

WHAT IS RELIGION, OF WHAT DOES ITS ESSENCE CONSIST?

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CHAPTER I

During certain periods in the existence of all human societies, a time has come when religion has first strayed from its basic meaning, and then digressed further and further until it has lost track of this meaning and eventually ossified in the already established forms, at which point it has come to have less and less influence on people's lives.

At these times the educated minority, no longer believing in the existing religious teaching, simply pretend to believe in it because they find it necessary for the purpose of holding the masses to the established order of life. Although the masses might cling to the established religious forms through inertia, their lives are no longer guided by religious demands, but simply by popular custom and state regulations.

This has occurred many times in various human societies. But what is happening today in our Christian society has never happened before. Never before have the educated minority, those with the most influence on the masses, not only had no belief in the existing religion, but seemed convinced that today's world no longer has any need of one. Rather than persuading those who doubt the truth of the professed religion that there is a more rational and lucid doctrine than the existing one, they persuade them that on the whole religion has outlived itself and become not just useless, but a harmful organ of social life, like the caecum in the human body. These sorts of people do not understand religion as something known to us through inner experience, but as an external phenomenon, like an illness, that happens to overwhelm certain people, and which we can only investigate through external symptoms.

In the opinion of some of these people, religion originated from attributing a spirit to all the phenomena of nature (animism); in the opinion of others, from the supposition that it is possible to communicate with our deceased ancestors; and in a third opinion, through fear before the forces of nature.

And so the learned people of our time argue further that since science has proved that wood and stone cannot be animated, that deceased ancestors can no longer experience what the living are doing, and that natural phenomena can be explained by natural causes, the necessity for religion is obviated, together with all those constraints that have hampered people as a result of religious beliefs. In the opinion of these learned people there has been a period of ignorance: the religious period which humanity outlived long ago leaving occasional atavistic indications of its existence. Then followed a metaphysical period, and this has been outlived. Today we, enlightened people, are living in a scientific period, a period of positive science which will replace religion and lead humanity to a height of development which was unattainable while it was subordinated to superstitious religious teachings.

At the beginning of the year 1901, the renowned French scholar Berthelot delivered a speech in which he informed his audience that the age of religion has passed and that it must now be replaced by science. I refer to this speech because it was the first to fall into my hands and because it was delivered in the capital of the educated world by a person whom everyone recognizes to be a scholar. The same thought is constantly expressed everywhere, from philosophical treatises to newspaper feuilletons. In his speech Mr Berthelot says that formerly there were two

principles motivating human society: force and religion. Today these principles have become superfluous because *science* has replaced them. By the word science, Mr Berthelot evidently means, like all who believe in science, a science that embraces every aspect of human knowledge, harmoniously united, assessed according to its degree of importance and in command of such methods that the data obtained is indisputably true. But since there is really no such science, and what is referred to as science is a collection of incidental, totally disconnected items of knowledge which are often completely useless, and not only fail to present the indisputable truth but very often present the most crude delusions, displayed as the truth today and refuted tomorrow, it is obvious that the thing which Mr Berthelot claims must replace religion does not exist. Therefore when Mr Berthelot and those in agreement with him say that science will replace religion, their assertion is entirely arbitrary and based on a completely unjustified belief in the infallibility of science, a belief quite similar to faith in the infallibility of the Church. Moreover, those considered and referred to as learned are quite convinced that a science already exists which should and can replace religion and which has already obviated the need for it.

'Religion is obsolete; to believe in anything other than science is ignorance. Science will arrange all we need and we need only science to guide us through life.' This is what the scientists themselves say, as also do those members of the crowd who, despite being quite unscientific, trust the scientists and share their conviction that religion is an outlived superstition and that we need only science to guide us in life: in other words that we need absolutely nothing because science, by virtue of its very aim of investigating all that exists, can give no guidance to human life.

CHAPTER 2

The learned men of today have decided that religion is not necessary and that it will be replaced by science, or already has been. Yet it remains the case that today, just as before, not a single human society, or rational being, has lived, or can live without religion. (I say *rational* person because an irrational one may live without religion, just as an animal does.) A rational being cannot live without religion because it is only this that gives him the essential guidance as to what to do first and what follows. Precisely because religion is inherent to his nature the rational man cannot live without it. Every animal is guided in its behaviour by consideration of the immediate results of his actions (other than that to which he is impelled by the straightforward need of satisfying his desires). Having considered these consequences, by means of those faculties of comprehension in its possession, an animal makes his actions conform to them and always, unhesitatingly, behaves in the same way, i.e. in accord with these considerations. Thus, for example, a bee flies after honey and brings it back to its hive, because in winter it must have a supply of food for itself and for its young, and beyond this it knows nothing and can do nothing. A bird behaves in the same way when it builds a nest, or when it emigrates from North to South. All animals act in this way when they do something that does not result from direct, immediate need, but are stimulated by considerations of anticipated consequences. But this is not so with men. The difference between man and the animals is that an animal's cognitive faculties are restricted to what we call instinct, while man's basic cognitive faculty is his reason. The bee gathering his food can have no doubt as to whether or not he is doing something that is good or bad. But a man reaping the harvest, or gathering fruit, cannot help wondering whether he is undermining the growth of future crops, or whether he is depriving his neighbours of food, Nor can he help thinking about what will happen to the children he is feeding, and much else besides. The more important questions of conduct in life cannot be conclusively resolved by a rational person precisely because there is an abundance of consequences of which he is inevitably aware. Rational man, even if he does not know, then feels that in the more important questions of life he cannot be guided by personal impulses, nor by a consideration of the immediate consequences of his actions. He can see that they are too diverse and often contradictory, as, for instance, those that are just as likely to be harmful as to be beneficial to himself and others. There is a legend about an angel who came down to earth and entered a God-fearing family where he murdered a child in its cradle. When asked why he had done it he explained that the child would have become the greatest of villains and caused the family unhappiness. This is so not only with questions as to what sort of human life is desirable and what useless or harmful. None of the important questions in life can be resolved by a rational person through considerations of the immediate results and consequences. He cannot be satisfied by the same things that guide an animal's behaviour. Man may regard himself as an animal living among animals, by the day, or he may think of himself as a member of a family, or society, or a nation that lives for centuries. Or he may find himself obliged (because his reason drives him irresistibly to it) to regard himself as a part of an infinite universe, living in infinite time. And, therefore, in respect of the infinitely small phenomena of life that influence his behaviour, a

rational person must do what in mathematics is called integration: that is, establish a relation to the immediate issues of life, a relation to the entire infinite universe in time and space, conceiving of it as a whole. And the relationship established by man to that whole, of which he feeds himself a part and from which he draws guidance for his behaviour, is that which has been, and is called religion. And therefore religion has always been, and cannot cease to be, an essential and indispensable condition of the life of rational humanity.

CHAPTER 3

This is how religion has always been understood by people who do not lack the faculty of higher (i.e. religious) consciousness, which distinguishes man from the animals. The oldest and most common definition of the word religion (*religare*, to bind) runs as follows: *religion is the bond between man and God*. 'Les obligations de l'homme envers Dieu voila la religion,' says Vauvenargues. Schleiermacher and Feuerbach attribute a similar meaning to religion when they acknowledge that *the basis of religion is man's consciousness of his dependence on God*. 'La religion est une affaire entre chaque homme et Dieu' (Bayle) 'La religion est la resultat des besoins de l'ame et des effets de l'intelligence' (B. Constant)

'Religion is a certain method by which man recognizes his relationship to the superhuman and mysterious forces on which he regards himself dependent' (Goblet d'Alviella). 'Religion is a definition of human life based on the bond between the human spirit and those mysterious spirits whose dominion over the world and over himself is recognized by man, and with which he feels himself united' (A. Reville)

Thus the essence of religion has been, and still is, understood by people with the highest human faculty, as the establishing by man of a relationship with the infinite Being, or beings, whose power he feels over him. No matter how this relationship has varied, for different peoples and at different times, it has always defined man's destiny in the world, from which guidance for conduct followed naturally. The Jew has understood his relationship to the infinite as follows: being a member of the nation God chose from among all nations, he must therefore observe in God's eyes the agreement He has entered into with his people. The Greek understood his relationship as follows: being dependent on the representatives of eternity- the gods - he ought to please them. The Brahmin has understood his relationship to the infinite Brahma in this way: he is a manifestation of this Brahma and ought, by renouncing life, to strive after unity with the Higher Being. The Buddhist has understood, and understands, his relationship with the infinite thus: in passing from one form of life to another, he inevitably suffers. This suffering originates from passions and desires, therefore he ought to try and nullify them, and make the transition to Nirvana. Every religion is the establishment of a relationship between man and the infinite Being of which he feels he is a part, and from which he derives guidance in his conduct. If therefore a religion fails to establish this relationship, as for instance in idolatry, or sorcery, then it is not a religion, but merely a degeneration of one. Even if a religion establishes a relationship between man and God, but does so through affirmations which are so contrary to the level of knowledge people have reached that they cannot believe in them, then neither is this a religion, but merely a semblance of one. Again, if it does not bind man to the infinite being, it is not a religion. Neither is a belief in propositions which give man no definite guidance in his conduct. It is similarly impossible to give the name religion to Comte's positivism, since it only establishes a relationship between man and mankind, not with the infinite. This relationship leads quite arbitrarily to Comte's morals, which despite making very high demands are unfounded. The most educated Comtist finds himself in a religious relationship that is incomparably lower than that of a simple person who believes in God, whatever the god, as long as it is infinite, and whose behaviour is derived from

this faith. The Comtist's argument about the 'grand etre' does not constitute belief in God and cannot replace it.

