

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU

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

by Leo Tolstoy

[Podcast 12 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 THREE (Continues)]

There is nothing but the assertion of the churches to show that God or Christ founded anything resembling what the churchmen understand by church. In the Gospel there is an indication against the church, as an external authority, and this indication is most obvious and clear in that place where it says that Christ's disciples should not call any one teachers and fathers. But nowhere is there anything said

about the establishment of what the churchmen call a church. In the gospels the word “church” is used twice — once, in the sense of an assembly of men deciding a dispute; the other time, in connection with the obscure words about the rock, Peter, and the gates of hell. From, these two mentions of the word “church,” which has the meaning of nothing but an assembly, they deduce what we now understand by the word “church.” But Christ could certainly not have founded a church, that is, what we now understand by the word, because neither in Christ’s words, nor in the conceptions of the men of that time, was there anything resembling the concept of a church, as we know it now, with its sacraments, its hierarchy, and, above all, its assertion of infallibility. The fact that men named what was formed later by the same word which Christ had used in respect to something else, does in no way give them the right to assert that Christ established the one, true church. Besides, if Christ had really founded such an institution as the church, on which the whole doctrine and the whole faith are based, He would most likely have expressed this establishment in such definite and clear words, and would have given the one, true church, outside of the stories about the miracles, which are used in connection with every superstition, such signs as to leave no doubts concerning its authenticity; there is nothing of the kind, but there are now, as there have been, all kinds of institutions which, each of them, call themselves the one, true church. The Catholic catechism says: “L’église est la société de fidèles établie par notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ, répandue sur toute la terre et soumise à l’autorité des pasteurs légitimes, principalement notre Saint Père — le Pape”, meaning by “pasteurs légitimes” a human institution, which has the Pope at its head and which is composed of certain persons who are connected among themselves by a certain organization. The Orthodox catechism says: “The church is a society, established by Jesus Christ upon earth, united

among themselves into one whole by the one, divine teaching and the sacraments, under the guidance and management of the God-established hierarchy,” meaning by “God-established hierarchy” the Greek hierarchy, which is composed of such and such persons, who are to be found in such and such places. The Lutheran catechism says: “The church is holy Christianity, or an assembly of all believers, under Christ, their chief, in which the Holy Ghost through the Gospel and the sacraments offers, communicates, and secures divine salvation,” meaning, by this, that the Catholic Church has gone astray and has fallen away, and that the true tradition is preserved in Lutheranism. For the Catholics the divine church coincides with the Roman hierarchy and the Pope. For the Greek Orthodox the divine church coincides with the establishment of the Eastern and the Russian Church.

AUTHOR’S FOOTNOTE: Khomyakóv’s definition of the church, which has some currency among Russians, does not mend matters, if we recognize with Khomyakóv that the Orthodox is the one true church. Khomyakóv asserts that the church is an assembly of men (of all, both the clergy and the congregation) united in love, and that the truth is revealed only to those who are united in love (Let us love one another, so that in agreement of thought, and so forth), and that such a church is the one which, in the first place, recognizes the Nicene Creed, and, in the second, after the division of the churches, does not recognize the Pope and the new dogmas. But with such a definition of the church there appears a still greater difficulty in harmonizing, as Khomyakóv wants to, the church which is united in love with the church which recognizes the Nicene Creed and the doctrine of Photius. Thus Khomyakóv’s assertion that this church, which is united in love and so is holy, is the church as professed by the Greek hierarchy, is still more arbitrary than the assertions of the Catholics and of the ancient Orthodox. If we admit the concept of the church in the

sense which Khomyakov gives to it, that is, as an assembly of men united in love and in truth, then everything a man can say in relation to this assembly is, that it is very desirable to be a member of such an assembly, if such exists, that is, to be in love and truth; but there are no external signs by which it would be possible to count oneself or another in with this holy assembly, or to exclude oneself from it, as no external institution can correspond to this concept. [End of Footnote.] For the Lutherans the divine church coincides with the assembly of men who recognize the Bible and Luther's catechism. Speaking of the origin of Christianity, men who belong to one or the other of the existing churches generally use the word "church" in the singular, as though there has been but one church. But this is quite untrue. The church, as an institution which asserts of itself that it is in possession of the unquestionable truth, appeared only when it was not alone, but there were at least two of them. So long as the believers agreed among themselves, and the assembly was one, it had no need of asserting that it was the church. Only when the believers divided into opposite parties, which denied one another, did there appear the necessity for each side to assert its authenticity, ascribing infallibility to itself. The concept of the one church arose only from this, that, when two sides disagreed and quarrelled, each of them, calling the other a heresy, recognized only its own as the infallible church. If we know that there was a church, which in the year 51 decided to receive the uncircumcised, this church made its appearance only because there was an other church, that of the Judaizing, which had decided not to receive the uncircumcised. If there now is a Catholic Church, which asserts its infallibility, it does this only because there are the Græeco-Russian, Orthodox, Lutheran Churches, each of which asserts its own infallibility, and thus rejects all the other churches. Thus the one church is only a fantastic conception, which has not the slightest sign

