

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU

Christianity Not As A Mystical Teaching But As A New  
Concept of Life

by Leo Tolstoy

[Podcast 11 of 13]

[Dear Soul, This book has been edited to begin with Chapter Five instead of the Author's original Preface and Chapters One through Four. Chapters One through Four are essentially a defense of Tolstoy's previous book on Christianity, entitled My Religion, a fascinating book which emphasizes the importance of adhering to the teachings of Jesus Christ. For one who is already familiar with that previous book, the Author's original order is not — in the view of the editor — most effective. Tolstoy's opening chapters, which are still good to read, are included after Chapter Twelve.

Peace be with you, Alan Lewis Silva, editor]

CHAPTER TWO The same impression of a desire to conceal, to pass in silence, what I attempted so carefully to express in my book, has been produced on me by the criticisms upon it. When my book appeared, it was, as I had expected, prohibited, and according to the law it ought to have been burned. But, instead of being burned, it was distributed among the officials, and it was disseminated in a large number of written copies and lithographic reprints, and in translations printed abroad. Very soon there

appeared criticisms upon the book, not only by the clergy, but also by the laity, which the government not only sanctioned, but even encouraged, so that the refutation of the book, which was assumed to be unknown to any one, was made a theme for theological essays in the academies. The critics upon my books, both the Russian and the foreign critics, can be divided into two classes: into the religious critics — people who consider themselves to be believers — and lay critics, who are freethinkers. I shall begin with the first: In my book I accuse the church teachers of teaching contrary to Christ's commandments, which are clearly and definitely expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, and especially contrary to the commandment about nonresistance to evil, thus depriving Christ's teaching of all significance. The church teachers recognize the Sermon on the Mount with the commandment about non-resistance to evil as a divine revelation, and so, if they have found it necessary to write about my book at all, they ought, it would seem, first of all to answer this chief point of accusation and say outright whether they consider the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and of the commandment about non-resistance to evil obligatory for a Christian, or not — and they must not answer it as this is generally done, that is, by saying that, although on the one hand it cannot properly be denied, on the other it cannot be affirmed, the more so that, and so forth — but must answer it just as the question is put by me in my book: did Christ actually demand from His disciples the fulfilment of what He taught in the Sermon on the Mount? and so, can a Christian, remaining a Christian, go to court, taking part in it and condemning people, or seeking in it defence by means of violence, or can he not? Can a Christian, still remaining a Christian, take part in the government, using violence against his neighbors, or not? And the chief question, which now, with the universal military service, stands before all men — can a Christian, remaining a

Christian, contrary to Christ's injunction, make any promises as to future acts, which are directly contrary to the teaching, and, taking part in military service, prepare himself for the murder of men and commit it? The questions are put clearly and frankly, and, it would seem, they ought to be answered clearly and frankly. But nothing of the kind has been done in all the criticisms upon my book, just as nothing of the kind has been done in the case of all those arraignments of the church teachers for departing from Christ's law, with which history is filled since the time of Constantine. Very much has been said in reference to my book about how incorrectly I interpret this or that passage in the Gospel, how I err in not acknowledging the Trinity, the redemption, and the immortality of the soul; very much has been said, but this one thing, which for every Christian forms the chief, essential question of life: how to harmonize what was clearly expressed in the teacher's words and is clearly expressed in the heart of every one of us — the teaching about forgiveness, humility, renunciation, and love of all men, of our neighbors and of our enemies — with the demand of military violence exerted against the men of one's own nation or another nation. Everything which may be called semblances of answers to this question may be reduced to the five following divisions. I have tried in this respect to collect everything I could, not only in reference to the criticisms upon my book, but also in reference to what has been written upon the subject in former times. The first, the rudest way of answering, consists in the bold assertion that violence does not contradict Christ's teaching, and that it is permitted and even prescribed by the Old and the New Testament. Assertions of this kind issue for the most part from people high up in the governmental or ecclesiastic hierarchy, who are, therefore, quite convinced that no one will dare to contradict their assertions, and that if one actually dared to do so, they