'True religion is that relationship, in accordance with reason and knowledge, which man establishes with the infinite world around him, and which binds his life to that infinity and guides his actions.'

CHAPTER 4

Despite the fact that at no time and in no place have people ever lived without religion, the learned people of today say, like Moliere's 'involuntary doctor' who assured us that the liver is on the left side, that 'nous avons change tout cela', and we can and must live without religion. But, as always, religion remains the chief motivator and heart of human societies. Without it, as without a heart, there cannot be rational life. Today, as in the past, there are a number of different religions, because the expression of man's relationship to the infinite, to God or the Gods, varies according to the times and according to the level of development of different peoples. However, since the appearance of rational man there has not been one human society that could live or has lived without religion.

It is true that there have been and still are periods in the life of nations when the existing religion has become so distorted and remote from life that it no longer guides it. But this interruption of religious influence on people's lives, occurring at certain times in all religions, has always been temporary. Religion, like all that lives, has the characteristics of birth, development, ageing, death and rebirth - rebirth in forms that are ever more perfect than the previous ones. After a period of heightened development religion always enters into a period of decline and death, which is usually followed by a period of regeneration and the formation of religious doctrine that is more rational and lucid than before. These periods of development, death and rebirth have always occurred in all religions. As soon as the profound religion of Brahmanism began to grow old and fossilize in rigid, coarse forms deviating from the original meaning, there appeared on the one hand a rebirth of Brahmanism, and on the other the elevated doctrine of Buddhism, which advanced humanity's understanding of its relationship to the infinite. The same kind of decline occurred in the Greek and Roman religions, with Christianity appearing after the lowest ebb of the decline had been reached. The same happened with Church Christianity in Byzantium, which degenerated into idolatry and polytheism. To counteract this distortion there appeared on the one side the Paulicians, and on the other, strict Mohammedanism with its fundamental teaching of the one God, as opposed to the doctrines of the Trinity and the Virgin Mother. The same happened with Papal Christianity during the Middle Ages, leading to the Reformation. Thus, these periods when there is a decline in the religious influence on the majority are an essential condition of the life and development of all religious teachings. The reason they occur is because no matter how unsophisticated it may be, every religion in its true meaning always establishes a relationship between man and the infinite, which is one and the same for all people. In all faiths man is regarded as equally insignificant before the infinite; they therefore all include the concept of equality between men in the eyes of what is called God, whether it be lightning, the wind, a tree, an animal, a hero or a King (living or dead), as occurred in Rome. The acceptance of equality between all men is a necessary and fundamental characteristic of all religions. Since in no place, and at no time, has this equality ever existed in reality, nor will it ever, what has happened is that as soon as a new religious teaching appeared (including as always a recognition of equality between all men) those for whom inequality was more advantageous have immediately tried to conceal this basic feature, thereby misconstruing the actual

doctrine. This has always and everywhere happened whenever a new religious teaching has appeared. On the whole it has been done unconsciously, because those for whom inequality is advantageous, the rulers and the rich, have tried to justify themselves in the eyes of the new religious teaching without having to alter their own position by using every possible means to instil a meaning into the doctrine that admits inequality. This distortion of religion in such a way as to enable those who rule over others to feel justified in doing so, when passed on to the masses naturally gave them the idea that their submission to their masters was demanded by the religion they professed.

CHAPTER 5

All human activity is actuated by three motive causes: feeling, reason and suggestion - the characteristic doctors call hypnotism. At times a person acts under the influence of feeling alone, seeking to achieve what he desires. At times he acts under the influence of his reason alone, which indicates what he ought to do. At other times, and more frequently, he acts because he himself, or others, have suggested a certain action and he unconsciously submits to the suggestion. Under normal conditions of life all three motive forces take part in influencing a person's behaviour. Feeling impels him to a certain action, reason tests the conformity of this action against the surrounding circumstances, and against the past and anticipated future, and suggestion urges him to complete, without thought or feeling, those actions evoked by feeling and condoned by reason. A person would not undertake to do anything without feeling. Without reason he would quickly yield to a number of feelings that are contradictory and harmful to himself and others. Without the ability to submit to suggestion (one's own or others'), a person would constantly experience the feeling arousing him to a certain action, and would continually concentrate his reason on verifying the expediency of this feeling. Therefore all three motive causes are vital to every most simple human action. If a person walks from one place to another it is because feeling prompted him to make the transfer, reason sanctioned the intention and dictated the means of doing it (in this instance, walking along a particular road), so that his muscles obey and he walks along the prescribed road. As he walks, both his feeling and his reason are released for the next action, which would not happen without the capacity to submit to suggestion. This happens in all human activity, including the most important one: religious activity. Feeling evokes the need to establish a relationship between man and God, reason defines this relationship and suggestion leads a person towards behaviour that follows from this relationship. But this only happens as long as religion does not undergo distortion. As soon as distortion begins, suggestion becomes stronger and stronger and the activities of feeling and reason weaken. The methods of suggestion are always and everywhere the same. They consist in making use of man's state of mind at a time when he is most susceptible to suggestion, such as in childhood, or at important moments such as birth, death, or marriage. The person is first influenced through works of art, architecture, sculpture, painting, music, drama, and then in this state of suggestibility (similar to that provoked in certain people when they are half asleep) instilled with whatever it is the persuader wishes.

This occurrence can be seen in all the old religious teachings: in the lofty teachings of Brahmanism, as they degenerated into a primitive worship of countless images in various temples, to the accompaniment of singing and incense burning, in the Jewish religion preached by the prophets and reduced to the worship of God in grandiose temples, together with majestic songs and processions, in the elevated form of Buddhism which was reduced, together with its monasteries, images of Buddha and numerous exultant rituals, to mysterious Laminism, and also in Taoism with its witchcraft and incantations.

Whenever any religious teaching has started becoming distorted its guardians, having already brought people to a state of weakened rational activity, have then

employed every means of persuading them of what they wanted. In all faiths it has been necessary to persuade them of the same three tenets which lie at the basis of all the perversions that have corrupted ageing religions. Firstly, that there are special people who alone can act as intermediaries between man and God, or the Gods; secondly, that miracles have been, and are being, performed which prove and confirm the truth of what the intermediaries say; and thirdly that there are certain words repeated orally or written in books which express the unwavering will of God, or the Gods, and which are sacred and infallible. As soon as these propositions are accepted, under hypnotic influence, everything said by these intermediaries is recognized as the holy truth, and then the chief purpose of the religious perversion is accomplished. This purpose is not only to conceal the law of human equality, but to construe and affirm the highest inequality: the division of castes, the distinction between people and goys, Orthodox and heretic, holy and sinful. The same division has always occurred in Christianity: complete inequality between men has been accepted, as well as division, not just according to their understanding of the doctrines into lay and cleric, but according to social status into those with power and those who must submit, which the teaching of St Paul acknowledges as ordained by God.

