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CHAPTER 5

Leo Tolstoy's correspondence with Nikolai Strakhov: the dialogue on faith

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ABOUT THE CORRESPONDENCE

Among Leo Tolstoy's voluminous letters, his correspondence with Nikolai Strakhov stands out for its intensity, intimacy, reciprocity, and confessional nature.¹ As a literary critic and philosophical writer, Nikolai Nikolaevich Strakhov (1828–96) participated in the major intellectual debates and publishing ventures of the 1860s–80s. In his prodigious role as editor, private correspondent, and confidant, he served as a conveyor of diverse ideas and a mediator between disparate people. (In many ways, he served as a “link” between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.)² What Strakhov self-consciously offered to Tolstoy was his special ability, and need, to “enter other people's interests and thoughts” (I: 207; April 22, 1875). Tolstoy insisted on reciprocating. At his urging, in spring 1875 (after four years of friendship), Strakhov confessed that he had been desperately searching for a “cause” in life (I: 207). Tolstoy wanted to probe the matter further: “Your spiritual condition has been revealed to me a little, and I want all the more to penetrate it further” (I: 211; May 5, 1875). He suspected that they were both yearning for faith. Thus, Strakhov admitted to the same desire that Tolstoy himself had experienced as of late: to visit Optina Pustyn' – a monastery and hermitage celebrated for its elders (*starsy*), charismatic Orthodox spiritual advisers eager to advise laymen and even hear their informal (non-sacramental) confessions (I: 211).³ (For the next two years they would plan and discuss a visit to Optina, which took place only in July 1877.) But for Tolstoy, an unfinished project stood in the way of his new aspirations: “I'm at work at the moment on that dreary, vulgar A[nna] Karen[ina] and all I ask God is that he give me the strength to be rid of it as soon as possible, to free some space [...] for other, more pressing matters” (I: 215; August 25, 1875). For some time now, Tolstoy had felt an urge to abandon belles-lettres for a higher cause. In May 1874, he told Strakhov that he had neglected the novel to work on an article “in the form of my

pedagogical *profession de foi*" (I: 164; May 10, 1874). Come the fall of 1875, it was religious-philosophical thoughts on the "meaning of life and death."

When the two met in Iasnaia Poliana in late September 1875, Tolstoy felt a "remarkable spiritual affinity" between them. In letters that followed, he urged Strakhov to join him in the urgent task to "elucidate and define" their "religious worldview" (I: 222; October 26 [?], 1875). Tolstoy felt that they both were at a crossroads: suspended, like many of their contemporaries, between "Christian belief" and "nihilistic materialism" and, in their individual life journeys, between life and death, they had a common duty to speak out, so as to "help those who are in the same miserable lonely condition." Strakhov responded that he would follow Tolstoy's advice and do what he could (I: 224; November 4, 1875). Tolstoy sealed their pact: "I rejoice at your plan and challenge you to a correspondence." He immediately added: "My God, if only somebody would finish A. Karenina for me!" (I: 226; November 8–9, 1875).

And so the two men began a philosophical dialogue; its subject was personal faith in the age of reason and science. Scholars have long used this correspondence to trace Tolstoy's dramatic evolution in the late 1870s, between *Anna Karenina* and *A Confession*, into a religious-philosophical writer. In the words of Andrew Donskov, under whose editorship this correspondence has been recently published in full, "the germ of almost all the moral/religious principles [Tolstoy] expounded in the last three decades of his life can be found in his pre-1880 letters to Strakhov."⁴ In this chapter, I will focus on the correspondence itself: an act of intimate communication between two friends established for the purpose of elucidating and defining their respective religious outlooks.

The act itself was a matter of irresistible need and a social duty, but its success was not guaranteed. Tolstoy was tormented by the problem of self-expression: *how* to speak about one's faith, that is, about that which lies apart from reason and language. In these years, Tolstoy's writing on faith, much of which he discarded, was experimental in nature. Then, after more than four years of intense epistolary exchange, Tolstoy described the development of his religious views in the work we know under the title *A Confession* (*Ispoved'*, written between 1879 and 1882).

The correspondence between Tolstoy and Strakhov in the years 1875–79 may be the most important strand in the story of Tolstoy's religious conversion and his evolution from belles-lettres to religious-philosophical writings.⁵ Side-by-side with everyday matters, their letters contained a self-conscious philosophical dialogue. Such dialogue, of course, has a long and venerable tradition as philosophical genre, from Plato to Hume to

Rousseau, and beyond, which endowed this intimate conversation with an aura of larger significance.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUE

When, at Tolstoy's instigation, Strakhov opened their dialogue, he used Kant's three fundamental questions to set the agenda: 1. What can I know? 2. What ought I to do? 3. What may I hope? (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 805/B 833). The second question was the most important for him: indifferent (he wrote) to the question of the immortality of the soul, Strakhov wanted to know "what is to be done," or, "translated into Christian language, how to save one's soul" (I: 228; November 16, 1875). Like many a Russian intellectual, Strakhov sought specific instructions for "active involvement in life" (his words), but, unlike others, he approached the matter in a religious key.

In his response, Tolstoy focused on a different question, which had preoccupied him since childhood: "What may we hope for?" – by which he meant the future, eternal life of the soul. But he believed that all three questions were inextricably linked into one: "What am I?" (I: 230; November 30, 1875). A question about his own character – and simultaneously about the nature of man – "What am I?" was a theological issue for Tolstoy.

Commenting that it might seem irresponsible to address such questions "on two sheets of note-paper," he added that this was something he would have done even if he were not writing a letter to an intimate friend, but rather a "*profession de foi*, to which the whole of humankind attended" (I: 230). So, writing to an intimate friend, he was as if making a solemn declaration of a religious creed.

Then Tolstoy made "a digression on method" (his words) – pages of tedious repetitions and paraphrases (I: 230–35). In brief, he tried to say that "scientific method," which relied on logical reasoning, was inapplicable to philosophy – the "true" philosophy, concerned with the meaning of human life and death. True philosophy relied on "harmony" rather than logic, on "linking disparate notions into a single whole," which convinced "instantly," without deductions and proofs (I: 234). He offered an emblematic image: "a philosophical outlook spawned directly from life is a circle or a sphere with no end, middle or beginning" (I: 235). (In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy associated his perfectly harmonious character, the peasant Platon Karataev, with a sphere or ball.) He also offered examples of philosophers who had pursued the ideal of such "true philosophy," and named the one who had come closest: Plato (I: 232). (Tolstoy did not comment on the role of the dialogue form in promoting this accomplishment, but it would be

hard to imagine that he did not have in mind that Plato had set the standard for the genre of philosophical dialogue.)

Appended to the November 30 letter, was "an introduction of sorts" (transcribed by a copyist) to an "as yet unwritten philosophical work" (the introduction was entitled "Why do I write?" [*Dlia chego ia pishu*]).⁶ Tolstoy started in the first person and in the autobiographical mode:

I'm forty-seven years old [...] I feel that old age has set in.

