

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Throughout his long life, Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi (1828–1910) grappled with the major questions of human existence. Who are we? What is the purpose of life? Where are we going? (Paperno 2014) Almost all his major fictional characters are concerned with these questions and give different answers to them (Orwin 1993). In the autobiographical trilogy *Childhood, Boyhood and Youth*, the protagonist “tries out” various philosophical beliefs, seeking to find what can give meaning to human life. These are also the aspects that elevate *War and Peace* from being a purely historical epic to becoming an existential drama.

Around 1879–80, Tolstoi experienced a deep personal crisis. Emerging from it, he believed that he had finally found answers to the questions that he had wrestled with. From there on he appeared primarily as a religious preacher and anarchist socialist (Christoyannopoulos 2016), but without renouncing fiction as a medium. Several of his most important works originate from this period – *The Death of Ivan Ilich*, *Resurrection*, *The Kreutzer Sonata* and *Father Sergius*. Also in these novels and short stories, the characters are searching for the meaning of life – and many of them end up finding it in one form or another.

As a philosophical system, “Tolstoianism” may not be particularly significant, but its major role in the cultural history of Europe – indeed, the world – means that it holds great interest also for posterity. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, dozens of Tolstoian communities sprang up in Russia and abroad attempting to put the ideas of their great inspirer into practice (Popovskii 1983; Alston 2014), but his influence was not limited to the groups of professed Tolstoians. At the time, no thinker – with the possible exception of Friedrich Nietzsche – was as influential as Tolstoi. For some twenty-five years – from 1885 to 1910 – it was hardly possible to discuss religious or social issues without taking his views into account, if for no other reason than to condemn them. A few quotations may illustrate the dominant position held by Tolstoi:

No author has ever put his imprint as strongly on the consciousness of his contemporaries . . . as has Count L.N. Tolstoi (Kuliukin 1902, 818).

No one has been so much discussed, no one has been so much criticized, no one has had as many worshipers as the late L.N. Tolstoi. No other name has so often shone from the pages of newspapers and magazines, nothing has been so popular in Russia and abroad as the name of Lev Tolstoi (A. Nikol'skii 1911, issue 5, 372).

L. Tolstoi stands at the centre of criticism and public attention. His moral and social ideas are being discussed everywhere. In the salons, in the learned societies, in the literary circles, among the youth, in the popular press as well as in serious journals, theological as well as secular. Small brochures and thick books, casual remarks and serious scholarly papers, church sermons and public lectures – all of this makes up an impressive library. (Preobrazhenskii 1898, 1)

Famous is also A.S. Suvorin's dictum in a diary entry from 1901:

We have two Tsars: Nicholas II and Lev Tolstoi. Which of them is stronger? Nicholas II cannot touch Tolstoi, cannot overthrow his throne, while Tolstoi indisputably rocks the throne of Nicholas and his dynasty. (Suvorin [1923] 1992, 316)

These quotes may sound like the effusions of overexcited followers, but all four were in fact written by persons who had no sympathy with Tolstoi's ideas. If they exaggerated Tolstoi's significance somewhat, this only bears witness to how he was perceived in his time – a pertinent fact in itself. "Tolstoianism" deserves considerable attention, greater than what it has received so far in scholarship.

Secondly, anyone wishing to deal with Tolstoi from a literary perspective cannot ignore Tolstoianism. Throughout his towering opus, there is an intimate connection between the thinker and the novelist; it would hardly be doing justice to the great writer if one admired only his stylistic skills, without taking seriously the messages he sought to convey (Orwin 1993). Also, for understanding Tolstoi's early literary works, his later preaching may prove fruitful. Tolstoi's later authorship can be said to have been latent in his early writings, achieving fruition in his mature thinking. These two periods relate to each other as questions and answers: His "conversion" is not so much a rupture as a breakthrough.

With this book, I hope to contribute to our understanding of why Tolstoi thought and taught as he did, by tracing the historical sources of some of his ideas. Tolstoi read extensively, and in his works he referred to a wide range of thinkers and faith systems. Many of these he cited with

appreciation, some even with undisguised enthusiasm (e.g., Haase 1928, *passim*). However, such fascination should not always be taken as confirmation that this or that author or thought system exercised a strong influence on Tolstoi. Often, it indicates texts that Tolstoi saw as confirming his own views, or simply a fleeting interest that did not leave noticeable traces on his thinking.

