

Contemporary Icons of Nonviolence

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Edited by

Anna Hamling

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Thank you all,

Anna Hamling

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PREFACE

ANNA HAMLING

It is blasphemy to say that non-violence can be practiced by individuals and never by nations which are composed of individuals.

– M.K Gandhi

The philosophy and strategy of nonviolence [must] become immediately a subject for study and serious experimentation in every field of human conflict, by no means excluding relations between nations.

– Martin Luther King Jr

What is the basis for choosing a nonviolent response to conflict and violence? Hopefully, readers will find the answer to this question in our edited volume of *Contemporary Icons of Nonviolence*. Its object is to present and analyse the nonviolent philosophy of a number of selected icons of nonviolence from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries from four religious traditions: Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, and Islam, as a realistic alternative to violence. My decision to contextualize the work and theories of the selected important figures in their religious, historical, and cultural traditions was mostly pragmatic. Lev Nikolaevicz Tolstoy (Russia), through his principled (moral) theory of nonviolence, initiated a chain of inter-connected, cross-cultural, and inter-religious dialogues by his disciples and those who followed in the subsequent centuries. Some names are instantly recognizable while others are a little less well known: Mahatma Gandhi (India), Martin Luther King Jr (USA), Óscar Romero (El Salvador), Nelson Mandela (South Africa), Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Pakistan), and His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan (born in Switzerland). As we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi (India) on October 2, 2019, his philosophy of nonviolence and his activism in this sphere deserve a special place in the current volume. His work is re-visited, re-examined, and re-applied to the context of the twenty-first-century world. What makes him such an icon of nonviolence and how do global audiences construct their categories of icons? Why has Gandhi's nonviolent trajectory profoundly influenced his followers, and why does his name still resonate so strongly in the world?

To re-affirm the importance of Gandhi's contributions to the field of nonviolence in the twenty-first-century world, we are dedicating two chapters to his theory and activism. The following two studies are on Martin Luther King Jr (United States), who was a disciple of Gandhi. We commemorated the seventieth anniversary of his birth on January 15, 2019, and celebrate the importance of his nonviolent theory and activism and the influential role it played in African America civil rights and around the world. Gandhi also influenced Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Pakistan), often called the "Islamic Gandhi," and his contribution to the study of nonviolence deserve special mention in this current volume. All of the great figures presented in this volume are linked as they studied, explored, analysed, and applied the strategies of nonviolence by following the works and examples of their predecessors, leading back to Tolstoy. They learned from each other and were successful in attaining the status of an "icon" of today. They built powerful bridges and points of solidarity among themselves. They are, among certain others, our hope for a nonviolent future.

The original concept, to which I adhere strictly, was to include only nine chapters in this volume, dedicating them to the icons of nonviolence who lived (or are still living) in the turbulent historical circumstances. These chapters have been written by experts in their fields from around the world. It was also a pragmatic decision to accept only chapters that present fresh and innovative research that would inspire scholars, students, and the public to contribute either by their own activism or their research to the field of nonviolence. Besides tracing the historical development of the concept of nonviolence, this volume also suggests ways of applying nonviolence to our everyday lives in the first quarter of the twenty-first century.

Having explained the rationale for the inclusion of the selected icons, the question is – how do we understand the concept of an icon for the purpose of this volume? And why do some icons who have died still have such a powerful global impact? According to the definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an icon is: "A person or thing regarded as a representative symbol, especially of a culture or movement; a person, institution, etc., considered worthy of admiration or respect."¹

The process of the transformation of an icon involves a succession of interwoven effects and produces a meaning fundamental to all human cultures. The meaning of an icon starts with either a dramatic singular event that gives continuous meaning to the icon or a number of events

¹ *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 343.

over a period that give continuous meaning to the icon. Tomaselli and Scott write: “The longer the history of an icon, the richer the layer is of symbolic significances organically attached to it, though some more recent or contemporary icons (Mandela, M. L. King Jr) also manage to achieve this status.”²

Icons are particularly powerful signifiers because they are immediately recognizable and carry complex cultural codes in a compact image.