Old age is what I call that inner, spiritual condition in which all the world's external phenomena have lost interest for me [...] If a sorceress were to appear before me and ask me what I desired, I would not be able to express one single wish.

(As scholars have noticed, years later, in *Confession*, Tolstoy would appeal to this same image.) He had lived (wrote Tolstoy) through "childhood, adolescence, youth," reached "maturity," that is, had gone "up the mountain," reached the "summit" – and started the descent. What next? This much seemed clear: death (I: 236). Having considered, and rejected, the idea that life might be inherently meaningless, Tolstoy started searching for a view on life that would relieve this sense of meaninglessness. The purpose of his writing was "To tell how it was that I passed from a state of hopelessness and despair to an explanation for myself of the meaning of life" (I: 237). At this point, the copied manuscript comes to an end. Resuming his letter (in his own hand), Tolstoy commented that he could not give the rest to the copyist. That which followed argued that these questions were fully answered by religion, admitting that, "with the knowledge we possess, it is impossible for us to believe in the principles of religion." Exposure to such material "could have led the copyist into temptation" (I: 237).

As Tolstoy made clear, he started writing at the very moment of transition (from the state of hopelessness to uncertain groping for meaning) and in the presence of others (the addressee and the copyist). The writing itself was an act of religious self-definition. Accordingly, he focused on the *how*: on the process and method.

Tolstoy concluded his first philosophical letter by inviting his correspondent to respond. The philosophical method, he reiterated, rests on harmonious linking of disparate notions into a single whole. He awaited Strakhov's response and objections in order to demonstrate the "harmony" in the assembly of his "religious (philosophical) views" (I: 239). Thus, Tolstoy wanted an interlocutor – a philosophical writer whom he urged to embark on a parallel quest – in order to validate that his credo was properly harmonized or, at most, to fine tune it.

In response, Strakhov suggested that in his "digression on method" Tolstoy seemed to be saying that science employed "analysis" (division of the whole

into parts), while philosophy strove for “synthesis” (1: 240–41; December 25, 1875). Tolstoy responded firmly that he did not agree with this simple “substitution of terms,” but he urged Strakhov to respond to his next philosophical letter, which would go out in a few days (1: 243; January 1–2, 1876).

Tolstoy’s long-delayed second philosophical letter, mailed only on February 14–15, 1876, contained an unfinished essay, “The soul and its life outside of the life that is known and understood by us” (*O dushe i zhizni ee vne izvestnoi i poniatnoi nam zhizni*).⁷ Turning to a different mode – not spiritual autobiography, but abstract philosophy – Tolstoy, again, started with the word “I”: “I exist” (PSS 17: 340). Having crossed out this statement, he made an attempt to approach the problem from the view point of his antagonists, the materialists: I live and, as I know from experience (*opyt*), I will die. Nothing remains, then, but dead matter (PSS 17: 351–52). And what about the soul: how would one “define” the soul – that which lies, and lasts, beyond reason? How would one speak of that something which is larger than both the living and the dead, the “I” and the “non-I”? After many pages of repetitive and barely penetrable philosophizing, Tolstoy returned to his initial point: What am I? He mused: “I don’t know to what extent Descartes’ formulation is accurate: I think, therefore I live; but I know that if I say – *I know myself above all, that I live*, – this cannot be inaccurate” (PSS 17: 351).

It was not easy for Strakhov to engage in a philosophical dialogue with the man he venerated: “I cannot write to you, my inestimable Lev Nikolaevich, about philosophy” (1: 255; March 20, 1876). When he finally forced himself to respond, he rephrased and contextualized Tolstoy’s main arguments in the language of a well-informed student of Western philosophy: “Your letter is an attempt to tread the same path as Descartes, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer. They began in precisely the same way, from themselves, from Cogito ergo sum, from the I, from the consciousness of the will, – and from there derived their understanding of all else that exists” (1: 256; April 8, 1876). He praised Tolstoy for the “power” of his thoughts. Yet, his compliment notwithstanding, Strakhov felt that retracing the steps of post-Cartesian philosophy from its starting point in the subject would not bring what both men desired: something that lay beyond human reason and the human subject (1: 256–67). Moreover, Strakhov told Tolstoy that the form he chose for the expression of his view on life did not show him at his best:

You are trying [...] to contain your views in the formulas of general knowledge. I am certain that the results you receive will be one hundred times more impoverished than the content of your poetic meditations. Consider, for instance, whether I can place the view on life diffused in your works above what Schopenhauer or Hegel or anyone else has to say about life? (1: 257)

He then turned the conversation to readers' reactions to the published installments of Tolstoy's novel (chs. 7–19 of pt. 5 appeared in the April issues of *Russkii vestnik*): "*Anna Karenina* is arousing admiration and rancour such as I never before remember in literature" (I: 258). But Tolstoy wanted to hear not the praise, but only the critical comments about *Anna Karenina* (I: 259; April 8–9, 1876). As for Strakhov's response to his philosophical letter, he, again, rejected his interlocutor's interpretation of his ideas. Admitting that he was unable to express himself, he put his trust in Strakhov's special ability to understand: "I am afraid that I cannot say what I want to [...] I hope that you will understand even that which is ill-expressed" (I: 261; April 14 [?], 1876). Responding to his interlocutor's objections, Tolstoy extended his initial ideas further, naming that one principle which embraced everything, the living and the dead; the "I" and the "non-I": "the living God and the God of love" (I: 261).

Strakhov began his response immediately, but he mailed his unfinished "*philosophical letter*" (I: 27; his italics) much later, as an addendum to the regular letter of May 8, 1876:

You see in the world the living God and feel his love. Now your meaning is clear to me, and I can, I feel, tell you frankly that it can be developed logically in the same strict form as other philosophical systems possess. It will be a pantheism, the fundamental principle of which will be love, just as the will is for Schopenhauer, as thought is for Hegel. (I: 263; written after April 14; mailed on May 8, 1876)

Strakhov then asked Tolstoy to define his understanding of evil, but Tolstoy returned to their philosophical correspondence only more than six months later (I: 291; November 12–13, 1876). In summer 1876, Strakhov twice visited Iasnaia Poliana, where the two men continued their philosophical conversations in person.

As for their correspondence, I would argue that as an attempt to elucidate their respective professions of faith, the exchange of philosophical formulas that took place between May 1875 and May 1876 led to a dead end. Philosophizing did not seem to bring Tolstoy closer to answering questions about the meaning of life and death. Moreover, he did not seem encouraged by Strakhov's responses – he was not a man to accept being associated with existing philosophical conceptions. (The name of Hegel alone would have been extremely annoying; Tolstoy did not share Strakhov's devotion to Hegel.)

While the regular exchange of the "philosophical letters" proper came to a halt after one year, another topic came to the fore in their continuing

correspondence: *Anna Karenina*. Over the course of the year, Strakhov again and again tried to turn the conversation to Tolstoy's unfinished novel. As Tolstoy commented on April 23, 1876, in more than one way, their correspondence "doubled" (*razdvoilas'*) (1: 267).

