CHAPTER III

THE SOLUTION - Early Phase (1879-1887)

I. Meaning of Life

As is evident from the concluding words of A Confession, Tolstoy's first step towards the solution of the meaning of life was to explore the religion of Christ as enunciated by Church. Years before while still a youth of twenty-seven years he had conceived of "a great, stupendous idea" to found a "new religion corresponding to the present state of mankind: the religion of Christ but purged of dogma and mysticism - a practical religion, not promising future bliss but giving bliss on earth."¹ Now the time had come for that. Tolstoy's early explanation of the meaning of life was by way of the religion of Christ. It was not a mere interpretation of Christ's faith, rather it was the understanding of life with the aid of Christ.

The first task before him at this stage was to study all the relevant Christian scriptures in translation as well as in the original, and to make an inten-

¹As quoted in Aylmer Maude, The Life of Tolstoy, I, 189.
sive search into the practices of Church. As to the Church, his mind was formed more or less inimically towards it as is evident from his 'Confession', but to separate the grain from the chaff he was to undertake now systematically. He made a very sincere and painful effort to unentangle the truth. For this he learnt Greek and went to the original source for clarity and understanding. He made a most diligent effort to arrive at the truth. If some people think that he made a subjective interpretation of Christ, it may be remarked that though he tried his best to arrive at objectivity, finally every interpretation of Christ is bound to be subjective. Were it not so there would not have been so many sects and orders in the realm of Christendom. Moreover, Tolstoy indicated his method to arrive at the true interpretation of Christ when he wrote that to understand any book one must choose out the parts that were quite clear, dividing them from what was obscure or confused, and from what was clear we must form our idea of the drift and spirit of the whole work. Then on the basis of what we understood we ought to proceed to make out what was confused or unintelligible. This was the appropriate manner to read all kinds of books, particularly
the Gospels which had passed through a multiplicity of compilations, translations, transcriptions, and were composed many centuries past by men who were not highly educated and were superstitious.¹

That truth lay in the teaching of Christ he was convinced of. That it could explain the meaning of life there was every reasonable hope. And as the very word of Christ was to be found in the Gospels he turned to a study of it:

It was search for the meaning of life, that is, search for a path of life - to know how to live - that brought me to belief, and when I had seen the life of men who adopted Christ's teaching I clung to them. Such men, who professed Christ's teaching by their works, I encountered equally and indiscriminately among the orthodox Huzzo-Greeks, the different sects of dissenters, and the Catholics and Lutherans, so that evidently the general sense of life given by Christ's teaching was drawn not from the creeds but from something else that is common to all the communities. I watched good people of more than one faith, and observed in them all the same understanding based on the teaching of Jesus. In all these different sects of Christians I saw full agreement in the conception of what is good and evil and as to how one ought to live. And all these people explained this conception of theirs by the teaching of Jesus. The doctrines had divided them, but the basis was one and the same; therefore it is what lies at the basis of all the faiths that alone is true. And just this truth is what I now seek to learn. The truth of the faith must lie not in separate interpretations of Christ's revelation - those interpretations which have divided Christians into a thousand sects - but in the

¹Tolstoy, "How to read the Gospels,” On Life and Essays on Religion, p. 207.
primary revelation of Christ himself. That revelation—the words of Christ himself—is in the Gospels. And so I turned to the study of the Gospels.1

After scrutinising the various theological matter he came to the conclusion that the quintessence of Christian teaching lay in the four Gospels, the rest being at best an interpretation and elucidation of it. The whole Christian tradition was contained in it. According to him, the books of the Old Testament could serve only as an explanation of the form Christ's teaching took, and this in no way elucidated the meaning of Christ's teaching. The Epistles of John and James were private interpretations of the teaching evoked by special occasions, and it was sometimes possible to find Christ's teaching expressed in them from a new side, but nothing more. It was often found, especially in the Epistles of Paul, an expression of the teaching which involved readers in perplexity, obscuring the teaching itself. The sets of the Apostles had often nothing in common with the Gospels and the Epistles of John, Peter, and James, and even contradicted them. The book of Revelation revealed nothing. Only the Gospels, at whatever different times written, gave the exposition of the whole teaching.2

