"THE DIVINE AND THE HUMAN. OR THREE MORE DEATHS": A LATE CHAPTER IN LEO TOLSTOY'S DIALOGUE WITH DEATH

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On August 8, 1879, three revolutionaries were hanged in Odessa for an attempt on the life of Alexander II. On December 11, Tolstoy listed in his diary "thirteen themes," among them "Execution in Odessa." (PSS 53/170)[1] Twenty-five years later he wrote on that theme a story of some fifty pages, which he first called "The Human and the Divine," (PSS 54/204), then "Three More Deaths" (PSS 42/662), and finally "The Divine and the Human" [Bozhestvennoe i chelovecheskoe] (PSS 76/154). Tolstoy worked on the story for almost three years, from December 1903 to October 1906, calling it "a story in which it is possible as well as necessary to say something important." (PSS 89/26) Nonetheless, there exists only one, not easily accessible, English translation which was published in 1906.[2]

Nor has the story received much critical attention. To be sure, "The Divine and the Human" is, as its title suggests, a rather schematic

[1]All passages marked PSS, followed by volume and page number, are taken from L. N. Tolstoy, Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii (Moscow 1928-1960), and quoted in my translation.

[2]The story's publication history is rather curious. Tolstoy had sent copies of the story to England to his close friend and disciple Chertkov, requesting that he translate and publish it, and also to Gorbunov-Posadov for Krug Chteniia II, which was to appear in early summer 1906. That publication was delayed, and the story appeared in print first in English, in a small volume called L. N. Tolstoy: The Divine and the Human and Other Stories. A Volume of Stories on Revolution; Crime and Death; Regeneration, Love and Eternal Life, translated by V. Tchertkoff & E. A. (Christ Church, Hants.: Free Age Press, 1906). There the story has the subtitle "Or Three More Deaths," which Chertkov links by a footnote to Tolstoy's 1858 story "Three Deaths."

In Russia, the story made its first appearance, in a retranslation of Chertkov's version, in the issues of June 17 and 22 of Novaya Zhizn'. The same text was also published as a separate brochure by the Moscow publishing house Svobodnyi Put', with the following subtitle, probably not authorized by Tolstoy: "A New Story, whose Heroes are the Revolutionaries of the 70s and 80s, Populists, Social Democrats and Sectarians." Finally, On October 22, Tolstoy's own Russian text appeared in print as part of his almanach Krug chteniia za 1906oi god, without any subtitle. (Cf. PSS 88/321, 324; 89/20, 25-29, 31, 50)

and didactic tale, and in many ways typical of the inspirational writings of the late Tolstoy. However, in two important aspects, one thematic, the other structural, it makes a major contribution to our appreciation of Tolstoy, and on both counts it deserves attention.

As title and subtitle suggest, the "The Divine and the Human" is relevant as a reflection of Tolstoy's late religious beliefs, and belongs to the extensive body of Tolstoy's writings which focus on the problems of death and dying. Parallels to "Three Deaths" are unmistakable, so that the story can indeed be seen as completing a circle begun almost fifty years before. It is also rather unusual structurally. As so often, Tolstoy uses his favorite devices of parallelism and contrast; however, he also introduces--and this he had only done once before, in "Master and Man"--a set of connected religious symbols.[3] Though they are largely descending, i.e. traditional, in contrast to the ascending symbolism of the earlier story, Svetlogub, one of the story's protagonists, is given a symbolic dimension which is unique in Tolstoy's fiction.

Like "Three Deaths," "The Divine and the Human" is the story of three deaths--the death by public hanging of the young revolutionary Anatolii Svetlogub, the suicide by hanging, in prison and seven years later, of his one-time mentor Ignatii Mezhenetskii, and the natural death, just before Mezhenetskii's suicide and in an adjacent cell, of an Old Believer who is only identified by his nickname, "Tobacco Kingdom." In contrast to "Three Deaths," all three deaths are human, and a far more intricate pattern of linkages connects them. Mezhenetskii initially provides the impetus for Svetlogub's revolutionary activity; Svetlogub's religious transformation in prison is witnessed by the Old Believer who, in turn, seeks out Mezhenetskii to pass on to him Svetlogub's spiritual heritage, and who dies with a vision in which Svetlogub's figure fuses with that of Christ. When Mezhenetskii, failing to understand the sectarian's message and, unable to overcome his disillusionment and despair, decides to hang himself, the commotion around the Old Believer's death in the adjacent cell enables him to get hold of the rope he needs. In a final ironic link, the two bodies are laid out side by side.

