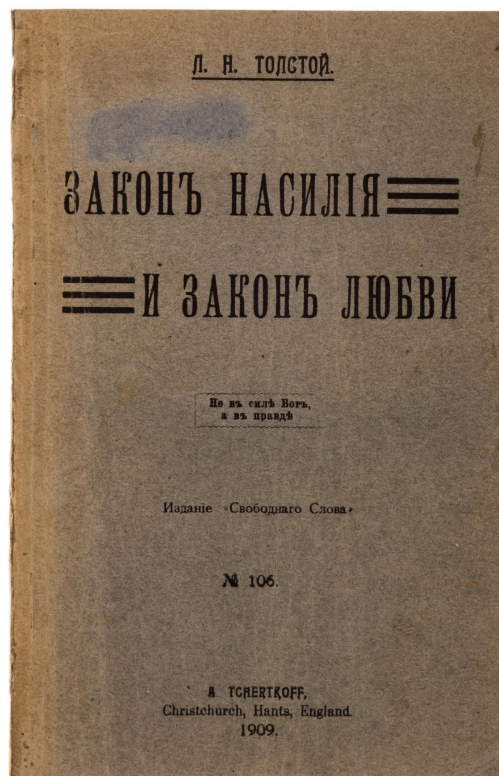


# Law of Violence and the Law of Love (1909)

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# Introduction

I write what I am writing, because — knowing the one thing which can free the people of Christendom from the dreadful physical suffering and, above all, from the spiritual corruption into which they are sinking deeper and deeper — I, standing at the brink of the grave, cannot keep silent.

In our day it cannot but be clear to all thinking people, that the life of man — not in Russia only, but in all Christendom — with its ever increasing want among the poor and luxury among the rich, with its struggles of all against all: Revolutionaries against Governments, Governments against Revolutionaries, oppressed races against their oppressors, State against State, West against East; with its ever-growing armaments devouring the strength of the peoples, with its refinements and depravity — that this life cannot continue, and that the life of the Christian nations, unless it changes, must inevitably become more and more wretched.

This is clear to everyone; but unfortunately people often do not see the cause of this wretched state of things, and still less see how to remedy it. The most varied circumstances are looked upon as causes of this state, and the most varied means are suggested as remedies for it.

And yet it has only one cause, and there is but one remedy for it.

The cause of the wretched condition of the Christian nations is the absence of a supreme conception, common to them all, of the meaning of life, of faith, and of the guidance for conduct resulting from faith. The means of escape from this state of wretchedness — not a fantastical or artificial, but the most natural means — lies in the inhabitants of the Christian world adopting the highest understanding of life: an understanding suitable to the present age of mankind, though it was revealed to them nineteen centuries ago, and accepting the guidance for conduct flowing from that understanding, which is *the Christian teaching in its real meaning*.

# I

People can, and do, live the reasonable and harmonious life natural to them, only when they are united by their understanding of the meaning of life; that is to say, by a belief and accord in one and the same understanding of life (satisfying the majority of them equally) and in the guidance for conduct flowing therefrom. But if that happens which cannot help happening (since the explanation of the meaning of life and the guidance for conduct flowing therefrom is never final, but constantly becomes clearer and clearer) — when it happens that the understanding of the meaning of life, having become more definite and exact, demands a different direction for conduct, while the life of the people still pursues its old course — then the life of those nations becomes discordant and miserable. And this discord and misery increase continually, so long as the people (not assimilating the religious understanding accordant with their time, and the guidance for conduct that flows from it) continue to live according to the guidance flowing from the old, outlived understanding of life, and instead of assimilating the religious conception proper to their time, try artificially to devise an understanding of life that would excuse their way of life, no longer in accord with the spiritual demands of the majority of men. This has often been repeated in history, but never, I think, has the discord between the life of the people who have not kept pace with the religious elucidation of the meaning of life, and the guidance for conduct flowing therefrom, been so great as it now is among the Christian nations, who have not accepted *in its true meaning* the Christian teaching revealed to them, and the guidance for conduct flowing therefrom, but continue to live their former heathen life.

This discord in the life of the Christian nations is especially great, I believe, because the explanation of the meaning of life which Christianity brought to their consciousness, was too much in advance of the way of life of the nations who accepted it, and therefore the guidance it gave for conduct was too contrary, not only to the individual habits of the people, but to the whole manner of life of the heathen nations who accepted the Christian teaching. This has caused the striking discord, immorality, wretchedness, and unreasonableness of the life of the Christian nations.

This has come about because the people of the Christian world, having accepted as Christianity, a Church teaching which fundamentally differs from heathenism only by its insincerity and artificiality, soon ceased to believe in this teaching, and did not replace it by any other. So that the people of the Christian nations, freeing themselves more and more from belief in the perverted Christian teaching, have at last reached the state in which they now are — a state in which the majority know no explanation of the meaning of their life: that is to say, have no religion, faith, or general guidance

for their conduct. The majority of men, the working men — though externally they hold the old, Church faith, no longer believe in it, and are not guided by it in their lives, but keep its traditions merely from habit and for appearance' sake; while the greater part of the minority — the so-called educated classes — either consciously no longer believe in anything (though some of them, for political reasons, pretend still to believe in Church Christianity), or the smaller part of them, sincerely believing in a teaching incompatible with life and that lags behind it, try to justify their faith by all sorts of complicated sophistries.

In this lies the chief and only cause of the miserable condition in which the Christian peoples are now living.

The wretchedness of this position is increased by the fact that as this state of faithlessness has long continued, it has come about that those men of the Christian world to whom this state of irreligion is profitable — that is to say, the ruling classes — either shamelessly pretend to believe what they do not and cannot believe, or (especially the most depraved of them, the learned people) openly declare that for men of our time no explanation of life whatever is necessary, no faith, nor any such guidance for action as flows from such a faith; but that the only fundamental law of human life is the law of evolution and the struggle for existence, and that therefore man must and should be guided solely by his desires and passions, or by his natural impulses.

In this unconscious faithlessness of the masses, and conscious denial of faith by the so-called educated men of Christendom, lies the cause of the wretchedness of the population of our world.

## II

People of the Christian world — after accepting, in place of the true Christian teaching, a perversion of it (invented by the Church) which replaced heathenism and at first partly satisfied men by its new forms — have left off believing in this Church-perverted Christianity, and, at last, are left without any religious understanding of life, or any guidance for conduct flowing therefrom. And since, without such an understanding of the meaning of life, and such guidance for conduct, common to all — or at least common to the majority of men — human life must be both unreasonable and wretched; the longer that state has endured among Christian nations, the more unreasonable and wretched their life has become. And in our day, life has reached a degree of unreasonableness and wretchedness in which it can no longer continue to exist in its old forms.

The majority of working people, deprived of land and therefore of the possibility of enjoying the products of their labour, hate the landowners and capitalists who enslave them. The landowners and capitalists, aware of this attitude of the working classes towards them, fear and hate them, and by means of force, organized by government, keep them enslaved. And steadily and unceasingly the position of the workers grows worse, their dependence on the rich increases; and equally steadily and unceasingly the wealth of the rich and their power over the workers increases, together with their fear and hatred. Just as steady is the increase, which can have no limits of the arming of each nation against the rest, and the expenditure of more and more of the labour of the slave-workers on the land, aquatic, submarine, and aerial structures, the object of which is simply the preparation for international mass-murders. And these mass-murders have occurred, and are still occurring, and cannot help occurring — for all the Christian nations (not as individuals, but as nations) united into States, hate each other, and hate the non-Christian States, and are ready at any moment to attack one another. Moreover, there is not one large Christian State which, from some kind of unnecessary patriotic traditions, does not hold in its power, against their will, one or more small races, forcing them to share in the life of the Great Power they hate: Austria, Prussia, England, Russia or France, with their subject lands; Poland, Ireland, India, Finland, the Caucasus, Algiers, and others. So that, besides the ever-growing hatred of the poor against the rich, and the hatred of the large nations for one another, there is also the continually growing hatred of subject nations for their subjugators. And what is worst of all, is the fact that all these hatreds, most repugnant to human nature, are not only not condemned, like every other malicious feeling between man and man, but, on the contrary, are applauded and exalted as valuable services, and as virtues. The

hatred of the oppressed workers for the rich and powerful, is lauded as love of liberty, brotherhood and equality. The German hatred of the French, the English hatred of the Germans, and the Russian hatred of the Japanese, and the reverse, is considered the virtue of patriotism. Similarly, or even more highly, is valued the patriotic hatred of Poles for Russians and Prussians, and of Prussians and Russians for Poles and Finns, and so forth.

Nor is this all. All these evils would not suffice to prove that the life of Christian nations cannot continue in its present course. These evils might be accidental and temporary phenomena, if there were among these nations some kind of guiding religious principle common to them all. But this is just what there is not. There is nothing resembling a common, guiding religious principle among the nations of the Christian world.

They have a Church-religious lie, and not one but several, antagonistic to one another: Catholic, Greek-Orthodox, Lutheran, and others. There is the scientific lie — in fact several, each antagonistic to the others. There are the political, international, Party lies. There are the lies of art, of traditions, and of custom. There are many very varied lies, but there is no kind of guidance — no moral guidance — flowing from a religious outlook on life. And the people of our Christian world live like animals, guided in their lives merely by personal interests and by their struggle with one another; differing from animals only in that the animals from time immemorial have kept the same stomachs, claws, and fangs, while people move with ever-increasing rapidity from roads to railroads, from horses to steam, from spoken sermons and letters to printing, to telegraphs and telephones, and from sailing-boats to ocean steamers, from swords to gunpowder, cannons, quick-firing guns, bombs, and war-aeroplanes. And life with telegraphs, telephones, electricity, bombs, and aeroplanes, and with hatred for all, directed not by some uniting spiritual principle, but, on the contrary, by animal instincts which divide, and which employ mental powers for their own satisfaction, becomes ever more and more insane and wretched.



### III

The majority of people in the Christian world feel the ever-increasing wretchedness of their position, and, to free themselves, they employ the only means which, from their outlook on life, they consider effective. This means is the use of force by men against one another. Some, who consider the existing order profitable to themselves, try to maintain it by Governmental force; others, also by the use of force — by Revolutionary activity — try to destroy the existing order and to set up another, better one, in its place.

There have been many Revolutions, and suppressions of Revolutions, in the Christian world. The outward forms have been changed, but the essence of Governmental order — the power of the few over the many, the depravity, the fraud, the governing class's fear of the oppressed, the oppression, enslavement, stupefaction, and embitterment of the masses — if changed in form, have not lessened, but have in reality appreciably increased and are increasing; and what is now happening in Russia shows with particular clearness not only the complete uselessness, but the evident harmfulness, of using violence to unite men.

Our recent newspapers more and more rarely contain news of how and where a robbery has been committed, a gendarme, an officer, or a policeman killed, or of where an attempt at crime has been discovered; but they all more and more frequently contain news of executions and death-sentences.

Already for a year, nay two years, they have been hanging and shooting ceaselessly, and thousands have been strangled and shot. Thousands, too, have been killed and blown up by the bombs of the Revolutionists. But as, lately, more and more have been killed by the rulers, and less and less by the Revolutionists, the governing classes triumph, and it seems to them that they have conquered, and can now continue to live their customary lives, maintaining fraud by force, and force by fraud.<sup>1</sup>

The error at the root of all the political doctrines (the most Conservative, as well as the most advanced) which has brought men to their present wretched condition, is always one and the same. It is that people considered, and still consider, it possible so to unite men by force that they should all unresistingly submit to one and the same scheme of life, and to the guidance for conduct flowing therefrom.

It is intelligible that men, yielding to passion, may by force oblige others who do not agree with them, to do what they wish. One can by force push a man out here and drag him in there, where he does not wish to go. (Both animals and men, under the

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I.

influence of passion, always behave in this way.) And this is comprehensible. But what is not at all comprehensible, is the argument that violence can be a means of inducing people to behave as we want them to behave.

All violence consists in men, by the threat of inflicting suffering or death, coercing others to do what the coerced ones do not wish to do. And therefore the victims do what they dislike doing, only so long as they are weaker than their oppressors, and cannot avoid the evil which threatens them if they do not fulfil what is demanded of them. As soon as they become stronger, they naturally not only leave off doing what they did not wish to do, but, irritated by the struggle with their oppressors and by all they have suffered at their hands, they, after freeing themselves from their oppressors, in their turn force those they disagree with, to do what they (the stronger) consider good and necessary for themselves. So it seems clear that the struggle between oppressors and oppressed cannot possibly unite people, but on the contrary can only divide them the more the longer it lasts.

This would seem so clear that it would not be worth talking about, if from time immemorial the lie that some people's violence towards others may be useful to men and may unite them had not been as widespread and tacitly accepted as though it were the most undoubted truth, not only among those to whom this violence is profitable, but among a majority of the very people who have suffered and are suffering most from violence. This deception existed even before Christianity appeared, and has remained, and still remains, in full vigour throughout the whole of Christendom.

The difference between what existed in ancient times before the advent of Christianity, and what now exists in Christendom, is only that the erroneousness of the idea that violence inflicted by some on others may be useful to mankind and may unite them, was in ancient times quite concealed from men, but now the truth expressed with special clearness in Christ's teaching, that the violence of some towards others cannot unite, but can only disunite people, is elucidated more and more. And as soon as people understand that the violence done by some towards others, besides causing the latter to suffer, is also unreasonable, those who used quietly to submit at once become indignant and embittered at the violence.

