

MY RELIGION

by Leo Tolstoy

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Chapter 5 The true meaning of the doctrine of Jesus was revealed to me; everything confirmed its truth. But for a long time I could not accustom myself to the strange fact, that after the eighteen centuries during which the law of Jesus had been professed by millions of human beings, after the eighteen centuries during which thousands of men had consecrated their lives to the study of this law, I had discovered it for myself anew. But strange as it seemed, so it was. Jesus' law, "Resist not evil," was to me wholly new, something of which I had never had any conception before. I asked myself how this could be; I must certainly have had a false idea of the doctrine of Jesus to cause such a misunderstanding. And a false idea of it I unquestionably had. When I began to read the Gospel, I was not in the condition of one who, having heard nothing of the doctrine of Jesus, becomes acquainted with it for the first time; on the contrary, I had a preconceived theory as to the manner in which I ought to understand it. Jesus did not appeal to me as a prophet revealing the divine law, but as one who continued and amplified the absolute divine law which I already knew; for I had very definite and complex notions about God, the creator of the world and of man, and about the commandments of God given to men through the instrumentality of Moses. When I came to the words, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a

tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil,”—the words, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,” expressed the law given by God to Moses; the words, “But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil,” expressed the new law, which was a negation of the first. If I had seen Jesus’ words, simply, in their true sense, and not as a part of the theological theory that I had imbibed at my mother’s breast, I should have understood immediately that Jesus abrogated the old law, and substituted for it a new law. But I had been taught that Jesus did not abrogate the law of Moses, that, on the contrary, he confirmed it to the slightest iota, and that he made it more complete. Verses 17-20 of the fifth chapter of Matthew always impressed me, when I read the Gospel, by their obscurity, and they plunged me into doubt. I knew the Old Testament, particularly the last books of Moses, very thoroughly, and recalling certain passages in which minute doctrines, often absurd and even cruel in their purport, are preceded by the words, “And the Lord said unto Moses,” it seemed to me very singular that Jesus should confirm all these injunctions; I could not understand why he did so. But I allowed the question to pass without solution, and accepted with confidence the explanations inculcated in my infancy—that the two laws were equally inspired by the Holy Spirit, that they were in perfect accord, and that Jesus confirmed the law of Moses while completing and amplifying it. I did not concern myself with accounting for the process of this amplification, with the solution of the contradictions apparent throughout the whole Gospel, in verses 17-20 of the fifth chapter, in the words, “But I say unto you.” Now that I understood the clear and simple meaning of the doctrine of Jesus, I saw clearly that the two laws are directly opposed to one another; that they can never be harmonized; that, instead of supplementing one by the other, we must inevitably choose between the two; and that the received explanation of the verses, Matthew 5: 17-20,

which had impressed me by their obscurity, must be incorrect. When I now came to read once more the verses that had before impressed me as obscure, I was astonished at the clear and simple meaning which was suddenly revealed to me. This meaning was revealed, not by any combination and transposition, but solely by rejecting the factitious explanations with which the words had been encumbered. According to Matthew, Jesus said:— “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets (the doctrine of the prophets): I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” And in verse 20 he added:— “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” I am not come (Jesus said) to destroy the eternal law of whose fulfilment your books of prophecy foretell. I am come to teach you the fulfilment of the eternal law; not of the law that your scribes and pharisees call the divine law, but of that eternal law which is more immutable than the earth and the heavens. I have expressed the idea in other words in order to detach the thoughts of my readers from the traditional false interpretation. If this false interpretation had never existed, the idea expressed in the verses could not be rendered in a better or more definite manner. The view that Jesus did not abrogate the old law arises from the arbitrary conclusion that “law” in this passage signifies the written law instead of the law eternal, the reference to the iota—jot and tittle—perhaps furnishing the grounds for such an opinion. But if Jesus had been speaking of the written law, he would have used the expression “the law and the prophets,” which he always employed in speaking of the written law; here, however, he uses a different expression—“the law or the prophets.” If Jesus had meant the written law, he would have used the expression, “the

law and the prophets," in the verses that follow and that continue the thought; but he says, briefly, "the law." Moreover, according to Luke, Jesus made use of the same phraseology, and the context renders the meaning inevitable. According to Luke, Jesus said to the Pharisees, who assumed the justice of their written law:— "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." (Luke 16: 15-17.) AUTHOR'S FOOTNOTE: More than this, as if to do away with all doubt about the law to which he referred, Jesus cites immediately, in connection with this passage, the most decisive instance of the negation of the law of Moses by the eternal law, the law of which not the smallest jot is to fail: "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery." (Luke 16: 18.) That is, according to the written law divorce is permissible; according to the eternal law it is forbidden. [End of footnote.] In the words, "The law and the prophets were until John," Jesus abrogated the written law; in the words, "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail," Jesus confirmed the law eternal. In the first passage cited he said, "the law and the prophets," that is, the written law; in the second he said "the law" simply, therefore the law eternal. It is clear, then, that the eternal law is opposed to the written law, exactly as in the context of Matthew where the eternal law is defined by the phrase, "the law or the prophets." The history of the variants of the text of these verses is quite worthy of notice. The majority of texts have simply "the law," without the addition, "and the prophets," thus avoiding a false interpretation in the sense of the written law. In other texts, notably that of Tischendorf, and in the canonical

versions, we find the word “prophets” used, not with the conjunction “and,” but with the conjunction “or,”—“the law or the prophets,”—which also excludes any question of the written law, and indicates, as the proper signification, the law eternal. In several other versions, not countenanced by the Church, we find the word “prophets” used with the conjunction “and,” not with “or”; and in these versions every repetition of the words “the law” is followed by the phrase, “and the prophets,” which would indicate that Jesus spoke only of the written law. The history of the commentaries on the passage in question coincides with that of the variants. The only clear meaning is that authorized by Luke—that Jesus spoke of the eternal law. But among the copyists of the Gospel were some who desired that the written law of Moses should continue to be regarded as obligatory. They therefore added to the words “the law” the phrase “and the prophets,” and thereby changed the interpretation of the text. Other Christians, not recognizing to the same degree the authority of the books of Moses, suppressed the added phrase, and replaced the particle καί, “and,” with ἢ, “or”; and with this substitution the passage was admitted to the canon. Nevertheless, in spite of the unequivocal clearness of the text as thus written, the commentators perpetuated the interpretation supported by the phrase which had been rejected in the canon. The passage evoked innumerable comments, which stray from the true signification in proportion to the lack, on the part of the commentators, of fidelity to the simple and obvious meaning of Jesus’ doctrine. Most of them recognize the reading rejected by the canonical text. To be absolutely convinced that Jesus spoke only of the eternal law, we need only examine the true meaning of the word which has given rise to so many false interpretations. The word “law” (in Greek [letters], in Hebrew, torah) has in all languages two principal meanings: one, law in the abstract sense, independent of

formulation; the other, the written statutes which men generally recognize as law. In the Greek of Paul's Epistles the distinction is indicated by the use of the article. Without the article Paul uses [the word] the most frequently in the sense of the divine eternal law. By the ancient Hebrews, as in books of Isaiah and the other prophets, torah, is always used in the sense of an eternal revelation, a divine intuition. It was not till the time of Esdras, and later in the Talmud, that "Torah" was used in the same sense in which we use the word "Bible"—with this difference, that while we have words to distinguish between the Bible and the divine law, the Jews employed the same word to express both meanings. And so Jesus sometimes speaks of law as the divine law (of Isaiah and the other prophets), in which case he confirms it; and sometimes in the sense of the written law of the Pentateuch, in which case he rejects it. To distinguish the difference, he always, in speaking of the written law, adds, "and the prophets," or prefixes the word "your,"—"your law." When he says: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7: 12), he speaks of the written law. The entire written law, he says, may be reduced to this expression of the eternal law, and by these words he abrogated the eternal law. When he says, "The law and the prophets were until John" (Luke 16: 16), he speaks of the written law, and abrogates it. When he says, "Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law" (John 7: 19), "It is also written in your law" (John 8: 17), "that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law" (John 15: 25), he speaks of the written law, the law whose authority he denied, the law that condemned him to death: "The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die" (John 19: 7). It is plain that this Jewish law, which authorized condemnation to death, was not the law of Jesus. But when Jesus says, "I am not come to destroy the

