Through the lives and deaths of Thomas More and Ivan Ilyitch, this article explores the consequences of choosing to follow God or to follow man. Although one man is historical and the other fictional, they make a good contrast because they both are prominent lawyers adroit in governmental and judicial affairs. Both wisely understand what modern liberalism rejects, that humans are dependent creatures. More places himself in the hands of God while Ilyitch places himself in the hands of his social betters. More lives a life of joy. Ilyitch lives a life of quiet despair. More can embrace death. Ilyitch cannot embrace his earthly end until at last he sees that even though he wasted his life redemption is still possible.

Thomas More’s friends mourned his death despite the fact that he was beheaded for high treason. Ivan Ilyitch’s friends were consumed by self-interest in the wake of news of his demise despite the fact that he died a respectable member of the Russian judiciary. This essay argues that the reactions to the deaths of More and Ilyitch shed light on how they lived and what they valued, providing an apt point of departure for a meditation on how we ought to live and what we ought to value. More placed himself into the hands of God while Ilyitch placed himself in the hands of his social betters. More lived a life of joy. Ilyitch lived a life of quiet despair. More embraced death. Ilyitch could not embrace his earthly end until at last he saw that even though he wasted his life redemption was still possible.

Ivan’s friends had two reactions to his death. “On hearing of Ivan Ilyitch’s death, the first thought of each of the gentlemen in the room was of the effect this death might have on the transfer or promotion of themselves or their friends.” And his “more intimate acquaintances, the so-called friends, could not help thinking too that now they had the exceedingly tiresome social duties to perform of going to the funeral service and paying the widow a visit of condolence,” which would disrupt their card games.

Despite the fact that More had been convicted of treason, his friends wept at his death. Sir William Kingston, charged with escorting More back to the Tower after More’s sentencing at Westminster Hall “began to cry as he took leave of [More].” He told More’s son-in-law: “Master Roper, I
was ashamed at myself that, at my departing from your father, I found my heart so feeble, and his so strong, that he was fain to comfort me which should rather have comforted him.”6 Sir Thomas Pope visited More in the Tower to relay the King’s message that More should be brief in addressing the crowd at his execution later that day. Upon leaving More’s cell, Pope reportedly “broke down and cried.”7

Ivan’s friends tolerated him while More’s friends loved him deeply. Why the difference? Both men—the fictional Ivan and the historical Thomas—wisely understood in ways that many of our contemporaries fail to grasp that they were, to use Alasdair MacIntyre’s phrase, dependent rational animals.8 Both men comprehended the profound truth that they were not the center of the universe. But here the similarities end.

Ivan bet his life on the proposition that he was dependent on those who wield earthly power. As a result, his life was small and cramped and would have remained so no matter how far he rose in the Russian government. Thomas bet his life on the proposition that he was primarily dependent on God. As a result, his life was vast and free and would have remained so whether or not he rose to positions of earthly prominence. Each man exercised wisdom given his starting point—his premises. But one learned near the end that his foundation had been built upon sand, that what he mistook for wisdom was in reality mere folly.

By meditating on the “wisdom” displayed by each of these lawyers as they built prominent careers, we can delve more deeply into the tension present daily in our lives and the lives of our students between our dependency on God and our dependency on other flawed human beings. Through More’s life and death, we see that total dependency on God brings about an interior freedom allowing the person to confront the truth about themselves and others; to see and to act on the good without counting the cost, and to live joyfully seeing beauty in even the most comical of circumstances. More habituated himself to this ordering of priorities through a lifetime of daily decisions both large and small. Ilyitch’s habits masked this reality from him. Over time Ivan and the mask became one, fused into a partnership that would dictate the course of his life. During Ilyitch’s long convalescence, the mask started to crack until near the end Ivan experienced a particularly excruciating three-day journey through purgatory that painfully ripped the mask from him, finally giving truth to the folly of his life.

A member of the Court of Justice and dead at the age of 45, Ivan had not been a bad man, in fact he had hardly been a man at all. St. John Paul wrote that “each of us has both a desire and the duty to know the truth about our own destiny,” as we ask: “Does life have meaning? Where is it going?”9 Unwisely, Ivan doesn’t confront these questions rigorously until
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unmistakably confronted with his own mortality. About a month before his death, Ivan “cried like a child. He cried at his own helplessness, at his awful loneliness, at the cruelty of people, at the cruelty of God, at the absence of God.” In his anguish he cries out: “Why hast Thou done all this? What brought me to this? Why, why torture me so horribly?”

