

Church and State

by Leo Tolstoy

Faith is the meaning given to life; it is that which gives force and direction to life. Every living man finds this meaning and lives upon its basis. If he does not find it, he dies. In the search after it, man makes use of everything worked out by humanity. All that is worked out by humanity is called revelation. Revelation is what helps man to understand the meaning of life. Such is man's relation to faith.

What a remarkable thing! There appear men who do their level best to get people to make use of this, rather than of that, form of revelation; they cannot rest until others accept their particular form of revelation; they curse, punish, and kill all the dissenters they can reach. Others do the same: they curse, punish, and kill all the dissenters they can reach. Others again do the same. And thus they all curse, punish, and kill one another, each demanding that all should believe just like them. It turns out that there are hundreds of faiths, and they all curse, punish, and kill one another.

At first I was startled and I marveled how it was that such an obvious absurdity, such an obvious contradiction, did not destroy faith itself. How could believing people remain in this deception?

Indeed, it is incomprehensible from the general point of view, and it proves incontestably that every faith is a deception and that all this is a superstition, as is proved by the now reigning philosophy. Looking from the general point of view, I, too, arrived incontestably at the recognition that all faiths are human deceptions. But I could not help but think, in spite of the very stupidity of the deception, its obviousness, and the fact that all humanity submits to it, that there was something that was not deceptive at the base of this deception. Otherwise, everything was so foolish that no one could be deceived by it. Even the submission to the deception, a submission common to all humanity living a true life, made me recognize the importance of the phenomenon that served as a cause of the deception. In consequence of this conviction, I began to analyze the Christian teaching that served as a foundation for the deception of the whole of Christian humanity.

This was the result from the general point of view. From the personal point of view – from the one in consequence of which every man and I, too, in order to live, must have faith in the meaning of life, and does have faith – this phenomenon of violence in matters of faith is still more striking in its absurdity.

Indeed, how, why, and for whom is it necessary that another should not only believe, but also profess his faith like myself? A man lives; consequently he knows the meaning of life. He has established his relation to God, he knows the truth of truths, and I know the truth of truths. Their expression may be different, but the essence must be one and the same since we are both men. How, why, and what can compel me to demand of anyone that he shall express his truth precisely as I do? I cannot compel a man to change his belief by violence, by cunning, or by deception (false miracles).

Faith is his life. How then can I take his faith from him and give him another? It is the same as taking his heart out of him and putting in another. I can do so only when his faith and mine

are words, and not what he lives by – an excrescence, and not a heart. This also cannot be done because it is impossible to deceive a man or make a man believe in what he does not believe – impossible, because he who believes, he who has established his relations to God and so knows that faith is man’s relation to God, cannot wish to establish the relation of another man to God by means of violence or deception. This is impossible, but it is done, and has been done everywhere and at all times. It could not be done because it is impossible, but something has been done which resembles it very much. What has been done is that men foist upon others a semblance of faith, and the others accept this semblance of faith – the deception of faith.

True faith cannot be foisted upon anyone and cannot be accepted on account of anything – violence, deception, or advantage – and so it is not faith, but a deception of faith. It is this deception of faith that is an old condition of the life of humanity.

In what does this deception consist and on what is it based? By what is it evoked for the deceivers, and by what does it maintain itself for the deceived? I will not speak of Brahmanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, or Islam, in which there appears the same phenomena, but not because it would be impossible to find the same deception. To anyone reading about these religions, it will be clear that in these faiths the same happened as in Christianity, but I will speak exclusively of Christianity because it is a faith known, necessary, and dear to us. In Christianity, the whole deception is built upon a fanciful conception of the church, which is based upon nothing and which from the beginning of the study of Christianity startles one by its unexpected and useless absurdity.

Among all the impious conceptions and words there is not a conception or word more impious than the conception of the church. There is not a conception that has created more evil than the conception of the church. In reality, the word means an assembly and nothing more, and is in this sense used in the gospels. In the languages of all the modern nations the word *ecclesia* signifies a house of prayer.

Beyond these meanings this word, in spite of fifteen hundred years of the existence of the deception of the church, has not penetrated into any language. From the definitions given to this word by the priests who need the deception of the church, it is evident that it is a preface that says, “Everything which I am going to say now is the truth, and if you do not believe it, I will have you burned, and will curse and in every way offend you.” This conception is a sophism that is necessary for certain dialectical purposes, and it remains the possession of those who need it. This conception does not exist at all among the people, either among the masses, or in society and in the midst of cultured people, although it is taught in catechisms. This definition (it is really a shame to have to analyze it, but it has to be done, because so many people give it out so seriously as something very important) is absolutely false. Nothing is really said when it is said that the church is an assembly of true believers because, if I say that an orchestra is an assembly of all the true musicians, then I have said nothing if I do not also say what I mean by true musicians. But according to theology, it turns out that the true believers are those who follow the teaching of the church, that is, those who are in the church.