Svetlogub is modeled on Dmitrii Lizogub, one of the three revolutionaries hanged in Odessa in 1879. Lizogub was apparently a very appealing figure. A young man from a wealthy family, he had received a religious upbringing but became an atheist and participated in the revolutionary movement in Kiev, a city that saw more violence than either Moscow or St. Petersburg. He was nicknamed "the saint" for his ardent beliefs and dedication to the welfare of the people. His guilt remains in doubt, since the dynamite which caused his arrest was given to him by a police informer. In order to avoid the publicity which would have surrounded a trial in Kiev, Lizogub and the other two revolutionaries were

[3]For a discussion of that story's symbolic dimension, see my "Leo Tolstoy's 'Master and Man' - a Symbolic Narrative," SEEJ VII (Fall 1963), 258-269.

tried and hanged in Odessa.[4]

Tolstoy's story acquired its symbolic dimension only gradually. At first he included Lizogub's tale--calling him Sinegub--in a draft for Resurrection. There a revolutionary retells Sinegub's story which he has heard from an old sectarian.[5] On December 30, 1903 Tolstoy indicates his intention to write "the story of a revolutionary and a schismatic" (PSS 54/203) and, changing the revolutionary's name once again, begins to write "The Divine and the Human."[6]

In the first draft, Svetlogub resembles "the saint" closely. His "belief was bright [svetlaia vera], loving, peaceful, divine rather than human." (PSS 42/651) He rejects violence and therefore parts company with the terrorists. When he is condemned, he is not afraid of the event "which would end this life and begin a new one, in which he had never ceased to believe." (PSS 54/206) Then, however, his depiction undergoes a transformation, and in the final version he is more complex but also weaker, relying on others for inspiration and guidance, and thrown into despair and doubt when he is forced to fall back on his own strength.

In many aspects Svetlogub reminds us of the young Tolstoy. Like Tolstoy, he grew up in a wealthy environment and experienced guilt feelings about his privileged position. After graduating from the university, he established on his estate a model school, a cooperative, and a home for the destitute and aged, without being able to assuage his restlessness and guilt. And like Tolstoy, Svetlogub eventually discovers "the true meaning of life" in the Gospel, and it is based on the commandments which had become central for Tolstoy as well: "Be not angry, do not commit adultery, suffer evil, love your enemies."[7]

But though Svetlogub's final insight--the advocacy of unselfish love--is one of the main tenets of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, Svetlogub--and here too he resembles his author who was eventually

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[4]Tolstoy was apparently familiar with two biographies of Lizogub, one contained in S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii's Podpol'naia Rossiia, the other in an anonymous, typed manuscript which was found among Tolstoy's papers. (Cf. PSS 42/645-646)

[5]This section was probably written in 1898-1899. There was a historical Sinegub, a revolutionary active in 1878. (Cf. K. S. Shokhor-Trotskii, Tolstoi, Pamiatniki tvorchestva i zhizni. Vypusk 2 (Moscow 1920), 9-12. For the Resurrection entry see PSS 89/21.

[6]The name change alerts us to the story's intended symbolic dimension: "Lizogub," with its association of lizat' [to lick] and guby [mouth], is an unattractive name; sinii [dark blue] is neutral; Svetlyi means "light," "bright," or "shining."

[7]In "What I Believe" (1884) Tolstoy bases his creed entirely on these commandments.

excommunicated--is not a "good Christian." Aside from the Beatitudes and Christ's moral teachings, the New Testament bores or exasperates him. He rejects the ministrations of the prison chaplain, and even on the scaffold "he did not believe in God," (ch. 7)[8]

Svetlogub may not die a Christian death, but he dies a Christlike death. In fact, he resembles Christ both in appearance and behavior, and his words and thoughts paraphrase Christ's words. In the letter which he writes to his mother on the eve of his execution, he asks her to "forgive them for they know not what they do. I dare not apply these words to myself, but they are in my soul and uplift and console me." (ch. 5) He sends his forgiveness especially to Prokhorov, the man who had caused his arrest, possibly by design, and thus become his Judas. When, on the way to his execution, Svetlogub sees the lined-up spectators, "he felt sorry that these people did not know what he now knew. 'But they will know, I will die, but the truth will not die. They will all know. Not I alone, all of them can and will be happy.'" (ch. 7) When the death sentence is read to him on the scaffold, he muses: "Why, why do they do this? How sad that they don't understand, and that I am no longer able to explain it to them. But they shall know. Everyone shall know." (ibid.) When the hangman approaches him, Svetlogub murmurs: "Lord, help me, have mercy on me," and he dies with Christ's last words: "Into Thine hands I commend my spirit." (ibid.)