of reality. As an actual, historical phenomenon there have existed only many assemblies of men, each of which has asserted that it is the one church, established by Christ, and that all the others, which call themselves churches, are heresies and schisms. The catechisms of the most widely diffused churches, the Catholic, the Orthodox, and the Lutheran, say so outright. In the Catholic catechism it says: "Quels sont ceux, qui sont hors de l'église? Les infidèles, les hérétiques, les schismatiques." As schismatics are regarded the so-called Orthodox. The Lutherans are considered to be heretics; thus, according to the Catholic catechism, the Catholics alone are in the church. In the so-called Orthodox catechism it says: "By the one church of Christ is meant nothing but the Orthodox, which remains in complete agreement with the œcumenical church. But as to the Roman Church and the other confessions" (the church does not even mention the Lutherans and others), "they cannot be referred to the one, true church, since they have themselves separated from it." According to this definition the Catholics and Lutherans are outside the church, and in the church are only the Orthodox. But the Lutheran catechism runs as follows: "Die wahre Kirche wird daran erkannt, dass in ihr das Wort Gottes lauter und rein ohne Menschenzusätze gelehrt und die Sacramente treu nach Christi Einsetzung gewahrt werden." According to this definition, all those who have added anything to the teaching of Christ and the apostles, as the Catholic and Greek Churches have done, are outside the church. And in the church are only the Protestants. The Catholics assert that the Holy Ghost has uninterruptedly operated in their hierarchy; the Orthodox assert that the same Holy Ghost has operated in their hierarchy; the Arians asserted that the Holy Ghost operated in their hierarchy (this they asserted with as much right as the now ruling churches assert it); the Protestants of every description, Lutherans, Reformers, Presbyterians, Methodists, Swedenborgians,

Mormons, assert that the Holy Ghost operates only in their assemblies. If the Catholics assert that the Holy Ghost during the division of the Arian and of the Greek Churches left the apostatizing churches and remained only in the one, true church, the Protestants of every denomination can with the same right assert that during the separation of their church from the Catholic the Holy Ghost left the Catholic Church and passed over to the one which they recognize. And so they do. Every church deduces its profession through an uninterrupted tradition from Christ and the apostles. And, indeed, every Christian confession, arising from Christ, must have inevitably reached the present generation through a certain tradition. But this does not prove that any one of these traditions, excluding all the others, is indubitably the correct one. Every twig on the tree goes uninterruptedly back to the root; but the fact that every twig comes from the same root does in no way prove that there is but one twig. The same is true of the churches. Every church offers precisely the same proofs of its succession and even of the miracles in favor of its own authenticity; thus there is but one strict and precise definition of what the church is (not as something fantastic, which we should like it to be, but as something which in reality exists), and this is: the church is an assembly of men, who assert that they, and they only, are in the full possession of the truth. It was these assemblies, which later on, with the aid of the support of the temporal power, passed into mighty institutions, that were the chief impediments in the dissemination of the true comprehension of Christ's teaching. Nor could it be otherwise: the chief peculiarity of Christ's teaching, as distinguished from all the former teachings, consisted in this, that the men who accepted it tried more and more to understand and fulfil the teaching, whereas the church doctrine asserted the full and final comprehension and fulfilment of this teaching. However strange it may seem to

us people educated in the false doctrine about the church as a Christian institution, and in the contempt for heresy, it was only in what is called heresy that there was true motion, that is, true Christianity, and it ceased to be such when it stopped its motion in these heresies and became itself arrested in the immovable forms of the church. Indeed, what is a heresy? Read all the theological works which treat about heresies, a subject which is the first to present itself for definition, since every theology speaks of the true teaching amidst the surrounding false teachings, that is, heresies, and you will nowhere find anything resembling a definition of heresy. As a specimen of that complete absence of any semblance of a definition of what is understood by the word "heresy" may serve the opinion on this subject expressed by the learned historian of Christianity, E[dmund]. de Pressensé, in his *Histoire du Dogme*, with the epigraph, "Ubi Christus, ibi Ecclesia" [Where Christ is, there is the church] (Paris, 1869). This is what he says in his introduction: "Je sais que l'on nous conteste le droit de qualifier ainsi, les tendances qui furent si vivement combattues par les premiers Pères. La désignation même d'hérésie semble une atteinte portée à la liberté de conscience et de pensée. Nous ne pouvons partager ces scrupules, car ils n'iraient à rien moins qu'à enlever au christianisme tout caractère distinctif." And after saying that after Constantine the church actually misused its power in defining the dissenters as heretics and persecuting them, he passes judgment on the early times and says: The Church is a free association; there is much to be gained by separation from it. Conflict with error has no weapons other than thought and feeling. One uniform type of doctrine has not yet been elaborated; secondary divergencies arise in East and West with complete freedom; theology is not tied to invariable formulas. If in the midst of this diversity appears a mass of beliefs common to all, is one not right to see in it, not a formulated system, framed

