LEO GRAF TOLSTOY

"THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU"

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ENRICHED EDITION
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"The Kingdom of God Is Within You"

Enriched edition. Christianity Not as a Mystic Religion but as a New Theory of Life

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Hannah Mead

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Introduction

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A lone conscience confronts an empire armed with laws, churches, and bayonets, insisting that true power begins within, that the measure of civilization is not the might of its institutions but the integrity of the individual soul, that obedience to love can dissolve the machinery of violence, and that the quiet revolution of personal responsibility threatens every habit of domination, so that the reader must watch, with mounting clarity, as the familiar scaffolding of authority falters before a demand that asks nothing less than the purification of motive and the daily courage to refuse complicity.

The Kingdom of God Is Within You is a non-fiction work by Leo Tolstoy, composed in the early 1890s and first published outside the Russian Empire in 1894 due to censorship. It distills the author's late religious and moral thought into a sustained critique of violence sanctioned by state and church. Without telling readers what to believe, Tolstoy builds a case that moral transformation originates in the individual conscience. He addresses how ordinary life—work, law, education, and especially war—tests that conscience. The book is not a novel but a rigorous treatise, urgent in tone and sweeping in scope.

Its classic status rests on a rare fusion of literary force and ethical audacity. Tolstoy's prose, plain yet unyielding, marries the clarity of a moral pamphlet to the narrative energy of a master storyteller. The book helped define

modern debates about pacifism, conscientious objection, and the relationship between religion and politics. It expanded the possibilities of political writing by treating the inner life as the ground of social reform. Readers return to it because its central challenge—live by what you know to be right, regardless of consequences—does not age, and because its argument keeps provoking fresh answers.

The author wrote from the vantage of a renowned artist who had undergone a profound spiritual reorientation. Known worldwide for War and Peace and Anna Karenina, Tolstoy in his later years turned from fiction to questions of faith, ethics, and responsibility. He looked at the world around him—autocracy, military conscription, deference to power—and asked what a truthful life required. The book belongs to this late period of inquiry, when Tolstoy sought a practical, universal morality rooted in the teachings of Jesus but addressed to all who care about justice, whether believers or skeptics.

Publication history sharpened the book's edge. Russian censors blocked it at home, so it appeared abroad and quickly circulated through translations, reaching readers far beyond Tolstoy's homeland. The controversy enhanced its visibility: opponents denounced its uncompromising stance as impractical or subversive, while supporters praised its coherence and courage. The unusual trajectory—written by a Russian count, disseminated internationally because it was banned at home—helped the book acquire the aura of a forbidden mirror, reflecting not only Russia's dilemmas but the moral paradoxes of any society that legitimizes violence.

As a piece of prose, it is notable for method as much as message. Tolstoy argues by patiently assembling examples, examining assumptions, and asking the reader to test claims against personal experience. He does not rely on ornate rhetoric; he relies on moral clarity and a relentless return to first principles. The effect is cumulative. By the end of each movement of thought, the reader senses that familiar rationalizations have been gently, stubbornly stripped away, leaving the elemental question: what would it mean to act consistently with a law of love in public and private life?

The book’s intellectual conversation reaches backward and outward. Tolstoy engages the ethical tenor of the Gospels and the witness of early Christians while also conversing with modern critics of state power. He admired practical demonstrations of conscientious civic life and read figures who argued for principled disobedience to unjust authority. The resulting synthesis is neither cloistered theology nor abstract philosophy. It is a civic ethic: a claim that moral truth is intelligible, accessible to reason and conscience, and capable of reorganizing social relations without recourse to coercion or domination.

Central to the treatise is Tolstoy’s examination of how institutions enlist ordinary people in sustaining harm. He considers the moral cost of warfare and the machinery that prepares for it; he probes education, law, and religion when they drift from service to truth. Against this stands a demanding alternative: the refusal to answer evil with violence, and the insistence that genuine reform begins with personal commitment. The proposal is radical precisely

because it is so simple. It asks not for heroic gestures but for consistent allegiance to what the heart already recognizes as right.

