am not speaking of the small communities of people who have openly rejected the Church teaching and established their own one, more or less approximating to the true meaning of the Christian teaching, because their numbers are so insignificant in comparison with the vast masses of the people who are increasingly liberating themselves from any kind of religious consciousness.)

The same thing has happened with the non-laboring, educated people of the

Christian world. Even more lucidly than the simple folk these people perceived the complete bankruptcy and the inner contradictions of the Church teaching and quite naturally rejected it. But at the same time they were unable to recognize the true teaching of Christ, since this teaching goes against the whole existing order, and more importantly against their exclusively privileged position in it.

Thus it is that in the Christian world of today some people – the vast majority – live, outwardly fulfilling the Church rites out of habit, formality, convenience, fear of the authorities, or other self-interested aims, but without believing in the teaching of the Church, for having already seen its inner contradiction they can no longer believe in it. Others, who constitute a continually increasing section of the population, no longer accept the existing religion and, under the influence of a teaching they call ‘science’, consider any religion to be a vestige of superstition; they are guided in life by nothing other than their personal instincts.

To people who embraced a religious teaching that was superior to their capacities (such as the Christian teaching was to the pagans who adopted it at a time when social life, in the form of a coercive political regime, was already deeply embedded in the current morality and customs), what happened, which at first seems contradictory, was inevitable. Namely, as a result of having accepted the most advanced religion of their times, they found themselves devoid of any religion, and their moral and spiritual state sank lower than that of those who professed much inferior, and very much cruder, religious beliefs.

Chapter 6

‘The Church’s perversion of Christianity has distanced us from the realization of the Kingdom of God; but, Christian truth, like fire on dry wood, has consumed its outer layer and burst forth. Everyone can see the significance of Christianity, and its influence is already stronger than the deceit which conceals it.’

‘I can see a new religion, based on trust in man, appealing to untouched depths within us, believing that we can love good without any recompense, and that the divine principle exists in man.’ (Solter)

‘What we need, what the people need and the age demands, in order to find a way out of the murk of egoism, doubt and negation in which it is immersed, is a faith in which our souls can cease to wander in pursuit of personal ends and can move forwards in unison, recognizing one source, one law, one end. Any strong belief that springs up from the ruins of the old, worn-out religions will modify the existing order, since all strong beliefs invariably accompany any offshoot of human activity.

In different formulas and different degrees, mankind repeats the words of the Lord’s prayer: “Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven”.’ (Mazzini)

‘It is impossible to weigh or measure the evil that results from false belief. Religion is the establishment of a relationship between man and God and the universe, and the definition of man’s purpose that results from it. What would man’s life be like if this relationship and resulting definition were false?’

‘It is not sufficient to discard the false faith, that is the false relationship to the universe. It is still necessary to establish a new one.’

The tragedy of the situation of the people of the Christian world consists in the fact that, owing to an unavoidable misunderstanding, the Christian nations adopted as their own a religious teaching which in its true meaning most clearly negated and destroyed the whole social structure of life by

which they were living and without which they could not imagine life.

In this lies both the tragedy of the situation and the great, exclusive blessing of the Christian nations.

In the distorted manner in which the Christian teaching was presented to the pagan peoples it appeared to them simply as a slight modification of their crude conceptions of divinity, presenting a much higher conception of man's purpose and the moral demands made of him. However, the real significance of the teaching was concealed from them by complex dogmas and attractive, hypnotic rituals to such an extent that they did not even suspect it. And yet, the true significance of this teaching was not only clearly expressed in the Gospel texts, accepted by the Church as divine revelations and inseparably connected with the Church's distorted teaching; but this meaning was so natural and akin to the spirit of mankind that despite being buried under false and distorted dogmas, those who were more sensitive to the truth began, with increasing frequency, to adopt the teaching in its true meaning and to perceive, with ever greater clarity, the contradictions between the existing order of the world and the true Christian teachings.

This contradiction was recognized in the Middle Ages, and even in ancient times, by the Fathers of the Church: Tatian, Clement, Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactancius and others. In modern times it has become still clearer and has been expressed in the large number of sects who rejected political structures that contradicted Christianity with their invariable accompaniment of violence, as well as in all the various humanistic teachings that do not even call themselves Christian, for example: Socialism, Communism, Anarchism, – ideas that are spreading very rapidly at the moment and which are really nothing other than partial manifestations of Christian consciousness in its true sense, denying violence.

The fact that the world's Christian nations adopted, in a hidden, perverted form, a teaching which in its real meaning must inevitably destroy the order of life in which they live and from which they do not wish to part is the cause of the suffering of the peoples of Christendom. Their great blessing was that, having adopted Christianity in its distorted form, which nevertheless included

a truth concealed from them, they are now brought to the inevitable necessity of accepting the Christian teaching in its true, rather than distorted, meaning; this true meaning has become increasingly clear to them and is now quite apparent, and it is this alone that can save people from the wretched situation in which they find themselves.

Chapter 7

‘The main reason for our poor social structure is false belief.’

‘We must pay the greatest attention to our public affairs; we should be prepared to change our minds, to renounce our old views and adopt new ones. We should cast prejudices aside and argue with a completely open mind. A sailor who raises the same sail regardless of changes in the direction of the wind will never reach his port.’ (Henry George)

We should understand Christ’s teaching, openly and simply, and the horrible deceit in which each and every one of us lives will become clear.

It is becoming more and more evident in our age that the true significance of the Christian doctrine is that the essence of human life is the evergrowing manifestation of the source of everything, indicated in us through love; and, therefore, that the essence of human life and the highest law governing it is love.

The fact that love is a necessary and happy aspect of human life was recognized by all the ancient religious beliefs. In all the teachings of the Egyptian sages, the Brahmins, the Stoics, the Buddhists, Taoists and others, amicability, pity, mercy, charity and love in general are considered the chief virtues. In the most superior of these teachings this recognition reached the point where love towards every living thing was advocated, and even recompense of good for evil, as is taught by the Taoist and Buddhist religions in particular. But not one of these doctrines made this virtue the basis of life, a supreme law that should be not only the chief, but the only, guiding principle in people’s conduct, as did the most recent religion: Christianity. In all the pre-Christian doctrines love was regarded as one of the virtues, but not as that which the Christian teaching acknowledges it to be: metaphysically the origin of everything, practically the highest law of human life, i.e. that which under no circumstances admits of exception. Compared to all the ancient teachings Christianity is neither new nor different; it is simply a more clear and precise expression of the basis of human life that was felt and

vaguely expounded by previous religions. In this respect the peculiarity of the Christian teaching lies only in the fact that, being the last, it uses greater precision and clarity to express the essence of the law of love and the guidance for conduct that must follow from it. And thus the Christian teaching on love is not, as in former doctrines, merely a teaching about a certain virtue, but it is a definition of the supreme law of human life and the guidance for conduct that inevitably follows from it. Christ's teaching clarifies why this is the highest law in life, and at the same time it indicates a series of actions which men must either commit or not commit as a consequence of accepting this teaching as the truth. The Christian dogma states very clearly that since it is the supreme law its fulfilment cannot admit any exceptions, as former teachings did, and that the love which defines these laws is only love when it admits no exceptions and when it is applied equally to foreigners, to all sectarians, and likewise to the enemies who hate us and wrong us.

The step forward achieved by the Christian teaching, as well as its most important significance and virtue, lay in the explanation of why this law is the supreme law of human life, and the precise definition of the actions which must follow from it.

The explanation of why this law is the supreme law of life is expressed with particular clarity in the Epistle of St John: 'Beloved let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loves is born of God and knows God... No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us... God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God and God in him.' (I John, IV, 7,8,12,16) and: 'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loves not his brother abides in death' (I John, III, 14).

The teaching amounts to saying that what we call 'our self', or our life, is really the divine principle, limited in us by our body, and manifesting itself as love, and that therefore the true life of each man, divine and free, expresses itself as love.

The guidance for conduct that follows from this understanding of the law of

love that admits no exceptions is expressed in many parts of the Gospels, and with particular clarity and precision in the fourth commandment of the Sermon on the Mount: 'You have heard that it hath been said: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth [Ex., XXI, 24]. But I say unto you, That you resist not evil' is said in verse 38 of the fifth chapter of St Matthew's gospel. In verses 39 and 40, as if foreseeing those exceptions which might appear necessary when the law of love is applied to life, it is clearly and definitively stated that there are, and can be, no circumstances when it is permissible to deviate from the very simple and vital requirement of love: not to do to others that which you would not have them do to you: '... but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.'

In other words, violence performed against you can never justify violence on your part. This inadmissibility of justifying transgressions of the law of love on account of behaviour from others is expressed even more clearly and exactly in the last commandment of the Sermon on the Mount, which makes a straightforward reference to the usual false argument used to justify breaking the law: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love your neighbour and hate your enemy' (Leviticus, XIX, 17–18), 'But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you; That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans do the same? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the publicans do so? Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' (Matt., v, 43–8)

It is this recognition of the law of love as the highest law of human life, and the clearly expressed guidance for conduct that follows from the Christian teaching on love, applied equally to enemies and those who hate, offend and curse us, that constitutes the peculiarity of Christ's teaching. The precise and definite meaning given to the doctrine of love and the guidance resulting from it inevitably involves a complete transformation of the established structure of life, not only among Christian nations, but among all the nations

of the world.

In this lies the principal difference between the former teachings and the chief significance of the Christian teaching in its true meaning; and it is this that comprises the step forward in human consciousness achieved by the Christian doctrine. This step is based on the fact that all the former religious and moral teachings on love, while compelled to admit the virtue of love in human life, yet allowed the possibility of certain situations whereby the fulfilment of the law of love ceased to be obligatory and could be suspended. And as soon as the law of love ceased to be the highest, immutable law of human life, all its beneficence disappeared, and the teaching of love was reduced to eloquent homilies and words which were non-obligatory and left the whole way of the life of the nations as it was before the doctrine of love appeared: that is based on violence alone. But the Christian teaching in its true meaning, recognizing the law of love as supreme, and permitting no exceptions in its application to life, ruled out any form of violence and consequently could not but condemn the whole structure of the world founded on violence.

And this chief significance of the teaching was hidden from people by false Christianity, which acknowledged the law of love not as the supreme law of human life, but in the manner of the pre-Christian teachings – as just one of the rules of conduct which it is useful to observe when there is nothing to prevent one from doing so.

Chapter 8

‘The wretchedness of war and military preparation not only fail to comply with the reasons presented in their justification, but for the most part these reasons are so insignificant that they are unworthy of consideration and are quite unknown to those who die in war.’

‘People are so accustomed to maintaining the external order of life by violence that they cannot conceive of life being possible without violence.

Moreover, if men employ violence to establish an outwardly just life, then the people who establish this sort of life must know what justice is and be just themselves. If some people can know what justice is and are able to be just, why cannot everyone know it and be just?’

‘If people were completely virtuous they would never digress from the truth.

The truth is only dangerous to those who commit evil. Those who do good love the truth.’

‘Reason is often the slave of sin; it strives to justify it.’

‘It is sometimes astonishing to see a person defending very strange, irrational propositions, whether they are religious, political or scientific. Look further and you will discover that he is defending his own position.’

The true meaning of Christ’s teaching consists in the recognition of love as the supreme law of life, and therefore not admitting any exceptions.

Christianity (i.e. the law of love not admitting any exceptions) that does permit the use of violence in the name of other laws, presents an inner contradiction resembling cold fire or hot ice.

It would seem evident that if some people, despite recognizing the virtue of love, can admit the necessity of tormenting or murdering certain people for the sake of some future good, then others, by just the same right and also

acknowledging the virtue of love, can claim the same necessity in the name of some future good. Thus it might appear obvious that the admission of any kind of exception to the requirements of fulfilling the law of love diminishes the whole significance, meaning and virtue of this law which lies at the basis of all religious doctrines and teachings on morality. It seems so obvious that one might be ashamed at being asked to prove it; nevertheless the people of Christendom, both believers and non-believers who still acknowledge the moral code, regard the teaching on love that opposes all violence (especially the doctrine of non-resistance to evil that follows from the law of love) as something fantastic, impossible and totally inapplicable to life.