The knowledge that man must love and forgive sustains Svetlogub during his final hours. And his presence, as did Christ's, affects those who come into contact with him. The warden of the prison who is, initially, the very incarnation of prison regulations--correct and impersonal--reacts with anguish and embarrassment to Svetlogub's exhortation that he should leave this kind of work, and that he, Svetlogub, might be able to help him. "The warden swallowed hard, turned abruptly and went out, slamming the door." (ch. 5) The little boy, who follows the condemned man's cart, is at first afraid of the prisoner. But when Svetlogub blows him a kiss, he responds "with a sudden, sweet, good smile" (ch. 7)--as if he had received a blessing. When on the scaffold Svetlogub, resisting the urge to reproach the priest for becoming a tool of the corrupt and vicious system, merely declines the cross and offers his hand to the priest instead--i.e., giving rather than taking--the priest turns away, "avoiding Svetlogub's eyes." (ibid.) Though, in view of Tolstoy's low opinion of the Church, it is doubtful that the priest will be changed by the encounter, even he is described as affected by contact with Svetlogub.

Svetlogub's confrontation with the hangman, an extremely unpleasant individual who reeks of vodka and sweat, is especially dramatic. A pardoned murderer and hardened executioner, he handles Svetlogub brutally, regarding him as a mere object on which to practice his skill. Yet Svetlogub's last words to him--"Aren't you sorry for me?"

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[8]I am indicating chapters rather than pages of "The Divine and the Human" since I am quoting from my as yet unpublished translation.

(ibid.)--have a devastating effect on him. After the execution, he refuses to continue plying his trade. He takes to drinking, gradually sells all he owns, and ends up in a mental ward.

Most lasting is Svetlogub's effect on the Old Believer, though their contact is limited to a smile which Svetlogub gives the old man as the procession leaves the prison. This one moment of visual communication seems to suffice. When the sectarian sees "a youth with bright eyes and wavy curls who mounted the cart with a smile," holding a bible, he knows that "this man has found the truth... The servants of the Antichrist will strangle him with a rope for that very reason, to keep him from disclosing the truth to anyone." (ch. 6) Henceforth, the Old Believer tries to divine Svetlogub's truth.

A number of traditional symbols as well as allusions to biblical events buttress Svetlogub's symbolic dimension. The Governor-General signs the death warrant with hands "wrinkled with washing and age." The association with Pilate washing his hands of his responsibility is prepared by the description of the Governor-General's doubts about Svetlogub's guilt and his decision to sign the death warrant quickly, in order to avoid personal involvement and agitation. Svetlogub's mother, in her outburst, paints Svetlogub as mankind's innocent victim and savior: "They will hang him who has sacrificed everything, his whole career, all of his fortune, he gave it all to others...to the people." (ch. 2) To be sure, she only admires her son now that she is about to lose him. Yet as she rebels against a God who permits her son to become a victim of not only the administrative machine but also the world's indifference, she too touches, if unwittingly, upon the symbolic significance of Svetlogub's death.

"The Divine and the Human" is divided into two almost equal halves. The first focuses on Svetlogub, the second on Mezhenetskii, Svetlogub's mentor and fellow revolutionary.

Mezhenetskii, too, has historical predecessors. He is apparently a composite of three revolutionaries whom Tolstoy had either met or been told about, and who had displayed admirable self-discipline and mental ingenuity during their long solitary confinements.[9]

Like Svetlogub, Mezhenetskii is forced by prison and the pressures of solitude to fall back upon his own strength. But where Svetlogub had failed and through his failure become open to the words of the Gospel, Mezhenetskii seems to succeed and thereby eventually fails. His self-control and convictions sustain him through seven years of solitary confinement, only to crumble when he is confronted by men who dismiss his work and theories as worthless and even harmful.

He, too, encounters a number of other people; however, his contact with them remains sterile. When he reproaches the prison doctor

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[9]Cf. Literaturnoe nasledstvo, vol. 69, II (Moscow, 1961), p. 156.

for serving as a tool of the cruel and unjust system, the doctor not only remains unperturbed but threatens to punish Mezhenetskii for his impertinence. When he explains his beliefs to the old sectarian, the latter rejects them by walking out on him without a word. The "new revolutionaries" react to his expostulations with scorn and derision.

Mezhenetskii could easily have been presented as a tragic figure, a martyr for a good cause. He is not. His daydreams reveal him as vain and self-centered, and his revolutionary work as a sublimation of personal frustrations: "The Imperial Family and all oppressors of the people disappeared, a republic was instituted, and he, Mezhenetskii, was made President." (ch. 10) After his discussion with the new revolutionaries, he is shaken by "the total contempt these people had for him, Mezhenetskii, the hero of the revolution, him who had sacrificed twelve years of his life for it." (ch. 13) Like Svetlogub, he begins to wonder if his life was wasted. But while Svetlogub found love, and in love a way to transcend death, Mezhenetskii is overwhelmed by "a terrible anger...at this entire world" (ibid.) and chooses suicide, thereby finalizing the meaninglessness of his life.