Many monographs have been written about Tolstoi's relation to other thinkers and cultures.¹ One aspect, however, remains understudied: His relationship with the Orthodox faith. On the one hand, this is surprising: Tolstoi learned about religion from the Russian peasantry, who generally saw religion as synonymous with Orthodoxy. On the other hand, one can understand why this aspect has been largely overlooked for so long: On February 24, 1901, Tolstoi was solemnly excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church. In cathedral churches throughout the country, a circular letter from the Holy Synod was read that condemned his "anti-religious and anti-Christian doctrine." Two months later, Tolstoi issued a rebuttal confirming that he had indeed "renounced the church that is calling itself Orthodox." Here he held that the church doctrine was "theoretically a false and harmful lie, and practically a collection of the crudest superstition and witchcraft" (Tolstoi PSS 34, 247). This exchange is by far the single most famous episode in the relationship between Tolstoi and the Orthodox Church, establishing the relationship between them as mutually antagonistic.

Indeed, Lev Tolstoi developed his religious ideas in conscious opposition to the Orthodox faith in which he had been brought up. This opposition was strong and real – but he also clearly took over and implicitly accepted certain aspects of Orthodox theology and spirituality. In *A Confession* (1884), Tolstoi's first religious tract after his deep spiritual crisis in the late 1870s, he claimed that Orthodoxy consisted of both truth and falsehood; he saw it as his task to disentangle the two aspects, digging

¹ For instance, Milan Markovitch, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et Tolstoi* (1928); Robert Quiskamp, *Die Beziehungen L.N. Tolstois zu den Philosophen des deutschen Idealismus* (1930); Franz-Heinrich Philipp, *Tolstoj und der Protestantismus* (1959). Books that address his relationship with non-European cultures include Pavel Biriukov, *Tolstoi and the Orient* (1925); Derk Bodde, *Tolstoy and China* (1950); Claus Fischer, M. *Lev N Tolstoj in Japan* (1969); A. I. Shifman, *Lev Tolstoi i vostok* (1971); Radha Balasubramanian, *The Influence of India on Leo Tolstoy and Tolstoy's Influence on India* (2013); John Burt Foster, *Transnational Tolstoy* (2013); Natalia Velikanova and Robert Whittaker, eds, *Tolstoi i SShA: perepiska* (2004). Books on Tolstoi's relationship with and influence on other thinkers include Alexej Baskakov, *"Ströme von Kraft": Thomas Mann und Tolstoi* (2014); Charlotte Alston, *Tolstoy and His Disciples: The History of a Radical International Movement* (2014); Henry Pickford, *Thinking with Tolstoy and Wittgenstein* (2016).

out the occasional nuggets of wisdom from what he called the “dung of stale Orthodoxy” (Tolstoi PSS 24, 807). Often he drew a distinction between the teachings of the official Church, which he rejected, and the living faith of simple Russian believers, which he admired.

My own starting point for examining the relationship between Tolstoi and Orthodoxy is that any critique of religion must necessarily be a critique of the religious forms and ideas in which one was raised and socialized. Religion *per se* does not exist – only specific, historical religions; likewise, there is no timeless, ahistorical critique of religion. Any church influences its opponents both positively and negatively – by the elements they take over from it (usually without acknowledging this), and since such rebellion is provoked by precisely the features that are characteristic of that particular faith or denomination.

Tolstoi was deeply imbued with Orthodox ways of thinking and incorporated important elements of Orthodox spirituality into his own religious system. In its basic structure, however, his teaching differed significantly from the Orthodox worldview. The elements he selected from Orthodox spirituality underwent a radical change of meaning when applied to his message. Thus, in determining the relationship of Tolstoi to the Orthodox Church we must emphasize both continuity and break at the same time. To say that Tolstoi was influenced by Orthodox spirituality is not the same as saying that he was in any way an Orthodox believer – clearly he was not. Rather, it recognizes that in nineteenth-century Russia the worldview of the Orthodox Church rubbed off even on some of its most vehement detractors.

I make no claims to originality with this line of reasoning. It has long been used in the study of Western critics of religion, including Tolstoi’s great contemporary, Friedrich Nietzsche. It is generally accepted that Nietzsche’s militant atheism is incomprehensible unless one understands his love–hate relationship with German Protestantism. Nietzsche himself claimed: “the Protestant pastor is the grandfather of the German philosophy” (Nietzsche 1979, III, 1171), and the same line of reasoning has been applied to him by several historians of ideas. Karl Jaspers wrote that Nietzsche is “gripped by Christian motives” and “uses them in his fight against Christianity” (Jaspers [1938] 1977, 58). Alf Ahlberg argued that, when Nietzsche’s teachings are compared with Christianity, the similarities are far more significant than the differences (Ahlberg 1923, 111).