This is now going on among the oppressed of all nations.

And not only are the oppressed more and more conscious of this truth, but in our day the oppressors also are conscious of it. The oppressors themselves are today not sure that they are behaving well and justly when employing violence towards others. For the rulers as well as for those who resist them, this delusion is being destroyed; although, biased by their position, both parties try, by all sorts of arguments — mostly false ones — to persuade themselves that force is useful and necessary; in the depths of their souls they know that by committing their cruel deeds they gain only the semblance, and that but a temporary semblance, of what they desire, while really not drawing nearer to, but drifting further from, their aim.

## IV

The nations of Christendom today have not only reached, but have passed, the limit the nations of the ancient world reached before their downfall. This is made especially clear by the fact that in our day all steps forward in technical improvement fail to promote the common welfare, but, on the contrary, show more and more plainly that all this progress can but increase the misery of mankind, and can in no way lessen it. One might invent new submarine, underground, aerial or supraerial appliances for carrying people with greater rapidity from place to place, new devices for diffusing human speech and thought, but as the people carried from place to place do not wish and are unable to do anything but evil, so the words and thoughts they spread can only encourage people to do evil, and the more and more perfected appliances for the destruction of life, which make it more and more possible to murder without exposing oneself to danger, only show more and more clearly the impossibility of the life of the Christian nations continuing in the direction in which it is now going.

The life of the Christian nations at present is terrible, especially as a result of the absence of any kind of moral principle uniting them, and because of its unreasonableness, which degrades man — in spite of all his mental achievements — to a moral plane lower than the animals; and especially by the complexity of the accepted lie, which more and more conceals from men the wretchedness and cruelty of their lives.

The fraud supports the cruelty of life; the cruelty of life demands more and more fraud; and, like snowballs, both continue to grow.

But everything has an end. And I think the end of this wretched condition of the Christian nations has now come.

The position of the people of the Christian world is terrible, but yet it is the very position which had to come, and could not help coming, and which must inevitably bring these nations to their deliverance. The sufferings endured by the people of Christendom, flowing from the absence of the religious outlook on life which would be suitable for our time, are unavoidable conditions of growth, and must inevitably end by men accepting an outlook on life suitable to their age.

# V

The peculiarity of the position of the Christian nations of our day, lies in the fact that they have based their lives on a teaching which in its real meaning contradicts their way of life; and this meaning, hidden heretofore, now begins to be perceived. The Christian nations have built their house not even on sand, but on melting ice; the ice begins to melt, has even melted — and the house is falling.

So long as the majority of men, deceived by Church teaching, and having only the dimmest conception of the real meaning of Christ's teaching, instead of worshipping their old idols, deified the Christ-god, His mother, and the saints, bowed down to relics and icons, and believed in miracles, sacraments, the Atonement, and the infallibility of the Church hierarchy — the heathenish organization of society was able to hold its own and to satisfy men. People believed in the explanation of the meaning of life given to them by the Church, and in the guidance for conduct that flowed therefrom; and this faith drew men together. And this continued till people began to see what was hidden behind the Church faith, given to them as true. Unfortunately for the Church faith, there existed the Gospels, acknowledged by the Churches themselves to be holy; and in spite of all the efforts of the Churches to hide from men the essence of the teaching expressed in the Gospels — neither the prohibition of the translation of the Gospels into the language the people understood, nor the false interpretations put upon it, nor anything else, could quench the light which penetrated through the Church deceptions and illuminated the souls of men, who saw more and more clearly the great truth contained in the teaching.

As soon as, with the spread of literacy and printing, men began to know the Gospels and to accept what was in them, they could no longer help seeing — in spite of all the quibbles of the Church — the contradiction staring them in the face, between the State organization supported by the Church, and the Gospel teaching. The Gospel flatly denied both the Church and the State with their authorities.

This contradiction, becoming more and more evident, at last had the effect of causing men to cease to believe in the Church faith, but for the most part Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants alike they continued from habit and for the sake of convention, and partly from fear of the authorities, to maintain the outward forms of the Church faith, without any longer accepting its inward significance.

So it was with the great majority of working people. (I do not here speak of those small communities of men who openly denied the Church teaching and established their own, more or less in accord with Christianity in its true sense. I do not speak of them,

because their number was too insignificant, in comparison with the immense number who liberated themselves more and more from every kind of religious consciousness.)

The same thing happened with the non-labouring, learned men of the Christian world. These people saw still more clearly than the common people, the incompatibility and internal contradiction of the Church teaching, and they naturally rejected that teaching; but they still could not acknowledge the real teaching of Christ, for it was contrary to the whole existing order, and in particular to their exceptionally profitable position in that order.

So that in our time, in our Christian world, some men — the great majority — still live, externally fulfilling the Church rites from habit, for appearance' sake, for convenience, for fear of the authorities, or even for interested motives; but they do not and cannot believe in the teaching of that Church, for they already clearly perceive its inner contradiction. Another, ever-growing part of the population, not only do not acknowledge the existing religion, but, influenced by the teaching called 'science', consider every religion to be a relic of superstition, and is not guided in life by anything except its own personal impulses.

To people who accepted a religious teaching beyond their strength (and the Christian teaching was such for the heathen who accepted it at a time when social forms depending on a coercive governmental *regime*, had become deeply rooted in the morals and habits of mankind) - to people who thus accepted the Christian teaching, something happened which at first seems contradictory, but which yet could not have helped happening: namely, that as a consequence of having accepted the highest religion of their time, these people were deprived of all religion, and in moral and religious consciousness fell lower than those who held a much lower, and even the very crudest religious beliefs.

## VI

The tragedy of the position of the people of Christendom lies in the fact that, through an unavoidable misunderstanding, the Christian nations accepted as suited to themselves a religious teaching which, in its real meaning, most definitely denied and destroyed the whole social structure in which these nations were living, and without which life seemed to them impossible.

That was the tragedy of their position, but that was also the great, exceptional blessing of the Christian nations. In the distorted aspect in which Christianity was presented to the heathen nations, it appeared to them to be only a slight modification of their own crude conceptions of the Deity, and a higher understanding of the destiny of man and the demands of morality. The real meaning of the teaching was so hidden from them by complicated dogmas and attractive, hypnotizing rites, that they had no suspicion of it. Yet this teaching in its true meaning was not only clearly expressed in the Gospels, which the Church accepted as a divine revelation, and which was inseparably connected with the Church's perverted teaching, but this real meaning was so natural and so near to the human soul, that, buried under false and perverted dogmas as it was, those men who were sensitive to the truth, began more and more often to accept the teaching in its real meaning, and more and more clearly perceived the contradiction between the organization of society and true Christianity.

This contradiction was perceived not only by the teachers of the Early Christian Church, Tatian, Clement, Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius and others, but also in the Middle Ages; and in later times it was recognized more and more clearly, and found expression in an immense number of sects who denied the un-Christian, Governmental order, with its inevitable accompaniment of violence, as well as in very varied humanitarian teachings, which did not even call themselves Christian (such as now widespread doctrines of Socialism, Communism, and Anarchism), all of which are merely one-sided manifestations of Christian consciousness in its true sense, denying violence.

The fact that the Christian nations accepted in a hidden, depraved aspect, a teaching which in its real meaning inevitably destroys the order of life in which they live, and from which they do not wish to part, was the cause of their sufferings. Their great blessing lay in the fact that, having accepted Christianity in a depraved aspect, but yet in one containing the truth they did not perceive, they are now led to the inevitable necessity of accepting the Christian teaching, no longer in its depraved meaning, but in its real meaning — which has been growing plainer and plainer, and is now quite plain, and which alone can save men from the wretched condition in which they live.

## VII

The Christian teaching in its full and true meaning, as in our day becomes more and more evident, is that the essence of human life is the conscious, ever-growing manifestation of that Source of all, the sign of which in us is love; and that, therefore, the essential thing in human life, and the highest law that can guide it, is love.

That love is the necessary and most blissful condition of human life, was acknowledged by all the religious teachings of antiquity. In all the teachings of the sages, Egyptian, Stoic, Brahmin, Buddhist, Taoist, and others, concord, pity, mercy, philanthropy, and love in general, were considered one of the chief virtues. In the highest of these teachings, this acknowledgement reached the point at which love for everything that lives was lauded, and even the principle of returning good for evil, and this was particularly taught by the Taoists and Buddhists.

But not one of these teachings made this virtue the basis of life, the supreme law, which must be not only the chief but the sole guide of human conduct, as was done in Christianity, the latest of all the religious teachings. In all the pre-Christian teachings love was considered to be one of the virtues, but not what the Christian teaching acknowledges it to be: metaphysically, the foundation of everything; practically, the supreme law of human life; that is the law which admits of no exception.

The Christian teaching, in its relation to all the ancient teachings, is no new and special teaching; it is only a more clear and definite expression of that foundation of human life which was felt and vaguely preached by previous religions. The Christian teaching is peculiar only in that, being the latest, it more exactly and definitely expresses the essence of the law of love and the guidance for conduct inevitably flowing therefrom.

So that the Christian teaching of love is not, as in previous religions, merely the inculcation of a given virtue, but it is the definition of the supreme law of human life, and of the guidance for conduct inevitably resulting therefrom. The teaching of Christ explains why this law is the supreme law of human life, and it also points out the line of action a man must follow or avoid, in consequence of his avowal of the truth of this teaching.

It is specially clearly defined in the Christian teaching that the fulfilment of this law, since it is the supreme law, allows of no exceptions such as the old teachings permitted; and that the love defined by this law is only then love, when it admits no exceptions, and is applied equally to foreigners, to all sectarians, and to enemies who hate and wrong us.

In the explanation of why this law is the supreme law of human life, and in the exact definition of the line of conduct inevitably flowing therefrom, lies the step forward accomplished by Christian teaching, and its chief importance and beneficence.

The explanation of why this law is the supreme law, is given with special clearness in the Epistles of St. John.

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is begotten of God, for God is love. . . . No man hath beheld God at any time: if we love one another, God abideth in us.

“God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him. . . .

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not abideth in death.” — I *John* 4:7,8,12, 16; 3:14.

The whole teaching is, that that which we call “our self”, our life, is the divine principle, limited in us by our body and manifesting itself in us by love; and that therefore the real life of each man, divine and free, manifests itself by love.

The guidance of conduct flowing from such an understanding of the law of love, admitting no exceptions, is expressed in many parts of the New Testament, and is defined particularly clearly and exactly in the fourth commandment of the Sermon on the Mount:

“You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth (*Exod.* 21:24): but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil”, is said in the 38th verse of the Fifth Chapter of *Matthew*. And in verses 39 and 40, as though foreseeing those exceptions which might appear necessary when applying the law of love to life, it is clearly and definitely said that there are and can be no conditions in which a divergence is permissible from the first and simplest demands of love — Not to do to others what we do not wish them to do to us.

It is said: “But whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also”; that is, that violence done to you can never serve as justification for violence on your side. This inadmissibility of justification for departing from the law of love on account of anything done by other people, is still more clearly expressed, and precisely expressed, in the commandment in the Sermon on the Mount which explicitly mentions the usual false explanations, pretending to make it permissible to break that law:

*Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy (Levit. 19:17, 18): but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you . . . that ye may be sons of your Father which is in Heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and unjust. For if ye love them that love you,*



*what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the Gentiles the same? Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*  
— *Matt. 5:43-48.*

And it is this acknowledgement of the law of love as the supreme law of human life, and this clearly expressed guidance for conduct resulting from the Christian teaching of love embracing enemies, and those who hate, offend, and curse us, that constitutes the peculiarity of Christ's teaching, and by giving to the doctrine of love, and to the guidance flowing therefrom, an exact and definite meaning, inevitably involves a complete change of the established organization of life, not only in Christendom, but among all the nations of the earth.

Therein lies the chief difference from the old teachings, and the chief significance of the Christian teaching in its true meaning: and therein lies that step forward in human consciousness which the Christian teaching has effected.

That step consists in the fact that all the former religious and moral teachings about love, acknowledging, as they could not help doing, the beneficence of love in human life, yet allowed the possibility of conditions under which the fulfilment of the law of love ceased to be obligatory and might be evaded. And as soon as the law of love was not the supreme, unalterable law of man's life, all the beneficence of that law was destroyed, and the doctrine of love was reduced to eloquent injunctions and sayings which were not obligatory, and left the whole organization of the life of the nations as it was before the teaching of love appeared: that is to say, left it founded on force alone. But the Christian teaching, in its real meaning, acknowledging the law of love to be supreme, and its application in life exempt from any exceptions, by that acknowledgement rejected all violence, and consequently could not help rejecting the world's whole organization founded on violence.

And this chief significance of the teaching was hidden from people by pseudo-Christianity, which acknowledged the law of love not as the supreme law of human life, but — as the pre-Christian teaching had done — as merely one of the rules of conduct which it is useful to follow when nothing hinders its observance.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix II.

## VIII

The teaching of Christ in its true meaning consists in the acceptance of love as the supreme law of life, and therefore does not admit any exceptions.

