

A STUDY ON PRINCIPLES OF TRUE RELIGION, LEO TOLSTOY

S. Seethalakshmi

Research Scholar, Queen Mary's College, Chennai

Introduction

True religion is that relationship, in accordance the reason and knowledge, which man establishes with the infinite world around him, and which binds his life to that infinity and guides his actions. Reason is the power man possesses to define his relationship to the universe. Since the relationship is the same for everyone, thus religion unites men. Union among men gives them the highest attainable well-being, on both the physical and the spiritual level. 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**: 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.

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...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 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 recognises that with which man unites and merges as he reaches Nirvana. And that something is the same origin which the other religions recognise 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, rationalisation, 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.**

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 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.

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.

The essence of any religion lies solely in the answer to the question: why do I exist, and what is my relationship to the infinite universe that surrounds me?

From the most elevated to the most primitive, there is not one single religion that does not have as its basis the establishment of man's relationship to the universe, or to its first cause.

It is impossible for there to be a person with no religion (i.e. without any kind of relationship to the world) as it is for there to be a person without a heart. He may not know that he has a religion, just as a person may not know that he has a heart, but it is no more possible for a person to exist without a religion than without a heart. Religion is the relationship a person recognises himself to have with the external world, or with its origin and first cause, and a rational person cannot fail to have some kind of relationship to it.

Knowledge of Reality

But you may well say that the establishing of a relationship between man and the universe is not the concern of religion but of philosophy, or of science in general, if philosophy is to be regarded as a part of science. I do not think so. I believe quite the

opposite, that to suggest that science as a whole, including philosophy can establish a relationship between man and the universe is entirely mistaken and is the main reason for the confusion that is understanding religion, science and morality that exists among the cultured strata of our society.

Science, including philosophy, cannot establish man's relationship to the infinite universe, or towards its origin, if no other reason than that before any kind of philosophy or science could come into existence there must have been that, without which it is impossible to have any kind of mental activity, or any kind of relationship whatsoever between man and the universe.

Philosophy always has been, and always will be, merely an investigation of things that stem from an established religious attitude between man and the universe. Therefore, until that relationship is established there is no material for philosophical investigation. Neither philosophy nor science is able to establish man's relationship to the universe, because this relationship must be established before any kind of philosophy or science can begin.

Religion & Morality

If religion is the establishing of a relationship between man and the universe, defining the meaning of life, then morality is the indication and explanation of those activities that automatically result when a person maintains one or other relationship to the universe. Morality cannot be independent of religion, since it is not only a consequence of religion- that is, of the relationship a person has to the world- but it is also included in religion by implication. Every religion is an answer to the question of the meaning of life. And the religious answer includes a certain moral demand.

Even if we accept the impossible and believe that in a thousand years social progress alone will have united the whole of humanity in one entity which will form a single state, with a single government, even then one must not forget that the struggle between nations and States that will have been abolished will turn into a struggle between the human and the animal kingdom.

It is truly desirable that moral teaching should not be adulterated by superstition, but the truth of the matter is that moral teaching is only a result of a particular relationship established between man and the universe, or God. If the establishment of such a relationship is expressed in forms we feel to be superstitious, then in order to avoid this we must strive to express it more reasonably, clearly and precisely, or even to destroy the previously established relationship between man and the universe that is now inadequate, and replace it with one that is more reasonable, clear and precise.

Religion is a particular relationship that man establishes between his own separate personality and the infinite universe, or its origin. And morality is the permanent guide to life that follows from this relationship. 'The reform of evil that exists in life must begin with a denunciation of the religious lie and the establishing of religious truth within each

individual person.' 'There is no greater unhappiness than when a person starts to fear the truth lest it denounce him.' 'Wrong does not cease to be wrong because the majority share in it.' The majority of the working people, deprived of land and consequently of the possibility of enjoying the fruits of their labour, hate the landowners and capitalists who hold them in servitude.

Non-Violence

Violence produces something only resembling justice, but it distances people from the possibility of living justly, without violence. The Christian teaching in its true meaning, acknowledging the SUPREME LAW of human life to be the law of love which in no instance permits violence between men, is so close to the heart of man and gives such undoubted freedom, such independent happiness to both the individual and groups of people, as well as to the whole of humanity, that it would seem this need only be known for all men to accept it as the guiding principle of their behaviour. Thus, in order to accept the Christian teaching in its true meaning, the people of the Christian world, who have, to a greater or lesser extent, understood the truth of Christianity, must free themselves not only from their belief in the false forms of a perverted Christian teaching, but also from belief in the necessity and inevitability of that system of government that was founded on this false Church religion.

Thus, although liberation from false religious forms is taking place ever more frequently, the people of our time, having rejected belief in dogmas, sacraments, miracles, the sanctity of the Bible and other institutions of the Church, are nevertheless unable to free themselves from those false teachings of the State, founded on a perverted Christianity and hiding the true one. And so, those who, like the working populace, believe in the lawfulness of the existing structure of society, as too the so-called educated people who try, either gradually or by revolutionary processes, to change the existing order, believe equally in the necessity of violence as a chief weapon for structuring society. And neither one of them either acknowledges, or is capable of imagining, a social structure other than one based on violence. One need only recall Christ's teaching forbidding violent resistance to evil, and people, from the privileged gentry as compared to the labouring classes, will, whether they are believers or non-believers, simply smile ironically at such a reference, as if the idea that non-violent resistance to evil were possible is such blatant nonsense that serious-minded people would not even mention it.

I sit on a man's back, choking him, and making him carry me, and yet assure myself and others that I am very sorry for him and wish to ease his lot by any means possible, except getting off his back. The changed form and substance of law is rather like what a jailer might do who shifted a prisoner's chains...or removed them and substituted bolts and bars. A Russian should rejoice if Poland, the Baltic Provinces, Finland, Armenia, should be separated, freed from Russia; so with an Englishman in regard to Ireland, India and other possessions; and each should help to do this, because the greater the state, the more

wrong and cruel is its patriotism, and the greater is the sum of suffering upon which its power is founded. Therefore, if we really wish to be what we profess to be, we must not only cease our present desire for the growth of the state, but we must desire its decrease, its weakening, and help this forward with all our might.

References

1. Tolstoy, Leo. *A Confession and other Religious Writings, (1879-82)*, Penguin Books, 1987.
2. Leo Tolstoy. EJ Simmons, Little, Brown and Company, 1946.
3. Tolstoy and the Novel, J Bayley, Chatto & Windus, 1967.
4. Tolstoy: Principles for a New World Order, David Redfearn.
5. Kenneth C. Wenzel, "Tolstoy's Georgist Spiritual Political Economy: Anarchism and Land Reform, 1897-1910.