CHAPTER 6

Inequality between people, not just between lay and clergy, but between rich and poor, and masters and slaves, was established by the Church Christian religion in the same clear cut manner as in other religions. And yet, judging by what we know of the original conditions of Christianity from the teachings expressed in the Gospels, it would appear that the chief methods of distortion used by other religions had been foreseen and that warnings against them had been clearly stated. It was straightforwardly said against the priestly caste that none could be the teacher of another ('Do not call yourselves fathers and teachers'). Against the attribution of sacred knowledge to books it was said that what is important is the spirit and not the letter, that man ought not to believe in human traditions, and that all the laws and the Prophets, that is all those books in which the writing is considered sacred, lead only to the fact that we should do to others as we would wish them to do to us. If nothing is said against miracles, and if in the Gospels themselves there are descriptions of miracles presented as if performed by Jesus, it is nevertheless evident from the whole spirit of the teaching that the validity of Christ's doctrine is not based on miracles, but on the actual teaching ('Whosoever wishes to know if my teaching is true, let him do as I say'). The most important thing is that Christianity proclaims the equality of all men, no longer merely as a basic teaching of universal brotherhood, but because all men are recognized as being sons of God. It would therefore seem impossible to twist Christianity in such a way as to destroy the awareness of equality between all men.

But human intelligence is shrewd, and whether it was done unconsciously or semi-consciously, an entirely new method was devised (a 'truc' as the French say) in order to make the warnings in the Gospels and the clearly proclaimed equality between men inoperative. This 'truc' consisted in attributing infallibility not only to certain words, but to a certain group of people called the 'Church', who had a right to pass this infallibility on to people selected by themselves.

A slight addition to the Gospels was invented saying that when He departed for heaven, Christ handed certain people the exclusive right not just of instructing people in the sacred truth (according to the Gospel texts he handed over at the same time a right, seldom used, of being invulnerable to snakes, poisons and fire), but of saving and condemning people, and more importantly of conferring this power on others. As a result, as soon as the idea of the Church was firmly established all the Gospel proposals for hindering the distortion of Christ's teaching became inoperative, for the Church was superior to both reason and to the writings considered sacred. Reason was acknowledged as the source of all error and the Gospels were not interpreted in the light of common-sense, but merely as those who constituted the Church wished.

And thus, all the three previous methods of religious distortion- priesthood, miracles, and the infallibility of the Scriptures - were adopted wholeheartedly by Christianity. It was admitted as lawful to have intermediaries between God and man, because the Church recognized them as such. The reality of miracles was admitted because they bore witness to the infallibility of the Church, and the sanctity of the Bible was agreed because it was acknowledged by the Church.

Christianity was perverted in the same way as all the other religions with the

single difference that precisely because Christianity voiced its fundamental doctrine of equality between all men with such clarity, it was necessary to use special force to distort the teaching and conceal its basic clause. With the help of the concept of a Church this was done to a greater extent than in any other religion. Indeed no other faith has ever preached things so incompatible with reason and contemporary knowledge, or ideas so immoral as those taught by Church Christianity. This is without mentioning all the nonsense in the Old Testament, such as the creation of light before the sun, the creation of the world six thousand years ago, the housing of all the animals in the ark, and all the various immoral atrocities such as the order to murder children and entire populations at God's command. Nor have we mentioned the absurdity of the sacrament of which Voltaire said that there have been and are a great many absurd religious teachings, but never before was there one in which the main religious act consists in eating your own God. And what can be more ridiculous than saying that Our Lady was both mother and virgin, or that the heavens opened up and a voice rang forth, or that Christ flew up to heaven and is seated up there somewhere, at the right hand of His father, or that God is three persons in one, not three gods like Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva? but three combined in one. There can be nothing as immoral as those dreadful teachings according to which an angry and vengeful God punishes everyone for the sin of Adam, or that he sent his son to earth to save us, knowing beforehand that men would murder him and be damned for it. Again it is absurd to suggest that man's salvation from sin lies in baptism, or in believing that all these things actually happened, and that the son of God was killed in order to save people and that those who do not believe it will be punished by God with eternal torment. And so, putting aside those things some people consider to be additions to the essential religious dogma, such as faith in certain relics or icons of the Virgin Mary, prayers of supplication, addresses to various saints according to their speciality, or the Protestant doctrine of predestination, even so the very premises of this religion, accepted by all and formulated in the Nicene Creed, are so ridiculous and immoral, and so contradictory to healthy human feeling and reason, that people cannot believe in them. They can repeat certain words with their lips, but they cannot believe in things devoid of meaning. One can use one's lips to say: 'I believe the world was created six thousand years ago', or: 'I believe in God the Father in three persons', but no one can believe it all because the words make no sense. Therefore, the people of our world who profess a distorted form of Christianity do not actually believe in it. This is the peculiarity of our times.

CHAPTER 7

People today do not believe in anything and yet, following the lines of that false definition of faith which they take from the Epistle to the Hebrews, and incorrectly ascribe to St Paul, they imagine they have faith. According to this definition faith is the 'substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen'. But, besides the fact that faith cannot be a substance of something hoped for, since faith is a spiritual state and the substance of things hoped for is an external event, neither can it be the evidence of things not seen, since this evidence, as explained in a subsequent section of the Gospel, is based on trust and evidence of the truth: trust and true faith are two separate concepts. Faith is neither hope nor trust, but a particular spiritual state. Faith is man's awareness that his position in the world obliges him to perform certain actions. A person acts according to his faith, not as the catechism says because he believes in things unseen as in things seen, nor because he wishes to achieve things hoped for, but simply because having defined his position in the world it is natural for him to act according to it. Just as a farmer tills the soil and a seafarer sails the seas, not as the catechism suggests because they both believe in things unseen and hope to be rewarded for their activity (this hope exists but it is not what guides them), but because they regard the activity as their vocation. Similarly a religious believer behaves in a certain way, not because he believes in things unseen, or expects rewards for his conduct, but because once he has defined his position in the world it is natural for him to act according to this position. If a person has defined his position in society as an unskilled labourer, an artisan, an official or a merchant he considers he ought to work as an unskilled labourer, artisan, official or merchant, and does so. In just the same way men in general, having defined their position in the world in one way or another, unavoidably and naturally act according to this definition (which is sometimes not even a definition but a vague consciousness). Thus, for instance, a person who has defined his position in the world as being a member of God's chosen people, who in order to enjoy God's protection must fulfil His demands, will live in such a way as to fulfil these demands. Another person who has defined his position in such a way that he believes he has passed, and is passing through, various forms of existence and that the deterioration or improvement of his future more or less depends on his actions, will be guided in life by this definition. The behaviour of a third person, who has defined his position as that of an 'incidental combination of atoms in which a consciousness has been temporarily ignited but which is bound to be extinguished for ever, will differ from the two above-mentioned.

The conduct of these people will be completely different, because they have defined their positions differently, which means that they believe differently. Faith is the same thing as religion with the only difference that by the word religion we imply a phenomenon observed outside ourselves, whereas what we call faith is this phenomenon experienced within ourselves. Faith is man's conscious relationship with the infinite universe, from which he derives guidance for his activity. And because genuine faith is never irrational, or incompatible with existing knowledge, its characteristics can be neither supernatural nor senseless, as is thought, and has been expressed by the Church Father who said, 'Credo quia absurdum'. On the

contrary the conditions of true faith, despite the fact they cannot be proven, not only never include anything contrary to reason, or incompatible with people's knowledge, but always explain those things in life without which the tenets of faith would appear irrational and contradictory.

Thus for instance the ancient Hebrew, believing that there is a higher eternal Almighty Being who created the Universe, the earth, the animals, mankind etc., and who promised to protect his people if they fulfilled his law, was not believing in anything irrational or incompatible with his knowledge. Quite the opposite, this faith elucidated many aspects of life that would otherwise have been inexplicable to him.

In just the same way a Hindu who believes that our souls have been in animals, and that according to the level of good or evil in our lives, they will pass into higher or lower animals, has much that would otherwise be inexplicable clarified by this faith. It is the same with a person who considers life evil and the aim of life to be peace, achieved through the suppression of desire. He does not believe in anything irrational, but, on the contrary, in something that makes his outlook more reasonable than it would be without this belief. It is the same with the true Christian who believes that God is the spiritual father of all men, and that man reaches the highest state of well-being when he recognizes himself as a son of God and brother to all men. All these beliefs, even if they cannot be proven, are not irrational in themselves, but quite the opposite. They are conducive to a more rational explanation of those phenomena of life which seem irrational and contradictory without them. Moreover, all these beliefs, by defining man's position in the universe, inevitably demand certain actions that accord with this position. And therefore if a religious teaching asserts meaningless propositions that explain nothing but only help to further confuse an understanding of life, it is not a faith but a distortion of it that has already lost the chief characteristic of true faith.