One can see why those in power say that without employing violence there can be no order, or decent life, meaning by the word 'order', that structure of life wherein the minority can indulge in excess through the labor of others, and by 'decent life', the lack of any impediment to leading such a life. However unjust what they say is, one can see that they are able to speak thus because the suppression of violence would not only deprive them of the possibility of living in the way they do, but would expose all the age-old injustice and cruelty of their life.

One might think the working populace do not need the violence which, surprising as it may seem, they employ so systematically against one another, and from which they suffer so badly. For the violence the rulers do to the oppressed is not the direct, spontaneous violence of the strong over the weak, or the majority over the minority, one hundred over twenty, etc. The violence of the rulers is upheld in the only way the violence of the minority over the majority can be: by the fraud which cunning, quick-witted people established long ago, as a consequence of which people, for the sake of small but instant gain, deprive themselves not only of greater profits but of freedom, and expose themselves to the most cruel sufferings. The essence of this fraud was stated as far back as four centuries ago by the French writer La Boëtie in his article 'Voluntary Slavery'. This is what he says about it:

'It is not weapons, not armed men – cavalry and infantry – that defend tyrants, but, however hard to believe, three or four men support a tyrant and keep the whole country in servitude to him. The circle of people closest to the

tyrant has always consisted of five or six men. These men have either wormed their way into his favour, or been chosen by him, in order to be the accomplices of his cruelty, the companions of his pleasure, and to share in his robberies. These six have six hundred in their power who behave towards the six as the six behave towards the tyrant. The six hundred have six thousand beneath them, whom they have elevated to the position and appointed to govern the provinces and handle financial affairs on the condition they serve their avarice and cruelty. And these are followed by a still larger retinue. And anyone who wishes to get to the heart of the matter will see that there are not just six thousand, but hundreds of thousands, even millions, chained to the tyrant by these links. Thanks to this there is an increase in the number of public functionaries, and this supports the tyranny. And all those who are engaged in this service also profit by it themselves, and by these profits are bound to the tyrant; and the number of people for whom tyranny is advantageous is so plentiful that they approach in number those who would welcome freedom. As the doctor says, if there is something poisonous in our bodies all the bad juices will pour into the unhealthy spot, and it is just the same with governance: as soon as a tyrant is created he gathers all the rotten wastes of the State around him – all the gangs of thieves and good-for-nothings who are unequipped to do anything but are simply self-interested and grasping, assemble in order to participate in the booty, and to become petty tyrants under the chief one.

Thus the tyrant enslaves some of his people through others who, if they were not good-for-nothings, he would fear. But, as they say, ‘in order to chop wood, they take wedges of the same wood’. Similarly, his retainers must be of the same type as those from whom they protect him.

They sometimes suffer at his hands, but these God-forsaken, lost souls are prepared to endure all evil so long as they are in a position to inflict it in their turn – not on those who inflict it on them, but on those who cannot do anything except endure it.’

This lie is now so firmly rooted in the nation that those very people who only suffer from the use of violence justify it and even demand it as if it were something essential to them, and they inflict it on one another. The result of

this habit of deception, now become second nature, is the astonishing human delusion whereby the people who suffer the most from the deception are the ones who support it.

One would think it would be the working people, receiving no advantage from the violence exercised over them, who would eventually see through the deceit in which they are entangled and, having once done so, free themselves in the most simple and easy way: by ceasing to participate in the violence which can only be done to them by virtue of their participating in it.

It would seem so simple and natural for the working people, particularly the agricultural workers, who in Russia, as in the rest of the world, form a majority, to finally understand that they have for centuries been suffering from something they have brought upon themselves to no advantage; that the chief cause of their sufferings is that the land is owned by people who do not work on it, and this is upheld by them themselves acting as watchmen, village constables and soldiers; and that all the taxes demanded of them, both directly and indirectly, are collected by them themselves, as village elders, tax-collectors and, again, as policemen and soldiers. It would seem such a simple thing for the working people to realize this and to finally say to those they regard as their leaders: 'Leave us in peace! If you, emperors, presidents, generals, judges, bishops, professors and other learned men need armies, navies, universities, ballets, synods, conservatoires, prisons, gallows and guillotines, do it all yourselves: collect your own taxes, judge, execute and imprison among yourselves, murder people in war, but do it all yourselves and leave us in peace because we need none of it, and we no longer wish to participate in all these useless, and above all evil deeds!'

What could be more natural than this? And yet, the working people, more especially the agricultural workers for whom none of it is necessary, do not do so, either in Russia or in any other country in the world. Some of them, the majority, continue to torment themselves, fulfilling government demands that run counter to their own needs by becoming policemen, tax collectors or soldiers; while the others, the minority, trying to escape violence, inflict it, at any given revolutionary opportunity, on those from whose violence they suffer; in other words, they stifle fire with fire, and only achieve an increase

in the violence used against themselves.

Why do people act so irrationally?

Because, as a result of the perpetuated deception, they can no longer see the connection between their oppression and their participation in violence.

Why do they not see the connection?

For the same reason that accounts for all human misery: because they lack faith and without faith people can only be guided by self-interest, and a person guided only by self-interest cannot do otherwise than deceive or be deceived.

And this leads to the apparently surprising phenomenon that, despite all the evident advantages of violence, despite the fact that the deceit in which the working classes are entangled has become so evident today, despite the obvious exposure of the injustices from which they suffer, despite all the revolutions aimed at the extermination of violence, the working people, the vast majority of the population, not only submit themselves to violence but continue to support it and, contrary to common sense and their own interests, commit acts of violence against each other.

Some of the working people, the vast majority, continue out of habit to cling to the old, false Christian teaching of the Church while no longer believing in it but only in the doctrine of 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth', and the political structure based on it. The other section, the factory workers who have been touched by civilization (especially in Europe) deny all religion and yet in the depths of their souls they unconsciously believe in the ancient law of 'an eye for an eye', and following this they submit, although hating it, to the existing regime when they can see no alternative. When they see an alternative they attempt to exterminate violence through the most diverse violent means.

The first, the great majority of the uncivilized workers, cannot alter their position, because professing belief in the political structure they cannot refrain from participating in violence; the civilized working people, who have

no faith and who follow nothing but various political doctrines, cannot free themselves from violence because they try to exterminate it with violence.

Chapter 9

‘The savage instinct of military murder has been so carefully cultivated and encouraged over the course of a thousand years that it has dug deep roots in the human brain. One must hope, however, that a humanity better than ours will manage to free itself from this dreadful crime. But what will this superior humanity think of the so-called refined civilization which we are so proud of? Almost the same as we think of the tribes of ancient Mexico with their cannibalism, who are at once war-like, pious, and bestial.’ (Letourneau)

‘War will only be annihilated when people cease to have any share in violence, and are prepared to suffer all the persecutions they will bring upon themselves for doing so. This is the only way to annihilate war.’ (Anatole France)

‘Ask the majority of Christians what they consider the greatest evil from which Christ freed humanity and they will say: from Hell, from eternal fire, from punishment in the next world. As a corollary to this they think that salvation is something that someone else can achieve for us. The word hell, sparingly used in the Scripture, has done much harm to Christianity as a result of false interpretations. People run away from external hell which they are made to fear most of all. The salvation that man needs most and that which gives him freedom is redemption from the evil within his soul. There is something far worse than external punishment. It is the sin of the soul being in rebellion against God; the soul, endowed with God’s strength, yielding itself to the force of bestial instinct; the soul which lives in the sight of God, yet fears the threats and fury of men, preferring human glory to its own peaceful awareness of virtue. There is no disaster worse than this. And it is this that the unrepentant person carries with him to the grave. And it is this we ought to fear.

To gain salvation, in the highest meaning of the word, means to raise the fallen spirit, cure the sick soul, give it back its freedom of thought, conscience and love. In this lies the salvation for which Christ died. It is for this salvation that we have been given the Holy Spirit, and it is towards this

salvation that the Christian teaching is directed.’ (Channing)

‘It seems so easy to tell the truth, yet it takes a great deal of inner strength to do so.

The level of a person’s honesty is an indication of the level of his moral perfection.’

This is how it has been for a long time among the non-Christian and the Christian world alike, and continues even today. But I believe that now, at precisely this moment, after the pitiful, pointless Russian revolution, and more especially after the extremely impertinent and senseless cruelty of the manner in which it was suppressed, Russians, who are less civilized than the other nations, i.e. less corrupt intellectually, and still adhering to a vague concept of the idea of the Christian teaching, Russians, who for the most part are the agricultural workers, will finally understand where the means of salvation lie and be the first to make use of it.

A military tribunal is being held in a provincial town. There is a table and on the table a mirror with a two-headed eagle over it and an inscription stamped beneath; there are also legal texts and neatly arranged sheets of paper with printed headings. At the table, in the seat of honour, sits a rotund man in military uniform with galloons and a cross around his neck; he has an intelligent face, expressing good nature, and is looking especially kindly at the moment having just had lunch and received reassuring news of his child’s health. Next to him is another officer, of German origin, displeased with his appointment and reflecting on the report he will give to the chief. In the third seat is an extremely young officer, a dandy, a convivial-looking fellow who, while lunching at the colonel’s table, cracked a witty joke that amused everyone. He is recalling the joke and smiling, almost noticeably. He is longing to smoke and waiting impatiently for the interval. At a separate table sits the secretary. Before him is a pile of papers in which he is totally absorbed so as to be ready to hand over the required paper as soon as the chief demands it.

Two young men, one a peasant from the Province of Penza, the other a petty

bourgeois from the town of Lubin, both dressed as soldiers, bring in a third man, very young and also dressed in a soldier's greatcoat. This young man is pale. He glances around once at his tribunal and then fixes his gaze ahead. He has already spent three years in prison for refusing to take the oath and perform military service. In order to be rid of him after these three years he has been offered the chance to take the oath and then be released on the grounds that like a soldier he has spent three years in service, albeit in prison. But the young man has stated in church the same as he said before the assembly: that as a Christian he can neither take the oath, nor be a murderer. On this occasion he is being tried again for his new refusal. The secretary reads the document called the indictment. It states that the young man has refused to receive his pay and that he considers military service sinful. The good-natured chairman asks: 'Do you plead guilty?' 'I have done and said all that is stated here but I do not consider myself guilty,' the young man answers in a faltering, trembling voice.

The chairman nods his head as an indication that the reply is in order; he then glances at the document and asks: 'How do you explain your refusal?'

'I have refused, and still do because I consider military service sinful,' he falters. 'It is against Christ's teaching.'

The chairman is satisfied by this and nods his head approvingly. Everything is in order.

'Have you anything further to add to your statement?'

With a trembling lower lip the young man talks of how it is written in the Gospels that it is forbidden not only to kill but to hold bad feelings towards one's fellow men.

The chairman approves of this too. The German frowns disapprovingly, and the young officer listens, with his head and eyebrows raised, as if hearing something new and interesting.

The accused, becoming more and more flustered, states that the oath is straightforwardly forbidden and that he would consider himself guilty unless

he refused, and that he is now ready...

The chairman stops him, considering that the accused is speaking unnecessarily and failing to keep to the point.

After this the witnesses are summoned: the colonel of the regiment and a sergeant-major. The colonel of the regiment is the chairman's usual bridge partner and a great devotee and master of the game. The sergeant-major is an agile, good-looking, obliging Pole of noble birth, and a passionate reader of novels. A priest enters too, an elderly man who has just taken leave of his daughter, his son-in-law and his grandchildren, who have been staying with him; he is feeling upset after a quarrel with his wife on account of his having given their daughter a carpet which his wife did not wish to give away.

'Would you be so kind, Father, as to swear the witnesses in, and to remind them of the sinfulness of giving false witness before God,' asks the chairman, addressing the priest.

The priest puts on a stole, picks up a crucifix and a bible, and gives the usual words of admonition. Then the colonel takes the oath. He swiftly raises two clean fingers (fingers that are very well known to the chairman, who follows them in card games), and repeats the words of the oath after the priest, then he kisses the crucifix and the bible with a smack of the lips, as if he were enjoying himself. After the colonel, the Catholic priest enters and swears in the sergeant-major with equal rapidity.

The court waits calmly and seriously. The young officer, who has just been out for a quick smoke, arrives back in time for the testimony of the witnesses.