In this volume, it is the simple definition of icons which is accepted – individuals who have become larger-than-life, almost myth-like symbols that communicate ideals, sentiments, or aspirations. The perceptions of the public change over time, which is a result of changing social, cultural, or political circumstances. We collectively reimagine them in relation to new interests or concerns and evolving geopolitical situations.

It will no doubt be remarked that each of the icons included in this volume are men, and that in their religious beliefs represent Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, and Islam. I would have liked to offer a wider spectrum of gender, faith, and no religion, and I confess my own sense of disappointment that after three consecutive calls for abstracts this was not forthcoming. Perhaps this first volume might stimulate those wishing to see the broader spectrum recognized to prepare submissions for a second. International audiences might have celebrated more male peers than other genders, but this has changed rapidly recently. This is also work for volume two.

Below is a brief summary of the introduction and all nine chapters.

In his introduction “What is Nonviolence?” Professor Michael Nagler clarifies the concept of nonviolence and presents some strategies and how to apply them in everyday life.

In chapter one, “Tolstoy's Concept of Nonviolence,” Irina Gordeeva examines the religious-journalistic works of Lev Tolstoy and his intent to show that in the centre of his religious worldview was a concept of the conscience as the voice of God within the human, the voice of the single spiritual being who lives in all people. Tolstoy's philosophy of nonviolence derived from his teachings about this “world's soul” that is common to all living beings (and not only to people), being separated from each other by individual bodies. Both the religious and non-religious works of Tolstoy called upon an understanding of this spiritual connection between people.

² Keyan Tomaselli and David Scott, *Cultural Icons* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2009), 19,

In chapter two, “Gandhi in Champaran and Beyond: a Nonviolent Modernist and His Relevance in Our Times,” Santosh Kumar Rai argues that the life, ideas, and practices of Gandhi stood for the promises of modernity, challenging its flawed practices. Mahatma Gandhi and his *Ahimsa* were new interventions in the modern public sphere in a society where violence and counter-violence were everyday facts of life. Dr Kumar Rai connects the Gandhian approach and its relevance to modern human rights as a holistic alternative to the other dominant ideologies from the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment onwards. Through Gandhi’s ideas and practices, a counter-ideology of modernity was being created, one which was not practiced in the metropolitan world or the universities, but in the minds of the illiterates of the regions like Champaran, through constant engagements and dialogues.

In chapter three, “Gandhi’s Passion and the Poetics of Nonviolent India,” Chaitali Choudhury and Akshaya Rath explore how Gandhi embodied the image of the alternative identity and translated it into his struggle against imperialism and violence. Taking into account his voluminous writings and political experiments, the authors seek to understand how Gandhi absorbed his philosophy of nonviolence from the culture of the oppressed such as eunuchs and untouchables, as well as from the mainstream philosophical ideas of Orientalists and Christian religious preachers. Both authors therefore analyze how Gandhi affected his cultural persona of a nonviolent ascetic by founding his nonviolent nationalism on an alternative site of discourse by collaborating with life in the periphery.

In chapter four, “Martin Luther King Jr’s Theory of Nonviolent Action: Radical Love and the Beloved Community,” Michael Minch contextualizes Martin Luther King Jr’s theology of nonviolence in relation to the following: his thinking about love and the “Beloved Community”; his indebtedness to Gandhi; his strategy of moving from prophetic leadership regarding civil rights to poverty to opposition to the war in Vietnam; the question of King’s moving toward a vision of strategic nonviolence late in his career; an interrogation of what he might have learned from his contemporaries; and of what he gave his contemporaries and later generations of theorists and practitioners of nonviolence. Professor Minch frames Martin Luther King’s strategic nonviolence in a larger set of practices and theorizations than is conventionally offered. His contention is that King’s prophetic voice is both more complicated and complex, and at the same time more valuable, than conventionally understood.

In chapter five, “Martin Luther King Jr’s Meta-logic of (Non)violence: a Spectrum for Social Change and Human Development,” Johnny Mack explores Martin Luther King Jr’s understanding of violence and nonviolence as alternative values at the disposal of human choice when confronted with the inherent conflicts in social change and human development.