Not only do people today not have this faith, but they do not even know what it is, and what they take to be faith is either an oral repetition of what they are given as the essence of faith, or the fulfilment of ceremonies which, Church Christianity teaches, will help them to achieve their desires.

CHAPTER 8

People in our world live without faith. One section, the educated, wealthy minority, having freed themselves from the persuasion of the Church, believe in nothing because they regard every faith either as an absurdity, or as a useful means of controlling the masses. The vast, poor and uneducated majority, consisting of people who with few exceptions are true believers, finding themselves slaves under the influence of hypnosis, think they believe in what is suggested to them beneath the guise of faith. But it is not faith, for rather than clarifying man's position in the world, it only obscures it. This situation and the mutual relations between the non-believing, pretentious minority, and the hypnotized majority, shapes the life of our world, which we call Christian. And this life, both of the minority who hold the means of hypnosis in their hands, and of the hypnotized majority, is terrible on account of both the cruelty and immorality of the rulers, and the oppression and stupefaction of the enormous working masses. Never before at any period of religious decline has such a low level of disregard and negligence towards the chief characteristic of all religions and of Christianity in particular - the equality of all men - been reached as in our time. The main reason for the terrible cruelty between men today, apart from the absence of religion, is still the refined complexity of life which shields people from the consequences of their actions. However cruel Attila, Genghis Khan and their followers may have been, the act of killing people personally, face to face, must have been unpleasant to them, and the consequences of the murder still more unpleasant: the wailing relatives and the presence of the corpses. And thus their cruelty was restrained. Nowadays we kill people through such a complex process of communication, and the consequences of our cruelty are so carefully removed and concealed from us, that there is no restraint on the bestiality of the action. The cruelty of some people towards others will continue to increase until it has reached unprecedented dimensions.

I think that today if, perhaps not the renowned villain Nero, but some commonplace entrepreneur, wanted to make a pond of human blood for the diseased rich to bathe in, as prescribed by their learned doctors, he would be able to arrange it all unhindered so long as he respected the accepted and appropriate forms. Thus he would not compel people to lose blood, but would put them in a position such that their life was at risk unless they did so. In addition to this he would invite priests and scientists - the former to consecrate the pond in the way that they consecrate canons, rifles, prisons and gallows, and the latter to testify to the necessity and justification of such an establishment, just as they have testified to the necessity of wars and houses of ill-repute. The basic principle of all religions - the equality between all men - has been forgotten, neglected and buried under so much ridiculous dogma put forward by the religion, and in science this same inequality (expressed in the theory of the struggle for the existence and survival of the fittest) is acknowledged as such a necessary condition of life, that the destruction of millions of human lives for the convenience of the ruling minority is regarded as a most commonplace and necessary facet of living, and happens continually.

People of today's world cannot take enough delight in the brilliant, unprecedented and colossal achievements of nineteenth century technology.

There is no doubt that never before in history has such material success, i.e. in conquering the forces of human nature, been achieved as in the nineteenth century. But there is also no doubt that never before in history has there been such a display of immoral living, free of any force restraining man's animal desires, as that which exists now in our Christian humanity, which is becoming ever more bestialized. The material progress achieved in the nineteenth century is truly enormous, but it was, and still is being, purchased at a cost of neglect for the most elementary demands of morality, such as humanity has never witnessed before, not even under Genghis Khan, Attila, or Nero.

No one would argue that iron-clads, railroads, printing presses, tunnels, phonographs, Rontgen rays and so forth are very fine things. Indeed they are, but what are also fine, as Ruskin says, finer beyond comparison with all else, are human lives, of which millions are now destroyed for the acquisition of iron-clads, roads, tunnels etc., all of which disfigure rather than beautify life. The usual reply to this is that they are already inventing, and with time will have invented, devices to check the destruction of human life existing at the moment. But this is not true. So long as people do not consider all men as their brothers and do not consider human life as the most sacred thing, which rather than destroy they must consider it their first and foremost duty to support; that is so long as people do not behave towards one another in a religious manner, they will always ruin one another's lives for the sake of personal gain. No fool would agree to spend thousands if he could achieve the same aim by spending hundreds, with the addition of a few human lives he finds at his disposal. Each year in Chicago about the same number of people are crushed on the railway. The managers of the railway quite logically do not make any adaptations in order to prevent people from being crushed, since they have calculated that the annual payments to the injured people and their families are less than the interest on the cost of making such adaptations.

It is very likely that people who destroy human lives for their own gain can be shamed by public opinion, or forced to make the adaptations. But as long as people are not religious and commit their acts before man and not God they will make changes in order to protect human lives in one respect, and then in another matter they will once again use human life as the most profitable material.

It is easy to conquer nature and to construct railways, steamships, museums and so forth if you do not spare human lives. The Egyptian pharaohs were proud of their pyramids and we too admire them, forgetting about the lives of millions of slaves sacrificed in constructing them. In the same way we admire our exhibition palaces, iron-clads and transoceanic cables, forgetting with what we pay for it all. We should only feel proud of it all when it is done freely, by free men and not by slaves.

Christian nations have conquered and subdued the American Indians, Hindus and Africans. They are now doing the same to the Chinese and are proud of it. But these conquests and subjugations really arise, not through the spiritual superiority of the Christian nations, but on the contrary, because on a spiritual level they are far beneath the others. Forgetting the Hindus and the Chinese, even among the Zulus there were, and are, obligatory religious rules, whatever they might be, which condone certain actions and forbid others. In Christendom we have none. Rome conquered the world when it had freed itself from all religions. The same is

happening, only to a greater extent, among the Christian nations. They all share in common an absence of religion and consequently, despite internal dissension, are united in one federate band of criminals where theft, plunder, debauchery, individual and mass murder are performed without the slightest pang of conscience and even with utmost self-complacency, as for instance in China not so long ago. Some do not believe in anything and are proud of it. Others pretend to believe in what for their own advantage they have persuaded the masses to believe in beneath the guise of faith. The rest, the great majority of the population, accept as faith the hypnotism exercised over them and slavishly submit to everything demanded of them by their non-believing rulers and persuaders.

And these persuaders make the same demand as has always been made by Nero and his like, who have tried somehow to fill the emptiness of their lives: the satisfaction of their senseless and over-abundant luxury. Luxury cannot be obtained other than by enslaving other people. As soon as there is slavery there is an increase in luxury, and the increase in luxury inevitably instigates an increase in slavery. It is only people who are hungry, cold and tied down by need who will spend their whole lives doing something they have no need of doing, but which is needed for the amusement of their masters.

CHAPTER 9

In the sixth chapter of the Book of Genesis there is a profound point where the author says that before the flood God had already seen how the spirit He had given men in order for them to serve Him was being used simply to serve their own lust. And that He became so angry He regretted having created them and resolved that before annihilating them altogether He would shorten man's life to 120 years. The very same thing which, according to the Bible, angered God to limit human life is happening now among the people of Christendom.

Reason is the power man possesses to define his relationship to the universe. Since the relationship is the same for everyone the establishing of it, i.e. religion, unites men. Union among men gives them the highest attainable well-being, on both the physical and the spiritual level.

Complete unity with the highest and most perfect reason and, thereby, perfect well-being is an ideal towards which humanity strives. By giving identical answers to all members of any particular society, when they ask questions about what the world is and what they the inhabitants are, all religions unite men and bring them closer to the reality of well-being. But, when reason diverges from its own particular function (the clarification of the relationship with God and the activities that conform to it), and is directed not only at service to the flesh, or bitter strife with other men and other creatures, but also at justifying this evil existence, so contrary to man's nature and purpose, then these dreadful misfortunes occur from which the majority of today's people are suffering. Moreover, a situation then arises whereby it is almost impossible to return to a reasonable, decent life. Pagans, united by primitive religious teachings, are far nearer to an apprehension of the truth than are the supposed Christian nations of today, who live without any religion and among whom the most advanced people are convinced, and persuade others, that religion is not necessary and that it is far better to live without it.

Among the pagans one can find men who have realized the inconsistency of their faith with both their increasing knowledge, and the demands of their reason, and who try to adopt a religious teaching more compatible with the spiritual state of the nation, which unites their fellow countrymen and co-believers. But among the men of our world, where some regard religion as an instrument with which to govern the masses, others think it an absurdity, and the vast majority, grossly deceived, think they are in possession of the true religion, all become impervious to any advance or approach to the truth.