Such analysis of the sources of a thinker’s worldview goes beyond the traditional pursuit of conceptual “loans.” Rather than “loan,” we should speak of ideational “heritage.” Applying this metaphor to Tolstoi, we can

say that, although the Russian Orthodox Church sought to “disinherit” Tolstoi spiritually with its Circular letter of 1901, and Tolstoi may similarly be said to have renounced any inheritance from the Church in which he had grown up, in both cases this turned out to be only partial. It is indeed possible to break out of the intellectual universe in which one was brought up, but certain mental structures will normally remain. Ideational “legacy” lies somewhere between a legal inheritance, which one can renounce completely, and inheritance in the biological sense, which no one can cast off at will.

Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii of the Tartu–Moscow school of cultural semiotics developed a theory of cultural change that may provide a guide for understanding Tolstoi’s relationship to Orthodoxy. They argued that not only languages but entire cultures may be analyzed as *systems of signs*. Russia, they noted, had several times undergone abrupt cultural shifts when, in the course of a few decades, the values of one generation were supplanted by their opposites. Superficially, this interpretation may seem a mere repetition of Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev’s thesis that Russians are maximalists who are constantly thrown from one extreme to another (Berdiaev [1937] 1955; Berdiaev [1946] 1970). However, the semioticians emphasized not only the rupture, but also the continuity that is preserved over apparently yawning cultural gaps. The signs of the old culture are not automatically discarded: Sometimes they live on in new forms and with new meanings that the semiotician may disentangle.

In *Historia sub specie semiotica* (1974), Boris Uspenskii discussed the cultural rupture under Peter the Great, seeking to understand the semiotic contrast between the “medieval” and “modern” in Russian culture and what happens when they collide. Contemporary reactions to the shocking cultural and social innovations introduced by Peter were emphatically and unanimously negative – nor could they have been otherwise, Uspenskii maintained. Peter acted as a blasphemer and an iconoclast, and for this he was rewarded by his devout Orthodox subjects with the title “Antichrist.” However, in his iconoclasm Peter deliberately – perhaps inevitably – employed and inverted the signs and the symbols of the old culture. From one point of view, Uspenskii claims, Peter’s behaviour was not a cultural revolution, but appears as “anti-texts or minus-behaviour within the bounds of the same culture However paradoxical this might be, Peter’s behaviour in large measure did not exceed the bounds of traditional ideas and norms; it entirely confined itself within these limits, but only by means of a negative sign” (Uspenskij [1974] 1988, 112).

In “Binary Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture,” Lotman and Uspenskii returned to this topic. With regard to Peter the Great, they argued that:

The new culture demonstrated its blasphemous, anti-ecclesiastical nature with emphatic zeal. Thus it is all the more interesting that the growth of the new culture constantly reveals models of an ecclesiastical–mediaeval type. (The latter, in their turn, are merely a manifestation of the enduring models that have organized the entire stretch of Russian cultural history, including, one may suppose, both the pre-Christian and Christian periods). (Lotman and Uspenskij [1977] 1985, 54)

In their view, Peter’s cultural revolution was the most egregious example of a more general tendency in Russian history. (Lotman and Uspenskii did not mention the October Revolution, probably because Soviet censorship would not have accepted it.) They saw Russian culture as characterized by a particularly high degree of binary tensions between the old and the new, between true faith and false, between the norm and breach of the norm. Even after such a breach, much of the old lives on, albeit often in unconscious and distorted form. “Change occurs as a radical negation of the preceding state. The new does not arise from a structurally ‘unused’ reserve, but results from a transformation of the old, a process of turning it inside out” (Lotman and Uspenskij [1977] 1985, 33). This model, which is clearly related to Hegel’s concept of *Aufhebung*,² allows a search for the old in the new, for continuity in the break.

Lotman and Uspenskii saw this form of cultural-historical development as peculiar to the Eastern Orthodox cultural environment. They pointed out that in the Western Catholic understanding of the metaphysical universe there were three “spaces” or dimensions: Heaven, hell and purgatory. While heaven is entirely holy and hell purely evil, purgatory is ethically and religiously neutral. This tripartite mental universe made possible the emergence of a secular (de-sacralized and de-demonized) culture between the two extremes. Orthodox theology, by contrast, never developed any teachings about purgatory; Lotman and Uspenskii regarded this as one reason why Russian cultural history has, to a greater extent than Western culture, made convulsive leaps from one position to the opposite (Lotman and Uspenskii [1977] 1985, 31–34).