law, but to teach you the fulfilment of the law; for nothing of this law shall be changed, but all shall be fulfilled," then he speaks, not of the written law, but of the divine and eternal law. Admit that all this is merely formal proof; admit that I have carefully combined contexts and variants, and excluded everything contrary to my theory; admit that the commentators of the Church are clear and convincing, that, in fact, Jesus did not abrogate the law of Moses, but upheld it—admit this: then the question is, what were the teachings of Jesus? According to the Church, he taught that he was the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, and that he came into the world to atone by his death for Adam's sin. Those, however, who have read the Gospels know that Jesus taught nothing of the sort, or at least spoke but very vaguely on these topics. The passages in which Jesus affirms that he is the second person of the Trinity, and that he was to atone for the sins of humanity, form a very inconsiderable and very obscure portion of the Gospels. In what, then, does the rest of Jesus' doctrine consist? It is impossible to deny, for all Christians have recognized the fact, that the doctrine of Jesus aims summarily to regulate the lives of men, to teach them how they ought to live with regard to one another. But to realize that Jesus taught men a new way of life, we must have some idea of the condition of the people to whom his teachings were addressed. When we examine into the social development of the Russians, the English, the Chinese, the Indians, or even the races of insular savages, we find that each people invariably has certain practical rules or laws which govern its existence; consequently, if any one would inculcate a new law, he must at the same time abolish the old; in any race or nation this would be inevitable. Laws that we are accustomed to regard as almost sacred would assuredly be abrogated; with us, perhaps, it might happen that a reformer who taught a new law would abolish only our civil laws, the official code, our

administrative customs, without touching what we consider as our divine laws, although it is difficult to believe that such could be the case. But with the Jewish people, who had but one law, and that recognized as divine—a law which enveloped life to its minutest details—what could a reformer accomplish if he declared in advance that the existing law was inviolable? Admit that this argument is not conclusive, and try to interpret the words of Jesus as an affirmation of the entire Mosaic law; in that case, who were the Pharisees, the scribes, the doctors of the law, denounced by Jesus during the whole of his ministry? Who were they that rejected the doctrine of Jesus and, their High Priests at their head, crucified him? If Jesus approved the law of Moses, where were the faithful followers of that law, who practised it sincerely, and must thereby have obtained Jesus' approval? Is it possible that there was not one such? The Pharisees, we are told, constituted a sect; where, then, were the righteous? In the Gospel of John the enemies of Jesus are spoken of directly as "the Jews." They are opposed to the doctrine of Jesus; they are hostile because they are Jews. But it is not only the Pharisees and the Sadducees who figure in the Gospels as the enemies of Jesus: we also find mention of the doctors of the law, the guardians of the law of Moses, the scribes, the interpreters of the law, the ancients, those who are always considered as representatives of the people's wisdom. Jesus said, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," to change their way of life. But where were the righteous? Was Nicodemus the only one? He is represented as a good, but misguided man. We are so habituated to the singular opinion that Jesus was crucified by the Pharisees and a number of Jewish shopkeepers, that we never think to ask, Where were the true Jews, the good Jews, the Jews that practised the law? When we have once propounded this query, everything becomes perfectly clear. Jesus, whether he was God or man, brought his doctrine to a people

possessing rules, called the divine law, governing their whole existence. How could Jesus avoid denouncing that law? Every prophet, every founder of a religion, inevitably meets, in revealing the divine law to men, with institutions which are regarded as upheld by the laws of God. He cannot, therefore, avoid a double use of the word "law," which expresses what his hearers wrongfully consider the law of God ("your law"), and the law he has come to proclaim, the true law, the divine and eternal law. A reformer not only cannot avoid the use of the word in this manner; often he does not wish to avoid it, but purposely confounds the two ideas, thus indicating that, in the law confessed by those whom he would convert, there are still some eternal truths. Every reformer takes these truths, so well known to his hearers, as the basis of his teaching. This is precisely what Jesus did in addressing the Jews, by whom the two laws were vaguely grouped together as "Torah." Jesus recognized that the Mosaic law, and still more the prophetic books, especially the writings of Isaiah, whose words he constantly quotes—Jesus recognized that these contained divine and eternal truths in harmony with the eternal law, and these he takes as the basis of his own doctrine. This method was many times referred to by Jesus; thus he said, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" (Luke 10: 26). That is, one may find eternal truth in the law, if one reads it aright. And more than once he affirms that the commandments of the Mosaic law, to love the Lord and one's neighbor, are also commandments of the eternal law. At the conclusion of the parables by which Jesus explained the meaning of his doctrine to his disciples, he pronounced words that have a bearing upon all that precedes:— "Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven (the truth) is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure (without distinction) things new and old." (Matthew 13: 52.) The Church understands these words, as

they were understood by Irenaeus; but at the same time, in defiance of the true signification, it arbitrarily attributes to them the meaning that everything old is sacred. The manifest meaning is this: He who seeks for the good, takes not only the new, but also the old; and because a thing is old, he does not therefore reject it. By these words Jesus meant that he did not deny what was eternal in the old law. But when they spoke to him of the whole law, or of the formalities exacted by the old law, his reply was that new wine should not be put into old bottles. Jesus could not affirm the whole law; neither could he deny the entire teachings of the law and the prophets—the law which says, “love thy neighbor as thyself,” the prophets whose words often served to express his own thoughts. And yet, in place of this clear and simple explanation of Jesus’ words, we are offered a vague interpretation which introduces needless contradictions, which reduces the doctrine of Jesus to nothingness, and which re-establishes the doctrine of Moses in all its savage cruelty. Commentators of the Church, particularly those who have written since the fifth century, tell us that Jesus did not abolish the written law; that, on the contrary, he affirmed it. But in what way? How is it possible that the law of Jesus should harmonize with the law of Moses? To these inquiries we get no response. The commentators all make use of a verbal juggle to the effect that Jesus fulfilled the law of Moses, and that the sayings of the prophets were fulfilled in his person; that Jesus fulfilled the law as our mediator by our faith in him. And the essential question for every believer—How to harmonize two conflicting laws, each designed to regulate the lives of men?—is left without the slightest attempt at explanation. Thus the contradiction between the verse where it is said that Jesus did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil the law, and Jesus’ saying, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye... But I say unto you,”—the contradiction between the doctrine of Jesus and the

very spirit of the Mosaic doctrine—is left without any mitigation. Let those who are interested in the question look through the Church commentaries touching this passage from the time of Chrysostom to our day. After a perusal of the voluminous explanations offered, they will be convinced not only of the complete absence of any solution for the contradiction, but of the presence of a new, factitious contradiction arising in its place. Let us see what Chrysostom says in reply to those who reject the law of Moses:— “He made this law, not that we might strike out one another’s eyes, but that fear of suffering by others might restrain us from doing any such thing to them. As therefore He threatened the Ninevites with overthrow, not that He might destroy them (for had that been His will, He ought to have been silent), but that He might by fear make them better, and so quiet His wrath: so also hath He appointed a punishment for those who wantonly assail the eyes of others, that if good principle dispose them not to refrain from such cruelty, fear may restrain them from injuring their neighbors’ sight. “And if this be cruelty, it is cruelty also for the murderer to be restrained, and the adulterer checked. But these are the sayings of senseless men, and of those that are mad to the extreme of madness. For I, so far from saying that this comes of cruelty, should say that the contrary to this would be unlawful, according to men’s reckoning. And whereas thou sayest, ‘Because He commanded to pluck out an eye for an eye, therefore He is cruel’; I say that if He had not given this commandment, then He would have seemed, in the judgment of most men, to be that which thou sayest He is.” Chrysostom clearly recognized the law. An eye for an eye, as divine, and the contrary of that law, that is, the doctrine of Jesus, Resist not evil, as an iniquity. “For let us suppose,” says Chrysostom further:— “For let us suppose that this law had been altogether done away, and that no one feared the punishment ensuing thereupon, but that license had been