To say nothing of the fact that there are hundreds of such true faiths, the definition does not say anything and, it would seem, is as useless as the definition of the orchestra as an assembly of true musicians. However, one immediately sees the motive behind all this. The church is true and one, and in it are the pastors and the flock. The God-ordained pastors teach this true and one doctrine: “Upon my word, everything we are going to say is the truth.” There is nothing else. The whole deception is in the word and the conception of the church. And the meaning of this deception is only that there are people who are dreadfully anxious to teach their faith to others.

Why are they so anxious to teach their faith to other people? If they had the true faith, they would know that faith is the meaning of life, the relation to God established by every man, and that, therefore, it is impossible to teach a faith, but only the deception of faith. But they want to teach. For what? The simplest answer would be that the pope needs cakes and eggs, and the bishop needs a palace, fish pie, and silk vestments. But this answer is insufficient. Such, no doubt, was the inward, psychological impulse for the deception, an impulse that supported the deception. But, analyzing in this manner, how could one man (an executioner) have decided to kill another man, against whom he has no malice? It would be insufficient to say that the executioner kills because he is given whiskey, a white loaf, and a red shirt. Even so, it would be insufficient to say that the Archbishop of Kiev with his monks fills bags with hay, calling them saintly relics, only for the purpose of having an income of thirty thousand rubles. Both actions are too terrible and too contrary to human nature for such a simple, coarse explanation to be sufficient. Both the executioner and the archbishop will, in explaining their acts, adduce a whole series of proofs, the chief foundation of which will be historic tradition. "A man must be executed. Men have been executed ever since the beginning of the world. If not I, another will. I will do it, I hope, with God's aid, better than any one else!" Even so will the archbishop speak: "External worship is necessary. Saintly relics have been worshipped ever since the beginning of the world. People worship the relics of the Grottoes and have been coming here. If not I, another man will manage things here. I hope, with God's aid, to be able to put to better God-pleasing use the money obtained in a blasphemous manner."

To understand the deception of faith, it is necessary to go to its beginning and source.

We speak of what we know of Christianity. Turning to the beginning of the Christian teaching in the gospels, we find that the teaching directly excludes external divine worship, condemns it, and in particular clearly and positively denies authoritarianism. But since Christ's time and nearer to our own times, we find a departure of the doctrine from these foundations, as laid down by Christ. This departure began with the times of the apostles and especially with Paul, the lover of the authoritarian teaching, and the farther Christianity spread, the more and more it deviated, adopted those very methods of external divine worship, and became authoritarian, the negation of which is so positively expressed by Christ. But in the first times of Christianity, the conception of the church was used only as a representation of all those who shared the belief which I regard as the true one. The conception is quite correct, so long as it does not include the expression of belief in words, but means the expression of it in one's whole life, since a belief cannot be expressed in words.

The concept of the true church was also used as an argument against dissenters. But previous to Emperor Constantine and the Nicene Council the church was only a concept. Since the time of Emperor Constantine and the Nicene Council the church has become an act – an act of deception. That deceptions of the archbishop with the relics, of the popes with the Eucharist, of the Iberian Virgin, of the Synods, and so forth, deceptions which, for their monstrousness, startle and frighten us so, began in nothing but the advantage of these persons. It is an old deception, and it did not begin with the advantages to individual persons merely. There does not exist a man so execrable as to have the courage to do so, if he were the first and if there were no other causes. The causes that led to it were bad. "By their fruit you shall know them." The beginning was evil: hatred, human pride, enmity against Arius and others. Another, a still greater evil, was the union of the Christians with the temporal power. The temporal power, Emperor Constantine, who according to the pagan conceptions stood upon the height of human greatness (he was counted among the gods), accepted Christianity, gave the whole nation an example, converted

the people, and lent a helping hand against the heretics and by means of an ecumenical council established the one true Christian faith.

The Christian Catholic faith was established forever [when it was embraced by Constantine]. So natural it is to submit to this deception, and up to now people believe in the saving power of this event, whereas it was an event when the majority of Christians renounced their faith. Those were the crossroads, where the vast majority of Christians took the pagan road on which they continue to travel until the present time. Charlemagne and Vladimir did the same.