In acute pain, Ilyitch continued to cry out. Although he expected no answer he continued his inquisition of God: “Come, more then; come, strike me! But what for? What have I done to Thee? what for?” In this moment, he heard a reply from deep within his soul asking him “What is it you want?” He responded: “What? Not to suffer, to live.” The tables turned, and Ivan’s inquisitor pressed him: “To live? Live how?” As yet unable to confront the lie that had been his life, Ivan responded: “Why, live as I used to live before—happily and pleasantly.” In crying out to God, by asking these questions, he had opened the crack for mercy to enter his life. I’ll return to Ivan’s redemption later; for now, I want to turn to his earlier life and then to Thomas More’s life.

Ivan’s life proceeded from the conviction that life ought to be lived “easily, agreeably, and decorously.” In what should be taken as a warning to professors, Tolstoy tells us “that it began with life at the school of jurisprudence. Then there had still been something genuinely good; then there had been gaiety; then there had been friendship; then there had been hopes. But in the higher classes these good moments were already becoming rarer.”

To live “easily, agreeably, and decorously,” Ivan required the right patrons and a certain forgetfulness. “At school he was just the same as he was later on all his life—. . . strict in doing what he considered his duty.” And, “his duty he considered whatever was so considered by those persons who were set in authority over him.” From early on, “he was attracted, as a fly to the light, to persons of good standing in the world, assimilated their manners and their views of life, and established friendly relations with them.” During school he had loathed himself for committing what had seemed to him very vile acts, but later “perceiving that such actions were committed also by men of good position” who didn’t consider “them as base,” Ivan—not being able to “regard them as good . . . forgot about them completely, and was never mortified by recollections of them.”

After school, even his less than virtuous social life “was accompanied with such a tone of the highest breeding that it met “with the approval of the people of high rank.” When a girl fell in love with him, he asked himself: “After all why not get married.” At first, marriage agreed with Ivan, but this all changed with the first pregnancy. Family life, with its responsibilities to others, became “tiresome” and “dull.”
To continue to live “easily, agreeably, and decorously,” it became necessary for Ivan “fence off a world apart for himself outside of his family.”

He sought “to make himself free from the unpleasant aspects of domestic life and to render them harmless and decorous” to the point that he came to expect from domestic life “only those comforts—of dinner at home, of housekeeper and bed which it could give him, and, above all, that perfect propriety in external observations required by public opinion.”

“When antagonism and querulousness entered the picture, “he promptly retreated into the separate world he had shut off for himself . . . and there found solace.”

Ivan found solace in two places outside the family—card games and work. “His official pleasures lay in the gratification of his pride; his social pleasures lay in the gratification of his vanity. But Ivan Ilyitch’s most real pleasure was the pleasure of playing ‘screw,’ the Russian equivalent of ‘poker’ with “good players” and “good cards” followed by “supper and a glass of wine.”

Some evening he found work irksome, but if there was no game of screw, he preferred work to “sitting alone or with his wife.”

With pride, Ivan carried out his official duties with “exactitude and incorruptible honesty.” He masterfully dis-integrated the various aspects of human affairs. Ivan “rapidly acquired the art of setting aside every consideration irrelevant to the official aspect of the case, and of reducing every case, however complex, to that form in which it could in a purely external fashion be put on paper.”

He completely excluded “his personal view of the matter” in favor of “observing all the necessary formalities.” In fact, “the great thing necessary was to exclude everything with the sap of life in it, which always disturbs the regular course of official business, not to admit any sort of relations with people except official relations.”

Ivan mastered “this art of keeping the official aspects of things apart from his real life [to] the highest degree.”

Ivan “wisely” succeeded in ordering his life around his core principles—living a “frivolous, agreeable, light-hearted life, always decorous and always approved by society.” Professionally, he attained the rank of member of the Court of Justice. Personally, he and his family surrounded themselves with “none but the very best” persons.

His home was just as he had dreamt, “spacious, lofty reception-rooms in the old style, a comfortable, dignified-looking study for him, rooms for this wife and daughter, [and] a schoolroom for his son.”