given to all the wicked to follow their own dispositions in all security to adulterers, and to murderers, to perjured persons, and to parricides; would not all things have been turned upside down? would not cities, market-places and houses, sea and land, and the whole world have been filled with unnumbered pollutions and murders? Every one sees it. For if, when there are laws, and fear, and threatening, our evil dispositions are hardly checked; were even this security taken away, what is there to prevent men's choosing vice? and what degree of mischief would not then come revelling upon the whole of human life? "The rather, since cruelty lies not only in allowing the bad to do what they will, but in another thing too quite as much—to overlook, and leave uncared for, him who hath done no wrong, but who is without cause or reason suffering ill. For tell me; were any one to gather together wicked men from all quarters, and arm them with swords, and bid them go about the whole city, and massacre all that came in their way, could there be anything more like a wild beast than he? And what if some others should bind, and confine with the utmost strictness, those whom that man had armed, and should snatch from those lawless hands them who were on the point of being butchered; could anything be greater humanity than this?" Chrysostom does not say what would be the estimate of these others in the opinion of the wicked. And what if these others were themselves wicked and cast the innocent into prison? Chrysostom continues:—"Now then, I bid thee transfer these examples to the Law likewise; for He that commands to pluck out an eye for an eye hath laid the fear as a kind of strong chain upon the souls of the bad, and so resembles him who detains those assassins in prison; whereas he who appoints no punishment for them, doth all but arm them by such security, and acts the part of that other, who was putting the swords in their hands, and letting them loose over the whole city" ("Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew"). If

Chrysostom had understood the law of Jesus, he would have said, Who is it that strikes out another's eyes? who is it that casts men into prison? If God, who made the law, does this, then there is no contradiction; but it is men who carry out the decrees, and the Son of God has said to men that they must abstain from violence. God commanded to strike out, and the Son of God commanded not to strike out. We must accept one commandment or the other; and Chrysostom, like all the rest of the Church, accepted the commandment of Moses and denied that of the Christ, whose doctrine he nevertheless claims to believe. Jesus abolished the Mosaic law, and gave his own law in its place. To one who really believes in Jesus there is not the slightest contradiction; such an one will pay no attention to the law of Moses, but will practise the law of Jesus, which he believes. To one who believes in the law of Moses there is no contradiction. The Jews looked upon the words of Jesus as foolishness, and believed in the law of Moses. The contradiction is only for those who would follow the law of Moses under the cover of the law of Jesus—for those whom Jesus denounced as hypocrites, as a generation of vipers. Instead of recognizing as divine truth the one or the other of the two laws, the law of Moses or that of Jesus, we recognize the divine quality of both. But when the question comes with regard to the acts of every-day life, we reject the law of Jesus and follow that of Moses. And this false interpretation, when we realize its importance, reveals the source of that terrible drama which records the struggle between evil and good, between darkness and light. To the Jewish people, trained to the innumerable formal regulations instituted by the Levites in the rubric of divine laws, each preceded by the words, "And the Lord said unto Moses"—to the Jewish people Jesus appeared. He found everything, to the minutest detail, prescribed by rule; not only the relation of man with God, but his sacrifices, his feasts, his fasts, his social, civil, and family duties, the

details of personal habits, circumcision, the purification of the body, of domestic utensils, of clothing—all these regulated by laws recognized as commandments of God, and therefore as divine. Excluding the question of Jesus' divine mission, what could any prophet or reformer do who wished to establish his own doctrines among a people so enveloped in formalism—what but abolish the law by which all these details were regulated? Jesus selected from what men considered as the law of God the portions which were really divine; he took what served his purpose, rejected the rest, and upon this foundation established the eternal law. It was not necessary to abolish all, but inevitable to abrogate much that was looked upon as obligatory. This Jesus did, and was accused of destroying the divine law; for this he was condemned and put to death. But his doctrine was cherished by his disciples, traversed the centuries, and is transmitted to other peoples. Under these conditions it is again hidden beneath heterogeneous dogmas, obscure comments, and factitious explanations. Pitiably human sophisms replace the divine revelation. For the formula, "And the Lord said unto Moses," we substitute "Thus saith the Holy Spirit." And again formalism hides the truth. Most astounding of all, the doctrine of Jesus is amalgamated with the written law, whose authority he was forced to deny. This Torah, this written law, is declared to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth; and thus Jesus is taken in the snare of his own revelation—his doctrine is reduced to nothingness. This is why, after eighteen hundred years, it so singularly happened that I discovered the meaning of the doctrine of Jesus as some new thing. But no; I did not discover it; I did simply what all must do who seek after God and His law; I sought for the eternal law amid the incongruous elements that men call by that name.

Chapter 6 When I understood the law of Jesus as the law of Jesus, and not as the law of Jesus and of Moses, when I understood the commandment of this law which absolutely abrogated the law of Moses, then the Gospels, before to me so obscure, diffuse, and contradictory, blended into a harmonious whole, the substance of whose doctrine, until then incomprehensible, I found to be formulated in terms simple, clear, and accessible to every searcher after truth. Throughout the Gospels we are called upon to consider the commandments of Jesus and the necessity of practising them. All the theologians discuss the commandments of Jesus; but what are these commandments? I did not know before. I thought that the commandment of Jesus was to love God, and one's neighbor as one's self. I did not see that this could not be a new commandment of Jesus, since it was given by them of old in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. The words:— "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 5: 19.)— these words I believed to relate to the Mosaic law. But it never had occurred to me that Jesus had propounded, clearly and precisely, new laws. I did not see that in the passage where Jesus declares, "Ye have heard that it was said.... But I say unto you," he formulated a series of very definite commandments—five entirely new, counting as one the two references to the ancient law against adultery. I had heard of the beatitudes of Jesus and of their number; their explanation and enumeration had formed a part of my religious instruction; but the commandments of Jesus—I had never heard them spoken of. To my great astonishment, I now discovered them for myself. In the fifth chapter of Matthew I found these verses:— "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But

I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the Gehenna of fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.” (Matthew 5: 21-26.)

When I understood the commandment, “Resist not evil,” it seemed to me that these verses must have a meaning as clear and intelligible as has the commandment just cited. The meaning I had formerly given to the passage was, that every one ought to avoid angry feelings against others, ought never to utter abusive language, and ought to live in peace with all men, without exception. But there was in the text a phrase which excluded this meaning, “Whosoever shall be angry with his brother without a cause”—the words could not then be an exhortation to absolute peace. I was greatly perplexed, and I turned to the commentators, the theologians, for the removal of my doubts. To my surprise I found that the commentators were chiefly occupied with the endeavor to define under what conditions anger was permissible. All the commentators of the Church dwelt upon the qualifying phrase “without a cause,” and explained the meaning to be that one must not be offended without a reason, that one must not be abusive, but that anger is not always unjust; and, to confirm their view, they quoted instances of anger on the part of saints and apostles. I saw plainly that the commentators who authorized anger “for the glory of God”

as not reprehensible, although entirely contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, based their argument on the phrase “without a cause,” in the twenty-second verse. These words change entirely the meaning of the passage. Be not angry without cause? Jesus exhorts us to pardon every one, to pardon without restriction or limit. He pardoned all who did him wrong, and chided Peter for being angry with Malchus when the former sought to defend his Master at the time of the betrayal, when, if at any time, it would seem that anger might have been justifiable. And yet did this same Jesus formally teach men not to be angry “without a cause,” and thereby sanction anger for a cause? Did Jesus enjoin peace upon all men, and then, in the phrase “without a cause,” interpolate the reservation that this rule did not apply to all cases; that there were circumstances under which one might be angry with a brother, and so give the commentators the right to say that anger is sometimes expedient? But who is to decide when anger is expedient and when it is not expedient? I never yet encountered an angry person who did not believe his wrath to be justifiable. Every one who is angry thinks anger legitimate and serviceable. Evidently the qualifying phrase “without a cause” destroys the entire force of the verse. And yet there were the words in the sacred text, and I could not efface them. The effect was the same as if the word “good” had been added to the phrase. “Love thy neighbor”—love thy good neighbor, the neighbor that agrees with thee! The entire signification of the passage was changed by this phrase, “without a cause.” Verses 23 and 24, which exhort us to be reconciled with all men before appealing for divine aid, also lost their direct and imperative meaning and acquired a conditional import through the influence of the foregoing qualification. It had seemed to me, however, that Jesus forbade all anger, all evil sentiment, and, that it might not continue in our hearts, exhorted us before entering into communion with God to ask ourselves if there

