

The Inevitable Revolution

by Leo Tolstoy

“The kingdom of God is within us, and is attained by effort.”

“There are none so deaf as those who refuse to hear.”

I know that many, many people, especially the so-called educated, having glanced at this article of mine and seeing what it is about, will shrug their shoulders, smile contemptuously, and not read any further. “It is the same old nonresistance. How is it he is not yet tired of it?” they will say.

I know that will be so: firstly, for people who call themselves learned, and whose learning does not accord with what I say; and secondly, for people carried away by their activity as rulers or revolutionaries, whom my article will present with the dilemma of acknowledging as absurd either the things they have been and are doing and for the sake of which they have sacrificed so much, or what I am now saying. It will be the same for many so-called educated people, who in the most important questions of life are accustomed, without using their own heads, to adopt opinions professed by the majority of those among whom they live and which justify the positions they hold.

But I know that all who think for themselves and are as yet unspoiled by the heap of empty pseudo-knowledge, which in our day is called science, will be with me. I know this because, for people who think for themselves, as well as for the vast majority of laboring men, the folly and immorality of causing themselves useless suffering are daily becoming more and more evident. The former as well as the latter can, in our times, no longer help acknowledging the simple and now glaring truth that, to improve life, it is only necessary to stop doing that which causes these sufferings.

1

As far back as we know the social life of man, we know that besides family, tribal, and commercial relations, men were also bound together by the subjection of the many to one or several rulers. This subjection of some by others – of the majority by the minority – was so general to all nations and had existed so long that all men, both those in power over the many and those who submitted to them, considered such an arrangement of life inevitable, natural, and the only one possible for social human existence. The rulers considered that, being ordained by God Himself to have power over the people, they ought to try to use their power in the best way to secure a quiet, peaceful, and happy life for their subjects.

This was often expressed by the sages and was also in the religious teachings of the oldest and most numerous part of mankind: in the religious books of China and India, the Shoo King, and the laws of Manu. The subjects considered that such an arrangement of life was foreordained by God and inevitable, and therefore they submitted meekly to power and upheld it

in order to enjoy as much freedom of interaction as possible with other subjects, who were under authority like themselves.

Such was the condition of human life based on force, and humanity lived in that way for ages. It was so in India, in China, in Greece, in Rome, and in medieval Europe. And however objectionable it may be to the human consciousness of our times, so it continues to be for the majority of men up to now. Both in Europe and in the East, subjects and rulers have lived for ages and continue to live now, without, for the most part, admitting the possibility of any other means of union except force.

And yet, in all the religious teachings of the ancient world – in Brahmanism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and the teachings of the Greek and Roman sages – alongside of the confirmation of the power of those who rule by force, another teaching was always expressed in various ways: the teaching that mutual love is the best means of uniting men, since it gives them the greatest blessedness. That thought has been variously expressed with various degrees of clarity in the different Eastern teachings. But 1900 years ago it was expressed with striking clarity and definition in Christianity. Christianity showed men not merely that love is a means of human interaction that gives happiness, but also that love is the highest law of life and that, therefore, the law of love is incompatible with the former order of things founded on violence.

The chief significance of Christianity and its distinction from all former teachings that preached love lay in the fact that, having proclaimed the law of love to be the highest law of life and one admitting of no exceptions, but always obligatory, it exposed those customary divergences from the law of love which, together with an acknowledgment of the beneficence of love, had been tolerated in the old order of life, founded on the power (supported by violence) of the rulers. Under the old order of life, violence, including killing in self-defense, in defense of one's neighbors or of one's country, or in punishment of crime was a necessary condition of social life.

But Christianity, making love the highest law of life, regarding all men as equals, preaching the forgiveness of every offense, injury, or deed of violence, and the return of good for evil, could never in any case allow the violence of one man to another, which always has death itself as a last resource. Therefore Christianity, in its true meaning, acknowledging love as the fundamental law of life, directly and distinctly rejected the violence that was at the base of the whole former system of life.

Such was and is the chief significance of Christianity. But those who accepted Christianity, having for ages lived under a complex governmental system resting on force, and not understanding its full importance, but instead trying to hide that importance from themselves and others, accepted only as much of Christianity as was not contrary to their established way of life. The Church teaching that grew up on original Christianity united the teaching of Christ with the ancient Hebrew teaching. It hid the essence of Christianity so skillfully under dogmas and injunctions quite foreign to it that violence, evidently incompatible with true Christianity, began to be looked upon both by the rulers and by the ruled, not only as not foreign to the Christian law of love, but as quite lawful and compatible with it.