² This untranslatable German term may mean “elevation to a higher level” as well as “cancellation,” and Hegel consciously played on this duality. In a change from “thesis” to “antithesis,” the old both disappears and is retained at a higher level, as a “synthesis.”

Many scholars who are deeply influenced by Lotman's and Uspenskii's theories are nevertheless skeptical to their dichotomization between Western and Russian culture (e.g., Gasparov 1985, 26–28). In my view, their theories can be used as an interpretive key not only for one particular culture, but with general application, as they themselves sometimes did. For example, in his study of the daily life of the Decembrists – the Russian guard officers who rebelled against Tsar Nicholas I in 1825 – Lotman maintained that “a norm and its violations are not locked into a static state of contradiction; they are constantly changing places. Rules arise for violating rules, and violations appear that are essential to norms” (Lotman [1977] 1985, 96).

In *The Social Construction of Reality* (1976 [1966]) Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann developed a theory of socialization at the micro-level that is compatible with macro-level cultural semiotics. They provide a ground-breaking theoretical analysis of how and why the prevailing perceptions of reality in a society are adopted and internalized by its members. Even though there are strong conformity pressures in the vast majority of known societies, totally successful socialization is an anthropological impossibility, they conclude. The individual will always stand both inside and outside the community.

The symmetry between objective and subjective reality cannot be complete. The two realities correspond to each other, but they are not coextensive. No individual internalizes the totality of what is objectified as reality in his society, not even if the society and its world are relatively simple ones. On the other hand, there are always elements of subjective reality that have not originated in socialization. (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1976, 153–54)

Berger and Luckmann use the term “unsuccessful socialization” for cases when an individual is unable or unwilling to accept the roles, norms, and conventions of a society. Like totally successful socialization, totally unsuccessful socialization is an anthropological impossibility (except in cases of extreme organic pathology). Successful and unsuccessful socializations are gradations along a continuum, not absolute opposites. Some individuals are closer to one pole, some closer to the other. The factors that push an individual toward unsuccessful socialization and into the role of a deviant, rebel or social critic may be socially or biographically conditioned, or non-reducible idiosyncrasies (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1976, 183–84).

As a scathing critic of the Church and society of nineteenth-century Russia, Tolstoi placed himself near the pole of “unsuccessful socialization.” He had a highly developed ability to see through and dissect fundamental aspects of “the social reality” – indeed, that was among his most important

qualities as a writer of fiction. The Russian formalist and literary theoretician Viktor Shklovskii highlighted the “technique of alienation” (*priom ostraneniia*) as a major tool in Tolstoi’s prose writing. In his novels, Tolstoi often offers purely external descriptions of well-known social conventions, as if he were an alien from Mars unacquainted with the conventional meanings assigned by society. As an example, Shklovskii referred to battle scenes as well as theater scenes in *War and Peace* (Shklovskii [1967] 1971, 14). With such “tricks” or “devices” (*priomy*), Tolstoi created an effect of surprise and distance. Here we should note that, for Tolstoi, alienation was not just a technique he employed in his fictional writings, but also an essential element in his criticism of religion, culture and society. Through “uncomprehending” descriptions of institutions, symbolic systems and power structures, he “unmasked” them as man-made constructions – as in the communion scene in *Resurrection*, where the Body of Christ (the communion bread) is referred to as “a piece of loaf” and the chalice as “a cup of wine” (Tolstoi PSS 32, 134). By deliberately removing the sacramental act from its familiar context and refusing to recognize the convention, Tolstoi deprived it of any value.³

Although he did not use that term, also Iurii Lotman emphasized the important role of the alienation technique in Tolstoi’s prose. His prime example was the short story *Kholstomer* from 1886 (Lotman 1988, 219–20). By describing social relations in Russia as seen through the eyes of a horse, Tolstoi denudes the social conventions and social hierarchies of their accepted meanings and role. A horse has not been socialized into accepting that some people are rich and others poor, some powerful and others not, and is “free” to criticize social phenomena from the outside. That is, the horse does not criticize, but simply *describes* these social relations as perceived by one who does not know the conventional social codes – and in the process exposes them as unnatural and unjust.