were any person who might be angry with us. If such were the case, whether this anger were with cause or without cause, he commanded us to be reconciled. In this manner I had interpreted the passage; but it now seemed, according to the commentators, that the injunction must be taken as a conditional affirmation. The commentators all explained that we ought to try to be at peace with everybody; but, they added, if this is impossible, if, actuated by evil instincts, any one is at enmity with you, try to be reconciled with him in spirit, in idea, and then the enmity of others will be no obstacle to divine communion. Nor was this all. The words, "Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council," always seemed to me strange and absurd. If we are forbidden to be abusive, why this example with its ordinary and harmless epithet; why this terrible threat against those that utter abuse so feeble as that implied in the word raca, which means a good-for-nothing? All this was obscure to me. I was convinced that I had before me a problem similar to that which had confronted me in the words, "Judge not." I felt that here again the simple, grand, precise, and practical meaning of Jesus had been hidden, and that the commentators were groping in gloom. It seemed to me that Jesus, in saying, "be reconciled to thy brother," could not have meant, "be reconciled in idea,"—an explanation not at all clear, supposing it were true. I understood what Jesus meant when, using the words of the prophet, he said, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" that is, I will that men shall love one another. If you would have your acts acceptable to God, then, before offering prayer, interrogate your conscience; and if you find that any one is angry with you, go and make your peace with him, and then pray as you desire. After this clear interpretation, what was I to understand by the comment, "be reconciled in idea"? I saw that what seemed to me the only clear and direct meaning of the verse was destroyed by the phrase, "without a cause." If I could

eliminate that, there would be no difficulty in the way of a lucid interpretation. But all the commentators were united against any such course; and the canonical text authorized the rendering to which I objected. I could not drop these words arbitrarily, and yet, if they were excluded, everything would become clear. I therefore sought for some interpretation which would not conflict with the sense of the entire passage. I consulted the dictionary. In ordinary Greek, the word means "heedlessly, inconsiderately." I tried to find some term that would not destroy the sense; but the words, "without a cause," plainly had the meaning attributed to them. In New Testament Greek the signification of [it] is exactly the same. I consulted the concordances. The word occurs but once in the Gospels, namely, in this passage. In the first epistle to the Corinthians, 15: 2, it occurs in exactly the same sense. It is impossible to interpret it otherwise, and if we accept it, we must conclude that Jesus uttered in vague words a commandment easily so construed as to be of no effect. To admit this seemed to me equivalent to rejecting the entire Gospel. There remained one more resource—was the word to be found in all the manuscripts? I consulted Griesbach, who records all recognized variants, and discovered to my joy that the passage in question was not invariable, and that the variation depended upon the [Greek] word. In most of the Gospel texts and the citations of the Fathers, this word does not occur. I consulted Tischendorf for the most ancient reading: the word did not appear. This word, so destructive to the meaning of the doctrine of Jesus, is then an interpolation which had not crept into the best copies of the Gospel as late as the fifth century. Some copyist added the word; others approved it and undertook its explanation. Jesus did not utter, could not have uttered, this terrible word; and the primary meaning of the passage, its simple, direct, impressive meaning, is the true interpretation. Now that I understood Jesus to forbid anger, whatever the

cause, and without distinction of persons, the warning against the use of the words "raca" and "fool" had a purport quite distinct from any prohibition with regard to the utterance of abusive epithets. The strange Hebrew word, raca, which is not translated in the Greek text, serves to reveal the meaning. Raca means, literally, "vain, empty, that which does not exist." It was much used by the Hebrews to express exclusion. It is employed in the plural form in Judges 4: 4, in the sense, "empty and vain." This word Jesus forbids us to apply to any one, as he forbids us to use the word "fool," which, like "raca," relieves us of all the obligations of humanity. We get angry, we do evil to men, and then to excuse ourselves we say that the object of our anger is an empty person, the refuse of a man, a fool. It is precisely such words as these that Jesus forbids us to apply to men. He exhorts us not to be angry with any one, and not to excuse our anger with the plea that we have to do with a vain person, a person bereft of reason. And so in place of insignificant, vague, and uncertain phrases subject to arbitrary interpretation, I found in Matthew 5: 21-26 the first commandment of Jesus: Live in peace with all men. Do not regard anger as justifiable under any circumstances. Never look upon a human being as worthless or as a fool. Not only refrain from anger yourself, but do not regard the anger of others toward you as vain. If any one is angry with you, even without reason, be reconciled to him, that all hostile feelings may be effaced. Agree quickly with those that have a grievance against you, lest animosity prevail to your loss. The first commandment of Jesus being thus freed from obscurity, I was able to understand the second, which also begins with a reference to the ancient law:— "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is

profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. (Matthew 5: 27-32.) By these words I understood that a man ought not, even in imagination, to admit that he could approach any woman save her to whom he had once been united, and her he might never abandon to take another, although permitted to do so by the Mosaic law. In the first commandment, Jesus counselled us to extinguish the germ of anger, and illustrated his meaning by the fate of the man who is delivered to the judges; in the second commandment, Jesus declares that debauchery arises from the disposition of men and women to regard one another as instruments of voluptuousness, and, this being so, we ought to guard against every idea that excites to sensual desire, and, once united to a woman, never to abandon her on any pretext, for women thus abandoned are sought by other men, and so debauchery is introduced into the world. The wisdom of this commandment impressed me profoundly. It would suppress all the evils in the world that result from the sexual relations. Convinced that license in the sexual relations leads to contention, men, in obedience to this injunction, would avoid every cause for voluptuousness, and, knowing that the law of humanity is to live in couples, would so unite themselves, and never destroy the bond of union. All the evils arising from dissensions caused by sexual attraction would be suppressed, since there would be neither men nor women deprived of the sexual relation. But I was much more impressed, as I read the Sermon on the Mount, with the words, "Saving for the cause of fornication," which

permitted a man to repudiate his wife in case of infidelity. The very form in which the idea was expressed seemed to me unworthy of the dignity of the occasion, for here, side by side with the profound truths of the Sermon on the Mount, occurred, like a note in a criminal code, this strange exception to the general rule; but I shall not dwell upon the question of form; I shall speak only of the exception itself, so entirely in contradiction with the fundamental idea. I consulted the commentators; all, Chrysostom and the others, even authorities on exegesis like Reuss, all recognized the meaning of the words to be that Jesus permitted divorce in case of infidelity on the part of the woman, and that, in the exhortation against divorce in the nineteenth chapter of Matthew, the same words had the same signification. I read the thirty-second verse of the fifth chapter again and again, and reason refused to accept the interpretation. To verify my doubts I consulted the other portions of the New Testament texts, and I found in Matthew (19), Mark (10), Luke (16), and in the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, affirmation of the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage. In Luke (16: 18) it is said:— “Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.” In Mark (10: 5-12) the doctrine is also proclaimed without any exception whatever:— “For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he said unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she