"I WISH THAT YOU, INSTEAD OF READING ANNA
KAR[ENINA], WOULD FINISH IT ..."

Tolstoy was increasingly irritated by Strakhov's exhortations to return to *Anna Karenina*. Literature – an institution replete with professional authors, journals, criticism – disgusted him (1: 259; April 8–9[?], 1876). He even coined a new spelling for the word itself, expressing his disdain by transcribing from the French: "In spite of your great, independent mind, you pay tribute to Petersburg and to *littérature*" (1: 244; January 1–2, 1876.) He found the writing profession morally dangerous: "The rank of writer is loathsome; it's depraving" (1: 259; April 8–9 [?], 1876). Tolstoy was now fearful of both criticism and praise of *Anna Karenina* and he felt disgusted by the novel itself. Strakhov responded with intense emotion:

You are losing your usual calm and, it seems, you want me to advise you to cease printing *Anna Karenina* and leave the thousands of readers who are all asking and waiting for how it will end cruelly in the dark? [...] You've worked me up into such a state of agitation as if I had to write the end of the novel myself. (1: 264–65; late April [?], 1876)

Strakhov also reproached Tolstoy for failing to respond to his reflections in his letters on the novel. He now asked Tolstoy: did he correctly understand the "idea" of the novel? (1: 264). Tolstoy finally rose to Strakhov's challenge: "your opinion of my novel holds true, but this is not everything – that is, it's all true, but what you've said is not everything that I wanted to say" (1: 266; April 26, 1876). What he said next has been since cited by numerous scholars. In order to express all that is in his novel, he would have to write the same work over again. Expression is only realized through the "linkage" (*stseplenie*) of parts, and evades plain verbal summary:

every idea, expressed by itself in words, loses its meaning, is terribly debased, when taken alone out of that linkage in which it is found. The linkage itself is not constituted by an idea [...] but by something else, and to express the basis of this linkage directly in words is quite impossible; but it is possible only indirectly – in words describing images, actions, situations.

He gave an example: the scene of Vronsky's attempted suicide, highly praised by Strakhov. When Tolstoy was revising this chapter, Vronsky, "completely unexpectedly" for him, the author, "but quite decidedly, proceeded to shoot himself" (*sovershenno dlia menia neozhidanno, no nesommenno, Vronskii stal streliat'sia*; I: 267). Tolstoy then leveled his anger at literary critics writing about *Anna Karenina*: "And if critics now already understand what I want to say [...] then I congratulate them and can confidently assure them *qu'ils en savent plus long que moi*" (I: 268). Twentieth-century literary critics tend to read this formula as a claim of art's superiority over other forms of expression, affirming its ability – and Tolstoy's – to produce inexhaustible meaning, perhaps to express the inexpressible. But at precisely the time Tolstoy coined this formula, he was considering retreating from literature and abandoning *Anna Karenina* for philosophical discourse. In the context of the Tolstoy–Strakhov correspondence, we may read Tolstoy's famous words differently: as an admission of art's inherent inability to deliver a clear and unambiguous message and a complaint about the author's lack of control over his text. Rather than struggle with the vicissitudes of artistic form, Tolstoy now wanted to find a form of expression that would indeed allow him to say, in words, what he wanted to, would allow him to say "I," and would convince instantly. It seemed to him that philosophical discourse, while it also required careful "linking," offered such a possibility.

Rather than agree to return to literature, Tolstoy tried to convince Strakhov, who himself wrote literary criticism (including critical articles on Tolstoy), to follow his example: "Give up literature altogether and write philosophical books. Who else is there? Who else will say what we think?" (I: 293; November 12, 1876). But Tolstoy must have known that the real problem was *how*: how to put one's thoughts into words.

Indeed, it was the problem of expression – artistic expression – that stood in the way of bringing *Anna Karenina* to completion. While Strakhov begged him not to leave thousands of readers in the dark, Tolstoy himself did not know "how it would all end." After the April 1876 issues, the publication came to a halt. At the end of July, still nothing appeared in press. Addressing Strakhov, Tolstoy grumbled: "I wish that you, instead of reading Anna Kar[enina], would finish it, and rescue me from this sword of Damocles" (I: 276; July 31, 1876).

Tolstoy finally completed the publication of the novel in July 1877, and entrusted Strakhov with the preparation of the revised separate edition (so in a way, Strakhov did finish the novel for Tolstoy).⁸ Immediately after, in late July, the two men made their long-planned pilgrimage to the monastic

community of Optina Pustyn', where they engaged the holy fathers and the elder Amvrosii in a conversation about religion and faith.

“TO EXPRESS, IN THE FORM OF CATECHISM, THAT
WHICH I BELIEVE IN”

Not long after the completion of *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy again turned to his attempts to articulating his *profession de foi*. While his character, Levin, seemed to have found a response to the question “What am I?” in the faith that “filled his heart” as a “sensation,” Tolstoy – the author who refrained from clearly articulating Levin’s newly found faith in words – did not. Neither could he accept Levin’s conclusion that there was “no need to speak,” that this was “a mystery needed and valued by me alone and inexpressible in words.” Tolstoy was still searching for the verbal means of speaking about his faith to others.

There were, after all, accepted forms. As Tolstoy wrote to Strakhov in November 1877, he had heard a priest teaching his children a lesson in Orthodox catechism, and, finding it odious and unconvincing, tried to write his own: “to express, in the form of catechism, what I believe” (I: 374). This attempt, too, showed Tolstoy how “hard” it was; he feared, even, that, for him, it might be “impossible.” As often happened in these years, he felt overcome with despair (I: 374; November 6, 1877).

An unfinished fragment, “Christian catechism” (*Khristianskii katikhizis*), (PSS 17: 363–68), begins with a formula of his personal creed: “I believe in the one true holy church, living in the hearts of all men and on all the earth” (PSS 17: 363). But when he broke into the standard sequence of questions and answers, he found himself in difficulty. The first question (“What is necessary for the soul’s salvation?”), found “A clear definition of that which we believe in.” But the next question – “What is faith?” – led to a deadlock (PSS 17: 364).⁹

In a rough draft of yet another unfinished philosophical essay, “A definition of religion-faith” (*Opredelenie religii-veri*), Tolstoy coined a new term, “religion-faith” – a fusion of religion and faith; and he focused on the word itself: “the word religion-faith is the word ...”¹⁰ “Clear and unquestionable” it might be for believers, but for those who did not believe (or “thought that they did not believe”), the word itself needed definition (PSS 17: 357). The untidy piece of paper (torn and crumpled as if discarded in despair) runs to less than half a page and ends in a half phrase (PSS 17: 781; undated).

After these failures, Tolstoy embarked on another project: extensive reading of the books that “define religion, faith.” Strakhov – who held a

post in the Imperial Public Library in St. Petersburg – served as his guide. In mid-December, Tolstoy reported that he had assembled a set of historical and philosophical studies of religion, including D. F. Strauss, Ernest Renan, Max Müller, Émile Burnouf, and Vladimir Soloviev (I: 385; December 17–18, 1877). On January 3, he acknowledged being somewhat “lost” in the thoughts of others (I: 389).