Christianity (that is, the doctrine of the law of love) that permits occasional violence in obedience to other laws, is a contradiction in nature similar to cold fire or hot ice.

It seems evident that, if some men, for the sake of certain desirable results in the future, though they acknowledge the beneficence of love, may allow the necessity of tormenting or killing certain people, then, by just the same right, others, also acknowledging the beneficence of love, may allow the necessity (also for the sake of some future good) of tormenting and killing other people. So that it seems evident that the admission of any kind of exception to the command to fulfil the law of love, destroys the whole meaning, the whole significance, the whole beneficence of that law, which lies at the root of every religious teaching and of all moral teaching. This appears so evident that one is ashamed to argue it; but yet people of the Christian world, professed believers, as well as men calling themselves non-believers but yet acknowledging a moral law — regard the teaching of love, which rejects all violence (and especially the doctrine of not repaying evil by evil, which flows from that teaching) as something fantastical, impossible, and quite inapplicable to life.

It is understandable that those in power may say that without violence there can be no order or good life, meaning by the word ‘order’, a system under which the few can enjoy to excess the fruits of the labour of others, and meaning by the words ‘good life’, the non-interference with such a life. However unjust what they say may be, it is comprehensible that they should talk like that, for the abolition of violence would not only deprive them of the possibility of living as they do, but would expose the whole long-standing injustice and cruelty of their life.

But at any rate one would think the working people do not need the violence they (strange to say) so carefully inflict on themselves, and from which they suffer so much. For the violence the rulers do to the subjected is not the direct, personal violence of strong men to weak men, or of the many to the few: of, say, a hundred towards a score, etc. The violence of the rulers is upheld, as the violence of a minority towards the majority can only be upheld, by the fraud long ago devised by shrewd and cunning men, which causes people, for the sake of a small present and evident gain, to deprive themselves not only of the greatest advantages, but even to sacrifice their freedom and undergo most cruel sufferings. The essence of this fraud was stated four hundred years ago by the French writer, La Boetie, in an article entitled *Voluntary Slavery*.

This is what he said about it:

“Not weapons, nor armed men, mounted or foot, protect tyrants; but, hard as it may be to believe it, three or four men uphold the tyrant and keep the whole country in slavery to him. The circle of the tyrant’s intimates has always consisted of not more than five or six. These people either themselves crept into his confidence, or were chosen by him to be partakers in his cruelty, comrades in his pleasures, managers of his amusements, and accomplices in his robberies. These six have six hundred in their power, whose relations to the six are similar to the relations of the six towards the tyrant. The 600 have 6,000 under them, whom they have appointed to rule over Provinces or to manage money matters, on condition that they shall serve their cupidity and cruelty. These are followed by a still larger retinue; and anyone who cares to unravel this net will see that not only 6,000, but hundreds of thousands and millions are chained to the tyrant by these links. For this reason appointments are multiplied, which are all a support for tyranny. And all who occupy these positions find it to their own interests, and by these interests they are attached to the tyrant; and there are thus almost as many to whom tyranny is profitable as there are to whom freedom is welcome. And as the doctors say that, if anything in our bodies is out of order, all the bad juices flow at once to the unhealthy spot, so it is with a monarchy: as soon as he becomes a tyrant, all that is evil, all the sediment of the State, the gangs of thieves and good-for-nothings, incapable of working, but avaricious and greedy, collect to partake in the plunder and to become small tyrants under a great tyrant.

“So that a tyrant enslaves some of his subjects by the help of others, and is protected by those whom, if they were not scoundrels, he would have to fear. But, as the saying is, ‘to split wood, one takes wedges of the same wood’; and so his bodyguards resemble those from whom they protect him. They sometimes themselves suffer at his hands; but these God-forsaken, lost men, are prepared to suffer evil so long as they are in a position to do evil, not to him who inflicts it on them, but to them who bear it, and cannot help bearing it.”

From this deception — so deeply rooted in the people, that the very men who suffer from the use of violence justify it, and even demand it for themselves as something necessary, and inflict it on one another — from this habit of deception, which has become a second nature, results that astonishing delusion which causes those who suffer most from the deception, to uphold it.

One would have thought that just the working people, who derive no kind of profit from the violence done them, would at last see through the deception in which they are entangled, and having seen the fraud, would free themselves from it in the simplest and easiest way: by ceasing to take part in the violence which can only be perpetrated upon them thanks to their participation in it.

It would seem that nothing could be simpler or more natural, than that, having for centuries suffered from the violence they have themselves done to themselves without any advantage, the working people, especially agriculturists, who, in Russia and also in the rest of the world, are the majority, would at last understand that they cause their own sufferings: that that landed property, belonging to owners who do not work on it, which is the chief cause of their sufferings, is upheld by them themselves, as watchmen, policemen and soldiers; just in the same way as all the taxes, direct and indirect, are collected by them from themselves as village-elders, office-holders, tax-collectors, and again as policemen and soldiers. It would seem so plain for working people to understand this, and at last to tell those whom they look on as their chiefs, "Leave us in peace! If you, Emperors, Presidents, Generals, Judges, Archbishops, Professors, and all you learned people, want armies, fleets, universities, ballets, synods, conservatoires, prisons, gallows and guillotines — arrange them for yourselves: collect the money yourselves, judge, put one another in prison, hang men, and kill men in wars — only do it yourselves, and leave us in peace, for we want none of it, and no longer wish to take part in all these — to us — unnecessary and, above all, evil deeds!"

What, one would think, could be more natural than that? And yet the labourers, and especially the agricultural labourers, who do not require any of those things, either in Russia or in any other country, do not do this; but the majority continue to torment themselves, fulfilling the demands of the Authorities against themselves, and becoming policemen, tax-collectors, or soldiers; while the minority, to rid themselves of violence, commit violence whenever they can (in times of Revolution) upon those from whose violence they are suffering: that is to say, they quench fire with fire, and thereby only increase the violence done to themselves.

Why do the people behave so unreasonably?

Because, from long continued deception, they no longer see the connection between their bondage and their own share in the deeds of violence.

And why don't they see this connection?

For the same reason which lies at the root of all human misery — because they have no faith, and without faith men can only be guided by their own interests, and a man guided by his own interest, cannot be anything but a deceiver or a dupe.

This is the cause of the seemingly astonishing phenomenon that working men, the enormous majority of people — in despite of common-sense and their own interest, commit violence on themselves, despite the fact that violence is evidently disadvantageous for them, and despite the obviousness in our day of the fraud in which the working people are enmeshed, in spite of the exposure of the injustice from which they suffer, in spite of all the Revolutions aiming at the abolition of violence — continue not only to submit to violence, but to maintain it.

Some working men, the enormous majority of them, cling from habit to the old, Church, pseudo-Christian teaching, no longer believing in it, but believing only in the old law of "an eye for an eye", and in the State organization founded thereon. The others, among whom (especially in Western Europe) are all those factory-hands who

have been touched by civilization, although they deny all religion, yet deep in their souls unconsciously believe in the old law of “an eye for an eye”, and, following that law, submit when they have to, to the existing order, though they hate it; and try, when they can, to destroy violence by the most various and violent means.

The first, the great majority of uncivilized labourers, cannot change their position, because, believing in Government organization, they cannot refuse to take part in its violence; while those who have no faith, the civilized working men, guided only by various political teachings, cannot emancipate themselves from force, because they try to destroy violence by violence.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix III.

## IX

his has long gone on and still continues in the whole I heathen and Christian world alike. But I think that now, yes now, after the pitiful, stupid Russian Revolution, and especially after the terribly insolent and senselessly cruel suppression of it, the less civilized Russians — that is, those less mentally depraved, who have a deep, though vague, understanding of the essence of the Christian teaching — the Russians, chiefly the agriculturists, will at last understand where salvation lies, and will be the first to begin to avail themselves of it.

That means of salvation has long been foreseen by men and it draws them to itself; and latterly it has entered more and more into the consciousness of the people, and it already begins to find application.

A Court Martial is being held in a Government town. On the table is the Mirror of Justice, surmounted by the double-headed eagle, and with an inscription at its base; also law books, and whole sheets of paper neatly folded, with printed headings. At the table, in the chief place, sits a thick-set man in a military, gold-laced uniform, with a cross hung round his neck, and with an intelligent face expressing good-nature, especially now that he has just had a good lunch and has received satisfactory news of the health of his youngest child. Near him sits another officer, of German extraction, dissatisfied with his appointment, and at present considering the report he will render to his chief. In the third seat is a quite young officer, a high-spirited dandy, who at lunch at his Colonel's has just fired off a witty jest which amused everybody. He now remembers this joke, and smiles just perceptibly. He badly wants to smoke, and awaits the adjournment with impatience. At a separate table sits the Secretary, a pile of papers before him, and his whole attention devoted to being ready promptly to hand up whatever document the Judges may require.

Two young men, one a peasant from the Penza Government, the other a townsman from Lubim, dressed as soldiers, bring in a third, quite a young man, also wearing a soldier's overcoat.

This young man is pale. He only once glances at the Judges, and then looks intently before him. This young man has already been in prison three years for refusing to swear allegiance and declining to serve in the army. To get rid of him, after three years' imprisonment, they offered to let him take the oath; and then, as a soldier who had been three years in the service — though in prison — he could be set at liberty. But the young man had said in Church the same that he said when first called as a

conscript: that he, as a Christian, could neither swear nor slay men. Now he is being tried for this second refusal.

The Secretary reads a paper called the Indictment. In it, it is said that the young man has refused to draw his pay, and considers military service a sin. The kindly President asks: "Do you plead guilty?"

"All that is said there, I said and did; but I do not consider myself guilty", says the young man, faltering and with a trembling voice.

The President nods as a sign that the answer is in order, glances at a paper, and asks:

"What explanation of your refusal can you give?"

"I refused, and do refuse, because I consider military service a sin —" he hesitates "— contrary to Christ's teaching."

The President is satisfied with this also, and nods approvingly. All is in order.

"Have you no more to say?"

The young man, his nether lip trembling, speaks of what is said in the Gospels: that not only killing, but all unkindly feelings towards one's brother, is forbidden.

The President approves of this also. The German frowns discontentedly. The young officer, lifting his head and raising his eye-brows, listens attentively, as to something new and interesting.

The accused, growing more and more agitated, speaks about oaths being plainly forbidden, and says he would consider himself guilty had he not refused, and that he is now ready —

The President stops him, considering that the accused is now talking irrelevantly of what does not concern the case and is therefore unnecessary.

After this, witnesses are called. They are, the Commander of the regiment, and a Sergeant-Major. The Commander is the President's habitual partner at bridge, a great lover of, and an adept at, the game; the Sergeant-Major is an agile, handsome, obliging Pole of noble birth, and a great reader of novels. A priest also comes in — an oldish man who has just taken leave of his daughter, his son-in-law and grandchildren, who had been staying with him. He is feeling upset after an encounter with his wife, about a carpet he gave to his daughter, which his wife did not wish to part with.

"Will you be so good, Father, as to swear in the witnesses, and remind them that bearing false witness is a sin in God's sight?" says the President to the priest.

The priest puts on a stole, takes a cross and a Testament, and repeats the usual words of admonition. Then he administers the oath to the Commander. The latter, with a quick movement, raises two clean fingers (which the President knows so well, having watched them at cards) and repeats after the priest the words of the oath, and kisses the cross and the Testament with a smack, as if enjoying it. Then a Catholic priest comes forward and administers the oath to the handsome Sergeant-Major with equal alacrity.

The Judges wait calmly and seriously. The young officer has been out and had a smoke, but gets back in time for the examination of the witnesses.

The witnesses say the same that the accused had said. The President expresses approval. Then an officer who has been sitting apart rises. He is the Prosecutor. He walks up to a desk, moves some papers lying upon it from place to place, and then he begins to speak loudly and clearly, recounting all that the young man has done — as all the Judges know, and as the young man himself has just avowed, not only not concealing what he is accused of, but on the contrary, strengthening the case for his prosecution. The Prosecutor says that the accused, as he has himself told them, does not belong to any sect, that his parents are Orthodox, and that therefore his refusal of military service is caused solely by his own obstinacy; and that that obstinacy of his, and that of other misguided and insubordinate people like him, has led the Government to enact a severe punishment for such people, which in the Prosecutor's opinion is applicable in the present case.

After that, the prisoner's advocate says something quite unnecessary, and then all go out. Then the accused is again brought in, and the Judges re-enter. They take their seats, and at once rise again; and the President, in a calm, monotonous voice, without looking at the accused, announces the decision of the Court. The accused, the man who has suffered for three years rather than call himself a soldier, is now first deprived of his military rank, and of some rights and privileges or other, and is next condemned to serve in a Penal Battalion for four years.

After that the convoy leads the young man away, and the participators in the proceedings all return to their ordinary occupations and pleasures, as though nothing particular had occurred.

Only the young officer fond of smoking, feels a strange disquieting sensation he cannot shake off, resulting from the persistently haunting words of the prisoner, which were so noble, strong and unanswerable, and were spoken with such agitation. At the Judges' consultation this young officer wished not to agree to the decision of his seniors, but became confused, swallowed his saliva, and agreed with them.

At the Colonel's evening party, when, between two games of bridge, everybody had assembled at the tea-table, the conversation turned on the recalcitrant soldier. The Commander of the regiment expressed his definite opinion that the cause of it all was lack of education.