would not hear these objections. These men have, in consequence of their intoxication with their power, for the most part to such an extent lost the concept of what that Christianity is, in the name of which they occupy their places, that everything of a Christian nature in Christianity presents itself to them as sectarian; but everything which in the writings of the Old and the New Testament may be interpreted in an anti-Christian and pagan sense, they consider to be the foundation of Christianity. In favor of their assertion that Christianity does not contradict violence, these men with the greatest boldness generally bring forward the most offensive passages from the Old and the New Testament, and interpret them in the most non-Christian manner: the execution of Ananias and Sapphira, the execution of Simon Magus, and so forth. They adduce all those words of Christ which may be interpreted as a justification of cruelty, such as the expulsion from the temple, "It shall be more tolerable on that day for Sodom, than for that city," and so forth. According to the concepts of these men, the Christian government is not in the least obliged to be guided by the spirit of humility, forgiveness of offences, and love of our enemies. It is useless to refute such an assertion, because the men who assert this refute themselves, or rather, turn away from Christ, inventing their own Christ and their own Christianity in place of Him in whose name the church exists and also the position which they occupy in it. If all men knew that the church preaches Christ punishing, and not forgiving, and warring, no one would be believing in this church, and there would be no one to prove what it is proving. The second method is a little less rude. It consists in asserting that, although Christ really taught to offer one's cheek and give up a shirt, and this is a very high moral demand, there are malefactors in the world, and if these are not curbed by the exercise of force, the whole world and all good men will perish. This proof I found for the first time in John Chrysostom and I

pointed out its incorrectness in my book, *My Religion*. This argument is ungrounded, because, in the first place, if we allow ourselves to recognize any men as special malefactors (Raca), we thus destroy the whole meaning of the Christian teaching, according to which we are all equal and brothers, as the sons of one heavenly Father; in the second place, because, even if God permitted the exertion of violence against malefactors, it is absolutely impossible to find that safe and indubitable sign by which a malefactor may be unerringly told from one who is not, and so every man, or society of men, would recognize another as a malefactor, which is the case now; in the third place, because even if it were possible unerringly to tell malefactors from those who are not malefactors, it would still not be possible in a Christian society to execute, or maim, or lock up these malefactors, because in Christian society there would be no one to do this, because every Christian, as a Christian, is enjoined not to use violence against a malefactor. The third method of answering is still shrewder than the previous one. It consists in asserting that, although the commandment of non-resistance to evil is obligatory for a Christian when the evil is directed against him personally, it ceases to be obligatory when the evil is directed against his neighbors, and that then a Christian is not only not obliged to fulfil the commandments, but is also obliged in the defence of his neighbors, contrary to the commandment, to use violence against the violators. This assertion is quite arbitrary, and in the whole of Christ's teaching no confirmation of such an interpretation can be found. Such an interpretation is not only a limitation of the commandment, but a direct negation and annihilation of it. If any man has a right to use violence when another is threatened by danger, then the question as to the use of violence reduces itself to the question of defining what constitutes a danger for another person. But if my private judgment decides the question of

danger for another, then there does not exist such a case of violence that it could not be explained on the basis of a danger with which another is threatened. Wizards were executed and burned, aristocrats and Girondists were executed, and so were their enemies, because those who were in power considered them to be dangerous for others. If this important limitation, which radically undermines the meaning of the commandment, entered Christ's mind, there ought somewhere to be mention made of it. But in all the preaching and the life of the teacher there is not only no such limitation, but, on the contrary, there is expressed a particular caution against such a false and offensive limitation, which destroys the commandment. The mistake and the blunder of such a limitation is with particular clearness shown in the Gospel in connection with the judgment of Caiaphas, who made this very limitation. He recognized that it was not good to execute innocent Jesus, but he saw in Him danger, not for himself, but for the whole nation, and so he said: "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." And more clearly still was the negation of such a limitation expressed in the words said to Peter when he attempted with violence to resist the evil which was directed against Jesus (Matthew xxvi. 52). Peter was not defending himself, but his beloved and divine teacher. And Christ directly forbade him to do so, saying that he who takes the sword shall perish with the sword. Besides, the justification of violence used against a neighbor for the sake of defending another man against worse violence is always incorrect, because in using violence against an evil which is not yet accomplished, it is impossible to know which evil will be greater — whether the evil of my violence or of that against which I wish to defend my neighbor. We execute a criminal, thus freeing society from him, and we are positively unable to tell whether the criminal would not have changed on the morrow and whether our execution is

not a useless cruelty. We lock up a man whom we suppose to be a dangerous member of society, but beginning with tomorrow this man may cease to be dangerous, and his incarceration is futile. I see that a man whom I know to be a robber is pursuing a girl, and I have a gun in my hand — I kill the robber and save the girl; the robber has certainly been killed or wounded, but it is unknown to me what would happen if that were not the case. What an enormous amount of evil must take place, as it actually does, as the result of arrogating to ourselves the right to prevent an evil that may occur! Ninety-nine hundredths of the evil of the world, from the Inquisition to dynamite bombs and the executions and sufferings of tens of thousands of so-called political criminals, are based on this reflection. The fourth, still more refined answer to the question as to how a Christian should act toward Christ's commandment of non-resistance to evil consists in asserting that the commandment of non-resistance to evil is not denied by them, but is accepted like any other; but that they do not ascribe to this commandment any special exclusive significance, as the sectarians do. To ascribe to this commandment an invariable condition of Christian life, as do Garrison, Ballou, Dymond, the Quakers, the Mennonites, the Shakers, and as did the Moravian brothers, the Waldenses, Albigenses, Bogomils, Paulicians, is one-sided sectarianism. This commandment has neither more nor less significance than all the others, and a man who in his weakness transgresses any one of the commandments about non-resistance does not cease to be a Christian, provided he believes correctly. This subterfuge is very clever, and men who wish to be deceived are easily deceived by it. The subterfuge consists in reducing the direct conscious negation of the commandment to an accidental violation of the same. But we need only compare the relation of the church teachers to this commandment and to others, which they actually recognize, in order that