Still another attempt was a literary dialogue, entitled “Interlocutors” (*Sobesedniki*), which Tolstoy started on December 20, 1877. In its form, the extant draft resembles a Platonic dialogue. It is a conversation between seven participants who debate one topic: what is faith? Tolstoy defined the participants by their social roles and ideological positions, suggesting concrete prototypes: a “healthy idealist philosopher,” aged 42 (“Fet – Strakhov – Schopenhauer – Kant”); a “natural scientist,” who speaks for progress, aged 37 (“Virchow – Dubois Raimond – Tyndall – Mill”); a “positivist,” aged 35 (“Bibikov”); a “clever priest,” who denies reason, aged 56; a “dialectical thinker,” aged 50, who justifies faith by sophisms (“Khomiakov – Urusov”); a “monk,” aged 70 (“Father Pimen [...] sleeps”), and, last, the “I,” aged 49 and named “Ivan Ilych.”¹¹ Here we gain a clue to what Tolstoy saw in his real-life correspondent, Strakhov: an idealist approximating Kant or Schopenhauer. But for the imaginary dialogue, Tolstoy expanded the team of interlocutors. The “priest” and the “monk” are clearly based on those Tolstoy had met during his recent pilgrimage with Strakhov to Optina Pustyn’, where he was especially impressed with the sincerity and simplicity of Father Pimen, who had fallen asleep during a sophisticated conversation on faith.¹²

The participants in Tolstoy’s dialogue discuss whether or not faith might be justified by different types of knowledge – science, pure reason (according to Kant), “dialectical reason,” and experience (*opyt*). The “I” (Ivan Ilych), who initially demanded the definition of faith, first tries to circumvent the arguments of his interlocutors, momentarily insists on the “subjective ethical principle,” but then, finally, “finds himself in a pitiful situation” (PSS 17: 371). Exactly a year later, December 20, 1878, Tolstoy returned to his unfinished dialogue, now reworking it as an interchange between two interlocutors (I. I., who is asked to define “faith-religion,” but instead attempts to define *his own* faith, and K., who challenges I. I. from the point of view of reason). After several pages, Tolstoy stopped, and addressed himself: “I wanted to express the thought that had come to me directly in the form of a dialogue and I got into a muddle” (PSS 17: 373). He continued as a diary of sorts, with dated entries, asking, again and again, “Where is the source of faith?” “What am I?” This project, too, was abandoned.

To summarize: for more than three years now, Tolstoy had been trying to elucidate his religious views, or define his *profession de foi*, but all of his attempts (philosophical essays, a catechism, a literary dialogue) came to naught. Strakhov was implicated in most of these attempts, and, perhaps most importantly, he heard Tolstoy's confessional reflections on his struggle to define his faith, his frustration with *Anna Karenina*, his disillusionment with *littérature*, and his depression and despair.

I would suggest that Tolstoy's next attempt was to focus on the notion of "life." But first I will make a digression and introduce a groundbreaking attempt to define one's *profession de foi* that serves as an essential context for Tolstoy's endeavors.

ROUSSEAU AND HIS PROFESSION / CONFESSION

It was, of course, Jean-Jacques Rousseau who had famously confronted the problem of faith in the age of reason, and, placing himself between the two parties of his time – those who relied on reason and those who relied on the church – rejected both. Like Tolstoy after him, he embraced faith and could not stand the materialists.¹³ But above all, he insisted that faith was to be found not in the official church, but in the hearts of all men. At a pivotal point in his life, Rousseau decided to abandon literature, and above all "the profession of writer," with all the social falsity it entails.¹⁴ Holding pedagogy in higher esteem, he had embarked on a pedagogical novel, *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, devoting its core part, "Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard," to religion. (When "Profession de foi" appeared in 1762 as part of *Émile's* volume 4, the whole work was banned.) In "Profession de foi," Rousseau, too, dismissed a lesson of catechism taught by a pedantic priest to children as a "heart-breaking stupidity," and decided to replace it with a confession of personal faith.¹⁵ He, too, asked repeatedly: "What am I?" Rousseau took himself – a sense of his own being – as the fundamental truth and the starting point of reasoning about the world ("I exist").¹⁶

There is an intimate relationship between Tolstoy and Rousseau. As Tolstoy once said:

I read all of Rousseau, all twenty volumes [...] I more than admired him – I deified him. At age fifteen, I wore a medallion with his portrait around my neck in place of the cross. Many pages by him are so near to me, that it seems that I wrote them myself.¹⁷

In his *Confession*, Tolstoy mentions reading Rousseau as a formative experience of his early life. While the name of Rousseau does not appear in

Tolstoy's writings on faith from 1875 to 1879, it feels as if some phrases and paragraphs were written by Rousseau himself. Much has been said, and can still be said, on the topic Tolstoy and Rousseau.¹⁸ Here, I will focus on one common concern that they shared: how to tell one's personal faith to others. The issue is not limited to establishing a direct link between Tolstoy and Rousseau. It hardly needs saying that Rousseau – in the “Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard” and in the *Confessions* – provided articles of faith and strategies of self-expression that could be used by generations of modern people, including those who felt a need to reconcile a strong sense of individual being and religious belief – such belief that would not be derived from established religion.

Scholars have long sought the secret of Rousseau's impact in his ingenious use of form, genre, and ways of communicating with the reader. In recent years, Dorothea von Mücke has shown how, in “Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard,” Rousseau worked with two established religious genres, profession of faith and confession (merging them into one), with the dialogic form, and with the speaking “I.” To summarize a complex argument in brief, she argues that Rousseau's “Profession de foi” achieves both the secularization of religious discourse, replacing it with a conversation about God between friends, and a sacralization of the intimate, confessional dialogue, endowing it with the promise of faith and salvation. This dialogic text invites the reader to enter into a similar dialogue with the author of the novel.¹⁹

Indeed, carefully situated within *Émile*, the inserted text of the “Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard” is set up as a dialogue: a “young man” is in a conversation with his mentor, the Vicar, who not only entrusts his friend with the profession of his personal faith but also “opens his soul,” confessing intimate facts of his life, mainly his relationship to the church, religion, and faith. As the introductory narrative to the “Profession de foi” makes clear, before their decisive conversation the two friends routinely engaged in a reciprocal exchange of confessions. Finally, after the Savoyard Vicar makes his profession (on the side of a high hill), his young friend comes to share his non-canonical faith. A subtle play with the speaking “I” and its autobiographical potential underlies this exchange. The “young man” is the novel's first-person narrator, Émile's tutor, called “Jean-Jacques.” The novel does not provide the reader with his confession, but shortly after the publication of the “Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard,” in the *Confessions* (started in 1765), the author added a confessional story of his own life – the life of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. I would suggest treating them as twin texts that reinforce each other. It hardly comes as a surprise that

many a reader took the “Profession de foi” as a profession of Rousseau’s own faith and accepted Rousseau as their spiritual guide.²⁰