"They get hold of all sorts of ideas, and don't know what applies to what; and it results in such incongruities."

"No, uncle, I don't agree with you", broke in a girl-student, a Social-Democrat, the Commander of the regiment's niece. "The energy, the steadfastness of that man, are worthy of respect. One can only regret that his strength is wrongly directed", she added, thinking how useful such steadfast people would be if, instead of upholding obsolete, religious fancies, they supported scientific, Socialistic truths.

"Ah well! You're a confirmed Revolutionary", said her uncle, smiling.

"And it seems to me", said the young officer, continually inhaling smoke, "that from a Christian point of view he is unanswerable."



“I don’t know from what point of view”, remarked an old General severely; “I only know that a soldier must be a soldier, and not a preacher.”

“In my opinion, the chief thing”, said the President of the Court, smiling with his eyes, “is, that if we want to play our six rubbers, we must not lose the precious time.”

“I will bring the tea to the card-table for those who have not yet finished”, said the hospitable host; and one of the players, with an adroit, accustomed movement, spread out the cards like a fan; and the players took their places. . . .

In the lobby of the prison, where the convoy with the prisoner who had refused to serve were awaiting an order from the officials, the following conversation was taking place:

“How is it that the priests do not know?” said one of the convoy. “Had it not been in the books, there would have been an excuse for them.”

“But evidently they don’t understand”, replied the prisoner. “If they understood they would say the same. Christ ordered us not to kill, but to love.”

“That’s so! It’s clear, and what’s more, it’s hard!”

“Not at all hard. I have been in prison, and am sentenced again; but my soul is so at ease, that God grant as much to everybody!”

A non-commissioned officer of the reserve, and no longer young, came up, and said respectfully to the convict:

“Well, Simydnitch, sentenced?”

“Sentenced.”

The officer shook his head. “It’s all very well; but it’s hard to bear.”

“It seems one has to learn to bear”, replied the young prisoner, smiling, and evidently touched by the sympathy shown him.

“Yes, that’s so. The Lord endured and bade us endure, but it is hard.”

At these words the handsome Polish Sergeant-Major entered the lobby with a quick, masterful step:

“No talking! . . . Now, quick march to the new prison!”

The Sergeant-Major was particularly severe because an order had been given him to see that the prisoner had no communication with the soldiers: for during the two years he had been confined in this prison, four men had been perverted by him and had similarly refused service, and had already been tried, and were now confined in different prisons.

# X

What the young man who refused military service said at his trial, has been said long ago, from the very commencement of Christianity. The sincerest and most fervent Fathers of the Church said the same thing about the incompatibility of Christianity with one of the fundamental and inevitable conditions of the existing Governmental order, that is to say — the army. They said that a Christian cannot be a soldier and cannot be prepared to kill anybody he is ordered to kill.

The Christian community of the first centuries, up to the fifth century, in the persons of its leaders definitely recognized that to Christians any kind of murder is forbidden, and therefore that murder in war is also forbidden.

Thus, in the second century, the philosopher Tatian, who became a Christian, considered killing in war as inadmissible for Christians as any other kind of murder, and considered the military wreath of honour to be shameful for a Christian. In the same century, Athenagoras of Athens said that not only do Christians not murder, but they also avoid being present where murder is committed.

In the third century, Clement of Alexandria, contrasted the peaceable race of Christians with the ‘warlike’ heathens. But the abhorrence of war by the Christians was expressed most clearly of all by the celebrated Origen. Applying to Christians the words of Isaiah, that the time would come when people would “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks”, he quite definitely says: “We raise no weapon against any nation, we do not learn the art of fighting, for through Jesus Christ we have become children of peace.” Replying to Celsus, who accused the Christians of avoiding military service (in the opinion of Celsus, if the Roman Empire became Christian it would perish), Origen says that Christians, more than others, fight for the good of the Emperor, but they fight for him by good deeds, prayers, and by their good influence upon people. “In so far as fighting with weapons is concerned, it is perfectly true”, says Origen “that Christians would not fight in the Imperial armies, and would not go even if the Emperor forced them to do so.”

In the same definite way, Tertullian, Origen’s contemporary, expresses himself about the impossibility of a Christian being a soldier. “It is not fitting to serve the emblem of Christ and the emblem of the devil,” says he, with reference to army service, “the fortress of light and the fortress of darkness. One soul cannot serve two masters. And besides, how can one fight without the sword, which the Lord Himself has taken away? Is it possible to do sword exercises, when the Lord says that everyone who takes the sword shall perish by the sword? And how can a son of peace take part in a battle?”

“The world goes mad with the mutual shedding of blood,” says the celebrated Cyprian, “and murder, considered a crime when committed singly, is called a virtue when it is done in the mass. The multiplication of violence secures impunity for the criminals.”

In the fourth century Lactantius said the same: “There should be no exception to God’s commandment, that to kill a man is always a sin”, says he. “It is not permissible for Christians to bear arms, for their only weapon is truth.”

In the rules of the Egyptian Church of the third century, and in the so-called “Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ”, it is unconditionally forbidden for any Christian to enter military service, under penalty of being expelled from the Church.

In the lives of the Saints there are many instances of Christian martyrs of the first centuries who suffered for refusing military service.

So, for instance, Maximilian, brought before the Departmental authority for Military Service, replied to the Proconsul’s first question, as to his name: “My name is Christian, and therefore I cannot fight.” In spite of this declaration he was enrolled as a soldier, but refused to serve. He was told he must choose between the service or death. He said: “I would rather die, but I cannot fight”, and he was handed over to the executioner.

Marcellus was a centurion in the Trojan Legion. Having accepted the teaching of Christ and convinced himself that war is un-Christian, he took off his military decorations before the whole Legion, threw them on the ground, and declared that having become a Christian, he could no longer serve. He was put in prison, but there also he said: “A Christian cannot bear arms.” He was executed.

After Marcellus, Cassian, who belonged to the same Legion, refused to serve. He also was executed.

Under Julian the Apostate, Martin, who had been born and bred in a military centre, refused to continue his service. Being examined by the Emperor, he said only, “I am a Christian, and therefore cannot fight.”

The first Ecumenical Council, in the year 325, clearly decreed a severe penance for Christians who after having left the army, re-entered it. The exact words of this decree in the translation accepted by the Greek Orthodox Church, ran thus:

“Those called by righteousness to the fulfilment of the faith, and who, in their first burst of zeal, laid aside their military girdles, but afterwards were like dogs returning to their vomit. . . must bow before the church for ten years, asking forgiveness by listening to the Scriptures for three years from the (church) porch.”

Those Christians who did remain in the army, were instructed not to kill a foe in war. Even in the fourth century, we find Basil the Great recommending that soldiers who had offended against this decision should not be admitted to communion for three years.

And so, not only during the first three centuries of Christianity, during the time of persecution, but at first even after the triumph of Christianity over paganism, when

Christianity was recognized as the dominant, State religion, the conviction still maintained itself among Christians that war is incompatible with Christianity. Ferrucius expressed this definitely and decidedly, and was executed for so doing: "Christians are not allowed to shed blood, even in a just war and at the command of Christian Emperors." In the fourth century Lucifer, Bishop of Caliris, preached that even the blessing most precious to a Christian — his faith — must be defended, "not by killing others, but by one's own death". Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, who died in the year 431, still threatened eternal torments to those who served Caesar with arms in their hands.

Thus it was during the four first centuries of Christianity. Under Constantine, however, the cross already appeared on the standards of the Roman legions. And in 416 a decree was formulated that no pagan should be admitted into the army. All the soldiers had become Christians: *i.e.*, all the Christians, with very few exceptions, had renounced Christ.

From that time, during nearly fifteen centuries, the simple, indubitable and evident truth, that the profession of Christianity is incompatible with readiness to commit every kind of violence and even to kill at the will of other people, was hidden from men to such a degree — and to such a degree was real Christian feeling weakened — that from generation to generation, men, nominally professing Christianity, lived and died sanctioning murder, participating in it, committing it, and profiting by it.

So the centuries went by. As though in mockery of Christianity — the Crusades were undertaken. In the name of Christianity most shocking crimes were wrought, and those rare men who retained the fundamental principles of Christianity, which do not admit of violence: the Manichaeans, Montanists, Cathari and others, only received from the majority of men, ridicule and persecution.

But truth, like fire, gradually burns through all its coverings; and since the commencement of the last century, has begun to show itself more and more clearly, and to gain the attention both of the willing and the unwilling.

This truth has shown itself in many places, but particularly brightly in Russia at the beginning of the last century. There were probably very many manifestations of it, that have left no trace.

Only some of them are known to us.

# XI

In 1818, as General Mouravydf noted in his Diary, “Five serfs from the Tambof Government were sent to the Caucasus for refusing to serve when taken as conscripts. They were flogged several times with the knout and made to run the gauntlet, but they would not yield, and always made the same reply: ‘All men are equal. The Emperor is a man like ourselves. We will not submit, will not pay taxes, and especially we will not kill our brother man in war. You may cut us in pieces, but we will not yield. We will not put on the soldier’s cloak; we will not eat soldiers’ rations; we will not be soldiers. We will accept alms, but we want nothing from the Government.’ ”

Such men were flogged to death, or tortured, in prisons, and everything relating to them was carefully kept dark; but their number continually increased during the century.

Thus:

“In 1827 Nikolayef and Bogdanof, of the Guards, ran away from military service to a Raskdlnik (Dissenting) Hermitage arranged by the townsman Sokolof, in the forest. When captured they refused army service as contrary to their convictions, and would not be sworn in. For this conduct the military authorities decided to make them run the gauntlet, and to put them in a Penal Battalion.

“In 1830, in the Peshehdnsk District of the Yaroslaf Government, an unknown man and woman were seized by the local police. On examination, in reply to the usual questions, the man stated that he was called George Ivanof, did not know where he came from, had never had any father, except Christ the Saviour, and was sixty-five years of age. The woman gave similar replies.

“At the Magistrate’s Court, after admonition from the priest, these people added that besides the one Heavenly King, they acknowledged no one; neither Emperor, nor civil nor spiritual Governments. On examination at the Law Court the man said he was seventy years old, and did not acknowledge any spiritual or civil authorities, and regarded the rulers as renegades from the laws of the Christian religion. George Ivanof was exiled to Solovetz Monastery, to be employed as a workman; but for some reason he was kept in prison, and remained there till his death, which occurred in 1839. He died, adhering firmly to his erroneous convictions.

“In 1835, in the Yaroslaf Government, an unknown man was captured, who called himself Ivan. He declared that he did not believe in the holy saints, nor in the Emperor, nor in any of the Authorities. By the Emperor’s order he was sent to Solovetz Monastery, to be employed as a workman during the summer. The same year, by Imperial command, he was sent to be a soldier.

“In 1849 a peasant conscript from the Moscow Government, Ivan Shourouf, nineteen years of age, on enrolment refused to take the oath, in spite of all coercion. As explanation of his refusal, he said that according to the word of God one must serve God alone, and that he therefore did not wish to serve the Tsar, and would not take the oath, fearing to perjure himself. The Authorities, considering that to let the case become known, by having Shourouf tried, would do harm, decided to confine him in a Monastery. The Emperor Nicholas I gave the following decision on the Report of Shourouf’s case: ‘Let this recruit be sent under a convoy to Solovetz Monastery.’”<sup>1</sup>

Such are some of individual cases that got into print — a minute fraction of all the people in Russia who have considered it impossible to reconcile the profession of the Christian faith with obedience to Governmental authority.

Whole communities with many thousands of members, admitting the incompatibility of the existing order of things with the teaching of Christ existed during the last century, and many such communities exist now: Molokans, Jehovahists, Hlisti, Skoptsi, Old Believers and many others, who for the most part conceal their non-acceptance of Governmental authority but consider it to come from the source of all evil — the Devil. Especially noticeable and strong in their direct denial of the Governmental Authorities, in the last century, were tens of thousands of Doukhobdrs, of whom some thousands, in spite of all persecution, held to the truth and emigrated to America (Canada).

The number of people acknowledging the incompatibility of Christianity with obedience to the Government, has continually increased; and in our time (especially since the Government introduced the demand, most obviously contrary to Christian teaching — that of conscription for all) the antagonism between a Christian understanding and the Governmental order has begun to appear more and more often.

Thus, at the present time, even more and more young men refuse military service, and prefer to endure the cruel torture to which they are subjected, rather than be false to their understanding of the law of God.

I happen to know some dozens of men in Russia, some of whom have completed their heavy martyrdom for the faith, and some of whom are still in prison. Here are the names of some of those who have suffered: Zalubdovsky, Lubin, Make’yef, Drdzhin, Iziimtchenko, Olhovik, Sereda, Farafdnof, Egdrof, Ganzha, Akoulof, Dymshitz,

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<sup>1</sup> From M. Koikin’s *Exiles and Prisoners in Solovdtz Monastery*.

Ivtchenko, Bezverhy, Tchaga, Shevtchouk, Boiifrof, Gontcharenko, Zaharof, Tregoubof, Vdlhof, Slobddinuk, Mirdnof, Bougaef, Tchelyshof, Menshikof, Reznikdf, Ryshkdf, Koshevdy. Of those now in prison I know: Ikdnnikof, Kourtysh, Vamavsky, Shnyakin, Molosay, Koudrin, Pantchenkof, Deryabin, Kalatchef, Bannof, Zinkitchef, Martchenka and Prozretsky.