Dr Mack examines King’s understanding of tri-partite forms of violence and nonviolence in his chapter. He also analyzes King’s last book (*Where Do We Go From Here, Chaos or Community*, 1967) and the question it raises. According to Mack, King summarizes the premise of his nonviolence logic and the bi-polar choice humans must make, where chaos constitutes a violent path and community a nonviolent path, in both the means and ends and questions and counter-poses of violence and nonviolence as the value choices integral to organizing and sustaining social structures and our behaviour in human relations. This article explicates this meta-logic and argues it as central to understanding Martin Luther King Jr’s logic of nonviolence.

In chapter six, “The Greater Jihad: Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Islamic Pacifism in Pre and Post-Independence Pakistan,” Anwar and Nabil Ouassini examine the theory of nonviolence by one of the central figures in the construction of contemporary Islamic pacifism, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who was known as the “Islamic Gandhi.” The authors elaborate on Khan’s attempt to reframe the Islamic tradition to create a legal and spiritual framework of non-violence that has laid the foundations of what many contemporary Islamic scholars call “Islamic pacifism.” While his philosophy of nonviolence is a direct by-product of twentieth-century anti-colonial struggles and post-independence development, the enduring impact of his work and legacy lives on today.

In chapter seven, “Óscar Romero as Religious Icon: Symbol of Conversion to the Poor,” Zachary R Dehm explores the true power of Óscar Romero, the slain Archbishop of San Salvador and icon of nonviolence. Romero redirects our attention to the plight of the poor and nonviolent resistance to oppression. Thus, in the truest sense of the word, Romero is a religious and cultural icon of, and for, the *campesinos* [peasants] of Latin America. He redirects the perspectives of those at the global socioeconomic centre and draws them toward the kinds of conversion that constitutes a break with the status quo and the structures of violence it maintains.

In chapter eight, “The Black Pimpernel turned Nobel Laureate: the Evolution of Nelson Mandela,” Mark Malisa and Thelma Quardey Missedja examine the evolution of the political philosophy of Nelson

Mandela, especially with regards to apartheid in South Africa. In tracing the evolution of the work of Mandela, the authors refer to Mandela's upbringing in rural South Africa at a time when black South Africans were being dispossessed of their land and other natural resources. Mandela was called the Black Pimpernel, a trait made clear during the Rivonia Treason Trials of the time. Mandela's revolutionary violence firmly anchored in the philosophy of Ubuntu is also examined, along with its giving way to nonviolence, reconciliation, and restorative justice.

Chapter nine, "His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan: Effective Pluralism, Social Change, and the Nonviolent Civil Reshaping of the Public Square," by Karim Dharamsi and Farouk Mitha, explores the Aga Khan's contributions through his development framework to a pluralistic, multi-ethnic society. The authors examine Prince Karim Aga Khan's contributions to architecture and design, suggesting that his understanding of Islam, in general, and Ismailism, in particular, are grounded in a relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical, between how our perceptions are shaped and what kinds of virtues might steer us towards a more inclusive and less divisive cosmopolitanism.

This chapter on his Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan concludes our edited volume one on a positive note. It indicates we need to work within a framework of the multi-ethnic society in the twenty-first century to initiate intercultural dialogue and the possibility of achieving a more peaceful future for all of us. This chapter is followed by a brief conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS NONVIOLENCE?

MICHAEL NAGLER

And what is the single most powerful thing we can do to increase it? We first need to get at the question with a “Russian doll” approach – the meaning within the meaning.