Men lived, submitting to violence and committing it, and yet professed the teaching of love, which clearly rejected violence. That inner contradiction was always present in the Christian world, and became more and more developed mentally. In the other, larger, non-Christian part of the human race – in Egypt, India, and China (I do not speak of the Muslim world, which lived according to a teaching related to Christianity) – in Brahmanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism – where the law of love was also proclaimed to men living according to the law of

violence, the contradiction between the two incompatible theories was not so sharp or so strong as in Christianity. But though in the religious teachings of the East, India, and China the incompatibility of the law of love with the law of violence was not so plainly pointed out as in Christianity, that inner contradiction has done and is doing its work in the non-Christian world as well. It is making more and more clear to men the necessity of changing the old, outlived principle of violence for the law of love, which from various sides is entering men's consciousness.

Acknowledgment of the law of love, which was to supplant violence, penetrated human consciousness more and more – and yet life continued on its old foundations.

Things went on this way for centuries. But the time came when, in spite of all the efforts of the rulers and their helpers, the truth that the law of love is the highest law of human life, and that therefore violence, incompatible with love, cannot be the highest law of life, entered more and more into the consciousness of men. In our day the majority of men have become more or less conscious of it. It is a truth that is natural to and innate in man's spiritual nature, and that is expressed more or less clearly in all religious teachings, and especially so in Christianity. As it is impossible to extinguish a fire by smothering it with savings, so, when once it had kindled in human consciousness, it was impossible to stifle the truth, so clearly expressed in all religious teachings and so near to the hearts of men, that the unity natural to man is unity based on love and not on force.

This truth, not directly expressed, but stated in various propositions and demands that were its outcome, appeared everywhere more and more frequently, seeking application in life. Thus, in the Christian world sooner than elsewhere, this truth appeared in demands for the equality of citizens (though only those of one and the same country), the abolition of slavery, the acknowledgment of the rights of women, and even in the teachings of socialism, communism, and anarchism. And this truth has and is manifesting itself in all sorts of unions and peace congresses, and in many different sects – Christian as well as Muslim – that flatly deny violence and free themselves from subjection to it.

In the Christian world, and the Muslim, which is akin to it, this truth entered more clearly into the consciousness of men. But in the Far East it was also unceasingly doing its work, so that even in India and China, where violence is allowed by the religious law, violence and caste already appear in our times as something foreign to human nature.

All the people of the world, though they do not yet acknowledge the law of love in its full meaning, already feel the impossibility of continuing to live according to the old law of force, and seek a basis for their mutual interaction more in agreement with the spiritual growth of humanity. There is only once such basis, and it was announced thousands of years ago by the world's best men.

2

Violence, the former basis of unity among men, now no longer inspires people with the blind confidence it used to but, on the contrary, appears as something repugnant to their consciences. The majority of men now feel more or less vividly the necessity of arranging life on other bases than on violence. But the old customs, traditions, education, habits, and especially the arrangement of life are all such that men desirous of doing things demanded by the law of love do them by means of violence. They employ means directly opposed to the law of love, while claiming to act in its name.

Thus, in our time, in the name of love and for the good of the people, revolutionaries, communists, and anarchists perpetrate their destructions and murders. In the name of love, too, and again for the good of the people, the governments arrange their prisons, fortresses, exile systems, and executions. In the name of love and the highest welfare, not of one, but of all nations, diplomats arrange their alliances and congresses, resting on ever increasing and ever more elaborately armed armies. In the name of love, wealthy men, having gathered and retained wealth thanks to laws enforced by violence, arrange all sorts of philanthropic institutions, the security of which is again guarded by violence.

This is done everywhere.

The great, unnoticed evil of violence is perpetrated for the sake of things which appear good, and are intentionally paraded in that light. And, as must needs be the case, this not only fails to improve our condition, but makes it worse. Therefore, the condition of men in our time deteriorates more and more, and has become incomparably worse than that of men in ancient times. It has grown worse because the means of violence have increased a hundredfold, and the increase in the means of violence has increased the evil done by violence.