I also know of such men in Austria, Hungary, Servia, Bulgaria, Holland and France. There are particularly many of them in Bulgaria.

Nor is that all. Similar refusals occur, on the same grounds, in the Mohammedan world also, in Persia among the Babists, and among Russian Mohammedans in the sect called "God's Regiment".

The ground for these refusals is one and the same — most natural, inevitable and indisputable; it is an acknowledgement of the necessity of obeying the religious law rather than the State law, when these conflict. The State law, in its demand of military service: that is, of readiness to slay at the will of others, cannot but be contrary to all religious-moral law, which is always founded on love to one's neighbour, like all religious teachings, not only Christian, but also Mohammedan, Buddhist, Brahminist, and Confucian.

The strictest definition of the law of love, excluding any kind of exception, which Christ expressed 1900 years ago, is, in our time, recognized by the most morally sensitive people of all religions, and this no longer as a result of following Christ, but by their own direct cognition of its truth.

Yes, this is the only means of salvation.

At first it seems as though the refusals of military service are special cases, relating only to military service; but this only seems so. For these refusals are not accidental actions evoked by special circumstances. These refusals are the consequence of a real and sincere acceptance of a religious teaching. And such acceptance naturally destroys the whole order of life based on principles that clash with it and are contrary to it. It destroys the existing order of things, because if men, understanding that participation in violence is incompatible with Christianity, will not go as soldiers, as tax-collectors, as Judges, as jurymen, as policemen, or as any sort of officials, clearly the violence from which the people now suffer will no longer exist.

## XII

But what can those hundreds, thousands, or let us even say hundreds of thousands, of insignificant, powerless, ruined people do, against the whole enormous number of men bound by the Governments and armed with all the mighty weapons of violence? The struggle seems not merely unequal, but impossible.

And yet the result of this struggle is as certain as the outcome of the struggle between the darkness of night and the dawn of morning.

This is what one of the young men now imprisoned for refusing military service writes:

“Sometimes I have an opportunity of talking to the sentinels, and I smile sincerely every time they say to me: ‘Ah, fellow countryman, it’s a pity your youth should all be passed in confinement!’ — ‘What does it matter?’ I reply. ‘Is not the end the same for us all?’ — ‘Yes, that’s true enough; but you’d be all right in the squad, if you served.’ — ‘But I have a quieter life here than you have in the squad.’ — ‘Ah, yes, I daresay!’ they reply ironically. ‘It’s not much good though! You are in here for the fourth year now. Had you served, you would have been back at home long ago; but as it is, when will they release you?’ — ‘But what if I’m all right here?’ I say, and they shake their heads and say ‘It’s queer!’ and it sets them thinking.

“The same kind of conversation goes on between me and the comrades in my cell, who are soldiers. One of them, a Jew, says to me: ‘It is wonderful! You have suffered so much, and yet are almost always cheerful and in good spirits!’ And if one of them in the cell gets down-hearted, the others say to him: ‘Eh! You have hardly had time to get seated, and are already in the dumps! You should look at Father’ (so they have nicknamed me, on account of my little beard). ‘See how long he’s been here, and still he keeps gay!’ And so one word leads to another, and a conversation begins. Sometimes we just chat, but sometimes we start a serious talk: about God, life, and all that interests us. Sometimes one of them tells about his life in the village, and I feel so happy! And on the whole, my life is not so bad.”

And this is what another writes:



“I cannot say that my inner life is always the same. There are moments of weakness, and moments of joy.

“At present I am feeling well; but yet it needs much strength to look serenely on all one comes across in prison. Then one tries to look deeper into the matter, and assures oneself that it is all happening in an instant of time, and that more strength has been given me than is needed for this case, and joy lights up one’s heart, and one forgets all that has happened. Thus, in internal struggle, life goes on.”

This is what a third writes:

“On March 28th I was tried and sentenced to five years, five months and six days’ imprisonment. You would not believe how light and glad I felt after the trial: just as, after carrying a heavy load, one feels relief on putting it down, so, after the trial, I felt light and brisk; and I hope always to feel as well.”

Not such is the spiritual condition of those who employ violence, submit to it and share in it. Those thousands and millions of men, instead of the feeling of love for one’s brother natural and proper to man, feel towards everybody except a small circle of similarly minded people, only hatred, condemnation and fear; and they so deaden in themselves all human feelings, that the slaying of their brothers seems to them a condition necessary for their well-being.

“You speak of the cruelty of the executions! But what is one to do with these scoundrels?” say the Russian Conservatives. “In France, tranquillity was obtained after I forget how many thousands had been beheaded. Let them stop loading and throwing bombs, and then we’ll leave off hanging them!”

With similar inhuman cruelty the Revolutionary leaders demand and desire the death of the rulers; and the Revolutionary workmen and agricultural labourers demand the death of the capitalists and land-owners.

These people know they are not doing what is natural and right, and they are afraid, and lie, and try to evoke in themselves hatred, lest they should see the truth. They deaden the truth that lies in them and appeals to them; and they unceasingly suffer the cruellest pangs of mental distress.

The first group (the Non-Resisters) know they are doing what is natural to all men, doing that towards which humanity moves, and what invariably gives felicity both to the individual and to all. The others (the users of violence), however they may try to hide it from themselves, know that they are doing what is unnatural and repugnant to humanity — what mankind is more and more abandoning — and what causes suffering both to individuals and to people in general, and to the doers most of all. On the one

side there is the consciousness of lack of liberty, fear, and secrecy; on the other side is freedom, peace, and frankness. On the one side, lack of faith; on the other, faith. On the one side, falsehood; on the other, truth. On the one side, hatred; on the other, love. On the one side, the outlived, painful past; on the other, the coming, joyful future.

Then how can it be in doubt, which side will conquer?

A wonderful truth was expressed by a now deceased French author, who wrote this wonderful and inspired letter:

“The soul never so harassed man, never so dominated him, as it does today. It is as though it were in the air we all breathe. The few isolated souls that had separately desired the regeneration of society have, little by little, sought one another out, beckoned one another, drawn nearer, united, comprehended one another, and formed a group, a centre of attraction, toward which others now fly from the four quarters of the globe, like larks towards a mirror. They have, as it were, formed one collective soul, so that men in future may realize together, consciously and irresistibly, the approaching union and steady progress of nations that were but recently hostile one to another. This new soul I find and recognize in events seemingly most calculated to deny it.

“These armaments of all nations, these threats their representatives address to one another, this recrudescence of race persecutions, these hostilities among compatriots, and even these youthful escapades at the Sorbonne, are all things of evil aspect, but not of evil augury. They are the last convulsions of that which is about to disappear. The social body is like the human body. Disease is but a violent effort of the organism to throw off a morbid and harmful element.

“Those who have profited, and expect for long or for ever to continue to profit by the mistakes of the past, are uniting to prevent any modification of existing conditions. Hence these armaments, and threats, and persecutions. But look carefully and you will see that all this is quite superficial. It is colossal, but hollow. There is no longer any soul in it — the soul has gone elsewhere; these millions of armed men who are daily drilled to prepare for a general war of extermination, no longer hate the men they are expected to fight, and none of their leaders dares to proclaim this war. As for the appeals, and even the threatening claims, that rise from the suffering and the oppressed — a great and sincere pity, recognizing their justice, begins at last to respond from above.

“Agreement is inevitable, and will come at an appointed time, nearer than is expected. I know not if it be because I shall soon leave this earth, and the rays that are already reaching me from below the horizon have disturbed my sight, but I believe our world is about to begin to realize the words,

‘Love one another’, without however being concerned whether a man or a God uttered them.” — Dumas fils

Yes, in this, and only in this fulfilment in life of the law of love (not in a limited, but in its real meaning, as the supreme law which admits of no exceptions) in this alone lies salvation from the terrible and ever more calamitous and apparently hopeless condition in which the nations of Christendom now find themselves.

## XIII

”A terrible weight of evil is hanging over the people of the earth, and presses upon them”, wrote I fifteen years ago. “Those standing under this weight, and more and more crushed by it, seek ways to rid themselves of it.

“They know that with their united strength they could lift the weight and throw it off, but they cannot agree to undertake it all together, and each one stoops lower and lower, to let the weight rest on the shoulders of the others. So the weight presses down more and more, and would have long since crushed them, were it not for those who are guided in their actions not by considerations of the external results of their actions, but only by an inner accord between their conduct and the voice of conscience. Such men have existed and still exist — Christians — for, in place of an external aim (for the attainment of which the consent of everybody is required), to set oneself an inward purpose (to attain which no one’s consent is needed) is the essence of true Christianity. And therefore deliverance from the slavery in which people are living, impossible for ordinary people, has come, and is coming only through Christianity — only by exchanging the law of violence for the law of love.

“‘The aim of life in general cannot be fully known to you’, says the Christian teaching to each man, ‘and only seems to you like an ever greater and greater approximation towards the welfare of the whole world, and the realization of the kingdom of God. But the aim of individual life is certainly known to you, and consists of attaining in yourself the greatest perfection of love, necessary for 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: barriers may be placed in the way of their realization; but the advance towards inward perfecting, and the increase of love in oneself and in others, cannot be stopped by anything or anybody.

“‘And it is only necessary for man to set himself (instead of a false, external, social aim) this one true undoubted and attainable inner aim of life, and all the chains by which he seemed to be helplessly bound will immediately fall to pieces, and he will feel perfectly free. . .

“A Christian liberates himself from the State law by not requiring it for himself or for others; considering human life to be better secured by the law of love which he acknowledges, than by the law upheld by violence. . . .

“To a Christian who has recognized the demands of the law of love, all the demands of the law of violence not only cease to be binding, but present themselves as human errors which must be exposed and abolished. . . .

“The profession of Christianity in its real meaning, including Non-Resistance to evil by violence, frees men from all external power. But it not only frees them from external power, it also gives them the possibility of attaining that amelioration of life which they vainly seek to attain by changing the external forms of life, though changes in external forms are always merely consequences of a changed consciousness; and life is only made better, in so far as such changes are founded on a change of consciousness.

“All external changes in the forms of life, not having a change of consciousness at their base, do not improve the condition of the people, but generally make it worse. It was not the Government’s decrees that stopped child-beating, torture, and slavery, but a changed consciousness in men made these decrees inevitable. And life improved only in so far as it rested on the altered consciousness: that is, in as far as the law of violence had been replaced in men’s consciousness by the law of love.

“People think that if a change of consciousness influences the forms of life, the contrary must also be true; and as to direct their activity to external changes is pleasanter (the effect is more evident) and easier, they therefore always prefer to direct their strength not to changing consciousness, but to changing forms; and therefore for the most part they occupy themselves not with the essential matter, but only with its semblance. The external, restless, useless activity which consists in establishing and adapting the external forms resulting from the change of consciousness, hides from men that essential, inner activity which alone can ameliorate their lives. And this superstition, more than anything else, hinders the general amelioration of human life.

“A better life can only come when the consciousness of men is altered for the better; and therefore all the efforts of those who wish to improve life, should be directed to changing their own and other people’s consciousness.

“Christianity in its real meaning (and only that kind of Christianity) frees people from the slavery in which they live in our times, and alone makes possible a real improvement in their life, individually and collectively.

“It would seem clear that only real Christianity, excluding violence, gives salvation to each separate individual, and that it also gives the possibility of improving the collective life of humanity; but people could not accept this, till life under the law of violence had been fully tried and until the field of the delusions, cruelties, and sufferings of Governmental life had been explored in all directions.

“It is often cited as a most convincing proof of the falseness, and especially of the impracticability of Christ’s teaching, that having been known to men for 1900 years, it has yet not been accepted in its full meaning, but only externally: ‘If’, people say, ‘it has been known for so many years, and yet has not been accepted as guidance for the lives of men, if so many martyrs and confessors of Christianity have perished uselessly without changing the existing order of things — that evidently shows the teaching to be untrue and impracticable.’

“To say and think this is like saying and thinking that if a seed that has been sown instead of at once giving blossom and fruit, lies and decomposes in the ground, that is

a sign that the seed is not good and fertile, and therefore must and should be stamped down.

“That on its appearance the Christian teaching was not at once accepted in its full meaning, but was accepted only in an external, perverted form, was both unavoidable and necessary.

“A teaching destroying the whole then existing order of things, could not have been accepted on its first appearance in its full significance, but could be accepted only in an external, perverted form.

“Men — the great majority of men — were not capable of understanding Christ’s teaching spiritually. They had to be brought to understand by experience, which made their own sides ache, that every deviation from the teaching leads to destruction.

“The teaching was accepted, inevitably, as the external worship of a deity, replacing paganism, and life continued to go on and on, along heathen lines. But this perverted teaching was inseparably bound up with the Gospel; and the priests of pseudo-Christianity, in spite of all their efforts, could not hide from men the essence of the true teaching, which, against their will, unrolling bit by bit before men’s eyes, entered into their consciousness.

“For eighteen centuries, this double work, positive and negative, has gone on: on the one side, the removal of people further and further from the possibility of a good and reasonable life; and on the other, the greater and greater elucidation of the true meaning of the teaching.

