

THE LAW OF LOVE
AND
THE LAW OF VIOLENCE

BY
LEO TOLSTOY

TRANSLATED BY
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Note

The work of Count Leo Tolstoy entitled *The Law of Love and the Law of Violence* has never been published in Russia, and consequently was not translated into English with the rest of his works. A Russian author, M. Halperine-Kaminsky, translated it into French from the manuscript and published it in France.

Shortly after its publication, Paul Bourget's drama *La Barricade* was produced in Paris. This play, based on the idea of inter-class warfare, was the subject of much controversy. It was even supposed that, in answer, Tolstoy wrote this treatise with its theory of the "Law of Love" as opposed to the "Right of Violence" proclaimed by the French master and his friends. But this supposition was erroneous, for the book was published first.

M. Halperine-Kaminsky sent Count Tolstoy criticisms of the play from the pens of such well-known writers as Rene Dounic and M. de Mun, and received the following reply:

Mr. Halperine-Kaminsky:

Thank you very much for the articles on *The Barricade*. I read the most interesting ones at once.

Yes, it is a very significant phenomenon, and I should like to give you my opinion on this subject. But I have so little strength left, so short a time to live, and so much work on hand that I doubt if I shall entirely realize my desire.

For the moment, what struck me most in the debates caused by Mr. Bourget's play is their astonishing mixture of profound erudition, great intelligence, extraordinary elegance of language, and subtle courtesy towards the adversary. But I am also struck by their most brutal egotism, concerned only with personal and class interest, and absolute ignorance of religious and moral principles, even those which are indispensable to our lives and without which man descends to the level of the beasts. This is in spite of the invention of marvelous flying machines, or of the wonderful perfection of the artists of the Theatre Français, of the Vaudeville, and the like.

I am particularly surprised that men like M. Bourget and his friends can still speak so seriously of Catholicism in France in 1910, after Voltaire, Rousseau, and many other thinkers. Nothing proves more clearly how misguided these men have been, not as to their intelligence, but as to their reasoning; not their polish and brilliance, but their morality. In this conflict it is evident that *tous les moyens sont bons*.¹

We know well, they say, that Catholicism is the most vulgar, the most absurd, and the most stupefying of lies, and that it has long since been denounced and stripped bare; but it serves our purposes. Let us make use of it...

My best wishes,
Leo Tolstoy

¹ Translator's note – All means are justifiable.

It is interesting to see what Tolstoy thought of the state of the world just before the Great War. In spite of his apparent pessimism, he was as hopeful as Mr. H. G. Wells for the future condition of mankind. But in his sweeping denunciation of legislators, judges, and all sorts of authorities, he went far beyond the English writer, who says, "Our State could have grown up in no other way. We had to have these general dealers in human relationship, politicians and lawyers, as a necessary stage in political and social advancement. Just as we had to have soldiers and policemen to save people from mutual violence."²

Preface

Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God. (*John, 3:19-21*)

The worst thing of all is when man begins to fear the truth lest it denounce him. (Blaise Pascal)

The glory of the good is in their conscience and not in the mouths of men.³

The only reason why I am writing this is because, knowing the one means of salvation for Christian humanity from its physical suffering, as well as from the moral corruption in which it is sunk, I, who am on the edge of the grave, cannot be silent.⁴

All thinking people must admit that the present life of Christian nations will deteriorate more and more if we cannot make up our minds to modify it. The misery of the disinherited and the luxury of the rich increase each day. The struggle of all against all – revolutionaries against governments, governments against revolutionaries, oppressed nations against their oppressors, state against state, the West against the East – is becoming ever more bitter.

Many are aware of this. Unfortunately, they very rarely see the cause of the lamentable situation, and still less the means of remedying it. They give all sorts of reasons for it, and propose numerous remedies, but not the right one.

The cause of the unhappy situation of Christian humanity is the lack of a superior conception of life and a rule of conduct in accordance with it, a rule held in common by all people professing Christianity.

The cure for this situation, a cure neither fantastic nor artificial, but natural, can be found in the practical observance of the conception of life revealed to humanity nineteen centuries ago, and which today answers to the intellectual and moral development of humanity: Christian Doctrine in its true sense.

² Translator's note – *Men Like Gods*, page 283.

³ Translator's note – Unattributed epigraphs placed at the beginning of the chapters are quotations from Tolstoy's works made by the author himself.

⁴ Transcriber's note – Tolstoy wrote this in 1908. He did not die until 1910.

The Law of Love and the Law of Violence

Chapter 1

One of the most vulgar of superstitions is that of the wise men who believe that one can live without faith. (*Daily Reading, 2nd Part, Introduction*)⁵

True religion consists in establishing the relation of each of us towards the infinite life that surrounds us, the life that unites us to the infinite, and guides us in all our acts. (*Daily Reading, 2nd Part, 1, 2*)

If you feel that you no longer have faith, know that you are in the most dangerous situation in which a man can find himself on earth.

Men live in a reasonable way and on good terms with each other when they are united by the same conception of life; that is to say, by a religion that satisfies all of them alike and gives them the same rule of conduct. But when it happens that the conception of life, modified by moral and intellectual progress, becomes more precise and exacts a new rule of conduct, while men continue to follow the former one, their lives become unhappy and they no longer live in harmony.

The evil is aggravated more and more as men continue to ignore the new religious conception and its consequent rule of conduct, and when they observe the law imposed by the antiquated rule. Instead of admitting the religious conception corresponding to the phase of their development, they form a conception that justifies their way of living, but does not correspond to the moral needs of the majority.

This phenomenon has been repeated on several occasions in the history of humanity. But never, I believe, has the discord, between the various peoples and the religious conception that they have adopted been so great. Indeed, they continue to live a pagan life.

In my opinion, this discord is so pronounced because the Christian conception of life, at the moment of its formation, goes far beyond the moral and intellectual state of the nations who acknowledged it at that time. That is why the rule of conduct that it indicated was too greatly opposed, not only to individual habits, but even to the whole social organization of pagans, who became Christians in name only.

Thus it is that these nations have become attached to a false Christianity, represented by the Church, whose principles differ from those of paganism only by a lack of sincerity. For that very reason, faith in Christian doctrines disappeared little by little without being replaced by any other. That is why the Christian world finds itself in its present condition. The majority of its adherents possess no explanation of the meaning of life – that is to say, no religion and no common rule of conduct.

The working masses, even though they outwardly profess the religion of the Church, do not believe in it, do not practice it in their daily lives, and follow its traditions by habit and

⁵ Translator's note – The work *Daily Reading*, from which many epigraphs are taken, was written by Tolstoy with quotations from his own writings and from those of great writers of all countries and all times.

convention. As for the so-called cultivated classes, they either believe positively in nothing at all, or rather they pretend to believe in the Christianity of the Church for political reasons. Or else, a small minority believes sincerely in the Christian doctrines, contrary to the life it leads, and seeks to justify its belief by all sorts of insidious sophisms.

There is only one reason for the unhappy condition in which Christianity now finds itself.

It is still more complicated by the fact that, because of its long duration, some of the leaders who profit by this unbelief pretend to believe what they do not believe at all. Others, the more intellectual, who are the most corrupt, openly preach the futility for men of our time of such a conception of life or faith, and the rules of conduct that result from it. They try to make them believe that the only fundamental law of human life is the struggle for existence, guided by our passions or our natural needs.

The regrettable cause of all our misery is, therefore, this unconscious lack of faith of the masses and the conscious ignoring of the necessity for religion by the so-called cultivated classes.

Chapter 2

Men have an irresistible tendency to believe that no one sees them when they themselves do not see, like children who close their eyes so that no one may see them. (Lichtenberg)

Men of our time believe that all the insanity and cruelty of our lives, the enormous wealth of a few, the envious poverty of the majority, the wars, and every form of violence are perceived by nobody, and that nothing prevents us from continuing to live thus. Error continues, nevertheless, to be error, even when it is accepted by the majority. (*Daily Reading, 6- 8, and the conclusion*)

Having accepted Christian doctrine in the form corrupted by the Church, the pagans, satisfied at first with the new doctrine, withdrew little by little from the Christianity of the Church, and ended by living without any religious conception of life or the rules of conduct resulting from it. Since the majority of men are unable to live without a common rule of conduct, life, as I have said, gradually becomes unhappier. It will not be able to continue to exist in its present form.

Farm laborers, dispossessed of the land, and consequently of the possibility of enjoying the fruit of their labor, hate the landed proprietors and capitalists who enslave them. The proprietors and the capitalists, knowing the sentiments they inspire in the workers, distrust them, doubt them, and seek to keep them in submission by the organized force of government. Thus it is that the situation of the workers is continually aggravated and their dependence upon the rich increases. At the same time the wealth of the rich, their power over the workers, their fear, and their hate continue to increase.

This is equally the cause of the progressive increase of armaments of nation against nation and of the expense caused by employing workmen for military preparation. And these preparations have international carnage as their only end. These murders are committed because all Christian people (not individuals, but people united together in states) hate each other and are ready at any moment to hurl themselves at each other.

Thus it is that all of the great powers, by observing antiquated patriotic traditions, oppress one or several groups of nations and force them to participate in the life of the dominating

nations that they hate. For example, Austria, Prussia, England, Russia, and France oppress Poland, Ireland, India, Finland, the Caucasus, and Algeria. This is the way that, apart from the hatred of the poor, of the rich, and of independent states, the hatred of oppressed nations for their oppressors is developing and spreading.

The worst is that all these hatreds, so contrary to human nature, are not condemned as bad sentiments, but, on the contrary, are exalted, and raised to the pinnacle of virtues. The hatred of the oppressed workers for the rich is praised in the same degree as love of liberty, fraternity, and equality. The hatred of Germans for French, English for Americans, Russians for Japanese, and vice versa, is considered a patriotic virtue. The hatred of Poles for Russians and Prussians, and Prussians and Russians for Poles and Finns, is even more intense.

But the plagues to which I have drawn attention are not sufficient to demonstrate the impossibility of continuing our present mode of life. If our world possessed a rule of religious conduct, we could look upon the evils that inflict it as temporary, occasional phenomena. In reality, the religion that we see professed is a mendacious one. There are even several – Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, etc. – and all are in a state of permanent hostility. There exists also a false science, equally divided, whose denominations quarrel with each other. There are political and international lies of different parties – lies of art, lies of tradition and habit, and lies of all sorts – but no rule of moral conduct imposed by a religious conception.

The men of the Christian world also live the lives of beasts, take their selfish interests for guides, and are in a state of perpetual struggle among themselves. What distinguishes them from the beasts are the latter's constant need of food and of claws for defense, while men pass with dizzy haste from roads to railroads, from animal locomotion to steam, from the spoken word and manuscripts to printing, the telegraph, and the telephone, from sailing vessels to transatlantic liners, and from steel weapons to cannon, machine guns, bombs, and airplanes. It is this overwrought life we lead that is getting madder and madder, and unhappier and unhappier, because men, instead of keeping to a spiritual, moral principle that would unite them in a society of peace and concord, are guided by their bestial instincts, which they seek to satisfy by trading on their intellectual faculties.

Chapter 3

If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. (*Matthew 18: 6*)

One cannot struggle against the calls of conscience. These calls come from God; that is why it is preferable to answer them at once. (*Daily Reading, October 23rd*)

The evil committed by man not only weakens his soul and deprives him of true happiness, but the more often falls back on the one who commits it.

To do wrong is as dangerous as to provoke a wild beast. More frequently than not evil falls back on the one who has committed it. (*Daily Reading, June 6th*)

Most men of our time, perceiving the constant increase, of their misfortunes, employ the only means of salvation that, according to their conception of life, they consider rational: the oppression of part by the rest. Those who see that their interest lies in the maintenance of the present State defend it with the force that the Church puts at their command. Those who wish to change the order of existing things also have recourse to violence in order to replace the former State by a new one that they think better. The number of revolutionaries and counter revolutionaries in the Christian world cannot be counted. However, if the social forms are modified, the base remains the same. The domination of a few over the majority, corruption, lies, the fear of the oppressed, servitude, anger and the brutalizing of the masses – all these things remain as they were, and even spread and develop.

What is going on now in Russia, in particular, gives evidential proof of the futility and harm of using violence as a means of uniting men. The incidents of highway robbery, assassination of policemen, officers, and detectives, and attacks on high functionaries, so frequent a short time ago, are becoming more rare every day, while death sentences and executions are increasing. They have not stopped shooting and hanging people for the past two years, and those executed can be counted by the thousand. Thousands were also killed by revolutionary bombs. But since the number of those killed by the leaders of the State is incomparably greater than those killed by revolutionaries, the former triumph and believe that they have conquered. They do not doubt that they will be able to continue their usual existence of maintaining lies by violence, and violence by lies.