However cruel and inhuman the Neros and Ivan the Terribles may have been, they had not the means of acting upon people that the Napoleons and Bismarcks now have with their wars, or the English Parliaments have with their repression of Hindus, or our Russian Schlüsselburgs have with their hard labor and exiles. There were in olden times men like Solovévý the Robber and Pougatchéf, but there were not those means of murder – bombs and dynamite – which make it possible for one weak man to kill hundreds. In ancient times some were the slaves of others, but there was not the general seizure of land there is now. Nor was there such difficulty in obtaining the necessities of life, and therefore there was not that desperate condition in which millions of our unemployed now find themselves – a position far worse than that formerly endured by the slaves.

Today the workmen seek slavery and suffer because they cannot find a master slave owner. In our days, just because it is not acknowledged that violence causes evil, and because this evil is hidden behind good intentions, the condition of the working masses (especially with the present means of communication, armaments, and the deprivation of the masses) has reached the highest degree of destitution. Their irritation against the rich and powerful has reached the highest point, just as on the part of the rich and powerful the consciousness of the insecurity of their position has reached its highest point, as well as their fear and ill-will toward the working people.

It is becoming ever more and more impossible for the life of men, rulers or ruled, to continue in its present condition. This is vividly felt by the former as well as by the latter. Life was possible, with its division into dozens of hostile states, with their emperors, kings, armies, and diplomats, and with their seizure of the fruits of the people's toil for armaments and the maintenance of armies, so long as each nation naively imagined that it alone was a real nation, that all the others were enemies and barbarians, and that it was not only laudable to devote labor and life to the defense of one's people and its rulers, but that this was inevitable and as natural as to eat, to marry, or to breathe.

Such a life was possible when men believed poverty and riches to be conditions foreordained by God, and when the powerful and rich never doubted the lawfulness of their position. In their souls, before God, they were sincerely proud of it, considering themselves to be a chosen, peculiar kind of men, while the common people, the "villains," those who worked with their hands or traded, they considered creatures of a lower race. And the subjected and poor believed

that the powerful and rich were really a peculiar kind of men, ordained by God Himself to rule over them, just as for them themselves He had foreordained a life of subjection and poverty.

Such a life was possible in the Christian world, so long as it never entered the heads either of the rulers or of the ruled to doubt the Catholic, Orthodox, Greek, or Lutheran religions. These were called Christian, though they allowed not merely complete inequality but downright slavery, and considered the killing of human beings permissible and even laudable. People believed so firmly in this artificial religion that it was not necessary to defend it either by conscious fraud or by force.

This went on for centuries, but the time came when all that made such a life possible began to crumble away. At last the people of the whole world, and especially of Christendom, became conscious that not they alone – Germans, French, Japanese, or Russians – live in the world. They became aware that not they alone want to safeguard the welfare of their nation, but that all are in the same position and, therefore, all war is not merely ruinous to the masses, who receive no advantages but only get privations from it, but is also quite unreasonable.

Besides this, the people of our time have become more or less clearly conscious that the taxes taken from them are not used for their good, but are, for the most part, spent on things harmful to them: on wars and on the luxuries of their rulers. They are aware that wealth is not something granted from above, as they formerly believed, but is the fruit of a whole chain of deceptions, extortions, and deeds of violence practiced on the laboring people. In the depths of their souls the powerful and rich in our time know this, but not having the courage to give up their position, they try to maintain it either by rude violence, fraud, or concessions.

Besides being divided into different nationalities, with some held in subjection and anxious for freedom, and with others dominant and anxious to withhold freedom, men are also now everywhere divided into two hostile and embittered classes. The workers are defrauded, humiliated, and conscious of the injustice of their position, while the rulers and the rich, also conscious of the injustice of their position, are yet anxious to retain it at any cost. For the attainment of their aims, both groups are ready to commit, and actually are committing, the greatest crimes: frauds, robberies, spying, murders, explosions, and executions. As a result, the condition of humanity has now evidently become such as cannot long continue.

It is true, there still are people who wish to assure themselves and the workers that, for the establishment of a new order in which evil will not exist and all will be happy, just one more convincing defense of the existing injustice, one more beautiful theory as to the arrangement of life in the future, or just one more effort to fight the foe is all that we need. Such people exist among the rulers also. They try to assure themselves and others that mankind cannot live otherwise than as it has been living for hundreds and thousands of years, and (however unpleasant this may be) that there is no need to change anything. They are convinced that it is only necessary to unflinchingly crush all attempts to alter the existing order, and, without refusing the “reasonable” demands of the people, to lead them firmly along the path of moderate progress – and then all will be well.