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2 Ibid., pp. 107-8.
In a story also written by him, Where Love is, God is (1885), we get a reference that Christ's whole significance is to be found in Gospels. A cobbler named Martin was in a state of utter despair because firstly his wife died then his only surviving son out of eight children also died. In sheer desperation he stopped going to Church and even spoke against God. Then one day an old man from his village, who had been a pilgrim for the last eight years, called in on his way from the Troitaa monastery. Martin opened his heart to him and told of his sorrow:

"I no longer even wish to live, holy man," he said. "All I ask of God is that I soon may die. I am now quite without hope in the world."

The old man replied: "You have no right to say such things, Martin. We cannot judge God's ways. Not our reasoning, but God's will, decides. If God willed that your son should die and you should live, it must be best so. As to your despair - that comes because you wish to live for your own happiness."

"What else should one live for?" asked Martin. "For God, Martin," said the old man. "He gives you life, and you must live for Him. When you have learnt to live for Him, you will grieve no more, and all will seem easy to you."

Martin was silent awhile, and then asked: "But how is one to live for God?"

The old man answered: "How one may live for God has been shown us by Christ. Can you read? Then buy the Gospels and read them; there you will see how God would have you live. You have it all there."¹

¹Tolstoy, "Where Love is, God is," Twenty Three Tales (London, 1906), p. 159.
Tolstoy wrote a large, comprehensive work on the Gospels entitled *A Harmony, Translation, and Examination of the Gospels*, and also a summary of it, *The Gospel in Brief*. The larger work consisted of four parts:

1. An account of the course of his own life and of the thoughts which led him to the conviction that the Christian teaching contained the truth.

2. An examination of the Christian teaching, firstly according to its interpretation by the orthodox Russo-Greek Church, then according to its interpretation by the Church in general — by the Apostles, the Councils, the so-called Fathers of the Church, and an exposure of what was false in those interpretations.

3. An examination of Christian teaching not according to the above-mentioned interpretations but solely as ascribed to Christ in the Gospels.

4. An exposition of the real meaning of Christ's teaching, the reason why it had been perverted, and the consequences to which it led.

It were the Gospels which provided Tolstoy with a cue to explain the meaning of life by creating a certain relationship between the flesh and spirit of
man. It was the explanation which Christ gave to the
flesh and spirit of man that he followed to make the
explanation. It was for the man of flesh and spirit
that a meaning was sought, and also it was out of this
flesh and spirit that a meaning was to be sought. Tolstoy
explained the meaning of life with the aid of Gospels
in the following manner:

The beginning and the end of everything is the
soul of man. Every man, though he realizes that he was
conceived by a bodily father in his mother's womb, is
conscious also that he has within him a spirit that is
free, intelligent, and independent of the body.
That eternal spirit proceeding from the infinite,
is the origin of all and is what we call God. We know
Him only as we recognize Him within ourselves. That
spirit is the source of our life; we must rank it above
everything and by it we must live. By making it the
basis of our life we obtain true and everlasting life.
The Father-spirit who has given that spirit to man
cannot have sent it to deceive men - that while conscio-
ous of everlasting life in themselves they should
lose it. This infinite spirit in man must have been
given that through him men should have an infinite
life. Therefore the man who conceives of this spirit as
his life has infinite life, while a man who does not
so conceive it has no true life. Men can themselves
choose life or death: life in the spirit, or death in
the flesh. The life of the spirit is goodness and light;
the life of the flesh is evil and darkness. To believe
in the spirit, means to do good deeds; to disbelieve
means to do evil. Goodness is life, evil is death. God -
an external creator, the beginning of all beginnings -
we do not know. Our conception of Him can only be this:
that He has sown the spirit in men as a sower sows his
seed, everywhere, not discriminating as to what part
of the field; and the seed that falls on good ground
grows, but what falls on sterile ground perishes. The
spirit alone gives life to men, and it depends on them
to preserve it or lose it. For the spirit, evil does not exist. Evil is an illusion of life. There is only that which lives and that which does not live.