The mistake of all political doctrines, from the most conservative to the most advanced, which has brought men to their present lamentable condition, is the same: to keep men in society by the aid of violence so as to make them accept the present social organization and the rule of conduct that it imposes. Certainly, it is possible to push a man forcibly in the direction that he refuses to take. It is thus that animals act, as well as men who are led by passion. It is natural and comprehensible. But how shall one understand the reasoning by which violence is a means of inviting men to do everything we wish them to do?

Constraint always consists in forcing others, by threats of suffering or death, to do what they refuse to do. That is why they act against their own wishes as long as they consider themselves weaker than their oppressors. From the moment that they feel themselves stronger, they will not only cease to obey, but, irritated by the struggle and by all that they have suffered, they will first gain their liberty, and then in their turn they will impose their will upon those who disagree with them. So it should be quite evident that the struggle between oppressors and oppressed, far from constituting a means of social organization, leads to disorder and general disagreement.

This disorder is so certain that it would be superfluous to speak of it, had not the lie, according to which violence is a means of reunion, been implanted for so long a time, and been admitted by tacit consent to be an indisputable truth. Such consent is given as much by those who profit by it as it is given by the majority of those who are victims of violence.

This lie existed before the Christian era, and has since survived in all its strength. The only difference between former times and our own is that then the nonsense of violence as a means of grouping was hidden from men, while today the truth of Christ, according to which violence is a means of disunion, stands out more and more clearly. The moment that men understand it they will no longer be able to endure violence without revolting against it.

This is observed today among the oppressed in every country. And not only the oppressed are beginning to perceive this truth. The oppressors, in their turn, are also aware of it. They are no longer certain of acting well and justly when they use violence towards the weak.

Accustomed to their reciprocal situations, the leaders and the led are seeking to persuade each other by arguments, mostly false, that brute force is necessary and useful, but they already feel deep within themselves that their acts of cruelty, instead of gaining, draw them further away from the desired end.

Appendix to Chapter 3

The men who, in the opinion of the directing classes, do the greatest harm to society are hung, banished, or locked up in prisons. Thousands of other men, less dangerous, are driven away from the capitals and large cities and wander, hunger stricken and in rags, across Russia. Police agents, in uniform or in civilian clothes, watch them, spy upon them, and arrest them. Books and newspapers, considered reprehensible, are seized.

While this is taking place, there are animated debates at the *duma* as to the best way to assure the prosperity of a nation and on the necessity of constructing a fleet, of using certain systems for organizing the property of the peasants, or of levying or not levying certain taxes. In this Russian parliament everything takes place as it does among other civilized nations. There are leaders, lobbyists, quorums, parties, and the like. It would seem as if there were nothing missing. However, it is precisely among us, in Russia, and at this moment, that the order of existing things is approaching nearer and nearer to the moment of its disappearance.

In fact, let us admit that you, men of the government, still shoot five, ten, and even thirty thousand condemned people, besides which you are inclined to follow the example of the governments that repressed former European revolutions.

But there are other forces than these forces of repression: moral forces, which are the most powerful, and much more powerful than the gallows, guns, prisons, and spies. You are not ignorant of the fact that all those whom you have strangled or shot have fathers, brothers, wives, sisters, friends, and co-religionists. If, by executions, you get rid of those whom you send to their graves, you will not only arouse their relations, but you will also make a much greater number of enemies even among strangers, who will be much angrier than were those whom you have killed. The more people you cause to disappear, the less you will get rid of your principal enemy, universal hate. By means of your crimes you only set loose this hate, and render it more dangerous.

The worst of it is that you arouse sentiments of cruelty, which you believe you can counteract by executions. You know well that the latter are not accomplished only with the aid of your writings in the courts and in the ministries. They are done by men to other men.

A young soldier of the reserve, puzzled, told me how he was obliged to dig a long trench to bury ten men condemned to be shot, and how some soldiers were forced to kill the condemned, while others were posted behind the murdering soldiers, ready to shoot them if they hesitated to carry out their brutal orders. Can an act like that take place without leaving any trace in the human soul, an act commanded by the very people whom the soldiers are taught to look upon as estimable and sacred?

I read lately in a newspaper that a wretched governor general had given to be published an order of the day in which he complimented two "brave" policemen because they had shot an unarmed prisoner who was trying to escape. As a reward, the governor saw that each of the policemen was paid 25 rubles. Not being able to believe in such an act of authority, I wrote to the newspaper that published the order of the day to confirm it. I received the order itself, and

was informed that praise for these murderous acts is habitual and is given by the highest dignitaries.

Can these words and acts take place without leaving any trace of corruption or cruelty upon those who read these orders of the day, or who participate in these acts? They cannot help arousing distrust and disgust for those who order these acts, which are so against one's conscience, and for those who reward the people who execute them. It is evident that, if thousands of people are suppressed, tens and hundreds of thousands are depraved by their participation in these barbarous acts. They lose the remainder of their religious and moral scruples and are prepared by this to commit the same atrocities to the very men who now force them into violence.

And what do you say of the news spread by the newspapers among millions of readers giving the number of those condemned to death and executed, news repeated each day, like the necessary news about the changing of the weather? If the readers do not ask themselves how the acts of the authorities can be reconciled with the Scriptures, or even with the sixth commandment of Moses, these contradictions can only arouse disdain for this commandment, for religion in general, and for the authorities, as acts contrary to both religious law and to conscience.

Is it not clear that these crimes of the authorities, instead of causing their enemies to disappear, only increase their number? It ought to be evident to the authorities themselves.

If Marcus Aurelius, in spite of his gentleness and wisdom, could make war against and execute people without pangs of conscience, Christians can no longer do as much without recognizing their criminality. The very fact of imagining peace conferences and conditional condemnations, as hypocritical as they are stupid, shows that the leaders know perfectly well that what they are doing is wrong. They can try to persuade themselves and others that they are acting in virtue of superior considerations, but they cannot hide from themselves or from others all the degradation and all the horror of their activities. Everybody today knows that murder is a crime, whatever the motive may be. Kings, ministers, and generals know it just as well.

It is the same with revolutionaries of all parties, from the moment that they admit assassination as a means to an end. They may say that they will no longer make use of violence, as they are doing today, when the reins of power are in their hands, but their acts are as immoral and as cruel as those of governments. That is why, like governments, they are the cause of the hatred, bestiality, and corruption that are becoming more and more prevalent among us.

The revolutionaries differ from the present masters because of the fact that the vanity of the latter's activity is evident, while the activity of the former, generally theoretical and rarely applied during revolutions, is less evident. That is why it seems less criminal. In any case, the methods of both are equally foreign to human nature and to the principles of Christian doctrine. In sowing hatred and madness among men to the same degree, they both not only do not attain the end that they follow, but take us further away from it.

The two opposite camps – governors and revolutionaries – as much in Russia as in the rest of the world, can be compared to people, who, wishing to warm themselves better, break up the walls of their house to feed its furnace.

Chapter 4

When, among a hundred men one man dominates ninety-nine, it is iniquity and despotism. When ten dominate ninety, it is injustice and oligarchy. When fifty-one dominate forty-nine (and this only theoretically, for, in reality, among

these fifty-one there are ten or twelve masters), then it is justice and liberty. Could anyone imagine anything more ridiculous and absurd than this reasoning? However, this is the very reasoning that serves as a basic principle for everyone who extols better social conditions.

All the nations in the world are restless. An active force that seems to be preparing the way for a cataclysm is felt everywhere. Man has never assumed so great a responsibility. Each moment brings care that becomes more and more absorbing. One has the impression that something great is going to be accomplished. But on the eve of the appearance of Christ the world was then, also, expecting great events; yet it did not welcome Him when He came. In the same way the world might feel the birth pangs before His next coming and go on failing to understand what is happening. (Lucie Malaury, *Daily Reading, June 30th*)

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (*Matthew 10:28*)

The states of the Christian world have not only reached, but in our day have passed the limits towards which the states of ancient times were approaching before their dismemberment. We can see by this fact that each step that we make today towards material progress not only does not advance us towards the general wellbeing, but shows us, on the contrary, that all these technical improvements increase our miseries. Submarine, subterranean, and aerial machines may be invented for transporting men with the rapidity of lightning. The means of propagating speech and human thought may be multiplied *ad infinitum*. But it would still remain a fact that the travelers, who are so comfortably and rapidly transported, are neither willing nor able to commit anything but evil, and their thoughts and words can only incite men to evil. As to the perfected weapons of destruction, which make carnage easier while diminishing the risk of those who employ them, they give evidential proof of the impossibility of persevering in the same direction.

Thus, the horror of the situation of the Christian world appears under a double aspect: the absence of a moral principle of union and a gradual lowering of man to a degree below that of animals. This is so, in spite of all his intellectual progress and, above all, in spite of the complexity of the lies that hide our miserable condition and our cruelty.

The lies cover the cruelty, the cruelty causes the spreading of the lies, and both increase like snowballs. But everything must come to an end. And I consider that a crisis in this unfortunate condition is approaching. The Christian world must inevitably get to the end of this horrible situation, and it must as inevitably get out of it. The evils we see, resulting from the lack of a religious conception corresponding to our epoch, are the inevitable condition of progress. They should also disappear as inevitably after the adoption of a religious principle that would correspond to our epoch.

Chapter 5

From the day when the first members of councils placed exterior authority higher than interior, that is to say, recognized the decisions of men united in

councils as more important and more sacred than reason and conscience; on that day began the lies that caused the loss of millions of human beings and which continue their unhappy work to the present day.

In 1682 the English doctor Laitan, an honorable man, having written a book against the bishopric, was judged and condemned to the following punishment: he was cruelly whipped, one ear was cut off, his nose was split, and the initials of the words "Trouble Maker" were marked on one cheek with a hot iron. Seven days later he was again whipped, although the wounds of his former punishment were not yet healed. The other side of his nose was split, his other ear was cut off, and his other cheek was marked. All this was done in the name of Christian charity. (Maurice Davidson)

Christ founded no church, established no state, made no laws, and imposed no government or exterior authority. He simply set himself to write the law of God in the hearts of men in order that they might govern themselves. (Herbert Newton)

The special characteristic of the situation in which the Christian world finds itself today is that its social organization is founded on a doctrine that, in its true acceptance, is ruining the existing state of things; and that this acceptance, hidden until now, is beginning to appear. One might compare this organization to a house built, not even on sand, but on ice. That is why its foundation is melting, and the house is beginning to fall to pieces.

As long as the majority of the faithful, deceived by the Church, have only a rudimentary idea of the doctrine of Christ; as long as they adore Christ-God, his mother, the saints, and relics in the place of former fetishes; and as long as they believe in miracles, in the Holy Sacrament, in the Redemption, and in the infallibility of the princes of the Church; the pagan organization of life can keep going and give every satisfaction to the believers. They also accept the meaning of life that the Church gives them and the rule of conduct that results from it. And this faith, too, concurs in the union of men.

Unhappily for the faith imposed by the Church, there exist the Scriptures, which the Church itself has recognized as holy. In spite of the efforts of the ecclesiastics to hide the true meaning of the evangelistic doctrine from the laity, in spite of having forbidden the Scriptures to be translated into the language of the people, and in spite of its false interpretations, nothing can hide the light that filters through the lies of the Church and illuminates the souls of those whose eyes are opening more and more to the truth.

In proportion as education has spread and as printing has replaced writing, the Scriptures have become more accessible. Men cannot help but perceive the striking contradiction between the order of existing things upheld by the Church, and the evangelistic doctrine that it acknowledges as being holy. Read and understood as it is, the Scriptures appear to be a frank and explicit denial of both the State and the Church. In becoming more and more evident, this contradiction has resulted in the loss of the faith imposed by the Church, and it is only by tradition, propriety, or fear that the majority of men continue to practice the outer forms of the Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant cults – but without believing in the inner truths of this religion.

I do not mention here the little communities that reject the ecclesiastic doctrines entirely and which profess their own doctrine, approaching more or less to the true Christian teaching. The

number of their adherents is too small in comparison with the enormous number of men who are becoming more and more devoid of any religious sentiment. If the popular masses still practice the official cult outwardly, the upper classes, perceiving with still more precision the contradictions contained in the Church doctrine, turn away from it entirely. But they cannot adopt the true doctrine of Christ, since this is in opposition to the existing State and would ruin the privileges they enjoy.

It follows that the immense majority of the Christian world practices the forms of the Church simply by interest, propriety, or fear, while the minority not only does not acknowledge the existing religion, but still further, influenced by what is called science, considers all religions as vestiges of superstition, and acts only under the impulse of instinct. The nations that had accepted Christian doctrine at the time when this doctrine was superior to its moral development will fall into a state of complete irreligion, and its moral level will descend lower than that of nations who profess much inferior, and even quite vulgar beliefs.

Chapter 6

The corruption of Christianity takes us further away from the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. But Christian truth, like fires that smolder in dry wood, has consumed its covering and broken forth. The meaning of Christianity has already been revealed to everyone, and its action is becoming greater than the veil that covers it.