we may convince ourselves that the relation of the church teachers to the commandments which they recognize is quite different from their relation to this one. They actually recognize the commandment against fornication, and so never, under any condition, admit that fornication is not an evil. The preachers of the church never point out any cases when the commandment against fornication ought to be broken, and they always teach that we must avoid the offences which lead to the temptation of fornication. But this is not the case with the commandment about non-resistance. All the church preachers know cases when this commandment may be broken. And thus they teach men. And they not only do not teach how to avoid these offences, of which the chief one is the oath, but themselves commit them. The church preachers never and under no condition preach the violation of any other commandment; but in relation to the commandment of non-resistance they teach outright that this prohibition must not be understood in too direct a sense, and not only that this commandment must not be carried out at all times, but that there are conditions, situations, when directly the opposite should be done, that is, that we should judge, wage war, execute. Thus, in reference to the commandment about non-resistance to evil, they in the majority of cases preach how not to fulfil it. The fulfilment of this commandment, they say, is very difficult and is characteristic only of perfection. But how can it help but be difficult, when its breach is not only not prohibited, but is also directly encouraged, when they directly bless the courts, prisons, guns, cannon, armies, battles? Consequently it is not true that this commandment is recognized by the church preachers as of equal significance with the other commandments. The church preachers simply do not recognize it, and only because they do not dare to confess it, try to conceal their failure to recognize it. Such is the fourth method of answers. The fifth method, the most refined, most popular,



and most powerful one, consists in begging the question, in making it appear as though the question had long ago been decided by some one in an absolutely clear and satisfactory manner, and as though it were not worth while to speak of it. This method is employed by more or less cultivated ecclesiastic writers, that is, such as feel the laws of logic to be obligatory for them. Knowing that the contradiction which exists between Christ's teaching, which we profess in words, and the whole structure of our life cannot be solved with words, and that, by touching it, we can only make it more obvious, they with greater or lesser agility get around it, making it appear that the question about the connection of Christianity with violence has been decided or does not exist at all. The majority of the ecclesiastic critics of my book employ this method. I could adduce dozens of such criticisms, in which without exception one and the same thing is repeated: they speak of everything but the chief subject of the book. As a characteristic example of such criticisms, I shall quote an article by the famous, refined English writer and preacher, [Frederic William] Farrar, a great master, like many learned theologians, of evasions and reticence. This article was printed in the American periodical, Forum, in October, 1888. Having conscientiously given a short review of my book, Farrar says: [Tolstoy] came to the conclusion that a coarse deceit had been palmed upon the world when these words were held by civil society to be compatible with war, courts of justice, capital punishment, divorce, oaths, national prejudice, and indeed with most of the institutions of civil and social life. He now believes that the Kingdom of God would come if all men kept these five commandments, ... 1. Live in peace with all men; 2. Be pure; 3. Take no oaths; 4. Never resist evil; 5. Renounce national distinctions. Most of the Bible does not seem to him to reflect the spirit of Christ at all, though it has been brought into artificial and unwarrantable connection with it. Hence

he rejects the chief doctrines of the church: that of the Atonement by blood, that of the Trinity, that of the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles... and believes himself to be the immediate disciple of Christ alone. "Is this interpretation of Christ a true one?" he asks. "Are all men bound, or is any man bound, to act as this great writer has done?" One just hopes that in reply to this essential question, which alone could have urged the man to write an article on the book, he will say that this interpretation of Christ's teaching is correct, or that it is not correct, and so will prove why, and will give another, a correct interpretation to the words which I interpret incorrectly. But nothing of the kind is done. Farrar only expresses his conviction that, "though actuated by the noblest sincerity, Count Tolstoy has been misled by partial and one-sided interpretations of the meaning of the Gospel and the mind and will of Christ." No explanation is given as to what this error consists in, but all there is said, is: "To enter into the proof of this is impossible in this article, for I have already exceeded the space at my command." And he concludes with an easy mind: Meanwhile the reader who feels troubled lest it should be his duty also to forsake all conditions of his life, and to take up the position and work of a common laborer, may rest for the present on the principle, *Securus judicat orbis terrarum* ["the verdict of the world is conclusive"]. With few and rare exceptions, the whole of Christendom, from the days of the apostles down to our own, has come to the firm conclusion that it was the object of Christ to lay down great eternal principles, but not disturb the bases and revolutionize the institutions of all human society, which themselves rest on divine sanction as well as on inevitable conditions. Were it my object to prove how untenable is the doctrine of communism, based by Tolstoy upon the divine paradoxes (sic!), which can be interpreted on only historical principles in accordance with the whole method of the teaching of Jesus, it would require