by the representatives of scholastic authority, but faith itself in its surest instinct and its most spontaneous manifestation? If the same unanimity which is revealed in essential points of belief is found also in rejecting certain tendencies, are we not right to conclude that these tendencies were in flagrant opposition to the fundamental principles of Christianity? And will not this presumption be transformed into certainty if we recognize in the doctrine universally rejected by the church the characteristic traits of one of the religions of the past? To say that gnosticism or ebionitism are legitimate forms of Christian thought, one must boldly deny the existence of christian thought at all, or any specific character by which it could be recognized. It pretends to be a big tent, but it collapses. No one in the time of Plato would have dared to give his name to a doctrine in which the theory of forms had no place, and one would deservedly have excited the just mockery of Greece in trying to represent Epicurus or Zeno as a disciple of the Academy. Let us recognize, then, that if a religion and a doctrine exists which is called christianity, it may have its heresies. The whole discussion of the author reduces itself to this, that every opinion which is not in agreement with a code of dogmas professed by us at a given time is a heresy; but at a given time and in a given place people profess something, and this profession of something in some place cannot be a criterion of the truth. Everything reduces itself to this, that "Ubi Christum, ibi Ecclesia;" but Christ is where we are. Every so-called heresy, by recognizing as the truth what it professes, can in a similar manner find in the history of the churches a consistent explanation of what it professes, using for itself all the arguments of De Pressensé and calling only its own confession truly Christian, precisely what all the heresies have been doing. The only definition of heresy (the word ἄρρεσις means part) is the name given by an assembly of men to every judgment which rejects part of the teaching, as professed by the



assembly. A more particular meaning, which more frequently than any other is ascribed to heresy, is that of an opinion which rejects the church doctrine, as established and supported by the worldly power. There is a remarkable, little known, very large work (Unparteiische Kirchen- und Ketzer-historie, 1729) [Impartial History of Church and Heresy], by Gottfried Arnold, which treats directly on this subject and which shows all the illegality, arbitrariness, senselessness, and cruelty of using the word "heresy" in the sense of rejection. This book is an attempt at describing the history of Christianity in the form of a history of the heresies. In the introduction the author puts a number of questions: 1. regarding those who make heretics (von den Ketzermachern selbst); 2. concerning those who were made heretics; 3. concerning the subjects of heresy; 4. concerning the method of making heretics; and 5. concerning the aims and consequences of making heretics. In connection with each of these points he puts dozens of questions, answers to which he later gives from the works of well-known theologians, but he chiefly leaves it to the reader himself to make the deduction from the exposition of the whole book. I shall quote the following as samples of these questions, which partly contain the answers. In reference to the fourth point, as to how heretics are made, he says in one of his questions (the seventh): "Does not all history show that the greatest makers of heretics and the masters of this work were those same wise men from whom the Father has hidden His secrets, that is, the hypocrites, Pharisees, and lawyers, or entirely godless and corrupt people?" Questions 20 and 21: "And did not, in the most corrupt times of Christianity, the hypocrites and envious people reject those very men who were particularly endowed by God with great gifts, and who in the time of pure Christianity would have been highly esteemed? And, on the contrary, would not these men, who during the decadence of Christianity elevated themselves

above everything and recognized themselves to be the teachers of the purest Christianity, have been recognized, in apostolic times, as the basest heretics and antichristians?" Expressing in these questions this thought, among others, that the verbal expression of the essence of faith, which was demanded by the church, and a departure from which was considered a heresy, could never completely cover the world-conception of the believer, and that, therefore, the demand for an expression of faith by means of particular words was the cause of heresy, he says, in Questions 21 and 33: "And if the divine acts and thoughts present themselves to a man as so great and profound that he does not find corresponding words in which to express them, must he be recognized as a heretic, if he is not able precisely to express his ideas? And is not this true, that in the early times there was no heresy, because the Christians did not judge one another according to verbal expressions, but according to the heart and acts, in connection with a complete liberty of expression, without fear of being recognized as a heretic? Was it not a very common and easy method with the church," he says in Question 21, "when the clergy wanted to get rid of a person or ruin him, to make him suspected as regards his doctrine and to throw over him the cloak of heresy, and thus to condemn and remove him? "Though it is true that amidst the so-called heretics there were errors and sins, yet it is not less true and obvious from the numberless examples here adduced" (that is, in the history of the church and of heresy), he says farther on, "that there has not been a single sincere and conscientious man with some standing who has not been ruined by the churchmen out of envy or for other causes." Thus, nearly two hundred years ago, was the significance of heresy understood, and yet this conception continues to exist until the present time. Nor can it fail to exist, so long as there is a concept of the church. Heresy is the flip-side of the church. Where there is