I see a new religion, founded on confidence in man, calling upon the unspoiled sentiments that are lying asleep in us, believing that we can love good for itself without any idea of recompense and that the divine principle is in us. (Solter)

What we require, what is necessary for the people, and what our time needs for us to be raised from the mud of egotism in which we are plunged is faith. Thanks to it, our souls will stop wandering in pursuit of selfish ends and will be able to march in unison by acknowledging one origin, one law, and one end. Every firm belief that rises from the ruins of former religions modifies the order of existing things, for all strong beliefs accompany every branch of human activity.

Humanity repeats in two different formulas and in different degrees the words of the prayer, "May your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven." (Mazzini)

One can neither weigh nor measure the evil that false religion has caused and is still causing. Religion is the establishment of the relation that exists between man, God, and the universe, and the definition of man's mission that results from it. How miserable our lives would be if this relation and this definition were false.

It is not sufficient to throw away the false religion, that is to say, the false relation of man as regards the universe. We must still establish the true one. (*Daily Reading, September 19th*)

It is rather tragic that one part of the pagan world accepted a religious doctrine, which, far from being at the highest moral level of the society of that time, sapped the bases of the social state. But, even worse, at the same time it constitutes the most fortunate event that could happen to nations professing the Christian religion.

Presented to pagans in an unnatural form, this doctrine appeared to them as a simple attenuation of their vulgar conception of the divinity, and as a higher idea of the mission of man and his moral needs. But the real significance of the doctrine was so hidden from them by dogmas and practices of their cults that they did not even suspect it. All this was true, in spite of the precise teaching of Christ in the Scriptures, which is acknowledged as a divine revelation by the Church. Happily, this doctrine corresponds so well with the spiritual nature of man that, in spite of the mass of dogmas under which it is buried, those who have greater intuition of the truth see through its real meaning and realize how it contradicts the order of existing things.

The fathers of the ancient church – Tatian, Clement, Origen, Tertullian, Lactantius, and others – had already realized this contradiction. It was the same in the Middle Ages. It was revealed with particular force in modern times. And its recognition is shown by the appearance of a great number of religious sects, which reject government that is contrary to the Christian doctrine condemning violence.

It was equally recognized by the humanitarian doctrines that claim to have nothing in common with Christianity, and which are really nothing else than partial manifestations of the Christian conscience. Such are the socialist, communist, and anarchist doctrines.

The cause of the sufferings of Christian nations is thus the theoretical acceptance of a doctrine that, when applied, should inevitably abolish the order of things to which these nations are accustomed, and which they do not wish to renounce. Their great good fortune is having admitted Christianity, which, even when false, includes the truth. In fact, today these nations are brought to the necessity of recognizing the true meaning of the doctrine, which alone is able to save men from their present hopeless condition.

Chapter 7

The principal cause of our bad social organization is false belief.

We ought to pay great attention to our public affairs. We should be ready to modify our opinions, to renounce our former ones, and to thoroughly understand the new. We should cast off our prejudices and should reason with an entirely free mind. The sailor who keeps the sail set in the same direction in spite of the changing of the wind will never reach port. (Henry George)

It is only necessary to frankly adopt the doctrine of Christ in order to perceive at once the horrible lie in which each and every one of us is living. (*Daily Reading, January*)

Christian doctrine, the real significance of which we are grasping more and more, teaches that man's mission is to manifest ever better and better the universal rule of conduct, and it is love that proves the presence of this rule in us. That is why the highest law that should guide us is love.

All the ancient religions recognize that love is the essential condition for a happy existence. The sages of Egypt, the Brahmans, the Stoics, the Buddhists, and others declared the principal virtues to be kindness, pity, compassion, and charity – in one word, love in all its forms. The highest of these doctrines, especially those of Buddha and Lao-Tse, went as far as recommending love to every human being, and for people to return good for evil.

However, none of them placed this virtue as a supreme law that should be the only motive of our acts. This was the distinctive trait of the most recent religion, that of Christ. All previous doctrines proclaimed the love of one's neighbor as one of the virtues, while the doctrine of Christ is based on the metaphysical principle of love, the supreme law, which should guide us in our daily life and which allows no exception.

Christ's teaching should not be considered as entirely new. Standing out distinctly from former beliefs, it is only the clearer and more precise expression of the principle that previous religions divined and taught instinctively. Thus it is that instead of love being merely one of the virtues, as it was for them, Christianity has made it a supreme law, giving man an absolute rule of conduct. The Christian doctrine explains why this law is the highest, and indicates as well the acts that man should or should not commit after having acknowledged the truth of this teaching. It follows, with great clarity and precision, that the observance of the supreme law, and because it is supreme, should not allow any exception, as the previous doctrines did, and that love is love when it is given in the same degree to other nations, other religions, and even to the enemies who hate us and do us harm.

That is the progress made by the Christian doctrines, and therein lies its principal virtue. The explanation of why this commandment is the supreme law of life is given with special clarity in the Epistles of John:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. (*1 John 4:7,8,12,16b; 3:14*)

According to this doctrine, our ego (our life) is the divine principle limited by our body, and manifests itself in us by love. It is why the true life of each of us is the manifestation of love. How we should interpret this conception of the law of love in our acts has been indicated to us in the Scriptures on numerous occasions, and with special clarity and precision in the fourth commandment of the Sermon on the Mount.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ (*Exodus 21:14*) But I tell you, do not resist an evil person.” (*Matthew 5:38-39a*)

Foreseeing, no doubt, the exceptions that would inevitably appear when the law of love is applied, verses 39b and 40 of the same chapter state clearly that no circumstances whatever should arise that could permit any deviation from the strict commandment of love: do not do to others what you would not have them do to you.

“If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.”

In other words, this means that violence directed against you does not justify the use of violence by you. The same condemnation of our breaking the law of love, when we feel justified by the attitude of others, is even more clearly indicated in the last commandment of the Sermon on the Mount.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor (*Lev. 19:18*) and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (*Matthew 5:43-48*)

It is this law of love and its recognition as a rule of conduct in all our relations with friends, enemies, and offenders – in fact, everyone – that inevitably brings about the complete transformation of the existing order of things. It does this, not only among Christian nations, but also among all the populations of the globe. And this is also the essential difference between Christian doctrine in its true conception and previous religions. This is the progress that has been accomplished in the universal conscience of mankind.

The previous religious and moral doctrines that acknowledged the benefit of love in human life allowed, however, certain circumstances in which the realization of this law cannot be obligatory. Also, as soon as it ceases to be a changeless law, its beneficence disappears and the doctrine of love is reduced to fruitless teaching, not modifying in any way the mode of living that is founded on violence. On the other hand, true Christian doctrine, making of the law of love a rule without exceptions, in the same way abolishes the possibility of any violence, and cannot, in consequence, help but condemn every state founded on violence.

It is just this signification of Christianity that was hidden from men by false Christianity, because the latter acknowledges love, not as a higher law, but, with the example of previous doctrines, as only one of the many rules of conduct, useful for observance when circumstances do not prevent it.

Appendix to Chapter 7

The Christian doctrine in its true sense, affirming love to be the supreme law and not allowing violence in any case, answers so well to the human heart, gives such a certainty of liberty, and gives happiness so independent of all desire that it should have been accepted, one would think, from the moment it was known.

In fact, men seek to realize it progressively, in spite of the efforts that the Church is making to hide its true sense. Unhappily, when the true sense of this doctrine began to appear, the greater part of the Christian world was already so accustomed to see the truth in the outer forms that it was no longer possible for it to perceive the exact sense of the doctrine, or its opposition to the existing state. That is why those who have more or less understood the Christian truth should free themselves, not only from the lying forms of false Christianity, but also from the belief in the necessity of a social state founded on the false religion of the Church.

Thus it is that the men of our time, having rejected the dogmas, the miracles, the sanctity of the Bible, and other articles of faith, are incapable of freeing themselves from the false static doctrine that, thanks to false Christianity, hides the true doctrine. On the one hand, most of the workers continue to practice the cult by tradition, to believe in the Church to a certain degree, and to believe as well in a static government founded on the official religion, which is so contrary to real Christianity. On the other hand, the so-called educated classes have for the most part abandoned this official religion a long time ago. They consequently do not believe in Christianity, but continue to believe, as unconsciously as the workers, in the static organization, which has violence as its principle, and which was established by the same Church Christianity in which they no longer believe.

So neither the one nor the other can imagine any other social organization than the one founded on violence. It is really this unconscious faith, this superstition of the Christian world, according to which violence is the indispensable principle of every social organization, which constitutes the principle obstacle to the Christian doctrine in its real sense.

Chapter 8

The disasters caused by wars and military preparations not only surpass in horror the motives that provoke them, and by which one seeks to justify them; these motives themselves are often ignored by the victims of the war. (*Daily Reading, June 17th*)

Men are so accustomed to see order maintained by the aid of force that they cannot imagine a social organization without restraint. The organizers of a reign of justice founded on violence should know what justice is and should be just themselves. And if some can know what is just, and be just, why should other men not know, and why should not they, as well, be just? (*Daily Reading, August 14th*)

If men were absolutely virtuous, they would never move an inch from the truth. The truth is harmful to the one who does evil. Whoever does good, loves truth. (*Daily Reading, August 29th*)

Reason is frequently the slave of sin; it strives to justify it. (*Daily Reading, August 29th*)

I am often astonished to see men defend certain strange maxims, whether religious, political or scientific. Seek and you will find what is necessary to defend your position. (*Daily Reading, May 27th*)

The true Christian doctrine consists only in the recognition of love as the supreme law of life, and consequently not allowing any exception. This means that the pretended Christian doctrine that does allow exceptions, such as the possibility of the use of violence in the enforcement of laws, is a contradiction as obvious as cold fire or warm ice.

It seems natural that if the possibility is once admitted that men may torture or kill their fellow beings in the name of humanity, others may claim the same right to torture and kill in the name of some ideal of the future. The admission of a single case contrary to the law of love destroys all its beneficial characteristics, although it is the basis of all religious or moral doctrines. This seems so self-evident that one hesitates to be obliged to prove it. Nevertheless, the believers or the nonbelievers of the Christian world (the latter acknowledge the moral law) look upon the doctrine of love condemning violence as fantastic and inapplicable to life.

We can see that governments insist that good order cannot be maintained without violence, really meaning by the word “order” the maintenance of a government that permits a minority to profit as much as it likes by the work of the majority. We can see why they say it, for the suppression of violence would take away their means of continuing their present existence and would denounce its iniquity of long standing.

This ought not to be the case for the mass of workers who employ violence on each other and who suffer from it so cruelly. The situation of the oppressed should not be compared to the constraint used directly by the stronger on the weaker, or by a greater number on a smaller number. Here, indeed, it is the minority that oppresses the majority, thanks to a lie established ages ago by clever people, in virtue of which men despoil each other, for insignificant profits, of much greater advantages – such as liberty – and are exposed to painful suffering.

The origin of this lie was uncovered four centuries ago by the French writer La Boetie, in his work, *Voluntary Slavery*. He said:

It is not bands of horsemen, or companies of infantry, or weapons that defend the tyrant. Instead, it will not at first be believed, even as true as it is, there are always four or five who control the tyrant, four or five who hold the country in servitude for him. There are always five or six who have access to the tyrant, and who have offered themselves, or are called upon by him, to be accomplices of his cruelty, companions of his pleasures, panderers to his lust, and sharers in his pillage. These six train their chief so well that he must be wicked, not only as the result of his own brutality, but of theirs also. These six have six hundred who profit under them, and they act towards them as the six act towards the tyrant. These six hundred have under them six thousand whom they have raised in degree, and to whom they have given, even if indirectly, the government of provinces or the handling of taxes, so that they may control their avarice and cruelty. They perform their duties when it seems good to them, and also do so much evil that they could not exist except under protection, or be dispensed with except by means of law and punishment.

Great are the consequences that result from this. And anyone who looked closer into this net would be interested in seeing that not only the six thousand, but hundreds of thousands, even millions, hold the tyrant by this cord, helping themselves by means of it. In the same way, in Homer, Jupiter boasts that if he pulls a chain, he will draw all the gods to him. From this came the rise of the

senate, the establishment of new states, and the election of offices – certainly not to reform justice, but to keep the tyrant in power.

To sum up, we owe our present condition to the favors, the gains, and the advantages that one acquires together with the tyrants, who find as many people to whom tyranny seems profitable, as those to whom liberty would be agreeable. If physicians say there is something the matter with one part of our body, although the rest is quite well, they come at once to the infected part. In the same way, as soon as a king is declared a tyrant, all the wicked and dregs of the kingdom (I do not say a lot of robbers and cheats who can do neither evil nor good in a republic, but those who are filled with ardent ambition and extraordinary avarice) gather around him and uphold him in order to share in the booty and to be petty tyrants under the great tyrant.

Thus act the great thieves and the famous corsairs: some discover countries, others rob travelers; some are in ambush, others lie in wait; some assassinate, others despoil; and even here there are degrees, and while some are only servants, others are the chiefs of the group, although one and all share in the booty or at least are in the search for it. They say that the Sicilian pirates assembled in such great numbers that Pompey the Great had to be sent against them. But they allied themselves with several splendid cities and towns, in whose harbors they could hide with great security when they returned from their raids, and for recompense they allowed these towns a certain percentage of their pillage.