Proud of their improvements in things needed by the life of the body, and of their refined, useless reasonings, aimed at proving their own righteousness as well as their superiority over any other nation at any other historical period, they stagnate in their ignorance and immorality. And they are fully convinced that they are standing at a summit never previously reached by humanity, and that each step forwards along the path of ignorance and immorality raises them to yet greater heights of enlightenment and progress.

CHAPTER 10

It is in man's nature to create harmony between his rational (spiritual) and his bodily (physical) activity. A person cannot be at peace until he has somehow established this harmony. But it can be established in two ways. The first is when he uses his reason to decide on the necessity, or desirability, of a certain action, or actions, and then acts on his reason. The second is for a person to perform actions under the influence of his emotions and then to invent intellectual explanations or justifications for them.

The first method of reaching conformity between action and reason is typical of those who profess some kind of religion and on the basis of its doctrines know what they ought to do, and what they ought not to do. The second method is typical of the majority of non-religious people, who lack a general standard of evaluating the worthiness of their actions and who therefore always establish conformity between their reason and their actions, not by subjecting the latter to the former but - having accomplished an action under the impulse of feeling- by using reason to justify them.

The religious person, knowing what is good and what is wrong in his actions and in those of others, and why one is good and another bad, when he sees a contradiction between the demands of his reason and his actions (or those of others), will use all the power of his reason to find a way of eradicating it. In other words, he will learn the best way of achieving harmony between them. But a person without religion, lacking the guiding principle for determining the value of his actions (other than the pleasure they afford), and yielding to the impulse of his varied and frequently contradictory emotions, involuntarily falls into a contradiction. Finding himself in this state he tries to resolve, or hide the contradiction with rationalizations that are variously complicated and skillful, but always dishonest. Thus, while the deliberations of religious people are always simple, uncomplicated and honest, the mental activity of non-religious people is particularly subtle and extremely complex and dishonest.

If we take a very simple example: that of a person prone to debauchery, i.e. unchaste, unfaithful to his wife, or unmarried and prone to debauchery. If he is a religious man he will know that it is wrong and concentrate all his mental energy on finding a way of freeing himself from his vice. He might avoid intercourse with adulterers or adulteresses, increase his workload, forbid himself to look upon a woman as an object of desire, etc. All this is perfectly simple and intelligible to anyone. But if a dissipated person is non-religious he will immediately invent all kinds of explanations as to why it is a very good thing to love women. This leads him to all sorts of complex, cunning and subtle considerations about the mergence of souls, beauty, free love and so forth. The more these are propagated the further they obscure the matter and conceal what should be done.

For those without religion the same happens in all spheres of their activity and thought. In order to hide the inner contradictions, complex, subtle arguments are piled up and the mind becomes crowded with all sorts of useless rubbish, deflecting the person's attention from what is important and essential and making it possible for him to stagnate in the lie, in which today's people are living, without noticing it.

'Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil,' it is written in the Gospel. 'For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the

light, lest his deeds should be reproved' (John, III, 19).

Thus, due to the absence of religion, the people of today's world have built themselves a very cruel, bestial and immoral life. They have also led their complex, subtle and useless mental activities to such a level of unnecessary intricacy and confusion in order to conceal the evil in their lives, that the majority have entirely lost the capacity of differentiating between good and evil, falsehood and truth.

There is not a single question which the men of our world can approach simply and straightforwardly. Every question, be it economic (internal or foreign), civil, diplomatic, scientific, not to mention religious and philosophical ones, are put so artificially and mistakenly, wrapped in such a thick layer of complex, unnecessary argument and full of so many subtle twists of meaning and words and such sophistry and debate that all discussions of such questions go round and round in circles, grasping hold of nothing, like a disconnected car wheel. They lead nowhere except to achieve the one purpose for which they are instigated: to conceal from oneself and others the evil in which men live and which they commit.

CHAPTER 11

In every sphere of today's so-called sciences the same feature renders useless all the mental effort people direct towards investigating various fields of knowledge. The feature is that all the scientific investigations of our times evade the essential question demanding an answer, and examine secondary issues, the investigation of which leads to nothing but becomes increasingly complex the further it proceeds. It could not be otherwise with a science that selects its objects at random, rather than according to the demands of a religious outlook defining what man should study and why, and what first and what follows. Thus, for example, in the currently fashionable question of sociology, or political economy, there would appear to be only one question: how and why some people do nothing while others work for them? (If there is another question it is inherent in the first: why do people work separately, hindering each other, and not jointly which would be more profitable? If there were no inequality there would be no strife.) It appears that there should be only this question, but science does not think to pose it, or reply to it, but initiates its discussions from a distance, conducting them in such a way that in no instance can its conclusions resolve or enhance a solution to the basic question. Discussions begin with questions about what was and what is, and the past and the present are regarded as something as unalterable as the course of the heavenly bodies in the sky. Abstract concepts of value, capital, profit and interest are devised, leading to the complicated game of human intelligence which the disputants have been carrying on for one hundred years already. In truth, the question can be resolved very easily and simply.

The solution is that since all men are brothers and equals, each person must behave towards others as he would wish them to behave towards him, and the whole problem, therefore, rests on the destruction of a false religious law and the establishment of a true one. But the leading figures of Christendom will not accept this answer: quite the opposite, they try to conceal the very possibility of such a solution from people, and in order to do so devote themselves to the futile mental activity they call science.

The same happens in the field of jurisprudence. There would seem to be only one essential question: why are there people who permit themselves to exercise force on others, to rob, imprison, execute, send them to war, and much else besides? The solution to the question is very simple, looking at it in the only way that befits the question, i.e. the religious one. From the point of view of religion a person must not perform acts of violence against his neighbour, so there is only one thing necessary to resolve the problem: destroy all the superstitions and sophisms that permit violence, and firmly instil in men the religious principles that exclude a possibility of violence.

Yet the leading figures not only fail to do this, but they devote all their wits to concealing from others the possibility of such a solution. They write shelves of books on different laws: civil, criminal, political, ecclesiastic, financial and others, and they expound and debate these themes in the complete conviction that they are doing something not just useful, but very important. In answer to the question of why, among people born equals, some may judge, constrain, rob and execute others, they give no answers; and not just this but they fail to recognize the existence of the

question. According to their doctrine this violence is committed not by people, but by some abstract entity called the State.

In exactly the same way the learned people of today, in all spheres of knowledge, evade and keep silent about the essential questions and conceal the inner contradictions. In the study of history the essential question is: how did the working masses, i.e. nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths of humanity, live? And we get nothing resembling an answer to this question; the question does not even exist, yet historians of one discipline write piles of books about Louis XI's stomach-aches, about the atrocities committed by Elizabeth I of England and Ivan the Terrible of Russia, about who their ministers were and what literary verses and comedies were written for the entertainment of these sovereigns, their favourites and ministers. Historians of another discipline write about what the places people lived in were like, what they ate and what they traded in, what sort of clothes they wore and, in general, about things that could have no influence on the life of the nation, but were consequences of their religion, which this kind of historian imagines to be a result of the sort of food people ate, or the clothes they wore.

In truth, an answer to the question of how the working classes used to live can be given only by recognizing religion as an essential condition of people's lives. The answer therefore lies in the study of those religions the people professed and which brought them to the position they found themselves in.

In the study of natural history there seems to be especial need to obscure men's common sense. But here too, because of the attitude adopted by contemporary science, instead of giving the most natural answer to the question of what the kingdom of living creatures, plant and animal, is, and how it is subdivided, an idle, unclear and completely useless prattle is carried on (directed for the most part at the Biblical account of the creation) as to how organisms came into existence. No one really needs to know, or can know, this, since however the origin is explained, it lies hidden from us in the infinity of time and space. Yet there are theories, refutations and new theories on this theme which form thousands of books in which the unexpected conclusion is always the same: that the law of life to which man must submit is the struggle for existence.

Added to all this, the applied sciences, such as technology and medicine, inevitably diverge from their reasonable purpose and adopt a false direction as a result of the absence of any religious guiding principle. Thus the whole of technology is aimed not at easing the burden of the working masses, but at the improvements requested by the wealthy classes, thus increasing the division between rich and poor, masters and slaves. If some advantage from these inventions and improvements, some small fragment, falls into the lap of the working classes, it is certainly not because they were intended for the people, but simply because by their nature they could not be kept from them.

It is the same with medical science which has advanced in its false direction to the extent that it is only available to the rich. The masses, because of their life-style and poverty, and because no one is concerned about improving their lot, can only make use of it under such restricted conditions that this assistance gives a clear example of how medical science has diverged from its purpose.