As Mücke concludes, in the end, Rousseau performed a crucial part of the cultural work that prepared the displacement of religion in favor of an autonomous sphere of art and aesthetics. His “Profession de foi” “reframes the domain of belief in a secular manner,” addressing “those questions that cannot be resolved by rational inquiry alone” – the questions of outlook onto the world – in a secular fashion.²¹

Rousseau, of course, had models to follow and to transform. Though in the *Confessions*, as a matter of principle, Rousseau does not acknowledge his predecessors, his title points to the *Confessions* of St. Augustine – a text that also fuses the confessional story of the author’s past, sinful, life with the profession of his newly found faith, defining the finer points of early Christian doctrine.²² An influential scholarly tradition relates Augustine’s *Confessions* and Rousseau’s *Confessions* to pose the trajectory of autobiography as a form of self-expression. After Augustine, the telling of one’s life became linked to confession (in more than one sense – confessing sins and confessing belief) and to conversion. After Rousseau, the story of religious confession and conversion was transformed into a secular autobiographical narrative.²³ And yet, arguably, neither Rousseau’s “Profession du foi,” nor many of the secular biographical narratives that followed it, have cut all of their ties to the initial Christian pattern.

When, in the 1870s, Tolstoy invited his friend Strakhov to a confessional dialogue in which each was supposed to define his personal *profession de foi*, this whole tradition was at his disposal.²⁴ Moreover, whatever Tolstoy knew or did not know of this lineage, once his own conversion narrative appeared, soon assuming the title *A Confession*,²⁵ the link suggested itself: many readers have since mentioned Augustine, Rousseau, and Tolstoy in one phrase. With this in mind, I now return to Tolstoy.

TO WRITE ONE’S LIFE

In the letter of January 27 [?], 1878, Tolstoy sent Strakhov a brief report “On searching for faith” (*Ob iskanii very*). He returned to the initial Kantian questions Strakhov posed in November 1875, reiterated that all three could be easily expressed by one (“What am I?”), and reaffirmed his conviction that “reason did not, and could not, say anything in response.” The answers, he said, lay in religion. But when one tried to formulate such answers, they inevitably became “meaningless”: “Meaningless simply by virtue of the fact that they are expressed by the word [...] As expression, as form, they are

meaningless, but as content, they alone are the truth" (I: 399; January 27 [?], 1878). How, then, to access that "truth" which lies apart from words? People, Tolstoy now claimed, give their answers "not through the word, the instrument of reason [...] but through their whole lives" (I: 399).

Strakhov responded that he could not share Tolstoy's trust in religion (he even found the Gospels unclear) (I: 402; February 3, 1878). Tolstoy sadly acknowledged the difference between them: "I see that my way is not your way" (I: 405; February 7, 1878). Two months later, Tolstoy expressed his disappointment in his friend and fellow traveler: in all this time, Strakhov had not covered much distance on his way to faith (I: 423; April 8, 1878).

Strakhov eagerly admitted his failures: Tolstoy expected something from him (he wrote), but "got nothing." He pictured himself as a man who was "vacillating," "negating," and who remained "incapable of firm belief": "Yes, such am I ..." (I: 428; April 11, 1878). Still, he worked hard to search through various views on religion.

To this, Tolstoy responded that it was precisely this immersion in other people's views that was to blame (I: 429; April 17–18, 1878). He unveiled his new method and made another demand on Strakhov – to look for answers in the story of his own life: "You've lived through two thirds of your life. What has guided you, how have you known what is good and what is evil? This is what counts – tell your own self and tell us, without asking what other people say or how they speak" (I: 429). It could be that, like Rousseau in his *Confessions* he thought that "each individual only really knows himself," but, to achieve proper self-knowledge, one had to compare oneself to another.²⁶

Strakhov did try to meet Tolstoy's new expectations; first, he rephrased Tolstoy's vague question: "You ask me: how have I lived up to this point?" His answer – which he called his "confession" – focused on his inability to engage actively in life:

Well this is how: I have never properly lived. In the period of greatest development of my powers (1857–67), I didn't so much live as submit to life, yield to temptations; but I was so tormented that then I renounced life [...] I did my service, worked, wrote, all so as just not to depend on others, so as not to be ashamed in front of friends and acquaintances [...] And so the whole time I did not live, but only *accepted* life [...] Here is my confession to you. (I: 432–33; April 25, 1878)

Thus, instead of a confessional story of his life, Strakhov offered a disclaimer: since he has never "lived," there is nothing to tell.

The failure of this exchange, I think, derived from uncertainty about the meaning each of the interlocutors attached to the idea of telling one's life.

In his evasive response, Tolstoy brought up the question of faith: "I hope that we shall be able to discuss the subject of our correspondence in person. In brief, what's strange to me is why you are not a believer. And this is just what I've been saying, though probably awkwardly and not so clearly" (I: 434; May 5–6, 1878). Thus, Tolstoy made clear that his veiled reproaches of the last months concerned Strakhov's failure to embrace religion. Perhaps what he now demanded from Strakhov, in place of his *profession de foi*, was a story of his life-long quest for faith. But Tolstoy was unable (or unwilling?) to put into clear words what it was that he expected. Strakhov realized that he had misunderstood, but decided that his mistake lay in his overly personal approach: "You don't want to continue the conversation [...] I'm ashamed that I didn't understand, and turned the question to myself personally" (I: 436; May 14, 1878).

Tolstoy acknowledged: "A strange kind of misunderstanding has arisen between us" (I: 429; May 23–24, 1878). Then, he made another attempt to convey what he wanted: "I keep on at you about something that's tricky: give me a straight answer – how do you know what has guided and what guides you now in life?" (I: 439). Strakhov tried again, in much the same vein as in his first "confession":

You ask what I live by. But, first, I must say that I do not at all live. I've still got pride left, which moves me to serve, dress myself, look after my money [...] Then I gain as much leisure as possible, read and keep thinking about that great mystery; you know that I am constantly preoccupied with the question of religion. (I: 441; late May 1878)

In his next philosophical letter, Tolstoy responded to Strakhov's new work, *On the fundamental concepts of psychology* (*Ob osnovnykh poniatiakh psikhologii*), which was based on his voluminous reading:

Your merit lies in the fact that you have proved that philosophy – thought – cannot, in any manner, serve as the foundation for spiritual life, but your error lies in the fact that you do not admit that it is necessary that these foundations (if foundations are what they are) do exist [...] [those foundations which we] cannot possibly gain by reason, or by our very nature, and which are therefore given to us. It is in this sense that I ask you: what do you live by – and you, about the most important thing, say in jest, mistakenly: I do not live. (I: 447; May 29, 1878)

From his insistent reiterations of these vague questions, it transpires that, for Tolstoy, what "one lives by" was faith; it followed that the way to tell one's faith was to tell one's life, and to tell one's life meant to tell a story of one's search for faith.