In early drafts, Mezhenetskii was a far more substantial character, and there his plight is described in moving terms:

> We worked for a goal which all of us could see clearly: the elimination of the suffering of the people which was obvious. But these cold doctrinaries, what is their justification? (PSS 42/523-524)

Similarly, in a passage in which Mechenetskii reflects on his conversation with the guard, a kind but lethargic man called Krasavtsev, Mezhenetskii's full realization of the futility of his undertaking becomes apparent:

> Only now, in the mood into which his discussion with the new revolutionaries had brought him, did Mezhenetskii suddenly understand from Krasavtsev's words the whole vanity, uselessness, absurdity of his former activities and even more of that aimless fantastic activity in which the new revolutionaries were now engaged. (PSS 42/525-526)

Tolstoy's attitude toward the various revolutionary movements of his time may have remained unchanged throughout his life, but in these passages he at any rate demonstrates considerable awareness of their sincerity and tragic dimension. Unfortunately, as Tolstoy attempted to strengthen the story's religious dimension, Mezhenetskii's depiction lost much of its vigor and appeal.

The story's two parts are linked structurally as well as thematically by the figure of the Old Believer. He, too, is modeled on

a real person, a peasant nicknamed "Tobacco Kingdom," whose visit in 1893 had both startled and impressed Tolstoy, because of his wild views and the striking expressions with which he had attacked religious malpractices, the government and the existing social order.[10]

The Old Believer witnesses Svetlogub's last journey. When, upon learning that Mezhenetskii had been Svetlogub's friend, he tries to elicit from him the secret of Svetlogub's creed, Mezhenetskii treats him to a political speech instead. The old man leaves, certain that "this one either boasts of being of the same belief or else does not wish to disclose it." (ch. 8) Seven years later, en route to Siberia, their paths cross again. Now it is the Old Believer who, on his deathbed, sends for Mezhenetskii to convey "the truth" to him. But his message is couched in the ambiguous language of the Revelation, and it remains as unintelligible to Mezhenetskii as to the other inmates who witness the old man's death. Tolstoy, however, makes sure that we take seriously the old man's vision of universal love and harmony under the aegis of Christ:

> In the dormitory, where the sick old man lay in the darkness,...the greatest thing on earth was taking place. The old sectarian was dying, and to his spiritual vision was revealed all that he had sought and desired so ardently throughout his life. In a dazzling light he saw the Lamb in the form of a bright youth, and a great multitude of people from all nations were standing before him in white robes, and all were rejoicing, and there was no longer any evil on earth. All this was taking place, the old man knew it, in his soul and in the whole world, and he felt great joy and peace. (ch. 13)

Like the parrot in Flaubert's "A Simple Heart" which fuses with the Dove for the dying Felicité, the Lamb and Svetlogub become one in the Old Believer's vision.[11] Nor does Tolstoy fashion his words casually. Many passages in diaries and letters indicate the close link between the old man's message and attitude toward death, and Tolstoy's own; others reflect the importance Tolstoy assessed to this story which was to express

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[10]"I had heard of but never seen such a man before," Tolstoy wrote to his wife on October 30, 1893. (PSS, 84/202-203)

[11]The comparison is not as far-fetched as it may seem: In his introduction to S. T. Semënov's Peasant Tales (1894), Tolstoy discusses Flaubert's approach to "St. Julien the Hospitaler," the second of Flaubert's Three Tales of which "The Simple Heart" was the first.

"a topic of immense gravity: the attitude toward death." (PSS 55/167)[12]

Though "The Divine and the Human" is the story of three deaths, the three prisoners are not its only protagonists. In fact, this story contains a far greater number of secondary characters than most of Tolstoy's shorter works. Some, reminiscent of Gogol's dead souls, never appear.[13] Others are mere bystanders.[14] Three figures, however--the Governor-General, Svetlogub's mother and Roman, the Socialist--form a secondary triangle around the theme of death.

The Governor-General is directly responsible for Svetlogub's death, since he signs the death warrant; Roman, through his denigration of Mezhenetskii, becomes the immediate cause of the latter's suicide, and Svetlogub's mother is implicated in the deaths of both men by her lack of understanding for her son, and by her accusatory letter to Mezhenetskii. Let us take a closer look at them.

The Governor-General of the Southern Provinces is a big German with drooping moustaches, a hard look, an inexpressive face, and the white cross of St. George. We only meet him in the first, four-page chapter which, a masterpiece of compactness, introduces him as the incarnation of the alien, unjust and indifferent force majeure which murders innocent men. Significantly, he is a foreigner, a German. Reminiscent of the German general in War and Peace who fought on Russia's side against Napoleon, he is brave, efficient, inhumane and stupid. While he signs Svetlogub's death warrant hastily, he pays close attention to the report on the payment of troop provisions. When he shows emotion, it is, ironically, through fear of death. He recalls his doubts about Svetlogub's guilt and his heart "begins to beat irregularly." Recalling his doctor's advice--"As soon as you are aware of your heart, stop working and distract yourself!"--he dismisses the case from his mind. Tolstoy's viewpoint is clear: A man who has a heart cannot fulfill the odious duties demanded of him by the Tzar and the government.