In both camps there are such believers, but people no longer have faith in them, and the two hostile camps are becoming ever more and more hostile. The working people’s envy, hatred, and embitterment against the powerful and rich, and the latter’s fear and hatred of the working people, are growing greater and greater, and are more and more infecting both sides with mutual hatred.

The position of people in our time is terrible, and the cause of this terrible position is that we live, not according to a view of life suited to our consciousness, but according to a view of life that was natural to our ancestors a thousand years before our era, but which cannot now satisfy our spiritual demands. The reason is that we, who more or less clearly realize that love as the basis which, replacing force, can and must unite men, still employ that force which united men in old times, but is no longer suited to us, is contrary to our consciousness, and therefore not only fails to unite, but now even separates mankind.

Could an old man be happy, or rather, could he help being unhappy if he wished to live the life of a youth; or a grown-up man, if he wished to live the life of a child? However much a man might try to continue to live the life of an age he had outgrown, he would be brought, willingly or unwillingly, if not by his reason then by his sufferings, to live in conformance with his age.

It is the same with human societies and with mankind as a whole, if in its life it is guided, not by a consciousness suitable to its growth, but by one it has long outgrown. And that is what is happening to mankind in our time.

We do not and cannot know the conditions of birth, origin, or disappearance either of an individual or of mankind. But within the limits of time attainable by us, we know quite surely that the life of mankind has always been, and still is, subject to the same law of gradual growth and development to which the life of an individual is subject. As we see in the life of each individual that the main direction of his activity is guided by his understanding of the meaning of life – by his conscious or unconscious religious view of life – we see the same in the life of the whole of mankind.

It is natural and almost inevitable that an individual's progress should be hindered by the fact that, being accustomed to the habits of a stage he has already outgrown, he is reluctant and dilatory in abandoning them. Such a person often gives himself up to pursuits suitable to his former state and intentionally tries by fictitious reasoning to justify this continuation in a way of life no longer natural to him. So also humanity, clinging by natural inertia to a previous and now outworn arrangement of life, justifies that delay to itself by fictitious reasoning which, in the case of humanity, always takes the form of pseudo-religious beliefs and equally false "scientific" theories.

There are many superstitions which cause men to suffer, but there is none more general or more harmful in its results than the one which assures men that human consciousness (that which finds expression in teachings about the meaning of life and about the guidance for conduct flowing from it, and which is called religion) can stand still and remain unaltered at all periods of human life.

It is this superstition, causing human societies to live according to religious and scientific teachings which always lag behind humanity's continually developing consciousness, that has always been one of the chief sources of those misfortunes which have overtaken human societies. And always, the greater the portion of mankind that endured these delays and the longer they lasted, the greater were the consequent disasters.

It happens that these hindrances arise, and are especially noticeable, among some small portion of humanity, but it also happens that the spirit of retardation seizes the whole human race, as is happening now. Thus, the retardation of one section of humanity in progress toward a more reasonable life, brought about by the abuses of the Roman Church (reaching to the utmost perversion of the essence of Christ's teaching), affected only a comparatively small portion of

humanity: those subject to the papal superstition. And the disasters brought on by the Reformation and the wars that followed it were of comparatively short duration.

But it also happens that people live for centuries in discord with their consciousness. This happens, not to certain nations merely, nor in regard to some local religious or social question merely, nor in regard to minor questions, but to the whole of mankind and in regard to questions touching the bases of life common to all. Consequently, the disasters resulting from such a stoppage of life, and from its guidance by religious principles no longer accordant with men's consciousness, continue for a very long time, and are particularly great. Such is the position in which, not a part, but the whole of mankind is now living as a result of the fact that they continue, through inertia, to rely on violence for their unification. This was once inevitable and common to all the nations, but they are now more and more clearly perceiving another, higher basis – love – which is to replace the old methods of violence.