the church, there is also heresy. The church is an assembly of men asserting that they are in possession of the indisputable truth. Heresy is the opinion of people who do not recognize the indisputableness of the church truth. Heresy is a manifestation of motion in the church, an attempt at destroying the ossified assertion of the church, an attempt at a living comprehension of the teaching. Every step of moving forward, of comprehending and fulfilling the teaching has been accomplished by the heretics: such heretics were Tertullian, and Origen, and Augustine, and Luther, and Huss, and Savonarola, and Chelcický and others. Nor could it be otherwise. A disciple of Christ, whose teaching consists in an eternally greater and greater comprehension of the teaching and in a greater and greater fulfilment of it, in a motion toward perfection, cannot, for the very reason that he is a disciple of Christ, assert concerning himself or concerning any one else, that he fully understands Christ's teaching and fulfils it; still less can he assert this concerning any assembly. No matter at what stage of comprehension and perfection a disciple of Christ may be, he always feels the insufficiency of his comprehension and of his fulfilment, and always strives after a greater comprehension and fulfilment. And so the assertion about myself or about an assembly, that I, or we, possess the complete comprehension of Christ's teaching, and completely fulfil it, is a renunciation of the spirit of Christ's teaching. No matter how strange this may seem, the churches, as churches, have always been, and cannot help but be, institutions that are not only foreign, but even directly hostile, to Christ's teaching. With good reason Voltaire called the church "l'infâme" [the infamous]; with good reason all, or nearly all, the Christian so-called sects have recognized the church to be that whore of whom Revelation prophesies; with good reason the history of the church is the history of the greatest cruelties and horrors. The churches, as churches, are not certain institutions

which have at their base the Christian principle, though slightly deviated from the straight path, as some think; the churches, as churches, as assemblies, which assert their infallibility, are antichristian institutions. Between the churches, as churches, and Christianity there is not only nothing in common but the name, but they are two absolutely divergent and mutually hostile principles. One is pride, violence, self-assertion, immobility, and death; the other is meekness, repentance, humility, motion, and life. It is impossible at the same time to serve both masters — one or the other has to be chosen. The servants of the churches of all denominations have tried, especially of late, to appear as advocates of motion in Christianity; they make concessions, wish to mend the abuses which have stolen into the church, and say that for the sake of the abuses we ought not to deny the principle of the Christian church itself, which alone can unite all men and be a mediator between men and God. But all this is not true. The churches have not only never united, but have always been one of the chief causes of the disunion of men, of the hatred of one another, of wars, slaughters, inquisitions, nights of St. Bartholomew, and so forth, and the churches never serve as mediators between men and God, which is, indeed, unnecessary and is directly forbidden by Christ, who has revealed the teaching directly to every man, and they put up dead forms in the place of God, and not only fail to reveal God to man, but even conceal Him from them. Churches which have arisen from the failure to comprehend, and which maintain this lack of comprehension by their immobility, cannot help persecuting and oppressing every comprehension of the teaching. They try to conceal this, but this is impossible, because every motion forward along the path indicated by Christ destroys their existence. As one hears and reads the articles and sermons, in which the church writers of modern times of all denominations speak of Christian

truths and virtues, as one hears and reads these clever discussions, admonitions, confessions, which have been worked out by the ages, and which sometimes look very much as though they were sincere, one is prepared to doubt that the churches could be hostile to Christianity: "It certainly cannot be that these people, who have produced such men as Chrysostom, Fénelon, Butler, and other preachers of Christianity, should be hostile to it." One feels like saying: "The churches may have deviated from Christianity, may be in error, but cannot be hostile to it." But as one looks at the fruits, in order to judge the tree, as Christ has taught us to do, and sees that their fruits have been evil, that the consequence of their activity has been the distortion of Christianity, one cannot help but feel that, no matter how good the men have been, the cause of the churches in which they have taken part has not been Christian. The goodness and the deserts of all these men, who served the churches, were the goodness and the deserts of men, but not of the cause which they served. All these good men — like Francis d'Assisi and Francis de Sales, our Tikhon Zadónski, Thomas à Kempis, and others — were good men, in spite of their having served a cause which is hostile to Christianity, and they would have been better and more deserving still, if they had not succumbed to the error which they served. But why speak of the past, judge of the past, which may have been falsely represented to us? The churches with their foundations and with their activity are not a work of the past: the churches are now before us, and we can judge of them directly, by their activity, their influence upon men. In what does the activity of the churches now consist? How do they act upon men? What do the churches do in our country, among the Catholics, among the Protestants of every denomination? In what does their activity consist, and what are the consequences of their activity? The activity of our Russian, so-called Orthodox, Church is in full sight. It is a vast fact,