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[12]Cf. especially the letters of 2/19/1904 (PSS 75/45) and 11/4/1905 (PSS 89/28), and diary entries of 3/22/1904, 3/29, 10/23 and 11/3/1905, and 11/26/1906.

[13]The Tzar, the tenor Barbin, the student who introduces Svetlogub to populism, the Governor-General's secretary, his physician, the little girl in Svetlogub's dream, Mezhenetskii's friends.

[14]The Governor-General's attendant, his wife and daughter, the daughter's fiancé, the unmarried princess, the governor's wife, the society wit Kopëv, the schoolmaster who accompanies Svetlogub's mother, her physician, the chambermaid and the other guests at the hotel, Svetlogub's neighbor in prison, his judge, the prison chaplain, the guard, the officer of the gendarmes, the soldiers and spectators at the execution, the warden of Mezhenetskii's prison, his judges, his doctor, the five political prisoners, the tall prisoner, the warden and the guard at that prison.

The second chapter presents Svetlogub's mother, also against the backdrop of Svetlogub's sentence. She is "a pleasant-looking lady, not old, with curls turning grey and small wrinkles around her eyes." The term "lady" which Tolstoy substituted for the "woman" of the first version, recalls the capricious lady in "Three Deaths." Though her grief seems genuine, it is not free of theatrics. "She was in reality glad that they were holding her, for she felt she ought to do something and did not know what, and she was afraid of herself." The passage echoes a familiar theme--Tolstoy's critique of the pose man assumes in the face of death, his lack of sincerity, the compulsion to "act," to "do something." In "Childhood," it was the attempt at demonstrating one's grief, in "Three Deaths" the husband's "embarrassment" upon seeing his wife die, in "The Death of Ivan Il'ich" the impatience and hypocrisy surrounding the dying man. Though drawn in much fainter hues, the same touch of insincerity can be detected in the mother's hysterical outbursts of grief and blasphemy, and as a result they are pitifully inadequate and inappropriate. In addition, the fact that she is staying "at the best hotel in town," hints at the wealthy background which her son has been trying to live down. But physical comfort is not the only thing to stand between them. She still sees him as a boy of eight decked out in velvet--"to him, this sweet little boy they want to do this!"--and can only recall "the sad, mysterious expression" with which he had parted from her. Ironically, she turns away from God at the very moment when her son finds Him, a gesture likewise indicative of the deep gulf between them. When, seven years later, she writes to Mezhenetskii and blames him for her son's ruin, the letter intensifies his self-doubts and despair. Like the Governor-General, she can only harm, not help.

Roman, the socialist, personifies the new generation of revolutionaries who have superceded the Populists and Terrorists. Tolstoy tells us very little about him. Self-assured, condescending and sarcastic, he recalls Bazarov. Like Bazarov, he is a physician, and this factor adds another ironic touch to the story. Though a doctor, Roman is unaware of or indifferent to the devastating effect his accusations have on Mezhenetskii. Nor does he show any reaction to Mezhenetskii's suicide when, again ironically, he is called in to revive the victim. Like the Governor-General, Roman cannot revive, only kill.

The fate of these three figures is sealed by their negative reactions to the two revolutionaries. Incapable of good-will, self-scrutiny and a search for values, they are ineligible for redemption. Ostensibly alive, they are actually dead souls in this densely populated landscape.

Though the theme of death is present in much of Tolstoy's fiction, "The Divine and the Human" does seem to close a circle begun almost fifty years before, with "Three Deaths." Both stories are studies on dying, and both are structured in similar fashion. The early story had juxtaposed the deaths of a consumptive lady, an old coachman and a tree, and linked the three episodes through a common locale: the lady stops at the inn at which Fëdor lies dying, and the tree is felled to provide a cross for Fëdor's grave.

Usually, the interpretation of the story follows that offered by Tolstoy himself in his letter to his second cousin Alexandra. There, Tolstoy first suggests that it is not the creed itself but the lady's kind of Christianity which is inadequate; then, however, he advocates a pagan nature religion, stressing its biological as well as esthetic aspects.[15] In the story, this dichotomy is not stressed. The lady is condemned less for her lack of faith than for her lack of honesty and courage. In fact, she seems on the verge of achieving both when the priest, by reviving her hopes of recovery, causes a renewal of her struggle and, as a necessary corollary, her despair. Similarly dishonest and cowardly is her husband's ambivalent attitude, and the prayers and readings offered by the deacon are meaningless for all.