Reception mirrored the book's boldness. Authorities viewed its argument as a threat to established hierarchies, and its publication outside Russia underscored that unease. Yet readers across continents found in it a vocabulary for their own doubts and hopes. The work became a touchstone for those exploring conscientious objection, Christian pacifism, and the possibility of social change through moral example. Its circulation proved that ideas, once clearly uttered, can travel farther than borders permit, and that the quiet persuasion of integrity can rouse movements as effectively as manifestos or party programs.

Its influence is historically tangible. Mohandas K. Gandhi credited Tolstoy's book with deepening his commitment to nonviolent resistance, a link that helped carry the argument into twentieth-century struggles for civil and political rights. Through such channels, the work shaped the language of reform far beyond religious contexts. Writers and activists drew on its themes to challenge militarism, segregation, and imperial domination. Even those who dispute Tolstoy's conclusions often engage his premises, acknowledging that he framed the central moral questions of power, obedience, and responsibility with unusual precision.

For the contemporary reader, the book offers less a program than an examination of conscience. Tolstoy asks how one justifies participation in systems that conflict with one's moral insight, and whether an alternative is imaginable in practice. He trusts readers to test every claim,

to compare rhetoric with lived experience, and to discover what follows from that test. The pages beckon not to despair, but to the steady work of alignment between belief and behavior—a difficult, sometimes lonely path, yet one rendered persuasive by its inner coherence.

That is why The Kingdom of God Is Within You endures. Its themes—nonviolence, integrity, the critique of institutional complicity, and the summons to inner transformation—speak as urgently in an age of mass warfare, surveillance, and polarization as they did in Tolstoy's time. The book retains its appeal because it refuses cynicism: it wagers that ordinary people, acting from conscience, can alter history. As long as societies wrestle with the ethics of power, Tolstoy's clear, insistent voice will continue to invite readers to begin where all durable change starts: within.

Synopsis

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Leo Tolstoy’s The Kingdom of God Is Within You is a late-nineteenth-century work of religious and social criticism that consolidates the author’s mature views on Christian ethics and public life. First published in 1894 after difficulties with domestic censorship, it addresses readers beyond Russia as well as at home. Tolstoy presents the book as a response to objections raised against his earlier statements on faith, aiming to clarify what he regards as the plain demands of the Gospel. Throughout, he advances a sustained argument rather than a personal memoir or ecclesiastical treatise, moving from diagnosis of contemporary society to proposals for moral action.

Tolstoy begins by confronting what he sees as a fundamental contradiction between professed Christian belief and the accepted practices of modern states. He points to war, conscription, courts, and punishment as institutionalized violence, and to the cooperation of churches with such systems. This contrast sets the stage for his thesis: that the essence of Christianity lies in a clear ethical teaching centered on love and nonviolence. He contends that the widespread accommodation of violence is not a peripheral problem but the defining moral crisis of his time, implicating ordinary people through obedience and habit as much as rulers and clergy.

Turning to sources, Tolstoy emphasizes the moral instruction of the Gospel, with special attention to teachings

that forbid retaliation and command love of enemies. He argues that this teaching is neither esoteric nor optional, but direct and comprehensive. Against this, he surveys how theological traditions, governmental interests, and cultural assumptions have introduced exceptions or reinterpretations that nullify the original demands. Dogmatic disputes and ritual observances, in his view, have displaced attention from the practical transformation of life. He proposes a return to the ethical core of Christianity as the key to resolving the contradiction between creed and conduct.

With this foundation, Tolstoy analyzes the machinery of coercion in modern society: armies raised by compulsory service, legal systems that punish through deprivation, and education that normalizes obedience to authority. He describes how these structures depend on the consent of those who administer and support them, often without reflective endorsement. The practice of oath-taking and the compartmentalization of duties, he maintains, distribute responsibility so that individuals feel absolved of moral agency. By tracing violence to routine acts and everyday complicity, he shifts the focus from dramatic events to the quiet, continuous operations that make them possible.