“And in our day it has come to this, that real Christianity, formerly understood only by a few men gifted with vivid religious feeling, has now, in some of its manifestations (in the guise of Socialist doctrines) become a truth within the reach of the simplest; while the life of the community at every step runs counter to this truth in the crudest and most evident way. . . .

“The position of mankind in Europe, with land held as private property, with taxation, a priesthood, prisons, guillotines, forts, cannons, dynamite, milliardaires and beggars, seems terrible indeed. But this only seems so. For all these horrors which are being committed, and those which we expect to be committed, are being committed or ready to be committed by ourselves. Not only may all this not be, but, to accord with the present condition of human consciousness, it ought not to be. Power lies not in the forms of life, but in human consciousness; and human consciousness is now in a highly strained condition, drawn in two opposite directions by a palpable inconsistency. Christ said He had conquered the world, and He really conquered it. The evil of life, however terrible it may be, no longer really exists, for it no longer dominates the consciousness of men.

“The growth of consciousness proceeds steadily, not by leaps and bounds; and one can never see the line which divides one period of the life of mankind from another; and yet there is such a line, just as there is a dividing line between childhood and youth, winter and spring, etc. Or, if there be no exact line, there is a transition period;

and mankind in Europe is at present passing through such a transition period. All is ready for the step from one

condition to another. Only a little push is needed, which would complete the change. And this little push may be given at any instant. The social conscience already rejects the old form of life, and has long been ready to assimilate a new one. Everyone feels and knows this. But the inertia of the past and timidity of the future sometimes have the effect of preventing what has long been prepared in consciousness from becoming realized. At such moments a single word is sometimes enough to consolidate consciousness, and that chief force of social, human life — public opinion — may suddenly, without struggle or violence, overturn the whole existing system. . . .

“The salvation of men from their degradation, enslavement and ignorance, will not come about by Revolutions, not by Trades Unions or Peace Congresses, but in the simplest way: by each man who is called on to take part in violence to his brothers and to himself, recognizing his real, spiritual *ego*, and asking in amazement: ‘But why should I do that?’

“Not Revolutions, or cunning, deep, Socialistic, Communal arrangements of Unions and Arbitrations, and so forth, will save humanity; but only this spiritual consciousness when it becomes general.

“A man need only awaken from the hypnotism which hides from him the real consciousness of humanity, in order not merely to refuse to fulfil the demands which the Government makes upon him, but to be terribly surprised and indignant that anybody should put such demands to him. And this awakening may occur at any moment.”

Thus I wrote fifteen years ago; and I now say boldly that this awakening is actually taking place. I know that, being eighty years old, I shall not see it; but, as certainly as spring follows winter, and day follows night, I know that, for our Christian world, the time has come.

## XIV

All that may be so; but before people can rid themselves of the organization of life, founded on violence, in which they are entangled and which holds them, they would all have to be religious: that is, would have, for the sake of fulfilling God's will, to be ready to sacrifice their physical and personal welfare, and to live not for the future, but only in the present, endeavouring, in this present, to fulfil God's will as revealed to them by love. But the people of our world are not religious, and therefore cannot live so."

So say the people of our day, as though they believed that religious consciousness, faith, is a condition unnatural to man — as if religious consciousness in a man were something exceptional, that has to be taught and instilled into him. But only those can speak and think so, who, as a result of the present peculiar condition of Christendom, are temporarily deprived of the most necessary and natural condition of human life, which is — faith.

Such a retort, is like that which a man would make against work being necessary for the well-being of mankind, if he said that in order to work, one must have the strength to do it; but what are people to do who have so lost the habit of working that they can't, and don't know how to, or have not the physical strength for it?

But just as work is not something artificial, invented or ordained by man, but something inevitable and necessary, without which people could not live, so it is with faith, which is the consciousness of one's relation to the Infinite, and the guidance of conduct that flows therefrom. Such faith is not something taught, artificial and exceptional, but on the contrary, it is a natural quality of human nature, without which people never have and never could live — any more than birds can live without wings.

If we now, in our Christian world, see people destitute of religious consciousness — or rather, not destitute of, but with a blurred religious consciousness — this monstrous, unnatural condition is only temporary and accidental. It is the condition of a few, and arises from the special circumstances in which the people of the Christian world have lived and are living — and it is just as exceptional as the position of those who live and can live without working.

And therefore, that men who have lost this natural feeling so necessary for human life may again experience it, they need not invent or devise anything, but need only remove the deception which has temporarily obscured that feeling, and blunted it in them.



If the people of our world only freed themselves from the fraud of Christian teaching perverted by Church doctrine, and from the justification and even exaltation of the Governmental system based on violence, and incompatible with true Christianity, which is upheld by that teaching, then, not only for all Christians, but for the whole world, the chief impediment to a religious consciousness of the supreme law of love (without possibility of any exceptions or violence) which 1900 years ago was revealed to humanity, and which now alone satisfies the demands of the human conscience, would disappear from the souls of men of itself.

And as soon as this law enters the consciousness of men as the *supreme* law of life, that condition (so harmful to morality) under which the greatest injustices and cruelties done by men to one another are considered to be actions natural and proper for men — will cease of itself; and that of which the Socialist and Communist organizers of future societies dream, and which they desire and promise, will be accomplished, that, and much more than that.

But this will be attained by exactly the opposite means, and will only be attained because it will not be sought by those self-contradictory methods of violence, by which the believers in violence try to accomplish it. This freedom from the evil which torments and depraves men will be attained, not by people consolidating and preserving the present system: monarchy or republic, of whatever kind, and not by destroying the existing system and founding a better: Socialist or Communist; in fact, not at all by men devising some particular arrangement of society which they consider best and forcing it by violence on other people; but merely by each man (the majority of men) without thinking or caring about the results of his activity for himself or for others acting in one way or another, not for the sake of this or that arrangement of society, but only to fulfil for himself, for his own life, what he admits to be the supreme law, the law of love, which does not allow violence.

## XV

But how can one live without a Government, or some authority? People have never lived so", you will be told.

People are so accustomed to the Governmental order under which they live, that it seems to them the unavoidable, permanent form of human life.

But it only seems so. People live, and have lived, outside all Governmental systems. All the savage nations who have not reached what is called civilization, have lived and are living so; and so live those who in their understanding of life have risen above 'civilization': Christian communities in Europe and America, and especially in Russia, who have rejected Government and do not require it, and who only endure its interference because they must.

The Governmental order of things is a temporary, and certainly not a perpetual, form of human life. And just as the life of an individual is not stationary, but continually changes, moves on, and perfects itself, so the life of all mankind is unceasingly changing, moving on, and perfecting itself. As each individual once sucked the breast, played with toys, learnt lessons, worked, got married, brought up children, freed himself from passions and gained wisdom with age, so the life of nations also changes and perfects itself, only not like an individual in a few years, but in the course of centuries and ages. And as, for a man, the chief changes occur in the invisible, spiritual sphere, so in the life of mankind the chief changes first of all occur in the invisible sphere of his religious consciousness.

And as these changes in the individual occur so gradually that it is never possible to point out the hour, the day, or the month, when the child ceases to be a child and becomes a youth, or the youth a man, and yet we unerringly recognize it when the change is accomplished — so we never can point out the years in which mankind, or a certain part of it, has out-grown one religious period, and reached the next. But just as we know about the former child, that he has become a youth, so, when the change is accomplished, we know about humanity, or a part of it, that it has outlived one religious phase and entered another, a higher one.

Such a change from one age to another, has in our day occurred in the life of the Christian nations.

We do not know the hour when the child becomes a youth, but we know that the former child can no longer play with toys; and in the same way we cannot name the year, or even the decade, during which the people of the Christian world outgrew their old form of life and entered another age defined by their religious consciousness, but we cannot help knowing and seeing that the people of the Christian world can no

longer seriously play at conquests, at meetings between monarchs, at diplomatic cunning, at Constitutions, with their Houses of Parliament and Dumas, at being Socialist-Revolutionaries, at democratic or anarchist parties and at Revolutions; and above all, cannot do all these things basing them on violence.

This is especially evident now among us, in Russia, with the external change of the Government organization. Serious, thinking Russian men, cannot but feel towards all the newly-introduced forms of Government, much as a grown-up man would feel if a new toy, such as he had not possessed in his childhood, were given him. However new and interesting the toy may be, he does not require it, and he can only regard it with a smile. So it is with us in Russia — both for thinking men and for the great mass of the people — in regard to our Constitution, Duma, and various Revolutionary unions and parties. For, really, the Russian people of our time — who, I think I am not mistaken in saying, feel, though but vaguely, the essence of the real teaching of Christ — cannot seriously believe that man's destiny in this world is, to employ the short space given him between birth and death, in making speeches in Parliament or at meetings with fellow Socialists, or in judging his neighbours in the Law Courts, or in capturing, locking up, and killing them, or in throwing bombs at them, or taking away their land, or seeing that Finland, India, Poland, or the Corea are added to what is called Russia, England, Prussia, or Japan; or in liberating these countries by violence, and for that being prepared even to condone collective massacres of one another. A man of our times cannot in the depths of his soul help being conscious of the absurdity of such activity.

We only fail to see the fact that the life we lead is discordant with human nature, because all those horrors among which we quietly live, have come about so gradually that we have not noticed them.

It has happened to me in my life to see a deserted old man in the most terrible plight; maggots swarmed in his body; he could not move a single limb without suffering, and yet so gradually had he come to it that he did not notice all the horror of his condition, and all he asked for was tea and a little sugar! So it is with us in our life. We do not see its full horror, merely because we have come to our present position by imperceptible steps, and are pleased with new cinematographs and motor cars, as he was pleased with his tea and sugar.

Apart from the fact that there is no kind of reason to believe that the abolition of violence, which is not conformable with reasonable, loving human nature, would impair, instead of improving, the condition of mankind — apart from that, the present condition of society is so dreadful that it is difficult to imagine anything worse.

Therefore the question of whether people can live without Governments is not only not a terrible one, as the defenders of the existing system wish to make out, but is merely laughable, as would be the question, addressed to a tortured man, of how he would live if people ceased tormenting him.

People who, owing to the existence of Government organization, hold exceptionally advantageous positions, imagine the life of people deprived of Governmental authority,

as a wild disorder, a struggle of all against all: just as if we were speaking, not of the life of animals (animals live peacefully, without Governmental violence) but of some terrible creatures, prompted in their activity solely by hatred and madness. But they imagine men to be such, merely because they attribute to them qualities contrary to human nature, but which have been promoted by that same Government organization under which they have themselves grown up, and which, in spite of the fact that it is evidently unnecessary and merely harmful, they continue to uphold.

And therefore to the question, What would life be like without Government? there can be but one answer, namely, that there would certainly not be all the evil which is created by Government; there would not be property in land, there would be no taxes spent on things unnecessary for the people; there would not be the separation of the nations, the enslavement of some by others; there would not be the waste of the people's best powers on preparations for wars; there would not be the fear of bombs on the one side and of gallows on the other; there would not be the insane luxury of some, and the still more insane destitution of others.

# XVI

Still, "what form would the life of those people take who decided to live without a Government?" asked men, evidently supposing that people always know what form their life will take, and in what form it will continue, and, therefore, that those who decide to live without a Government must also know in advance how their life would shape itself.

But in reality people never have known, and never can know, how their life will shape itself in the future. The conviction that people can know this, and can even arrange the future form of life, is a very crude, though very old and widespread superstition. Whether they submit to Government or not, people never have known, do not know, and cannot know, what form their life will take; and still less can a small number of people arrange as they please the life of all, for life always shapes itself, not according to the will of some people, but according to many complicated causes independent of the will of any given individuals; the chief cause being the moral and religious condition of the majority of the people in society.

The superstition that some people can know in advance what form the life of others — the majority of mankind — will take, and can even arrange this beforehand, has arisen, and maintains itself, in consequence of the desire of those who commit violence, to justify their activity, and the desire of those who suffer from violence, to explain it and make it more endurable. Those who commit violence assure themselves and others that they know what must be done in order that the life of men should take the shape they consider to be the best. The people who suffer the violence, until they are able to overthrow it, believe this; for only some such belief can give any kind of meaning to their own position.

One would think that history ought to have completely demolished this superstition. Some Frenchmen at the end of the eighteenth century upheld by violence a despotic monarchical organization; but despite all their efforts that organization crumbles, and a Republican organization springs up. In the same way, despite all the efforts of the Revolutionary leaders to preserve this organization, and despite the greatest violence, in place of the Republic, the Napoleonic Empire springs up. And again, contrary to the wish of the rulers, instead of an hereditary Empire, came the Coalition; Charles X, a Constitution, then again a Revolution, another New Republic, and so on, till the present Republic. And it has been the same with all the other coercive activities of man. All the efforts of the Papacy not only do not destroy the possibility of Protestantism, but evoke it. All the efforts of Capital only strengthen Socialistic tendencies. If some forms of society established by violence maintain themselves for a time, or are altered

by violence, this only happens because, at the given time, certain forms have ceased to correspond to the general, and especially to the spiritual, condition of the people; and not because someone maintained them or rearranged them.