which cannot be concealed, and about which there can be no dispute. In what consists the activity of this Russian Church, this enormous, tensely active institution, which consists of an army of half a million, costing the nation tens of millions? The activity of this church consists in using every possible means for the purpose of instilling in the one hundred millions of the Russian population those obsolete, backward faiths, which now have no justification whatsoever, and which sometime in the past were professed by people that are alien to our nation, and in which hardly any one now believes, frequently even not those whose duty it is to disseminate these false doctrines. The inculcation of these alien, obsolete formulas of the Byzantine clergy, which no longer have any meaning for the men of our time, about the Trinity, the Holy Virgin, the sacraments, grace, and so forth, forms one part of the activity of the Russian Church; another part of its activity consists in the activity of maintaining idolatry in the direct sense of the word — worshipping holy relics and icons, bringing sacrifices to them, and expecting from them the fulfilment of their wishes. I shall not speak of what is spoken and written by the clergy with a shade of learning and liberalism in the clerical periodicals, but of what actually is done by the clergy over the breadth of the Russian land among a population of one hundred million people. What do they carefully, persistently, tensely, everywhere without exception, teach the people? What is demanded of them on the strength of the so-called Christian faith? I will begin with the beginning, with the birth of a child: at the birth of a child, the clergy teaches that a prayer has to be read over the mother and the child, in order to purify them, since without this prayer the mother who has given birth to a child is accursed. For this purpose the priest takes the child in his hands in front of the representations of the saints, which the masses simply call gods, and pronounces exorcising words, and thus

purifies the mother. Then it is impressed on the parents, and even demanded of them under threat of punishment in case of non-fulfilment, that the child shall be baptized, that is, dipped three times in water by the priest, in connection with which incomprehensible words are pronounced and even less comprehensible acts performed — the smearing of various parts of the body with oil, the shearing of the hair, and the blowing and spitting of the sponsors on the imaginary devil. All this is supposed to cleanse the child and make him a Christian. Then the parents are impressed with the necessity of giving the holy sacrament to the child, that is, of giving him under the form of bread and wine a particle of Christ's body to eat, in consequence of which the child will receive the grace of Christ, and so forth. Then it is demanded that this child, according to his age, shall learn to pray. To pray means to stand straight in front of the boards on which the faces of Christ, the Virgin, the saints, are represented, and incline his head and his whole body, and with his right hand, with fingers put together in a certain form, to touch his brow, shoulders, and stomach, and pronounce Church-Slavic words, of which all the children are particularly enjoined to repeat, "Mother of God, Virgin, rejoice!" etcetera. Then the pupil is impressed with the necessity of doing the same, that is, crossing himself, in presence of any church or icon; then he is told that on holidays (holidays are days on which Christ was born, though no one knows when that was, and circumcised, on which the Mother of God died, the cross was brought, the icon was carried in, a saintly fool saw a vision, etcetera,) he must put on his best clothes and go to church, buy tapers there and place them in front of icons of saints, hand in little notes and commemorations and loaves, that triangles may be cut in them, and then pray many times for the health and welfare of the Tsar and the bishops, and for himself and his acts, and then kiss the cross and the priest's hand. Besides this prayer he is

enjoined to prepare himself at least once a year for the holy sacrament. To prepare himself for the holy sacrament means to go to church and tell the priest his sins, on the supposition that his imparting his sins to a stranger will completely cleanse him of his sins, and then to eat from a spoon a bit of bread with wine, which purifies him even more. Then it is impressed upon a man and a woman, who want their carnal intercourse to be sacred, that they must come to church, put on metallic crowns, drink potions, to the sound of singing walk three times around a table, and that then their carnal intercourse will become sacred and quite distinct from any other carnal intercourse. In life people are impressed with the necessity of observing the following rules: not to eat meat or milk food on certain days, on other certain days to celebrate masses for the dead, on holidays to receive the priest and give him money, and several times a year to take the boards with the representations out of the church and carry them on sashes over fields and through houses. Before death a man is enjoined to eat from a spoon bread with wine, and still better, if he has time, to have himself smeared with oil. This secures for him happiness in the next world. After a man's death, his relatives are enjoined, for the purpose of saving the soul of the defunct, to put into his hands a printed sheet with a prayer; it is also useful to have a certain book read over the dead body and the name of the dead man pronounced several times in church. All this is considered an obligatory faith for everybody. But if one wants to care for his soul, he is taught, according to this faith, that the greatest amount of blessedness is secured for the soul in the world to come by contributing money for churches and monasteries, by putting holy men thus under obligation to pray for him. Other soul-saving measures, according to this faith, are the visiting of monasteries and the kissing of miracleworking icons and relics. According to this faith, miracle-working icons and relics concentrate in