Anticipating objections, Tolstoy addresses familiar arguments for coercion, such as the need to restrain wrongdoing, defend families, or protect the vulnerable. He questions whether violent means reliably secure these ends, contending that force breeds fear, resistance, and further harm. He also rejects the claim that perfection must precede obedience to moral truth, urging that the

imperative stands whether or not society is ready. While he does not deny the difficulties or risks of nonviolence, he asserts that the refusal to participate in collective harm establishes a different logic of action, one that gradually transforms relations and expectations.

In practical terms, Tolstoy sketches forms of conscientious noncooperation. He commends refusal to serve in the military, to lend one's skills to institutions of punishment, or to swear unconditional obedience when it violates conscience. He encourages simplifying one's life to reduce dependence on systems upheld by coercion, and to cultivate local, mutual forms of support. He acknowledges that such steps may entail social costs and misunderstanding, yet argues that moral clarity arises from acting in accord with truth rather than from theoretical plans. The emphasis remains on personal responsibility, not on prescribing a uniform program.

Beyond political structures, Tolstoy critiques the ideals of progress that celebrate technical and economic advances while overlooking moral regression. He examines property relations, labor, and consumption, arguing that prosperity often rests on exploitation and distance from the consequences of one's actions. The promise that scientific or institutional innovations will cure social ills, he contends, distracts from the necessity of ethical conversion. He proposes modest living, honest work, and compassion as alternatives to dominance and accumulation, maintaining that these habits align with the central teaching he upholds and undermine the incentives that sustain violence.

Tolstoy then considers how social change occurs. He rejects both passive resignation and revolutionary overthrow, seeing each as captive to the logic of force. Instead, he describes the spread of moral insight through example, persuasion, and the visibility of consistent lives. As people refuse cooperation with injustice, institutions lose legitimacy and capacity. This process, he argues, does not depend on centralized leadership or sudden upheaval, but on the multiplication of conscientious action. The transformation he envisions is historical and cumulative, yet grounded in decisions that individuals can make immediately, within their circumstances.

The book closes by returning to its guiding claim: that the kingdom of God signifies an inner, present reality accessible to conscience, and that fidelity to it reshapes outward life. Tolstoy's contribution is not a novel social blueprint but a sustained call to align belief with practice, especially where violence is concerned. He leaves readers with questions about authority, duty, and the costs of obedience, while insisting that moral truth is knowable and binding. Without venturing into prophecy or prediction, the work's enduring significance lies in its challenge to examine complicity and to consider nonviolent integrity as a practical path.

Historical Context

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The Kingdom of God Is Within You emerged from late imperial Russia in the 1890s, a society defined by autocracy, estate hierarchy, the Orthodox Church, and a conscript army. Following decades of uneven reform, political authority was concentrated in the tsar, with Alexander III ruling until 1894 and Nicholas II succeeding him. Censorship constrained religious and political dissent, and the secret police monitored radical ideas. Tolstoy wrote from his estate at Yasnaya Polyana, yet addressed a global readership. Because Russian censors blocked publication, the book first appeared abroad in 1894, signaling both the limits of domestic debate and the transnational pathways of print culture.

The book’s ethical demands must be read against the social consequences of the 1861 emancipation of the serfs. Despite the legal end of serfdom, peasants carried heavy redemption payments and struggled with land scarcity, tax burdens, and periodic hunger. The village commune (mir) mediated land use but could not shield families from poverty. Tolstoy had long observed rural suffering, ran experiments in peasant education, and criticized aristocratic privilege. In his work he rejects the legitimacy of property relations that perpetuate hardship, presenting Christian love and voluntary renunciation as alternatives to coercive ownership, and condemning social inequality sustained by law, custom, and habit.

The assassination of Alexander II in 1881 and the accession of Alexander III brought a conservative turn commonly called the era of reaction. Emergency security statutes, intensified censorship, and Russification policies marked the period. The Department for Protecting the Public Security and Order, known as the Okhrana, expanded surveillance and infiltration of dissident networks. Tolstoy's argument that state power rests on organized violence resonated directly with this political climate. He criticized not only repression but the broader system that normalized force as a tool of governance, warning that fear and obedience, cultivated from childhood, enabled institutions to demand moral compromises from ordinary people.