This divergence and perversion of the essential question is most striking in what

goes today by the name of philosophy. There would seem to be only one question for philosophy to resolve: what must I do? Despite being combined with an enormous amount of unnecessary confusion, answers to the question have at any rate been given within the philosophical tradition of the Christian nations. For example, in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, or in Spinoza, Schopenhauer and especially Rousseau. But in more recent times, since Hegel's assertion that all that exists is reasonable, the question of what one must do has been pushed to the background and philosophy has directed its whole attention to the investigation of things as they are, and to fitting them into a prearranged theory. This was the first step backwards. The second step, degrading human thought yet further, was the acceptance of the struggle for existence as a basic law, simply because that struggle can be observed among animals and plants. According to this theory the destruction of the weakest is a law which should not be opposed. And finally, the third step was taken when the childish originality of Nietzsche's half-crazed thought, presenting nothing complete or coherent, but only various drafts of immoral and completely unsubstantiated ideas, was accepted by the leading figures as the final word in philosophical science. In reply to the question: what must we do? the answer is now put straightforwardly as: live as you like, without paying attention to the lives of others.

If anyone doubted that the Christian world of today has reached a frightful state of torpor and brutalization (not forgetting the recent crimes committed in the Boers and in China, which were defended by the clergy and acclaimed as heroic feats by all the world powers), the extraordinary success of Nietzsche's works is enough to provide irrefutable proof of this. Some disjointed writings, striving after effect in a most sordid manner, appear, written by a daring, but limited and abnormal German, suffering from power mania. Neither in talent nor in their basic argument do these writings justify public attention. In the days of Kant, Leibniz or Hume, or even fifty years ago, such writings would not only have received no attention, but they would not even have appeared. But today all the so-called educated people are praising the ravings of Mr N, arguing about him, elucidating him, and countless copies of his works are printed in all languages.

Turgenev made the witty remark that there are inverse platitudes, which are frequently employed by people lacking in talent who wish to attract attention to themselves. Everyone knows, for instance, that water is wet, and someone suddenly says, very seriously, that water is dry, not that ice is, but that water is dry, and the conviction with which this is stated attracts attention.

Similarly, the whole world knows that virtue consists in the subjugation of one's passions, or in self-renunciation. It is not just the Christian world, against whom Nietzsche howls, that knows this, but it is an eternal supreme law towards which all humanity has developed, including Brahmanism, Buddhism, Confucianism and the ancient Persian religion. And suddenly a man appears who declares that he is convinced that self-renunciation, meekness, submissiveness and love are all vices that destroy humanity (he has in mind Christianity, ignoring all the other religions). One can understand why such a declaration baffled people at first. But after giving it a little thought and failing to find any proof of the strange propositions, any rational person ought to throw the books aside and wonder if there is any kind of rubbish that would not find a publisher today. But this has not happened with Nietzsche's books.

The majority of pseudo-enlightened people seriously look into the theory of the superman, and acknowledge its author to be a great philosopher, a descendant of Descartes, Leibniz and Kant. And all this has come about because the majority of the pseudo-enlightened men of today object to any reminder of virtue, or to its chief premise: self-renunciation and love - virtues that restrain and condemn the animal side of their life. They gladly welcome a doctrine, however incoherently and disjointedly expressed, of egotism and cruelty, sanctioning the ideas of personal happiness and superiority over the lives of others, by which they live.

CHAPTER 12

Christ reproached the scribes and pharisees because they took the keys to the kingdom of heaven, but neither entered themselves, nor permitted others to.

The learned scribes of today do the same thing: they have taken the keys, not to the kingdom of heaven, but to enlightenment, but neither enter themselves, nor allow others to. Using any manner of deceit and hypnotic power, the priests and clergy have instilled in people the idea that Christianity is not a religion proclaiming the equality of all men, and therefore destructive to the whole of today's pagan structure of life, but that on the contrary, it supports this structure and instructs us to differentiate between people, as we would differentiate between one star and another. It bids us to acknowledge that all power is derived from God and to obey it absolutely. It suggests to the oppressed that in general terms their position is ordained by God and they should bear it meekly and humbly, and submit to the oppressors. These oppressors need not be meek and humble but, as emperors, kings, popes, bishops, and secular and spiritual authorities of any kind, they must correct others by teaching and punishing them while themselves living in splendour and luxury, the provision of which is an obligation of those they subject. Thanks to this false teaching which they whole-heartedly support, the ruling classes govern the people, forcing them to provide for the luxuries, vanities and vices of the rulers. Moreover, the scientists, being the only ones who have freed themselves from this hypnotic influence, and who alone can deliver the people from their yoke, and who say they wish to do so, rather than actually doing something to accomplish this aim, do the very opposite, imagining that they thereby serve the people.

It would seem that from even the most cursory observation of what it is that most troubles the rulers these men should realize what it is that really motivates, and what it is that really holds the people down in certain positions and they should direct all their energies at that motivating force. Not only do they fail to do this, but they consider such a thing quite useless.

These men appear not to want to see all this and diligently and often sincerely they do all sorts of things for the people, yet failing to do the one thing needed above all else. In order to understand where it is they should direct their efforts to free the masses from enslavement, they need only watch with what fervour all rulers contend for the motive force by means of which the people are governed.

What is it the Turkish sultan guards, and what does he cling on to above all else? Why on entering a town does the Russian emperor first of all kiss the icons and relics? And why, despite all the lustre of culture he so effects, and regardless of whether it is opportune, does the German emperor speak of God, Christ, the sanctity of religion, oaths, etc. in all his speeches? It is because they all know that their power rests on the army, and the possibility of an army existing at all rests on religion. If wealthy people happen to be particularly religious and pretend to be believers, going to Church and observing the sabbath, they do all this on the whole because their instinct for self-preservation warns them that their exclusive and privileged position in society is bound to the religion they profess.

Very often these men do not know in what way the power they have is based on religious deceptions. However, their instinct for self-preservation shows them the

weak spot in that which maintains their position, and they defend this before all else. These men always permit, and always have permitted socialist and even revolutionary propaganda, within certain limits. But they never allow religious principles to be touched.

Therefore, if the leading figures of today, scholars, liberals, socialists, revolutionaries, anarchists, cannot use history or psychology to understand what it is that motivates people, they should be persuaded by what they see, that men are not motivated by material conditions, but only by religion.

Yet it is a surprising fact that while the scholarly and learned men of today have a very acute insight and understanding of the people's living conditions, they do not see what stares them in the eye. If these men deliberately behave in such a way as to leave the nation in religious ignorance in order to maintain their privileged position among the minority, it is a terrible, horrible fraud. Those who behave in this way are the very hypocrites Christ condemned so strongly - indeed the only people He condemned. And He condemned them because no other monsters or evildoers have ever brought so much evil into human life as these sort of people have.

If these men were sincere the only explanation for such strange mental shortcomings is that, just as the masses are under the influence of a false religion, so too these pseudo-enlightened men of today find themselves under the influence of a false science, which has decided that the main nerve by which humanity has always lived, and still lives, is no longer necessary and can be replaced by something else.

CHAPTER 13

The peculiarity of our times lies in the deceit, or perfidy, of the bibliophiles, the educated men of our world. In this too lies the cause of the impoverished condition in which Christian humanity lives, and of the brutalization in which it is increasingly immersing itself.

As a rule the leading, educated people of today's world assert that the false religious beliefs held by the masses do not present anything of great importance, and that it is neither worthwhile nor necessary to confront them directly as Hume, Voltaire, Rousseau and others have done previously. In their opinion science (i.e. the uncoordinated, incidental knowledge disseminated among the people) will achieve this purpose of its own accord. In other words, that a person who has learnt how many million miles the earth is from the sun, and which metals can be found in the sun and stars, will cease to believe in the doctrines of the Church.