Although life for the most part was easy, agreeable, and decorous for Ivan, the Hound of Heaven gnawed—literally—at his side. Facing his own physical decline, he gradually—over a month’s time—and finally confronted the foundations of his life’s chosen path, wondering whether he had “lived as one ought.” Had he ordered his life wisely? He thought he had.
But, what if the first principles upon which he built that life were false? Although Ivan didn’t know it yet, a merciful God was inviting him to a profound examination of conscience. Before exploring how God and Ivan resolve the looming crisis, I turn to More to contrast his life with Ilyitch’s life.

Thomas More’s life was ordered by different priorities. While studying law, Thomas lectured on “Augustine’s City of God.” And, “at the centre of Augustine’s work was the question that was uniquely to concern More himself: Do we wish to live in the earthly city or the heavenly city?” Ackroyd said that this “question was posed to him at the end of his life, when he chose the latter,” but the fact that he was asking the question while still studying law shapes the contours of his life and helps him prepare for that final “yes” to God when his life hangs in the balance. For Thomas, a daily Mass goer, “ambition and penitence, success and spirituality” went hand-in-hand as he balanced “these complementary vistas—of the hollowness of the world and of the delight in game.” From this, Ackroyd argues, “springs” More’s wit and irony.

A man of deep integrity, More lived a joy-filled life, seeking the good of others, taking pleasure in friendship over material positions, and attentive to his family and God. Erasmus gives us a glimpse into More and his character through a letter he wrote to Ulrich von Hutten in 1519, sixteen years before More’s execution. “As for care of his personal appearance, he has taken absolutely no heed of it since boyhood, to the extent of devoting very little care even to those niceties allotted to the gentlemen.” Life at Court, populated as it is with “self-seeking, . . . pretence and luxury,” was not to More’s taste. As to friendship, “whoever desires a perfect example of true friendship, will seek it nowhere to better purpose than in More.” Thomas takes pleasure in the wit of others, even when it is directed at him, and “there is nothing in human life to which he cannot look for entertainment, even in most serious moments.” He had a monkey, fox, ferret, weasel, and other animals because he took pleasure in them and took pleasure from his guests’ pleasure at seeing such creatures.

Toward his wife, children, and household Thomas displayed “kindness” and “merry humor.” Toward riches, he was “absolutely free” of “any love of filthy lucre.” As a lawyer, he put the interests of his clients ahead of his own, attempting to persuade them “to settle their actions” to “save them expense.” Erasmus says that as a judge “no one ever determined more cases, and no one showed more absolute integrity” than More such that “his native city held him in deep affection.” In contrast to Ilyitch,

You might call More the general resource of everyone who needs help. He thinks some great stroke of luck has come his way if he has been
Thomas has “fixed hours at which he says his prayers.”

“When he talks with friends about the life after death, you recognize that he is speaking from conviction, and not without good hope. And, More is like this even at court.”

Thomas’s life lived richly in the world but not of it prepared him, with God’s grace, to lose every worldly possession—even his own life—for the sake of his soul. Upon resigning his office as Lord Chancellor, Thomas had his tomb constructed as “a constant reminder of the unrelenting advance of death... that he may not shudder with fear at the thought of encroaching death, but may go to meet it gladly, with longing for Christ.”

After his arrest, More tells his daughter Margaret that “I know full well my own frailty and the natural faintness of my own heart, if I had not yet trusted that God would give me strength rather to endure all things than to offend him by blasphemously swearing against my own conscience, you can be very sure I would not have come here. And since in this matter I look only to God, it matters little to me if men call it as it pleases them and say it is not a matter of conscience but just a foolish scruple.”

And, so Thomas came to his death by beheading on July 6, 1535, “the King’s good servant and God’s first.”

Over the years, some of my students have said that More was foolish not to acquiesce in Henry VIII’s break with Rome, arguing that he should have kept himself alive in order to press his case at a less dangerous time. What these students fail to see is that More’s life—the good life rooted in an interior freedom that comes from dependence on God—would have been destroyed the instant he capitulated to his earthly king, preferring preservation of his earthly life to all other goods. His integrity shredded, joy would have been drained from his life as he reduced friendship to a mere utilitarian compact for survival. True wisdom required putting God before King.