Thus the tyrant enslaved his subjects, some by the help of others, and was protected by those from whom, if they were worth nothing, he should himself have been protected. But, as they say, to cut wood one must have wedges of the same kind of wood. There are the archers, there is the guard, and there are the halberdiers. Not that they do not suffer occasionally on his account, but these lost sheep, these people abandoned by God and man, are content to endure evil in order to commit it in their turn, not on those who inflict it on them, but on those who suffer from it like themselves and who are unable to commit it.

It would seem that the workers, not gaining any advantage from the restraint that is exercised on them, should at last realize the lie in which they are living and free themselves in the simplest and easiest way: by abstaining from taking part in the violence that is only possible with their co-operation. It would be so simple and so natural to make the agricultural laborers, who are in the majority in Russia and other countries, understand that for centuries they have been suffering by their own fault and without any advantage; that the exclusive possession of the land is assured by those who do not work it themselves – guards, police agents, and soldiers; and that all the taxes are imposed by them, inasmuch as they are employed by the exchequer.

When they have at last understood, it would be natural to get them to say to those they consider as chiefs, “Leave us alone. If you emperors, generals, judges, bishops, professors and other learned men have need of armies, navies, universities, corps de ballet, ecclesiastic courts, conservatories of music, prisons, gallows, or guillotines, prepare them all yourselves. Tax yourselves, judge yourselves, imprison and execute each other, exterminate yourselves, and get yourselves killed in war. Leave us alone, for we have no need of all these things and we do not wish to participate in acts that are futile as far as we are concerned, and above all, so wicked.”

Nothing should be more natural than that the working class should thus express itself. But most of them continue their existence as martyrs in the police service, in financial offices, and in the regiments. Others, the minority, try to free themselves from oppression by revolt and by committing violence in their turn on those who oppress them, or, in other words, try to quench fire with fire and thus increase the violence from which they are suffering.

Why do men act so irrationally? It is because the long duration of the lie has caused them to lose all notion of the bond that exists between their servitude and their participation in violence.

Why do they not see this bond? Because they no longer have faith, and without faith, men are guided only by interest. In fact, he who is guided by interest alone cannot do otherwise than deceive or be deceived.

The result is a surprising phenomenon: the masses of the working class, the great majority, not only continue to support violence, but even maintain it, contrary to common sense and contrary to their evident interest. They do this in spite of very frequent denunciations of the iniquity from which they are suffering, and in spite of revolutions for the purpose of suppressing violence by violence.

All these workers continue, by habit, either to profess the false Christian doctrine taught by the Church, or to deny all religion. They believe in the bottoms of their hearts in the ancient law of “a tooth for a tooth” and in submitting to the detested government, or else seek to destroy it by violence. Part of them are powerless to change their situation because, believing in the necessity of the present social organization, they cannot refrain from participating in its violence. The rest, whose religion has been replaced by political doctrines, cannot free themselves from violence because they are forced to suppress it by violence of another sort.

Appendix to Chapter 8

When one speaks of the principal law of the Christian doctrine, nonresistance to evil by violence, men of the privileged classes, believers or unbelievers, to smile ironically, as if it were an absurdity so evident that one cannot even speak seriously about it.

Most of these people consider themselves to be moral and educated. They seriously discuss the questions of the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, and the Redemption of the Sacraments. Or else, they converse with you just as seriously as to which of the two principal political parties has the greatest chance of success, which grouping of the state is to be most desired, and what the most likely vision of the future state will be – that of the social democrats, or of the social revolutionists. But all are equally convinced that one cannot speak seriously of nonresistance to evil.

Why? Simply because it is impossible for men not to feel that the admission of nonresistance to evil ruins their lives as they now are, and exacts of them something new and unknown, which terrifies them.

That is why the questions about the Trinity, the Immaculate Conception, and Communion are capable of occupying serious people, and unbelievers can find amusement by discussing questions of syndicates, parties, socialism, and communism, while nonresistance to evil seems an insane idea. And the more senseless it seems to them, the higher their position.

In the same way, the force of the denial of the doctrine of nonresistance is in proportion to the degree of the power, wealth, and civilization of men. Those who occupy powerful positions – the very rich, and those who, like the learned, justify the position of these people – simply shrug their shoulders at every allusion to the law of nonresistance. Men less important, less rich,

or less clever despise it equally. But all those whose lives are founded on violence judge with more or less disgust the possibility of the application of the law of nonresistance.

So it is certain that, if the admission of the Christian doctrine in its real sense depended upon people who enjoy privileged positions, the passing of the state founded on violence to the one having love for its principle would be nearer than it is today, above all in Russia, where more than two thirds of the population are not yet deprived by wealth, power, or by civilization.

As the majority of the Russian people have no motive and no advantage in depriving themselves of lives where love reigns, it must surely be they who will take initiative in replacing the present state by a new one that one's conscience, already clear on the subject, indicates.

Chapter 9

The savage instinct of military murder has been so carefully cultivated for thousands of years that it has become deeply rooted in the human brain. It is to be hoped, however, that a better humanity will be able to free itself from this horrible crime. But what will this better humanity think of the so-called refined civilization of which we are so proud? The same that we think of the ancient inhabitants of Mexico and of their cannibalism: people who were warlike, pious, and bestial at the same time. (Letourneau)

War will disappear only when men shall take no part whatever in violence and shall be ready to suffer every persecution that their abstention will bring them. It is the only way to abolish war. (Anatole France, *Daily Reading, December 29th*)

Ask the majority of Christians what they consider the greatest evil from which Christ freed humanity, and they will answer from Hell, everlasting fire, and punishment in the next world. And according to this idea, they believe that our salvation may be obtained thanks to the intervention of others. The word Hell, which is seen so seldom in the Scriptures, has done much harm to Christianity on account of false interpretation. Men flee from an external Hell, when in reality they carry within themselves the Hell that they should fear the most. The salvation that they need, that frees them, is the liberation of their souls from the evil that is concealed within them.

Much worse than external punishment is the soul in a state of rebellion against God, the soul endowed with divine force and abandoning itself to bestial passions. It is the soul living in the sight of God and fearing the anger of men, preferring glory in men's eyes to the peaceful realization of his virtue. There is no greater disaster than that.

It is this that impenitent man carries with him to his grave.

To gain salvation, in the highest interpretation of this word, is to lift up the weary spirit, to cure the suffering soul, and to give it back its liberty of thought, conscience, and love. In doing this one finds the salvation for which Christ died. It is for this salvation that the Holy Ghost was given to us. It is towards this salvation that the true Christian doctrine is discovering the right road. (Channing)

It seems so easy to tell the truth, yet it takes a great deal of effort within ourselves to attain this virtue. A man's degree of veracity indicates the degree of his moral perfection. (*Daily Reading, September 19th*)

The condition of the Christian world indicated in the preceding chapter, as well as that of the rest of the inhabitants of the earth, remains the same as has been described. But I believe that the moment has come, for Russians above all, and for the *moujiks* in particular, to see at last where the means of salvation lies.

I believe that the Russians are summoned first to this task because they are less civilized than the other nations. That is to say, they are less corrupt intellectually, and they have kept a vague but profound understanding of the Christian religion. They are summoned today precisely because they have just gone through an irregular, lamentable revolution and a repression horrible in its extraordinarily insolent and stupid cruelty.

The means of salvation of which I am speaking has been foreseen by men for a long time, but it is only lately that they are becoming conscious of it and are beginning to apply it.

A military court is sitting in a Russian town. The judges are seated before a table. On this table are the mirror of justice surmounted by the two-headed imperial eagle and carrying an inscription on its base, law books, and sheets of paper with underlined headings.

Among the judges, in the place of honor, is seated a stout man in uniform with a cross at his collar. He seems rather intelligent, good-natured, and even tenderhearted because he has lunched well and has received comforting news about his youngest son's health. At his side is another officer, of German origin, who is displeased at having been appointed. He is going over in his head the terms of the report that he is about to address to his chief. A very young officer occupies the third place – smart, good-humored, still thinking of the epigram that he ventured to make while lunching at the colonel's, and which amused the guests so much. He is still smiling about it. He is frantically anxious to smoke, and is impatiently awaiting the end of the sitting.

At a short distance the registrar is sitting in front of a small table. He is absorbed in the arrangement of a bundle of papers, among which he will choose the documents to be asked for presently at the first injunction.

Two young people, one a peasant from the government of Panza, the other a small-time merchant from the town of Lubin, are both dressed as troopers. A third is brought in, dressed like the others and quite young.

This young man is very pale. He casts a rapid glance at the court, and then his eyes take on a vague expression. He has passed three years in prison for having refused to take the oath for military service. In order to get rid of him after his three years of prison, he has been offered an opportunity to swear allegiance, after which he could be set at liberty as having served three years, even though he passed them in prison. But he has again refused, declaring, as he did the first time, that he was a Christian, and that he could not possibly swear an oath of allegiance or become a murderer.

The registrar reads a paper called the act of accusation. It is noted that the young man has refused to touch the pay and considers that military service is a sin.

The president good-naturedly asks the accused if he is guilty.

"Everything that has been read is exact. I acted and spoke like that, but I do not consider myself guilty," answers the young man in a voice trembling with emotion.

The president nods his head in assent, as if the reply was what he expected it to be. He consults a paper and asks, "What do you say in explanation of your conduct?"

“I have refused and I still refuse because I consider military service a sin, contrary to the teaching of Christ.”

The president, satisfied, nods again in approval. Everything is in order. He asks, “Have you anything to add?”

The young man explains with trembling lips that it is written in the Scriptures that murder is forbidden, and not only murder, but even any hostile feeling towards one’s neighbor.

The president keeps on approving. The German officer frowns. The young officer, head and eyebrows raised, becomes attentive as if he were hearing something new and interesting.

The accused, becoming more and more agitated, says that the oath is positively forbidden, that he would consider himself guilty if he had consented to serve, that he was again ready...

This time the president stops him, finding that the accused is digressing and making futile remarks.

The witnesses are called: the colonel of the regiment and the sergeant. The colonel is the president’s usual partner at cards and is a past master in that exercise. The sergeant is a Pole belonging to the minor nobility – clever, handsome, and a great reader of fiction.

Then in comes the priest, who is rather elderly. He has just left his daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren, who have come to visit him, and he is still under the influence of a quarrel with his wife on account of a carpet that he has given his daughter, against his wife’s express wish.

“Father, please swear in the witnesses, and tell them the sin they will commit against God by not telling all the truth,” says the president, addressing the priest.

The latter puts on his vestment, takes the cross and the Bible, and pronounces the usual exhortation.

The colonel is the first to take the oath, rapidly raising two very clean fingers, so well known to the president. He repeats after the priest the formula of the oath, and kisses the cross and Bible noisily, as if the act gave him pleasure.

Then it is the turn of the priest to swear in the young sergeant just as quickly.

The judges, grave and calm, wait. The young officer, who had gone out for a minute to take a few puffs of a cigarette, comes back during the deposition of the witnesses. The latter testify, confirming what the accused has said. The president nods approvingly.

After this an officer placed at a certain distance from the judges gets up. He is the speaker for the defense. He approaches the desk, takes up the papers lying there, and begins to speak in a loud voice, setting forth in lengthy periods everything that the young man has done, which the judges know already, and which the accused has just admitted, without trying to minimize his crime, but rather aggravating it.

The prosecutor announces that, according to the young man’s own declaration, he does not belong to any sect, that his parents are orthodox, and that, to begin with, his refusal to serve was only unwillingness. This obstinacy, not only of the accused, but of others like him, obliged the government to take the most severe measures against them, applicable as well in the present case.

Then it is the turn of the defender, whose speech seems to have little connection with the affair.

Then everyone goes out, comes back, and causes the accused to come back, followed by the court. The judges first sit down, then get up, and the president, without looking at the accused, reads the sentence in a quiet, even voice. The accused, who has already suffered three years for not being a soldier, is condemned: first to be dismissed from the army and deprived of all his rights and privileges, and secondly to four years of prison.

The guard takes the young man out. Then all those who took part in the ceremony return to their occupations and habitual distractions, as if nothing in particular had happened.

Except that the young officer, the great smoker, feels a strange twinge of uneasiness, which recurs each time he thinks of the strong, noble words of the accused, said with so much emotion. During the deliberation the young officer had a fancy to express a contrary opinion to the decision of his elders, but he was embarrassed, so he swallowed hastily and agreed.

That evening, at the home of the colonel of the regiment, between two games of cards, when all the guests were seated around the tea table, they began to speak of the case of the refractory soldier. The colonel expressed his opinion frankly that lack of instruction was the cause of such incidents. One assimilates all kinds of ideas without adapting them to circumstances, and that leads to all sorts of extravagances.