Thus the world presents itself to all men, and each man has a consciousness of the kingdom of heaven in his soul. Each one can of his own free will enter that kingdom or not. To enter it he must believe in the life of the spirit, for he who believes in that life has everlasting life.\(^1\)

Fluidicating further the life of spirit he wrote:

We must serve all that has life, for life lies not in doing one's own will but the will of the Father of life. And that will is that the life of the spirit, which each one has, should remain in him and that all should cherish the life of the spirit in them until the hour of death. The Father, the source of all life, is the spirit. Life consists only in carrying out the will of the Father, and to carry out that will of the spirit one must surrender the body. The body is food for the life of the spirit. Only by sacrificing the body does the spirit live.\(^2\)

Tolstoy's explanation of life with the aid of Gospels leads to the following conclusions:

1. The life of the flesh was transitory and mortal, but the life of the spirit was eternal and immortal. Man's body was liable to perish anytime but the spirit would ever live. This way he created a relationship between the finite and infinite life. This was in agreement with one of the fundamental conclusions that he had derived while diagnosing life in *A Confession* that any solution to the meaning of life could only be by


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 275.
establishing a link between the finite and infinite life. As he wrote: "however irrational and distorted might be the replies given by faith, they have this advantage, that they introduce into every answer a relation between the finite and the infinite, without which there can be no solution." 

3. The life of the flesh in itself was evil. It was because, firstly, it was short-lived and might end any moment, secondly, it led to no meaningful conclusion after death.

3. Though the life of flesh was evil in itself but when it became a means to serve the life of the spirit then it became meaningful and good. Body was to serve the life of the spirit. The life of spirit was of course the real life but spirit could not exist without bodily existence. As he wrote: "The body is food for the life of the spirit." Therefore, the life of flesh was also essential but only as subsidiary and instrumental to the higher life of the spirit.

4. God is the ultimate source of the spirit and is referred to as the Father-spirit. To live the life of spirit was to set in accord of the will of God, and

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it was in the realm of spiritual life that the kingdom of God could be attained. This, indicates, firstly, Tolstoy's belief in God, though howsoever vague; and, secondly, that his whole argument on life was dependent upon a conception of Him. If there was no God there would not be any fulfilling of His will and there would not be any kingdom of God either. Though time and again he expressed man's inability to find out God - the creator, nevertheless, he remarked that His will was evident in the framework of the world and it was imperative for all men to fulfil it. The will, as remarked earlier, was to be fulfilled by living the life of the spirit.

But how this life of the spirit was to be lived?

There must be some methodology to put into practice the theoretical exposition of the life of spirit. Tolstoy explained with the aid of Gospels the precepts - both positive and negative - to be followed. As to what men ought to restrain themselves from was:

Family and household cares must not hinder the life of the spirit. He who is troubled about what results to his bodily life from the fulfilment of the Father's will, acts like a ploughman who looks back while ploughing, instead of in front of him.

Cares for the pleasure of the bodily life, which seem so important to men, are delusions. The only real
business of life is the announcement of the Father's will, attention to it, and fulfilment of it....

Jesus said: He who desires to obtain true life, consisting in the fulfilment of the Father's will, must first of all give up his own personal desires. He must not only not plan his life according to his own wishes, but must be ready to endure privation and suffering at any moment.

He who desires to arrange his bodily life according to his own desires, will wreck the true life of fulfilment of the Father's will. And there is no advantage in gain for the physical life if that gain wrecks the life of the spirit.

Most ruinous of all for the life of the spirit is the love of gain, of getting rich. Men forget that whatever riches or goods they obtain they may die at any moment, and that property is not essential for life. Death hangs over each of us. Sickness, murder, or accident, may at any moment end our life. Bodily death is an inescapable condition of every second of our life....He who does not wholly reject the cares and gains of the bodily life cannot fulfill the Father's will, for no man can serve himself a little and the Father a little....

