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The Overthrow of Hell and Its Restoration

A “dramatic dialogue” between Beelzebub and his
angels

Leo Tolstoy

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November 17, 1902

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other hands, and closed their circle. And all the devils, laughing, squealing, whistling and fluttering, waving and shaking their tails, began to whirl and to dance around Beelzebub. Beelzebub himself, having spread his wings and waving them, danced in the middle, lifting up his feet highly. Above them the same shouting, crying, moaning, and gnashing of teeth was heard.

ing of the noble feelings in people, instead condones their vices, by painting them in an attractive form. Devil of medicine explained that the whole purpose is to inspire people that the most important thing for them is to take care of their own bodies. And because there's no end in looking after your body, people who care about their body with use of medicine, not only forget about lives of other people's, but also of their own. Devil of culture explained that he inspires people that utilizing all those deeds which run devils of technical improvements, division of labor, communications, printing, art, and medicine, is a kind of virtue and that the persons enjoying all these may be quite pleased with themselves and don't not need to try to be better. Devil of education explained that he inspires people that they, while living wrongly and not even knowing what the good life is, can teach kids a good life. Devil of correction explained that he teaches people that, being spoiled themselves, they can correct the perverse other people. The devil of stupefying said that he teaches people that instead of having to get rid of sufferings produced by wrongful life and trying to live a better life, they better lose themselves under the influence of the stupefying wine, tobacco, opium, morphine. Devil of charity said that he is giving people something, robbing people and giving sliding valves to the robbed, they are virtuous and don't need an improvement, – he makes them inaccessible to the good. Devil of socialism boasted that, in the name of the highest social order of life, he, besides hatred between social classes, also stirs up hostility between the sexes. – I – of comfort, I – of fashion! – screamed and squeaked still other devils, creeping to Beelzebub. – Do you really think that I am so old and stupid that I do not understand that teaching about life is false, and all that could be harmful to us becomes useful to us, – cried loudly and Beelzebub bursting out in laughter. – Enough. Thank you all, – and he swung his wings and leapt to his feet. The devils surrounded Beelzebub. Devil at one end was the devil in a cloak – the inventor of the Church, at the other end – the devil in the mantle, the inventor of science. These devils took each

(I)

It was at the time when Christ opened to people his teaching. That teaching was so clear, and it was so easy and was so obviously going to liberate people from the evil that it was impossible not to accept it, and nothing could keep it from spreading around the whole world. And Beelzebub, the father and Lord of all devils, was alarmed. He clearly saw that his power over people will end forever, unless Christ denies his sermon. He was worried, but not discouraged, and incited Pharisees and Scribes, subdued to him, to insult and torment Christ as much possible and advised Christ's disciples to run away and leave him alone. He hoped that the infamous punishment, humiliation, abandoning him by all the disciples and, finally, the suffering and punishment itself will make sure that Christ denies his teaching. And renunciation will destroy the whole power of the teaching. The case was decided on the cross. And when Christ cried out: "Father, Father, why have you left me," Beelzebub was victorious. He grabbed shackles prepared for Christ, and put them on his feet, making sure they will not get loose when he puts them on Christ. But suddenly he heard a voice from the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do", after what Christ cried out: "It is finished!" and let go of his spirit. Beelzebub realized that everything was lost for him. He wanted to take the shackles off his feet and run, but could not move. Shackles glued to his feet. He wanted to take off on his wings, but could not stretch them. And Beelzebub saw how Christ, in the bright light, stopped at the gates of hell, saw sinners from Adam to Judas came out of hell, saw all devils fled, and saw the walls of hell silently fell down from all four sides. He could not endure this anymore and loudly screamed and fell through cracked floor of hell into the underworld.