“Pardon me, uncle,” said a student, who was a social democrat and the colonel’s niece. “The strong opinions and the energy of this man are worthy of respect. One should only regret that this force has taken a wrong direction,” added the young girl, thinking how such energy would be valuable if used in the service of socialist ideas, instead of being wasted in out-of-date religious whims.

“Come, you are a mad revolutionary,” said her uncle, with a smile.

The young officer, cigarette in mouth, intervened in his turn, “Yet it seems to me that from the Christian point of view it would be difficult to contradict him.”

“I don’t know anything about any point of view,” said a general severely. “But I do know that a soldier should be a soldier, and not a preacher.”

“In my opinion,” said the president of the tribunal, his eyes twinkling, “the most important thing of all is not to lose time if we want to finish our game.”

“If any of you want more tea, you will be served at the card table,” said the master of the house amiably, while one of the players, in a practical manner, threw the cards on the table. Each one took his place.

In the prison entry, where the soldiers who were guarding the prisoner were waiting with him for their orders, another conversation took place.

“How is it that the priest does not understand what exactly is said in the books?” asked one of the soldiers with a Ukrainian accent.

“Naturally he doesn’t understand,” answered the prisoner, “or he would have said as I do. Christ commands us to love and not to kill.”

“That is true, but very difficult.”

“It is not at all difficult. Just see, I have been locked up, and I am going to be locked up again, but I have such a light heart that I wish you all had the same.”

A middle-aged noncommissioned officer drew near, and addressing the prisoner, said to him respectfully, “Well, Seminitch, you’ve been condemned?”

“Yes, of course.”

The noncommissioned officer shook his head, and added, “That is all very well, but one has to suffer for it.”

“It is necessary,” answered the prisoner with a smile, visibly touched by this sympathy.

“I know. Our Lord suffered and He told us to suffer also, but it is difficult just the same.”

As he was speaking, the handsome Polish sergeant entered with a quick, authoritative step, and said briefly, “No conversation here. Put him in prison.”

The sergeant was especially severe, because he had received orders to see that the prisoner did not talk with the soldiers. In fact, during the time that this refractory youth had been in

prison, four men had already been seduced by him. They had been court-martialed for refusing to serve, and were imprisoned in their turn.

Chapter 10

It is much more natural to conceive of a society directed and guided by rational ideas that are profitable to everyone than the society of the present day, where violence alone determines the conduct of men.

It is likely that constraint, exercised by the State, was necessary in former days to assure the grouping of men. Perhaps it is still necessary today, but men can no longer close their eyes or help feeling the state of things in which violence can only trouble their peaceful existence. It follows that in seeing it, or in feeling it, they cannot prevent themselves from seeking to realize this order of things. The means of realizing it is in the moral improvement of each one of us, and in abstention from any violence. (*Daily Reading, October 13th*)

The declarations made before the military judges by conscientious objectors are only repetitions of what has been said since the appearance of the Christian doctrine. The most ardent and sincere fathers of the Church declared the teaching of Christ to be incompatible with one of the fundamental conditions of the existence of the State: armed force. In other words, a Christian must not be a soldier, prepared to kill everyone that he is ordered to.

The Christian communities of the first four centuries declared categorically, from the mouths of their pastors, the prohibition of all murder, individual or collective – that is to say, war.

The philosopher Tatian, converted to Christianity in the second century, considered murder in warfare to be just as inadmissible for his co-religionists as any other kind of assassination, and looked upon the laurel crown of the victor as an unworthy symbol.

In the same period Athenagoras of Athens said that not only must Christians not kill, but that they also must not be witnesses of executions.

In the third century, Clement of Alexandria contrasted warlike pagans with “the peaceful community of Christians.”

But it was Origen who most forcibly expressed the Christians’ dislike of war. In applying the words of Isaiah to the Christians, “They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks,” he said clearly, “We do not arm ourselves against any nation. We do not learn the art of war because, through Jesus Christ, we have become the children of peace.” Answering the accusation of Celsus against the Christians who avoided military service (in Celsus’ opinion, the Roman Empire would disappear as soon as it became Christian), Origen said that Christians fought more than the rest for the welfare of the emperor, since they defended him by good actions, by prayers and by good influence on other men. As to armed combat, Origen added that he was certain that they would neither take part with the imperial armies, nor would they take part even if the emperor himself obliged them to do so.

Tertullian, a contemporary of Origen, expressed himself as categorically on the impossibility of Christians being warriors. Speaking of military service he said, “It is not fitting to serve at the same time the symbol of Christ and the symbol of the devil, the power of light and the power of darkness. One and the same soul cannot serve two masters. And how may we wage war without the sword that God himself has taken away from us? How can we learn the use of the sword,

when Our Lord said that he who raised the sword would perish by the sword? How can the sons of peace take part in combat?"

The celebrated Cyprian in his turn said, "The world is going mad in mutual extermination, and murder, considered as a crime when committed individually, becomes a virtue when it is committed by large numbers. It is the multiplication of the frenzy that assures impunity to the assassins."

Lactantius declared the same thing in the fourth century: "There cannot be a thousand exceptions to God's commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill.' No weapon except truth should be carried by Christians."

The rules of the Church of Egypt in the third century, as well as the *Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, absolutely forbid any Christian to serve in the army, under pain of excommunication.

In the *Acts of the Saints*, there are many examples of martyrdom suffered by the faithful of Christ for having refused to serve. For example, Maximilian who was brought before the conscription council and asked to give his name to the proconsul, answered, "I am called a Christian, and consequently am not a warrior." He was delivered to the executioner.

Marcellus was a centurion in the Legion of Troy. Having embraced the Christian doctrine, and being convinced that war was an impious act, he took off his armor before the whole legion, threw it on the ground, and declared that having become a Christian he could no longer remain in the army. He was imprisoned, but again he repeated, "A Christian must not carry weapons." He was executed.

Cassius likewise confessed to the same religion and refused to serve. He suffered a similar fate.

Under Julian the Apostate, Martin of Tours, brought up in a military atmosphere, refused to continue his service. During the examination that the emperor made him undergo he only answered with the words, "I am a Christian and therefore am not a warrior."

In the year 325, the first general council instituted a severe penance for Christians who went back to the army after having left it. Here are the exact terms of this order in the Russian translation recognized by the Orthodox Church:

Called by the grace of the profession of faith and having shown their first ardor in removing their warlike accouterments, then having returned to them like the dogs towards their vomiting, they should implore the Church for a period of ten years, asking pardon, [after having] listened to the Scriptures for three years on the threshold of the Church.

Christians, enrolled for the first time in the army, were instructed not to kill their enemies during war. In the fourth century Basil the Great recommended that soldiers who had infringed this rule should not be admitted to the Communion for three years.

One sees that the conviction that war is incompatible with Christianity was in force, not only during the first three centuries, during which time Christians were persecuted, but even at the moment of their triumph over paganism, when their doctrine was recognized as the state religion.

Ferrucius declared it very clearly and paid for it with his life. "He forbade Christians to shed blood, even in a just war and under the orders of Christian sovereigns."

In the fourth century Lucifer, Bishop of Calaris, professed that the Christians should defend faith, their greatest possession, not in killing, but in sacrificing their own lives.

Paulin, Bishop of Nole, who died in the year 431, threatened eternal torment to those who served Caesar bearing weapons.

Thus it was during the first four centuries of Christianity.

But the standards of the Roman Legions were already carrying the cross under the reign of Constantine. And in 416 an order was decreed that pagans were not admitted into the army. All the soldiers had become Christians. In other words, all the Christians had, with few exceptions, denied Christ.

Since then, and for about fifteen centuries, the simple and evident truth of the incompatibility of Christianity with the committing of all kinds of violence, including assassination, has been so hidden from men that generation after generation succeed each other in killing, participating in and profiting by murder, while professing the doctrine that condemns them.

The crusades were a mockery, and the most horrible crimes were committed in the name of Christianity; so much so, that the few people who kept to the true principles of Christianity by not consenting to any violence – the Montagnists, Albigensians, and Waldensians – were universally despised or persecuted.

But, like fire, truth little by little consumes all the veils that hide it, and since the beginning of the last century, it has sprung up with even increasing brightness by attracting attention in spite of everything. This truth has often been manifested in Russia, especially in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Its manifestations were doubtless many, but its traces have been effaced. Only a few are known to us.

Chapter 11

True courage in the struggle cheers the man who knows that God is his ally.

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (*John 16:33*)

Do not wait for the realization of the divine work that you are serving. Know that not one of your efforts will be useless, but will hasten the hour. (*Daily Reading, May 24th*)

The most important acts, both for the one who accomplishes them and for his fellow creatures, are those that have remote consequences. (*Daily Reading, May 28th*)

A governor-in-chief of the Caucasus, Mouraviev, noted the following in his private diary:

In 1818 five serfs of the Government of Tambov who had refused to serve in the army were sent away from the Caucasus. On several occasions they were made to suffer the “bastonade,” a torture that consisted in making them pass between two rows of troops, each soldier in turn striking the victim. But it did no good. The defaulting recruits repeated, “All men are equal. Our sovereign is a man like us. We will not obey him, we will not pay taxes, and above all, we will not kill men, our brothers, in war. You may cut us up into pieces, but we will not yield. We will not wear the uniform, we will not eat at the mess, and we will not

be soldiers. We will contribute our pennies if you like, but we do not wish to receive any of the State's money."

These men and others like them were bastonaded until they were left to die. They rotted in the prison, and nothing more was said about them. But their number increased, just the same, during the last century.

For example, they say that in 1827 two soldiers of the guard, Nicolaiev and Boddanov, fled into a hermitage of the sect of old believers, erected in the middle of a forest by the merchant Sokolov. When captured, they refused to serve again or to take the oath, because it was contrary to their conviction. The chiefs decided to put them to the torture of the bastonade between two rows of soldiers, and then they were placed in disciplinary companies.

M. Koltchine⁶ wrote:

In 1830, a man and a woman were arrested in the Government of Yaroslav. At their examination, the man said that he was named Egor Ivanov, aged 65 years, but that he did not know who he was. He had never had any other father, he said, than Christ the Savior. The woman made the same declaration. During the exhortation made by the priest before the court, the two accused added that they had on earth no other czar than the one in Heaven, and that they recognized no emperor or any civil or religious authorities.

On another occasion Egor Ivanov, then aged 70 years, repeated that he did not recognize any of the authorities, and that he considered that they had all digressed from the rules of the Christian religion. He was exiled to the monastery of Solovki to be employed in the works there, but he was shut up – no one knows why – and he remained there until his death. He kept firmly to the position he had taken.

In 1835 an unknown man calling himself only Ivan was arrested in the Government of Yaroslav. He declared that he did not recognize the saints, the emperor, or any authority. He was exiled by order of the emperor to Solovki to be employed in the fields. In the same year he was transferred to the army, also by imperial order.

In 1849 a recruit of the Government of Moscow, Ivan Schouroupov, aged nineteen, refused to take the oath of allegiance, in spite of all the punishments incurred. As the motive for his refusal he gave the Word of God, which commands that God alone shall be served. That is why he did not wish to serve the emperor or to take the oath of allegiance, for fear of committing perjury. The military authorities, fearing the bad affect that this would have on the others, decided to imprison Schouroupov in the monastery without trial. Emperor Nicholas I inscribed the following resolution on the report of the affair that was presented to him: "Banish the said recruit to the Monastery of Solovki."

This is the information recorded in the press relative to some isolated cases constituting evidently one in a thousand of all those who, in Russia, have recognized the impossibility of professing Christianity and at the same time obeying the public authorities.

⁶ *The Deported and the Prisoners of the Convent of Solovki.*

As to entire communities, counting thousands of members and moved by the same faith, they were very numerous in the last century and still are today. I shall mention the Molokanes, Jehovahists, Khlisti, Skoptsi, the old believers, and many others, who generally dissemble their denial of governmental authority, but consider it as the element of every evil, and as being diabolic.

It was above all the Doukhobors, who, numbering several tens of thousands, forcibly denied all public powers. Several thousand of these Doukhobors remained firm in their conviction, in spite of all the persecutions to which they were exposed. They were finally exiled to Canada.

The number of defaulting recruits has increased more and more. From the time that our government instituted universal military service, the refusal of true Christians multiplied still more. No persecution and no punishment stopped these young people from what they considered disobedience to divine law.

By chance, I have known quite a number of these men who have suffered painfully for their faith in Russia, and many of whom are still detained in prison. Here are the names of some of the victims: Zalubovsky, Lubitch, Mokeiev, Drojjine, Izumchenko, Olkhovik, Sereda, Farafonov, Egorov, Gancha, Akoulov, Chaga, Dimchitz, Ivanenko, Bezverkhi, Slobudnuk, Mironov, Bougaiev, Chelichev, Menchikov, Reznikov, Rojkov, Chevchook, Bourov, Goncharenko, Zakharov, Tregoubov, Volkov, and Koschevoi.