And the deception of the church is continued until the present, a deception that consists in thinking that the acceptance of Christianity by the temporal power is necessary for those who understand the letter and not the spirit of Christianity, because the acceptance of Christianity without the renunciation of power is a scoffing at Christianity and a corruption of it.

The sanctification of the power of the state by Christianity is a blasphemy, a ruin of Christianity. Having for fifteen hundred years lived under this blasphemous union of putative Christianity and the state, we have to make a great effort in order to forget all the complex sophisms by means of which the whole teaching of Christ has been everywhere distorted so as to please the temporal power and to make its peace with the state by trying to explain the sanctity of the state and its possibility of being Christian.

In reality, the words “Christian state” have the same logic as the words “warm, hot ice.” Either there is no state, or there is no Christianity. To understand this clearly, it is necessary to forget all those fancies in which we are carefully educated, and to ask directly for the meaning of those historical and juridical sciences that we are taught. These sciences have no foundations at all; they are all nothing but an apology for violence.

We shall pass by the histories of the Persians, Medes, and so forth, and shall take the history of the state that was the first to form a union with Christianity. There was a robbers’ den in Rome. It grew through rapine, violence, and murder, and it conquered the nations. The robbers and their descendants, with leaders such as Caesar Augustus at their head, robbed and tortured the nations for the gratification of their lusts. One of the heirs of these robber leaders, Constantine, who had read a lot of books and had grown weary of his lustful life, preferred certain dogmas of Christianity to his former beliefs. He preferred the mass to the sacrificing of human victims, and the worship of the one God, with his Son Christ, to that of Apollo, Venus, and Zeus, and ordered this faith to be introduced among those whom he kept under his power.

“Kings rule over the nations, but it should not be thus among you. You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not have riches, you shall not judge, you shall not condemn, you shall suffer evil” – nobody told him all that. All he was told was, “Do you want to be called a Christian and to remain a leader of robbers – to beat, burn, wage war, fornicate, execute, and live in luxury? You may.”

And they arranged a counterfeit Christianity for him, and they arranged it pleasantly, better than could have been expected. They foresaw that, if he read the Gospel, he might come to see that all that was demanded in it was a Christian life, and not the building of temples and attendance in them. They foresaw this, and carefully arranged for him such a Christianity that he was able, without putting himself out, to live as of old, in pagan fashion. Indeed, Christ, the Son of God, came for the very purpose of redeeming him and everybody else. It was because Christ died that Constantine could live as he pleased. More than that, he could say words of repentance, swallow a piece of bread soaked in wine, that would be his salvation, and everything would be forgiven.

More than that, they even sanctified his robber's power and said that it was from God, and anointed him with oil. For this he, at their wish, arranged an assembly of the priests, commanded them to say what man's relation to God should be, and commanded that every man should repeat this. They did repeat it and were satisfied, and so this faith has existed for fifteen hundred years. Other leaders of robber bands introduced it, and they were all anointed, and everything is from God. (In our country a murderess of her husband, a harlot, was from God, and in France Napoleon was from God.) And for this the priests are not only from God, but almost Gods themselves, because in them sits the Holy Ghost. And He sits also in the Pope, and in our Synod with its commanders, the officials.

When an anointed person, that is, the leader of a band of robbers, wants to strike down his own people or a foreign nation, the priests hurry to make some holy water for him, sprinkle the cross with it (the one on which Christ, having carried it, died for having denied these very robbers), and bless him in his killing, hanging, and chopping off of heads.

All would have been well, but they could not agree, and the anointed persons began to call one another robbers – which they really are. The people began to listen, stopped believing in the anointed persons and the guardians of the Holy Ghost, and learned from them to call them, as is proper and as they call themselves, robbers and cheats.

But I only mention the robbers in passing, because they have corrupted the cheats. What I have been speaking about is the cheats, the so-called Christians. They became such through their union with the robbers; nor could it have been otherwise. They lost the road the moment they sanctified the first king and assured him that he was able to aid the faith with his violence – the faith having to do with meekness, self-renunciation, and endurance of insults. The whole history of the church as we know it today, the history of the hierarchy under the power of the kings, is a series of vain endeavors on the part of this unfortunate hierarchy to preserve the truth of the teaching by preaching it through lies and departing from it in deeds. The meaning conveyed by the hierarchy is based only on the doctrine that it wishes to teach. The teaching speaks of meekness, self-renunciation, love, and poverty, but the teaching is preached by means of violence and evil

For the hierarchy to have something to teach and to have disciples, it must not renounce the teaching. But, to clear itself and its illegitimate union with the power, it must by every cunning device conceal the essence of the teaching, and so transfer the centre of gravity of the teaching from the essence of the teaching to its external side. That is precisely what is done by the hierarchy, the source of that deception of faith which is preached by the church. The source is the union of the hierarchy, under the name of the church, with the power and with violence. The source of people's wishing to teach the faith to others is that the true faith arraigns them, and they are obliged to substitute their own invented faith for the true faith in order to be justified.