For some, nonviolence is a roster of techniques. No one would disagree that there *are* techniques or tactics that implement nonviolence; but they are only the surface, and if you approach the topic with only that in mind you can make mistakes. A case in point (in my view) is the classic and influential list of 198 techniques assembled by the late Gene Sharp. Some of these, particularly those that humiliate the opponent, would not be considered nonviolent in the deeper sense but only nonviolent, i.e. they do not inflict physical harm. Gandhi would make the British ashamed of what they were *doing* but never ashamed of what they *were* – a subtle but critical distinction. When one’s commitment to nonviolence is *only* to a set of techniques he called it “the nonviolence of the weak.” Always more effective than violence (the technique of the *very* weak) but nowhere near the potential of a nonviolence arising from the awareness that the opponent is fully human and has arrived at their position, however much it may seem unjust or hurtful, for reasons that seemed legitimate to them. This is essentially a vision, an awareness, of the innate unity among people (indeed, in the end, with all that lives).

The goal of a nonviolent action coming from this deeper place will of course involve a redress of grievances but include, perhaps primarily, repair and restoration of the *relationships* involved. This is how we get to one of the principles of nonviolence I like to call work vs. “work,” where “work” in quotes means achieving one’s immediate aim – reform of an unfair law, removal of a dictator – while work without quotes means to do good work in the social field – work that will often show up down the road as a far more important result than originally intended. The classic example is the Salt Satyagraha of 1930, which actually achieved very little

in terms of alleviating the hated salt tax, but actually demonstrated, in the “nonviolent moment” at the Dharsana salt pans that, as historian Arnold Toynbee put it, “(Gandhi) made it impossible for us to go on ruling India.” But at the same time, “he made it possible for us to leave without rancour and without humiliation.”

This work vs. “work” distinction yields a powerful formula which sums up what we need to know about the effectiveness of nonviolence in a nutshell:

*Violence sometimes “works” but never works; while
Nonviolence sometimes “works” but always works.*

Nonviolence, to the extent that it’s engaged in any of the infinite ways possible will *always* do good work in the social field, often, as we’ve seen, leading to unforeseen positive results that may far outweigh the immediate result, whether or not the latter was gained. Counter-intuitively, but perfectly in line with this principle, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan found that nonviolent insurrections led to more democracy some years down the road than violent ones, *even if they “failed.”*³

What one brings to any situation of conflict, the techniques one selects to deal with one’s partners (aka opponents), determines its ultimate results, and has been determined in turn by what one “sees” – in particular, whether or to what degree one is aware of the humanity of the other. Critically, it also depends on what nonviolent options one is aware of. Awareness of nonviolence is not available in our educational system, not to mention that powerful (dis-)educational force of the mass media. That is changing, and informal avenues are becoming available now, though not nearly quickly enough to meet the urgent needs of the time.

We can define principled nonviolence, Gandhi’s nonviolence of the brave, as follows:

Nonviolence is a method of persuasion that draws on the best within a person to elicit the best from others.

This definition goes far toward explaining the surprising effectiveness of nonviolence, how it elevates human dignity (which is in short supply these days), and why it is rewarding to doer and recipient alike – why it is such a fulfilling practice, in sharp contrast to the devastating effects of

³ *Why Civil Resistance Works: the Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (Columbia Studies in Terrorism and Irregular Warfare) (New York: Columbia University, 2011).

practicing violence. US service men and women are committing suicide at the appalling rate of over twenty a day. But the definition does even more. It brings out the most profound secret of nonviolence – that it is the defining characteristic of what it means to be human. This is the deepest meaning. Gandhi, who was not given to exaggeration, said quietly and often that “nonviolence is the law of the human.”

The question then is why has it taken so long – is still taking so long – for nonviolence to be recognized and used, and what shall we do about it?

The problem with nonviolence is not that it requires courage – people throw themselves enthusiastically into many reckless adventures that require courage of a kind – but that the relentless materialism of modern culture makes it all but incomprehensible how nonviolence fits into the scheme of things, and why it’s effective. Before it comes to the surface as a form of behaviour, as we’ve seen, nonviolence is essentially an immaterial, spiritual force. Scientists are only now, here and there, coming to accept the existence of some kind of “subtle energy” in the universe, which opens the door for a metaphysics that would include what Gandhi called “soul-force” (*Satyagraha*, or nonviolence). In a universe of separate, competitive fragments, a universe of matter, what is the “adaptive advantage” of self-sacrifice? How can we explain its effect on others, or train for and develop it?

