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# What the Orthodox Religion Really Is

Leo Tolstoy

1904

Count Tolstoy has written for the *Revue de Paris* an article entitled “What the Orthodox Religion Really Is.” He indicts the Russian national Church for apostasy to the tenets of the founder of Christianity on almost every count, and gives this description of the orthodox religion, which, he declares, is losing its hold on the people:

“Orthodox religion brings to my mind only a lot of long-haired men, who are very arrogant, without instruction, clothed in silk and velvet, decorated with ornaments and jewels, whom one calls archbishops and metropolitans, and thousands of other men, with hair uncombed, who find themselves under the most servile domination of a few individuals who, under color of dispensing the sacraments, cheat and rob the people. How can I have faith in this Church and believe, if to a man who asks from the bottom of his soul it replies only by the most miserable deceptions, by insanities, and affirms that no one has the right to make any other reply to these questions? . . . I may choose the color of my trousers, I may take a wife according to my taste, but in other respects, in

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those in which I feel myself a man, I must ask these imbecile people, these fools and deceivers. As a guide of my life in the innermost corner of my soul, I am to have the pastor, the priest of my parish, who has just come from the seminary, a shallow boy, almost illiterate, or an aged drunkard, whose only care is to acquire as many fowls and pigs as he can. If during prayer the deacon asks long life for the adulteress, Catherine the Second, or for Peter, that robber and assassin who blasphemed the Gospel, I must pray for that. Often these miserable wretches have asked that my brothers be burned or hanged, and I must cry '*Anathema!*' These men declare that my brethren shall be cursed, and I must cry '*Anathema!*' They insist that I shall drink wine in a little spoon, and assert that it is not wine, but the blood of the body of God,—and I must do it. Oh, but it is terrible!"