



The Light Shines in Darkness

Aylmer Maude, Leo Tolstoy

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In this play in five unfinished acts, Tolstoy portrays the generally negative reactions of a man's family and friends to views that Tolstoy himself advocated. The man, Nicholas, rejects the notion that Christianity should be based upon blind faith and insists that religion must be rational. He feels that people should love one another, that this is the true basic message of Christianity, and therefore people should not volunteer for military service where people kill one another. He also contends that land belongs to everyone and that he must give up the thousands of acres that he owns to the peasants, leaving himself only the bare necessities for life. He knows the light that is shinning in the darkness of the world.

Nicholas agues with a priest about Christianity. He contends that the Church has perverted Christianity and is responsible for developing notions that are destroying the truth of Christianity. Contrary to the contentions of the Church, the Church does not preserve the truth. He shows the priest contradictions in the Bible that cannot be reconciled. He argues that the insistence of the Church upon certain ceremonies has divided Christianity into many groups, each with their own sacraments. He insists that humans are responsible for themselves and a Church should not think that it has a duty to direct and control human behavior. The priest agrees with Nicholas that what Nicholas says is reasonable, but insists that a Christian must accept Church doctrine based on faith.

Nicholas feels certain that once he explains about the military and about the rights of all people to all land, his wife will see the reasonableness of his position. She does not. She feels that he wants to deprive his future son-in-law of a military life, the life he desires, the life that will give him joy and a livelihood, and the happiness of their daughter. She is shocked when she hears that he wants to give away his property and leave them in near penury. She asks a more senior priest to come and reeducate Nicholas. The priest comes and there is an interesting debate, with the priest constantly calling Nicholas "prideful," as if this explained his behavior.

The play's final acts dramatize the adverse effects that Nicholas' teachings have upon some people who accepted and acted upon them and the way that these ideas destroy Nicholas.



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