Among those who are imprisoned I know Ikonnikov, Kourtych, Varnavsky, Chniakine, Molossai, Koudrine, Pantchikov, Deriabine, Kalatchev, Bannov, Zinkitchev, Martchenko, Prozretsky, and Davidov.

I know others in Austria, Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria, Holland, France, Switzerland, Sweden, and Belgium. Better still, these refusals to serve in the army have taken place lately and for the same motives in the Muslim world, notably among the Babides, in Persia, and in the sect of the Legion of God in Russia.

The motive for these refusals is always the same, and is as natural, necessary, and incontrovertible: recognition of the necessity of observing the religious law rather than the civil one when these are in opposition. But a civil law exacting military service, that is to say, the command to kill by order of the chiefs, can only be in opposition to every religious and moral law founded on the love of one's neighbor. It is the case for all religious doctrines – Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Brahman, and Confucianist.

The definition of the law of love given nineteen centuries ago by Christ has, in our days, penetrated the consciousness of men, no longer by the observance of Christ's teaching, but directly, among all those in whom the moral sense is developed. Here, and only here is our salvation.

It would seem at first sight that the refusals to serve in the army are only isolated cases. But one forgets that these are not occasional acts, determined by certain circumstances. They are the result of sincere professions of religious doctrines.

It is evident, then, that this faith ruins everything that is based on principles contrary to it. Indeed, as soon as men understand that their participation in violence is incompatible with the Christianity that they profess; as soon as they refuse to serve as soldiers, tax collectors, judges, jury, police agents; the acts of violence from which the whole world is suffering will disappear immediately.

Chapter 12

When you can say with entire truth and with a whole heart, “Lord God, lead me wherever you desire,” then, only, do you deliver yourself from servitude and become really free. (*Thoughts of the Wise, April 14th*)⁷

A free man is only master of what he can dispose of without hindrance. But one cannot dispose entirely of oneself. That is why, when you see that a man wishes to dispose, not of himself, but of others, know that he is not free. He has become the slave of his desire to dominate men. (Epictetus, *Thoughts of the Wise, June 11th*)

What can these hundreds, these thousands, or even these hundreds of thousands of men – feeble, powerless, and isolated – do in the presence of a considerable number of other men, obedient to the government’s orders and provided with the most formidable weapons of destruction? Does not the struggle seem unequal and impossible?

Nevertheless, the result of this struggle is as little in doubt as is the struggle between the shades of night and the light of dawn. Here is what was written by one of these young men who was imprisoned for having refused to serve in the army:

Sometimes I am able to speak with soldiers of the guard, and I cannot help smiling when they say to me, “Come, my lad, it can’t be very easy for you to spend all the years of your youth in prison.”

“Doesn’t it all end the same way?” I say.

“That’s true, but you wouldn’t be so badly off in the regiment, if you wished to serve.”

“I am better off here than the rest of you in the regiment.”

And they answer, “That is true. But just the same, here it is the fourth year that you have been imprisoned, while if you had done your military service, you would have been free long ago.”

“But since I am all right here.”

“That is odd,” mused the soldier, shaking his head, and looking pensive.

I have the same conversations with the soldiers imprisoned with me. “It is queer. You endure everything, and in spite of it all, you are always happy and active,” one of them said to me, a soldier of Jewish origin.

My other prison comrades said when they saw any of their number become sad, “Look here, you are scarcely shut up here before you pine away. Look at Daddy (that is what they call me on account of my beard), he’s been here for a long time, but he’s always happy.”

At times we have long conversations just for the sake of speaking, but sometimes in order to speak of God, of life, and of other interesting things. Or else one of my comrades speaks of his life in his village, and one feels so well by listening. In fact, I cannot complain of my existence here.

⁷ Translator’s note - Another collection made by Tolstoy made before *Daily Reading*.

Another writes:

I will not say that my mental life is always the same. I pass moments of lassitude as well as moments of joy.

At the present time I am feeling well. But just the same, it takes a lot of strength to take part in what goes on in prison with a feeling of triumph. In order not to give way, I try to see into the depths of things, and to persuade myself that it is all momentary and that I have more force within me than is needed for whatever the case may be. Then joy brightens my heart again, and wipes away everything that has just happened. It is in this mental struggle that my existence is passing.

A third writes:

Sentence has been passed. I am condemned to five years, five months, and six days of prison. You could never believe the joy and peace I felt after the judgment, as if I had been relieved of an enormous weight. I wish I could always feel as light and active.

Quite different is the state of the soul of those who participate in violence, submitting to it or profiting by it. All these thousands and millions of men are ignorant of the very natural sentiment of love for one's neighbor. On the contrary, they hate, blame, or fear, suppressing all their human sentiments to such a point that the murder of their brothers seems the indispensable condition of their well-being.

"You reproach us for the cruelty of the executions," say the Russian conservatives today. "But what shall we do with these wretches? In France they quieted the country only after cutting off innumerable heads. Let them stop throwing bombs, and we will stop hanging them."

The leaders of the revolution insist upon the death of the leaders of the government with the same inhuman cruelty. The revolutionaries, workmen from the factories or the fields, insist upon the death of the capitalists, the landed proprietors. These men know that their acts are contrary to human nature and they lie, seeking to arouse wickedness in themselves, in order to smother the truth that is in them. They suffer from the most smarting evil, that of the soul.

Some believe that they are compelled by human nature to accomplish the task towards which all humanity is tending, and which certainly results in good, as much to the individual as collectively. Others, in spite of all their efforts to hide it from themselves, know that all their acts are contrary to our nature, and that they are sticking to a task from which humanity is constantly withdrawing, a task from which mankind is suffering, as well as each one of us, and they themselves more than any. On one side there are liberty, peace, and sincerity. On the other side are slavery, fear, and dissimulation. On the one side is faith, on the other, lack of belief; on one side truth, on the other, lies; on one side love, on the other, hatred; on one side a radiant future, and on the other, a frightful past.

How can one doubt which side will be victorious?

What irrefutable truths were expressed by a French writer, now dead, when he wrote this marvelously inspired letter:

No matter what he does, no matter what he says, no matter what one says to him, man has only one body to nourish, and one intelligence to cultivate and develop. He has one soul to satisfy. This soul is also working incessantly, in continual evolution towards the light and truth. As long as it will not have received all the light, or conquered all the truth, it will torment him.

Well, it has never worried him, never dominated him so much as in the present day. It is, as it were, in the air that one breathes. The individual souls who alone have had the will to undertake a social regeneration have been gradually sought out, called, approached, united, and understood. They have formed a group, a centre of attraction towards which other souls now fly from the four quarters of the globe, as swallows toward a mirror. They more or less constitute, as one might say, a collective soul, in order that in future men may realize, in common, the coming union and regular progress of nations who have recently been hostile to each other. I find and recognize this new soul in facts that seem the most likely to be denied.

This arming of all the nations, these threats that their representatives make to each other, this renewing of race persecution, these enmities among compatriots, and even the horseplay in the Sorbonne are examples that have a bad appearance, but are not a bad omen. They are the last convulsions of what is going to disappear. The social body acts like the human body; the malady is only a violent effort of the organism to free itself from a morbid and harmful element.

Those who have profited, and who hope to go on profiting for a long time, by the errors of the past will unite in order that nothing shall be changed. As a result, there are these weapons, these threats, and these persecutions. But if you will look closely you will see that all that is merely external. It is colossal and empty. The soul is not there; it has gone elsewhere. These millions of armed men, who are exercising every day in preparation for a general war of extermination, do not hate those that they must fight, and not one of their chiefs dares to declare this war. As to the claims, even the most serious ones, of those at the bottom, a great and sincere pity, which at last recognizes them as legitimate, is answering them from above.

The entente is inevitable within a certain time, and is nearer than one supposes. I do not know if it is because I am going to leave this world soon, and if the glimmerings of light beyond the horizon have enlightened me also, affecting my sight, but I believe that our world is going to enter into the realization of the words, "Love one another," without bothering, either, whether it was a man or a God who said them.⁸

Yes, it is certainly in the practical realization of the law of love, in its true significance, that is to say, as a supreme law allowing no exception, in which is found the salvation from the horrible condition confronting the nations of the Christian world. This is a condition which is gradually reaching the point of seeming to have no solution.

⁸ Translator's note – Letter from A. Dumas fils to the director of the *Gaulois* entitled *Mysticism in School*.

Chapter 13

Social life can be bettered only by individual self-denial. (*Daily Reading, January 19th*)

Do what you have to do in life according to divine will, and in that way you will improve the lives of everybody. (*Daily Reading, January 17th*)

Fifteen years ago I wrote:

The crushing heaviness of evil is weighing down on men. They are seeking the way to free themselves. They know that by uniting their efforts they would be able to lift up this weight and throw it off, but they cannot agree as to how they shall work when everyone is dropping lower and lower and leaving the weight on the shoulders of the rest. Thus, it is getting heavier and heavier for the greater number, and this weight would have crushed them long ago if men had not been found who thought less of the consequences of their acts than of the agreement of their conduct with the calls of their consciences.

These men are Christians. They are that because, instead of seeking to attain the external goal for which one must get the consent of all, they see only the internal goal, for the realization of which it is not necessary to agree with anyone. And yet, here is the foundation of true Christianity. That is why freedom from the servitude in which we find ourselves at present is impossible for those who seek it in collective effort. It can only be obtained by the substitution of the law of love, that fundamental principle of Christianity, for the law of violence.

This doctrine says to each individual: You cannot know the end of social life. You can only picture it as a form of progressive approach towards universal happiness, towards the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. On the other hand, you are aware of the aim of personal life: it is the development in each of the greatest amount of love, in order that the Kingdom of God may be realized. This aim is certain and is easy to approach. You can be ignorant of the best methods for attaining the external goal.

You can meet obstacles in the way of its realization, but nothing can stop your drawing nearer to inner perfection, which is the increase of love in you and in others. So it is enough to institute, in the place of the illusory social aim, this individual aim of life. It is the only sure and accessible aim, and the chains that you thought were fastening you forever will drop immediately, and you will feel yourself absolutely free...

The Christian can ignore the laws established by the State because he has no need of them for himself, or for others; he considers that human life is better assured by the law of love professed by him than by the law of violence that one wants to impose on him... Having recognized the efficacy of the law of love, he does not consider the law of violence obligatory, and he denounces the other as the most horrible of mistakes...

The profession of true Christianity, which includes the precept of nonresistance to evil by violence, relieves those faithful to this doctrine from any

external authority. Much better, it gives them the possibility of obtaining better conditions in life, those that men seek vainly by changing its external forms. In reality, these forms change only after the modifications that have arisen in men's consciences, and in the measure in which this conscience has evolved.

It was not the orders of a government that abolished the murder of children, tortures, or slavery, but the universal conscience that caused these orders. Since the evolution of conscience determines the changes in the modes of life, the contrary, as well, should happen (or so they say). As it is more agreeable and easier to modify external forms (because the results are more apparent), this activity is preferred to the one whose aim is to modify conscience. That is why one is more frequently occupied with the foundation, rather than with the form.

It is often argued in proof of the falsity and lack of realization of the Christian doctrine that, although revealed to men nineteen centuries ago, it has been adopted by them only outwardly. It is said that, even if it has been known for so long a time, it has not become our rule of conduct. If so many Christian martyrs have died without making any change in the order of existing things, that clearly shows that the doctrines are false and unattainable.

To think and speak thus is to say that seeds buried in the earth and not sprouting instantly are not good seeds and should be destroyed. It was inevitable that the Christian doctrine was not embraced in its entire significance at the moment of its construction.

A doctrine ruining the whole order of existing things cannot be accepted immediately and entirely. That is why it was embraced only in a weakened form. The great majority of men in that epoch were incapable of assimilating this doctrine by spiritual means. Experience had to first show them that all digressions from the commandments of the doctrine would be disastrous to them.

The doctrine was therefore accepted as a new outer cult, replacing paganism, but the pagan conditions of life did not undergo any change whatever. Nevertheless, weakened as it was, this doctrine based on the Scripture could not help but produce a certain result. In spite of all the efforts of the servants of false Christianity to hide its true meaning, it penetrated little by little into the consciences of men.

This double effort, positive and negative, lasted eighteen centuries. On the one hand people were drawn further and further away from the possibility of leading reasonable and good lives; on the other hand the doctrine was coming to light more and more under its true aspect. In our own time we already see the true Christianity, until now understood only by a few minds endowed with religious sentiments, manifested in the form of socialist doctrines, accessible to the simplest being, while social life continues to exist in evident contradiction to this truth.

One trembles before the present horrible condition of human life: taxes, clergy, great landed properties, prisons, guillotines, cannon, dynamite, millionaires, and beggars. In reality, all these horrors are the result of our own acts. Not only can they disappear, but they must disappear in order to be in conformity with the new conscience of humanity. Christ said that He conquered

the world, and, as a matter of fact, He has conquered it. As dreadful as it is, the evil no longer exists, because it has disappeared from the consciences of men.⁹

Today humanity is passing through a transition phase. Everything is ready for passing from one state to the other. It needs only a slight push to start this passing, and it can take place at any minute.