The witnesses testify to what has been said by the accused. The chairman expresses approval. Then the officer who has been sitting apart stands up: he is the prosecutor. He walks up to the desk, shuffles around the papers lying on it and begins speaking loudly, recounting everything the young man has done, which the whole court already knows, and which the young man has just expounded himself without any attempt to conceal the reason for which he is accused, but, on the contrary, increasing the grounds for conviction. The prosecutor declares that the accused, as he himself admits, does not belong to

any religious sect, that his parents are Orthodox believers and, therefore, his refusal to fulfill his military service has no grounds other than obstinacy. He declares that this obstinacy of the accused and of other mistaken, recalcitrant people like him has forced the government to the decision of taking severe punitive measures against such types, and that these measures should, in his opinion, be used in this instance. Then follow a few unnecessary words from the defence. They all go out. Then the accused is led in again, followed by the court. The judges sit down and immediately stand up again and the chairman, without looking at the accused, reads the decision of the court in a quiet, even voice: the accused, a man who has already served three years for not letting himself be called a soldier, is firstly deprived of his military title and of various rights and privileges, and secondly, sentenced to four years imprisonment in a penal battalion.

After this the young man is led out under escort and all the participants resume their usual occupations and entertainments, as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened.

Only the young man, the keen smoker, feels some peculiar, disturbing sensation which he cannot get rid of, while he is haunted by the memory of the strong, noble, indisputable words the condemned man expressed with such emotion. During the adjournment this young man had wanted to disagree with the decision of his elders, but stopped short, swallowed his words, and agreed.

In the evening at the colonel's home, during the interval between rubbers, everyone gathered around the tea table and the conversation turned to the recalcitrant soldier. The commander expressed his clear opinion that the reason for it all was lack of education: 'They snatch hold of all kinds of ideas but they do not know what to do with them and it leads to all this nonsense.'

'No, Uncle, I do not agree with you,' a female student, a social democrat and a niece of the colonel, broke in. 'One should respect the energy and staunchness of the man. One must only regret that this strength is falsely directed,' she added, thinking about how useful these stoical people would be if only they defended the scientific truths of socialism, rather than outdated

religious fantasies.

‘Come now, you’re a confirmed revolutionary,’ said her uncle, smiling.

‘And it seems to me,’ said the young officer who never stopped smoking, ‘that from the Christian point of view there is nothing to contradict him!’

‘I don’t know about points of view,’ said an old general sternly, ‘I only know that a soldier must be a soldier and not a preacher.’

‘In my opinion the most important matter of all,’ said the chairman of the tribunal, his eyes sparkling, ‘is that if we want to play six rubbers, we mustn’t waste precious time.’

‘If anyone wants more tea, I will serve it at the card table’, said the hospitable host, and one of the players, with an adept and practised gesture, spread his cards like a fan. And the players took their seats.

At the entrance to the prison, where the escort with the recalcitrant prisoner awaited the instructions from the officials, a conversation ensued.

‘How come the priests don’t know?’ said one of the escorts. ‘If it isn’t in the books, that’s maybe why.’

‘It must be that they don’t understand,’ answered the prisoner. ‘If they understood they would say the same thing. Christ did not instruct us to kill, but to love.’

‘That must be so. But it’s a strange thing and a hard thing moreover.’

‘There’s nothing hard in it. Here I am locked away, and about to be shut up again, yet my soul feels so good I wish everyone felt the same.’

A middle-aged administrative officer approached. ‘Well, Semeonovitch,’ he addressed the prisoner with respect, ‘sentenced?’

‘Yes, I’m sentenced.’

The officer shook his head, 'Well, there it is, but it's hard to put up with.'

'But one must do it,' answered the prisoner, smiling and visibly touched by the sympathy.

'That's the way it is. Our Lord endured and He asked us to, but it's hard.'

As he spoke these words, the handsome Polish sergeant-major entered with quick, dashing steps.

'Stop all the chattering, march to the new prison!'

The sergeant-major was particularly fierce because he had been ordered to make sure that the prisoner did not talk to the soldiers. During the last two years he had been in prison he had perverted four men with whom he had come into contact; they had similarly refused to take the oath, been tried and were now serving sentences in various prisons.

Chapter 10

‘The Christian revelation was the teaching stating the equality of men, that God is the Father and that all men are brothers. It struck to the core of the monstrous tyranny which suffocated the civilized world; it shattered the slaves’ chains and annihilated the enormous injustice whereby a small group of people could live in luxury at the expense of the masses, and ill-treat the so-called working classes. This is why the first Christians were persecuted and why, once it became clear that they could not be suppressed, the privileged classes adopted it and perverted it. It ceased to be the celebration of the true Christianity of the first centuries and to a significant extent became the tool of the privileged classes.’ (Henry George)

‘The Church’s perversion of Christianity has distanced us from the realization of the Kingdom of God; but Christian truth, like fire on dry wood, has consumed its outer layer and burst forth. Everyone can see the significance of Christianity, and its influence is already stronger than the deceit which conceals it.

I can see a new religion based on trust in man, appealing to untouched depths within us, believing that we can love good without any recompense, and that the divine principle exists in man.’ (Solter)

‘Do not think that Church Christianity was an incomplete, one-sided, formal view of Christianity, but nevertheless Christianity. Do not think this, for Church Christianity is the enemy of true Christianity and stands in relation to true Christianity as a criminal caught in the act. It must either destroy itself, or continue to commit new crimes.’

What the recalcitrant soldier said at his trial has been said long ago, since the first appearance of Christianity. The most sincere and fervent Fathers of the Church said the very same thing about the incompatibility of Christianity with one of the fundamental and unavoidable conditions of the existing political structure: the army. For a Christian cannot be a soldier and cannot be prepared to murder anyone he is ordered to.

The Christian community of the first to the fifth centuries A.D. categorically declared, through its leaders, that Christianity forbids any murder, including murder in war.

In the second century the philosopher Tatian, a convert to Christianity, declared that killing in war was inadmissible for Christians, as was any kind of murder, and he regarded the honoured military wreath as an obscenity for a Christian. In the same century Athinagoras of Athens stated that not only must Christians themselves not kill, but they must not be present at any scene of murder.

In the third century Clement of Alexandria contrasted the ‘warrior-like pagans’, with the ‘peaceful race of Christians’. But it was the renowned Origen who most clearly expressed the Christians’ dislike of war. Applying to the Christians the words of Isaiah, who said that a time would come when people would beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks, Origen says firmly: ‘We will not raise arms against any other nation, we will not practise the art of war, because through Jesus Christ we have become the children of peace.’ Replying to the accusation made by Celsus against the Christians who refused military service (for in the opinion of Celsus the Roman Empire would collapse if it became Christian), Origen says that Christians fight more than others for the sake of the Emperor, but they do it through good deeds, prayers, and by setting a good example to others. As for armed combat, Origen quite rightly says that a Christian will not fight in the Emperor’s armies, not even if the Emperor forced them to.

Tertullian, a contemporary of Origen, expressed himself equally decisively on the impossibility of Christians becoming soldiers. He said of military service: ‘It is not fitting to serve the emblem of Christ and the emblem of the devil, the fortress of light and the fortress of darkness. One soul cannot serve two masters. And how can one wage war without the sword which the Lord himself has taken away? How can it be possible to practise using the sword when the Lord has said that anyone who takes up his sword will perish by the sword? How can a son of peace participate in combat?’

The celebrated Cyprian said: ‘The world is going mad in mutual bloodshed.

And murder, which is considered a crime when people commit it singly, is transformed into a virtue when they do it en masse. The offenders acquire impunity by increasing their ravaging.’

In the fourth century Lactancius said the same thing: ‘There must not be any exception to God’s commandment that it is always a sin to kill a person. It is not permitted to bear arms, for our only weapon is the truth.’

In the rules of the third century Egyptian Church, and in the so-called ‘Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ’, it is absolutely forbidden for any Christian to enter military service, under pain of excommunication from the Church. In the lives of the Saints there are a number of examples of Christian martyrs of the early centuries who suffered on account of their refusal to enter military service.

Thus Maximilian, having been brought to the office of military conscription, answered the Proconsul’s first question as to what his name was, thus: ‘My name is Christian and therefore I cannot fight.’ Despite this statement he was enrolled as a soldier, but refused to serve. It was explained to him that he must choose between his duty to perform military duties and death. He said, ‘I had better die, for I cannot fight.’ He was handed over to the executioner.

Marcellus was a soldier in the Legion of Troy. Believing in the teaching of Christ and the fact that warfare is an anti-Christian activity, he took off his military decorations in front of the whole legion, threw them on the ground and explained that having become a Christian he could no longer serve. He was imprisoned, but while in prison he still said: ‘A Christian cannot bear arms.’ He was executed.

After Marcellus, Cessian, who belonged to the same regiment, refused to serve. He too was executed.

Under Julian the Apostate, Martin, who had been brought up in a military environment, refused to continue his service. Under examination from the Emperor he simply said: ‘I am a Christian and therefore I cannot fight.’

At the first Ecumenical Council in 325 it was clearly stated that there would

be a severe penance for Christians who rejoined the army having left it. The original words of this resolution, in the translation recognized by the Orthodox Church, are as follows: ‘Called by grace to the profession of faith and expressing their first fit of anger by removing their military girdles, they then go back, like dogs to their vomit... and these people prostrate themselves before the Church for ten years, begging forgiveness as they listen to the readings of the Scriptures from the porch.’

Christians who remained in the army were instructed not to kill the enemy in time of war. Even in the fourth century Basil the Great recommended that soldiers guilty of breaking this decree be banned from communion for three years.

Thus, not only in the first three centuries at a time of Christian persecution, but even after Christianity had triumphed over paganism and was adopted as the prevailing State religion, the Christians still held the conviction that war is incompatible with Christianity. Ferrucius said this quite explicitly and decisively, and was executed for doing so: ‘Christians are not allowed to shed blood, even in a just war, or at the order of Christian rulers.’ In the fourth century Lucifer, Bishop of Calaris, taught that even the most precious blessing of the Christian – his faith – must be defended, ‘not by killing others, but by one’s own death’. Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, who died in 431, threatened with eternal torment those who served Caesar with weapons in their hands.

This is how it was during the first four centuries of Christianity. Under Constantine the cross had already appeared on the standard of the Roman Legions. In 416 a decree was issued forbidding pagans to join the army. All the soldiers became Christians: that is, all the Christians, with only a few exceptions, renounced Christ.

Over the course of the subsequent fifteen centuries, the simple, indubitable and evident truth, that the professing of Christianity is incompatible with readiness to commit any kind of violence, even murder, at the will of others, has been so concealed from people, and has so weakened the sincerity of the Christian religious sentiment, that for generation after generation people,

nominally professing Christianity, have lived and died, permitting murders, participating in murders, committing them and profiting by them.

Thus the centuries went by. As if mocking Christianity the Crusades were embarked upon. The most dreadful crimes were performed in the name of Christianity and those few people who had clung on to the basic principles of Christianity and did not permit violence – the Manicheans, Montanists, Cathars and others – only incited the majority of people to despise and persecute them.

But the truth, like a flame, slowly burns through the wrappings concealing it, and from the beginning of the last century it has become ever more apparent to people, and whether they like it or not it has caught their attention.

This truth has manifested itself in many places, but especially noticeably in Russia at the beginning of the last century. There were probably very many examples that have occurred, leaving no trace.

Only some of them are known to us.

Chapter 11

‘Among people living evil lives, every step in the direction of goodness invokes persecution rather than love.’

‘True bravery in battle is natural for him who knows that God is his ally.’

‘In the world you shall have tribulation: but cheer up: I have overcome the world.’ (John, XVI, 33)

‘Do not await the fulfilment of the divine cause you serve; but know that none of your efforts are fruitless, for they all advance the cause.’

‘The most important and necessary human deeds, for both doer and recipient, are those of which he does not see the results.’

In the year 1818 a governor-in-chief of the Caucasus, Moraviev, noted in his diary that five serfs had been sent from the Tambov region to the Caucasus because when they were conscripted they refused to serve. They were flogged several times with a knout and chased down the gauntlet, but they would not give in and kept saying: ‘All men are equal, the Tsar is a man like the rest of us; we will not obey, we will not pay taxes and, above all, we will not kill our fellow men in war. You can tear us to pieces but we will not give in. We will not put on military greatcoats, we will not eat soldiers’ rations, we will not be soldiers. We will take alms, but we do not want any money from the government.’