These considerations point the way in which each of us can make a contribution to hastening the general understanding and adoption of nonviolence, and thereby actually make our contribution to the advance of human evolution. At the Metta Center we have formulated five eminently doable ways each of us can do this:⁴

- avoid violent media (just about all of it)
- learn everything you can about nonviolence and the “new” model of reality in which it is embedded
- take up a spiritual practice if you have not already done so
- be personal in your daily interactions with everyone
- tackle a critical problem that calls for your particular capacities *and* be prepared to explain the new model to whomever is prepared to listen.

Oh, and one last thing – when you get to work, be strategic. Rushing out to a protest and then going home – the technique *du jour*, at least for

⁴ For a fuller version see www.mettacenter.org/roadmap.

beginners – is ineffective. Nonviolent change requires sustained, strategic action.⁵

The challenge of converting the world to a nonviolent vision is not beyond us. It's the critical challenge of our time. Getting engaged in it is actually a journey of self-discovery into which, as Gandhi said, we are all invited at this critical juncture of human history.

⁵ There are several good books, websites, and organizations offering guidance on strategic action, most recently George Lakey, *How We Win: a Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning* (Brooklyn; London: Melville House, 2018).

PART I

THE CHALLENGE OF NONVIOLENCE

CHAPTER ONE

TOLSTOY AS AN ICON OF NONVIOLENCE

IRINA GORDEEVA

Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) – a world-famous Russian writer and religious thinker – devoted much of his writing and a great part of his life to the problem of nonviolence. Tolstoy was born into a wealthy aristocratic family, and spent his childhood at Yasnaya Polyana, a family estate located in the Tula region. There were five children in the family. Unfortunately, they lost their parents early and were brought up by relatives.

Tolstoy's early life was typical for a representative of the Russian elite of that time. However, from his early years he felt some sort of dissatisfaction with himself and the life surrounding him. After receiving a home education he entered Kazan University, but left in 1847 and returned home where he lived as an ordinary landowner.

Permanent spiritual crises did not allow him to settle down in one occupational niche once and forever, and in the early 1850s Tolstoy started his army service, and participated in the Caucasus and Crimean wars. However he did not continue his military career and in 1856 left the army to become a writer. Soon, his literary works would bring him worldwide fame.

In the late 1850s and early 1860s, Tolstoy travelled abroad, and in this period his interest in social issues was revealed. These trips inspired him to take part in public activities; for example, he participated in the abolition of serfdom, and he opened a school for the peasants' children in his estate, where he practised new educational methods free of violence and compulsion. In 1862 Tolstoy married Sophia, and they raised thirteen children. Tolstoy spent most of his life in his estate Yasnaya Polyana, surrounded by his big family.

His life in the countryside determined his worldview. He closely communicated with the peasants and tried to work physically himself, creating the ideology of “bread labour” – the moral duty for everyone to earn one's own food. Previously, while he briefly lived in Moscow,

Tolstoy participated in the census and learned about the life of the city's poor.

In the late 1870s, when Tolstoy was at the peak of his literary career, he underwent an existential crisis (his famous "conversion" of 1878) that completely changed his life. He was in a deep depression and even thought about suicide, but managed to overcome it and came to the conclusion that he should totally reject the system of values in which he had been brought up. He found a new meaning of life in the teachings of Christ, although he considered him just a great spiritual leader and social reformist, denying his godlike nature.¹

In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Tolstoy wrote *Confession*, and a series of other theological works. After revising the Orthodox theology, he dismissed as prejudices some of the existing church teachings about God, legends about the creation of the world, ideas about angels and devils, the fall of man, the immaculate conception, and so on. Tolstoy concluded that, in the ecclesiastical teachings, the external cult supplanted the ethical teaching that once was at the centre of Christianity. As a result, the church teaching developed as an excuse for a historically determined sociopolitical order based on the oppression of people. Moreover, the church recognized and sanctified such immoral phenomena as divorce, slavery, courts, war, and execution. In Tolstoy's opinion, the word "church" had become "the name of deception, by which some people want to rule over others." Therefore, Tolstoy rejected the church in order to search for genuine Christianity, which he found in "extreme rationalistic and ethical evangelism." For him, the essence of Christianity was in the ethical commandments of Christ, and Tolstoy devoted the rest of his life to clarifying the ethical and social ideas of Christ, which he followed and preached.