an ampler canvas than I have here at my disposal. What a misfortune — he has not any space! And, strange to say, space has been lacking for fifteen centuries, to prove that Christ, whom we profess, said something different from what He said. They could prove it, if they only wanted to. However, it does not pay to prove what everybody knows. It is enough to say: “Securus judicat orbis terrarum.” And such are, without exception, all the criticisms of the cultivated believers, who, therefore, do not understand the perilousness of their position. The only way out for them is the hope that, by using the authority of the church, of antiquity, of holiness, they may be able to confuse the reader and draw him away from the thought of reading the Gospel for himself and of considering the question with his own mind. And in this they are successful. To whom, indeed, will it occur that all that which with such assurance and solemnity is repeated from century to century by all these archdeacons, bishops, archbishops, most holy synods, and Popes, is a base lie and calumny, which they foist on Christ in order to secure the money which they need for the purpose of leading a life of pleasure, while sitting on the backs of others — a lie and a calumny, which is so obvious, especially now that the only possibility of continuing this lie consists in frightening men into belief by their assurance, their unscrupulousness? It is precisely the same that of late years has taken place in the Recruiting Sessions: at the head of the table, with the Mirror of Laws upon it, and beneath the full-sized portrait of the emperor, sit dignified old officials in their regalia, conversing freely and unreservedly, noting down, commanding, calling out. Here also, with the cross over his breast and in silk vestments, with his gray hair falling down straight over his scapulary, stands an imposing old man, the priest, in front of the pulpit, on which lies a gold cross and a gold-trimmed Gospel. Iván Petróv is called out. A young man steps out. He is poorly and dirtily dressed and looks frightened, and

the muscles of his face tremble, and his fugitive eyes sparkle, and in a faltering voice, almost in a whisper, he says: "I — according to the law I, a Christian — I cannot —" "What is he muttering there?" impatiently asks the presiding officer, half-closing his eyes and listening, as he raises his head from the book. "Speak louder!" shouts to him the colonel with the shining shoulder-straps. "I — I — I — as a Christian —" It finally turns out that the young man refuses to do military service, because he is a Christian. "Talk no nonsense! Get your measure! Doctor, be so kind as to take his measure. Is he fit for the army?" "He is." "Reverend father, have him sworn in." No one is confused; no one even pays any attention to what this frightened, pitiable young man is muttering. "They all mutter something, but we have no time: we have to receive so many recruits." The recruit wants to say something again. "This is against Christ's law." "Go, go, we know without you what is according to the law — but you get out of here. Reverend father, admonish him. Next: Vasíli Nikítin." And the trembling youth is taken away. And to whom — whether the janitor, or Vasíli Nikítin, who is being brought in, or any one else who witnessed this scene from the side — will it occur that those indistinct, short words of the youth, which were at once put out of court by the authorities, contain the truth, while those loud, solemn speeches of the self-possessed, calm officials and of the priest are a lie, a deception? A similar impression is produced, not only by the articles of a Farrar but by all those solemn sermons, articles, and books, which appear on all sides, the moment the truth peeps out and arraigns the ruling lie. Immediately there begin long, clever, elegant conversations or writings about questions which touch closely upon the subject with a shrewd reticence concerning the question itself. In this consists the fifth and most effective means for removing the contradiction in which the ecclesiastic Christianity has placed itself by professing Christ in words and denying His

teaching in life, and teaching the same to others. Those who justify themselves by the first method, asserting outright and rudely that Christ has permitted violence — wars, murder — withdraw themselves from Christ's teaching; those who defend themselves according to the second, the third, and the fourth methods get themselves entangled, and it is easy to point out their untruth; but these last, who do not discuss, who do not condescend to discuss, but hide themselves behind their greatness and make it appear that all this has been decided long ago by them, or by somebody else, and that it no longer is subject to any doubt, seem invulnerable, and they will be invulnerable so long as people will remain under the influence of hypnotic suggestion, which is induced in them by governments and churches, and will not shake it off. Such was the attitude which the ecclesiastics, that is, those who profess Christ's faith, assumed toward me. Nor could they have acted otherwise: they are bound by the contradiction in which they live — the faith in the divinity of the teacher and the unbelief in His clearest words — from which they must in some way extricate themselves, and so it was not possible to expect from them any free opinion concerning the essence of the question, concerning that change in the lives of men which results from the application of Christ's teaching to the existing order. Such opinions I expected from the freethinking lay critics, who are in no way bound to Christ's teaching and who can look upon it without restraint. I expected that the freethinking writers would look upon Christ not only as the establisher of a religion of worship and personal salvation (as which the ecclesiastics understand him), but, to express myself in their language, as a reformer, who destroys the old, and gives the new foundations of life, the reform of which is not yet accomplished, but continues until the present. Such a view of Christ and His teaching results from my book, but, to my surprise, out of the large number of criticisms upon