Men of this kind were flogged to death, exterminated in prison, and everything about them was carefully hidden; but over the course of the last century their number has been steadily increasing.

Thus, ‘in 1827, two guardsmen, Nikolaev and Bogdanov, in order to avoid military service, fled to a small monastery of sectarians that had been established in the woods by a merchant called Sokolov. When they were caught they refused to serve in the army, saying that it was incompatible with

their beliefs; they also refused to take the oath. The military authorities decided to punish them for this by making them run the gauntlet and then sending them to a penal battalion.’

‘In 1830 an unknown man and woman were arrested by the local police in Poshehonsk region in the province of Yaroslav. On examination the man explained that he was called Egor Ivanov and that he did not know where he came from, and that for sixty-three years of his life he had had no father other than Christ the Saviour. His wife made the same declaration.

‘During the priest’s admonition in the local court, the two added that other than the one Heavenly Sovereign there was no other, and that they did not acknowledge the Tsar, nor any other established civil or spiritual authority. When he was interrogated in the court of law Egor Ivanov repeated that he was seventy years old, that he did not acknowledge civil and spiritual authorities and that he considered them transgressors of the commandments of the Christian religion. Egor Ivanov was banished to the Solovetski monastery to be put to work, but for some reason he was kept in jail, where he remained until his death in 1839. He died firm in his delusions.’

‘In 1835 an unknown person, calling himself simply Ivan, was arrested in the Province of Yaroslav. He declared that he did not recognize the saints, the Tsar, or any authority. He was sent to Solovetski monastery to be employed as a workman in the summer months. In the same year he was sent to the army by Imperial order.’

‘In the year 1849 a peasant recruit from the region of Moscow, Ivan Shurupov, aged nineteen, refused to take the oath despite every sort of coercion. The motive behind his refusal was that, in the words of God, he must serve only God alone, and he therefore did not wish to serve the Tsar, nor to take the oath of allegiance, for fear of being a perjurer. The authorities, reasoning that if Shurupov was tried and the case became known it would cause damage, decided to confine him in a monastery. The Emperor Nikolai Pavlovitch inscribed the following resolution on Shurupov’s report: “Remove the above-mentioned recruit, under guard, to the Solovetski monastery.”’

These are some of the reports that went into print concerning individual cases – about one thousandth of those Russians who realized the impossibility of reconciling the professing of Christianity and obedience to the political authorities. In the last century there were entire communities, with many thousands of members, who recognized the incompatibility of Christ's teaching and the existing order, and a great many still exist today: the Molokans, Jehovahists, Klisti, Skoptsi, Old Believers and many others, all of whom for the most part conceal their non-recognition of political authority, but regard it as the product of the source of evil: the devil. In the last century the Doukabars, numbering tens of thousands, were particularly noteworthy and powerful in their straightforward denial of political authority. Despite all the persecutions, several thousands stuck to the truth and emigrated to America. The number of people who have realized the incompatibility of Christianity and obedience to the government has continually increased; in our time, and especially since the government created the most blatant contradiction to Christ's teaching by demanding compulsory military service for all, the conflict between people of Christian belief and the political structure appears ever more frequently.

Thus, in very recent times, more and more young people are refusing military service and prefer to endure all the cruel torments to which they are subjected, rather than betray God's commandment, as they understand it.

I happen to know of dozens of people in Russia who have suffered severe persecution on account of their faith, and others who are even now in prison. Here are the names of some of those who have been persecuted: Zalubovsky, Lubitch, Mokev, Druzhin, Izumchenko, Olkovitch, Farafanov, Ganja, Akulov, Tchaga, Cherchouk, Burov, Goncharenko, Sakharov, Tregubov, Volkhov, Koschavoi. And in prison now: Ikonikov, Kurtish, Varnavsky, Orlov, Mokri, Molosai, Kudrin, Panshikov, Siksni, Debriabin, Kalachev, Bannov, Makrin.

I know of similar people in Austria, Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria. There are a very large number in Bulgaria. Moreover, in recent times, refusals made on the same grounds have begun to occur in the Muslim world: among the Babids in Persia, and among the so-called 'Legion of God' here in Russia,

recently founded in the Kazan.

The ground for these refusals is always the same, the most natural, inevitable and incontrovertible. It is the recognition of the necessity of following the religious commandments, above and before the State laws, when the two conflict. The State law demanding military service, or in other words the readiness to kill at the command of others, cannot but be contrary to any of the religio-moral laws that are always based on love of one's neighbour. This is the same in all religions, not just Christianity, but Mohammedanism, Buddhism, Brahmanism, Confucianism.

The very precise definition of the law of love, that does not permit any exclusions, revealed by Christ nineteen hundred years ago, is recognized today by morally sensitive people of all faiths, no longer as a result of following Christ, but through spontaneous awareness.

This is the only means of salvation.

It looks at first as if refusals to perform military duties are isolated instances relating only to military service, but this is not the case. These refusals are in fact not just occasional acts, evoked by particular circumstances; they are the result of genuine and sincere observance of religious teachings. And this kind of observance naturally destroys the entire structure of life based on principles that are incompatible and contradictory to it. It destroys the structure, because if those who understand that participation in violence cannot be reconciled with Christianity did not become soldiers, tax collectors, judges, jury, policemen, or officials of any kind, the violence from which people now suffer would clearly not exist.

Chapter 12

‘When you can say in all truth and with your whole heart: “My Lord, my God, do with me as you will”, only then will you free yourself from slavery and become completely free.

A free man is only master of what he can master without impediment. And the only thing we are entirely free to master without impediment is ourselves. Therefore, if you see a person wishing to control not himself but others, you know that he is not free: he has become a slave of his desire to dominate people.’ (Epictetus)

But what can the hundreds, thousands, let us say hundreds of thousands of insignificant, powerless, isolated people do against the vast number of men who are bound to the State and equipped with all the powerful weapons of violence? The struggle seems not only unequal but impossible, and yet the outcome of this struggle is as little in doubt as the outcome between the struggle between the darkness of night and the light of dawn.

One of those young men imprisoned for refusing military service wrote the following:

‘Sometimes I get the chance of talking to the soldiers from the guardroom and I always smile sincerely when they say to me: “Hey lad, it’s no good spending the whole of your youth in prison.”

“It’s all right. Isn’t the end the same for everyone?” I reply to them.

“Well that may be so, but it wouldn’t be so bad if you’d serve in the regiment.”

“But my life here is more peaceful than yours in the regiment,” I say.

“So it may be. But it’s no good for you. You’ve spent four years here and if you’d been in the army you’d have been home long ago. Goodness knows when you’ll go free now,” they say ironically, laughing at me.

“Well suppose I’m all right here,” I say. They shake their heads and give it some thought. “It’s odd.”

‘The same kind of conversation goes on between myself and my cellmates, who are soldiers. One Jewish soldier says to me: “It’s astonishing. You put up with so much yet you’re always cheerful and alert.”’

‘And when any one of my cellmates starts feeling dispirited and depressed the others say to him: “Look at you. Before you’ve had time to sit down you start pining. Look at the old dad here (as they call me on account of my little beard), look how long he’s been here and he still keeps cheerful!”’

‘And thus, bit by bit the conversation builds up between us. We chatter away about nothing, or sometimes about serious matters, God, life, or whatever interests us. Or else one of us talks about his life in the country and then how good I feel, just listening. On the whole I really don’t do too badly here.’

This is what another writes:

‘I could not say that my inner life is always the same; there are moments of exhaustion and moments of joy.

‘At the moment I am feeling fine, but it still takes a lot of courage to look triumphantly at all the things that constantly happen in prison life. You try to penetrate to the depths of things and to persuade yourself that all this is but a moment in time, and you have been given more strength than is needed in the situation, and then joy lights up your heart again and you forget about everything that has happened. Thus life continues in this inner struggle.’

And a third writes:

‘I was tried on 28 March and sentenced to five years, five months and six days in prison. You would not believe how relieved and cheerful I felt after the trial: it was like the relief one feels after a heavy burden has been removed. I felt so light-hearted and bold after the trial, I wish I could feel as good forever!’

On the other hand the spiritual state of those who employ violence, submit to it, and participate in it is completely different. Instead of experiencing the natural and inherent feeling of love for their fellow men, all these millions of people carry only feelings of hatred, blame and fear towards all humanity, with the exception of the small circle of like-minded people to which they belong. They suppress all their human feelings to such an extent that murdering fellow men seems to them to be a necessary condition of well-being in life.

‘You talk of the cruelty of executions, but what else can we do with the scoundrels,’ say conservative-minded people today in Russia. ‘In France things only calmed down after they had cut off goodness knows how many heads. Let them stop making and throwing bombs and we will stop hanging them.’

With the same inhuman cruelty the revolutionary leaders demand and desire the death of the government, and the revolutionary workers and peasants demand the death of the capitalists and landowners.

These people know that they are not behaving as men should behave, they are afraid, and tell lies and try to bring evil upon themselves in order not to see the truth. They stifle the truth that exists within them and which appeals to them, and they suffer, unceasingly, from the most cruel of all torments: the sufferings of the soul.

Some know that they are doing something that is natural to all people, which constitutes the aim towards which humanity is moving and which inevitably results in good, both for the individual and for the collectivity. Others, as much as they try to hide it from themselves, know that what they are doing is unnatural to man and against human nature, and is something from which humanity is continually withdrawing. They know that what they do creates suffering for the individual, for the collectivity and most of all for the person who is doing it. On the one hand is awareness of lack of freedom, fear and reticence; on the other freedom, peace and honesty. On the one hand, lack of faith, on the other, faith; on the one hand lies, on the other the truth; on the one hand hatred, on the other, love; on the one hand the age-old torments of

the past, on the other the incipient joys of the future. Thus what doubt can there be as to which side victory belongs to?

The irresistible truth was stated by the now deceased French writer when he wrote this wonderfully inspired letter: 'Spiritual force has never engaged man, has never exerted so much influence over him, as today. It has, so to speak, filled the air the world breathes. Those few individual spirits who lived in isolation and wished for social regeneration have sought it bit by bit; they have sought one another out, beckoned to each other, approached one another, united, understood one another and formed a group, a centre of attraction towards which other souls now fly from the four corners of the earth, just as larks fly towards a mirror. Thus they have formed a general collective soul in order that the men of the future may jointly realize, consciously and irresistibly, the impending union and steady progress of nations that were recently enemies of each other. I find and recognize this new spirit in phenomena which seem most likely to refute it.

'The arming of all nations, the threats made between government leaders, the re-emergence of racism, the enmity between fellow countrymen, and even the puerility of the events at the Sorbonne are really phenomena that look ominous but augur well. They are the final convulsions of something that is about to pass. The illness in this instance is the energetic attempts of an organism to free itself from a fatal element.

'Those who have profited and who hope to profit for ever more from the errors of the past are uniting in order to prevent any change. The results of all this are the armaments, threats and prosecutions; but if you look more carefully you will see that it is all superficial. It is colossal but empty.

'The spirit has gone: it has moved elsewhere. All these millions of armed men who practise daily in preparation for a universal war of extinction no longer hate those whom they must fight, and not one of the leaders has the courage to declare war. Recriminations can already be heard rising up from below and, recognizing their claim to justice with a great and sincere compassion, something above is already beginning to respond to them.

‘Mutual understanding inevitably approaches at an appointed time and it is far closer than we suppose. I do not know if this is because I am about to depart from the world and the light emanating from beyond the horizon has already clouded my vision, but I believe our world is entering an epoch where the words “Love one another” will be accepted without arguments about whether it was a man or a God who spoke them’ (Dumas, fils).

Only by fulfilling the law of love in its true rather than limited meaning, i.e. as the supreme law that does not admit any exceptions, can one find salvation from the terrible, increasingly disastrous, and apparently hopeless situation of the Christian nations today.

Chapter 13

The social conditions of life can only be improved by people exercising self-restraint.

It is said that one swallow does not make a summer, but can it be that because one swallow does not make a summer another swallow, sensing and anticipating summer, must not fly? If every blade of grass waited similarly summer would never occur. And it is the same with establishing the Kingdom of God: we must not think about whether we are the first or the thousandth swallow.

Live your life fulfilling God's will and you will know for sure that it is only by following this path that you most fruitfully enhance the overall improvement of life.