Apart from the restraints on the fleshly and worldly pursuits, a positive course of action was also to be followed. That was to love all men. This commandment of Christ was all-comprehensive and the nucleus of whatever significant in his teaching:

If you fulfil my commandments you will be blessed, and the commandment which sums up my whole teaching is simply that all men should love one another. And love is to sacrifice the bodily life for the sake of another; there is no other definition. And in fulfilling my law of love you will not fulfill it like slaves who obey their master's orders without understanding them; but

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you will live as free men like myself, for I have made
clear to you the purpose of life flowing from a know-
ledge of the Father of life.¹

'Love' was to form the cornerstone of Tolstoy's
philosophy of life. Whatever else he took from Christ
the teaching of love was the foremost of it. We get
reference to it in his writing at innumerable places.
He applied it to all the phases of human life and tried
to resolve antagonism with its aid. In the early phase
of his explanation of life, as well as the later, love
was to be one of the fundamentals of explanation. Even
in some of his works of imagination he gave expression
to it. He himself referred in a letter to V.I. Alexeev
in 1881 about the folk-tales in which he expressed his
love of Christian teaching. "I am also writing stories
in which I would try to express my ideas."² The story,
for example, Two Old Men (1885) has love for its theme.
Two pilgrims, Efim and Elisha, start for Jerusalem
to do pilgrimage. On the way at a place Elisha stays
behind to look after a miserable starving family. He
helps the family and puts it on feet. The other man
continues his journey and reaches Jerusalem. There at
the chapel where the holy sepulchre is he is surprised

¹Tolstoy, "The Gospel in Brief," A Confession and

²As quoted in Aylmer Maude, The Life of Tolstoy.
II, 87.
to see Elisha present along with others at a small distance from him. After the service is over the crowd begins to push forward to kiss the tomb and pushes Effim aside. When he tries to spot Elisha he is nowhere to be found. Next day again he is seen in the crowd yet lost again. The same happens the third day. When Effim decides to return, on the way back he stays with the same family which Elisha had looked after with great sympathy. The family tells him with what care Elisha had looked after them in their time of worst need. It is now that Effim comes to understand as to how Elisha happened to reach Jerusalem. He says that God may or may not have accepted his pilgrimage but He has certainly accepted his. After reaching home he meets Elisha and remarks to him that though his feet have been to Jerusalem but whether his soul or another's has been there more truly he could not say. He now understands that "the best way to keep one's vows to God and to do His will, is for each man while he lives to show love and do good to others."¹

In another story also, What Men Live By (1881), he elaborated on the theme of love. An angel is sent

by God to earth to learn the three truths: what dwells in men; what is not given to men; and what men live by? By his experience the angel gets to know that love dwells in men; that it is not given to man to know his own needs; and that men live not by care for themselves but by love. He who has love is in God, and God is in him, for God is love.

To Tolstoy love was not to be a mere philosophical exposition of the argument, rather it was very much to be a matter of practical conduct in life. He envisioned a regeneration of mankind by it. So much so that when the Tsar of Russia was assassinated by the revolutionaries in 1881 he wrote a letter to his son, the new Tsar, to forgive the murderers in a spirit of true Christian love and mercy. He wrote: "There is only one ideal which can be opposed to them ... the ideal of love, forgiveness, and the return of good for evil. One word of forgiveness and Christian love spoken and carried out from the height of the throne ... can destroy the evil which is corroding Russia. As a wax before the fire, all Revolutionary struggle will melt away before the man-Tsar who fulfils the law of Christ."¹

¹As quoted in Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, II, 65.
Further, according to him, whereas love was the positive teaching of Christ, the commandments were the cautious signposts to warn men drifting away from the right path: "the whole positive teaching of Christ is expressed in this one thing: Love God, and thy neighbour as thyself....The law and commandments of Christ, like the Jewish and Buddhist laws and commandments, are but indications of cases in which the snares of the world turn men aside from a true understanding of life." ¹

As a corollary to the Christian law of love was to practise goodness to others and live a life in common with them in place of their selfish, personal living. Individual was to renounce his personal life for the life of all. "The only true life is the life common to all, and not the life of the individual. Each should work for the life of others." ² This way the meaningless living for transitory, mortal life, would be substituted by the meaningful living for others where life would ever continue. This was in agreement with his argument of creating a relation between the finite individual existence and the infinite life of the spirit common to all, which could alone lead to the realization of

the true meaning of life.