my book, there was not one, either Russian or foreign, which treated the subject from the same side from which it is expounded in my book, that is, which looked upon Christ's teaching as a philosophical, moral, and social doctrine (again to speak in the language of the learned). This was not the case in a single criticism. The Russian lay critics, who understood my book in such a way that all its contents reduced themselves to nonresistance to evil, and who understood the teaching about non-resistance to evil itself (apparently for convenience of refutation) as meaning that it prohibited any struggle against evil, furiously attacked this teaching and very successfully proved for the period of several years that Christ's teaching was incorrect, since it taught us not to resist evil. Their refutations of this supposed teaching of Christ were the more successful, since they knew in advance that their views could neither be overthrown nor corrected, because the censorship, having failed to sanction the book itself, did not sanction the articles in its defence either. What is remarkable in connection with the matter is this, that with us, where not a word may be said about the Holy Scripture without a prohibition by the censorship, the clearly and directly expressed commandment of Matthew 5: 39 has for several years been openly contorted, criticized, condemned, and ridiculed in all the periodicals. The Russian lay critics, who evidently did not know all that had been done in the development of the question as to non-resistance to evil, and who at times even seemed to assume that I personally invented the rule of not resisting evil with violence, attacked the idea itself, rejecting and contorting it, and with much fervor advancing arguments which have long ago been analyzed from every side and rejected, proved that a man is obliged (with violence) to defend all the insulted and the oppressed, and that, therefore, the doctrine about not resisting evil with violence is immoral. The whole significance of Christ's preaching presented

itself to the Russian critics as though maliciously interfering with a certain activity, which was directed against what they at a given moment considered to be an evil, so that it turned out that the principle of not resisting evil with violence was attacked by two opposite camps — by the conservatives, because this principle interfered with their activity of resisting the evil which was produced by the revolutionists, and with their persecutions and executions; and by the revolutionists, because this principle interfered with the resistance to the evil which was produced by the conservatives, and with the overthrow of the conservatives. The conservatives were provoked, because the doctrine of non-resistance to evil interfered with the energetic suppression of the revolutionary elements, who are likely to ruin the welfare of the nation; while the revolutionists were provoked, because the doctrine of non-resistance to evil interfered with the overthrow of the conservatives, who were ruining the well-being of the nation. What is remarkable is, that the revolutionists attacked the principle of non-resistance, although it is most terrible and most dangerous for every despotism, because ever since the beginning of the world the opposite principle of the necessity of resisting evil with violence has been lying at the basis of all violence, from the Inquisition to the Schlüsselburg Fortress. Besides, the Russian critics pointed out that the application to life of the commandment about non-resistance to evil would turn humanity away from the path of civilization, on which it was marching now; but the path of civilization, on which the European civilization is marching, is, in their opinion, the one on which all humanity must always march. Such was the chief character of the Russian criticisms. The foreign critics proceeded from the same bases, but their reviews of my book differed from those of the Russian critics not only in a lesser degree of irritability and a greater degree of culture, but also in the essence of the

matter. In discussing my book and the Gospel teaching in general, as it is expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, the foreign critics asserted that such a teaching is really not Christian (Christian in their opinion is Catholicism and Protestantism), and that the doctrine of the Sermon on the Mount is only a series of very charming, impracticable reveries “du charmant docteur,” as Renan used to say, which were good enough for the naive and half-wild inhabitants of Galilee, who lived eighteen hundred years ago, and for the Russian peasants, [Vasily Kirillovich] Syutáev and [Timofej M.] Bondarév, and the Russian mystic, Tolstoy, but can in no way be applied to the high degree of European culture. The foreign lay critics tried, in a refined manner, without giving me any offence, to let me know that my opinion that humanity can be guided by such a naive teaching as the Sermon on the Mount is due partly to my ignorance, lack of acquaintance with history, lack of knowledge of all those vain attempts to realize in life the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, which have been made in history, and have led to nothing, thanks to ignorance concerning the whole significance of that high degree of culture on which European civilization now stands, with its Krupp guns, smokeless powder, the colonization of Africa, the government of Ireland, parliaments, journalism, strikes, constitutions, and Eiffel Tower. Thus wrote [Eugène-Melchior de] Vogüé, and [Anatole] Leroy Beaulieu, and Matthew Arnold, and the American writer [Minot Judson] Savage, and [Robert Green] Ingersoll, a popular American preacher of free thought, and many others. “Christ’s teaching is no good, because it is not adapted to an industrial and commercial age,” naïvely says Ingersoll, thus expressing with absolute precision and naïveté what the refined and cultured men of our time think about Christ’s teaching. The teaching is no good for our industrial age, as though the existence of the industrial age is something sacred which must not and