There is a great delusion, or terrible deception in this sincere, or insincere, assumption or assertion. From the very earliest childhood years, the years most susceptible to suggestion, when educators cannot be careful enough about what they impart to children, they teach them the ridiculous, immoral dogmas of the so-called Christian religion, which are incompatible with reason and knowledge. Children are taught the dogma of the Trinity, which cannot be accommodated in a healthy mind, and the descent of one of the three Gods to earth for the salvation of the human race and His resurrection and ascent to Heaven. They are taught about the awaited second coming and the punishment of eternal torments for not believing in these dogmas. They are taught to pray for their needs and for many other things. And when all this doctrine, compatible with neither reason, contemporary knowledge or human conscience, is indelibly stamped on the child's receptive mind, they leave him alone to fathom as best he can the contradictions arising from the dogmas he has accepted and assumed as the undoubted truth. No one tells him how he can and should reconcile these contradictions. If theologians do try to reconcile them they only succeed in confusing the matter still further. And bit by bit a person grows accustomed (with strong support from theologians) to the fact that he cannot trust in his reason and therefore everything in the world is possible, for he has nothing with which to differentiate between good and evil, lies and the truth. And in the thing most important to him- his actions - he must not be guided by his reason but by what others tell him. One can see the terrible distortion of man's spiritual world that inevitably results from such an education, and is supported in adult life by all the techniques of persuasion which, with the aid of the clergy, are continually exercised on people.

If a person of strong personality, with great labour and suffering, frees himself from the hypnotism in which he has been educated since childhood and which he has maintained in adult life, the perversion of his spirit by which he has been persuaded to distrust his own reason cannot disappear without leaving a trace, just as in the physical world the poisoning of an organism with a strong toxin cannot vanish without leaving any trace. Having freed himself from the hypnotic influence of this deceit, such a person, hating the falsehood from which he has just released himself, naturally adopts the doctrine of the leading figures, according to which religion is

regarded as one of the chief impediments to man's advance along the path of progress. And having adopted this teaching, such a man becomes like his teachers: quite unprincipled, i.e. someone without a conscience, guided in life by nothing but his whims, who rather than condemning himself on account of this, considers himself as standing at the highest point of spiritual development man can reach.

This is what happens to people with very strong personalities. The less strong, while being led to doubt, never entirely free themselves from the deceit in which they were brought up. By adhering to various fancifully construed and obscure theories intended to justify the absurdity of the dogma they have accepted, and by living in a realm of doubts, obscurities, sophism and self-deception, they only enhance the blindness of the masses and oppose their awakening.

However, the majority of people, lacking the strength and the opportunity to struggle against the assurances forced upon them, will live and die for generation after generation, in the same way as they live now, deprived of man's highest blessing: a truly religious understanding of life. And they will always be no more than the passive tools of the classes who rule over them and deceive them.

As for the terrible deception, the leading figures say that it is not important and not worth tackling directly. The only explanation of such an assertion, if it is made sincerely, is that they themselves are under the hypnotic influence of a false science. If it is not made sincerely, the explanation is that an assault on established beliefs is not profitable and is frequently dangerous. In any case, one way or another, the claim that profession of a false religion is harmless, or at any rate unimportant, and that it is therefore possible to spread enlightenment without destroying religious deception, is entirely incorrect.

Humanity can only be saved from disaster when it frees itself from the hypnotic influence the priests hold over it, and from that into which the learned are leading it. In order to pour something into a full vessel one must first empty it of its contents. Likewise, it is essential to free people from the deception they are held in, in order for them to adopt the true religion: i.e. a relationship with God, the source of all things, which is correct and in accord with the development of humanity, together with the guidance for conduct that results from this relationship.

CHAPTER 14

'But is there really a true religion? Religions are endlessly varied and we do not have the right to call any one of them true simply because it comes closest to our taste.' This is what men say as they examine the external forms of religion as if it were some kind of disease from which they feel themselves free, but from which others still suffer. But this is not true: religions differ in their external forms but are all the same in their basic principles. In all religions these basic principles form that true religion which alone is suited to all today's people, and the adoption of which is the only thing that can save men from their misfortunes.

Humanity has existed for a long time and just as it has successively made practical acquisitions, so too it could not help formulating those spiritual principles that have formed the basis of life, and the code of conduct following from these principles. The fact that blind people do not see them does not prove that they do not exist. It is not some kind of individual religion with its own peculiarities and distortions, but a religion consisting of religious principles which are found to be identical in all the widespread religions known to us, and which are professed by nine-tenths of the human race. The only reason why people have not become irreparably brutalized is because the finest men of all nations have, albeit unconsciously, clung to this religion and practised it. Only the deceitful assurances imposed on people, with the help of the clergy and scientists, prevents them from consciously accepting it. The principles of this true religion are so appropriate to man that as soon as people discover them they accept them as something they have known for a long time and which stand to reason. For us, the true religion is Christianity in those of its principles which conform, not in their external form, but in their basic principles, to Brahmanism, Confucianism, Taoism, Hebraism, Buddhism and even Mohammedanism. In just the same way, for those who practise Brahmanism, Confucianism, etc., true religion is that where the basic principles conform to those of all the other great religions. The principles are very simple, comprehensible and uncomplicated.

They are as follows: that there is a God who is the origin of everything; that there is an element of this divine origin in every person, which he can diminish or increase through his way of living; that in order for someone to increase this source he must suppress his passions and increase the love within himself; that the practical means of achieving this consist in doing to others as you would wish them to do to you. All these principles are common to Brahmanism, Hebraism, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity and Mohammedanism. (If Buddhism does not provide a definition of God, it nevertheless recognizes that with which man unites and merges as he reaches Nirvana. And that something is the same origin which the other religions recognize as God.)

'But that is not a religion,' say the men of today, accustomed as they are to regarding the supernatural, i.e. the absurd, as the main sign of religion. 'It is anything else you like, philosophy, ethics, rationalization, but not religion.' According to their way of seeing things, religion must be ridiculous and incomprehensible (*credo quia absurdum*). Yet it was from just these very religious principles, or rather as a consequence of their being propagated as religious doctrines, that through a long process of distortion, all the religious miracles and supernatural events were drawn

up, which are now considered basic characteristics of any faith. To claim that the supernatural and irrational form the basic characteristics of religion is much the same as noticing only the rotten apples and then claiming that the basic features of the fruit named apple are a flaccid bitterness and a harmful effect produced in the stomach.

Religion is the definition of man's relationship to the origin of everything, and of the purpose acquired as a result of this relationship, and of the rules of conduct that follow from this purpose. And the religion common to all, the basic principles of which are alike in all practices, fully satisfies these demands. It defines man's relationship to God as of a part to a whole. From this relationship follows man's purpose, which lies in increasing his spiritual qualities, and man's purpose leads to the practical rules of the law: do to others as you would have them do unto you.

People often doubt, and at one time I myself doubted, that such an abstract rule as 'Do to others as you would have them do unto you' could be as obligatory a rule and guide to conduct as the more simple rules: the fasts, prayers, communion, etc. But an irrefutable reply to this doubt is provided by the spiritual conditions of, let us say, a Russian peasant who prefers to die rather than spit out the Host on a dung heap, but who is nevertheless prepared to kill his own brothers at someone else's command.

Why should demands derived from the rule of doing to others as you would have them do unto you - for instance: do not kill your fellow men, do not curse, do not commit adultery, do not take vengeance, do not make use of your brother's needs for the satisfaction of your own whims, and many others - why should they not be taught with as much force, and become as obligatory and incontestable as the belief in the sanctity of the eucharist and images, etc., is for people whose faith is based more on trust than on clear inner consciousness?

CHAPTER 15

The truths of the religion common to everyone today are so very simple, intelligible and close to the hearts of all men. It would seem that parents, rulers and teachers only need to instil in children these clear and simple truths, common to people of all religions, the metaphysical essence of which is that the spirit of God is in man, and the practical law of which is that man must behave towards others as he would wish others to behave towards him, rather than the outdated and absurd teachings on the Trinity, the Virgin Mother, the Redemption, Indras, Trimurti and Buddhas and Mohammeds flying in the sky, and this in itself would alter the whole of mankind's life. Whereas nowadays children are instilled with the belief that God sent His son to redeem the sin of Adam, and that He established His Church, which must be obeyed as well as the rules arising from these principles as to when and where to pray and make sacrifices, when to abstain from which kind of food and on which days to refrain from work; if only instead of this it were taught and confirmed that God is a spirit, the manifestation of which dwells within us, and the strength of which we increase through our lives. One need only teach these ideas and all that follows quite naturally from these principles in just the same way as all the utterly useless stories about impossible events, and rules of meaningless ceremonies arising from these stories are currently put forward and instead of irrational strife and discord there would very soon emerge a peaceful, happy and united existence guided by one religion, with no need of help from diplomats, international law, congress law or from political economists and all the subdivisions of Socialists.

But nothing of the kind happens: people not only fail to destroy the deception of the false religion and propagate the true one but, quite the opposite, they distance themselves ever more and more, and further and further, from the possibility of accepting the truth.