Ivan and Thomas both saw their lives as part of a larger drama. Ivan felt like an “artist who has skillfully played his part in the performance, one of the first violins in the orchestra.” In his lack of introspection, he never considered the purpose of the performance. And, in his naiveté, he lived—until he got sick—as if the performance would continue without end. In contrast, More saw that “the whole elaborate medieval edifice of spectacle and display is built on upon the awareness of death. Yet within the over-
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whelming context of divine truth and divinity, there is also delight to be found in the transient game and an energy to be derived from the passing spectacle."68 For More, the end was always before him. Instead of paralyzing him, it freed him to participate joyfully in “the passing spectacle.”

Until the last days of Ivan’s life, he would have considered Thomas’s stance “foolish scruple.” But as the inevitability of his death became clearer, he saw the lie in what he had once viewed as a wise way to live. True joy and delight make a home in Ivan only when he allows himself to view this life in the context of its transience. At the end, two hours before his last breath, Ivan exclaims “So this is it! . . . What joy!”69 How did he arrive at that point?

Tolstoy devoted nearly 60 percent of the novelette to Ivan’s dying. What began as an “uncomfortable feeling”70 grew more problematic. His world began to crumble when he realized that the doctor was treating him as he had treated people in the court of justice. “From the doctor’s summing-up Ivan Ilyitch deduced the conclusion—that things looked bad, and that he, the doctor, and most likely everyone else, did not care, but that things looked bad for him. And this conclusion impressed Ivan Ilyitch morbidly, arousing in him a great feeling of pity for himself, of great anger against the doctor who could be unconcerned about a matter of such importance.”71

Two months into his illness, Ivan “knew that he was dying; but so far from growing used to the idea, he simply did not grasp it—he was utterly unable to grasp it.”72 As the thought of death confronted him, “he tried to get back into former trains of thought, which in the old days had screened off the thought of death.”73 He couldn’t escape the fact of death—the great It. Again and again, “It came and stood confronting him,” looking “at him.”74 “And worst of it was that It drew him to itself not for him to do anything in particular, but simply to look at It straight in the face, to look at It and, doing nothing, suffer unspeakably.”75

Thomas could suffer because he knew his own wretchedness, his need of purgation, his Savior’s passion, and the Father’s mercy. Ivan despaired at suffering because it didn’t comport with his worldview, according to which life should be easy, agreeable, and decorous. Those around Ivan added to his misery by lying about his condition, pretending “he was simply ill, and not dying.”76 But, “it was brought down to this level by that very decorum to which he had been enslaved all his life.”77 The “falsity” surrounding Ivan “and within him did more than anything to poison Ivan Ilyitch’s last days.”78

Into this picture came Ivan’s guardian angel, the only person in Ivan’s life to truly befriend and love him—Gerasim the servant. Gerasim, “the
only person who recognized the position, and felt sorry for him,” would sit with Ivan for hours, propping up Ivan’s feet to relieve the pain. In response to his master’s attempt to send him away, Gerasim replied: “We shall all die. So what’s a little trouble?”

Bolstered, I suspect, by Gerasim’s love, Ivan finally had the courage to cry out to God, but he didn’t yet have the courage to examine his life in God’s light. “Whenever the idea struck him, as it often did, that it all came of his never having lived as he ought, he thought of the correctness of his life and dismissed the strange idea.” During this time, loneliness was Ivan’s constant companion. Thomas, the saint, knew that as a sinful human being he hadn’t lived as he ought, but that was the one thing Ivan could not admit as he thought “of all the regularity, correctness, and propriety of his life.”

Fortunately for Ivan (and for us) “in the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

His moral sufferings [a few days before his death] were due to the fact that during that night, as he looked at the sleepy, good-natured, broad cheeked face of Gerasim, the thought had suddenly come into his head, “What if in reality all my life, my conscious life, has been not the right thing?” The thought struck him that what he had regarded as an utter impossibility, that he had spent his life not as he ought, might be the truth.

The truth had been there the whole time, the faint pulse of conscience, which had been gagged by his desire to live life as he wanted. “It struck him that those scarcely detected impulses within him against what was considered good by persons of higher position, scarcely detected impulses which he had dismissed, that they might be the real thing, and everything else might be not the real thing.” In response to this, “he tried to defend it all to himself. And suddenly he felt all the weakness of what he was defending. And it was useless to defend it.” His “horrible, vast deception [had] concealed both life and death.” This realization “intensified his physical agonies, multiplied them tenfold.”