Military conscription formed a central backdrop for Tolstoy's rejection of violence. The universal service law of 1874 obligated most males to serve in the army, an institution that absorbed vast resources and shaped civic identity through oath-taking and discipline. Russia's recent wars, including the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, reinforced patriotic narratives while revealing the human costs of conflict. Tolstoy had earlier witnessed combat in the Caucasus and Crimea, experiences that informed his later pacifism. In the book he insists that Christ's command to resist not evil by force bars participation in war, and he denounces oaths that subordinate conscience to state authority.

Tolstoy's confrontation with the Church was inseparable from the political order. Since the early eighteenth century, the Holy Synod governed the Russian Orthodox Church, entwining ecclesiastical authority with the state. Clergy

blessed military banners, taught loyalty to the sovereign, and served as moral arbiters for the peasantry. Tolstoy challenged this alliance, accusing church leaders of betraying the Sermon on the Mount by sanctioning violence, punishment, and wealth. His views provoked sustained conflict that culminated in his excommunication in 1901. The book, written earlier, lays out the theological core of that break, arguing that institutional religion obscured the living demands of the Gospel.

The catastrophic famine of 1891–92, focused in the Volga region and elsewhere, exposed the fragility of rural life and the shortcomings of imperial administration. Crop failures, transportation bottlenecks, and a hesitant official response worsened suffering. Zemstvo bodies and private actors organized relief; Tolstoy personally coordinated soup kitchens and criticized both governmental complacency and elite philanthropy that ignored structural causes. This crisis reinforced his belief that social salvation could not be achieved through bureaucratic mechanisms or charitable display. In the book’s polemic against state and church, one hears the famine’s lesson: institutions often validate themselves while failing those most in need.

New technologies reshaped Russian life in the late nineteenth century. Railway mileage expanded quickly, and construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway began in 1891, tightening imperial integration. Telegraph lines and a growing press accelerated communication and magnified official and commercial messaging. Tolstoy perceived these innovations ambivalently. He praised the spread of communication when it served truth, yet argued that the

modern press often disseminated patriotic myths and justified coercion. Censorship pushed him to publish abroad, but the same networks of rail, post, and translation carried his arguments across borders, demonstrating how technology enabled both control and dissent.

Industrialization gathered pace under Sergei Witte's policies in the 1890s, drawing workers into factories around St. Petersburg, Moscow, and the Donbass. Urban growth brought new forms of poverty and class conflict, and an organized labor movement slowly emerged. Among the educated public, radical ideologies multiplied: populists (Narodniki) appealed to peasants, while Marxist circles formed and later coalesced into parties. Tolstoy rejected revolutionary violence as another manifestation of coercion, even as he criticized autocracy and exploitation. In the book he addresses both camps, arguing that replacing one violent power with another cannot heal social wounds and urging ethical transformation at the level of individual life.

Judicial reforms of 1864 had introduced trial by jury and elements of judicial independence, but extraordinary measures after 1881 curtailed these innovations. Exile without trial, administrative repression, and a harsh penal system continued. Tolstoy's critique of courtrooms, prisons, and punishment reflects this mixed legal landscape. He contends that legal systems, by claiming to uphold justice through coercion, mask moral complicity in violence. For him, imprisonment and execution do not correct wrongdoing; rather, they reproduce it by teaching society that force is a legitimate response to harm. The book thus

attacks the foundations of punitive institutions, not merely their abuses.

Tolstoy’s pacifism drew on both Russian sectarian traditions and international currents. Communities such as the Doukhobors, Molokans, and certain Old Believer groups had long practiced nonviolence or refused military service. Abroad, Quaker testimonies, the writings of Adin Ballou and William Lloyd Garrison on nonresistance, and Henry David Thoreau’s essay on civil disobedience offered frameworks for conscientious refusal. Tolstoy read and corresponded across these networks. The book synthesizes this inheritance with his reading of the Gospels, arguing that truthful speech, honest labor, and refusal of compulsion form a coherent Christian anarchism grounded in love rather than institution or law.