4

Three, or even two, centuries ago, men called on by the Head of State to join the army did not doubt for an instant that, however hard what was demanded of them might be, they did not do merely a good thing, but something unavoidably necessary by going to war. They believed that they were sacrificing their freedom, labor, and even their lives in a holy cause: defending their country against its enemies and, above all, fulfilling the will of their God-appointed monarch. But now, every man who is sent to the wars (universal conscription, in particular, having helped to expose the fraud of patriotism) knows that those against whom he is being sent are men like himself, deceived by their rulers in the same way. Knowing this (especially in the Christian world), he cannot help seeing all the insanity and immorality of the action forced upon him. And, understanding its insanity and immorality, he cannot help despising and hating those who enforce it upon him.

So also, in olden times when people paid their taxes, yielding their labor to their governments, they felt sure that what they gave was needed for important and necessary things. Moreover, they regarded those who disposed of this produce of their labor almost as holy and infallible men. Now, almost every workman looks upon the government, if not as a band of robbers, at any rate as men concerned about their own interests, and certainly not about those of the people. Now he looks upon the necessity of putting his labor at the government's disposal as a temporary evil from which, with the whole power of his soul, he hopes and longs, one way or another, to soon liberate himself.

Two hundred, or even one hundred years ago, people regarded riches as a sign of worth and the accumulation of wealth as a virtue. They respected the rich and tried to imitate them. Now people, especially the poor, despise and hate the rich simply for being rich, and every attempt on the part of the rich to share some of their wealth in one way or another with the poor only evokes from the latter yet greater hatred of the rich.

In former times, the powerful and rich had faith in their position and knew that the working people believed in its lawfulness, and the people really did believe that the positions of the rich and of themselves were foreordained. Now, both the rich and the poor know that there is no justification either for the power of the rulers, or for the wealth of the rich, or for the oppression of the workers. Now they both know that, for the powerful and rich to maintain their position and for the workers to liberate themselves from their dependence, neither the former nor the

latter must disdain the employment of any possible means to attain their aim, including deception, bribery, and murder.

Both parties do so. And, worst of all, they do it knowing in the depth of their hearts that they will gain nothing by it, and that the continuance of such life is becoming more and more impossible. They search, but do not find a way of escape from this position. But the inevitable escape, one and the same for them all, reveals itself ever more and more clearly. There is but one way of escape: to liberate one's self from the belief, once common to mankind, in the necessity and lawfulness of violence, and to assimilate the belief, suitable to the present age of humanity and preached by all the religions of the world, in the necessity and lawfulness of love, excluding all violence of whatever kind.

Face to face with this decisive step, which confronts all mankind today, the people of the world now stand in indecision. But whether they like it or not, they cannot but take that step. They cannot help taking it, because the religious belief that sanctioned the power of some men over others has outlived its day. The new faith, suitable for our time, faith in the highest law of love, is entering more and more into men's consciousness.

One would think the sufferings arising from the violence men do to one another would awaken in them the thought that they are themselves to blame for their sufferings. "If people are themselves to blame, and I am a man, it follows that I am at fault," is what one would expect each one to say to himself. And consequently, one would expect him to ask himself, "What have I done to cause the misfortunes from which I and everyone else is suffering?"

That is what one might expect, but the superstition that some men not only have the right, but are specially called to arrange and are able to arrange the lives of others, is so deeply rooted in men's habits as a result of life having been so long based on violence, that the thought of his own part in the evil arrangement of human life occurs to no one. They all accuse one another. Some accuse those who they think ought to arrange their lives for them, and have not arranged them properly. Others, who arrange people's lives for them, are dissatisfied with those whose lives they arrange. And both the former and the latter ponder over the most intricate and difficult questions, but do not put to themselves the question that seems most natural: "What must I do to change the arrangement of life which I consider bad, and in which I cannot avoid participating in one way or another?"

Love must supersede violence. "Granting that it is so," people will say, "how, in what way, must and can the change come about? What must be done that this change should be accomplished, and the life of violence exchanged for a life of love?" "What is to be done?" ask both the rulers and the ruled, the revolutionaries and those engaged in public life, always attaching to the words, "What is to be done?" the meaning of, "How should men's lives be organized?"

They all ask how to arrange men's lives – what to do with other people – but no one asks, "What must I do with myself?"

The superstition that religion is immutable, which has led people to accept as lawful the rule of some men over others, has given birth also to another superstition (flowing from the first), which more than anything else hinders people from passing from a life of violence to a peaceful and loving life: the superstition that some men should and ought to organize the lives of others. Thus, the chief cause of men's stagnation in a form of life they already admit to be wrong lies in the amazing superstition (the outcome of the superstition of the immutability of religion) that some men not only can, but also have the right to, predetermine and forcibly organize the lives of others.