After confessing, Ivan took the Eucharist with a “moment of hope” that he would be healed. And he was healed but not in the way he expected. He began to scream and his screaming “never ceased for three days, and was so awful that through two closed doors one could not hear it without horror.” After three days, Ivan “caught sight of the light, and it was revealed to him that his life had not been what it ought to have been, but that it could still be set right.” Although his failing health prevented him from clearly asking forgiveness of his family, he knew “that He would understand Whose understanding mattered.”
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And all at once it became clear to him that what had tortured him and what would not leave him was suddenly dropping away all at once on both sides and on ten sides and on all sides. . . . Set them free and be free himself of those agonies. “How right and how simple!”

The pain? “Let the pain be.”

Death? “What death? There was no terror, because death was not either. In the place of death there was light.”

“What joy!” Having wisely (or foolishly depending on your outlook) lived his life as one of dependence on a loving and merciful God, Thomas More experienced joy throughout his life, even to his death. Having foolishly lived his life as one of dependence on those of higher rank in his society, Ivan Ilyitch lacked joy until mercifully in death all his illusions and delusions melted way in a refining fire. What words of wisdom can we glean from these two prominent lawyers? More said it succinctly, addressing his daughter Margaret when she visited him in prison: “Finally, it’s a matter of love”—God’s love for us, our love for God, our love for ourselves, and our love for others. Thomas drew strength from this his whole life. He lived—and died—loving God with his body, soul, and mind, following the formula laid down in his poem:

Love Him therefore with all that He thee gave:
For body, soul, wit, cunning, mind and thought,
Part will He none, but either all or naught.

Ivan received the knowledge, which is the basis for this wisdom, at the end.

Notes

In addition to the two peer reviewers, I would like to thank Gerard Wegemer for graciously answering a couple of questions on Thomas More, those who commented on this paper at the Nootbar Conference held at Pepperdine Law School in February of 2015, and those who commented on this paper at the Society of Catholic Social Scientists 23rd Annual Conference at Franciscan University in October of 2015. Your comments have improved this essay greatly. I dedicate the paper to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Immaculate Seat of Wisdom.

1. Although one man is historical and the other fictional, they make a good contrast because they both are prominent lawyers who meet an early death after living according to their own first principles. I am not the first to compare these two figures. See Joseph Allegretti, The Lawyer’s Calling: Christian Faith and Legal Practice (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 110.


3. Ibid., 2.

4. Ibid., 5–6.

6. Ibid. Roper reported that “among the large crowd assembled to see the famous prisoner, many then began ‘for very sorry thereof to mourn and weep.’” Ibid., 402.

7. Ibid., 404.


9. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, Fides et Ratio ¶26 (1998), available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html. “Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life? These are the questions which we find in the sacred writings of Israel as also in the Veda and the Avesta; we find them in the writings of Confucius and Lao-Tze, and in the preaching of Tirthankara and Buddha; they appear in the poetry of Homer and in the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles as they do in the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle.” Ibid., ¶1.2

10. St. John Paul writes: “the first absolutely certain truth of our life, beyond the fact that we exist, is the inevitability of our death. Given this unsettling fact, the search for a full answer is inescapable.” Ibid., ¶26.

“The daily experience of suffering—in one’s own life and in the lives of others—and the array of facts which seem inexplicable to reason are enough to ensure that a question as dramatic as the question of meaning cannot be evaded.” Ibid.

11. The Death of Ivan Ilyitch, supra note 3 at 57.


13. The Death of Ivan Ilyitch, 57.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 58.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 25.