By the 1890s a self-identified Tolstoyan movement began to cohere. Followers in Russia and abroad experimented with simple living, vegetarianism, abstention from tobacco and alcohol, communal agriculture, and the renunciation of military service. Some communities formed in Britain and other countries; inside Russia, conscientious objectors faced arrest, and gatherings were monitored. The book served as a practical and theological charter for these efforts, calling readers to conformity with conscience over custom. The movement also exposed social strains close to home, as Tolstoy’s practices conflicted with aristocratic norms and family expectations, underscoring the difficulty of living a radical ethic within existing structures.

Education and literacy gave the book a distinctive audience. After decades of expansion, primary schooling

and parish instruction raised literacy, though by the 1897 census only about one-fifth of the population could read. Zemstvo schools multiplied, and printing houses turned out literature for new readers. Tolstoy's own experiments in pedagogy at Yasnaya Polyana in the 1860s had emphasized freedom and moral development over rote catechism. In the 1890s, the widening public sphere meant that his religious essays could circulate among teachers, craftsmen, students, and clerks, even as their domestic publication faced barriers. The text addressed a society in which reading itself was politically charged.

The Russian Empire's ongoing expansion and governance of diverse peoples framed Tolstoy's anti-nationalist stance. Campaigns in the Caucasus and Central Asia had brought frontier populations under imperial rule, often through brutal pacification. Tolstoy's early service in the Caucasus gave him firsthand knowledge of colonial war and the rhetoric that accompanied it. In the book he condemns patriotic identity as a deception that licenses killing under banners and borders. He insists that Christian duty recognizes no national enemy, challenging the rituals and school lessons that fused Orthodoxy and fatherland. This critique clashed with an official culture that celebrated empire and military glory.

Tolstoy's arguments intersected with a growing international peace movement. The Inter-Parliamentary Union, founded in 1889, promoted arbitration, and peace congresses convened activists and legislators. Near the decade's end, governments gathered at The Hague Conference in 1899 to codify the laws of war and favor

arbitration. Tolstoy’s nonresistance proposition went further than institutional peace work by calling for withdrawal from all participation in coercive structures, including taxation supporting armies. His writing nonetheless entered the broader pacifist conversation, offering a spiritual and ethical rationale for nonviolent action that appealed to reformers beyond Russia’s borders.

Censorship shaped both the book’s content and its path to readers. Russian authorities deemed Tolstoy’s religious-political writings subversive, and the manuscript could not pass domestic censors. Publication abroad in 1894, followed by rapid translation, allowed it to circulate in Europe and North America. Within Russia, copies were smuggled or handwritten, and excerpts appeared in sympathetic periodicals where possible. Official scrutiny did not prevent discussion; rather, it dramatized the very thesis that sacred and civil institutions sought to suppress inconvenient truth. The circumstances of publication thus mirrored the book’s insistence that conscience must outlast prohibitions.

Events soon underscored the costs of conscientious refusal. In 1895, Doukhobor communities publicly destroyed weapons rather than serve in the army, prompting severe punishment, exile, and hunger. Tolstoy defended them in essays and correspondence, and at the end of the decade helped raise funds, including from the royalties of his novel Resurrection, to assist their emigration to Canada in 1898–99. This episode demonstrated both the practical application of nonresistance and the state’s readiness to enforce obedience. The book’s arguments about oaths,

military service, and truth-telling found concrete expression in the choices and sufferings of these sectarians.

Tolstoy’s broader public interventions amplified the context of the book. Earlier works such as What Then Must We Do? examined urban poverty and charity, while The Gospel in Brief condensed his reading of the New Testament. Together with The Kingdom of God Is Within You, these texts formed a sustained effort to redefine Christian ethics as a way of life opposed to coercion. Resistance came from officials, clergy, and some liberal reformers who considered his prescriptions impractical. Yet his call appealed to readers disillusioned with both autocracy and terrorism, offering a path that neither endorsed repression nor relied on violent revolution for change. The cultural ferment of the 1890s gave his voice unusual resonance, even under censorship pressures and police scrutiny.