So that the belief that some people, the minority, can arrange the life of the majority, that very thing which is considered the most certain truth — a truth in whose name the very greatest crimes are committed — is merely a superstition. The activity based on that superstition — that political activity of the Revolutionaries and of the rulers and their helpers, which is generally regarded as the most honourable and important work, is at bottom the most useless and also the most harmful of human activities, and the one which more than anything else has hindered and is hindering the real welfare of mankind.

Rivers of blood have been shed, and are being shed, in the name of this superstition, and incalculable sufferings have been and are being borne by men, on account of the stupid, harmful activity which has arisen from this superstition. And what is worst of all is that while rivers of blood have been and are being spilt in its name, this very superstition more than anything else has prevented and still prevents the accomplishment of those very improvements in our social system which are suitable to our time, and to the degree of development attained by human consciousness. This superstition hinders real progress chiefly because, in the name of the preservation and consolidation, or the alteration and amelioration of the social order, people — devoting all their strength to acting on other people — thereby deprive themselves of the activity and inner perfecting which alone can help to alter the construction of the whole of society.

Human life as a whole moves, and cannot help moving, toward the eternal ideal of perfection, only by each separate individual advancing towards his own personal and equally unlimited perfection.

What a dreadful, pernicious superstition is that under the influence of which men — neglecting the inward work upon themselves, which is the only thing really needed for their own and society's welfare, and also the one thing in which man has full power — direct all their strength towards arranging the life of others, which is beyond their power, and, for the attainment of this impossible aim, employ violent means, certainly evil and injurious to themselves and to others, and more surely than anything else removing them both from their personal and from the general perfection!

## XVII

All that may be true, but to abstain from violence will be reasonable only when all men, or the majority of men, understand the disadvantage, needlessness and unreasonableness of violence. As long as this is not so, what are individual men to do? Are they really not to defend themselves, but leave themselves and their lives and fate of those near them, to the mercy of bad and cruel men?"

But this question of what I ought to do to counteract violence which is being done before my eyes, is again founded on the crude superstition that it is possible for man not only to know the future, but also to arrange it as he likes. For a man free from this superstition, the question does not and cannot exist.

A villain has raised his knife above his victim, and I have a pistol in my hand, and I kill him. But then I do not know, and cannot know, whether the man who raised the knife would have carried out his intention or not. He might not have carried out his evil intention, but I certainly do my evil deed. And therefore the one thing a man can and should do, in this or any similar case, is just what he should do in all possible cases: he should do that which he considers right before God and before his conscience. A man's conscience may demand of him the sacrifice of his own life, but certainly not the life of another; and the same principle holds good in relation to resisting social evil.

So that to the question of what a man is to do when he sees crime being committed by one or many people, the answer that would be given by a man free from the superstitious belief in the possibility of foreknowing man's condition and pre-arranging such conditions by violence, is always, Act towards others as you would have them to act towards you.

"But he steals, robs and kills, and I don't steal, rob or kill. Let him fulfil the law of reciprocity, and then demand the same of me", is generally said by men of our world, and said the more confidently, the higher the social position they hold. "I don't steal, or rob, or kill", says a ruler, a Minister, a General, a Judge, a landed proprietor, a merchant, a soldier or a policeman. The superstition of social organization, which condones all kinds of violence, has so dimmed men's consciousness in our world, that, not seeing the continual, unceasing robberies and murders which are committed in the name of the superstition of pre-arranging the world, they only see these rare attempts of violence committed by those who are called murderers, robbers, or thieves, and whose violence is not committed in the name of goodness. "He is a thief, he is a robber, he is a murderer; he does not fulfil the rule of not doing to others what you do not wish to have done to yourself", they say — but who say it? Those very same men who

continually murder in wars, and force others to prepare for murder, and who rob, and plunder their own and other nations.

If the rule of doing to others what you wish to be done to yourself is insufficient against those who in our society are called murderers, robbers and thieves, this is so only because those people constitute part of that enormous majority of the nation, which, generation after generation, has unceasingly been killed, robbed and plundered by those whose superstitions hindered them from seeing the criminality of their actions.

And therefore, in reply to the question of how to act towards those who attempt any kind of violence against us, there is but one answer: Cease doing to others, what you do not wish to have done to yourself.

Not to mention all the injustice of adopting the obsolete law of revenge towards some cases of violence, while leaving unpunished the most terrible and cruel violence committed by the Government in the name of the superstition of organizing the future — the application of crude revenge, for violence committed by people called robbers and thieves is evidently also irrational and leads straight to the very reverse of the object for which it is done. It leads to the reverse of its aim, because it destroys that most powerful influence — public opinion, which, a hundred times more than prisons or gallows, protects people from the commission of all sorts of violence against one another.

And this same argument is most strikingly applicable to international relations. “What is one to do when savages come and begin to seize the fruits of our labour, and our wives and our daughters?” people say, thinking only of the possibility of preventing the commission against themselves of those outrages and crimes, which they forget that they are continually committing against other nations. White men talk of ‘the Yellow Peril’. The Hindoos, Chinese and Japanese talk with far greater reason of ‘The White Peril’. One need only rid oneself of the superstition which condones violence, to be horrified at all the crimes which have been and are unceasingly committed by some nations against others, and to be still more horrified by the moral dullness which results from that superstition and enables Englishmen, Russians, Germans, Frenchmen and North Americans to speak — in face of the awful crimes they have committed and are still committing in India, Indo-China, Poland, Manchuria and Algiers — not only about the danger of violence that threatens them, but of the need of protecting themselves from it.

So that a man need but in thought, and for a time, free himself from this terrible superstition of the possibility of foreknowing the organization of society, which serves to justify all sorts of violence, for the sake of that organization, and need but look sincerely and seriously at the life of mankind, and he will see clearly that *the admission of the necessity of resisting evil by violence is nothing but a justification by men of their habitual and favourite crimes: revenge, cupidity, envy, ambition, love of power, pride and anger.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix IV.



## XVIII

If all you who suffer in the Christian world (both the rich and powerful, as well as the poor and oppressed) would but free yourselves from those deceptions of pseudo-Christianity and Government which hide from you what was revealed by Christ and what your own hearts and reasons demand, it will be clear to you, that in yourselves and only in yourselves, lie the causes of this physical suffering (want) and the spiritual sufferings (consciousness of injustice, envy, and irritation) which torment you — the oppressed and the poor-, and that also in you, the rich and powerful, lies the cause of those fears, reproaches of conscience, and consciousness of the sinfulness of your lives, which agitate you too, more or less, according to your sensitiveness. Both sets of you should understand that you are bom neither the slaves nor the rulers of the others: that you are free men, but free and reasonable only when you fulfil the supreme law of your life, and that this law has been revealed to you-, and you need only throw aside the lie that hides it from you, to know in what that law consists, and wherein lies your salvation. That law is love, and welfare lies only in the fulfilment of that law. Understand it, and you will become really free, and will receive all that you now vainly try to attain by those tortuous ways, along which you are drawn by unbelieving and depraved men. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavily 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 ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” - *Matt.* 11:28-30.

What will save you and deliver you from the evils you suffer, and supply the true welfare after which you so ignorantly strive, is not the search for your own advantage, nor is it envy, nor the following of a Party programme, not hatred, nor indignation, nor the thirst for fame, not even the feeling of justice, nor above all, is it the effort to arrange other people’s lives; but — strange as it may seem to you — it is merely activity within your own souls, having no external aim and no conception of what will result from it.

Understand that the supposition that a man can organize the life of others, is a crude superstition accepted only because of its antiquity. Understand that men occupied in organizing the lives of others, beginning with Monarchs, Presidents, Ministers, and ending with spies and executioners like the leaders and members of Parties, and Dictators, do not represent anything noble, as many people suppose; but, on the contrary, are pitiful, deeply-erring men, occupied not merely with an impossible and stupid task, but with one of the very worst things anyone can do.

People already understand the pitiful degradation of the spy or the executioner, and are beginning to understand the same about a gendarme, a policeman, or even to some extent about an army man; but they do not yet understand it about a Judge, a Senator, a Minister, a Monarch, or the Leader or participator in a Revolution. Yet the business of Senator, Minister, Monarch, or Party Leader, is as mean, unnatural to human nature, and horrid; it is even worse than the business of an executioner or spy, because while similar to the business of the executioner or spy, it is shrouded in hypocrisy.

Everyone, and especially the young, should understand that to devote your lives, or even to occupy yourselves with arranging by violence the lives of others according to your own ideas, is not only a crude superstition, but is an evil, criminal business, pernicious to the soul. Understand that the desire of an enlightened human soul for the good of others, is not satisfied by the vanity of organizing their lives by means of violence, but only by that inner labour with one's own self, wherein alone a man is free and powerful. Only that work which increases love within one can satisfy this desire. Understand that all activity directed to organizing the life of others by violence, cannot serve the welfare of mankind, but is always more or less consciously a hypocritical deception, hiding low passions — ambition, pride or cupidity — under the mask of service to man.

Understand it, especially you, the young generation of the future, and leave off doing what most of you now are doing — cease to seek for imaginary happiness in shaping the welfare of the people by means of participation in Government, in Law Courts, by teaching other people, and (in order to do that) by entering institutions that — by accustoming you to idleness, conceit and pride — deprave you, namely, all sorts of Grammar Schools and Universities. Cease participating in various organizations which appear to have for their aim the welfare of the common people; and seek only one thing, a thing always needed by every man, always attainable by everyone, and that gives the greatest good to oneself, and more surely than anything else serves the good of one's neighbours. Seek in yourselves for one thing — an increase of love by means of the destruction of everything which prevents its manifestation: mistakes, passions; and you will then aid the welfare of mankind in the most effectual manner. Understand that in our time the fulfilment of the supreme law of love which we have learnt (excluding violence) is as inevitable for us as the law of migration and nest-building is inevitable for birds, the law of feeding on plants for herbivorous animals, and on flesh for the carnivora; and that therefore every departure we make from that law is certainly pernicious.

Only understand this, and devote your life to this joyful work; only begin to do it, and you will at once know that in this, and in this alone, lies the business of man's life, and that this alone produces that amelioration of the lives of all men towards which you strive so vainly, and in such mistaken ways. Understand that welfare for men lies only in their unity, and that unity cannot be attained by violence. Unity can only be

reached when each man, not thinking about unity, thinks only about fulfilling the law of life. Only this *supreme* law of love, alike for all men, unites mankind.

The *supreme* law of life, revealed by Christ, is now clear to men, and the following of it must unite them.

## XIX

Here is all I wished to say:

I wished to say that we in our day have reached a position in which we can no longer stay; and that whether we like it or not, we must enter a new path of life; and that in order to enter that path, we must not invent a new faith, nor any new scientific theories to explain the meaning of life and to guide it; above all, we do not require any particular kind of activity, but we only require one thing: to liberate ourselves from the superstitions of pseudo-Christianity and of Governmental organization.

If only every man understands that he not only has no right but has no power to arrange the life of others, and that the business of each man is simply to arrange his own life in accord with the supreme religious law revealed to him — then the painful, bestial organization of the life, so incompatible with the demands of our souls, of all the so-called Christian peoples, which is now becoming worse and worse — will vanish of itself.

Whoever you may be: Tsar, Judge, land-owner, artisan or beggar — think of it! Take pity on yourself, take pity on your own soul. . . . For however befogged you may be, and stupefied by your Tsardom, your power, or your riches, however afflicted you may be, and preoccupied with your needs and your wrongs, you, like all of us, are the possessor, or rather the manifestor, of that spirit of God which lives in us all, and which in our day clearly and unmistakably says to you: Why? Why do you torment yourself and everybody with whom you come in contact? Only understand who you are, and how insignificant, on the one hand, is that which you mistakenly call ‘yourself’ (believing your body to be yourself); and, on the other hand, how boundlessly great is that which you recognize as your real self — your spiritual being! Only understand this, and begin, each hour of your life, to live not for external aims, but for the fulfilment of that real calling of your life, revealed to you both by the wisdom of the whole world, by Christ’s teaching, and by your own consciousness. Begin to live, seeing the aim and welfare of your life in the daily greater and greater liberation of your soul from the deceptions of the flesh, and (which is essentially one and the same thing) the ever-increasing perfection of yourself in love. Only begin to do this, and from the first hour or day you will feel a new, joyful consciousness of full freedom and happiness entering more and more into your soul, and what will strike you most forcibly will be, how even those external conditions about which you were so troubled, and which were still so far from meeting your desires — how those conditions will of themselves — whether they leave you in your present position or lead you out of it — cease being impediments, and become greater and greater joys in your life.

And if you are unhappy, and I know you are unhappy — remember that what is here offered you is not invented by me, but is the fruit of the spiritual efforts of all the highest and best minds and hearts of humanity, and that in this alone lies the sole means of deliverance from your misery, and of gaining the highest good within the reach of men in this life.

This is what I wish to say to my brother men, before I die.