(II)

100, then 200, 300 years have passed since. Beelzebub didn't count time. He lied still in the black darkness and dead silence, and tried not to think about what has happened, and still thought and powerlessly hated the culprit of his destruction. But suddenly, – he had no idea how many years have passed since, – he heard above him sounds similar to foot-stomping, moaning, screaming, and tooth-gnashing. Beelzebub lifted his head and began to listen. Beelzebub couldn't believe in possibility of the hell recovery after that victory of Christ, yet meanwhile stomping, moaning, screaming and gnashing of teeth became clearer and clearer. Beelzebub raised his body, bent his shaggy feet (shackles, to his surprise, let go of him) and waving his freely open wings, whistled piercing sound with which he has in the past called for his servants and assistants. Before he took hold of his breath, red light flashed over his head and the crowd of devils, squashing each other, poured through the hole into the underworld and, like crows around carrion, surrounded Beelzebub. The devils were big and small, thick and thin, with long and short tails, and sharp, straight and curved horns. One of the devils, with a cloak over his shoulder, all naked and glossy-black, with a round face without mustache, beardless, huge drooping belly, sat on their haunches before the face of Beelzebub and, rolling up and down his fiery eyes, still smiling, evenly waved his long, thin tail from side to side.

(III)

– What is this noise? – Asked Beelzebub, pointing upward. – What's there? – All the same as it was always, – answered the glossy devil in a cloak. – Yes but are there any sinners? – asked Beelzebub. – A lot of them, – answered the glossy. – But how about that teaching of someone I don't want to name? – asked by Beelze-

(X)

– Very good. Thank you, – said Beelzebub and his face has lightened up. – You deserve an award, and I will graciously reward you. – But you forgot about us, – the remaining multi-haired, small, big, crooked-legged, thick, thin devils yelled in a several voices. – What are you doing? – asked the Beelzebub. – I – Devil of technical improvements. – I – of division of labor. – I – of ways of communication. – I – of typography. – I – of art. – I – of medicine. – I – of culture. – I – of education. – I – of correction of people. – I – of stupefying people. – I'm of charity. – I am of socialism. – I – am of feminism – they cried all of a sudden, crowding forward before Beelzebub. – Speak separately and briefly, cried Beelzebub. – You, – addressing to the devil of technical improvements. – What are you doing? – I influence people that the more things they make and the sooner they'll make them, the better it'll be for them. And people, ruining their lives for things, make them more and more, despite of the fact that these things are needed not to them but to those who get them make these things, and they will be unaffordable to those who make them. – Good. What about you? – Beelzebub turned to the devil of the division of labor. – I influence people that because it's possible to do things by machines rather than by people, so need to turn people into machines, and they're doing it, and people turned into machines hate those who did this to them. – And that's a good thing. You? – Beelzebub turned to devil of communications. – I influence people that for their benefits they need to move from place to place as fast as possible. And people, instead of improving their lives each in their respective places, spend most of life in moving from place to place and are very proud of that they can pass 50 miles per hour and more. Beelzebub praised that, too. Then devil of publication held speech. His role, as he explained, was to ensure that as many people as possible are informed of all those mean things that are being done and written about in the world. Devil of art explained that he, disguised as comforting and excit-

– more and more complicated, and most acquired knowledge – less and less applicable to life, this doesn't bother them and they, quite confident of the importance of their occupation, continue to explore, preach, write, print and translate from one language to another all of the predominantly not suitable studies and, if occasionally even suitable, then those go for fun of the rich minority or for the deterioration of the poor majority. But in order that they would never realize that single important for them is to establish the laws of life that are stated in the teaching of Christ, I influenced them that they cannot know the laws of the spiritual life and that any religious teaching, including the teachings of Christ, is a misconception and superstition, and they can learn about how they need to live from science I invented for them called sociology, the study of in how many different ways people lived badly in the past. So, instead of trying to live better themselves, according to the teachings of Christ, they think they will need only explore the life of people in the past, and that they will, from this study, bring common laws of life, and that to live well, they in their lives will have to comply only with those laws they have invented. In order to further strengthen their deception, I influence them something similar to the teachings of the Church, namely, that there is some continuity of knowledge called science, and that statements of this science just as infallible as the statements of the Church. As soon as those who consider themselves agents of science assure themselves in their infallibility, they naturally declare as unquestionable truths the most not only unnecessary, but also often ridiculous nonsense that they, once declared, can no longer deny. Because of this, I am saying that until I will keep instilling respect in them, the servility to that science that I invented for them, they will never understand that teaching that had nearly ruined us.