Author Biography

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Introduction

Leo Tolstoy (Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy), a Russian count born in 1828 at Yasnaya Polyana and deceased in 1910 at the Astapovo railway station, stands among the most influential novelists in world literature. His name is inseparable from War and Peace and Anna Karenina, expansive works that reshaped narrative ambition and psychological realism. Tolstoy also wrote shorter fiction of enduring resonance, including The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Master and Man, and major nonfiction that articulated a radical moral vision. His authority extended beyond literature into ethics, religion, and social thought, making him a global figure whose ideas traveled across continents and generations.

Tolstoy's reputation rests on artistic breadth and moral intensity. He combined meticulous observation of everyday life with philosophical interrogation of history, freedom, and human conscience. His novels are distinguished by intimate interiority, wide social range, and narrative techniques that allow readers to inhabit competing perspectives. The later Tolstoy became a public moralist, challenging institutions he believed perpetuated violence or hypocrisy. Translated quickly and widely, his fiction and essays influenced writers, reformers, and activists around the world. Even as critical fashions shifted, Tolstoy's authority as a realist of

unparalleled scope and as a principled critic of modern civilization remained foundational.

Education and Literary Influences

Tolstoy was raised on his family estate after early losses in his immediate family, receiving a broad private education before attending Kazan University in the mid-1840s. He pursued studies in Oriental languages and later law but left without a degree, turning to intensive self-education. The moral rigor and simplicity he admired in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, alongside the Gospels, left lasting marks on his thought. He read widely in history and philosophy, developing an interest in how individuals act within social currents and moral constraints. A lifelong diarist, he tested ethical resolutions against lived experience, an interplay that fed his fiction and later religious writings.

Military service shaped Tolstoy’s sensibility and themes. He joined artillery units in the Caucasus in the early 1850s and later served during the Crimean War, experiences that informed the Sevastopol Sketches. Travels in Western Europe in 1857 and again around 1860–61 exposed him to debates on education and social reform. He observed schools and experimented with pedagogy on his own estate, later publishing a pedagogical journal. Literary influences included Homer’s epic breadth, the moral imagination of Dickens and Hugo, and the philosophical provocation of Schopenhauer. From these sources Tolstoy fashioned a distinctive realism attentive to conscience, contingency, and the textures of ordinary life.

Literary Career

Tolstoy's earliest published fiction—Childhood (1852), Boyhood (1854), and Youth (1857)—announced a voice committed to psychological candor and moral inquiry. Sevastopol Sketches (1855–56) brought him fame for unsentimental depictions of war's confusion and courage. The Cossacks (published in the 1860s) drew on his Caucasian experiences and explored ideals of authenticity and nature. These works established his method: close interior scrutiny, social observation, and philosophical questioning. By his early thirties, he had become a recognized figure in Russian letters, though he remained wary of literary coteries and commercial pressures.

War and Peace, composed in the 1860s and issued in installments before book publication in 1869, expanded the possibilities of the novel. It fused family chronicle with national history, portraying the Napoleonic invasions while probing responsibility, chance, and historical causation. The narrative moves between battlefield, salon, and estate, illuminating character through shifting points of view and free indirect discourse. Critics and readers celebrated its immediacy and scope, together with its refusal to treat history as the product of single wills. The book consolidated Tolstoy's stature and influenced subsequent novelists seeking to reconcile private lives with public events.

Anna Karenina, serialized in the mid-1870s and published in book form by 1877, transposed Tolstoy's historical canvas into the social and domestic spheres of contemporary Russia. It juxtaposes intertwined households and moral choices, attending to the pressures of custom, conscience,

and desire. The novel’s artistry lies in its intimate psychological detail and in the structural balance between contrasting life paths. It quickly became a touchstone of realist narrative and remains central to debates on love, obligation, and the possibility of ethical happiness within modern society. Tolstoy’s marriage to Sophia (Sonya) Behrs, from 1862, contributed materially to the preparation and editing of his manuscripts.