cannot be changed. It is something like what drunkards would do, if, in response to advice about how to get themselves into a sober state, they should reply that the advice is out of place in connection with their present alcoholic state. The discussions of all the lay writers, both Russian and foreign, no matter how different their tone and the manner of their arguments may be, in reality reduce themselves to one and the same strange misunderstanding, namely, that Christ's teaching, one of the consequences of which is non-resistance to evil, is useless to us, because it demands that our life be changed. Christ's teaching is useless, because, if it were put into practice, our life could not continue; in other words — if we began to live well, as Christ has taught us, we could not continue to live badly, as we live and are accustomed to live. The question of non-resistance to evil is not discussed, and the very mention of the fact that the demand for non-resistance to evil enters into Christ's teaching is considered a sufficient proof of the inapplicability of the whole teaching. And yet, it would seem, it is indispensable to point out some kind of a solution to this question, because it lies at the foundation of nearly all affairs which interest us. The question consists in this: how are we to harmonize the conflicts of men, when some consider an evil what others consider to be good, and vice versa? And so, to consider that an evil which I consider an evil, although my adversary may consider it good, is no answer. There can be but two answers: either we have to find a true and indisputable criterion of what an evil is, or we must not resist evil with violence. The first solution has been tried since the beginning of historical times, and, as we all know, has so far led to no satisfactory results. The second answer, not to resist with violence what we consider evil, so long as we have found no common criterion, was proposed by Christ. It may be found that Christ's answer is not correct: it may be possible to put in its place another, better answer, by finding a criterion

which would indubitably and simultaneously for all define the evil; we may simply not recognize the essence of the question, as it is not recognized by the savage nations — but it is impossible, as the learned critics of the Christian teaching do, to make it appear that such a question does not at all exist, or that the relegation of the right to determine the evil and resist it with violence to certain persons or assemblies of men (much less, if we are these men), solves the question; whereas we all know that such a relegation does not at all solve the question, since there are some people who do not recognize this right as belonging to certain people or to assemblies of men. But it is this recognition that what to us appears evil is evil, or an absolute failure to comprehend the question, which serves as a foundation for the judgment of the lay critics concerning the Christian teaching, so that the opinions concerning my book, both of the ecclesiastic and the lay critics, showed me that the majority of men absolutely fail to comprehend, not only Christ's very teaching, but even those questions to which it serves as an answer.

CHAPTER THREE Thus, both the information received by me after the publication of my book, as to how the Christian teaching in its direct and true sense has without interruption been understood by the minority of men, and the criticisms upon it, both the ecclesiastic and the lay criticisms, which denied the possibility of understanding Christ's teaching in the direct sense, convinced me that, while, on the one hand, the true comprehension of this teaching never ceased for the minority, and became clearer and clearer to them, on the other hand, for the majority, its meaning became more and more obscure, finally reaching such a degree of obscurity that men no longer comprehend the simplest propositions, which are expressed in the Gospel in the simplest words. The failure to comprehend Christ's teaching in its true, simple, and direct

sense in our time, when the light of this teaching has penetrated all the darkest corners of human consciousness; when, as Christ has said, that which He has spoken in the ear, they now proclaim upon the housetops; when this teaching permeates all the sides of human life — the domestic, the economic, the civil, the political, and the international — this failure to comprehend would be incomprehensible, if there were no causes for it. One of these causes is this, that both the believers and the unbelievers are firmly convinced that Christ's teaching has been comprehended by them long ago, and so completely, indubitably, and finally, that there can be no other meaning in it than the one they ascribe to it. This cause is due to the duration of the tradition of the false comprehension, and so of the failure to understand the true teaching. The most powerful stream of water cannot add a drop to a vessel that is full. It is possible to explain the most intricate matters to a man of very hard comprehension, so long as he has not formed any idea about them; but it is impossible to explain the simplest thing to a very clever man, if he is firmly convinced that he knows, and, besides, incontestably knows, what has been transmitted to him. The Christian teaching presents itself to the men of our world precisely as such a teaching, which has for a long time and in a most indubitable manner been known in its minutest details, and which cannot be comprehended in any other manner than it now is. Christianity is now understood by those who profess the church doctrines as a supernatural, miraculous revelation concerning everything which is given in the creed of faith, and by those who do not believe, as an obsolete manifestation of humanity's need of believing in something supernatural, as a historical phenomenon, which is completely expressed in Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism, and which has no longer any vital meaning for us. For the believers the meaning of the teaching is concealed by the church, for unbelievers by science. I shall