The crushing heaviness of evil is weighing down on men. The people standing beneath this weight are becoming more and more crushed by it, and are searching for a means of freeing themselves from it.

They know they can lift the weight and throw it off through joint effort; but they cannot agree to do it all together. Everyone is sinking lower and lower, leaving the weight to rest on someone else's shoulders; the weight is pressing on people more and more heavily and would have crushed them long ago if it were not for people who are guided not by concerns of the consequences of their outer acts, but by the inner accord of their acts with the call of their conscience. These kind of people are, and always have been, Christians because instead of setting themselves an external goal which needs the cooperation of others to be achieved, they set themselves an inner goal, which requires cooperation from no one else and which is the essence of Christianity in its true meaning. And this is why salvation from the enslavement in which the men of today find themselves is impossible for most of them, and can be, and is, achieved only through Christianity, by substituting the law of violence for the law of love.

‘The general purpose of life cannot be fully known’, says the Christian teaching, ‘and you only imagine that it is a continual approach towards universal well-being and the realization of the Kingdom of God. The purpose of your personal life is most certainly known to you and consists of the realization in yourself of the greatest perfection of love, which is necessary to the realization of the Kingdom of God. And this aim is always known to you and is always attainable.

You may not know the best individual external aims, there may be obstacles in the way of achieving them, but the approach to inner perfection and the increase of love within yourself and others cannot be stopped by anyone or anything.

A person only needs to set himself, instead of the false, external, social aim, the one true, irrefutable, and attainable inner aim of life for all the chains, by which he seemed so indissolubly bound, to fall apart, and he will feel perfectly free...

A Christian is not bound by civil law because he has no need of it, either for himself or for others, since he considers human life better provided for by the law of love which he professes, than by a law maintained by violence...

For a Christian who has recognized the demands of the law of love, not only the demands of the law of violence can't be obligatory, but they are always seen as human errors which must be exposed and abolished...

The profession of Christianity in its true meaning, including non-resistance to evil, frees men from all external power. But it not only frees them from external power, it also gives them the possibility of attaining those improvements of life which they vainly seek through altering the external forms of life.

People think that the improvement of their condition is achieved by changes in life's external forms, yet changes in life's external forms are always a consequence of shifts in consciousness; life is only improved to the extent to which this change is based on modified consciousness.

All external changes of life's forms that are not founded on shifts in consciousness not only fail to improve people's situation but, by and large, worsen it. It was not government decrees that abolished child-beating, torture and slavery, but a change in people's consciousness that called for the necessity of these decrees. And life is only improved as far as it is based on changes in consciousness; that is, to the extent that in people's consciousness the law of violence is exchanged for the law of love. People think that if a shift in consciousness influences the forms of life, it must also work the other way, and since it is more pleasant, easy and the effect more apparent, to direct energy at external changes, they always prefer to direct their energy not at changing consciousness but at changing forms. Therefore for the most part they are preoccupied not with the essential matter, but with some semblance of it. The external, vain and useless activity based on establishing and adapting the external forms of life shields people from the essential inner activity, which alone can improve their lives. And this superstition, more than anything else, hinders the general improvement of people's lives.

A better life can only come when the consciousness of men is changed for the better; and therefore, those who wish to improve life must direct all their efforts towards changing both their own and other people's consciousness.

Christianity in its true meaning, and only this kind of Christianity, frees people from the slavery in which they find themselves today, and it is only this that affords men the possibility of genuine improvement in both their personal lives, and life in general.

It would seem obvious that only true Christianity, excluding violence, gives salvation to each individual person and provides the possibility of improving the overall life of humanity. But people could not accept this until life under the law of violence has been fully tasted, and until the field of delusions, cruelties and sufferings had been explored in every direction.

“The fact that Christ's teaching has been known to man for nineteen hundred years, and yet has only been adopted in its external forms,” is often cited as the most convincing proof of the falsity and especially the impracticability of Christ's teaching. People say: “If it has been known for so long and has still

not become the guiding force in people's lives, if so many martyrs and professed Christians have died in vain, without having transformed the existing order, this clearly indicates that the teaching is untrue and impracticable.”

To think this and say it is much the same as saying that if seeds that are sown fail to blossom and give fruit, but lie in the soil and rot, this proves that the seed is not genuine and fertile, and should, and must, be trampled underfoot.

The fact that the Christian teaching was not adopted in its full meaning at the time of its appearance, but was only adopted in its external, perverted aspects, was both inevitable and necessary.

A doctrine that undermined the entire existing order of the world could not have been accepted at the time of its appearance, but could only have been accepted in an external, distorted form.

The great majority of people at the time were in no position to understand Christ's teaching by following the spiritual path alone. It was necessary to bring them to an understanding of it by experiencing the truth, that all deviations from the Christian teaching are disastrous, and by learning this the hard way.

The teaching was adopted in the only form it could be: as an external worship of deity that replaced paganism, while life continued further and further along the heathen path. But this perverted teaching was inextricably bound to the Gospels and, despite all their efforts, the priests of false Christianity could not conceal from people the essence of the teaching which, against their will, gradually revealed itself to men, and entered their consciousness.

Over the course of eighteen centuries this dual trend has continued: the positive and the negative. On the one hand is the ever-increasing alienation of man from the possibility of a good and reasonable life; on the other, the ever-increasing elucidation of the true meaning of the teaching.

And today this process has reached the point where the Christian truth, formerly only recognized by a few, endowed with a keen religious sentiment,

has been made accessible, in some of its aspects, to even the simplest people, through the doctrines of the Socialists; and yet life contradicts this truth at every step in the most crude and obvious way.

The condition of our European humanity, with its private landowners, taxes, clergy, prisons, guillotines, fortresses, cannons, dynamite, millionaires and beggars, looks truly terrible. But it only appears so. In truth, all these things, all these horrors that are happening now, as well as those we await, are things that we do and are prepared to do ourselves. And this must cease. In order to conform to human consciousness this must not be so. For power does not lie in the forms of life but in human consciousness. And human consciousness is in an extremely tense condition, drawn between two opposite poles, full of screaming contradictions. Christ said that He conquered the world, and indeed He did. Evil, however dreadful it is, no longer exists, because it no longer exists in people's consciousness.

The growth of consciousness proceeds at an even pace rather than in leaps and bounds, and it is never possible to pin-point the feature that separates one period of existence from another, although that feature exists, just as there is a dividing line between childhood and youth, winter and spring, etc. If there is no definite dividing line, there is a transitory period. And it is this sort of transitory period that mankind is passing through at the moment. Everything is ready to make the transition from one condition to another. Only a slight push is needed in order to complete the change. And this push could be given at any moment. Society's awareness has already rejected the former way of life and has long been ready to adopt the new one. Everyone alike knows and feels this. But the inertia of the past and timidity of the future can sometimes create a situation whereby what has long been consciously known takes a while to be put into practice. At such moments one word is sometimes enough for consciousness to be consolidated: that all important force in human life – public opinion – may suddenly turn the existing order inside out without struggle or violence...

The salvation of men from oppression, enslavement and ignorance will not be achieved through revolutions, nor through trade unions or world congresses, but through the simplest way: by every single person who is called upon to

participate in violence over his fellow men and his own self recognizing the true spiritual "I" within himself, and asking in amazement, "Well, why should I do that?"

It is neither revolutions, nor the cunning, clever Socialist and Communist structures of unions, arbitrations, etc., that will save mankind, but only when this spiritual awareness becomes widespread.

It is really only necessary for man to rouse himself from the hypnosis that shields him from the true Christian vocation in order for him not only to refuse to comply with the demands the government makes of him, but to feel terrible surprise and indignation at the fact of these demands being made.

"And this awakening can occur at any moment," - this is what I wrote fifteen years ago. Today I can boldly write that this awakening is taking place. I, with my eighty years, know that I will not see it, but as surely as I know that spring follows winter and day follows night, I know that the time has come for Christian humanity.

Chapter 14

The human soul is Christian by nature. Christianity is always perceived by people as something forgotten and suddenly remembered... Christianity raises man to a height revealing a world of happiness, governed by the law of reason. The feeling on discovering the truth of Christianity is similar to that experienced by a man who has been locked in a dark, stuffy tower and then climbs to the highest platform on the battlements, from where he can see a beautiful world he has never seen before.

The realization of submitting to human law is enslaving; the realization of submitting to God's law is liberating.

One of the certain conditions of man's undertaking is the fact that the further away the goal of our strivings, and the less we desire to see the fruits of our labor ourselves, the greater and wider the extent of our success will be. (John Ruskin)

The most important and necessary work both for the man performing it and for others is that of which he will not see the results.

'This may all be so, but in order for men to free themselves from the way of life founded on violence, in which they are entangled and trapped, it is necessary for all men to be religious: that is, prepared for the sake of fulfilling God's law to sacrifice their bodily and personal welfare; and to live for the present, not for the future, striving for the present only to fulfill the will of God, revealed to them through love. But the people of our world are not religious, and therefore cannot live in this way.'

This is what people are saying today, as if suggesting that religious consciousness, or faith, is a condition unnatural to man, as if it is something exceptional that must be taught and instilled in him. But this is only said by people who, as a result of a particular condition of the Christian world, are temporarily lacking in the most essential and natural condition of human life: faith.

Such an objection is similar to that made by a person who objects to the necessity of work as a necessary condition of human welfare by saying that in order to work one must have the strength to do it. But what about those who are so unaccustomed to work that they cannot, do not know how to, or do not have the physical strength to do it?

Just as work is not something artificial, contrived and ordained by man, but is something unavoidable, without which man cannot live, the same is true of faith, that is to say the awareness of one's relationship to the Infinite, and the guidance for conduct that results from it. This kind of faith is not something artificial and exceptional that is taught, but on the contrary, it is the most natural feature of human nature, without which man, like a bird without wings, has never, and could never, live.

If we today, in our Christian world, see people lacking in religious awareness (or more strictly speaking, not lacking, but with an obscured religious awareness), this unnatural, abnormal situation is but a temporary and fortuitous condition of the few, and results from those particular circumstances in which the people of the Christian world have lived, and are living, and is just as exceptional as the position of those who live, and are able to live, without working.

And in order for people who have lost this feeling, so inherent and essential to life, to experience it anew, they do not need to invent or establish anything, but need only to eliminate that lie which has temporarily concealed and obscured this feeling from them.

If the men of our world could only be free of the deceit of the Church doctrine, which distorts the Christian teaching, and from the justification and exaltation of a political structure based on this doctrine, which is incompatible with Christianity, then, not only for all Christians, but for all the world, the chief obstacle to religious awareness of the supreme law of love, permitting no exception and no violence, which was revealed to humanity 1900 years ago, and which now alone satisfies the demands of the human conscience, will disappear from men's souls of its own accord.

And when this law penetrates consciousness as the SUPREME law of life it will, of its own accord, bring an end to that attitude, so harmful to morality, whereby the most extraordinary injustices and cruelties people perform on one another are regarded as natural, inherently human behaviour. And that which is dreamed of, desired and promised by the Socialist and Communist regimes of future societies will come to pass, and more besides. And this will be achieved by quite different means; it will be achieved precisely because it will not be sought through the contradictory means of violence, which both the government and its opponents employ in order to achieve it. Freedom from the evil which torments and corrupts men will be attained, not by strengthening and preserving the existing regimes, monarchies, republics or whatever, nor by suppressing the existing order and instituting better Socialist or Communist ones; indeed not in any instance by a few people inventing a particular social system they consider an improvement and imposing it on others by violence. It will be attained only when each one of us (the majority of people), without thinking or worrying about the consequences to ourselves or others, conduct our lives in a particular way, not for the sake of some social organization, but simply for the sake of fulfilling, for one's own self and one's own life, the supreme law of life: the law of love that does not permit violence under any circumstances.

Chapter 15

It is far more natural to conceive of a society of people governed by reasonable, advantageous laws, that are recognized by everyone, than of the society in which people live today, obeying only violence.

The man who has not yet awoken to the truth sees political power as various sacred institutions, like the organs of a living body forming the essential conditions of life. For the man who has awakened to the truth, these people appear very mistaken, for they have attributed to themselves some kind of fantastic significance without any rational justification for it, and they fulfill their desires through violence. The awoken person also regards the lost and for the most part bribed people doing violence to other people just as highway robbers, who grab people on the road and violate them. The antiquity, scale and organization of violence cannot alter the nature of the deed. The man awakened does not believe in the thing called the State and sees no justification for all the acts of violence performed in the name of the State: therefore he cannot participate in them. State violence is eradicated not as a result of external factors, but only through the awareness of those who have woken to the truth.