People need only free themselves from this common superstition and it would at once become clear to all that the life of every group of men gets arranged only in the same way that each individual arranges his own life. And if men – both those who arrange others' lives and those who submit to such arranging – would only understand that, it would become evident to all that nothing can justify any kind of violence between men, and that violence is not only a violation of love and even of justice, but of common sense.

Therefore, the deliverance of men from the disasters they now endure lies, first of all, in freeing one's self from the superstition of the immutability of religion, from the false and already obsolete religious doctrine of the divine right of the powers that be, and from the belief in the lawfulness and utility of violence that flows from it.

5

“Love, instead of laws executed by violence, is all very well! We will grant that the acceptance of love instead of violence as the means of uniting men would increase their welfare, but it would only do so if all accepted the law of love as obligatory,” is what people generally say. “But what is to become of all those who reject force, while living among people who have not rejected it? They will be deprived of everything, will be tormented, and will become the slaves of those who live by violence.”

This, and always this, is said by those who defend violence without trying to understand what is included in the teaching of love.

I will not speak of the fact that, if violence has ever protected the life and tranquility of men, it has, on the other hand, innumerable times been the cause of the greatest calamities – calamities that could not have happened if people had not tolerated violence. I will not speak of all the horrors that, from the earliest times, have been committed in consequence of the acceptance of the necessity of violence. Nor will I speak of the horrors of ancient and medieval wars, nor of the horrors of the great French Revolution, nor of the 30,000 communists of the year 1870, nor of the horrors of the Napoleonic, Franco-Prussian, and Turkish wars, nor of the Indian pacifications, nor of the present affairs in Persia, nor of the massacre of Armenians now taking place, nor of the murders and executions in Russia, nor of the many millions of workmen continually perishing of want and hunger.

We cannot weigh and decide the question whether more or less material evil would have resulted from the application of violence or the law of love to social life, because we do not and cannot know what would have happened had but a small portion of mankind followed the law of love, while the greater number continued to live by violence. That question cannot be solved, either by experience or by argument. The question is a religious and moral one, and is therefore solved, not by experience, but by one's inner consciousness. Like all religious and moral questions, it is solved, not by considerations of what is profitable, but by what man considers good or bad, right or wrong.

The relation of people of our world to the question of applying the law of love, and the inseparably connected conception of nonresistance to evil, illustrates more clearly than anything else the total absence in the people of our time, not only of Christian belief, or of any kind of religious belief, but of an understanding of what constitutes religious belief itself.

“The law of love, excluding force, is impracticable because it might happen that a scoundrel would kill a helpless child before our eyes,” they say.

People do not ask what they are to do when they see a man led out to execution, or see people being taught how to slay one another, or factory hands – men, women, and children – being killed off by unhealthy labor. They see all this, and not only never ask what they are to do, but themselves take part in the things: executions, army service and training, the starving of workmen, and many other things of the kind. But they are greatly interested and disturbed by the question of how to deal with a man who slays an imaginary child before their eyes. The fate of that imaginary child touches them so nearly that they cannot admit that one of the inevitable conditions of love is the non-use of violence. In reality, however, what concerns these people, who wish to justify violence, is not the fate of the imaginary child at all, but it is their own fate, their own way of life, supported by violence, and not maintainable if violence is repudiated.

It is always possible to protect a child by interposing one's own body to receive the murderer's blow. But this thought, natural to a man guided by love, cannot enter the heads of those who live by violence, for such people have not, and cannot have, any but animal motives for their actions.

In reality, the question of applying the demands of love to life can be brought to the simplest conclusion, which has always been accepted, and cannot help but be accepted, by reasonable people: love is irreconcilable with doing to others what one does not wish for one's self. It is irreconcilable, therefore, with wounding, depriving of freedom, or murdering other men – actions that are always inevitably included in the idea of violence. Therefore, it is possible to live by violence, not acknowledging the law of love as a religious law; or it is possible to live according to the law of love, and not admit the necessity for violence. To regard the law of force – *i.e.* violence – as Divine, and the law of love also as Divine, appears impossible. Yet, all the people of our day live in this most glaring contradiction – and especially the people of the Christian world.