The social conscience already condemns the former modes of life and is ready to adopt the new. The whole world feels it, and is convinced of it. But inertia and fear of the unknown retard its application in practice, as it has been retarded in theory for a long time. In such cases, it sometimes needs only one word to make the force called public opinion change the whole order of things at once, and do it without a struggle or violence.

The freeing of men from servitude and ignorance cannot be obtained by revolutions, syndicates, or peace congresses, but simply by the conscience of each one of us, forbidding us to participate in violence and asking us in amazement, "Why are you doing that?" In order for us to get free of the condition that hides our true mission from us, it is enough for us to ask in fear and indignation how anyone can insist upon our committing such horrible crimes. And this awakening can take place at any instant.

This is what I wrote fifteen years ago, and I repeat with conviction today that this awakening is about to take place. Certainly I shall not be there to aid in it. I am an old man, more than eighty years of age, but I know with certainty, the same as seeing spring follow winter and night come after day, that the time has already come in the life of Christian humanity.

Chapter 14

The human soul is Christian in its nature. Christianity is always accepted by man as a reminiscence of something forgotten. It raises him to a height from which he discovers a world of happiness, ruled by a natural law. Man's feelings on discovering the natural truth are those of a prisoner, one who has been confined in a dark tower and who, climbing to its highest balcony, discovers a marvelous world, until then unsuspected by him.

The idea of having to submit to man's law is enslaving; the idea of submitting to God's law sets one free. (*Daily Reading, January 28th*)

One of the surest conditions of human action is the fact that the further away is the goal towards which we are struggling, and the less we desire to help ourselves to the fruit of our efforts, the more certain we are of our success. (John Ruskin)

⁹ Transcriber's note – I take this to mean that society no longer regards the enumerated things as evil, which is a truly dreadful state of affairs.

The most important and the most necessary work, as much for the authors as for others, is the one that is fully appreciated a long time after the death of the author. (*Daily Reading, May 28th*)

“In order that men may be able to get rid of governments founded on violence, they must all be religious. In other words, they must all be prepared to sacrifice their material good to God’s law and live, not for the future, but for the present, and live forcing themselves to accomplish the divine will, which is in love. But the men of our time are not religious, and cannot, consequently, adopt this line of conduct.”

Those who say this suppose that to be religious is a state contrary to our nature, that it is manifested only in exceptional cases, and that it is the effect of education or suggestion. In reality, it is the absence of faith, the only natural condition of life, that causes men today to believe that religion is not a natural need.

Just as work is not an artificial thing imposed on men, but something inevitable, without which men cannot live, so faith, the consciousness of man’s relation to the universe and its resulting rule of conduct, is an inevitable phenomenon. This faith, far from being artificial, exceptional, or inculcated by education, is in human nature. We cannot do without it any more than birds that have lost their wings can fly. If in the Christian world today we see men who have lost their consciences, or rather, whose religious feeling has been obscured, this abnormal situation is temporary and has happened by chance or has been bred of special conditions in which men are living. This state is as exceptional as that of men who live without working.

So in order to re-conquer this sentiment, which is natural and indispensable to life, it is necessary for men to dissipate the lies that obscure the sentiment within them. In order for the chief obstacle to the supreme law of love to disappear at once, it will be sufficient to free men from the deception of the Christian doctrine as corrupted by the Church, which justifies a social organization founded on violence. The law that tolerates no exception, and that was revealed to humanity nineteen centuries ago, is the only answer to the demands of modern conscience.

From the moment that this law penetrates the universal conscience as the supreme law of life, our dreadful moral condition, permitting the greatest iniquities and acts of barbarism to be considered natural, will disappear of itself. Then will come to pass everything dreamed of and promised today by socialist and anarchist builders of future worlds. The result obtained will be even greater.

And this end will be attained just because it will not be necessary to make use of the violent means that the transgressors extol today. We will be free from the evil that is torturing and corrupting the whole world, not by preserving the present governments, monarchies, or republics, not by suppressing them and replacing them with socialist or communist organizations, and not, in general, by conceiving an organization and imposing it by force, but by having recourse to the only way: each one of us, without worrying about the result to ourselves or others, must in our own lives observe the supreme law of love, which condemns every violence.

Chapter 15

A man who continues to live in error sees the incarnation of power in certain sacred institutions, which are the indispensable organs of the social body. The man who awakens to the truth sees this assumed by men sunk in error and who

attribute to it a fantastic importance having no possible justification, and who accomplish their will by force.

For those with insight, these lost people, bribed as often as not, resemble brigands who hold up travelers on the high roads. For anyone who has awakened to the truth, the entity called the State does not exist, and therefore there is not the slightest justification, for him, for the acts of violence committed in the name of the State. And any participation in these acts is impossible for him.

To sum up, State violence will disappear, not with the aid of external means, but thanks only to the calls of conscience of men who have awakened to the truth.
(Daily Reading, October 16th)

The objection will be made, "But how can we get along without a government or any public authority? No state of society has ever existed without a government or any public authority?"

Men are so accustomed to the government under which they live that it seems to them an inevitable, permanent form of social life. To tell the truth, it is so only in appearance. Men have lived and are still living outside of any static organization. All the savage peoples who have not yet attained to what we call civilization have lived and are still living in that way. Men whose conceptions of life go beyond civilization live thus also. They are living in Europe, in America, and above all in Russia, where Christian communities deny public authority, not feeling the need of it and submitting only to forced interference.

The State is only a temporary form of human groups. Just as the life of an individual is constantly in a state of evolution and bettering itself, so the life of an entire community progresses and improves.

Every human being begins as a nurseling, playing and studying. Then he begins to work, marries, brings up his children, rids himself little by little of his passions, and acquires wisdom with age. The life of nations evolves in the same way, only their phases of development last not years, but hundreds and thousands of years. And as the necessary transformations take place in the individual in the spiritual, intangible world, the essential changes in humanity take place at first in the intangible world also: that of the religious conscience. In the individual, the transformations are so slow that one could not indicate the month, the day or the hour when the child becomes a youth, and the youth an adult. We cannot always say positively when these changes have already taken place. Neither can we indicate the epoch when humanity, or a certain part of humanity, passed from one religious age into another. But as we perceive that a youth is no longer a child, we see that humanity, or a certain part of it, has passed from one period into another after the change has already taken place.

Today we are watching the passage of humanity from one age to another among the nations of the Christian world.

We do not know the hour when a child becomes a youth, but we know that he can no longer play childish games. We cannot indicate the year, nor even the decade, when the Christian world passed from its former form of life and commenced the other age, determined by the religious conscience, but we cannot help seeing that the Christian world can no longer play seriously at conquests, diplomatic artifices, constitutions, or democratic, socialist, revolutionary, and anarchist parties. And above all, we cannot help seeing that the Christian world can no longer give itself up to all sorts of games that are based on violence.

This phenomenon is becoming evident among us particularly in Russia, after the external transformation of our political government. Serious-minded people cannot help feeling, as

regards this new form of government, as an adult would feel if he were given a present of a toy that he had never seen as a child. No matter how interesting and new the toy is, the adult has no need of it, and can only receive it with a smile. That is the attitude in Russia of all thinking men, as well as of the popular masses, in regard to the constitution, the *duma*, and all sorts of parties, revolutionary and otherwise.

I am convinced that Russians realize the true sense of Christ's doctrine. They can no longer seriously believe that a man's mission here below is to employ the short period between birth and death in making speeches to legislative assemblies, in judging his brothers in the courts, in capturing them, in locking them up and murdering them, in throwing bombs at them, and in taking away their property. They can no longer bother as to whether Finland, India, Poland, or Korea is annexed to what is called Russia, England, Prussia, or Japan. They no longer seek to liberate these countries by force or prepare to kill each other in quantities for that purpose. It is impossible for a man of our time to be ignorant in his inner consciousness of the madness of such acts.

If we do not perceive the horror of the existence that we lead, which is contrary to our nature, it is only because the atrocities, in the midst of which we continue to live peacefully, appear so slowly that we do not perceive them.

I once saw an old man abandoned to a horrible fate. Worms were crawling all over his body, and he could not move an inch without suffering atrociously. Nevertheless, the progress of the disease was so slow that he did not perceive the horror of his condition. He only asked for tea and sugar.

The same phenomenon is taking place in our social life. We no longer see its horror because we have come to our present condition by degrees, and, even as the old man, we rejoice at the appearance of cinemas and automobiles.

It is not enough to say that the suppression of violence – violence so contrary to the reasoning and loving nature of man – cannot make our present condition worse. That is why the question as to whether we can live without governments not only is not necessary, as the defenders of the existing order of things would have us believe, but it is quite ridiculous. It would be similar to asking a man suffering torture how he could live if his martyrdom stopped.

The privileged members of the present State imagine that the absence of every static organization would cause complete anarchy, the struggle of all against all, as if it concerned a life in common, not only of animals (they live in peace without static violence), but of certain monstrous creatures, guided in their acts only by hate and madness. To tell the truth, they picture men like this because they attribute to them aptitudes contrary to their natures, and which, in reality, are developed by the state of government that they uphold, in spite of the evil that it does to men.

That is why the question of what would men's lives would be like without government or public authority can only be answered by saying it is certain that, in any case, the evils caused by the government will disappear. There will be no more exclusive possession of the earth, no more taxes employed for harmful purposes, no more divisions between nations, no more subjection of some by the rest, no more dissipation of all human forces to make war, no more fear of bombs on one side or of gallows on the other, and no more mad luxury for part of the people and horrible poverty for the rest.

Chapter 16

We are living in a period of discipline, of culture and of civilization, but it is still far off from being a moral period. One can say that, in the present condition of humanity, prosperity increases with the misery of its inhabitants. And one might ask if we would not be happier living in a primitive state, deprived of all our culture of the present day. For how can one make men happy without making them moral and good? (Kant. *Daily Reading, June 16th*)

Try to conduct yourself in such a way that you need not resort to violence. (Daily Reading, October 15th)

We are quite accustomed to find ways of managing other people's lives, and these methods do not seem odd to us. They would be unnecessary, however, if men were religious and free. They are, in fact, the result of despotism and of the domination of one or a few over many. This error is harmful, not only because it causes suffering to those who feel the oppression of despots, but even more so because their consciences no longer warn them of the necessity of bettering their condition. But only this conscience can have an effect on one's fellow being.

Not only has one man not the right to dispose of a great number, but a great number have not the right to dispose of a single man. (V. Tchertkov, *Daily Reading, November 22nd*)

"Wonderful. But will you kindly tell us what form human society will take when it decides to live without government?" ask those who believe that men can always know what the social life of the future will be, and who therefore credit the same knowledge to those who wish to live without a government.

It is true that this idea is only a common superstition, very old and very prevalent. Men, whether they submit or refuse to submit to government, never know and cannot know what form this future state will take. How much less, then, could a minority organize the lives of everybody? This organization can be effected, not according to the will of some of them, but as the result of numerous intervening factors, the principal among which is the religious development of the majority of men.

The superstition that causes one to think that he can tell in advance how society will be organized in the future has its origin in the desire of the transgressors to justify their conduct, and in the desire of the victims to explain and lighten the weight of the constraint. The former persuade themselves and others that they know the way to make life take the form that they consider the best. The latter, who undergo such constraint that they do not feel strong enough to free themselves, have the same conviction, for it permits them to give a certain excuse for their position.

The history of nations ought to destroy this superstition entirely.

At the end of the eighteenth century, a few Frenchmen tried to maintain the old despotic regime, but in spite of all their efforts this regime fell and the republic replaced it. In the same way, in spite of all the efforts of the republican chiefs, in spite of all their acts of violence, the empire replaced the republic, and thus they succeeded each other: empire, coalition, Charles X, a

new revolution, a new republic, Louis-Philippe, then other governments up to the present day republic.

The same facts have been repeated wherever violence is the basis of action. For example, all the efforts of the papacy, far from killing Protestantism, have only further developed it. The progress of socialism is due to the efforts of capitalists. In short, even in the case where the government established by the aid of violence is maintained for a certain length of time, or is modified by the use of force, it is only because at that period the form of the social organization continues or ceases to answer to the moral condition of the people. It is not because any external cause assures or modifies its existence.

It follows that the axiom whereby a minority can organize the life of the majority, an axiom in the name of which one commits the greatest crimes, is only a superstition. In the same way, the activity that results from it, and which is generally considered as most honorable and important as much by the directors of the State as by the revolutionaries, is in reality only a pastime as useless as it is harmful, and which above all prevents the true happiness of humanity.

This superstition has caused and still causes much blood to flow, and much horrible suffering. The worst of it is that this superstition has always prevented and still prevents social betterment that answers to the degree of the development of the human conscience. It prevents true progress, because men spend their entire efforts in concerning themselves with others, thereby neglecting their own moral regeneration, which alone can contribute to the regeneration of the world in general. In fact, social life advances, and advances necessarily towards the eternal ideal of perfection, thanks to the progress of individuals in the endless path of perfection.