The theory of alienation makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of Tolstoi’s fictional writing and cultural criticism. However, we must bear in mind that Tolstoi was *not* a stranger in the culture and society he wanted to dissect, although he often experienced it as such. On the contrary, he had deep insights into precisely the culture and society of Russia. Perhaps the alienation technique as a deliberate and effective method can be skillfully employed *only* by a person who possesses intimate knowledge of the phenomenon he or she wants to expose. Only such a

³ For many more examples of Tolstoi’s use of defamiliarization as a subversive device, see Christoyannopoulos 2019.

person can give a description of the outside that causes the readers to pause and to start questioning what they had previously taken for granted. But even more important in our context is that as a non-Martian it was as impossible for Tolstoi, as for anyone else, to dissect *all* sides of the “socially constructed reality” he experienced around him. Also the rebel is a child of his time and his culture, and cannot avoid taking parts of it for granted.

It can perhaps be argued that not much of the older Orthodox religious culture was reflected in Russia’s cultural debates toward the end of the nineteenth century. Whereas Peter the Great and his associates, as Lotman and Uspenskii noted, had still been deeply influenced by Christian beliefs and concepts, with the next generations came an accelerating secularization of the Russian upper classes. The Russian intelligentsia that grew up in the nineteenth century was deeply immersed in Western philosophy and social theory: The Church and its teachings no longer laid the premises for the social debate. At the theological seminaries there were astute theologians intellectually on a par with the leading thinkers of the secular intelligentsia, but their overt influence in society was limited. Scholars have noted that in nineteenth-century Russia, there was an almost insuperable abyss between the theological colleges and the secular intellectual communities. With the exception of the early Slavophiles, Fedor Dostoevskii, Nikolai Leskov and Vladimir Solov’ev, few thinkers made any attempt to cross it (Florovskii [1937] 1982). Although Tolstoi should not be regarded as a member of “the intelligentsia” as the term was understood in Russia at the time, there is no doubt that he belonged on the secular side of that cultural divide.

Therefore, it might seem somewhat far-fetched to use Orthodoxy and not secular Russian culture as a framework for understanding his thinking. And yet, despite the high wall of separation between the Orthodox Church and secular Russian culture, the fact remains that important members of the intelligentsia such as Vissarion Belinskii and Mikhail Bakunin experienced intense religious periods in their youth. When Bakunin eventually broke with Christianity, he did not end up as an atheist, but as an anti-theist. Bakunin still assigned to God a significant role in human life, but now as a force to be combated and defeated (Bakunin [1882] 1970, 17; Weiant 1953, 120). Intelligentsia ringleaders such as Nikolai Chernyshevskii and Nikolai Dobroliubov were both runaway seminarians and sons of priests, and Nikolai Berdiaev argued that Russian atheism was in fact a religious phenomenon: The nihilism of the intelligentsia was “the negation of Russian apocalypticism” (Berdiaev 1955, 38). Berdiaev also pointed out that strong elements of Orthodox asceticism can be found in Chernyshevskii’s main work, *What must be done?* One of the characters in

this highly influential novel slept on a bed of nails in order to prepare himself for the self-sacrificing revolutionary struggle (Berdiaev [1937] 1955, 43). “The paradox is that the intelligentsia not only uncompromisingly rejected the church and religion, but unknowingly imitated the theological thinking and the essential features and functions of the Orthodox Church,” Alex Fryszman writes (Fryszman 1993, 58). Fryszman’s general characterization of the Russian intelligentsia, I will argue, is particularly apt with regard to Tolstoi.

In most cases, any theory about an intellectual substrate of Orthodoxy in the thinking of the Russian intelligentsia can be substantiated only by a structural analysis of similarities and parallels in their thinking. This limitation does not apply to Tolstoi, however. Unlike most other non-Orthodox Russian thinkers, he not only wrote an entire library of religious books and articles, but also discussed Orthodox theology in a detailed manner in these writings. That means that we can go beyond a purely structural analysis and engage directly in theological and historical comparisons.