Perhaps political violence was necessary to man's former existence, perhaps it is still necessary now, but people cannot help seeing, and foreseeing, a way of life where violence can only interfere with peaceful existence. And, seeing and foreseeing this, people cannot help striving to realize such an order. And the means of realizing it lie in inner perfection and non-participation in violence.

'But how can we live without a government, and without authority? People have never lived this way,' is the retort to this.

People are so accustomed to the political structure in which they live that to them it seems an unavoidable, everlasting form of human existence. But it only seems so: people have lived, and do live, outside the political structure. All the primitive peoples who have not yet reached what we call civilization

have lived and still live in this way. So also do people who have reached an understanding of life that is higher than civilization: Christian communities exist in Europe, in America and particularly in Russia, where the members have rejected the State; they feel no need of it and only put up with interference from it, when they cannot avoid doing so.

The State is only a temporary thing and in no way a permanent feature of human life. Just as the life of an individual person is not static, but is continually changing, moving forward and perfecting itself, so too the life of the whole of humanity does not cease to change, to move on and perfect itself. Each separate individual has at some point in his life drunk from his mother's breast, played with toys, studied, worked, married, raised children, freed himself from passion and grown wiser with age. And the life of a nation grows wiser and perfects itself in the same way, only not within a period of years, as with people, but over the course of centuries and millennia. As with people, the main changes occur in the spiritual, invisible realms, so too with humanity the main changes occur, first and foremost, in the invisible sphere of religious consciousness.

And just as in the individual these changes take place so gradually that it is never possible to pin-point the hour, the day or the month when a child ceased to be a child and became a youth and then a man, we nevertheless know for certain once this transition has occurred. Likewise we can never pin-point the period when humanity, or a particular part of it, has outlived one religious age and entered into another one. But just as we know that the former child has become a youth, we know that humanity, or a part of it, has outlived one period of religious growth and entered into another, higher one, once the transition has taken place.

This sort of transition from one period of human development to another is occurring today in the life of the Christian nations.

We do not know the hour when a child becomes a youth, but we know that the former child no longer plays children's games. Similarly we cannot name the year, nor even the decade, when the Christian world passed from its earlier form of life and entered another age, distinguished by its religious

awareness, but we cannot help knowing and seeing that the people of the Christian world can no longer seriously play at war games, monarchical audiences, diplomatic artifice, or at constitutions with chambers and dumas, or at party politics whether socialist-evolutionary, democratic, anarchic, or revolutionary. And, above all, we cannot continue to do all these things, basing them on violence.

This is especially noticeable now here in Russia with our outer changes in the political structure. The serious-minded Russian people can now no longer help feeling towards all the new forms of government that have been introduced, as an adult would feel if he were given a new toy, that he had not possessed as a child. However new and interesting the toy may be, he does not need it and can only regard it with amusement. This is how it is with us in Russia; it is the attitude all thinking men, as well as the vast masses of the population, have towards our constitution, the Duma, the various revolutionary parties and unions. Although it is not obvious, I believe I am not mistaken in saying that the Russian people of our time can no longer seriously believe that man's vocation in this life is to employ the short interval allotted him between birth and death in making speeches in the chambers, or to gatherings of Socialist comrades, or in judging one's neighbours in law courts, or in capturing, imprisoning and murdering them, or in throwing bombs and seizing their land; nor in worrying about whether Finland, India, Poland and Korea can be made part of what is called Russia, England, Prussia, Japan; nor in liberating these countries by force and being prepared for mass murder of one another. A man of our times cannot, in the depths of his soul, help recognizing the absurdity of all these activities.

The only reason we fail to see the full horror of the life we lead, so contrary to human nature, is because all the horrors in the midst of which we quietly live have crept in so gradually that we have failed to notice them. It befell me in the course of my life to see a neglected old man in the most dreadful state: his body was teeming with worms, he could not move a single limb without suffering, yet he did not realize the full horror of his predicament because it had crept upon him so imperceptibly. He asked only for tea and sugar. The same happens in our lives: we do not see the horror simply because the approach to the situation has been made with such quiet little steps that we do

not notice the full extent of the horror, but simply take pleasure in new cameras and motor cars, as the old man took pleasure in tea and sugar. Apart from the fact that there is nothing to lead us to suppose that the abolition of violence men use against each other and which is so contradictory to reasonable, loving human nature, would worsen rather than ameliorate the human predicament, apart from that society's present condition is so utterly dreadful that it would be hard to imagine anything worse.

Therefore, the question of whether people can live without governments is not frightening, whatever way the defendants of the existing order like to imagine it, but it is as farcical as it would be to ask a tortured man how he would live if they were to stop torturing him.

People who stand in exclusively privileged positions, as a result of the existing political structure, impose an opinion that people without government would be in tremendous strife and that everyone would be at war with everyone else. It is just as if they were speaking of the co-existence not of animals (animals live peacefully without any political coercion) but of some dreadful creatures whose behaviour is governed by nothing except hatred and madness. But they only paint people to be like this because they attribute to them qualities contrary to their nature, but which have been nurtured by that very same governmental structure under which they themselves have grown up and which they continue to support, despite its being absolutely unnecessary and harmful.

Therefore, to the question of what life would be like without government and authorities, the answer can only be that there would certainly not be all the evil which government creates. There would be no private landownership, no taxes spent on things needless to people, no division of nations, no enslavement of some by others, no more wastage of the best human resources on war preparation, no more fear of the bombs on the one hand, of the gallows on the other; and there would be none of the insane luxury of some, and still more insane poverty of others.

Chapter 16

‘We live in an age of discipline, culture and civilization, but it is still far from being a moral age. Under the present conditions people can say that the happiness of the State grows alongside the misery of the people. And there remains the question of whether we might not be happier living in a primitive condition where we would have none of our present culture.

For how can one make people happy without making them moral and good?’
(Kant)

Try to live in such a way that you have no need of violence.

We are very accustomed to arguing about how we might organize the lives of others, of humanity as a whole. And we find nothing strange in such deliberations. Whereas these sort of arguments could never exist between religious, and thereby free people. These arguments are the very results of despotism or the domination of one, or a few, over many.

This is how both despots and those perverted by them reason.

This mistake is harmful, not only because it torments and perverts those people beneath the despot’s control, but because the awareness of the necessity of reforming oneself diminishes in all men, whereas it is the only true method of influencing others. Not only has one man no right to give orders to a number of men, but neither have a number of men the right to give orders to one.’ (V. Chertkov)

‘Yes, but what form would human existence take without a government?’ ask people, who evidently think that we always know what form life will take, and in what form it will continue, and that those who have decided to live without a government must, therefore, know beforehand the form life will take. But really, we have never known and can never know what shape the future will take. The conviction that men can know and can even arrange the form of the future is really a very primitive, albeit old and widespread,

superstition. Regardless of whether or not people should submit to the government, the fact is they have never known and do not and cannot know the form their lives will take. Still less can a minority organize the lives of the rest as they please, since life never shapes itself according to the will of a few, but rather according to many complex reasons, independent of the will of any minority; the most important reason being the moral and religious condition of the majority of people within society.

The superstition that some people can not only know in advance the form that the lives of others, the majority, will take, but can also arrange this future existence, has arisen and is maintained by the wish of those exerting violence to justify their activity, and by the wish of those suffering from the violence to clarify and ease the burden of the violence they experience. Those who commit violence convince themselves, and others, that they know what must be done in order for people's lives to assume that form they consider best. And the people who suffer the violence will, until they have the strength to overthrow it, believe this, because it is only such a belief that gives some kind of meaning to their predicament.

One would think history should have destroyed this superstition entirely.

At the end of the eighteenth century a few Frenchmen maintained a despotic, monarchical structure through violence, but despite all their efforts, this structure was destroyed and replaced by a Republic. In just the same way, despite all the efforts of the Republican leaders to maintain the system, and albeit with the utmost violence, the Napoleonic Empire replaced the Republic; this in turn was replaced, against the will of its leaders, by a coalition government and not an hereditary empire. And so it went on: Charles X, a constitution, another revolution, another republic to be replaced by Louis Philippe and so on, up until the present Republic. And the same thing has occurred in all coercive human activities. All the efforts of the papacy, far from annihilating the possibility of Protestantism, provoke it. All the efforts of capitalism only strengthen the Socialist tendencies. If a political system established by force is maintained for a certain length of time, or is altered by force, it is only because at the given time certain forms ceased to be pertinent to the general condition, and more importantly to the spiritual

condition of the people, and not because someone has upheld them or reconstructed them.

And so the belief that some people, the minority, can arrange the lives of the majority – a thing that is regarded as the most indisputable truth in the name of which the greatest crimes are committed – is only a superstition. The activity founded on this superstition, the political activities of the revolutionaries as well as the rulers and their assistants, generally regarded as a most honourable and important matter, is really a most futile, and moreover harmful, human occupation and has been and still is the greatest hindrance to achieving the true well-being of humanity. Rivers of blood have been shed and are being shed in the name of this superstition, and inestimable suffering has been, and is being, endured by people on account of the ridiculous and harmful activities resulting from this superstition. And, worst of all, while rivers of blood have been and are being shed in the name of this superstition, it is precisely this that forms the greatest obstacle to society's successful creation of those particular improvements in life appropriate to our time, and to the level of development reached by human consciousness. The superstition prevents genuine progress, chiefly because people, under the pretext of preserving and strengthening, or altering and improving, social conditions, put all their energy into influencing other people, thus neglecting their own inner task of self-perfection, which alone can enhance a change in the structure of society as a whole.

Human life in its totality advances and cannot help moving forward towards the eternal ideal of perfection, only if each individual person advances towards his own, personal and unrestricted perfection.

What a frightening, destructive superstition this is, under the influence of which people ignore their inner duty, which is the only thing really necessary for their own and society's well-being, and the only thing genuinely within their power, and direct all their efforts towards arranging the lives of others (something beyond their power). And in order to attain this impossible goal they employ violent means that are certainly as harmful to themselves as to others, and which most surely alienate them from both personal and general perfection!

Chapter 17

‘Man need only divert his attention from searching for the solution to outer questions and pose the one, true inner question of how he should lead his life, and all the outer questions will be resolved in the best possible way.

We do not and cannot know what is the essence of common well-being, but we know very well that it can only be achieved through fulfilling the law of goodness that has been revealed to each person.’

‘If only instead of wishing to save the world people wished to save themselves, to liberate themselves rather than humanity, they would be doing so much more for the salvation of the world and the freedom of humanity.’
(Herzen)

In both personal and public life there is only one law: if you wish to improve life, be prepared to sacrifice it.

Go about the business of your life fulfilling God’s will and you can be certain of enhancing the overall improvement of life in the most fruitful way.

‘All that may be true, but it will only be reasonable to abstain from violence when all, or the majority of people, understand how disadvantageous, unnecessary and irrational violence is. Until this happens what can the individual person do? Should he really not defend himself? Should he really leave his life and the fates of those dear to him in the hands of evil and cruel people?’

So the question of what I should do to counteract acts of violence committed before my eyes is always based on the same primitive superstition that it is possible for man not only to know, but to organize, the future in the way he likes. For a man free of this superstition the question does not and cannot exist.

A rogue has raised his knife over his victim. I have a pistol in my hand and

kill him. But I do not know, and cannot possibly know, whether the purpose of the raised knife would have been implemented. The rogue may not have carried out his evil intention, whereas I certainly commit my evil deed. Therefore, the only thing that a person can and must do in this and similar instances is what he must always do in all possible circumstances: he must do what he believes he ought to do before God and before his own conscience. A man's conscience may demand that he sacrifice his own life but not that of another person. The same principle can be applied to the method of counteracting social evil.