themselves particular holiness, strength, and grace, and nearness to these objects — touching, kissing them, placing tapers before them, crawling up to them — contributes very much to a man's salvation, and so do masses, which are ordered before these sacred objects. It is this faith, and no other, which is called Orthodox, that is, the right faith, and which has, under the guise of Christianity, been impressed upon the people for many centuries by the exercise of all kinds of force, and is now being impressed with particular effort. And let it not be said that the Orthodox teachers place the essence of the teaching in something else, and that these are only ancient forms which it is not considered right to destroy. That is not true: throughout all of Russia, nothing but this faith has of late been impressed upon the people with particular effort. There is nothing else. Of something else they talk and write in the capitals, but only this is being impressed on one hundred million of people, and nothing else. The churchmen talk of other things, but they enjoin only this with every means at their command. All this, and the worship of persons and icons, is introduced into theologies, into catechisms; the masses are carefully taught this theoretically, and, being hypnotized practically, with every means of solemnity, splendor, authority, and violence, are made to believe in this, and are jealously guarded against every endeavor to be freed from these savage superstitions. In my very presence, as I said in reference to my book, Christ's teaching and his own words concerning nonresistance to evil were a subject of ridicule and circus jokes, and the churchmen not only did not oppose this, but even encouraged the blasphemy; but allow yourself to say a disrespectful word concerning the monstrous idol, which is blasphemously carried about in Moscow by drunken persons under the name of the Iberian Virgin, and a groan of indignation will be raised by these same churchmen. All that is preached is the external cult of idolatry. Let no one say that one thing does not interfere

with the other, that “these ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone,” that “all, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” (Matthew 23: 23, 3). This is said of the Pharisees, who fulfilled all the external injunctions of the law, and so the words, “whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe,” refer to works of charity and of goodness, and the words, “but do ye not after their works, for they say, and do not,” refer to the execution of ceremonies and to the omission of good works, and have precisely the opposite meaning to what the churchmen want to ascribe to this passage, when they interpret it as meaning that ceremonies are to be observed. An external cult and serving charity and truth are hard to harmonize; for the most part one thing excludes the other. Thus it was with the Pharisees, and thus it is now with the church Christians. If a man can save himself through redemption, sacraments, prayer, he no longer needs any good deeds. The Sermon on the Mount, or the creed of faith: it is impossible to believe in both. And the churchmen have chosen the latter: the creed of faith is taught and read as a prayer in the churches; and the Sermon on the Mount is excluded even from the Gospel teachings in the churches, so that in the churches the parishioners never hear it, except on the days when the whole Gospel is read. Nor can it be otherwise: men who believe in a bad and senseless God, who has cursed the human race and who has doomed His son to be a victim, and has doomed a part of humanity to everlasting torment, cannot believe in a God of love. A man who believes in God-Christ, who will come again in glory to judge and punish the living and the dead, cannot believe in Christ, who commands a man to offer his cheek to the offender, not to judge, but to forgive, and to love our enemies. A man who believes in the divine inspiration of the Old Testament and the holiness of David, who on his deathbed orders the

killing of an old man who has offended him and whom he could not kill himself, because he was bound by an oath, and similar abominations, of which the Old Testament is full, cannot believe in Christ's moral law; a man who believes in the doctrine and the preaching of the church about the compatibility of executions and wars with Christianity, cannot believe in the brotherhood of men. Above all else, a man who believes in the salvation of men through faith, in redemption, or in the sacraments, can no longer employ all his strength in the fulfilment in life of the moral teaching of Christ. A man who is taught by the church the blasphemous doctrine about his not being able to be saved by his own efforts, but that there is another means, will inevitably have recourse to this means, and not to his efforts, on which he is assured it is a sin to depend. The church doctrine, any church doctrine, with its redemption and its sacraments, excludes Christ's teaching, and the Orthodox doctrine, with its idolatry, does so especially. "But the masses have always believed so themselves, and believe so now," people will say to this. "The whole history of the Russian masses proves this. It is not right to deprive the masses of their tradition." In this does the deception consist. The masses at one time, indeed, professed something like what the church professes now, though it was far from being the same (among the masses, there has existed, not only this superstition of the icons, house spirits, relics, and the seventh Thursday after Easter, with its wreaths and birches, but also a deep moral, vital comprehension of Christianity, which has never existed in the whole church, and was met with only in its best representatives); but the masses, in spite of all the obstacles, which the government and the church have opposed to them, have long ago in their best representatives outlived this coarse stage of comprehension, which is proved by the spontaneous birth of rationalistic sects, with which one meets everywhere,

with which Russia swarms at the present time, and with which the churchmen struggle in vain. The masses move on in the consciousness of the moral, vital side of Christianity. And it is here that the church appears with its failure to support, and with its intensified inculcation of an obsolete paganism in its ossified form, with its tendency to push the masses back into that darkness, from which they are struggling with so much effort to get out. "We do not teach the masses anything new, but only what they believe in, and that in a more perfect form," say the churchmen. This is the same as tying up a growing chick and pushing it back into the shell from which it has come. I have often been struck by this observation, which would be comical, if its consequences were not so terrible, that men, taking hold of each other in a circle, deceive one another, without being able to get out of the enchanted circle. The first question, the first doubt of a Russian who is beginning to think, is the question about the miracle-working icons and, above all, the relics: "Is it true that they are imperishable, and that they work miracles?" Hundreds and thousands of men put these questions to themselves and are troubled about their solution, especially because the bishops, metropolitans, and all the dignitaries kiss the relics and the miracle-working icons. Ask the bishops and the dignitaries why they do so, and they will tell you that they do so for the sake of the masses, and the masses worship the icons and relics, because the bishops and dignitaries do so. The activity of the Russian Church, in spite of its external veneer of modernness, learning, spirituality, which its members are beginning to assume in their writings, articles, clerical periodicals, and sermons, consists not only in keeping the masses in that consciousness of rude and savage idolatry, in which they are, but also in intensifying and disseminating superstition and religious ignorance, by pushing out of the masses the vital comprehension of Christianity, which has been living in them by the side of