The claim that Tolstoianism contains a strong layer of Orthodoxy has emerged from time to time in the literature, but mostly as casual remarks in passing. For instance, in 1928 Nikolai Berdiaev wrote: “L. Tolstoi is a Russian to the marrow and could arise only on Russian Orthodox soil, even though he made changes to Orthodoxy” (Berdiaev 1928, 77). In *The Russian Idea* from 1946, Berdiaev returned to this idea in a less bombastic way: “For Tolstoi, the Orthodox basis is far stronger than one would normally think” (Berdiaev [1946] 1971, 184). However, Berdiaev did not elaborate on this, and forty years were to pass before another researcher picked up the cudgel. In 1986, Richard Gustafson published *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*, a major attempt to understand Tolstoi’s ideas with Orthodox theology as the crucial interpretive key. Although Gustafson did not refer to Berdiaev, his main thesis was precisely that a close relationship existed between Tolstoi’s worldview and Orthodox theology. He concluded: “Tolstoi may not be an Orthodox thinker, but certainly he is an Eastern Christian artist and theologian within the culture of Russian Orthodoxy” (Gustafson 1986, 457).

The German theologian Martin George concurs, but believes that Gustafson’s characterization is too weak. According to George, Tolstoi was “A Russian Orthodox Christian and remained so throughout all turns

and twists with explainable consistency” (George 2015, 242). At the same time, George believes that there are good reasons to regard Tolstoi as a heretic, as so many of Tolstoi’s Russian Orthodox contemporaries did. A heretic, he explains, is a person who one-sidedly picks out only certain parts of the Christian creed while they discard others (George 2015, 243). With these definitions, George’s understanding of Tolstoianism comes close to the deliberately paradoxical title of this book: “heretical Orthodoxy.” There is, however, a vital difference in how we use the concept of heresy in relation to Tolstoi. For George, this represents a theological assessment while I use it as a purely descriptive and historical term as an attempt to express, without any normative implications, the duality in how Tolstoi’s contemporaries characterized him.

With regard to Gustafson, I believe that his most important insight is expressed already in the title of his book: In the Russian religious tradition Tolstoi was at the same time both a “resident” and a “stranger.” It is in this duality that we must look for explanations of Tolstoi’s distinct character as an author and thinker (Gustafson 1986, 13). On the other hand, while Gustafson and I end up with very similar conclusions, we reach this endpoint via rather different routes. We diverge in our choice of empirical material to examine, and in our methodological approach. Because our two books are so related and yet so different, it seems relevant to present my own approach through a comparison with that of Gustafson.

Gustafson based his analysis on a “close reading” of Tolstoi’s fictional works and diaries and then compared the views expressed in Tolstoi’s writings with Orthodox theology. In order to find appropriate sources of this theology, Gustafson went to two extremes: To ancient church texts, and to works written in the twentieth century by some Orthodox and some Western scholars. The Orthodox theologians of the intervening period, including Tolstoi’s own century, are consistently overlooked. This, Gustafson explained, was because, in his view, “what passed as theology were but slightly dressed-up versions of Western systems of thought, Catholic and Protestant” (Gustafson 1986, xi). However, Gustafson made no attempt to explain how Tolstoi was able to penetrate beyond these Western-inspired thought systems and find the true Orthodox belief behind them. Implicit in Gustafson’s ahistorical approach is the claim that Orthodox thinking and spirituality have not undergone any significant changes over the centuries. He focuses on demonstrating dogmatic coincidences between Tolstoi’s thinking and Orthodox theology. This is what I will call “the correspondence method.”

Beyond doubt, this method is indispensable in any analysis of this kind. If there is no intellectual affinity, all attempts to prove a genetic relationship must fail. However, such correspondence will have significance only if the common elements found in both Tolstoy's writings and Orthodoxy are distinctive features and not just general ideas. One example: It does not take us very far when Gustafson claims that "Tolstoy's God of Life and Love is an Eastern Christian God. The concept of God as an abstract idea of absolute being has been replaced by a God who dwells in the world of change even as He transcends it" (Gustafson 1986, 108). This is no doubt true, but the view that God is at the same time *in* creation and above it, both immanent and transcendent, lies at the heart of both Western and Eastern mainstream theology. As we shall see, Tolstoy shared this view – but it is methodologically very difficult to claim that this is a specifically Orthodox heirloom.

In this book, I employ two approaches to draw out the connections between Orthodox thought patterns and Tolstoy's thinking, in addition to the correspondence method.