The deacon recites the 104th psalm. That psalm stresses God's grandeur and man's insignificance; however, the passage which Tolstoy quotes emphasizes death not as a transition to eternal life but as a natural phenomenon, a return to dust. Though the conception is incomprehensible to both the lady and the deacon, it corresponds closely to Fëdor's and the tree's manner of dying.

A cross is put on Fëdor's grave, yet he is, at best, a Christian by habit. He does not question or doubt, does not expect or desire anything. He accepts suffering and death submissively, more concerned with the inconvenience he causes than with his salvation.[16] Though he might, in a sense, be held responsible for the tree's death--in a dream the cook hears Fëdor chopping wood and the tree is felled to provide a cross for his grave--he is not to blame: Nature knows no moral precepts or prohibitions, only, as Tolstoy stresses in his letter, necessity and beauty. But once again there is a disparity between text and exegesis. In the story, the tree does not die quite as calmly as Tolstoy's letter would have us believe. As the ax begins to cut into its wood, "its dry leaves whispered something...the tree shuddered with its whole body...shaking with fear to its roots." (PSS 5/64)

The discrepancy between "Three Deaths" and Tolstoy's interpretation may not be significant, but it is revealing. It points to the presence, as early as 1859, of the two perspectives which Tolstoy, throughout his life, finds so difficult to harmonize. The story stresses the inability of the Church and its ministrants to express the true meaning of Christianity. Eventually this insight leads to Tolstoy's break with the Church, and to his attempts at reaching the true spirit of Christianity by his own analytical efforts. The letter, in contrast, shows Tolstoy's attempt to reject reason entirely and to return to that instinctive level of living which knows no sin. Again and again Tolstoy

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[15]Cf. PSS 60/265-266.

[16]In a draft for the story Fëdor "is murmuring disconnected prayers." (PSS 5/166) The passage was probably deleted to enhance the contrast between the peasant and the lady, and to stress that Fëdor is not really a Christian.

portrays simple men who in life and death remain part of nature, and eventually he tries to become one of them by moving out of the manor house into a peasant cottage, by dressing and living like a peasant. This tragic shortcut to paradise, toward an innocence which can never be his who has eaten from the apple of doubt, becomes Tolstoy's path toward a fata morgana which, for much of his long life, he mistakes for the light shining in the darkness. In "The Divine and the Human" this delusion seems, at least temporarily, overcome and a fusion of the two perspectives achieved.

The Old Believer in "The Divine and the Human" belongs to a group of simple and devout peasants who inhabit many of Tolstoy's writings. He is, however, not as solid and uncomplicated a figure as the self-sufficient, fatalistic Fëdor in "Three Deaths," the ever-cheerful and benevolent Platon Karataev in War and Peace, the healthy and spontaneously helpful Gerasim in "The Death of Ivan Il'ich" or the hard-working, devout Nikita in "Master and Man." Nor is "his way" presented as simply and clearly as theirs was. This need not mean that Tolstoy is now rejecting his message. Tolstoy, having vicariously struggled through the existential experiences of Ivan Il'ich and Vassilii Brekhunov, may by now have realized that the simple peasant's answer to questions of life and death as an intuitive, often irrational faith that is barely if at all expressible, cannot be his own answer or, at any rate, not his entire answer.

Between "Three Deaths" and "The Divine and the Human," Tolstoy had introduced death in a rich array of disguises: as a mystery, as terror, as liberation from suffering, a natural component of life, an existential experience in which it yields to or is sublimated into love and self-sacrifice. Religion or, more precisely, Christianity, is intricately involved in some of these deaths, peripheral in others.[17]

The consolations of the Church are depicted as outright harmful to the lady in "Three Deaths" and grotesquely obscene at Count Bezukhov's bier. In Mme. Irtenev's death, Christianity's role is ambivalent. Though she has a vision of Christ, she dies in agony. In contrast, for such simple believers as Natalia Savishna, the coachman Fëdor, Platon, Gerasim and Nikita, Christianity provides a natural and unobtrusive backdrop.