the idolatry. I remember, I was once present in the monastery bookstore of Óptin Cloister, when an old peasant was choosing some religious books for his grandson, who could read. The monk kept pushing the description of relics, holidays, miraculous icons, psalters, etcetera, into his hands. I asked the old man if he had the Gospel. "No." "Give him the Russian Gospel," I said to the monk. "That is not proper for him," said the monk. This is in compressed form the activity of our church. "But this is only true in barbarous Russia," a European or American reader will say. And such an opinion will be correct, but only in the measure in which it refers to the government which aids the church in accomplishing its stultifying and corrupting influence in Russia. It is true that nowhere in Europe is there such a despotic government and one to such a degree in accord with the ruling church, and so the participation of the power in the corruption of the masses in Russia is very strong; but it is not true that the Russian Church in its influence upon the masses in any way differs from any other church. The churches are everything the same, and if the Catholic, the Anglican, and the Lutheran Churches have not in hand such an obedient government as is the Russian, this is not due to the absence of any desire to make use of the same. The church, as a church, no matter what it may be, Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian — every church, insomuch as it is a church, cannot help but tend toward the same as the Russian Church — toward concealing the true meaning of Christ's teaching and substituting in its place its own doctrine, which does not put a person under any obligations, excludes the possibility of understanding the true activity of Christ's teaching, and, above all else, justifies the existence of priests who are living at the expense of the nation. Has Catholicism been doing anything else with its prohibition of the reading of the Gospel, and with its demand for unreasoning obedience to the ecclesiastic guides and the infallible Pope? Does

Catholicism preach anything different from what the Russian Church preaches? We have here the same external cult, the same relics, miracles, and statues, the miracle-working Notre-Dames, and processions. The same elatedly misty judgments concerning Christianity in books and sermons, and, when it comes to facts, the same maintenance of a coarse idolatry. And is not the same being done in Anglicanism, Lutheranism, and in every Protestantism which has formed itself into a church? The same demands from the congregation for a belief in dogmas which were expressed in the fourth century and have lost all meaning for the men of our time, and the same demand for idolatry, if not before relics and icons, at least before the Sabbath and the letter of the Bible. It is still the same activity, which is directed upon concealing the real demands of Christianity and substituting for them externals, which do not put a man under any obligations, and "cant," as the English beautifully define the occupation to which they are particularly subject. Among the Protestants this activity is particularly noticeable, since they do not even have the excuse of antiquity. And does not the same take place in the modern Revivalism — the renovated Calvinism, Evangelism — out of which has grown up the Salvation Army? Just as the condition of all the church doctrines is the same in reference to Christ's teaching, so are also their methods. Their condition is such that they cannot help but strain all their efforts, in order to conceal the teaching of Christ, whose name they use. The incompatibility of all the church confessions with Christ's teaching is such that it takes special efforts to conceal this incompatibility from men. Indeed, we need but stop and think of the condition of any adult, not only cultured, but even simple, man of our time, who has filled himself with conceptions, which are in the air, from the fields of geology, physics, chemistry, cosmography, history, when he for the first time looks consciously at the beliefs, instilled in

him in childhood and supported by the churches, that God created the world in six days; that there was light before the sun; that Noah stuck all the animals into his ark, and so forth; that Jesus is the same God, the son, who created everything before this; that this God descended upon earth for Adam's sin; that He rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and sits on the right of the Father, and will come in the clouds to judge the world, and so forth. All these propositions, which were worked out by the men of the fourth century and had a certain meaning for the men of that time, have no meaning for the men of the present. The men of our time may repeat these words with their lips, but they cannot believe, because these words, like the statements that God lives in heaven, that the heavens opened and a voice said something from there, that Christ rose from the dead and flew somewhere to heaven and will again come from somewhere in the clouds, and so forth, have no meaning for us. It was possible for a man, who regarded the heaven as a finite, firm vault, to believe, or not, that God created the heaven, that heaven was opened, that Christ flew to heaven; but for us these words have no meaning whatsoever. Men of our time can only believe that they must believe so; but they cannot believe in what has no meaning for them. But if all these expressions are to have a figurative meaning and are emblems, we know that, in the first place, not all churchmen agree in this, but that, on the contrary, the majority insist on understanding Holy Scripture in a direct sense, and, secondly, that these interpretations are varied and not confirmed by anything. But even if a man wishes to make himself believe in the doctrine of the churches, as it is imparted — the general diffusion of knowledge and of the Gospels, and the intercourse of men of various denominations among themselves, form for this another, even more insuperable obstacle. A man of our time need but buy himself a Gospel for three kopeks and read Christ's clear words to the