“But this is all abstract argument. Granting that I believe in the law of love, what am I – John, Peter, Mary, or anyone – to do if I believe that humanity has attained the point at which it is necessary to enter into a new way of life? What am I – John, Peter, or Mary – to do so that the evil life of violence should cease and the good life based on love should be established? What must I, just I – John, Peter, or Mary – do to help that change?”

This question, though it seems so natural to us, is as strange as though a man, ruining his life by drinking, gambling, debauchery, or quarrels should ask, “What am I to do to improve my life?”

Ashamed as one is to answer so naive a question, I will yet do so for the sake of those who may need such an answer.

The answer to the question of what a man must do, who disapproves of the existing arrangement of life and wishes to change and improve it, is simple, natural, and identical for all not dominated by the superstition of violence. It is this: **FIRST**, to leave off doing direct violence one's self, or preparing to do it; **SECOND**, to take no part in any kind of violence done by others, or in preparations for violence; and **THIRD**, not to approve of any violence.

FIRST, not to do direct violence one's self means not to seize anyone with one's own hands, and not to beat or kill anyone, either for personal motives or on the pretext of public service.

SECONDLY, to take no part in any kind of violence is not only not to be a police officer, governor, judge, jurymen, tax collector, czar, minister, or soldier, but also not to take part in lawsuits, either as plaintiff, defendant, guard, or jurymen.

THIRDLY, not to approve of any kind of violence means not making use of any kind of violence for one's own profit through speech, writing, or actions, expressing neither praise of or

agreement with violence itself, and not taking part in any actions upholding violence or supported by it.

It may easily happen that, if a man behaves so – refusing to have anything to do with army service, law courts, passports, the payment of taxes, or acknowledgment of authorities – and shows up the users of force and their supporters, he will be subjected to persecution. It is very likely that, in our times, such a man will be tortured, deprived of his property, exiled, imprisoned, and perhaps even killed. But it may also happen that a man who does nothing of all this, but on the contrary obeys the demands of the authorities, will suffer from other causes just as much, or even more, than one who refuses to obey. It might also happen that a refusal, founded on the demands of love, to take part in deeds of violence would open other people's eyes and lead many to refuse in the same way, so that the authorities would no longer be able to use violence against all who refused.

All this may be, or may not be, and therefore the answer to the question, "What must a man do?" cannot, for one who acknowledges the truth and applicability of the law of love, be founded on the anticipated results of actions. The results of our actions are not in our power. What actions are natural, and above all what actions are unnatural to a man, always and only depend on the man's faith. If he believes in the necessity of violence and believes in it religiously, then such a man will do violence – not for the sake of good results he expects from violence, but simply because he so believes. Similarly, if a man believes in the law of love, he will fulfill the demands of love and keep from actions contrary to the law of love, quite independently of any consideration of results, and merely because he so believes and cannot act differently.

Therefore, to fulfill the law of love and substitute it for the law of violence, one thing alone is needed: that people should believe in the law of love as they now believe in the necessity for violence. Let men but believe in the law of love, even approximately, as firmly as they now believe in the necessity for violence, and the question of how those who have rejected violence must deal with those who use violence will no longer be a question. Without any effort or shock, the life of men will take a form unknown to us, toward which mankind is moving, and which will release humanity from the evils from which it now suffers.

Is this possible?

6

There is but one solution, not of the question of social organization alone, but of all questions that agitate mankind. It lies in removing them from the seemingly broad and important, but really most narrow, insignificant, and always doubtful sphere of external activity, which pretends to aim, by scientific and social methods, at the good of all mankind. And it brings them to a sphere which seems narrow, but is in reality the widest, deepest, and above all the surest sphere of one's own personal, not physical, but spiritual life: the sphere of religion.

Only let each man for himself ask his real self, his soul, what he wants before God, or before his conscience if he does not wish to acknowledge a God, and at once the simplest, clearest, and most indubitable answers are obtained to what are apparently most complex and insoluble questions. Generally the questions themselves will disappear, and all that was complicated, tangled, insoluble, and tormenting will at once become simple, clear, joyful, and sure.