One essential point regarding Tolstoy's explanation of life may be noted that for him the search for the meaning of life was not something merely academic to satisfy the curiosity of mind, rather it was a "search for a path of life - to know how to live." It signifies that apart from being satisfactory to the mind it also ought to be realizable as a practical conduct in life. He was aware that any theory which could not be put into practice would be of no significance.

Tolstoy rounded off his explanation of life with the aid of Gospels by remarking that not only men should love each other and practise goodness to all, but also - being trustees in good faith - leave life better than they found it. From the day of their birth to death they were in debt to others, to those who lived before them, those living in the present, and those who would live - to that which was, is, and will be - the source of all things. A man who refused to unite himself with the source of life and lived for himself alone deprived himself of life. Only that life was true which carried on the life of the past, promoted the welfare of the present, and prepared the welfare of the future.

We shall examine later on that most of these ideas - as yet in a rudimentary form - would form the basis of Tolstoy's explanation of life in the later phase. As yet he was inclined to base his conclusions on life on the sound basis of Christian belief rather than his own which might have all the failings of an imperfect man. Later on Christ would suggest only the wider framework of his argument, the exposition being his own without any inhibition. It would be a transformation to a wider and deeper conceiving of the whole argument.
According to Tolstoy, it was essential that to realize the true meaning of life as found in the religion of Christ a true conception of the Christian religion be laid down. He held that if the conception of religion was false then the meaning of life to be derived therefrom would also be false. If Christianity was to serve its real purpose — that is to teach men how to live — then it must be truly representative of what Christ meant to say. In the course of centuries, under political and social vested interest, and also due to the interest of Church itself, the teaching of Christ had become disassociated more and more from its true aim and purpose. In the time of Tolstoy the Church had come to be not only an unworthy representative of what it preached, but even worse — an instrument in the hands of high and mighty to mislead and oppress the people. It did not explain any meaning of life or guided men according to the true Christian principles, rather it went outrightly against Christ when it sanctioned war and approved of various oppressive acts of the State. In brief,
the Church had lost its sense and soul.\footnote{Though these charges might have been more applicable to the contemporary Russian Church, but Tolstoy meant disapproval for Church as an institution itself.}

Tolstoy set out to demolish this bulwark of falsehood which inhibited the growth of true Christian teaching, and thereby the unfolding of the true meaning of life. Though we get a reference to the breaking away from the orthodox Church in *A Confession*, but with the publication of *Conclusions of a Criticism of Dogmatic Theology* in the same year of 1879 the break was final. By this time the meaning of life as he found in the Gospels was clear to him, and he came to understand that it was Church which was inimical to its unfolding. Therefore, firstly, to unentangle the truth from the hold of Church and place it before mankind, and, secondly, to deliver a lasting blow to the institution itself which inhibited the spread of true Christian teaching, he dug deep holes into its body and endeavoured to shake it to its very roots. To that end he moved in consistency with his mission and also with full responsibility. His onslaught against the Church — though severe — had nothing personal to gain for; on the contrary, as a Count and the owner of a large agricultural estate he had every reason to come to harm by it. Fully
Referring to the unwhole teaching of Church which he termed as blasphemous he wrote in Conclusion of a
Criticism of Dogmatic Theology:

The meaning of my life according to this teaching is an utter absurdity, incomparably worse than what presented itself to me by the light of my unsaid reason. Then I saw that I am alive and as long as I live I enjoy life, and that when I die I shall no longer feel anything. Then I was frightened by the senselessness of my personal life and the insolubility of the question: What are my efforts and my life for, since it will all end? But now it is still worse: it will not all end—all this senselessness, this caprice of someone's, will continue forever.