begin with the first: Eighteen hundred years ago there appeared in the pagan Roman world a strange, new teaching, which resembled nothing which preceded it, and which was ascribed to the man Christ. This new teaching was absolutely new, both in form and in contents, for the European world, in the midst of which it arose, and especially in the Roman world, where it was preached and became diffused. Amidst the elaborateness of the religious rules of Judaism, where, according to Isaiah, there was rule upon rule, and amidst the Roman legislation, which was worked out to a great degree of perfection, there appeared a teaching which not only denied all the divinities — every fear of them, every divination and faith in them — but also all human institutions and every necessity for them. In the place of all the rules of former faiths, this teaching advanced only the model of an inner perfection of truth and of love in the person of Christ, and the consequences of this inner perfection, attainable by men — the external perfection, as predicted by the prophets — the kingdom of God, in which all men will stop warring, and all will be taught by God and united in love, and the lion will lie with the lamb. In place of the threats of punishments for the non-compliance with the rules, which were made by the former laws, both religious and political, in place of the enticement of rewards for fulfilling them, this teaching called men to itself only by its being the truth. John 7: 17: “If any man wants to know of this doctrine, whether it be of God, let him fulfil it.” John 8: 46: “If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?” Why do you seek to kill a man who has told you the truth? The truth alone will free you. God must be professed in truth only. The whole teaching will be revealed and will be made clear by the spirit of truth. Do what I say, and you will know whether what I say is true. No proofs were given of the teaching, except the truth, except the correspondence of the teaching with the truth. The whole teaching consisted in the knowledge of the truth

and in following it, in a greater and ever greater approximation to it, in matters of life. According to this teaching, there are no acts which can justify a man, make him righteous; there is only the model of truth which attracts all hearts, for the inner perfection — in the person of Christ, and for the outer — in the realization of the kingdom of God. The fulfilment of the teaching is only in the motion along a given path, in the approximation to perfection — the inner — the imitation of Christ, and the outer — the establishment of the kingdom of God. A man's greater or lesser good, according to this teaching, depends, not on the degree of perfection which he attains, but on the greater or lesser acceleration of motion. The motion toward perfection of the publican, of Zacchæus, of the harlot, of the robber on the cross, is, according to this teaching, a greater good than the immovable righteousness of the Pharisee. A sheep gone astray is more precious than ninety-nine who have not. The prodigal son, the lost coin which is found again, is more precious, more loved by God than those who were not lost. Every condition is, according to this teaching, only a certain step on the road toward the unattainable inner and outer perfection, and so has no meaning. The good is only in the motion toward perfection; but the stopping at any stage whatsoever is only a cessation of the good. "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth," and "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." "Rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." "Be ye perfect as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." "Seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness." The fulfilment of the teaching is only in unceasing motion — in the attainment of a higher and ever higher truth, and in an ever greater realization of the same in oneself by means of an ever increasing love, and outside of oneself by an ever greater realization of the kingdom of God. It is

evident that, having appeared in the midst of the Jewish and the pagan world, this teaching could not have been accepted by the majority of men, who lived a life entirely different from the one which this teaching demanded; and that it could not even be comprehended in its full significance by those who accepted it, as it was diametrically opposed to their former views. Only by a series of misconceptions, blunders, one-sided explanations, corrected and supplemented by generations of men, was the meaning of the Christian teaching made more and more clear to men. The Christian world-conception affected the Jewish and the pagan conceptions, and the Jewish and pagan conceptions affected the Christian world-conception. And the Christian, as being vital, penetrated the reviving Jewish and pagan conceptions more and more, and stood forth more and more clearly, freeing itself from the false admixture, which was imposed upon it. Men came to comprehend the meaning better and better, and more and more realized it in life. The longer humanity lived, the more and more was the meaning of Christianity made clear to it, as indeed it could not and cannot be otherwise with any teaching about life. The subsequent generations corrected the mistakes of their predecessors, and more and more approached the comprehension of its true meaning. Thus it has been since the earliest times of Christianity. And here, in the earliest times, there appeared men, who began to assert that the meaning which they ascribed to the teaching was the only true one, and that as a proof of it served the supernatural phenomena which confirmed the correctness of their comprehension. It was this that was the chief cause, at first, of the failure to comprehend the teaching, and later, of its complete corruption. It was assumed that Christ's teaching was not transmitted to men like any other truth, but in a special, supernatural manner, so that the truth of the comprehension of the teaching was not proved by the correspondence of what was transmitted