Tolstoy's rejection of social injustice led him to abandon the idea of technological progress and stand for anti-capitalist, anti-modernization ideas close to the Slavophil and populist sentiments. As a philosopher, Tolstoy was eager to overcome individuality, regarding it as evil and an illusion, and replace it with the "people's truth" of common life, which he had found among Russian peasants.²

Tolstoy considered that while the official church was on the wrong path of external rituals, the genuine Christian teaching had been spread

¹ For a detailed description of the evolution of Tolstoy's worldview, see Valentin Asmus, "Mirovozzrenie L. N. Tolstogo," in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 69, no. 1: Lev Tolstoi (Moscow: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1961), 35–102.

² Andzhei Valitskii, *Istoriia Russkoi Mysli ot Prosvescheniia do Marksizma* (Moscow, 2013), 358.

among people by sectarian and free thinkers, and since then had existed in self-sustained, beyond-church forms.³ He was sure that there was no mystery in the question of the essence of life for the illiterate peasants, who always knew that one should follow the law of God in order to save their soul. Illiteracy for these people was not an obstacle for understanding the meaning of life, but quite the opposite – it would help. According to Tolstoy, for the revival of natural existence, individuals must emulate the peasants, “who are less intellectually corrupted and still adhere to a vague concept of the idea of a Christian faith, will finally understand where the means of salvation lie and be the first to make use of it.”⁴

Tolstoy believed that both he and other people could find a way to a true faith and a true life by watching common people and learning the gospel commandments. These ideas led to a radical break with the traditional mode of living of the Russian elite, and even with contemporary culture. Because of his big family, Tolstoy could not reject private ownership. Nevertheless, in the years following his conversion he altered his behaviour – he gave up hunting, meat, and bad habits, “he praised poverty, wore homespun, peasant clothing, and took up manual labor – splitting wood, fetching water, plowing the field, threshing grain, making shoes – all the while retaining his wealth.”⁵

Tolstoy’s philosophy answers questions about the meaning of life and what is good for people, how one should live, what God wants from people, how do people relate to the common, the immense, and the infinite, of which they are a part, and what are their attitudes to such similar particles – to people and to the whole – in the world? Tolstoy insisted that human life is filled with meaning to the extent that he subordinated it to the fulfilment of the will of God, which is given to us as the law of love, opposing the law of violence. The law of love is imprinted in the human heart, comprehended by the founders of religions, and by the eminent philosophers such as Confucius, Lao Tzu, Buddha, and Socrates. However, the fullest version is given in Christ’s commandments. Christ elevated love to the level of the highest law of life, proclaiming that in love and through love a divine principle is revealed in people: “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them” (1 John 4:16). Tolstoy concluded that, in order to save himself and his soul from decay, to give life meaning, a person must stop doing evil and committing

³ Asmus, *Mirovozzrenie L. N. Tolstogo*, 440.

⁴ Steven G. Marks. *How Russia Shaped the Modern World: From Art to Anti-Semitism, Ballet to Bolshevism* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 105.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

violence, including the cases when they themselves become the object of evil and violence.⁶

From the late 1870s the theme of nonviolence was one of the most important in the religious and publicist works of Tolstoy, such as: “What I Believe” (1883–4); “What is Religion, and What is the Essence of It?” (1884); “The Kingdom of God is within You” (1890–3); “Do Not Kill” (1900); “Christian Teaching” (1897); “What Then Must We Do?” (1886); “A Law of Violence and A Law of Love” (1908); “I Cannot Be Silent” (1908).