The next step in their dialogue took place in a face-to-face meeting in August 1878; we do not know what was said. Returning from his visit, Strakhov wrote to Tolstoy that, on his way back from Iasnaia Poliana, he had decided to take up Tolstoy's "challenge" to tell his life, but not as a "biography": "I will write *Instead of a Confession* and dedicate it to you" (1: 458; August 29, 1878).

Two weeks later, Strakhov confirmed his intention to write not-an-autobiography:

But what value, what meaning does my *life* have? [...] In what tone is it to be written? I could, I think, express a feeling of *disgust* most strongly of all:

And I, repulsed, read the story of my life,
I shudder and I curse
I s otrashcheniem chitaiu zhizn' svoiu
Ia trepeshchu i proklinaiu

(1: 463; September 14, 1878)

(Strakhov borrows Pushkin's line, from the 1828 poem "Reminiscence" [*Vospominanie*], and therefore also quotes Levin in *Anna Karenina*.) He also affirmed his dependence on a dialogue with Tolstoy as an addressee of his alternative confession: "But I am prepared to write this for you, but for others – I wouldn't see the point" (1: 463). But Tolstoy was in such a troubled mental state – out of touch with his own self – that he could not properly respond to his friend's letter (1: 475; October 27, 1878).

A year later, the two friends were still discussing their shared plan to exchange self-revelations. Tolstoy now clearly defined the task as the writing of two parallel life stories. Echoing Strakhov, he accepted the idea that self-disgust was the most appropriate emotional key for one's life story told for the benefit of the others: "Write your life story; I still want to do the same thing. But we just need to set this up so as to arouse disgust for our lives in all our readers" (2: 540; November 1–2, 1879).

At this point, it would seem, Tolstoy had in mind not a *profession de foi*, but a confession of one's sins and faults. It should be noted that the Russian language encourages the ambiguity: the word *ispoved'* is equivalent to the French word *confession*; the phrase *ispovedanie very* – to the phrase *profession de foi*.

In response, Strakhov, once again, shared with Tolstoy his sense of uncertainty and lack of clear judgment:

It's very hard for me to judge my life, not just the most recent events, but also the most distant ones. Sometimes my life appears vulgar to me, sometimes heroic,

sometimes moving, sometimes repulsive, sometimes unhappy to the point of despair, other times joyful [...] These oscillations cause me great distress: I can't get any truth from myself! And it doesn't happen just in my reminiscences, but every day in all my affairs. I don't feel anything purely or directly, everything in me splits into two. (2: 541; November 17, 1879)

Tolstoy took Strakhov's ambivalence as an inability to discriminate between good and evil and, I think, ultimately, as a confession of unbelief. He reacted with a strong moral admonition:

You write as if to challenge me. And I know very well that you value my opinion, as I do yours, and so I'll tell you all I think [...] The other is more visible than oneself. And I see you clearly. Your letter distressed me greatly. I have felt a lot and thought it over a lot. I think you are spiritually ill [...] And it is impossible for you to write your life story. You don't know what is good and what is bad in it. And one needs to know.

But he realized that he might have gone too far: "I don't think I will send this. I am very busy with work for myself, which I will never publish. Forgive me" (2: 545–46; November 19–22, 1879). This letter, indeed, remained unsent. The one Tolstoy sent instead focused on his own ongoing work:

I wrote you a long letter, dear Nikolai Nikolaich, and I am not sending it. I am very busy, and very excited about my own work. Not artistic work and not work for publishing. And your letter saddened and troubled me greatly.

Your letter is not good and your spiritual condition is not good. And it's impossible for you to write your life story. You do not know what is good and what is bad. (2: 547; November 22–23, 1879)

Almost five years had passed since Tolstoy, as he said in his letter of May 5, 1875, had "penetrated" his friend's soul. In December 1879, he reevaluated his initial hopes that an interpenetration of two kindred souls would bring each to a higher state of self-awareness:

I was glad to look into your soul, since you opened it to me; but it has been distressing me that you are so unhappy, so troubled. I did not expect that [...] You were not able to say what you have inside, and something incomprehensible came out. But you must not write your life story. You will not be able to. (2: 550; December 11–12, 1879)

So, in the end, Tolstoy's plan of reciprocal professions/confessions failed. Before, he had urged Strakhov to speak out; now, he tried to make him remain silent – on the strength of his conviction that others – himself, specifically – knew Strakhov better than he knew himself.

In the meantime, Tolstoy was intensely immersed in working on his own life story. When Strakhov visited him at Iasnaia Poliana in late December 1879, Tolstoy showed him a manuscript that (scholars believe) contained a preliminary variant of his *Confession*.²⁷ Whatever it was that Strakhov read, heard, and saw during his visit, when he returned home he affirmed his acceptance of Tolstoy's faith, describing the experience of religious conversion:

Something has as if suddenly dawned on me, and I feel more and more joy and view everything in this new light. I will tell you in all honesty why I was confused earlier, and why your present idea seems so new to me. Individual immortality in the form in which it is usually presented always seemed so incomprehensible and savage to me; in just the same way, the mystical rapture reached by the majority of religious people who talk in almost the same terms as you has always been abhorrent to me. But you have avoided both of these; acute as may be the movements of your soul, you do not seek salvation in self-oblivion or immobilization, but in clear and living consciousness. My God, how good this is! When I remember you, all your tastes, habits, pursuits, when I remember that unfailing, vehemently strong disgust of yours for forms of falsity in life, which resounds through all your writings and is reflected in all of your life, then I begin to understand how you have finally arrived at your present point of view. It could only be attained through strength of the soul, only through that long and arduous work which you have devoted yourself to. Please do not chastise me for praising you; I need to believe in you, this faith is my support. I've long called you the most complete and consistent writer; but above and beyond that, you are the most complete and consistent man. I am convinced of that by my reason and by my love for you; I will hold on to you and hope that I am saved. (2: 552; January 8, 1880)

Tolstoy's faith and – still more – Tolstoy's life, and Tolstoy the person, won Strakhov over: he addressed Tolstoy as his confessor and savior. Tolstoy – a layman – became a kind of holy *starets*, like those whom the two friends had visited in Optina Pustyn'.²⁸

As to the work in which Tolstoy was involved at the time, at this point Strakhov alone was taken into Tolstoy's confidence, but (he wrote to Tolstoy) he found a way to tell others without betraying this trust: he would say that Tolstoy was writing a private – unpublishable – "history" of his "relationship to religion."

THE PARTING OF WAYS: TOLSTOY'S *CONFESSION* AND STRAKHOV'S EPISTOLARY CONFESSIONS

Contrary to Tolstoy's repeated claims that he would not publish his ongoing work, in 1882 he submitted for publication (after first reading it aloud to others) the text entitled *Introduction to an unpublished work*

(*Vstuplenie k nenapechatannomu sochineniiu*); within several years, it was circulating under the title *A Confession*. (Though promptly banned, this document did reach readers through illegal distribution.) Now, the general reader took the place that Strakhov had occupied in the “philosophical correspondence” of 1875–79, which had established the dialogic relationship of reciprocity and participation. (After 1879, Tolstoy’s letters to Strakhov lost much of their confessional quality.) Tolstoy’s *Confession* encouraged the reader to identify with the author (the speaking “I”), using his story – a typical story of a man of his generation and class – as a template for examining his own life and faith. But this is a topic for another study.