Yasnaya Polyana  
2 July (o.s.) 1908

# Appendices

## Appendix I to Chapter III

The most dangerous people, according to the governing classes, have been hanged, or are in penal servitude, in fortresses and in prisons. Others, less dangerous, tens of thousands of them — have been turned out of the capitals and big towns, and are wandering about Russia tattered and hungry. The police arrest, and their secret agents spy and watch; and all books and papers dangerous to the Government are withdrawn from circulation. In the Duma, orators of different parties dispute how to safeguard the welfare of the people; whether a fleet is to be built or not, whether to arrange the system of peasant land-holding this way or that, how and why to hold or not to hold a Council of the Church. We have Leaders, who walk about lobbies; Party Alliances, Premiers, we have a quorum, and everything down to the smallest detail exactly as in all civilized nations. One would think nothing more could be wanted! And yet it is just now, and just in Russia, that the collapse of the present organization of life draws nearer and nearer.

Well — you men in authority will hang or shoot another five, ten, or thirty-thousand, as, evidently (imitating former repressions of Revolutions in Europe) you intend to. Very well, you will do it. But besides the noose, the gallows, spies, rifles, and their butt-ends, and prisons, there are also spiritual forces, very strong ones, much more powerful than any kind of gallows or prisons. For remember that all these people you strangle with cords and shoot beside graves ready dug for living men, have fathers, brothers, wives, sisters, friends, and fellow-thinkers; and if these executions deliver you from those who are buried in the grave, these same executions give birth, not only among those near to them, but even among strangers, to twice as many foes, twice as embittered as those you have murdered and buried in the ground. The more men you slay, the less can you free yourselves from your chief enemy — the hatred men feel towards you. By your crimes, you only increase this hatred tenfold, and make it more dangerous to yourselves.

But besides increasing among those near to your victims the number of your enemies and the intensity of their hatred, by these very executions you also increase among men who were complete strangers both to you and to your enemies, that very feeling of cruelty and immorality which you think you are combating by means of these executions. For these executions are not performed automatically, by the papers which you write in your Law Courts and Ministries. Executions are performed by men on

men. A young man who had been a soldier, evidently perplexed how to regard the matter, narrated to me how he had been made to dig a trench to serve as a grave for ten live men condemned to be shot, and how one set of soldiers was obliged to kill these condemned men, while another set, with loaded rifles, were placed behind the executioners, ready to shoot them, should they waver in carrying out the dreadful, inhuman action demanded of them. Can the performance of such awful deeds at the command of Authorities whom they have been taught to honour and consider sacred, pass without having an effect on human souls?

A few days ago I read in a newspaper that some miserable Governor-General issued an Order of the Day, expressing his praise and approval of two policemen, "fine fellows", as he put it, and awarded them Rs. 25 each for having shot an unarmed prisoner, who jumped down from a cart and tried to escape from them. I did not believe in this dreadful conduct of the Governor's, and wrote to the paper asking for confirmation. They sent me the original Order, and explained that such praise for killing is quite customary, and that those occupying the very highest positions express such approbation.

Can such actions and such words pass leaving no trace? Such insolently expressed, perverted thoughts and feelings cannot help leaving dreadful traces of depravity, immorality and cruelty, in the souls of those who take part in such deeds and read such Orders. Such deeds and such Orders cannot but evoke in people both distrust and contempt towards those who dictate these awful actions, repugnant to the human conscience, and praise and reward them. So that if thousands of people are executed, how many tens and hundreds of thousands of men who have in one way or other shared in these actions, have been depraved by this participation, and deprived by it of the last remnants of their religious and moral bases, and have been prepared, if not yet to hate, at least to despise, those who do such deeds, and prepare themselves at the first opportunity to commit the same crimes against the very people who now compel them to commit these crimes against their enemies?

And what of the influence of the reports in the papers of the number of those executed — reports read by millions, and printed every day, just like reports of changes in the weather, things which are sure to occur and must occur every day and always? If those who read these things every day do not ask themselves how to reconcile such deeds, done by order of the highest authorities, say with the Gospels, or even with the sixth Commandment of Moses, yet these contradictions cannot but react on the souls of men, by evoking contempt both for the commandments and for religion as a whole, on the one hand, and for the Authorities who do things evidently contrary both to the religious law and to conscience, on the other.

Is it not clear that the evil done by the ruling powers, to rid themselves of their visible enemies, is preparing twice, ten times as many enemies for them, invisible and more angry?

One would think it must be evident to every reasonable man that such Governmental activity cannot improve the position. This must be evident, not to outsiders only, but

to the rulers themselves. They cannot help seeing the uselessness of what they are doing, and the guilt of it all. They cannot help seeing it, for Christ's teaching of love to one's enemies — which has been and still is so carefully hidden by those who live by violence — although not in the entirety of its full and real meaning, yet at least in some degree has, in spite of everything, penetrated the consciousness of the men of the Christian world, and (I think I am not mistaken in saying) has been specially warmly accepted by the common Russian working people, whom the Government are now so zealously perverting.

Though Marcus Aurelius could, in spite of all his gentleness and wisdom, make wars and order executions with a calm conscience, yet people of the Christian world can no longer do so without an internal consciousness of their guilt; and no matter what stupid and hypocritical Hague Conferences and conditional punishments they invent, all these hypocritical stupidities not only fail to hide their crimes, but on the contrary show that they themselves know that what they are doing is wrong. However much they may assure themselves and others that the violation of all laws human and divine which they continually commit, is necessary for some higher consideration, they cannot hide either from themselves or from men of good will, the guilt, immorality, and meanness of their conduct. For everybody now knows that murder, of whatever kind, is repulsive, criminal, and bad. All the Tsars and Ministers and Generals know it, however they may hide behind the pretence of higher considerations.

It is the same with the Revolutionaries of whatever party; if they allow murder for the attainment of their aims, however much they may say that, once the power is in their hands, they will not need to employ the violent measures they now use — their actions are just as immoral and cruel as those of the Government. And therefore they produce the same terrible results as the evil doings of Government: the embitterment, brutalization, and demoralization of mankind.

Their activity differs only in this (and this is why it seems less criminal) that the futility of the activity of the Government in power is obvious, while the activity of the Revolutionaries, manifesting itself chiefly in theory and only spasmodically in practice — during Revolutions such as ours now in Russia — is not so evident.

The methods and means of strife employed by both sides are equally foreign to the human soul and to the bases of Christian teaching, and equally — embittering people and leading them to the highest degree of unreasonableness and brutality — fail to reach the aim they announce, and remove people further from its attainment.

The position and activity of both the struggling parties - the Government and the Revolutionaries, in Russia as well as in the rest of the Christian world — with their methods of improving the state of the nation by violence, is like that of men who, to warm themselves, break down the walls of the wooden house in which they live, and use the beams for fuel.



## Appendix II to Chapter VII

The Christian teaching in its real meaning, acknowledging the *supreme* law of human life to be the law of love, which in no case allows of violence by man to man — this teaching is so near to the heart of man, and gives such undoubted freedom and such independent happiness both to individuals and whole societies, and to all humanity, that one would think it was but necessary for it to be known, and all men would accept it as guide in their activity. And men really, in spite of all the efforts of the Church to hide this law, have more and more understood it and striven to realize it. But the misfortune was that at the time the Christian teaching in its true meaning began to become comprehensible to men, the greater part of the Christian world had already become used to believing in those external religious forms which not only hide the real meaning, but maintain a Governmental organization which is its exact opposite. So that, to accept the Christian teaching in its real sense, men of the Christian world, who have more or less understood the truth of Christianity, must free themselves not only from belief in the false forms of perverted Christianity, but also from belief in the necessity and inevitability of the Governmental organization which has been founded on that false Church religion.

So that, although liberation from the false religious forms takes place more and more rapidly, the people of our time, having rejected belief in dogmas, sacraments, miracles, the infallibility of the Bible, and other things set up by the Church, can still not liberate themselves from those false Governmental doctrines which were founded on the perverted Christianity and hide the true.

Some men, the majority of working people, following tradition, continue to do what the Church demands; and partly believing in that teaching, have implicit faith — literally *faith* — in the system of Government founded on violence, which has grown out of the Church faith and can in no case be compatible with the true meaning of Christianity. Others, the so-called educated people (who for the most part have long since ceased to believe in the Church, or therefore in any kind of Christianity) believe, just as unconsciously as the common people, in the system of Government based on violence that was introduced and confirmed by that very Church Christianity they have long since ceased to believe in.

So that, those who, like the working people, believe in the lawfulness of the existing order, as well as those so-called educated people, who try either gradually, or by a Revolutionary upheaval, to change the existing order, equally believe in the necessity for violence, as the chief means of organizing society. And neither the one side nor the other acknowledge, or even imagine, any organization of society not founded on violence.

It is just this unconscious *faith*, or rather superstition of the Christian world in the lawfulness of upholding the organization of the world by violence, and in the lawfulness and inevitability of violence; it is just this faith, founded on perverted Christianity and directly opposed to true Christianity (although people who have freed themselves

from faith in pseudo-Christianity do not acknowledge this), that has been and is to the present day, the chief obstacle to man's acceptance of Christian teaching in its real meaning, which is now becoming clearer and clearer.

## Appendix III To Chapter VIII

One need only refer to Christ's teaching, which forbids resistance to evil by violence, and men belonging to the privileged, as compared with the working classes, both believers and unbelievers, will only smile ironically at such a reminder, as though the thesis of Non-Resistance to evil were so obvious an absurdity, that serious people cannot discuss it.

The majority of such people, considering themselves moral and educated, will seriously talk and argue about the three-fold nature of God, the divinity of Christ, the Atonement, the sacraments, and so on, or about which of two political Parties has the best chance of success, what national alliances are most desirable, whose expectations are the more reasonable: those of the Social-Democrats or of the Socialist-Revolutionists; but they are all quite agreed that Non-Resistance to evil by violence, cannot be discussed seriously.

Why is this so?

Because men cannot help feeling that the acceptance of the Non-Resistance position cuts at the root of their customary way of life, and demands of them something new, unknown and seemingly terrible.

That is why questions about the Trinity, the Immaculate Conception, the Eucharist, and Baptism, can occupy religious people; and irreligious people can concern themselves with discussion of Political Alliances, Parties, Socialism and Communism, but the question of Non-Resistance to evil by violence seems to them an astonishing absurdity, and the more absurd, the more advantages they enjoy under the present system.

That is the reason why the greater the power, wealth, and civilization men enjoy, the more they deny the teaching of Non-Resistance, and the less they understand it.

People occupying important positions: the rulers, very rich people, those used to good position, and those who — like most scholars — justify the existing state of things, these people merely shrug their shoulders at any allusion to Non-Resistance. People less important, less wealthy and less learned, are less scornful. Still less scornful are the men of still less importance, wealth and learning. But yet all whose life is directly supported by violence, though they are not all equally disdainful, yet always take a negative attitude towards the idea of the possibility of adopting the teaching of Non-Resistance by violence.

So that if the decision of the question of liberating oneself from perverted Christian teaching, and from the permission of violence, transgressing against love, that flows therefrom, and the acceptance of Christian teaching in its real meaning, depended only

on civilized people enjoying in our society a position better in a material sense than that of the majority of the working folk — the transition now before us, from a life founded on violence, to a life founded on love, would not be so near and inevitable as it now is, especially here in Russia, where the enormous majority of the nation — more than two-thirds — are not yet depraved by riches, by power or by civilization.

But as this majority of the people have no reason to deprive, and no advantage from depriving themselves of the blessings of a life of love by admitting the use of violence, therefore among them — not perverted by power, riches or culture — it seems to me that that change in the system of life which is demanded by the already accomplished elucidation of Christian truth must begin.

## Appendix IV to Chapter XVII

But however strange appears to me the blindness of those who believe in the necessity and inevitability of violence, and however palpably evident to me is the inevitability of Non-Resistance, it is not arguments or appeals to reason that convince me, or can convince others of the truth of Non-Resistance — it is only man's consciousness of his own spirituality, the essential expression of which is love, that really convinces. Love, true love, which is the very essence of the human soul — that love which is revealed by Christ's teaching — precludes the possibility of any idea of any kind of violence.

Whether the use of violence or the bearing of evil will be useful or harmful, I do not know, and nobody knows; but I know, and everyone knows, that love is bliss. The love of others for me is bliss for me, and yet more so is my love for others. The highest bliss is my love, not merely for those who do not love me, but for those who, as Christ said, hate me, insult me, and do evil to me. Strange as it seems to one who has never felt this, it is so; and when one considers it and experiences it, one is only surprised how one could ever have failed to understand it. Love, true love, love that denies itself and transfers itself to another, is the awakening in oneself of the highest universal principle of life. But it is only then true love, and only then gives all the happiness it can give, when it is love free from anything personal, from the smallest particle of partiality to the object of one's love. And such love can only be felt for one's enemy, for those who hate and offend one. Therefore the injunction to love not those who love us, but those who hate us, is not an exaggeration, but an indication of the impossibility of making any exceptions to the opportunities of attaining the highest bliss that love can give. That it must be so, follows logically; and one need only experience it, to be convinced, So that cases of insult and attack become precious and desirable. And so, having looked into the essential attribute of the human soul, we see that by its nature answering evil with evil causes it to suffer; while, on the contrary, bestowing love in return for evil, gives it the highest attainable bliss.

And therefore, every Non-Resistance to evil by evil is the gaining of bliss, and of such bliss as (by destroying personality and thereby giving the highest bliss) at the same time destroys all suffering and, above all, destroys that bugbear which causes resistance — the fear of death.

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A critique of his ideas & actions



Leo Tolstoy

Law of Violence and the Law of Love (1909)

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