In "The Death of Ivan Il'ich" the situation is far more complex. Here, too, the rites of the Church are disparaged, though less stridently so than in "Three Deaths." God is at first denied, then challenged in Job-like defiance, and there is at least a touch of Job's eventual humility when Ivan Il'ich feels "that He whose understanding mattered

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[17]Even a superficial discussion of the meaning and interrelationship of the concepts of death, love and faith cannot be attempted here, though their importance for "The Divine and the Human" necessitates my at least touching on them. For an excellent and concise exposition see Käte Hamburger, Tolstoi, Gestalt und Problem (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), pp. 62-140.

would understand."[18] Nonetheless, Ivan Il'ich's death is Christian at best by implication. His existential anguish eventually produces the insight that an act of self-effacing love can still rescue his life from meaninglessness. And since this act makes him desist from struggling against death, so that his fear of death disappears, he interprets this absence of fear as meaning that death has ceased to exist. In another leap in logic, he transposes this psychological reaction onto a mystical level: if death, i.e., darkness does not exist, then there is light. The nature of the illumination is not indicated. Ivan Il'ich may well see it as a combination of a personal salvation--the light at the end of the sack leads out into the open--and immortality through his progeny, his son, perhaps even through the species, i.e., his family. All of these possibilities Tolstoy explores in some of the essays of that period.[19]

Vassilii Brekhunov, on the other hand, upon sacrificing his own life for that of his servant, is "not at all the same person he had been,"[20] and therefore now able to accept his death gladly, in the knowledge that he is preserving Nikita's life. His self-sacrifice is rewarded by his being called to follow "Him who had called him and told him to lie down on Nikita." (ibid.) Brekhunov's elation, though he knows he is dying, shows quite unequivocally that a genuine conversion has taken place. Though in this story, too, death loses its sting the moment it is accepted, instead of the light Christ appears and bestows immortality. In "Master and Man" Christianity has, for the first time, taken center stage, both thematically and symbolically, as a way of conquering death.[21]

Svetlogub shares several important traits and experiences with Ivan Il'ich and Vassilii Brekhunov, his most important predecessors in the quest for insight into the nature of death. Like Ivan Il'ich, he is a university graduate. After completing his studies, he turns to action, albeit humanitarian rather than self-serving, as was the case with Ivan Il'ich and Brekhunov. In the shadow of death, he at first tries to rationalize his behavior, just as they had done. Finally, and again not unlike them, he finds happiness in self-effacement and an acceptance of God.

But before Svetlogub arrives at his own answer, he also passes through some of the stages which other characters in Tolstoy's fiction had traversed. Like the younger Kozeltsov in the third Sevastopol sketch and

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[18]Leo Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Il'ich and Other Stories (New York: The New American Library, 1960), p. 155.

[19]Cf. What I Believe (1884), ch. 8, and On Life (1887), chs. 22-25.

[20]The Death of Ivan Il'ich, p. 290.

[21]I am bypassing Tolstoy's Christian folk tales since they are played out against a backdrop of conventional and simplified Christianity. The search for the meaning of death does not enter into them, despite Tolstoy's own excruciating confrontation with death's specter in 1879.

Nikolai Rostov in War and Peace, Svetlogub is at first "quite unable to picture the absence of his own existence." (ch. 5) When he sits down to write to his mother, it is "to avoid thinking." (ibid.) Even when, under the influence of his bible readings, he begins to advocate love and forgiveness, he has not really found his answer.

> He still could not believe that he had to die. Again and again he asked himself if he was not asleep and tried in vain to wake up. This thought was followed by another: What if all life in this world is a dream, the awakening from which is death... I will die and pass into a new state. (ibid.)

Svetlogub's hypothesis of life as a dream and death as an awakening recalls Andrei Bolkonskii's final insight. But while it had enabled Prince Andrei to turn willingly away from life toward death, Svetlogub is unable to accept such a concept.

> This thought pleased him, but when he tried to draw strength from it he felt that neither this thought--nor indeed any other thought could give him fearlessness in the face of death. (ibid.)[22]

Gradually, Svetlogub's final insight takes shape:

> "What then? What will there be?" he said, reverting to his former position. "Nothing? No, not nothing. But what then?"--And it suddenly became perfectly clear to him that for a living man there were and could be no answers to these questions.--"Why then do I keep questioning--why? Yes, why? One must not question, one must live--as I lived just now when I was writing this letter. After all, everyone has been condemned to die, long ago, always, and yet we live. We live well, joyfully when--when we love. Yes, when we love. I was writing a letter, I loved and I was happy. That's how one must live. And it is possible to live that way, everywhere and always, in freedom or in prison, today, tomorrow, and to the very end." (ch. 7)

[22]Svetlogub's resignation to the inadequacy of thought and rationalization, and his submission to feelings and intuition are close to the convictions expressed in "A Confession" (1879-82), as well as in "What I Believe" (1884) and "On Life" (1887).

Svetlogub's final response to death echoes that of Ivan Il'ich--to ignore death by turning all one's attention to love, an all-encompassing love which makes it possible to ignore death.[23] And, not unlike Brekhunov, Svetlogub has had his night at Gethsemane, and has returned accepting his fate and preaching love and forgiveness. But Svetlogub transcends both men, because his love and self-sacrifice are not directed at specific individuals, a son, a servant, thereby assuring a kind of personal immortality through their remembrance. Svetlogub sacrifices himself for the world at large, as Christ had done. He is rewarded, not simply by a vision of Christ, as Brekhunov was, but by becoming one with Christ, by fusing with him--at least in the Old Believer's vision.