committeth adultery." The same idea is expressed in Matthew. Paul, in the first epistle to the Corinthians, develops systematically the idea that the only way of preventing debauchery is that every man have his own wife, and every woman have her own husband, and that they mutually satisfy the sexual instinct; then he says, without equivocation, "Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife." According to Mark, and Luke, and Paul, divorce is forbidden. It is forbidden by the assertion repeated in two of the Gospels, that husband and wife are one flesh whom God hath joined together. It is forbidden by the doctrine of Jesus, who exhorts us to pardon every one, without excepting the adulterous woman. It is forbidden by the general sense of the whole passage, which explains that divorce is provocative of debauchery, and for this reason that divorce with an adulterous woman is prohibited. Upon what, then, is based the opinion that divorce is permissible in case of infidelity on the part of the woman? Upon the words which had so impressed me in Matthew; the words every one takes to mean that Jesus permits divorce in case of adultery by the woman; the words, repeated in Matthew, in a number of copies of the Gospel text, and by many Fathers of the Church—the words, "unless for the cause of adultery." I studied these words carefully anew. For a long time I could not understand them. It seemed to me that there must be a defect in the translation, and an erroneous exegesis; but where was the source of the error? I could not find it; and yet the error itself was very plain. In opposition to the Mosaic law, which declares that if a man take an aversion to his wife he may write her a bill of divorcement and send her out of his house—in opposition to this law Jesus is made to declare, "But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery." I saw nothing

in these words to allow us to affirm that divorce was either permitted or forbidden. It is said that whoever shall put away his wife causes her to commit adultery, and then an exception is made with regard to a woman guilty of adultery. This exception, which throws the guilt of marital infidelity entirely upon the woman is, in general, strange and unexpected; but here, in relation to the context, it is simply absurd, for even the very doubtful meaning which might otherwise be attributed to it is wholly destroyed. Whoever puts away his wife exposes her to the crime of adultery, and yet a man is permitted to put away a wife guilty of adultery, as if a woman guilty of adultery would no more commit adultery after she were put away. But this is not all; when I had examined this passage attentively, I found it also to be lacking in grammatical meaning. The words are, "Whoever shall put away his wife, except for the fault of adultery, exposes her to the commission of adultery,"—and the proposition is complete. It is a question of the husband, of him who in putting away his wife exposes her to the commission of the crime of adultery; what, then, is the purport of the qualifying phrase, "except for the fault of adultery"? If the proposition were in this form: Whoever shall put away his wife is guilty of adultery, unless the wife herself has been unfaithful—it would be grammatically correct. But as the passage now stands, the subject "whoever" has no other predicate than the word "exposes," with which the phrase "except for the fault of adultery" cannot be connected. What, then, is the purport of this phrase? It is plain that whether for or without the fault of adultery on the part of the woman, the husband who puts away his wife exposes her to the commission of adultery. The proposition is analogous to the following sentence: Whoever refuses food to his son, besides the fault of spitefulness, exposes him to the possibility of being cruel. This sentence evidently cannot mean that a father may refuse food to his son if the latter is spiteful. It can

only mean that a father who refuses food to his son, besides being spiteful towards his son, exposes his son to the possibility of becoming cruel. And in the same way, the Gospel proposition would have a meaning if we could replace the words, "the fault of adultery," by libertinism, debauchery, or some similar phrase, expressing not an act but a quality. And so I asked myself if the meaning here was not simply that whoever puts away his wife, besides being himself guilty of libertinism (since no one puts away his wife except to take another), exposes his wife to the commission of adultery? If, in the original text, the word translated "adultery" or "fornication" had the meaning of libertinism, the meaning of the passage would be clear. And then I met with the same experience that had happened to me before in similar instances. The text confirmed my suppositions and entirely effaced my doubts. The first thing that occurred to me in reading the text was that the [Greek] word, translated in common with, "adultery" or "fornication," is an entirely different word from the latter. But perhaps these two words are used as synonyms in the Gospels? I consulted the dictionary, and found that the [Greek] word, corresponding in Hebrew to *zanah*, in Latin to *fornicatio*, in German to *hurerei*, in French to *libertinage*, has a very precise meaning, and that it never has signified, and never can signify, the act of adultery, *ehebruch*, as Luther and the Germans after him have rendered the word. It signifies a state of depravity—a quality, and not an act—and never can be properly translated by "adultery" or "fornication." I found, moreover, that "adultery" is expressed throughout the Gospel, as well as in the passage under consideration, by the word. I had only to correct the false translation, which had evidently been made intentionally, to render absolutely inadmissible the meaning attributed by commentators to the text, and to show the proper grammatical relation of [it] to the subject of the sentence. A person acquainted with

Greek would construe as follows: “except, outside,” “the matter, the cause,” “of libertinism,” “obliges,” “her,” “to be an adulteress”—which rendering gives, word for word, Whoever puts away his wife, besides the fault of libertinism, obliges her to be an adulteress. We obtain the same meaning from Matthew. When we correct the unauthorized translation of [it] by substituting “libertinism” for “fornication,” we see at once that the phrase cannot apply to “wife.” And as the words could signify nothing else than the fault of libertinism on the part of the husband, so the words in the nineteenth chapter, can have no other than the same meaning. The phrase is, word for word, “if this is not through libertinism” (to give one’s self up to libertinism). The meaning then becomes clear. Jesus replies to the theory of the Pharisees, that a man who abandons his wife to marry another without the intention of giving himself up to libertinism does not commit adultery—Jesus replies to this theory that the abandonment of a wife, that is, the cessation of sexual relations, even if not for the purpose of libertinism, but to marry another, is none the less adultery. Thus we come at the simple meaning of this commandment—a meaning which accords with the whole doctrine, with the words of which it is the complement, with grammar, and with logic. This simple and clear interpretation, harmonizing so naturally with the doctrine and the words from which it was derived, I discovered after the most careful and prolonged research. Upon a premeditated alteration of the text had been based an exegesis which destroyed the moral, religious, logical, and grammatical meaning of Jesus’ words. And thus once more I found a confirmation of the terrible fact that the meaning of the doctrine of Jesus is simple and clear, that its affirmations are emphatic and precise, but that commentaries upon the doctrine, inspired by a desire to sanction existing evil, have so obscured it that determined effort is demanded of him who would know the truth. If the

Gospels had come down to us in a fragmentary condition, it would have been easier (so it seemed to me) to restore the true meaning of the text than to find that meaning now, beneath the accumulations of fallacious comments which have apparently no purpose save to conceal the doctrine they are supposed to expound. With regard to the passage under consideration, it is plain that to justify the divorce of some Byzantine emperor this ingenious pretext was employed to obscure the doctrine regulating the relations between the sexes. When we have rejected the suggestions of the commentators, we escape from the mist of uncertainty, and the second commandment of Jesus becomes precise and clear. "Guard against libertinism. Let every man justified in entering into the sexual relation have one wife, and every wife one husband, and under no pretext whatever let this union be violated by either." Immediately after the second commandment is another reference to the ancient law, followed by the third commandment:— "Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great king. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communications be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." (Matthew)

This passage always troubled me when I read it. It did not trouble me by its obscurity, like the passage about divorce; or by conflicting with other passages, like the authorization of anger for cause; or by the difficulty in the way of obedience, as in the case of the command to turn the other cheek;—it troubled me rather by its very clearness, simplicity, and practicality. Side by side with rules whose magnitude and importance I felt profoundly, was this saying, which seemed to me superfluous, frivolous, weak,

and without consequence to me or to others. I naturally did not swear, either by Jerusalem, or by heaven, or by anything else, and it cost me not the least effort to refrain from doing so; on the other hand, it seemed to me that whether I swore or did not swear could not be of the slightest importance to any one. And desiring to find an explanation of this rule, which troubled me through its very simplicity, I consulted the commentators. They were in this case of great assistance to me. The commentators all found in these words a confirmation of the third commandment of Moses—not to swear by the name of the Lord; but, in addition to this, they explained that this commandment of Jesus against an oath was not always obligatory, and had no reference whatever to the oath which citizens are obliged to take before the authorities. And they brought together Scripture citations, not to support the direct meaning of Jesus' commandment, but to prove when it ought and ought not to be obeyed. They claimed that Jesus had himself sanctioned the oath in courts of justice by his reply, "Thou hast said," to the words of the High Priest, "I adjure thee by the living God;" that the apostle Paul invoked God to witness the truth of his words, which invocation was evidently equivalent to an oath; that the law of Moses proscribing the oath was not abrogated by Jesus; and that Jesus forbade only false oaths, the oaths of Pharisees and hypocrites. When I had read these comments, I understood that unless I excepted from the oaths forbidden by Jesus the oath of fidelity to the State, the commandment was as insignificant as superficial, and as easy to practise as I had supposed. And I asked myself the question, Does this passage contain an exhortation to abstain from an oath that the commentators of the Church are so zealous to justify? Does it not forbid us to take the oath indispensable to the assembling of men into political groups and the formation of a military caste? The soldier, that special instrument of violence, goes in Russia by the