Whoever you may be – emperor, multi-millionaire, king, hangman, jailer, beggar, minister, thief, author, or monk – stop your activity for a moment and look into your holy of holies, your heart, and ask yourself what you, the real you, need in order best to live the hours or decades that

may still be left to you! And whoever you may be, if you but ask yourself about it sincerely and seriously, you cannot help giving yourself the answer that all men have given and do give themselves when they have or do put this question to themselves seriously and sincerely.

You certainly need one thing, the same that everyone always has needed and still needs: welfare¹, true welfare, not that which may be welfare today and may become evil tomorrow, and not that which is welfare for you alone and an evil to others. You need the one, real, undoubted welfare, which is so for you and for all men today, tomorrow, and everywhere. Such real welfare is given only to him who fulfills the law of his life. That law you know by your reason, by the teaching of all the sages of the world, and by your own heart's desire. That law is love: love of the highest perfection, love of God and of all that lives, and especially of the beings most like yourself – men.

Only let every one of us understand this, and he will at once also understand that his own and the whole world's sufferings are caused, not by some kind of wicked people guilty of the evil that is going on, but only by one thing: the fact that men live in conditions that have arisen from the use of violence, conditions contrary to love and incompatible with it. Therefore, the cause of the evil we all suffer from is not to be found in men, but in the false organizations of life by violence, which men consider unavoidable.

Let each man but understand that, and he will understand that it is not the thief who steals, not the rich man who gathers and keeps back wealth, not the ruler who signs a death warrant, not the executioner who carries it out, not the revolutionary who throws a bomb, not the diplomat who prepares for war, not the prostitute who yields her body and soul to dishonor, and not the soldier who shoots anyone he is ordered to shoot who are blameworthy. They do what they do only because they live in the false belief that violence is a necessity without which life is unimaginable.

When a man has understood this, he will see clearly all the injustice, cruelty, and unreasonableness of condemning people who have been brought to commit actions contrary to love by their obsolete belief in violence and in the complex conditions resulting from it. He will understand that it is not people's fault that they commit these actions, but that they commit them because of the existing superstition of violence, which can be destroyed, not by violence, but only by every man freeing himself from that pernicious superstition.

To liberate one's self from the superstition of violence, only one thing is necessary. One must free one's self from the general, pseudo-important questions of social activity, and must transfer all the efforts of one's soul from the sphere of external social activity to the fulfillment of the demands of one's inner, spiritual life. Those demands are clearly expressed by all the religious teachers of the world, as well as in the inner consciousness of each man. They call for the increase of the capacity to love in every man.

7

For life to continue in our day on the obsolete foundations sharply opposed to the truth acknowledged by everyone is impossible. Therefore, whether we like it or not, we must substitute the law of love for the law of violence in the arrangement of life. "But how will human life arrange itself on a foundation of love excluding violence?" No one can answer that question, nor does anyone need an answer. The law of love is not a law of social organization

¹ Transcriber's note – Good fortune, health, happiness, prosperity, and well-being.

for one or another nation or state, and which we can promote when we foresee (or rather, imagine we foresee) the conditions in which a desired change will come about. The law of love is also the law of life of the whole of mankind, and it would therefore be folly to imagine that we can know, or desire to know, the final aim both of our own life and the life of all mankind.

The fact that we do not know and cannot even imagine what the life of men, who believed in the law of love as people now believe in the necessity of violence, would be like only shows that, when we follow the law of love, we truly live, doing what is needful, each for himself, and for the life of mankind. We know that in following the law of love we do what is needful for ourselves, for only by following that law do we receive the highest good. We know that in following this law we also do what is needful for all mankind, because the good of mankind lies in union. Nothing can, by its very nature, bind men so closely and joyously together as the law of love, which also gives the highest good to the individual.

That is all I wished to say.

I believe with my whole soul that we are living on the eve of a great and worldwide revolution in the life of humanity. Every effort – even the smallest – to hasten the destruction of what must inevitably be destroyed, and the realization of what cannot help being realized, aids the approach of that revolution. I, who am now probably living out the last days of my life, could not help trying to impart this belief of mine to others.

Yes, we are standing on the threshold of a quite new and joyful life. The entrance into that life depends on our freeing ourselves from the ever-increasingly painful superstition that violence is necessary for the united life of men, and on our acceptance of that eternal principle of love which has already long lived in men's consciousness, and must inevitably replace the outworn, long-since unnecessary, and pernicious principle of violence.

*Published in the New York Times in two parts,
September 26th and October 3rd, 1909*

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