bub. – Devil in a cloak bared his teeth so that his sharp teeth opened up, and between all the devils a restrained laughter was spread. – This teaching doesn't hurt us. They don't believe in it, – said the devil is in a cloak. – Yes but this teachings obviously saves them from us, and he demonstrated that by his own death, – said Beelzebub. – I've altered it, – said the devil is in a cloak, quickly wiggling his tail over the floor. – Altered how? – Altered in a way so that people believe not in his teachings but in mine, which they call his name. – How did you do it? – asked Beelzebub. – It happened all by itself. I just helped. – Tell briefly, – Beelzebub said. Devil in a cloak, head bowed, was silent for a moment as though thinking, without rushing, and then started to tell: – When that terrible thing happened, that the hell was destroyed and the father and our Lord departed from us, – he said: – I went to those places where that same teaching was preached, which nearly ruined us. I wanted to see how people live, fulfilling it. And I saw that the people, living by this teaching, were perfectly happy and were not reachable by us. They were not angry at each other, not indulged by the feminine charms and either didn't marry or, if got married, had one wife, didn't have property, considered everything common belongings, didn't defend themselves from attackers and paid good for evil. And their life was so good that other people were attracted to them more and more. Seeing this, I thought that everything was lost and I was already about to quit. But there happened a circumstance which is negligible in itself, but it seemed to me deserving of attention, and I stayed. It happened that among these people, some decided that everybody should be circumcised and should not eat things sacrificed to idols, while others felt that this is not necessary and it is possible not to be circumcised and to eat anything. And I started to influence both sides that this controversy is very important and that neither one nor the other side need to concede, because this is the matter of serving God. And they believed me, and disputes have aggravated. One became angry at another, and then I started to suggest both that they can prove the truthfulness

of their own teaching by miracles. No matter how obvious it was that miracles could not prove the truthfulness of a teaching, they wanted to be right, so they believed me, and I gave them the miracles. It wasn't difficult to arrange this. They believed everything, which confirmed their desire to be the only ones who is right. Some said that firing tongues went on them, others said that they personally saw the deceased teacher, and much more. They invented something that has never happened, and lied in the name of him who has called us liars, they lied no worse than we do, without even noticing that. Some people talked about others: your miracles are not real – ours are, and the others talked about the first ones: no, yours are not real, but ours are true. The things went well, but I was afraid they could start to see too obvious deceit and so I invented the Church. And when they believed in the Church, I was relieved: I realized that we are saved and the hell is restored.

(IV)

– What is the Church? – Sternly asked Beelzebub who didn't want to believe that his servants could be smarter than him. – A church is that when people lie and feel that others do not believe them so they always refer to God, saying: “God knows it's true what I say”. This, in essence, is a church, – it has that quirk that people, who identify themselves with Church, become certain that they can no longer be mistaken, and because of that whatever stupidity they would say – they can no longer deny it. The Church is organized this way: people assure themselves and others that their teacher, God, to avoid misinterpretation of the law opened by Him to people, elected the special people who themselves or those to whom they will pass this power can only properly interpret his teaching. So that people who identify themselves with Church believe that they are in truth not because what they preach is the truth, but because they consider themselves single legitimate re-

most important thing for them is to know more about the relationship between the persons of the Trinity itself, about the origins of Christ, his properties, that of God, etc. And they much and for long discussed, proved, argued, and got angry. And these arguments kept them so occupied, that they were not thinking about how they should live. And without thinking about how they should live, they did not need to know what their teacher told them about life. Then, when they were already so confused in their reasoning that they no longer understood what they talked about, I inspired one, that the most important thing for them is to explore and explain everything that a man named Aristotle wrote, who lived thousands of years ago in Greece; to others I instilled that the most important thing for them is to find such a stone, whereby it would be possible to make gold, and the elixir, which would heal from all diseases and made people immortal. And the smartest ones and scientists put all their mental powers in this. Those who were not interested in this, I instilled that the most important is to know whether earth revolves around the Sun or the Sun around the Earth? And when they learned that the Earth moves, and not the Sun, and identified how many million miles from the Sun are to the Earth, they were very excited and since then they study even harder to learn the distance from the stars, although they know that there's no end to these distances and cannot be, and that there's countless number of stars, and know they don't need to know. In addition, I instilled in them that they really need and it's important to know how all the animals, all worms, all plants, all infinitely small organisms originated. And although it's absolutely clear they don't need to know that, and it's clear that it is not possible to know, because there are as infinitely many animals as stars, they put all their mental strengths on these and similar studies of the phenomena of the material world and were very surprised to find that the more they learn of what they don't need to know, the more remains unknown. And although it's clear that, while they research, the scope of what they managed to learn is becoming wider and wider, subjects study