The true faith may be anywhere, except where the faith is obviously false such as in the nature of violence; it cannot be in the state religion. True faith may be in all so-called schisms and heresies, but certainly cannot be where it has united with the state. Strange to say, the appellations, "Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant faith," as established in common speech, mean nothing but "faith united with the temporal power," state religion, and so these appellations are false.

The concept of the church – the agreement of many, of the majority – and at the same time its nearness to the source of the teaching in the first two centuries of Christianity, was only one of the poor external proofs. Paul said, "I know from Christ Himself." Another said, "I know from Luke." And all said, "We think correctly, and the proof that we do is that there is a large

assembly of us, *ecclesia*, the church.” But it is only with the Council at Nicaea, which was established by the emperor, that for a part of those who professed the same teaching there began the direct and palpable deception.

“It seemed good to us and to the Holy Ghost,” they began to say then. The concept of the church not only remained a poor argument, but also even became a power for some people. It united with the temporal power and began to act as a power. And everything that united with the temporal power and fell under its sway stopped being faith and became a deception.

What does Christianity teach, regarding it as a teaching of any church or of all the churches?

Analyze it by mixing or subdividing it as you please, and the whole Christian teaching immediately divides up into two distinct parts. The first is the doctrine of the dogmas, beginning with the divine Son, the Holy Ghost, the relation between these persons, and ending with the Eucharist with wine or without wine, leavened or unleavened bread, and the moral teaching. The second is the doctrine of meekness, abstinence from litigation, bodily and spiritual purity, non-condemnation, liberation from the fetters of slavery, and love of peace. No matter how much the teachers of the church tried to mix these two sides of the teaching, they never did mingle, just as butter separating from water always keeps apart as large and small drops.

The difference between these two sides of the teaching is clear to anybody. Anybody may observe the fruits of either side of the teaching in the lives of the nations, and may from these fruits conclude which side is more important and, if we are allowed to speak of “more true,” which is more true. Looking upon the history of Christianity from this side, one is horror-struck. Without exception, from the very beginning to the very end, up to our own time, no matter what dogma we may view, even beginning with the first, the dogma of Christ’s divinity, down to the folding of the fingers, the communion with wine and without wine, the fruits of all these mental labors, used for the elucidation of the dogmas, are: malice, hatred, executions, expulsions, the murder of women and children, the stake, and torture. Looking upon the other side of the moral teaching, from the removal to the wilderness for the purpose of communing with God to the custom of distributing white loaves in the prisons, we find the fruits of this to be: all our concepts of goodness, all that leads to joy and comfort, and all that serves us as a guiding light in history.

It was possible for those people to err before whose eyes the fruits of either had not yet become evident, and it was even impossible not to err. It was even possible for those to err who were sincerely drawn into these disputes about the dogmas, without noticing that with these dogmas they were only serving the devil, and not God, without noticing that Christ had expressly said that he came to destroy all dogmas. It was also possible for those to err who, having inherited traditions about the importance of these dogmas, received such a perverse mental education that they could not see their error. It is possible for those ignorant people to err, to whom these dogmas mean nothing but words or fanciful representations. But for us, to whom the first meaning of the Gospel, which denies all dogmas, is revealed – for us who have before our eyes the fruits of these dogmas in history – for us it is impossible to err. History is for us a verification of the authenticity of the teaching; it is even a mechanical verification.

Is the dogma of the immaculate conception of the Virgin necessary, or not? What came from it? Malice, curses, and scoffing. Has it been of any use? None. Is the doctrine about not punishing the harlot necessary, or not? What came from it? Thousands and thousands of times men have been softened by this reminder.

Again, do all men agree on any of the dogmas? No. Do all agree that understanding should be given to him who asks? Yes.

Now, the first, the dogmas – on which all men do not agree, which are of no use to anyone, which ruin men – are what the hierarchy has been giving out as faith. The second, the virtues – what all men agree upon, what all men need, and what saves men – are what the hierarchy, without daring to deny it, has not dared to advance as the genuine teaching, because this teaching denies the hierarchy itself.

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