- 1) Historical-genetic analysis: Through which channels did the Orthodox impulses pass before reaching Tolstoy? And how did he relate explicitly to them? This requires deeper study of Tolstoy's biography and reading. Unlike Gustafson, I focus on the Orthodox literature that Tolstoy read or with a high degree of certainty he can be assumed to have read. Presentations of Orthodox theology from more recent times will be used more sparingly in the analysis.
- 2) Reception analysis: If Tolstoy really adopted important ideas from Orthodox theology and piety, was this recognized in his lifetime? Those who are closest to detecting such coincidences were the Orthodox themselves, but also other sources will be investigated. Immensely rich and largely untapped sources are available here. Tolstoy's writings sparked a flood of reviews, comments, polemics and scholarly literature, and many Russian Orthodox believers were keen participants in debates about Tolstoy's ideas.

The reception analysis in this book falls into two parts. Some of it is integrated into the thematic analysis (Chapters 2–9) of how certain elements of Orthodox theology and spirituality were integrated in more or less transformed ways into Tolstoy's thinking. Here I draw on sources by Orthodox as well as non-Orthodox commentators. Then, the final part of

the book (Chapters 10–13) is devoted exclusively to Orthodox reactions to Tolstoi. Here I emphasize the breadth and diversity of these reactions – official and unofficial, polemical and academic, positive and critical. To my knowledge, these chapters represent the first attempt at offering a comprehensive account.⁴

Russian believers plunged into the debate about Tolstoianism with full weight, but their voices were barely heard outside their own circles. It may seem as if the label “Orthodox” functioned as a kind of disqualification: As the relationship between Tolstoi and the Church was so tense, it was assumed that the Orthodox pamphlets about him could contain nothing but biased slander. In many cases, this was no doubt correct – but Tolstoi’s Orthodox critics, with their spiritual worldview, were often in fact more congenial with him than many of his “worldly” critics of the time. On some points, the Orthodox were clearly better able to enter into Tolstoi’s worldview, and to shed light on aspects that were overlooked by others. For instance, the Russian philosophy professor A.A. Kozlov, who in 1888 published a recognized monograph, *Count L.N. Tolstoi’s religion*, admitted that he was not competent to comment on the veracity of Tolstoi’s interpretation of the Bible, and left it to Church historians and theologians to address this issue (Kozlov 1895, 7). Several Orthodox theologians avidly picked up this challenge.

In presenting Orthodox reactions, I examine which insights they can contribute with about Tolstoi’s thinking and how they placed themselves in relation to him, explicitly or implicitly. In offering their own standpoints, they also sometimes unwittingly revealed a closer spiritual relationship to him than they were prepared to acknowledge themselves. To the extent that this is the case, it reinforces my theory that there existed a certain set of common beliefs or “self-evident assumptions” (Nygren 1940, 67–70) that Tolstoi shared with (some or most of) his Russian Orthodox opponents of the time. Partly, this is shown by the aspects of Tolstoi’s thinking the Orthodox failed to criticize, and partly through the formulation of their arguments in their rebuttals of Tolstoi’s criticisms of Orthodoxy.

⁴ There have been special studies of how Tolstoi’s writings were received by other critics in his homeland (Oberländer 1965; Sorokin 1979). Sorokin organized his study according to the writers’ ideological position, but there is no chapter for Orthodox critics. Peter Ulf Møller included ecclesiastical writers on a par with other critics in his *Postlude to The Kreutzer Sonata: Tolstoj and the Debate on Sexual Morality in Russian Literature in the 1890s* ([1983] 1988), but that book deals with the debate about a single novella only.

The Orthodox literature on Tolstoi is vast, and not all of it merits our attention here. When selecting texts for this study, I have used several criteria. The official (and unofficial) responses of the national church leaders have a self-evident place, since they were prominent in defining the framework for the Orthodox polemics against Tolstoi (although surprisingly many Orthodox authors, as we shall see, ventured outside this framework). Further, some theologians are represented by virtue of their academic weight; others are included because they had a significant impact upon subsequent history. To bring out the range of Orthodox reactions, I have included many of the most sympathetic and laudatory as well as the most devastatingly critical opinions and abusive characterizations. Some Orthodox writers were willing to go along with Tolstoi's views to a surprising extent, whereas others rejected them out of hand even on those points where it took a trained eye to be able to detect how his teaching deviated from Church doctrine.

The reception analysis provides insights into the general intellectual history of the Russian Orthodox Church around 1900, and its capacity and willingness to confront the spiritual challenges of the time. The struggle against Tolstoianism was not a peripheral matter for Russian Orthodoxy, but something that the Church itself recognized as one of the most taxing tasks on the cultural front. The "Tolstoi affair" figured high on the agenda of the Church throughout the final fifteen to twenty years of Tolstoi's life and was a source of tremendous concern in ecclesiastical circles also before and after that time.