(IX)

– But the murders at war? How do you bring to that the students of that one who recognized all people are children of one father and commanded to love enemies? – Red devil bared his teeth, and releasing a stream of fire and smoke from his mouth, joyfully slapped himself on the back with his thick tail. – Here’s what we do: we influence each nation that they, this people, are the best in the whole world. Deutschland ueber alles (“Germany – above all”), France, England, Russia is above all, and that this nation must dominate over all other nations. And since we instilled the same in the minds of all peoples, they are, constantly feeling in the danger from their neighbors, always preparing to defend and angry at each other. And the more one side is preparing to defend and gets angry on their neighbors, the more the rest nations are preparing to defend themselves get angry at each other. So now all those people have accepted the teaching of the one who called us murderers, all permanently and mainly preoccupied with preparations for the assassination and the massacres themselves. – Well, that’s witty, – Beelzebub said after a long silence. – But how can free from deception scientists people didn’t see that the Church has distorted the teaching, and they didn’t restore it? – And they couldn’t do so, – with self-confident voice said, creeping forward, matte-black devil in the mantle, with flat forehead, with muscleless parts, and protruding large ears. – Why? – Strictly asked Beelzebub, disgruntled by over-confidence of the devil in the mantle. Undaunted by the hail of Beelzebub, devil in the mantle slowly sat up, not squatted as others but crossed his muscleless legs, and began to speak without hesitation in a quiet, even voice: – they cannot do this, because I constantly distract their attention from what they can and what they need to know, and I am sending it to something that they do not need to know and what they never will know. – How did you do it? – I did and do different things over time, – replied the devil in the mantle. – In the old days I instilled in people that the

ceivers of disciples of disciples of disciples of the teacher God himself. Although the acceptance of this had the same inconvenience as with miracles, namely that people could assert each for themselves that they are members of a single true Church (that actually took place), but the benefit of this approach was that, as soon as the people said to themselves that they are the Church, and built their teaching on this belief, they can no longer retract from what they said, no matter how absurd that was and no matter what other people spoke. – But why the Church reinterpreted the teaching to our benefit? – Beelzebub asked. – And they have done so because, – the devil is in a cloak continued, – that once they named themselves single interpreters of the law of God and convinced others, these people became supreme judges of the fate of people and therefore received the highest power over them. Having received this power, they naturally, puffed up and predominantly perverted and thus raised resentment and hatred of the people against himself. To deal with their enemies they, having no other weapons beside violence, began to persecute, execute, burn all those who didn’t recognize their authority. So they’ve got into position where they had to reinterpret the teaching in this sense that it would justify both their wrong life and the atrocities which they used against their enemies. They have done so.

(V)

– But the teaching was so simple and clear, – Beelzebub said, still not wanting to believe that his servants have done what he did not come up with, – that it was impossible to misinterpret it. “Do unto others as you want others to do unto you”. How do you misinterpret that? – For this, they, based on my advice, used a variety of methods, – the devil is in a cloak said. – People have a tale about how a good wizard, to rescue a person from an evil, turns him into a grain of millet and how the wicked wizard turns into a rooster

ready to peck the seed, but the good magician spread on that grain a bag of grains. The evil wizard could not eat all the grains, and he couldn't find that grain which he needed. Here's what they did, on my advice, to the teaching of that one who taught: "the entire law is in doing to another what you want them to do to yourself", they recognized 66 books to be the Holy law of God, and in these books every word recognized as work of God the Holy Spirit. Over the simple, understandable truth they filed out such a bunch of imaginary sacred truths that it became impossible to accept them all, nor to find that one that people need. This was their first approach. The second one, which they used successfully for more than a thousand years, was that they simply killed, burned all those who wanted to discover the truth. Now this method becomes obsolete, but they don't get rid of it and although they don't anymore burn people trying to discover the truth, but resent them, poison their lives so that only very few dare to expose them. This is the second approach. The third one is that, identifying themselves with Church, therefore infallible, they teach explicitly, when they need it, contrary to what Scripture has said, leaving believers themselves to get out of these contradictions as they wish or are able to. For example, it is written: "Christ is one teacher you have, and don't call Father anyone on earth, for you have one father who is in heaven, and don't call yourself a mentor, because you have one mentor – Christ", but they say: "we are fathers and mentors we are the only pastors over people." Or it's said: "If you want to pray, then pray in secret, and God will hear you", but they teach that we should pray in the temples all together with songs and music. Or it is written: "do not swear in any way", and they teach that all have to swear unconditional obedience to the authorities, whatever those authorities would require. Or it's said: "thou shalt not kill", but they teach that you can and should kill in the war and according to the Court. Or even it's said: "my teaching is spirit and life, consume it, like bread." But they teach that if you put pieces of bread into wine and say certain words, the bread will become the body, and the wine the blood, and