with the demands of reason and of the whole human nature, but by the miraculousness of the transmission, which served as an incontrovertible proof of the correctness of the comprehension. This proposition arose from a lack of comprehension, and its consequence was an impossibility of comprehending. This began with the very first times, when the teaching was still understood incompletely and often perversely, as we may see from the gospels and from the Acts. The less the teaching was understood, the more obscurely did it present itself, and the more necessary were the external proofs of its veracity. The proposition about not doing unto another what one does not wish to have done to oneself did not need any proof by means of miracles, and there was no need for demanding belief in this proposition, because it is convincing in itself, in that it corresponds to both man's reason and nature, but the proposition as to Christ being God had to be proved by means of miracles, which are absolutely incomprehensible. The more obscure the comprehension of Christ's teaching was, the more miraculous elements were mixed in with it; and the more miraculous elements were mixed in, the more did the teaching deviate from its meaning and become obscure; and the more it deviated from its meaning and became obscure, the more strongly it was necessary to assert one's infallibility, and the less did the teaching become comprehensible. We can see from the gospels, the Acts, the epistles, how from the earliest times the failure to comprehend the teaching called forth the necessity of proving its truth by means of the miraculous and the incomprehensible. According to the Acts, this began with the meeting of the disciples at Jerusalem, who assembled to settle the question which had arisen as to baptizing or not baptizing the uncircumcised who were still eating meats offered to idols. The very putting of the question showed that those who were discussing it did not understand the

teaching of Christ, who rejected all external rites — ablutions, purifications, fasts, Sabbaths. It says directly that not the things which enter a man's mouth, but those which come out of his heart, defile him, and so the question as to the baptism of the uncircumcised could have arisen only among men who loved their teacher, dimly felt His greatness, but still very obscurely comprehended the teaching itself. And so it was. In proportion as the members of the assembly did not understand the teaching, they needed an external confirmation of their incomplete understanding. And so, to solve the question, the very putting of which shows the failure to comprehend the teaching, the strange words, "It has seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us," which were in an external manner to confirm the justice of certain establishments, and which have caused so much evil, were, as described in the Book of Acts, for the first time pronounced at this meeting, that is, it was asserted that the justice of what they decreed was testified to by the miraculous participation of the Holy Ghost, that is, of God, in this solution. But the assertion that the Holy Ghost, that is, God, spoke through the apostles, had again to be proved. And for this it was necessary to assert that on the day of Pentecost the Holy Ghost came down in the shape of tongues of fire on those who asserted this. (In the description the descent of the Holy Ghost precedes the assembly, but the Acts were written down much later than either.) But the descent of the Holy Ghost had to be confirmed for those who had not seen the tongues of fire (though it is incomprehensible why a tongue of fire burning above a man's head should prove that what a man says is an indisputable truth), and there were needed new miracles, cures, resurrections, putting to death, and all those offensive miracles, with which the Acts are filled, and which not only can never convince a man of the truth of the Christian teaching, but can only repel him from it. The consequence of such a method of confirmation



was this, that the more these confirmations of the truth by means of stories of miracles heaped up upon one another, the more did the teaching itself depart from its original meaning, and the less comprehensible did it become. Thus it has been since the earliest times, and it has been increasingly so all the time, until it logically reached in our time the dogmas of the transubstantiation and of the infallibility of the Pope, or of the bishops, or of the writings, that is, something absolutely incomprehensible, which has reached the point of absurdity and the demand for a blind faith, not in God, not in Christ, not even in the teaching, but in a person, as is the case in Catholicism, or in several persons, as in Orthodoxy, or in a book, as in Protestantism. The more Christianity became diffused, and the greater was the crowd of unprepared men which it embraced, the less it was understood, the more definitely was the infallibility of the comprehension asserted, and the less did it become possible to understand the true meaning of the teaching. As early as the time of Constantine the whole comprehension of the teaching was reduced to a résumé confirmed by the worldly power — a résumé of disputes which took place in a council — to a creed of faith, in which it says, I believe in so and so, and so and so, and finally, in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, that is, in the infallibility of those persons who call themselves the church, so that everything was reduced to this, that a man no longer believes in God, nor in Christ, as they have been revealed to him, but in what the church commands him to believe. But the church is holy — the church was founded by Christ. God could not have left it to men to give an arbitrary interpretation to His teaching — and so He established the church. All these expositions are to such an extent unjust and bold that one feels some compunction in overthrowing them.