woman of Samaria, which are not subject to any other interpretation, about the Father needing no worshippers in Jerusalem, neither in this mountain, nor in that, worshippers in spirit and in truth, or the words about a Christian's being obliged to pray, not in temples, as the pagans do, and in the sight of all, but in secret, that is, in his closet, or that a disciple of Christ must not call any one father or teacher — a man needs but read these words, to become convinced that no ecclesiastic pastors, who call themselves teachers in opposition to Christ's teaching, and who quarrel among themselves, form an authority, and that that which the churchmen teach us is not Christianity. But more than that: if a man of our time continues to believe in miracles and does not read the Gospel, his mere intercourse with men of other denominations and faiths, which has become so easy in our time, will make him doubt in the authenticity of his faith. It was all very well for a man who never saw any men of another faith than his own to believe that his own faith was the correct one; but a thinking man need only come in contact, as he now does all the time, with equally good and equally bad men of various denominations, which condemn the doctrines of one another, in order to lose faith in the truth of the religion which he professes. In our time only a very ignorant man or one who is quite indifferent to the questions of life, which are sanctified by religion, can stay in the church faith. What cunning and what effort must be exerted by the churches, if, in spite of all these conditions which are subversive of faith, they are to continue building churches, celebrating masses, preaching, teaching, converting, and, above all, receiving for it a fat income, like all these priests, pastors, intendants, superintendents, abbots, archdeacons, bishops, and archbishops. Special, supernatural efforts are needed. And such efforts, which are strained more and more, are used by the churches. With us, in Russia, they use (in addition to all other means)



the simple, coarse violence of the civil power, which is obedient to the church. Persons who depart from the external expression of faith and who give expression to it are either directly punished or deprived of their rights; while persons who strictly adhere to the external forms of faith are rewarded and given rights. Thus do the Orthodox; but even all other churches, without exception, use for this all such means, of which the chief is what now is called hypnotization. All the arts, from architecture to poetry, are put into action, to affect the souls of men and to stultify them, and this action takes place without interruption. Particularly evident is this necessity of the hypnotizing action upon men, in order to bring them to a state of stupefaction, in the activity of the Salvation Army, which uses new, unfamiliar methods of horns, drums, songs, banners, uniforms, processions, dances, tears, and dramatic attitudes. But we are startled by them only because they are new methods. Are not the old methods of the temples, with special illumination, with gold, splendor, candles, choirs, organs, bells, vestments, lackadaisical sermons, and so forth, the same? But, no matter how strong this action of hypnotization may be, the chief and most deleterious activity of the churches does not lie in this. The chief, most pernicious activity of the church is the one which is directed to the deception of the children, those very children of whom Christ said that it will be woe to him who shall offend one of these little ones. With the very first awakening of the child, they begin to deceive him and to impress upon him with solemnity what those who impress do not believe in themselves, and they continue to impress him, until the deception, becoming a habit, is engrafted on the child's nature. The child is methodically deceived in the most important matter of life, and when the deception has so grown up with his life that it is difficult to tear it away, there is revealed to him the whole world of science and of reality, which can in no way harmonize with

the beliefs instilled in him, and he is left to make the best he can out of these contradictions. If we should set ourselves the task of entangling a man in such a way that he should not be able with his sound reason to get away from the two opposite world-conceptions, which have been instilled in him since his childhood, we could not invent anything more powerful than what is accomplished in the case of every young man who is educated in our so-called Christian society. What the churches do to people is terrible, but if we reflect on their condition, we shall find that those men who form the institution of the churches cannot act otherwise. The churches are confronted with a dilemma — the Sermon on the Mount, or the Nicene Creed — one excludes the other: if a man sincerely believes in the Sermon on the Mount, the Nicene Creed, and with it the church and its representatives, inevitably lose all meaning and significance for him; but if a man believes in the Nicene Creed, that is, in the church, that is, in those who call themselves its representatives, the Sermon on the Mount will become superfluous to him. And so the churches cannot help but use every possible effort to obscure the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount and to attract people toward itself. Only thanks to the tense activity of the churches in this direction has the influence of the churches held itself until now. Let a church for the shortest time arrest this action upon the masses by means of hypnotizing them and deceiving the children, and people will understand Christ's teaching. But the comprehension of the teaching destroys the churches and their significance. And so the churches do not for a moment interrupt the tense activity and hypnotization of the adults and the deception of the children. And it is this activity of the churches, which instills a false comprehension of Christ's teaching in men, and serves as an obstacle in its comprehension for the majority of so-called believers.