The Circular letter against Tolstoi in 1901 was a momentous act in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church. Although much has been written about this event, historians' perceptions of it have been rife with misunderstandings. This is due partly to insufficient knowledge of Orthodox canonical law and excommunication practice, and partly to the circumstance that the Church leadership itself, for tactical reasons, was deliberately elusive and unclear regarding its own action. To some extent, it is also a consequence of the fact that, for a long time, important Soviet archives were accessible only to Soviet scholars who gave very tendentious interpretations of it.

I have systematically mapped Orthodox writings on Tolstoi and Tolstoianism up until 1917, which was a natural breakoff point. Some more recent literature is also cited, but I have no pretensions to giving a comprehensive account of how Tolstoi was treated in Orthodox émigré literature. After the fall of Communism in the Soviet Union, several polemical and/or academic articles have been written in Russia about

Tolstoi and the Church, primarily by Orthodox authors. Only one author, however, Georgii Orekhanov, has devoted an entire book-length study to the topic – in fact, he has written no less than two bulky volumes of more than 500 pages each. Orekhanov is a Russian Orthodox priest; while clearly a conscientious and thorough scholar, he writes with a specific objective in mind: To vindicate the actions of the Russian Church and launch a counterattack on Tolstoi's criticisms. The title of Orekhanov's second volume is revealing: *Lev Tolstoi: A prophet without honour: A chronicle of the catastrophe*. Unlike Gustafson, Orekhanov finds in Tolstoi's thinking very little influence from Orthodoxy. In his view, Tolstoi's connection to Orthodoxy is primarily "in the negative," and not a matter of influence (Orekhanov 2010, 133–34). He detects "an impassable border" between Tolstoi's views and the teachings of the Church (Orekhanov 2010, 215). As Orekhanov sees it, the significance of Tolstoi's work is that it reflected the deep crisis of spirituality in nineteenth-century Russia, which was expressed in increasingly lower levels of faith and Church culture in Russian society. In my view, however, Orekhanov's perspective, while not irrelevant, is seriously flawed in its one-sidedness and moralism.⁵

To be sure, "Orthodoxy" is not a rounded, unchangeable and clearly demarcated entity. Although Orthodox believers often proudly maintain that their church has remained true to the teaching of the ancients – more faithfully than other Christian denominations – also Orthodox tradition has inevitably evolved over the ages. When I refer to "Orthodox spirituality," or "Orthodox theology" without further specification, what I have in mind is the dominant expressions of this faith as found in Russia in Tolstoi's times. Also with this delimitation, "Orthodoxy" admittedly remains a variegated phenomenon, school theology as taught at the theological seminaries and academies in many respects differed from religious folkways. As Patrick Michelson and Judith Kornblatt point out,

There was no single, authentic expression of ecclesiastical, Orthodox thought, much less lay religious thought. Rather, there were highly contested, ever-changing choice fields available for those religious thinkers who innovatively deployed their faith to engage public opinion Contestation, diversity, even cacophony were the order of the day in late imperial Russia, especially during the last several decades of the old regime. (Michelson and Kornblatt 2014, 8)

⁵ Indicatively, the title of the concluding chapter in his second book is "Can the Church forgive Tolstoi?" (Orekhanov 2016, 576). His answer is no.

This was certainly true also with regard to Orthodox polemics against Tolstoi. Although I am unable to delve deeply into the many facets of Russian Orthodoxy as Tolstoi encountered it, I try to show some of the diversity of beliefs, positions and opinions within the Russian Church at the time, in particular as they were expressed in attitudes toward Tolstoi and his message.

In order to decide who is an Orthodox believer, I have used a *subjective* criterion: All who identify themselves as Orthodox are accepted as such. This means that in the early Church, Origen of Alexandria will be included even though he was officially declared a heretic after his death in AD 253. The same is the case with Vladimir Solov'ev who in the late nineteenth century attempted to act as a bridge-builder between the Eastern and Western Churches, and for that reason was viewed with deep skepticism by many in the Russian Church. Also the odd Old Believers who engaged in the polemics about Tolstoi are included in my discussion as matter of course. In the so-called new religious consciousness in the Russian intelligentsia around the turn of the nineteenth century some, like Nikolai Berdiaev (1874–948), wanted to remain a son of the Church, in spite of many misgivings. Others, like Dmitrii Merezhkovskii (1865–941), engaged in lively debates with Russian theologians, but did not see themselves as Orthodox believers.