nickname of prissaiaga (sworn in). If I had asked the soldier at the Borovitzky Gate how he solved the contradiction between the Gospels and military regulations, he would have replied that he had taken the oath, that is, that he had sworn by the Gospels. This is the reply that soldiers always make. The oath is so indispensable to the horrors of war and armed coercion that in France, where Christianity is out of favor, the oath remains in full force. If Jesus did not say in so many words, "Do not take an oath," the prohibition ought to be a consequence of his teaching. He came to suppress evil, and, if he did not condemn the oath, he left a terrible evil untouched. It may be said, perhaps, that at the time at which Jesus lived this evil passed unperceived; but this is not true. Epictetus and Seneca declare against the taking of oaths. A similar rule is inscribed in the laws of Mani. The Jews of the time of Jesus made proselytes, and obliged them to take the oath. How could it be said that Jesus did not perceive this evil when he forbade it in clear, direct, and circumstantial terms? He said, "Swear not at all." This expression is as simple, clear, and absolute as the expression, "Judge not, condemn not," and is as little subject to explanation; moreover, he added to this, "Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." If obedience to the doctrine of Jesus consists in perpetual observance of the will of God, how can a man swear to observe the will of another man or other men? The will of God cannot coincide with the will of man. And this is precisely what Jesus said in Matthew:— "Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black." And the apostle James says in his epistle:— "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation." The apostle tells us clearly why we must not swear: the oath in itself may be unimportant, but by it men are condemned,

and so we ought not to swear at all. How could we express more clearly the saying of Jesus and his apostle? My ideas had become so confused that for a long time I had kept before me the question, Do the words and the meaning of this passage agree?—it does not seem possible. But, after having read the commentaries attentively, I saw that the impossible had become a fact. The explanations of the commentators were in harmony with those they had offered concerning the other commandments of Jesus: judge not, be not angry, do not violate the marital bonds. We have organized a social order which we cherish and look upon as sacred. Jesus, whom we recognize as God, comes and tells us that our social organization is wrong. We recognize him as God, but we are not willing to renounce our social institutions. What, then, are we to do? Add, if we can, the words “without a cause” to render void the command against anger; mutilate the sense of another law, as audacious prevaricators have done by substituting for the command absolutely forbidding divorce, phraseology which permits divorce; and if there is no possible way of deriving an equivocal meaning, as in the case of the commands, “Judge not, condemn not,” and “Swear not at all,” then with the utmost effrontery openly violate the rule while affirming that we obey it. In fact, the principal obstacle to a comprehension of the truth that the Gospel forbids all manner of oaths exists in the fact that our pseudo-Christian commentators themselves, with unexampled audacity, take oath upon the Gospel itself. They make men swear by the Gospel, that is to say, they do just the contrary of what the Gospel commands. Why does it never occur to the man who is made to take an oath upon the cross and the Gospel that the cross was made sacred only by the death of one who forbade all oaths, and that in kissing the sacred book he perhaps is pressing his lips upon the very page where is recorded the clear and direct commandment, “Swear not at all”? But I was troubled no more with regard to the

meaning of the passage comprised in Matthew when I found the plain declaration of the third commandment, that we should take no oath, since all oaths are imposed for an evil purpose. After the third commandment comes the fourth reference to the ancient law and the enunciation of the fourth commandment:— “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.” (Matthew) I have already spoken of the direct and precise meaning of these words; I have already said that we have no reason whatever for basing upon them an allegorical explanation. The comments that have been made upon them, from the time of Chrysostom to our day, are really surprising. The words are pleasing to every one, and they inspire all manner of profound reflections save one—that these words express exactly what Jesus meant to say. The Church commentators, not at all awed by the authority of one whom they recognize as God, boldly distort the meaning of his words. They tell us, of course, that these commandments to bear offences and to refrain from reprisals are directed against the vindictive character of the Jews; they not only do not exclude all general measures for the repression of evil and the punishment of evil-doers, but they exhort every one to individual and personal effort to sustain justice, to apprehend aggressors, and to prevent the wicked from inflicting evil upon others—for, otherwise (they tell us) these spiritual commandments of the Saviour would become, as they became among the Jews, a dead letter, and would serve only to propagate evil and to suppress virtue. The love of the Christian should be patterned after the love

of God; but divine love circumscribes and reproveth evil only as may be required for the glory of God and the safety of his servants. If evil is propagated, we must set bounds to evil and punish it—now this is the duty of authorities. Christian scholars and free-thinkers are not embarrassed by the meaning of these words of Jesus, and do not hesitate to correct them. The sentiments here expressed, they tell us, are very noble, but are completely inapplicable to life; for if we practised to the letter the commandment, “Resist not evil,” our entire social fabric would be destroyed. This is what Renan, Strauss, and all the liberal commentators tell us. If, however, we take the words of Jesus as we would take the words of any one who speaks to us, and admit that he says exactly what he does say, all these profound circumlocutions vanish away. Jesus says, “Your social system is absurd and wrong. I propose to you another.” And then he utters the teachings reported by Matthew. It would seem that before correcting them one ought to understand them; now this is exactly what no one wishes to do. We decide in advance that the social order which controls our existence, and which is abolished by these words, is the superior law of humanity. For my part, I consider our social order to be neither wise nor sacred; and that is why I have understood this commandment when others have not. And when I had understood these words just as they are written, I was struck with their truth, their lucidity, and their precision. Jesus said, “You wish to suppress evil by evil; this is not reasonable. To abolish evil, avoid the commission of evil.” And then he enumerates instances where we are in the habit of returning evil for evil, and says that in these cases we ought not so to do. This fourth commandment was the one that I first understood; and it revealed to me the meaning of all the others. This simple, clear, and practical fourth commandment says: “Never resist evil by force, never return violence for violence: if any one beat you, bear it; if one would deprive you of

anything, yield to his wishes; if any one would force you to labor, labor; if any one would take away your property, abandon it at his demand." After the fourth commandment we find a fifth reference to the ancient law, followed by the fifth commandment:— "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shall love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew). These verses I had formerly regarded as a continuation, an exposition, an enforcement, I might almost say an exaggeration, of the words, "Resist not evil." But as I had found a simple, precise, and practical meaning in each of the passages beginning with a reference to the ancient law, I anticipated a similar experience here. After each reference of this sort had thus far come a commandment, and each commandment had been important and distinct in meaning; it ought to be so now. The closing words of the passage, repeated by Luke, which are to the effect that God makes no distinction of persons, but lavishes his gifts upon all, and that we, following his precepts, ought to regard all men as equally worthy, and to do good to all—these words were clear; they seemed to me to be a confirmation and exposition of some definite law—but what was this law? For a long time I could not understand it. To love one's enemies?—this was impossible. It was one of those sublime thoughts that we must look upon only as an indication of a moral ideal impossible of attainment. It demanded all or

nothing. We might, perhaps, refrain from doing injury to our enemies—but to love them!—no; Jesus did not command the impossible. And besides, in the words referring to the ancient law, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt ... hate thine enemy,” there was cause for doubt. In other references Jesus cited textually the terms of the Mosaic law; but here he apparently cites words that have no such authority; he seems to calumniate the law of Moses. As with regard to my former doubts, so now the commentators gave me no explanation of the difficulty. They all agreed that the words “hate thine enemy” were not in the Mosaic law, but they offered no suggestion as to the meaning of the unauthorized phrase. They spoke of the difficulty of loving one’s enemies, that is, wicked men (thus they emended Jesus’ words); and they said that while it is impossible to love our enemies, we may refrain from wishing them harm and from inflicting injury upon them. Moreover, they insinuated that we might and should “convince” our enemies, that is, resist them; they spoke of the different degrees of love for our enemies which we might attain—from all of which the final conclusion was that Jesus, for some inexplicable reason, quoted as from the law of Moses words not to be found therein, and then uttered a number of sublime phrases which at bottom are impracticable and empty of meaning. I could not agree with this conclusion. In this passage, as in the passages containing the first four commandments, there must be some clear and precise meaning. To find this meaning, I set myself first of all to discover the purport of the words containing the inexact reference to the ancient law, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt... hate thine enemy.” Jesus had some reason for placing at the head of each of his commandments certain portions of the ancient law to serve as the antitheses of his own doctrine. If we do not understand what is meant by the citations from the ancient law, we cannot understand what