Thus, to the question of what a person should do in the face of the evil committed by one, or a number of persons, the answer given by a man free of the superstition that it is possible to foresee, and to employ violence to organize, the conditions of the future, is always the same: do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

'But he steals, robs and murders, and I do not steal, rob or murder. Let him fulfill the law of reciprocity and then ask me to fulfill it,' is what the people of our world usually say, and with greater conviction the higher their social standing. 'I do not steal, rob or kill,' say the governor, the minister, the general, the judge, the landowner, the merchant, the soldier, the policeman. The superstition of a social structure that justifies all kinds of violence has clouded the consciences of today's people to such an extent that they do not see the continual, never-ending acts of theft and murder that are committed in the name of this superstition of the future order of the world; they see only rare attempts at violence committed by men who are called murderers, robbers or thieves, who cannot justify their violence as being done in the name of welfare.

'He is a thief, a liar, a robber, he is a murderer and does not observe the rule of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.' Who says this? It is said by those very people who do not cease murdering in war and forcing people to prepare for carnage, and who steal and rob from both their own and other nations.

If the law of doing to others as you would have them do unto you has become

ineffective against those members of our society called murderers, robbers and thieves, it is only because these people comprise a section of the vast majority of the population who, for generation after generation, have been continually killed, robbed and pillaged by men whose superstition prevented them from seeing the criminality of their actions.

And therefore, to the question of how to relate to those people who attempt to commit all kinds of violence against us, the only answer is: 'Stop doing unto others that which you would not have them do unto you.'

Not to mention the complete injustice of applying the obsolete law of retribution in certain instances of violence, while the most dreadful and cruel acts of violence, committed by the State in the name of a superstition of organizing the future, are left unpunished; putting this aside, the application of crude retribution for acts of violence committed by those called robbers and thieves is, nevertheless, also blatantly irrational, and leads directly to the opposite of what is intended, since it destroys the tremendous power of public opinion, which is one hundred times more effective in protecting people from all kinds of violence than are gallows and prisons.

And this argument can be applied with striking pertinence to international relations: 'What must we do when savages come and take away the fruits of our labor and our wives and daughters?' say those who think only of the possibility of protecting themselves from the very same evil deeds and crimes which, they forget, they are continually committing against other nations. White men speak of the 'Yellow Peril', and with far more reason for doing so the Indians, Chinese, and Japanese speak of the 'White Peril'. For it is only necessary to be free of the superstition condoning violence in order to be horrified by all those crimes that have been, and are, committed by some nations against others, and to feel still more horrified by the moral torpor of the people that results from that superstition and enables English, Russians, Germans and Americans to speak (in the face of the most dreadful crimes they have committed and continue to commit in India, Indochina, Poland, Manchuria and Algeria) not just of the dangers of the violence threatening them, but of the necessity of protecting themselves from it.

The dreadful superstition that it is possible to foresee the future shape of society serves to justify all kinds of violence in the name of that structure. It is enough for a person to free his thoughts, even temporarily, of this superstition and to look sincerely and seriously at the life of the nation for it to become clear to him that acceptance of the need to oppose evil with violence is nothing other than the justification people give to their habitual and favourite vices: vengeance, avarice, envy, ambition, pride, cowardice and spite.

Chapter 18

‘The Creator himself pre-ordained that the criterion of all human behaviour was not profit but justice, and on the strength of this all efforts to define levels of profit are always useless. Not one person has ever known, or can know, what the final results of a certain action, or series of actions, will be, either for himself or for others. But each one of us can know which action is just and which is not. And likewise, we can all know that the consequences of justice will, at the end of the day, be as good for ourselves as for others, although it is beyond our power to say beforehand what this good will be and of what it will consist.’ (John Ruskin)

‘And you will know the truth and the truth will make you free’ (John, VIII, 32)

‘Man thinks therefore he is. It is clear that he must think rationally. A rationally thinking person thinks first of all about the purpose for which he must live; he thinks about his soul and about God. Just look at what worldly people think about; of anything but that. They think about dancing, about music and singing and similar entertainments; they think about buildings, about wealth, about power; they envy kings and the rich. But they never think about what it means to be a human.’ (Pascal)

All you suffering people of the Christian world, both rulers and rich and poor and oppressed, need only free yourselves from the deception of false Christianity and government (concealing what Christ revealed to you and what your reason and your heart needs) and it will become clear to you that it is in yourselves and only in yourselves that you will find the cause of all the bodily suffering (want), and spiritual suffering (awareness of injustice, envy and annoyance) that torments you – the oppressed and poor. And that it is also in yourselves, the rich and powerful, that you will find the cause of those fears, pangs of conscience and awareness of the sinfulness of your lives, all of which disturbs you, in varying degrees according to your moral sensitivity.

Understand, all of you, that you were born neither to be slaves, nor to be

masters; that you are free people, but that you only become free and rational when you fulfill the supreme law of life. This law has been revealed to you, and you need only discard those lies which conceal it from you to be able to see clearly of what this law consists and in what your happiness consists. This law consists in love, and well-being is only found in the fulfilment of this law. Realize it and you will become truly free and acquire everything that you now vainly seek through those complicated means to which you are attracted by confused and corrupted men, who believe in nothing.

‘Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light’ (Matt., 1, 28–31). You will be saved and delivered from the evil you endure and receive the true well-being you so clumsily strive after, not through personal desire, nor envy, nor through adherence to a party programme; nor through hatred, indignation or the pursuit of fame, nor even through a sense of justice, and above all not through troubling yourselves about the organization of other people’s lives. However strange it may seem, it is only through an activity within your own soul, involving no external aim and no consideration of what might come of it.

Understand that the assumption that a man may organize the lives of others is a crude superstition that people have only accepted because of its antiquity. And understand that those who are preoccupied with organizing the lives of others, be they monarchs, presidents and ministers, or spies and executioners, or members and leaders of a party, or dictators, understand that these people manifest nothing worthy – as people seem to think – but, to the contrary, are pitiable, deeply misled people, preoccupied with a task that is not only vain and stupid, but is one of the most horrible things man can choose to do.

People are already recognizing the pitiful degradation of a spy, or executioner, and are starting to feel the same about the police force, police agents, and even to some extent about the army; but they have not yet begun to feel this about judges, senators, ministers, political leaders and revolutionaries. And yet the work of the senator, the minister, the monarch, and the leaders of political parties is just as base, vile and alien to human

nature and, perhaps, even worse than the task of the executioner or spy, since it is just the same, but covered in hypocrisy.

Understand then, all of you, especially you young ones, that to dedicate your lives, or even to occupy yourselves with the forcible construction of other people's lives, according to your own ideas, is not just a primitive superstition, but a vile, criminal affair, destructive to the soul. Realize that the desires of an enlightened soul for the welfare of others is in no way satisfied by vainly organizing their lives through violence, but that it is only achieved through one's own inner work – the only thing where man has complete freedom and control. Only this task, increasing the love within oneself, can enhance the satisfaction of this desire. You must understand that no activity aimed at the organization of other people's lives through coercion can enhance people's welfare, but is always a more or less consciously hypocritical deceit used to cover up men's basest desires: vanity, pride and self-interest, under the guise of personal dedication to mankind.

Understand this, especially you young ones, the generation of the future, and cease, as the majority of us are doing at the moment, to search for illusory happiness in creating people's welfare by participating in the administration of the State, or judiciary, or by instructing others and, in order to do so, by entering perverting institutions (namely schools and universities) where you are trained in vanity, self-importance and pride. Cease participating in the various organizations whose aim is supposedly to further the welfare of the masses, and seek only that one thing that is always necessary and within the reach of us all, and which gives the greatest well-being to ourselves, and is the most likely thing to enhance the welfare of our neighbours. Seek this one thing within yourselves: an increase of love through eradicating all the mistakes, sins and passions which hinder its manifestation and you will further the well-being of the people in the most effective way. Understand that for the people of today the fulfilment of the supreme law of love now known to us (which excludes violence) is as unavoidable as is the law of migration and nest-building for birds, and the law of feeding on grass for herbivorous animals, and on meat for carnivorous ones; and that every transgression of this law is detrimental to us.

Just understand this and dedicate your life to this joyous work; only begin to do this and you will instantly realize that it is this, and only this, which can lead to that improvement of life for all, for which you strive so vainly and along such mistaken paths. Realize that man's welfare lies only in unity and that unity cannot be attained through violent means. Unity will only be achieved when, without thinking about unity, each person thinks only of fulfilling the law of life. And it is only the SUPREME law of life, one and the same for us all, that unites people.

The supreme law of life revealed by Christ is now clear to man and unity will only be achieved through following it, until there appears a new law that is even closer and dearer to the hearts of man.

Chapter 19

‘Some people seek well-being, or happiness, in power, others seek it in science or in sensuality. Those who are truly close to bliss realize that it cannot exist in something that only a few, rather than everyone, can possess. They realize that the genuine well-being of man is such that all people can possess it at once, without division and without jealousy; it is such that no one can lose it unless he wants to.’ (Pascal)

We have one, and only one, infallible guide: the eternal spirit that penetrates each and every one of us in unity and fills us with the ambition to attain that which we ought; it is the same spirit that urges the tree to grow towards the sun, the flower to drop its seeds in autumn, and which urges us to strive after God, thereby uniting ourselves.

The true faith attracts people to it, not by the promise of good to the believer, but by the indication of the only means of saving us from all evil, and from death itself.

Salvation does not lie in the rituals and profession of faith, but in a clear understanding of the meaning of our life.

This is all I wanted to say.

I wanted to say that we have now reached a situation in which we can no longer remain, and that whether we like it or not, we must enter a new path of existence and, in order for us to do that, we do not need to invent either a new faith, or new scientific theories, that might explain the meaning of life and guide it. And, above all, we do not need any particular kind of activity, except to free ourselves from the superstitions, of false Christianity and political structures alike.

Simply let everyone understand that he has neither the right nor the possibility of organizing other people’s lives and that the task of each man is only to observe his own life in accordance with the supreme religious law

revealed to him, and this in itself will obviate that tortuous, bestial order of life existing amongst the Christian nations which is so contrary to the requirements of our souls, and growing worse and worse.

Whoever you may be: tsar, judge, landowner, craftsman or beggar, think about it and take pity, take pity on your soul... For however obscured and stupefied you may be by your sovereignty, power or wealth, however exhausted and numbed you may be by your needs and grudges, like all of us you possess, or rather you manifest, that spirit of God that exists in us all and which now says to you, clearly and comprehensibly: why and for what purpose do you torment yourselves and all the others with whom you come into contact in this world? Just realize who you are, how insignificant is that which you mistakenly call yourself, identifying it as your body; and how immensely great is that which is really you: your spiritual being. Just realize this and begin to spend each moment of your life living not for external ideals, but in fulfilling the true purpose of your life, which has been revealed to you through the wisdom of the whole world, the teachings of Christ, and your own personal awareness. Begin to live by seeing the purpose and well-being of your life in the daily progress of your soul's liberation from the illusions of the flesh, and in the increasing perfection of love (which amounts to one and the same thing). Just begin to do this and from the first day, the first hour, you will experience a new and joyous sensation of the awareness of complete freedom and well-being flowing ever increasingly into your soul. And what will strike you most of all is how those very external circumstances which troubled you so much, but which were nevertheless so far from your desires, cease (whether they leave you in the same external situation, or whether they lead you out of it) to be a hindrance, and become greater and greater joys of your life.

And if you are unhappy – and I know that you are unhappy – remember that what has been suggested here was not invented by me, but is the fruit of the spiritual works of all the best and loftiest minds and hearts of mankind, and is the only means of deliverance from your unhappiness, providing the greatest well-being man can attain in this life.

This is what I wanted to say to my fellow men before I die.

Appendix to Chapter 3

The most dangerous people have been hanged, or are serving sentences in penal battalions, fortresses and prisons; tens of thousands of others, less dangerous, have been driven out of the capital cities and big towns and are wandering around Russia, bedraggled and hungry; the ordinary police arrest, the secret police pursue; all books and newspapers dangerous to the government are withdrawn from circulation. In the Duma debates go on between various party spokesmen as to how to protect the welfare of the people: should or should not fleets be built? Should peasant land-ownership be organized in this way or that way? How and why a Council of Churches should, or should not, be held. There are leaders who dally in lobbies, there are quorums, blocs, premiers and everything else down to the last detail, exactly as in all civilized nations. It would seem that we need nothing more. And yet, the collapse of the existing structure is drawing closer and closer, precisely here and precisely now, in Russia.