And what about Strakhov? In his letters, Strakhov continued to address his “confessions” to Tolstoy: “I will speak as if at confession” (2: 624; November 29, 1881); “I need to address God. And so, I want to confess before you” (2: 994; May 2, 1895). In one of the most elaborate of such confessions, on August 24, 1892, he speaks of his inability to carry his arguments to a conclusion. Strakhov points to a “celebrated precedent” that inspired him to embrace his hesitations. This was Plato: “his conversations do not have definitive conclusions” (2: 911; August 24, 1892). It appears that for Strakhov, a “concourse of thought” (his words), such as a Platonic dialogue, was an unfinished (Bakhtin would say unfinalized) message – “a boundless ocean,” and not, as for Tolstoy, an interlinkage of notions into an integral, harmonious whole emblemized by a ball or globe.

Such letters indicate that, their differences notwithstanding, to the end of his days, Strakhov accepted Tolstoy as his confessor and “savior.” And yet, in letters to another friend, Ivan Sergeevich Aksakov (one of Tolstoy’s critics), Strakhov expressed his skepticism about Tolstoy’s theological writings produced after 1880. But even when he wrote in a critical mode, Strakhov drew a distinction between Tolstoy’s – poorly written – professions of faith and the man himself, as he knew him in direct and intimate contact:

Everything Tolstoy writes concerning his abstract interpretation of Christianity is *very poorly* written; but his *feelings*, which he is entirely unable to express but of which I have direct knowledge through his facial expression, his tone of voice, his conversations, are imbued with exceptional beauty. There is so much of everything in him; but I am struck, and forever will be struck by his *nature*, the Christian traits of his nature.²⁹

Here, Strakhov put his finger on the essence of Tolstoy’s struggle with his *profession de foi*: Tolstoy was entirely unable to put it into words. But his “life” – his whole being – carried the message of sin, despair, repentance, faith, and salvation.

CONCLUSIONS

I hope to have shown how Tolstoy's correspondence with Strakhov dramatizes the process of searching for faith and for an adequate definition of a personal faith, enacted in the conversation between the two intimate friends. Though they might have understood each other best in their face-to-face conversations, the correspondence, while retaining some of the immediacy, had the advantage of permanence.

How did Tolstoy (who obviously took the lead) organize and conduct their epistolary conversation and what did he hope to derive from the dialogic form? From the start, he set up an exchange of both philosophical reflections on faith and intimate self-revelations, that is, professions of faith and confessions. He expected Strakhov to validate his (Tolstoy's) ideas by retracing his train of thoughts. The dialogue proceeded slowly and hesitantly, over more than four years. Tolstoy started in the vaguely autobiographical mode (the fragment "I am forty-seven years old"), quickly moved to abstract philosophizing ("On the soul"), ran into a deadlock, and returned to the writing of "life." He would invite his interlocutor to object, then reject Strakhov's objections. Insisting on the truth of his convictions, he accepted the difficulty of expressing them in words. When Tolstoy returned to the autobiographical mode, he also sought help from his interlocutor by urging him to write *his* life. Trying two different modes – writing about "faith" and writing about "life" – Tolstoy might have hoped to come up with a synthetic form. In the end, he posed "faith" as something that both was derived from lived experience and propelled one's life forward. Consequently, to profess one's faith was to tell one's life – not as autobiography, but as a story of one's relations to religion. (Tolstoy did not go so far as to coin the neologism "life-faith," but he came close to posing such an entity.)

In fact, throughout the correspondence, Tolstoy was unclear and imprecise – and not only because he found it difficult to express himself, but also because he believed that religious experience, by its very essence, eluded verbal communication. To describe his situation, I will borrow from Tolstoy's correspondence with another with whom, throughout his life, he discussed questions of religion – his devout cousin Alexandra Andreevna Tolstaia. In February 1880, when his confessional–professional correspondence with Strakhov came to a halt, he wrote to Tolstaia: "to tell one's faith is impossible [...] How to tell that which I live by. I'll tell you, all the same." (In the same breath he said: "You told your faith only because you said what the church says.")³⁰ I suggest that this same paradoxical position manifests itself in Tolstoy's philosophical correspondence with Strakhov in 1875–79.

Their correspondence unfolded at the time when Tolstoy, painfully unable to finish *Anna Karenina*, was eager to abandon *littérature* and the profession of the writer for another sphere, religion, and for another, as yet undefined, personal role. In the end, his interlocutor, Strakhov, helped put Tolstoy in the role of a religious sage, turning Iasnaia Poliana into a monastic habitat, on the model of Optina Pustyn'. The intimate conversation about faith between two friends took the place of religious rites administered by church (the sacrament of confession and the ritual presentation of one's profession of faith). In this sense, Tolstoy seemed to replay what happened in Rousseau's "Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard." But if Rousseau's "Profession de foi" and the *Confessions* had inaugurated (as scholars believe) the new autonomous sphere of art and aesthetics, Tolstoy, after more than a century, tried to do just the opposite. In the late 1870s, Tolstoy tried to return questions about the meaning of individual life – questions that could not be resolved by reason – from the sphere of literature in which the Enlightenment had placed them to that of (reformed) religion. By 1879, Tolstoy was working on a narrative (his future *Confession*) that would fuse the itinerary of personal conversion with the theological formulas of his new faith; in this sense, he turned from Rousseau to Augustine. As his correspondence with Strakhov shows, he was increasingly troubled by the uncertainty of the message delivered by a work of literature and by the freedom literature leaves the reader – to misunderstand or to understand only a part of the story, taking it for the whole. He longed for a form of expression that – while also based on a "system of linkages" – would "convince instantly," as a recital of a *profession de foi*. But in 1879, "faith" was not yet a creed (a formula) for Tolstoy: rather, it was a product of lived experience, presented to readers as a confessional story of his lifelong relations with religion and quest for faith. We know that, in the 1880s–90s, for many of Tolstoy's readers, the intimate intercourse between author and reader encouraged by his *Confession* (and by his subsequent religious writings) would result in conversion similar to that experienced by Strakhov in Iasnaia Poliana in December 1879. The relationship between the writer and the reader held a promise of salvation. This was not *littérature*.

NOTES

1. See *L. N. Tolstoi i N. N. Strakhov: Polnoe sobranie perepiski*, 2 vols. ed. and intro. Andrew Donskov, compiled by L. D. Gromova and T. G. Nikiforova (Ottawa and Moscow: Slavic Research Group at the University of Ottawa and the State L. N. Tolstoy Museum, 2003). The Tolstoy–Strakhov correspondence henceforth is cited in the text from this edition, by volume and page number.