to a new doctrine of the infallibility of the Church, the Christian marriage, and Christian equality. The doctrine of the infallibility of the Church in old times gave us the largest number killers of all times. People identified themselves with the infallible Church considered it's a crime to allow false teachers to corrupt people, and that therefore the murder of these people was pleasing God. And they killed the entire populations and executed, burned hundreds of thousands of people. And the funny thing is that those who were executed and burned, they started to understand the true doctrine, but were considered the most dangerous for people, i.e. servants of Devils. And those who executed and burned, actually our obedient servants, considered themselves Holy doers of the will of God. That was in the old days. In our time, a very large number of killers comes to us thanks to the doctrine of Christian marriage and equality. Teachings on marriage gives us, firstly, murders of spouses by each other and of children by mothers. Husbands and wives kill each other when they find the requirements of the law and custom of religious marriage too restrictive. Mothers kill their children for the most part when the relationships from which the children originate are not recognized by the marriage. Such killings are committed endlessly and regularly. Murders caused by Christian teaching on equality are committed periodically, but when committed, they occur in very large numbers. According to this teachings people are persuaded that they are all equal before the law. But people who are robbed feel that it is not true. They see that equality before the law only allows the robbers conveniently continue to rob, which they are not comfortable to do, and so they resent and attack their robbers. And then mutual killings begin that give us immediately tens of thousands of murderers at a time.

them. It's enough to anoint the chief robber, and he can serenely rob whoever and how much he wants. So, one time in Russia I, to experiment, planted on the throne one after another disgusting, stupid, illiterate and immoral and not having any rights, even according to their own laws, and the latest, not only a slut, but a criminal who killed her husband and legitimate heir. And people, just because she was anointed, did not only tear her nostrils or whip her, as they did with all the killers, but slavishly obeyed her for 30 years, giving her and her countless lovers to rob not only their properties but also the freedom of people. So nowadays the explicit robberies, i.e. power taking of the purse, horse, clothing, make up barely one millionth part of all those robberies perpetrated by people having legitimate opportunity of doing that. Nowadays the robberies are unpunished, and hidden; and generally willingness to rob is established between people in such way that the main goal of the life of almost all people became robbery, achieved only by the struggle between robbers themselves.

(VIII)

– Well, that's good, – said Beelzebub. – But the murders? Who manages murder? – I, – answered, speaking out of the crowd, red bloody devil with canines sticking out of his mouth, sharp horns and raised up thick, fixed tail. – How do you make the killers from followers of the one who said: “do not return evil for evil, love your enemies”? – How do you make the killers of these people? – We do this, too, the old way, – answered the red devil in deafening, trembling voice, – by exciting in people greed, zeal, hatred, revenge, pride. And also the old way we influence teachers of people that the best way to wean people from killing is for teachers themselves publicly to kill those who killed. It's not that this give us too many killers, as much it prepares them for us. The greatest number of killers came and continues to come to us thanks

to eat this bread and drink this wine is very beneficial for the salvation of souls. People believe this and diligently eat this soup and then, when they come to us, they are very surprised that this soup didn't helped them, – finished the devil in a cloak, rolled his eyes and grunted to the ears. – This is very good, – said Beelzebub and smiled. And all the devils burst in loud laughter.