Jesus proscribed. The commentators say frankly (it is impossible not to say so) that Jesus in this instance made use of words not to be found in the Mosaic law, but they do not tell us why he did so or what meaning we are to attach to the words thus used. It seemed to me above all necessary to know what Jesus had in view when he cited these words which are not to be found in the law. I asked myself what these words could mean. In all other references of the sort, Jesus quotes a single rule from the ancient law: "Thou shalt not kill"—"Thou shalt not commit adultery"—"Thou shalt not forswear thyself"—"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth"—and with regard to each rule he propounds his own doctrine. In the instance under consideration, he cites two contrasting rules: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy,"—from which it would appear that the contrast between these two rules of the ancient law, relative to one's neighbor and one's enemy, should be the basis of the new law. To understand clearly what this contrast was, I sought for the meanings of the words "neighbor" and "enemy," as used in the Gospel text. After consulting dictionaries and Biblical texts, I was convinced that "neighbor" in the Hebrew language meant, invariably and exclusively, a Hebrew. We find the same meaning expressed in the Gospel parable of the Samaritan. From the inquiry of the Jewish scribe (Luke), "And who is my neighbor?" it is plain that he did not regard the Samaritan as such. The word "neighbor" is used with the same meaning in Acts. "Neighbor," in Gospel language, means a compatriot, a person belonging to the same nationality. And so the antithesis used by Jesus in the citation, "love thy neighbor, hate thine enemy," must be in the distinction between the words "compatriot" and "foreigner." I then sought for the Jewish understanding of "enemy," and I found my supposition confirmed. The word "enemy" is nearly always employed in the Gospels in the sense, not of

a personal enemy, but, in general, of a “hostile people”. The use of the word “enemy” in the singular form, in the phrase “hate thine enemy,” convinced me that the meaning is a “hostile people.” In the Old Testament, the conception “hostile people” is nearly always expressed in the singular form. When I understood this, I understood why Jesus, who had before quoted the authentic words of the law, had here cited the words “hate thine enemy.” When we understand the word “enemy” in the sense of “hostile people,” and “neighbor” in the sense of “compatriot,” the difficulty is completely solved. Jesus spoke of the manner in which Moses directed the Hebrews to act toward “hostile peoples.” The various passages scattered through the different books of the Old Testament, prescribing the oppression, slaughter, and extermination of other peoples, Jesus summed up in one word, “hate,”—make war upon the enemy. He said, in substance: “You have heard that you must love those of your own race, and hate foreigners; but I say unto you, love every one without distinction of nationality.” When I had understood these words in this way, I saw immediately the force of the phrase, “Love your enemies.” It is impossible to love one’s personal enemies; but it is perfectly possible to love the citizens of a foreign nation equally with one’s compatriots. And I saw clearly that in saying, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies,” Jesus meant to say that men are in the habit of looking upon compatriots as neighbors, and foreigners as enemies; and this he reproveth. His meaning was that the law of Moses established a difference between the Hebrew and the foreigner—the hostile peoples; but he forbade any such difference. And then, according to Matthew and Luke, after giving this commandment, he said that with God all men are equal, all are warmed by the same sun, all profit by the same rain. God makes no distinction among peoples, and lavishes his

gifts upon all men; men ought to act exactly in the same way toward one another, without distinction of nationality, and not like the heathen, who divide themselves into distinct nationalities. Thus once more I found confirmed on all sides the simple, clear, important, and practical meaning of the words of Jesus. Once more, in place of an obscure sentence, I had found a clear, precise, important, and practical rule: To make no distinction between compatriots and foreigners, and to abstain from all the results of such distinction—from hostility towards foreigners, from wars, from all participation in war, from all preparations for war; to establish with all men, of whatever nationality, the same relations granted to compatriots. All this was so simple and so clear, that I was astonished that I had not perceived it from the first. The cause of my error was the same as that which had perplexed me with regard to the passages relating to judgments and the taking of oaths. It is very difficult to believe that tribunals upheld by professed Christians, blest by those who consider themselves the guardians of the law of Jesus, could be incompatible with the Christian religion; could be, in fact, diametrically opposed to it. It is still more difficult to believe that the oath which we are obliged to take by the guardians of the law of Jesus, is directly reprov'd by this law. To admit that everything in life that is considered essential and natural, as well as what is considered the most noble and grand—love of country, its defence, its glory, battle with its enemies—to admit that all this is not only an infraction of the law of Jesus, but is directly denounced by Jesus—this, I say, is difficult. Our existence is now so entirely in contradiction with the doctrine of Jesus, that only with the greatest difficulty can we understand its meaning. We have been so deaf to the rules of life that he has given us, to his explanations—not only when he commands us not to kill, but when he warns us against anger, when he commands us not to resist evil,

to turn the other cheek, to love our enemies; we are so accustomed to speak of a body of men especially organized for murder, as a Christian army, we are so accustomed to prayers addressed to the Christ for the assurance of victory, we who have made the sword, that symbol of murder, an almost sacred object (so that a man deprived of this symbol, of his sword, is a dishonored man); we are so accustomed, I say, to this, that the words of Jesus seem to us compatible with war. We say, "If he had forbidden it, he would have said so plainly." We forget that Jesus did not foresee that men having faith in his doctrine of humility, love, and fraternity, could ever, with calmness and premeditation, organize themselves for the murder of their brethren. Jesus did not foresee this, and so he did not forbid a Christian to participate in war. A father who exhorts his son to live honestly, never to wrong any person, and to give all that he has to others, would not forbid his son to kill people upon the highway. None of the apostles, no disciple of Jesus during the first centuries of Christianity, realized the necessity of forbidding a Christian that form of murder which we call war. Here, for example, is what Origen says in his reply to Celsus:— "In the next place, Celsus urges us 'to help the king with all our might, and to labor with him in the maintenance of justice, to fight for him; and, if he requires it, to fight under him, or lead an army along with him.' To this, our answer is that we do, when occasion requires, give help to kings, and that, so to say, a divine help, 'putting on the whole armour of God.' And this we do in obedience to the injunction of the apostle, 'I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority'; and the more any one excels in piety, the more effective help does he render to kings, even more than is given by soldiers, who go forth to fight and slay as many of the enemy as they can. And to those enemies of our faith who require us to bear arms for

the commonwealth, and to slay men, we can reply: 'Do not those who are priests at certain shrines, and those who attend on certain gods, as you account them, keep their hands free from blood, that they may with hands unstained and free from human blood, offer the appointed sacrifices to your gods? and even when war is upon you, you never enlist the priests in the army. If that, then, is a laudable custom, how much more so, that while others are engaged in battle, these too should engage as the priests and ministers of God, keeping their hands pure, and wrestling in prayers to God on behalf of those who are fighting in a righteous cause, and for the king who reigns righteously, that whatever is opposed to those who act righteously may be destroyed!'" And at the close of the chapter, in explaining that Christians, through their peaceful lives, are much more helpful to kings than soldiers are, Origen says: — "And none fight better for the king than we do. We do not, indeed, fight under him, although he require it; but we fight on his behalf, forming a special army—an army of piety—by offering our prayers to God." This is the way in which the Christians of the first centuries regarded war, and such was the language that their leaders addressed to the rulers of the earth at a period when martyrs perished by hundreds and by thousands for having confessed the religion of Jesus, the Christ. And now is not the question settled as to whether a Christian may or may not go to war? All young men brought up according to the doctrine of the Church called Christian, are obliged at a specified date during every autumn, to report at the bureaus of conscription and, under the guidance of their spiritual directors, deliberately to renounce the religion of Jesus. Not long ago, there was a peasant who refused military service on the plea that it was contrary to the Gospel. The doctors of the Church explained to the peasant his error; but, as the peasant had faith, not in their words, but in those of Jesus, he was thrown into prison, where he