- Tolstoy's other texts are cited from *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 90 vols. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1928–58); and henceforth cited in the text as *PSS* by volume and page. The author thanks Hugh McLean and Donna Orwin for valuable suggestions and Alyson Tapp for expert translations of the Russian texts.
2. See Donna Tussing Orwin, "Strakhov's *World as a Whole*: A Missing Link between Dostoevsky and Tolstoy," in Catherine O'Neil *et al.*, eds., *Poetics. Self. Place: Essays in Honor of Anna Lisa Crone* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2007), 473–93.
 3. For a thorough analysis of the Orthodox institution of *starchestvo*, Optina Pustyn', and Tolstoy, see Pål Kolstø, "Lev Tolstoi and the Orthodox *Starets* Tradition," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 533–54.
 4. From Donskov's comprehensive study, "Leo Tolstoy and Nikolaj Strakhov: a personal and literary dialogue" in the Tolstoy–Strakhov correspondence (I: xiv).
 5. The most recent, and best, source on Tolstoy's religious views in the context of his time is Inessa Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time: A Biography of a Long Conversion, 1845–1887* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008). The author treats Tolstoy's "conversion" as a lifelong engagement with religion.
 6. Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time*, 162–63, analyzes this letter in detail.
 7. The essay "O dushe ..." (which is known to us only from a copy preserved in Tolstoy's archive; *PSS* 17: 340–52) and another unfinished fragment from this time, "O budushchei zhizni vne vremeni i prostranstva" (November 1875), have been analyzed by Medzhibovskaya, in *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time*, 166–67.
 8. The complex story of the publication of the novel has been reconstructed by William Mills Todd, "The Responsibilities of (Co-)Authorship: Notes on Revising the Serialized Version of *Anna Karenina*," in Elizabeth Cheresch Allen and Gary Saul Morson, eds., *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 162–69.
 9. Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time*, suggests that Tolstoy was aiming at Metropolitan Filaret's Catechism, which starts "I believe in one Holy, Universal, and Apostolic Church" (174–75 and 193–94 nn. 46 and 48).
 10. Medzhibovskaya (*ibid.*) interprets Tolstoy's coinage "religiia-vera" differently (173).
 11. For explication of the names, see *PSS* 17: 735–36.
 12. The visit to Optina was discussed in the correspondence: see I: 355 and 349. For a detailed description of this visit, see N. N. Gusev, *Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi: materialy k biografii s 1870 po 1881 god* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1963), 440–41.
 13. I follow Jean-Guehenno, *Jean Jacques Rousseau*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), vol. II, 27–28.

14. So Rousseau says in Book Ten of his *Confessions* (describing the year 1759). Guehenno, *Jean Jacques Rousseau*, vol. II, 13–15.
15. From “Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard,” cited from *Émile* in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. IV (Paris: Pléiade, 1959), 554; hereafter cited as *OC*.
16. *OC* 570. The parallel, of course, is not complete: Tolstoy did not follow Rousseau in claiming his senses as the foundation of truth.
17. A reported conversation (1901); cited from the commentary to *PSS* 46: 317–18.
18. On the parallel between Rousseau’s and Tolstoy’s religious views, see Hugh McLean, “Rousseau’s God and Tolstoy’s God,” in his *In Quest of Tolstoy* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008), 143–58. Tolstoy’s reading of “Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard” in 1852 has been described by Galina Galagan in her *L. N. Tolstoi: khudozhestvenno-eticheskie iskaniiia* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1981), 55–58, and by Donna Tussing Orwin in her *Tolstoy’s Art and Thought, 1847–1880* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 39–49.
19. For the analysis of Rousseau’s “Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard,” I am much indebted to Dorothea von Mücke, “Profession/Confession,” *New Literary History* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 257–74. Here, I am paraphrasing von Mücke, “Profession/Confession,” 266, 267, 270, 272.
20. In describing the set up of the “Profession de foi,” I followed von Mücke. I bring in Rousseau’s *Confessions* and add the notion of the twin texts.
21. Formulations from von Mücke, “Profession/Confession,” 270–72.
22. Arguments connecting Rousseau and Augustine have been summarized by Guehenno, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. II, 141.
23. For a prominent example of this scholarly tradition, see Karl Joachim Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 22, 300 and *passim*.
24. I deliberately leave aside the question of when exactly Tolstoy read Augustine. The most recent work on the topic is Alla Polosina, “L. N. Tolstoi i Avrelii Avgustin o pamiati, vremeni i pronstranstve,” in Galina Alekseeva, ed., *Lev Tolstoi i mirovaia literatura* (Tula: Iasnaia Poliana, 2005), 65–76.
25. On his first attempt to publish it, in 1882, Tolstoy gave the work the title *Vstuplenie k nenapechatannomu sochineniiu*; it was in the 1884 edition, prepared without Tolstoy’s participation, that the work first appeared under the title *Ispoved’*, and, after 1885 Tolstoy himself called it *Ispoved’*. Tolstoy’s family and friends, including Strakhov, used the word *Ispoved’* much earlier; see *PSS* 23: 523–24.
26. Guehenno, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. II, 298, commented on Rousseau’s principle of confession by comparison.
27. Some scholars think that what Tolstoy showed to Strakhov in late December 1879 was a notebook of more than a hundred hand-written pages divided into five chapters: the first chapter uses the biographical “I” to relate the condition of his “soul” at the moment when he looked back at his life and started thinking about his faith; chs. 2 and 3 provide a critique of canonical theology.

In ch. 4, Tolstoy again relates the evolution of his religious thought. Finally, in ch. 5, which occupies three quarters of the notebook, Tolstoy retells – for clarity – all four Gospels. In conclusion, Tolstoy provides his profession of faith and critiques contemporary society from this point of view. It has been suggested that this work contains the core of Tolstoy's future four treatises: *Ispoved'* (*Vstuplenie k nenapechatannomu sochineniiu*) (1879–81; 1882), *Issledovanie dogmaticheskogo bogosloviia* (1879–80; 1884), *Soedinenie i perevod chetyrekh Evangelii* (1880–81), and *V chem moia vera?* (1883–84). To this day, this notebook has remained unpublished. T. G. Nikiforova published the first chapter and described the whole text in L. N. Tolstoy, "<Iskaniia istinnoi very>," in I. Borisova, ed., *Neizvestnyi Tolstoi v arkhivakh Rossii i SShA* (Moscow: AO-Tekhna-2, 1994), 122–30.

28. On Tolstoy's role as a "heterodox starets," see Kolstø, "Lev Tolstoi and the Orthodox Starets Tradition," 545–49.
29. Strakhov's letter to I. S. Aksakov, December 12, 1884 (archival document). The English translation from Donskov 1. xlv (translation adjusted). For the Russian, see 1: 51.
30. *Perepiska L. N. Tolstogo s gr. A. A. Tolstoi 1857–1903* (St. Petersburg: Tolstovskii muzei, 1911), 329.