Tolstoy started his religious search with philosophical and theological questions, but later turned to societal problems and wrote several critical works. However, their sharp criticism could not overcome censorship, and most of his philosophical and religious writings were never published in Tsarist Russia. According to Tolstoy, there is nothing mystical or mysterious in Christ’s teachings – they are simple, clear, and understandable to everyone, and one can find their quintessence in the Sermon on the Mount. From this, Tolstoy singled out five main commandments: do not be angry, do not commit adultery, do not swear, non-resistance to evil, and love your enemies. The fourth commandment is the most important: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5: 38).

Tolstoy considered Christ’s prohibition of violence as absolute – violence is unjustifiable under any circumstances and no one can resort to violence, even if you are beaten and hurt, and not only must good be responded to with good, but also evil. Also, Tolstoy was convinced that the fourth commandment should be used both in private and public life. All forms of violence should be eliminated, including prison, execution, and war.

At first, Tolstoy based his ideas mainly on the gospel, but his later works incorporated ideas he found in Taoism and Buddhism, as well as the works of the Roman Stoics (Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius) and the fathers and teachers of the church (Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian, and Lactantius). He learned the Christian heresies and sects (Bogomils, Pauliki, Petr Chelčický, Mennonites, Quakers), and carefully read the contemporary thinkers (such as Pascal, La Boétie,

⁶ For a detailed analysis of the philosophy of nonviolence, see Abdusalam Guseinov, “Faith, God, and Nonviolence in the Teaching of Lev Tolstoy,” *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 38, no. 2 (1999): 89–193.

Lamennais, and Henry Thoreau), including the American tradition of non-resistance (Adin Ballou, William Lloyd Garrison, and Jonathan Dymond).

Tolstoy argued that genuine religion embraces the basic principles common to all great religions – beliefs that they all share, and thanks to which humanity has not yet died out. He saw one of his tasks being to compile a special anthology of a collection of insights and wisdom of the great philosophers of all the times – *A Calendar of Wisdom* (also known as *Path of Life*, *A Cycle of Readings*, or *Wise Thoughts for Every Day*).

The main religious and ethical super-task which Tolstoy tried to solve was to substantiate a commandment of non-resistance to evil, not only as a rule of personal behaviour but as a law of social life, and to combine the norms of individual and social ethics. His program for the implementation of the non-resistance commandment included a personal self-perfection, “not-doing” as an individual principle of non-resistance to evil, but also civil non-participation in the existing system and civil disobedience as possible forms of mass protest against state violence.

In the concrete historical situation of Russia at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Tolstoy’s ideas were directed against the autocracy, police, and the “official” Orthodox Church. His sociopolitical position can be called Christian anarchism.⁷ According to Asmus, “in his works written in the 1980s and later, Tolstoy developed criticism of the social system based on the enslavement of the majority by the minority. Therefore, he changed the question about power, writing about it in more detail, and, importantly, he tried to explore the connection between power and violence. Tolstoy is interested not in the question of power or violence in general, but in the power and violence of a state, its institutions and people representing state power.”⁸ Anarchist philosopher A. Christoyannopoulos concludes:

In sum, for Tolstoy, a state cannot but be violent and must therefore be un-Christian and irrational. Christian states do not escape this verdict: all the states that have allegedly adopted Christianity have forced both their own peoples as well neighboring ones to act against their will. Because of its very structure and because those who lead it cannot by anything but immoral and self-interested, the state is necessarily violent and domineering ... Since, for Tolstoy, the cause of state violence lies in the very existence of the state, war, for instance, cannot be eradicated by peace

⁷ For a magnificent overview of the Christian-anarchist ideas of Tolstoy, see: Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, “Leo Tolstoy on the State: a Detailed Picture of Tolstoy’s Denunciation of State Violence and Deception,” *Anarchist Studies* 16, no. 1 (2008): 20–47.

⁸ Asmus, *Mirovozzrenie L. N. Tolstogo*.

conferences and alliances – for the scourge of war to disappear, the state itself must disappear.”⁹

Social and political events in Russia in the late nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century forced Tolstoy to oppose violence and social injustice publicly. He appealed to Tsar Alexander III to pardon the terrorists who had killed his father, Alexander II, wrote about famine among the peasants and the needs of the workers, protested against corporal punishment and the death penalty, fought against violations of the freedom of conscience, and defended the persecuted sectarians and refusers of military service. During the Russian-Japanese War, Tolstoy wrote an anti-militarist appeal. In 1905, he condemned the autocracy’s massacre of the unarmed workers who tried to approach the Tsar with a petition (“Bloody Sunday”). After the revolutionary events of 1905–7, Tolstoy condemned the repressive government policy against the revolutionaries, and at the same time urged the revolutionaries to abandon their methods of struggle.