To the question as to how I should live, the reply given by this teaching also contradicts all that my moral feelings require and demands what has always seemed to me most immoral—namely, hypocrisy. From all the moral applications of the dogmas only this emerges: save yourself by faith. If you cannot understand what you are told to believe, say that you believe it. With all the strength of your soul suppress the demand for light and truth; say that you believe, and do what results from that belief. The matter is plain. In spite of all proviso that for some reason it is necessary to do good works and to follow Christ's teaching about love, meekness, humility and self-sacrifice, it is evident that those deeds are not necessary, and the life of believers confirms this. Logic is inexorable. What is the use of works when I am redeemed by the death of a God, when even my future sins are all redeemed, and when it is only necessary to believe? And how can I struggle and strive towards goodness—which I formerly understood to consist in good deeds alone—when the chief dogma of the faith is that man can of himself do nothing, but all is done of itself by grace? It is only necessary to seek for grace; but grace is...
not obtained by me alone, it is imparted to me by others. Even if I have not time to become sanctified by grace during my lifetime there is a way to avail myself of it after death. I can leave money to the Church and I shall be prayed for. All that is asked of me is that I should seek for grace. But grace is given by the sacraments and the prayers of the Church, so I must fly to it and place myself so as never to be deprived of them. I must have priests around me, or live in a monastery, and leave as much money as possible for prayers for my soul. More than that, having insured myself for the future life I may calmly enjoy this one, and for this life make use of those instruments which the Church offers me, praying for the providence of God for aid in my worldly affairs in the ways indicated to me to make these prayers most efficacious. Prayers are more efficacious when uttered near to icons and relics and during a religious service.

I remember that when I did not yet doubt the Church teaching and read in the Gospel that "Blasphemy against the son of men shall be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven either in this world or in the world to come", I could not at all understand those words. But now they are only too terribly clear to me. This is it - that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will not be forgiven either in this world or in the world to come. That blasphemy is this terrible doctrine, the basis of which is the teaching about the Church.¹

In What I Believe (1884) Tolstoy went to the extent of abolishing Church altogether. He wrote that Church had played its role - essential in the formative stages of Christianity when it needed nourishment from it, but at the present stage of development it was not only unnecessary but a hindrance as well. It ought to

¹Tolstoy, "Conclusion of a Criticism of Dogmatic Theology," A Confession and What I Believe, pp. 91-5.
be replaced by the very source of Christian teaching. It is because the emancipation from the Church simply would not be enough, a fresh nourishment had to be found in the teaching of Christ where it was most amply available. And the source of Christian teaching were the Gospels. It was here that he found the explanation of the spirit which guided the life of all.

We note that though Tolstoy condemned the Church and argued for its abolition yet at the same time he vigorously emphasized the need of the teaching of Christ. In his apparent irreligiosity there was very much of religion.

He was of the opinion that only a true conception of religion would lead to a true meaning and conduct of life. He was ever weary of the efforts of science to realize a true meaning of life without the aid of religion. His contention was that the outlook on life was supplied by religion for science to work upon. Science by itself could not undertake to explain life. It was only when science acted upon the outlook supplied by religion that the exploration of science could be worthwhile. Similar was the case with philosophy. He emphasized the fact that if the meaning of life supplied
by religion was false than science and philosophy, educated to that religious outlook, would apply that false perception to the various phases of life.

He stressed further that if some men of learning considered religion to be a mass of irrationality and superstition, or if they thought that they had reached a state of intellectual development when no religion was necessary, then they were under an illusion and a serious mistake. Religion, according to him, was what induced men to live. Men had lived since times immemorial in one way or the other, at whatever stage what induced them to live was their religion. If during the early period of mankind there was worship of nature or the ancestors, it was perfectly in agreement with their stage of development and the understanding of life, and thereby their religion. He remarked that there was never any period, nor would there be any, when man would be without any religion or faith. Every reasonable activity of man was conditioned by faith. The faith was which induced men to follow certain reasonable activity.

We note that the inevitable relation which religion forms to the life of men and the very particular defining of it by Tolstoy has the mark of his own individual
analysis. The necessity of having a faith to lead a good meaningful life was proclaimed by religious men at different periods of mankind, but the way he interpreted it is both original and full of conviction of its prime necessity.