19. Did Ivan’s professors bear some responsibility for sucking joy, goodness, friendship, and hope out of their student’s life? Tolstoy doesn’t provide the answer, but I think the question worth pondering. “According to [Luigi] Guissani, the teacher—the master—comes to the student as the living embodiment of the hypothesis: ‘To educate means to suggest a proposal, but the proposal must be in response to a lived question. . . . Unless the issue is lived and felt by the educator, the response being offered will be a sham.’ In the end, ‘to educate is to communicate one’s self, to communicate one’s way of approaching reality, for a person is a living mode of relating to reality.’ This cannot be an abstraction, but must be a lived encounter with reality, providing coherence emanating from the teacher’s life. Michael Scaperlanda, “Producing Trousered Apes in Dwyer’s Totalitarian State,” Texas Review of Law and Politics 7 (2002): 175–221, 218 (quoting Luigi Guissani, The Risk of Education [2001]). What “self” did Ivan’s professors communicate? What “self” do we, as professors, communicate to our students?
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21. Ibid., 11.
22. Ibid. During his life, he shook off “various friends and relations, shabby persons.” Ibid., 27.
23. Ibid. “All the enthusiasms of childhood and youth passed, leaving no great traces in him.” Ibid.
24. Ibid., 12.
25. Ibid., 13.
26. Ibid., 15.
27. Ibid., 16.
28. Ibid., 17.
29. Ibid., 18.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 27.
33. Ibid., 26.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 14.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 25.
38. Ibid. “A man would come, for instance, anxious for certain information. Ivan Ilyitch, not being the functionary on duty, would have nothing whatever to do with the man.” Ibid.
39. Ibid., 16.
40. Ibid., 1.
41. Ibid., 27. “Ivan Ilyitch’s pleasures were little dinners, to which he invited ladies and gentleman of good social position, and such methods of passing the time with them as were usual with such persons.” Ibid., 26.
42. Ibid., 22. “In reality, it was all just what is commonly seen in the houses of people who are not exactly wealthy but want to look like wealthy people, and so succeed only in being like one another.” Ibid., 24.
44. See, e.g., *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch*, 28 (“But it came to pass that this uncomfortable feeling kept increasing, and became not exactly a pain, but a continual sense of weight in his side”).
45. Ibid., 59.
48. Ibid., 106.
49. Ibid., 112.
50. Ibid., 102–03.
51. Ibid., 103.
53. Ibid., 6. “Even the court of Henry VIII he could not be induced to join except by great efforts, although it would be difficult to wish for anything more cultured and more unassuming than the present king.” Ibid. “King Henry VIII would not rest until he dragged [More] to his court. I use the word ‘dragged’ advisedly, for no man was ever more consumed with ambition to enter a court than he was to avoid it.” Ibid., 10.
54. Ibid. “Friendship he seems born and designed for; no one is more open-hearted in making friends or more tenacious in keeping them. . . . The road to a secure place in his affections is open to anyone.” Ibid.
55. Ibid., 7.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid., 9–10.
58. Ibid., 10.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid., 11.
62. Ibid., 12.
63. Ibid. “What becomes then of those people who think Christians are not to be found except in monasteries?” Ibid.
65. *A Diologue on Conscience* (letter from Margaret Roper to Alice Alington, August 1534), in Wegemer and Smith, eds., *A Thomas More Source Book*, 316, 320. “Margaret, I know well that my wickedness has been such that I know I well deserve for God to let me slip, yet I cannot but trust in his merciful goodness, that as his grace has strengthened me up to now, and has made me content in my heart to lose goods, land, and life too rather than swear against my conscience.” Ibid., 334.
66. Ibid., 355.
70. Ibid., 28.
71. Ibid., 30.
72. Ibid., 41.
73. Ibid., 42.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., 43.
76. Ibid., 47.
77. Ibid., 48.
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78. Ibid., 49.
79. Ibid., 48 (“Gerasim alone did not lie”).
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid., 59. “‘But I am not to blame!’ he shrieked in fury.” Ibid.
83. Ibid., 59–60.
84. Ibid., 61.
85. The Canticle of Zechariah, Luke 1:79. Mercifully it is a dawning and not an instantaneous flash of light because Ivan would be blinded if the truth of his life were revealed to him in a flash.
86. Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyitch, 63.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid., 64. In the Christian life, a moment of truth is often followed by a recognition of our profound lack of understanding of that truth. In Matthew 16:16, God reveals to Peter that Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” Just a few verses later, Jesus rebukes Peter for insisting that the Passion will not occur: “Get behind me, Satan! . . . You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.” Matthew 16:23. Ivan experiences something analogous after receiving Jesus in the Sacrament. Ivan gains hope that God will heal his physical ailments, but God has other plans. God will allow Ivan to undergo his own passion so that his soul, through Christ, might be healed.
92. Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyitch, 64–65.
93. Ibid., 66.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid., 67.
100. See More, The Twelve Properties, 64.