As a Christian anarchist, Tolstoy did not support the liberal concept of social reorganization through the constitutional restriction of autocracy, but at the same time he was against the violent revolutionary reorganization of the society. Tolstoy’s political philosophy was quite unusual because it connected the radical criticism of the existing social system and the spiritual state of the privileged classes with a no-less radical denial of the revolutionary ideas of resistance by force. “Seek the truth, and the truth will make you free” – such was the creed of Tolstoy, expressed in its most concise form. Steven Marks states that, “As an anarchist, he stood for the abolition of *all* governments and opposed *all* ideologies that hinted at the use of force.”¹⁰ The rejection of violence and turn to peace making under the influence of the works of Tolstoy was not rare in both the governmental and revolutionary camps.

Tolstoy considered the primary, divine connection between people as the basis of the unity of people. The slogan “all people are brothers” came from his belief in the universal brotherhood of people in Christ, and the call to love everyone, without exception, regardless of national boundaries, social dividers, and other prejudices. Tolstoy called for international peace; therefore, his ideas were anti-boundary in nature. In his work “Christianity and Love for the Fatherland” (1894), Tolstoy asserts that patriotism is always an instrument of repression. For him, the patriotism of rulers is only an egoistic concern for their own wellbeing,

⁹ Christoyannopoulos, “Leo Tolstoy on the State,” 32.

¹⁰ Marks, *How Russia Shaped the Modern World*, 109.

while the patriotism of those under authority implies the denial of human dignity, intelligence, and conscience; that is, slavish submission in front of those at the top of power.

Tolstoy believed that personal, moral self-perfection would lead to changing society for the better, and there was no need to change other people, only yourself, to save your soul. “The whole teaching of Jesus,” says Tolstoy, “is only about what the people repeat in simple words: save their soul, direct their strength only to their own ... All that’s not your soul, all this is none of your business. Look for the kingdom of heaven and the truth in your soul, and all will be well.”¹¹

Tolstoy’s philosophy of history is based on the assumption that the historical process is not driven by separate people, or by great historical figures, heroes, and outstanding minds of humanity, but by a combination of “infinitely small units” – “homogeneous impulses of people.” He expressed this thought in *War and Peace*. As an ethical individualist, Tolstoy sought key values not in history or the sacred mission of nations, cultures, or churches, but in personal human experience. He believed in the eternal (not historically developing) truths and values, and denied the romantic understanding of nation or culture as a constructive force, and even denied the Hegelian view of history as a fulfilment of self-improving Reason.¹² Tolstoy believed that a person is historically determined and ethically free, and therefore it is impossible to set a goal of conscious influence on history – a person can only take care of their soul.

Tolstoy loved to repeat: “Do what you ought to do and let it be what may.” He believed that it was not in our power to anticipate the consequences of human actions, but it is in our power to act in accordance with conscience, which is the voice of God in a human:

I believe that the meaning of life of each individual person is ... only in increasing love to yourself ... this increase in love leads an individual person in this life to more and more good, gives the greater good after death, the more love there is in a person; and at the same time more than anything else, contributes to the establishment of the kingdom of God in the world, which is such a system of life where the now reigning discord, deception and violence will be replaced by free consent, truth and fraternal love of people among themselves.

The journalism of Tolstoy contradicted his philosophical and historical views in many respects. He called for a peaceful, non-violent revolution, for a radical change in all relations between people, for replacing life with

¹¹ Leo Tolstoy, *Collected Works in 90 Volumes* (Moscow, 1938), 302–3.

¹² Isaiah Berlin, *Istoriia Svobody* (Moscow: NLO, 2001), 274.