(VI)

– And do you still have, like in old times, fornicators, robbers, and murderers? – Already joyfully asked Beelzebub. The devils, also rejoiced, all started to talk all of a sudden, wishing to speak out before Beelzebub. – Not in the old way, but more than ever before, – yelled one. – There's not enough space in the old structures for the Sodomites, cried another. – Current destroyers are meaner than before, – the third shouted. – Not enough fuel for the killers, – the fourth roared. – Don't speak all at once. And let the one who I will ask respond. Who is responsible for fornication, come out and tell us how you're doing it now with the followers of that one who forbade changing of wives and warned not to look at women with lust. Who manages the fornication? – I, – answered, creeping in from behind closer to Beelzebub, brown feminine looking devil with a saggy face and incessantly drooling mouth. The devil then crawled forward from the row of others, squatted, leaned his head to one side, shoved his tail with a brush between the legs, and waving it, began in lilting voice to tell this: – We do it in an old way, used by you, our father and the Lord, even in paradise passed the entire human race over to our power, and by the new Church's way. According to the new Church way we do this: we assure people that their marriage is not what it really is, in the union of man with woman, but in dressing up in the finest dresses, going to a large building assigned for it, and there, in putting on their heads some special, prepared for it, caps, and with the sounds of different

songs walking three times around the table. We influence people that only this is a real marriage. And people persuaded in this, believe that anything other than these conditions, a connection of a man with a woman is a simple, non-binding pleasure or satisfaction of hygienic need, and therefore not hesitating to give in to this pleasure. Effeminate devil leaned his saggy head to the other side and paused, as if waiting for the reaction of Beelzebub to his words. Beelzebub nodded in approval, and effeminate devil so continued: – In this way, without leaving away previous, used and forbidden in heaven fruit and curiosity, – he continued, obviously wanting to flatter Beelzebub, – we are achieving the best successes. Imagining that they could arrange an honest religious marriage and even after intercourse with many women, men change hundreds of wives and so while become accustomed to fornication, they continue it even after a religious marriage. If the restrictive conditions of the religious marriage seem inconvenient to them for any reason, they arrange the second walking around the table, and consider the first marriage invalid. – Effeminate devil went silent and while clearing his drooling mouth with the tip of his tail, bent his head on the other side and silently stared at Beelzebub.

(VII)

– Simple and well done, – said Beelzebub. – I approve. Who manages robbers? – I, – answered, coming out, big devil with large curved horns, with a mustache curved upwards and huge crooked paws. This devil, crawling as before, came forward and, while fixing his mustache with both paws, was waiting for the question. – That one who ruined hell, – Beelzebub said, – taught people to live as the heavenly birds, and taught to give the beggar and to that one who wants to take your shirt, to give your jacket, and he said that in order to be saved, it is necessary to give the property away. How do you engage in robbery people who heard this? – And we're do-

ing this, – said the devil with a mustache, proudly leaning his head backward, – just like it was done by our father and ruler during the election of Saul in the Kingdom. The same way as it was revealed back then, we influence people that instead of stopping to rob each other, it is more profitable to let one person rob you, giving that one power over everything. What's new in our approach is just that to assert the rights of one person for the robbery we take this man in the temple, put on him a special cap, put him on a high chair, give in his hand a wand and a bead, lean with an oil and in the name of God and his son, proclaim this anointed with oil person is holy. So the robbery committed by this special person, who is considered holy, already cannot be limited. And these holy people, and their assistants, and the assistants of their assistants – all of them incessantly, coolly and safely rob people. They usually set such laws and practices, in which even without anointing an idle minority can always ransack the working majority unpunished. So lately, in some countries the robbery continues without the anointing, just the same way as it is where they anoint. As you, our father and Lord, can see, this is, in essence, the old way we use. What's new in it is only that we've made it more general, more subtle, more dispersed in space and time, and more sustained. We've made it more general in that before people willingly obeyed someone they elected above all, and we've done that they now, regardless of their desire, they obey not those who they elected and but whoever. We made it more subtle in that now robbed, through the device of special and indirect taxes, do not see their robbers. We've made it more dispersed in space in a way that the so-called Christians, not satisfied with robbing their own people, using different and strange excuses, mainly an excuse of spreading Christianity, to rob all those foreign people that have something to rob. This new way is spreading faster than others, thanks to the loans, public and governmental: they rob not only living now, but also future generations. We've made this more sustainable by making the chief robbers now considered sacred, and people are hesitant to confront