remained until he was ready to renounce the law of Christ. And all this happened after Christians had heard for eighteen hundred years the clear, precise, and practical commandment of their Master, which teaches not to consider men of different nationality as enemies, but to consider all men as brethren, and to maintain with them the same relations existing among compatriots; to refrain not only from killing those who are called enemies, but to love them and to minister to their needs. When I had understood these simple and precise commandments of Jesus, these commandments so ill adapted to the ingenious distortions of commentators—I asked myself what would be the result if the whole Christian world believed in them, believed not only in reading and chanting them for the glory of God, but also in obeying them for the good of humanity? What would be the result if men believed in the observance of these commandments at least as seriously as they believe in daily devotions, in attendance on Sunday worship, in weekly fasts, in the holy sacrament? What would be the result if the faith of men in these commandments were as strong as their faith in the requirements of the Church? And then I saw in imagination a Christian society living according to these commandments and educating the younger generation to follow their precepts. I tried to picture the results if we taught our children from infancy, not what we teach them now—to maintain personal dignity, to uphold personal privileges against the encroachments of others (which we can never do without humiliating or offending others)—but to teach them that no man has a right to privileges, and can neither be above or below any one else; that he alone debases and demeans himself who tries to domineer over others; that a man can be in a no more contemptible condition than when he is angry with another; that what may seem to be foolish and despicable in another is no excuse for wrath or enmity. I sought to imagine the results

if, instead of extolling our social organization as it now is, with its theatres, its romances, its sumptuous methods for stimulating sensuous desires—if, instead of this, we taught our children by precept and by example, that the reading of lascivious romances and attendance at theatres and balls are the most vulgar of all distractions, and that there is nothing more grotesque and humiliating than to pass one's time in the collection and arrangement of personal finery to make of one's body an object of show. I endeavored to imagine a state of society where, instead of permitting and approving libertinism in young men before marriage, instead of regarding the separation of husband and wife as natural and desirable, instead of giving to women the legal right to practise the trade of prostitution, instead of countenancing and sanctioning divorce—if, instead of this, we taught by words and actions that the state of celibacy, the solitary existence of a man properly endowed for, and who has not renounced the sexual relation, is a monstrous and opprobrious wrong; and that the abandonment of wife by husband or of husband by wife for the sake of another, is an act against nature, an act bestial and inhuman. Instead of regarding it as natural that our entire existence should be controlled by coercion; that every one of our amusements should be provided and maintained by force; that each of us from childhood to old age should be by turns victim and executioner—instead of this I tried to picture the results if, by precept and example, we endeavored to inspire the world with the conviction that vengeance is a sentiment unworthy of humanity; that violence is not only debasing, but that it deprives us of all capacity for happiness; that the true pleasures of life are not those maintained by force; and that our greatest consideration ought to be bestowed, not upon those who accumulate riches to the injury of others, but upon those who best serve others and give what they have to lessen the woes of their kind. If instead of regarding the taking of

an oath and the placing of ourselves and our lives at the disposition of another as a rightful and praiseworthy act—I tried to imagine what would be the result if we taught that the enlightened will of man is alone sacred; and that if a man place himself at the disposition of any one, and promise by oath anything whatever, he renounces his rational manhood and outrages his most sacred right. I tried to imagine the results, if, instead of the national hatred with which we are inspired under the name of “patriotism”; if, in place of the glory associated with that form of murder which we call war—if, in place of this, we were taught, on the contrary, horror and contempt for all the means—military, diplomatic, and political—which serve to divide men; if we were educated to look upon the division of men into political States, and a diversity of codes and frontiers, as an indication of barbarism; and that to massacre others is a most horrible forfeit, which can only be exacted of a depraved and misguided man, who has fallen to the lowest level of the brute. I imagined that all men had arrived at these convictions, and I considered what I thought would be the result. Up to this time (I said), what have been the practical results of the doctrine of Jesus as I understand it? and the involuntary reply was, Nothing. We continue to pray, to partake of the sacraments, to believe in the redemption, and in our personal salvation as well as that of the world by Jesus the Christ—and yet that this salvation will never come by our efforts, but will come because the period set for the end of the world will have arrived when the Christ will appear in his glory to judge the quick and the dead, and the kingdom of heaven will be established. Now the doctrine of Jesus, as I understood it, had an entirely different meaning. The establishment of the kingdom of God depended upon our personal efforts in the practice of Jesus’ doctrine as propounded in the five commandments, which instituted the kingdom of God upon earth. The kingdom of God upon

earth consists in this, that all men should be at peace with one another. It was thus that the Hebrew prophets conceived of the rule of God. Peace among men is the greatest blessing that can exist upon this earth, and it is within reach of all men. This ideal is in every human heart. The prophets all brought to men the promise of peace. The whole doctrine of Jesus has but one object, to establish peace—the kingdom of God—among men. In the Sermon on the Mount, in the interview with Nicodemus, in the instructions given to his disciples, in all his teachings, Jesus spoke only of this, of the things that divided men, that kept them from peace, that prevented them from entering into the kingdom of heaven. The parables make clear to us what the kingdom of heaven is, and show us the only way of entering therein, which is to love our brethren, and to be at peace with all. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, proclaimed the approach of the kingdom of God, and declared that Jesus was to bring it upon earth. Jesus himself said that his mission was to bring peace:— “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John). And the observance of his five commandments will bring peace upon the earth. They all have but one object—the establishment of peace among men. If men will only believe in the doctrine of Jesus and practise it, the reign of peace will come upon earth—not that peace which is the work of man, partial, precarious, and at the mercy of chance; but the peace that is all-pervading, inviolable, and eternal. The first commandment tells us to be at peace with every one and to consider none as foolish or unworthy. If peace is violated, we are to seek to re-establish it. The true religion is in the extinction of enmity among men. We are to be reconciled without delay, that we may not lose that inner peace which is the true life (Matthew). Everything is comprised in this commandment; but Jesus knew the worldly temptations that prevent peace

among men. The first temptation perilous to peace is that of the sexual relation. We are not to consider the body as an instrument of lust; each man is to have one wife, and each woman one husband, and one is never to forsake the other under any pretext (Matthew). The second temptation is that of the oath, which draws men into sin; this is wrong, and we are not to be bound by any such promise (Matthew). The third temptation is that of vengeance, which we call human justice; this we are not to resort to under any pretext; we are to endure offences and never to return evil for evil (Matthew). The fourth temptation is that arising from difference in nationalities, from hostility between peoples and States; but we are to remember that all men are brothers, and children of the same Father, and thus take care that difference in nationality leads not to the destruction of peace (Matthew). If men abstain from practising any one of these commandments, peace will be violated. Let men practise all these commandments, which exclude evil from the lives of men, and peace will be established upon earth. The practice of these five commandments would realize the ideal of human life existing in every human heart. All men would be brothers, each would be at peace with others, enjoying all the blessings of earth to the limit of years accorded by the Creator. Men would beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, and then would come the kingdom of God—that reign of peace foretold by all the prophets, which was foretold by John the Baptist as near at hand, and which Jesus proclaimed in the words of Isaiah:—“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.’... And he began to say unto them, To-day hath this Scripture been fulfilled in your ears” (Luke). The

commandments for peace given by Jesus—those simple and clear commandments, foreseeing all possibilities of discussion, and anticipating all objections—these commandments proclaimed the kingdom of God upon earth. Jesus, then, was, in truth, the Messiah. He fulfilled what had been promised. But we have not fulfilled the commands we must fulfil if the kingdom of God is to be established upon earth—that kingdom which men in all ages have earnestly desired, and have sought for continually, all their days.