One sees from all this the horror of the superstition that makes us neglect our task of individual betterment, and which alone procures personal happiness and general welfare. It is the only means of which we are really masters, contrary to the superstition that invites us to concern ourselves with the happiness of others, which is not in our power. It makes us employ means of constraint that are as harmful for us as for others, and takes us further from individual as well as social perfection.

Chapter 17

Let us each concern ourselves only with the solution of the inner question, that of our own conduct in life, and all questions concerning the outer world will thereby receive their best solution.

We do not know, and cannot know, in what general well-being consists. But we surely know that the realization of this well-being is possible only when we fulfill the law of goodness revealed to each man.

If, instead of dreaming of universal salvation, we concern ourselves with our own; if, instead of liberating humanity, we liberate ourselves; then we would do a great deal more for the salvation and freedom of everyone. (Herzen, *Daily Reading, June 30th*)

In individual life and in social life there is only one law: if you wish to better your life, be ready to sacrifice it. (*Daily Reading, January 19th*)

Accomplish your task in life by obeying the divine will, and you will be certain to help towards the betterment of social life in the most efficient way.
(*Daily Reading, January 17th*)

The following objection is often made: "All that you say may be true, but it will be possible to abstain from every act of violence only when the whole world, or even the majority, will understand the disastrous, futile, and senseless meaning of violence. While waiting for that, what can a few isolated individuals do? Must we refuse to defend ourselves, and let our neighbors be attacked by the wicked?"

Let us suppose that a brigand is raising his knife over his victim. I see him and am armed with a revolver, so I can kill him. But I am not absolutely certain what the brigand will do. He might not strike, while I would surely kill him. That is why the only thing a man can do in such a case is to follow his invariable rule of conduct, dictated by his conscience. But his conscience may demand his own life, and not that of another. Thus, to the question of what one should do in the presence of a crime committed by one or by a great number, every man, free of the superstition that affirms the possibility of foreseeing the future, will answer, "Do to others what you would have them do to you."

"But others steal, pillage, and kill, while I do none of these things. Let them also follow the law of mutual aid. Then I, in my turn, can be asked to observe it." The men of our world make this objection, with greater assurance the higher their situations is in the social scale.

"I do not steal," say the sovereign, the minister, the general, the judge, the landed proprietor, the merchant, the soldier, and the policeman. As a matter of fact, our idea of our social organization, founded on violence, is so impressed upon us that we do not perceive all the crimes that they commit each day in the name of the public good. We see only the rare violent attempts of those who are called murderers, burglars, or thieves.

"He is a murderer, he is a thief, he does not observe the rule of not doing to others what you would not have them do to you," say the same people who go on killing in war, who force nations to prepare for carnage, and who steal from and despoil their own as well as foreign nations. If the rule of mutual aid has no more effect upon those who, in our society, are called murderers or thieves, it is only because they constitute a part of the immense majority of people who, for generations and generations, were robbed and despoiled by men, and who do not see the criminal character of their acts.

That is why, to the question of knowing what attitude to take regarding those who use force against us, one can only answer, "Stop doing to others what you would not have them do to you."

There is great inconsistency and injustice connected with the punishment in certain cases of violence, when the most horrible crimes committed by the State in the name of the general good are left unpunished. These same punishments have a different result from what is generally expected. In fact, they destroy the powerful force of public opinion, which is a hundred times more capable of guaranteeing society against every act of violence than are the prisons and guillotines.

This reasoning can be applied with striking proof in international relations.

"How could we do otherwise than resist the invasion of our country by savages, who come to take away our property, our wives, and our daughters?" object those who wish to protect themselves from the crimes that they commit against other nations. "Yellow peril," cry the whites; "White peril," cry the Hindus, Chinese, and Japanese with more reason.

But as soon as one is freed from the superstitions that justify violence, one understands all the horror of the crimes committed by one nation against another. Even more, one understands the moral stupidity that allows English, Russians, Germans, French, and Americans to dream of protecting themselves against the very acts of violence that they commit in India, Indo-China, Poland, Manchuria, and Algeria.

It is enough, then, to free ourselves, even for a time, from the horrible superstition that lets us believe in the possibility of knowing the future forms of society. Such a superstition justifies every act of violence, and sincerely approves of our present life. If we free ourselves, we will immediately understand that recognizing the necessity of opposing evil by violence is only the justification of our habitual vices: vengeance, cupidity, envy, ambition, pride, cowardice, and spite.

Appendix to Chapter 17

Finding strange the blindness of the men who believe in the necessity for violence, and convinced as I am of the contrary, it is not arguments, however, that can persuade me and convince others of the truth. What determines my belief is the certainty of the spiritual nature of man, of which love is the manifestation. But real love, revealed to us by Christ, excludes the possibility of all violence.

I do not know, and no one can know, if the use of violence or resignation when threatened with evil will be useful or useless, harmful or harmless. But what I know, and what everyone knows, is that love is good. It is good when men feel affection for me. It is much better if I feel affection for men. In fact, the greatest good of all is my affection for all, not only for those who love me, but also, as Christ said, for those who hate me and injure me. Strange as it may be to anyone who has not felt this, it is nevertheless true. And the more I ponder on it, the more surprised I am not to have felt it sooner.

Real love, which denies self and identifies its “ego” with another, is synonymous with the awakening in the soul of the superior, universal principle of life. This is true love, and it gives all the good that it can give when it is only love – that is to say, when it is free of any personal interest. And it is this kind of love that must be felt for the enemy or the offender.

That is why the recommendation to love not only those who love you, but also those who hate you is no exaggeration. It simply indicates the impossibility of any exception, and the possibility of gaining the highest good that love can give.

The fact that it should be so is self-evident, but one must feel it to be convinced. As soon as one has felt it, offenses and attacks become undesirable. It follows that the human soul suffers when one opposes evil with evil, and on the other hand, feels the greatest happiness in returning good for evil.

Chapter 18

The Creator Himself has so arranged matters that human actions are guided by interest and not by justice, which is why all our efforts to establish the value of certain actions are in vain. We do not know, have never known, and can never know what the result of these actions, or any series of actions, will be for ourselves or for others. But we all can know which action is just, and which is

not. We can also know that the consequences of justice will eventually be as good as possible for others as well as for ourselves, although we can never say of what this good will consist. (John Ruskin)

You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (*John 8:32*)

Man thinks; he was created thus. And he should reason in a sensible way; that is evident. The man who reasons in this manner thinks first of his aim in life. He thinks of his soul and of God. Just see of what worldly men are thinking. They think of everything, except that. They dream of dancing music, singing, and other pleasures. They are occupied in building, getting rich, and becoming powerful. They envy kings and the rich, but they never think of the mission of man. (Pascal, *Daily Reading, June 20th*)

All of you – leaders, rich, oppressed, and poor – suffer from the lies of a false and static Christianity, lies that hide what Christ revealed to you and what your reason and your heart order you to do. From the moment that you are liberated, you will understand that the cause of all your physical and moral sufferings has been in yourself.

Understand then, all of you, that you were born neither slaves nor masters and that you are all free, but you are so only when you have observed the supreme law of life, and this law has been revealed to you. It will be sufficient for you to renounce the lies that hide it from you for you to see at once in what it consists and where your happiness lies. This law is in love, and happiness is found in its observance. Understand that, and you will become really free. You will today acquire everything that you are vainly seeking to obtain by the complicated means suggested to you by corrupted men.

Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. And you shall find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (*Matthew 11:28-32*)

You will be preserved from evil and you will acquire the real good, not by looking after your interest, and not by envy, hatred, anger, or ambition; not even by a sense of justice or, above all, by the care of organizing the lives of others. But, strange as it may seem, you will acquire the real good only by the work of your own soul, not following any outside interests, and not trying to reason with its dictates.

Understand, then, that belief in the possibility of ordering the lives of others is a vulgar superstition, which lasts only on account of its hoary age. Understand that the men who make use of it, beginning with the leaders of the State and the ministers, and finishing with the spies and executioners on the one hand, and the chiefs and members of the opposition parties on the other, are only pitiable people who have strayed and are occupied with a task, not only vain and stupid, but even the most abominable that one can conceive.

Men already see the ignominy of the spy and executioner, and are beginning to see that of the police, detectives, and even to a certain degree, of military men. But they do not yet see it of the judge, the minister, the sovereign, chiefs of parties, or revolutionaries. And yet the work of the

latter is as vile and as contrary to human nature, or even worse, than the work of the executioner or the spy, because it is more hypocritical.

Understand then, all of you, especially the young, that to want to impose an imaginary state of government on others by violence is not only a vulgar superstition, but even a criminal work. Understand that this work, far from assuring the good of men, is only a lie, a more or less unconscious hypocrisy, and is always hiding the lowest passions.

Understand it, you, men of tomorrow, and stop looking for an illusory happiness by participating in the administration of the State by judicial institutions, by instruction, and by all kinds of parties that have the good of the masses as an aim. Pay attention to only one thing, that which you need the most, that which is the most accessible, and that which gives the most happiness to us and to everyone: the increase of love in us by the suppression of vices and passions that keep it from manifesting itself. Understand that the observance of this supreme law of love is becoming as inevitable for us as is the law of flight for the birds, the law of nutrition by plants for the herbivorous, and the law of nutrition by meat for the carnivorous. And consequently, understand that the least transgression of this law is disastrous to us.

Remember it and consecrate your life to this joyous work. Just begin it, and you will see that it is the true work in life, and it alone determines the amelioration of the condition of everybody – an end that you follow blindly by false methods. Do not forget that the common bond is in the union of men, and that this union can never be attained by means of violence. It is enough that everyone should observe the law of life, and this union will be realized without the need of seeking for it. This supreme law, alone, is the same for all of us and unites us all.

Revealed by Christ, it is recognized today by men, and its observance is obligatory as long as there is no other law, a still clearer one, conforming more to the calls of human conscience that have been revealed to us.

Chapter 19

Some seek good or happiness in power, others in science, still others in pleasure. As to those who really understand what their happiness is, they know that it need not be possessed by the few, but by everyone. They know that the true good is the lot of all men at the same time, without division or jealousy. No one, unless he wishes, can lose it. (Pascal, *Thoughts of the Wise*, xxvii, 4)

We possess a single infallible guide and this is the universal spirit that lives in men as a whole, and in each one of us, which makes us aspire to what we should aspire. It is the spirit that commands the tree to grow towards the sun, the flower to throw off its seeds in autumn, and us to reach out towards God, and by so doing we become united to each other. (*Daily Reading, November 16th*)

The true faith attracts people to it, not by the promise of good to the believer, but by the indication of the only means of saving us from all evil, and from death itself. (*Daily Reading, September 11th*)

Salvation lies neither in the cult, nor in the practice of a religion, but in the clear comprehension of the meaning of our life. (*Daily Reading, September 11th*)

That is all that I want to say.

I want to say that we are in a situation and in a period in which we can no longer remain, and that, willingly or unwillingly, we are obliged to start out on a new path. And to follow it, we do not have to invent a new religion, or any scientific theories explaining the meaning of life and serving as a guide to it. It would be futile, above all, to have recourse to any special activity. It will be sufficient to adopt this single rule: free ourselves from the superstitions of false and static Christianity.

Let each one understand that he has not the right, or even the possibility, to organize the lives of others, but that he, in his own life, should act in conformity with the supreme religious law that has been revealed to him. Let each one do this, and the order of things that reigns among the so-called Christian nations – an order that makes the whole world suffer, which answers so little to the demands of our consciences, and which makes humanity unhappier each day – will immediately disappear.

Whoever you are – sovereign, judge, proprietor, worker, or beggar – reflect and take pity on your soul. No matter how obscured your brain may be by your authority or your wealth, no matter how badly treated you may be or how irritated by misery and humiliations, you possess and you manifest, like all of us, the divine spirit. That spirit asks you clearly today, “Why do you make yourself a martyr and make all those about you unhappy?” Understand who you are, just how insignificant and infallible is that which you call *you* – your spiritual self. Having understood it, commence to live entirely for the accomplishment of the superior mission of your life, which has been revealed to you by universal wisdom, by the doctrine of Christ, and by your own conscience.

Put the good of your life in the progressive freedom of your mind, freedom from all the illusions of the flesh, and in the improvement of your love for your fellow man, which is, after all, the same thing. As soon as you will have begun to live thus, you will be aware of a joyous sensation full of liberty and happiness. You will be surprised to see that the same external conditions, with which you were so concerned, and which were far from realization, will not prevent the coming of the greatest possible happiness.

And if you are unhappy (I know that you are), reflect upon what has been proposed to you here, and which I have not imagined, but which is the result of the thoughts and feelings of the best minds and human hearts, and which is the only way to deliver you from your unhappiness and the only way to acquire the greatest good that you can get in this life.

That is what I have wanted to say to my brothers before dying.