Fine then, you government people, hang and shoot another five, ten, or thirty thousand, as imitating former repressions of revolutions in Europe you clearly intend to do. Fine then, go ahead. But you know, as well as the noose, the gallows, spies, prisons, rifles, rifle-butts, etc., there are spiritual forces that are extremely strong and far more powerful than any sort of gallows or prison. You see, all those you strangle with ropes and shoot above graves dug out by men still living had and have fathers, brothers, wives, sisters, friends and like-minded followers, and if these executions spare you from those who are buried in the graves they generate, not only among those who were close to them, but among strangers too, twice as many enemies, twice as pernicious as those you have killed and buried in the earth. The more people you murder, the smaller the chance of saving yourselves from your chief enemy: the hatred people feel towards you. By your crimes you only increase this hatred tenfold and make it more dangerous to yourselves.

Apart from increasing the number of your enemies and their hatred, through those you execute, these very executions increase, even among men who are perfect strangers to yourselves and your enemies, that feeling of cruelty and

immorality you think you are combating with these executions. For these executions are not performed automatically by the papers which you write in your law courts and ministries. People are executed by other people. A young man, a former soldier, evidently perplexed as to how he should react to this, told me of how he was made to dig a trench, a grave for ten people sentenced to be shot, and how some soldiers were forced to shoot these condemned men, while others had to stand with loaded rifles behind the executioners ready to shoot them should they hesitate in fulfilling the ghastly, inhuman task demanded of them. Can the performance of such awful acts, at the command of authorities whom men have been inspired to honour and consider sacred, pass without affecting men's souls?

The other day I read a newspaper report about some unfortunate governor-general who issued an edict expressing his praise and approval for two 'fine young chaps', as he called them, who had shot an unarmed prisoner as he leapt off a cart and tried to escape; he rewarded them with twenty-five roubles each. I did not believe this dreadful story of the governor's behaviour and wrote to the editor of the newspaper asking him to confirm it. I was sent the original copy of the edict, and it was explained to me that this sort of praise for murder was an everyday thing and that the most high-ranking personages uttered these approbations.

Can these sort of words and deeds really disappear without trace? Thoughts and feeling so perverted and so audaciously expressed cannot but leave terrible traces of corruption, immorality and cruelty in the hearts of those who participate in them and read such orders. These deeds and injunctions must make people feel distrust and contempt for those who prescribe such terrible deeds, so offensive to the human conscience, and praise and reward them. So that if thousands are executed, how many tens of thousands, who have in one way or another taken part in these deeds, have been perverted by this participation and deprived of the last remnants of their religious and moral principles? Have they not been made ready, if not yet to hate, then to despise those who force them to perform these evil deeds, and to commit against them the very same deeds at the first opportunity?

The newspaper reports, printed daily and read by millions, on the number of

people executed and sentenced to death, have an effect similar to news of changes in the weather – something that is bound to change continually, by the day. Even if those who read this sort of news every day do not ask themselves how to reconcile such deeds, committed under orders from the highest authorities with, let us say, not the Gospels, but the sixth commandment of Moses, at least the contradictions must evoke contempt in their hearts for the commandments, for religion in general, and for the authorities who perform deeds so evidently contrary to both the religious laws and conscience.

Surely it is apparent that evil deeds committed by the governing powers in order to rid themselves of their visible enemies gather twice or even ten times as many invisible enemies, who are far more angry.

One would think it were obvious to every thinking person that such behaviour from the government cannot improve the situation. It should be obvious not only to outsiders but to the rulers themselves. They must see the evident futility of what they are doing, and they must see the criminality of it. They must see this, for Christ's teaching of love for one's enemy, so carefully concealed by those who live according to violence, has penetrated the consciousness of the people of the Christian world, albeit not in the entirety of its complete and real meaning. I believe I am not mistaken in saying that this teaching has been particularly keenly adopted by the simple Russian working people, whom the government are now so fiercely perverting.

Even if Marcus Aurelius could, despite his gentleness and wisdom, conduct wars and condemn people to death with a clear conscience, the people of today's Christian world can no longer do so without an inner awareness of their guilt. No matter what hypocritical and stupid Hague conferences and conditional punishments are invented, all these superficial absurdities not only fail to conceal their crimes, but on the contrary, point to the fact that these men already know themselves that what they are doing is wrong. However much they may assure themselves and others that various higher considerations dictate these dreadful violations of all human and divine laws, which are continually committed, they cannot hide, either from themselves or from decent people, the utter criminality, immorality and baseness of their

conduct. For nowadays everyone knows that murder of whatever kind is vile, criminal and wrong; all the tsars, ministers and generals know this, however much they hide behind some invented superior considerations.

It is the same with revolutionaries of whatever party, if they permit murder for the attainment of their aims. No matter what they say about the fact that when power is in their hands they will have no use for the violent means they now employ, their crimes are just as immoral and cruel as the activities of the government. And they therefore lead to the same awful consequences as do the evil-doings of the government: the animosity, bestialization and corruption of the people.

Their activity only differs in this (which is why it appears less criminal), that the futility of the activities of the government in power is apparent, while the activity of the revolutionaries – which is manifested for the most part in theory and only occasionally put into practice during revolutions, such as we have now in Russia – is not so evident.

The means and the method of struggle of both sides are equally alien to the human soul and to the tenets of the Christian teaching. Both embitter people, leading them to extreme levels of irrationality and brutality, while failing to attain the declared aim, and distancing others from any chance of attaining it.

The position and the activity of both warring parties – the government and the revolutionaries – here in Russia, as in the rest of the world, with their violent methods of improving human existence, is similar to that of people who, in order to warm themselves, break down the walls of the house they live in and chop it up for firewood.

Appendix to Chapter 7

The Christian teaching in its true meaning, acknowledging the SUPREME LAW of human life to be the law of love which in no instance permits violence between men, is so close to the heart of man and gives such undoubted freedom, such independent happiness to both the individual and groups of people, as well as to the whole of humanity, that it would seem this need only be known for all men to accept it as the guiding principle of their behaviour. And, in spite of all the efforts of the Church to conceal this law, people have really come to understand this more and more and striven to realize it. But the unhappy fact is that at the time when the true meaning of the Christian teaching started becoming clearer to people, a large section of the Christian world has already become accustomed to regarding the truth as existing in external religious forms. And these forms not only hide the true meaning of the Christian teaching but uphold a system of government that is in direct opposition to it. Thus, in order to perceive the Christian teaching in its true meaning, the people of the Christian world, who have, to a greater or lesser extent, understood the truth of Christianity, must free themselves not only from their belief in the false forms of a perverted Christian teaching, but also from belief in the necessity and inevitability of that system of government that was founded on this false Church religion.

Thus, although liberation from false religious forms is taking place ever more frequently, the people of our time, having rejected belief in dogmas, sacraments, miracles, the sanctity of the Bible and other institutions of the Church, are nevertheless unable to free themselves from those false teachings of the State, founded on a perverted Christianity and hiding the true one.

Some people, the majority of the working people, following tradition, fulfill the requirements of the Church and, partially believing in that teaching, they BELIEVE, without the least doubt they literally believe, in that system of government founded on violence that stems from the Church faith and which can under no circumstance be compatible with the Christian faith in its true meaning. Other people, the so-called educated ones, who on the whole have long ceased to believe in the Church and consequently in any kind of

Christianity, believe as unconsciously as the simple folk in the system of government founded on violence, which was introduced and established by the very Church Christianity they have long ceased to believe in.

And so, those who, like the working populace, believe in the lawfulness of the existing structure of society, as too the so-called educated people who try, either gradually or by revolutionary processes, to change the existing order, believe equally in the necessity of violence as a chief weapon for structuring society. And neither one of them either acknowledges, or is capable of imagining, a social structure other than one based on violence.

It is just this unconscious faith or, rather, the superstition the people of the Christian world have in the lawfulness of upholding the structure of the world by violence, as well as in lawfulness and the necessity of violence in itself; it is just this faith founded on perverted Christianity and directly opposed to the truth (although people who have freed themselves from belief in pseudo-Christianity fail to recognize this), that has been, and is still today, the chief obstacle to man's acceptance of the Christian teaching in its real meaning – a meaning which is now becoming clearer and clearer.

Appendix to Chapter 8

One need only recall Christ's teaching forbidding violent resistance to evil, and people, from the privileged gentry as compared to the laboring classes, will, whether they are believers or non-believers, simply smile ironically at such a reference, as if the idea that non-violent resistance to evil were possible is such blatant nonsense that serious-minded people would not even mention it.

The majority of such people, considering themselves moral and educated, will talk seriously and argue about the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the redemption, the sacraments and so forth; or about which of two political parties would have the best chance of success, or which political unions are the most desirable, whose proposals are sounder, those of the social democrats or those of the Socialist revolutionaries; but they are all quite agreed that belief in non-violent resistance to evil cannot be taken seriously.

Why is this?

Because people cannot but feel that acceptance of the principle of non-resistance to evil tears their established way of life at its roots, and requires from them something new and unknown which seems scary to them.

The outcome is that questions about the Trinity, the immaculate conception, the Eucharist and baptism may concern religious people, just as non-religious people may concern themselves with problems of political alliances, parties, Socialism and Communism, But the question of non-violent resistance to evil strikes them all as some kind of astonishing nonsense, and the more absurd it is the greater the advantages they enjoy, under the existing structure of the world.

This is why the negation of the teaching of non-resistance and the failure to comprehend it are always in proportion to the degree of power, wealth, and sophistication of people.

People who occupy important positions of power, those who are very rich, used to their position, and who, like the majority of scholars, justify it, simply shrug their shoulders in response to any mention of non-resistance. People less important, less wealthy and less learned are less contemptuous. Still less contemptuous are people of even less importance, wealth and learning. And yet, all those whose life is directly funded on violence, though they might not be so scornful, will always adopt a negative attitude towards the idea of possibility of applying to life the teaching of non-violent resistance to evil.

Thus, if the solution to the question of liberating oneself from the perverted Christian teaching and from the admissibility of violence that flows from it and which destroys love, and of recognition of the Christian teaching in its true meaning, depended only on civilized people, who in our society enjoy a better position, in the material sense, than the majority of the working population – if this were so, the impending transition from a life based on violence to a life based on love would not be so close and inevitable as it is now, especially here in Russia where the vast majority of the nation, more than two thirds of it, is not yet corrupted by wealth, power or civilization.

And since this majority has no reason or advantage of depriving itself of the blessings of a life of love by admitting the possibility of violence, it is therefore among these people (who are not perverted by wealth, power or civilization) that the change in the social structure, which is required by the attained understanding of the Christian teaching, must begin.

Appendix to Chapter 17

But however much the blindness of those who believe in the necessity and inevitability of violence may strike me as strange, and however blatantly apparent the inevitability of non-resistance may be to me, it is not reasoned conclusions that convince me, or that can irrefutably convince other people, of the truth of non-resistance; it is only man's awareness of his spirituality, the basic expression of which is love, that can convince. It is love, true love, which comprises the essence of man's soul; that love which is revealed in Christ's teaching, and excludes even the suggestion of any kind of violence.

Whether the employment of violence or the endurance of evil will be useful or harmful I do not know, and no one knows. But I do know, as every person knows, that love is well-being; the love of others for me is a blessing and still more is my love for others. The supreme bliss is my love for others, and not only for those who love me, but as Christ said, for those who hate me, offend me, and commit evil against me. However strange these things may sound to someone who has not felt this, it is so, and when you think about it and experience it you are only surprised at how you could ever have failed to understand it. Love, true love, love that denies itself and transfers itself to another, is the awakening within oneself of the highest universal principle of life. But it is only true love and affords all the happiness it can give when it is simply love, free from anything personal, from the smallest drop of personal bias towards its object. And such love can only be felt for one's enemy, for those who hate and offend. Thus, the instruction to love not those who love us, but those who hate us, is not an exaggeration, nor an indication of possible exclusions, but just an indication of that opportunity and possibility of receiving the supreme bliss that love gives. That this must be so follows logically and one only needs to experience it to be convinced. And then instances of offence and assault become valuable and desirable. And thus, having perceived the essence of the human soul, we see that it works in such a way that responding to evil with evil makes it suffer, whereas responding to evil with love leads to the highest attainable bliss.

Therefore, all non-violent resistance to evil brings well-being. And this well-

being, by sublimating the personality, leads to the greatest bliss and also destroys the scarecrow which evokes resistance: the fear of death.