The main reason why people do not do the thing that is most natural, essential and feasible is that people today are so accustomed, as a consequence of their irreligious lives, to establishing and securing their existence by force, bayonets, bullets, dungeons and gallows that they believe this sort of arrangement of life to be normal, and the only possible way. Moreover, it is not only those who profit by the existing order who think in this way, but also those who suffer from it, so stupefied are they by the hypnotic influence exercised on them that they, too, in the same way consider force to be the only means of construing a well-ordered human society. But it is precisely this arrangement and the consolidation of the social norm through violence that does more than anything to distance people from understanding the causes of their suffering, and thereby from the possibility of building a true social order.

What is accomplished is something similar to what a bad or malicious doctor does as he drives a malignant eruption inwards, thus not only deceiving the patient but worsening the illness and preventing any cure.

It seems very convenient for those who rule over and enslave the masses, and who think and say 'apres nous le deluge', to use the army and clergy, soldiers and politicians, the threat of bayonets, bullets, imprisonment, workhouses and the gallows, in order to force the servile classes to remain in their condition of

stupefaction and enslavement and not to hinder the ruling classes from exploiting their position. And the ruling men do it all, calling it good order, whereas nothing so hinders the establishment of good social order as this does. In reality, this sort of arrangement, far from being good order, is the establishment of evil.

If the people of our society who still possess the remnants of those religious principles which still exist among the masses had not before their eyes the continual performance of criminal behaviour, committed by those who have taken upon themselves the responsibility of watching over order and morality in people's lives - the wars, executions, imprisonments, taxation, the sale of vodka and opium - they would never have dreamt of committing one hundredth of the evil deeds, deceits, violations, murders, which they now commit in the full conviction that these deeds are good and natural to man.

The law of human life is such that the improvement of it, whether for the individual or for society, is only possible through inner, moral perfection. All the efforts people make to improve their lives through violent external behaviour towards one another serve as the most potent form of propaganda and example of evil, and do not improve life, but, on the contrary, increase the evil which gathers size like a snowball and increasingly alienates people from the only possible way of genuinely improving their lives.

The extent to which the habit of violence and criminal behaviour committed under the guise of a law by the guardians of order and morality becomes ever more frequent and cruel, and is increasingly justified by the false assurances that are presented as a religion, will determine the extent to which people will become more and more convinced of the idea that the law of their life does not lie in love and service to one's neighbour, but in struggling against and devouring one another.

And the more they become convinced of this notion, which degrades them to the animal plane, the harder it will be for them to rouse themselves from the hypnotic trance they are in, and to accept as the basis of life the true religion common to the whole of today's humanity.

A vicious circle has been established: the absence of religion makes animal life, based on violence, possible; animal life, based on violence, makes it increasingly impossible to be free of hypnotic influence and to adopt the true religion. And, therefore, people do not do what is most natural, possible and necessary in our times: they do not destroy the deception that resembles religion, and do not adopt and propagate the truth.

CHAPTER 16

Can there be a way out of this vicious circle, and if so, what is it?

At first it seems as if the people who should lead men out of this vicious circle are the governments that have taken upon themselves the responsibility of guiding the life of the people for their good. This is what those who have tried to alter the structure of life based on force, and to replace it with a reasonable structure based on mutual love and service, have always thought. It is what the Christian reformers thought, as also did the founders of various European theories of Communism, as well as the illustrious Chinese reformer, Mo Tzu who suggested that for the good of the people the government should not instruct school children in the science of war, and should not reward adults for military achievements, but should instruct both children and adults in the rules of respect and love, and give rewards and encouragement for deeds of love. So also thought and think the many Russian religious peasant-reformers whom I have known and still know, from Sytaev to the old man who has now on five occasions presented a petition to the Tsar asking him to revoke the false religion and propagate Christianity.

People naturally suppose that a government which justifies its existence by taking care of the welfare of the nation must, to ensure this welfare, wish to use the only means that can in no instance harm the people, but can only be conducive to the most fruitful results. But in no time or place have governments ever taken this obligation upon themselves, but on the contrary, they have always and everywhere shown the greatest fervour in defending the existing, false doctrine, and have used all possible means to persecute those who have attempted to inform people of the basic religious truths. In reality it cannot be otherwise: for governments to expose the falsity of existing religions and to propagate the true one would mount to the same as a person cutting down the branch on which he is sitting.

But if governments do not do this, it would seem certain that those learned men who have freed themselves from the deception of false religions, and who say they wish to serve the people who have provided for them, are sure to do it. But these people, just like the governments, do not do so: firstly, because they consider it pointless to expose themselves to unpleasantnesses and the risks of political persecution for unmasking a fraud which the government protects and which, in their opinion, will collapse of its own accord; secondly, because, considering all religion to be an outlived error, they have nothing to offer the people in place of the fraud they would destroy.

There remain those huge masses of uneducated people who are under the hypnotic influence of Church and State deception, and who therefore consider that the semblance of religion which has been instilled in them is the only true religion, and that there is no other, nor could there be. The masses are in the grip of a constant and intensified hypnotic influence. Generation after generation they are born, live and die in the same stupefied state in which they are now held by the clergy and government, and if they do free themselves from it they invariably fall into the category of scientists who negate religion, and their influence becomes as useless and harmful as that of their teachers.

Thus for some it is not advantageous and for others it is not possible.

CHAPTER 17

There would appear to be no way out.

And indeed there is not and cannot be any way out of this situation for non-religious people. Even if those who belong to the upper, governing classes pretend to be concerned for the welfare of the masses, they will never attempt (nor can they, guided as they are by worldly pursuits) to destroy the torpor and enslavement in which the masses live, and which enables the governing classes to rule over them. In exactly the same way, those belonging to the enslaved masses and also guided by worldly aims cannot wish to worsen their burdensome situation by struggling against the upper classes in order to expose the false teaching and propagate the truth. Neither of the two have any reason to do so, and if they are intelligent people they will never attempt to do it.

But this does not apply to religious people, to those religious people who, however perverted a society may be, always guard with their lives that sacred flame of religion, without which humanity could not exist. There are times (such as nowadays) when these people go unnoticed, are despised and scorned by all and spend their lives in obscurity, in exile, prisons and penal battalions, as happens here in Russia. But these people exist and it is they who preserve rational human life. However few there may be of these religious people, it is they alone who can tear asunder, and who do tear asunder, the enchanted circle in which people are shackled. They are able to do so because all the disadvantages and dangers that hinder worldly man from opposing the existing order of life not only do not exist for the religious person, but they strengthen his ardour in the struggle against the lie, and in confessing by word and deed that which he believes to be the divine truth. If he is a member of the ruling class he will not wish to conceal the truth in order to protect his own privileged position, but quite the opposite: since he hates these privileges he will make every effort to free himself from them and to preach the truth, for he already has no other purpose in life than that of service to God. If he is a member of the enslaved masses, then similarly he will refute the desire, common to the majority of people in his position, of improving the physical conditions of his life; for such a person will have no other purpose than that of fulfilling God's will by exposing falsehood and teaching the truth, and no form of suffering or threat can prevent him from living in conformity with this single purpose which he recognizes in life. They will both act in this way as naturally as the worldly person labours and puts up with privations in order to acquire wealth, or to please a ruler from whom he expects a reward. Every religious person believes in this way because a human soul enlightened by religion no longer believes in the life of this world (as do non-religious people), but lives in eternal, everlasting life where the suffering and death of this world are as insignificant as the blistered hands or wearied limbs of a ploughman ploughing a field.

It is these men who will tear asunder the enchanted circle in which people are now shackled. However few they are in number, however low their social standing, and however lacking they are in education and ability, it is these people who, as sure as the fire that lights the parched steppe, will set alight the whole world and ail those hearts of men that have been dried up by years of irreligious living and are thirsting

for renewal.

Religion is not a belief established once and for all in certain supernatural events that are supposed to have taken place at a particular time, nor is it a belief in the necessity of certain prayers and rituals, nor, as the scientists think, is it a survival of the superstitions of ancient ignorance which have no meaning or relevance to life today. Religion is a relationship established between man, everlasting life, and God in conformity with reason and contemporary knowledge, and which alone pushes humanity forwards to its destined aim.

'The soul of man is the lamp of God,' says a wise Jewish proverb. Man is a weak and miserable creature when God's light is not burning in his soul. But when it burns (and it only burns in souls enlightened by religion), man becomes the most powerful creature in the world. And it cannot be otherwise, for what then works in him is not his own strength, but the strength of God. This then is what religion is and what its essence consists of.