Svetlogub's Christlike dimension is, as was suggested initially, prepared throughout the story. The Old Believer's vision was undoubtedly meant as the story's climax. Unfortunately, the second part, which ends with Mezhenetskii's and the old man's deaths, is far weaker artistically than the first. It fails for two reasons. Mezhenetskii's story, though it does provide the desired parallel and contrast to Svetlogub's, is not effective because his character, initially so positive, has become ambiguous and schematic. The Old Believer's search and enlightenment do not convince because they are merely stated, and stated in ambiguous and unconvincing terms.

Moreover, an ironic ambivalence cannot be overlooked. The Old Believer's message is not understood by those to whom it is addressed so that Svetlogub's sacrifice seems to have been in vain. Thus the question imposes itself: To what extent does Svetlogub, whose background mirrors Tolstoy's in so many respects, speak for his author? Does his death stand for victory or defeat?

If we consult Tolstoy's writings of the time, Svetlogub's message of all-encompassing love and an imitatio Christi was indeed Tolstoy's answer. At least it was the answer he gave, in 1906, to the readers of Krug Chteniia, his collection of words of wisdom for every day, and still in 1909, to the children for whom he was writing "The Teaching of Jesus." But tragically, to his death, Tolstoy seemed unable to accept this answer fully for himself.

In 1894, twelve years before writing "The Divine and the Human," Tolstoy seemed to have entered a new phase of insight when, in "Reason and Religion," he stopped ignoring the difference between himself and the

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[23]In a variant, Svetlogub's death is even closer to that of Ivan Il'ich: "...the instinctive terror of choking, and suddenly--ectasy [vostorg] and illumination [prosvetlenie]." (PSS 42/530)

naive, unthinking peasant, and acknowledged the importance of reason.[24] It seemed then that he would finally be able to find a personal answer to some of the questions which had been haunting him all his life. And indeed, he claimed to have found the answer to life in Christ's moral teachings, his answer to death in Christ's example, and his religion in the "relation to the universe and its source."[25] Even so, Tolstoy's path led once more into the wilderness. When Christ triumphs in Svetlogub, Tolstoy has already rejected him in his "Reply to the Synod's Edict of Excommunication." (1901)[26] While love becomes Svetlogub's magic wand which transforms his life and death, it seems to have remained as abstract and elusive a force for Tolstoy as it had been for Prince Andrei. Though Christ's commandments sustain Svetlogub on his path toward death, Tolstoy's last days were poisoned by conflicts with his family, society and himself.[27]

"The Divine and the Human" is a remarkably rich if artistically uneven story. It provides a counterpart, both thematic and structural, to "Three Deaths," echoes and expands the symbolic imagery of "Master and Man," recapitulates the phases of Tolstoy's struggle with death and, finally, indicates Tolstoy's resolution of that struggle--at least theoretically--through a reconciliation of reason and belief, a turning toward unselfish love and Christ.

Unfortunately, the story's double contrast, of the divine vs. the human and of the three deaths, disrupts its formal unity, and Tolstoy's all too transparent didactic purpose as well as, ironically, his own ambivalence, weaken its thematic impact. Despite these flaws, "The Divine

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[24]Cf. Tolstoy's revealing diary entry of November 24, 1903: "We are aware of two lives in ourselves: the spiritual life, known to us through our inner consciousness, and the physical life, known to us through external observation....it is now absolutely clear to me that...both forms of knowledge--the materialistic and the metaphysical--have their own great importance." (Tolstoy's Diaries, ed. & tr. by R. F. Christian, London: Athlone Press, 1985, II, pp. 512-13.)

[25]"Religion and Morality" (1894), in Tolstoy Centenary Edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1933-34), vol. 12, p. 17.

[26]Ibid., vol. 12, p. 218.

[27]Cf. the moving diary entries written on August 7 and September 28, 1910, only a few months before his death: "I have seldom met a person more endowed with all the vices than I am: lasciviousness, malice, vanity, and above all, self-love. I thank God that I know this...and still struggle against it," and "It's very depressing. These expressions of love, this talkativeness and constant interference. It's possible, I know it's possible to love all the same. But I can't, I'm unwell." (Tolstoy's Diaries 1895-1910, ed. and tr. by R. F. Christian, London: Athlone Press, 1985, pp. 665 and 684) To be sure, Tolstoy's diary during the last year of his life also suggests that he was by now able to view his impending death with composure, at times even anticipation.

and the Human" makes an important contribution to Tolstoy's creative oeuvre and to his dialogue with death.