Tolstoy's belief in religion, being a part and parcel of his comprehension of life, was rational. If he believed that the teaching of Christ explained life he emphasised that it ought to be followed with full critical insight. A man of high critical reasoning as he was he could not have accepted any explanation unless it was rationally acceptable as well. It may appear rather paradoxical that when he explained the meaning of life with the aid of Gospels and urged for acceptance whatever Christ's true word implied he brought to bear the application of reasoning which led to doubt and contradiction. The explanation is that at this period he was rationally convinced of the teaching of Christ to solve the meaning of life. He believed that the faith of Christ was reasonable, as any true faith ought to be. He wrote: "Christ teaches, first of all, that men should believe in the light while the light is yet in them. Christ teaches that men should set that light of reason
above all else and should live in accord with it, not doing things they themselves consider irrational."¹

According to him, even if there was some metaphysical explanation of life in the teaching of Christ which was rationally unacceptable, it did not invalidate those rules of life without which it was impossible for man to live a reasonable life. He remarked that it did not matter whether Christ was a divine being or not, when or where the Gospels were composed, what was essential was that he laid down those fundamentals of life without which the true conception of life was not possible. He wrote: "Take away the Church, the traditions, the Bible, and even Christ himself: the ultimate fact of man's knowledge of goodness, i.e. of God, directly through reason and conscience, will be as clear and certain as ever, and it will be seen that we are dealing with truths that can never perish - truths that humanity can never afford to part with."²

Further, he emphasized that the strength of Christ's teaching lay not in its explanation of the meaning of life, but in what flowed therefrom - the teaching of life. His metaphysical teaching was not new, it had been


²As quoted in Introduction by Aylmer Maude to On Life and Essays on Religion, p. xv.
taught by all the true sages of the world. But it was in its application to life that its importance was.
The metaphysical basis of the teaching of the Jews and Christ was the same love of God and of one's neighbour, but whereas for the application of the teaching of Moses the fulfilment of six hundred and thirteen commandments was necessary the Christ's law was expressed in five commandments which were reasonable, beneficent, and embraced the whole life of man.

For the time Tolstoy appeared to have found an explanation to the riddle of life with Christ's aid. "I regard Christianity neither as an exclusive divine revelation nor as an historical phenomenon, but as a teaching which gives us the meaning of life."¹ Not only he found an explanation of life but also an immense relief from painful spiritual despair. "I, like that thief on the cross, have believed Christ's teaching and been saved. And this is no far-fetched comparison but the closest expression of the condition of spiritual despair and horror at the problem of life and death in which I lived formerly, and of the condition of peace and happiness in which I am now."²

²Ibid., p. 306.
He was so much enamoured of Christ's faith that at this period that he considered it to possess and even surpass other religions in its manifestation of the the worthies elements: "Christ's teaching cannot but be accepted by those believing Jews, Buddhists, Mohammedans, and others who have begun to doubt the validity of their own law."¹

In his seat to propagate the faith of Christ he even suggested a compromise between the orthodox Church practices and the purest form of Christian teaching as found in the Gospels. He felt that the people who had been following the Church for generations might find it unintelligible to break away with the older tradition all of a sudden. He told of a via media:

You are a believing Christian of whatever sect or confession. You believe in the creation of the world, in the Trinity, in the fall and redemption of man, in the sacraments, in prayers, and in the Church. Christ's teaching not only does not argue with you, but fully agrees with your outlook on the world; it merely adds something you have not got. Retaining your present belief you feel that the life of the world and your own life is filled with evil and you do not know how to avoid it. Christ's teaching ... gives you simple, practicable rules of life which will free you and other people from the evil that torments you. Believe in the resurrection, in heaven and hell, in the Church, in sacraments, in the redemption, and pray as your faith demands, fast and sing psalms - all this does not prevent you from fulfilling what Christ has revealed to be necessary for your welfare; do not be angry; do not commit adultery; do not bind yourself by oaths; do not defend yourself by violence; and do not go to war.²

²Ibid., pp. 590–1.