After a spiritual crisis in the late 1870s, Tolstoy produced fiction and essays reflecting renewed moral urgency. The Death of Ivan Ilyich (1886) distilled existential questions into spare, concentrated form; Master and Man (1895) and The Kreutzer Sonata (1889) continued to test social convention against conscience. Resurrection (1899) confronted legal and ecclesiastical institutions and was subject to censorship; the novel’s proceeds were directed to humanitarian causes associated with persecuted religious minorities. He wrote A Confession (late 1870s–early 1880s), The Kingdom of God Is Within You (1894), and What Is Art? (1897), and completed the late masterpiece Hadji Murad, published posthumously in 1912.

Beliefs and Advocacy

Tolstoy’s moral philosophy centered on a rigorous reading of the Sermon on the Mount, advocating nonviolence, truthfulness, and voluntary poverty. He criticized state coercion, militarism, and economic exploitation, and he questioned property relations and ecclesiastical authority. His educational projects in the late 1850s and early 1860s proposed child-centered learning, and he later compiled

primers intended for broad use. During the famine of 1891–92 he organized relief with associates and wrote on social responsibility in What Then Must We Do?, examining urban poverty and labor. He embraced vegetarianism as part of an ethic of nonviolence, articulating its moral rationale in essays from the 1890s.

The Kingdom of God Is Within You articulated Tolstoy's doctrine of nonresistance to evil by force, which helped inspire movements of nonviolent action. His correspondence with Mohandas K. Gandhi in 1909–1910 testifies to the international reach of his ideas, and Tolstoyan communities formed to practice simplicity and cooperative labor. His polemics against church and state drew official scrutiny, culminating in formal excommunication by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901. He maintained that art should serve moral clarity and accessibility, an argument that challenged prevailing aesthetics. Throughout his advocacy, Tolstoy remained committed to reform through persuasion, example, and practical assistance rather than political office.

Final Years & Legacy

Tolstoy's later decades were marked by tension between his principles and the realities of family life and literary fame. He sought to renounce property rights and redirect royalties, attempts that generated legal and personal conflict. Visitors from Russia and abroad came to Yasnaya Polyana to discuss literature and ethics, while he continued to write fiction, essays, and letters. In 1910 he left his home seeking a quieter, more ascetic existence; falling ill en

individuals refusing military service; exact publication details can vary between countries and editions.

44 In this passage 'Nazarenes' denotes a Christian sect in Serbia that conscientiously refused military service; the name has been used by various evangelical and nonresistant groups. Tolstoy cites them as an example of organized, religiously motivated pacifism confronting state conscription.

45 The castle of Chillon (Château de Chillon) is a medieval fortress on Lake Geneva that has been used historically as a prison and is famous from Lord Byron's poem 'The Prisoner of Chillon.' Tolstoy mentions prisoners held there to illustrate that conscientious objectors faced imprisonment even in Western Europe.

46 The 'Zacaspian border' refers to the region beyond or on the far side of the Caspian Sea (often called Transcaspian), i.e., remote frontier areas of the Russian Empire or Central Asia. Tolstoy uses it to indicate distant postings where authorities could quietly punish or execute dissenters away from public scrutiny.

47 Alphonse Karr was a 19th-century French writer and critic often remembered for sharp epigrams. Tolstoy quotes him to illustrate a commonly repeated witty retort used in debates about punishment and reform.

48 This French epigram translates roughly as "Let the gentlemen murderers set us the example." Tolstoy cites it as a bon mot used to resist abolition of capital punishment, showing how opponents demand the perpetrators change first before they will.

49 “Mandchoos” is an older transliteration of Manchus, the ethnic group from Manchuria who ruled China under the Qing dynasty. Tolstoy names them alongside other non-European peoples to discuss contemporary European anxieties about ‘savages’ and empire.

50 Tcherkesses is the French/older English form of Circassians, a North Caucasian people; Tolstoy refers to stereotyped local customs (such as stealing horses as proof of bravery) to illustrate how public opinion and traditions can perpetuate crime. He uses the example to argue that legal penalties alone do not change ingrained social norms.

51 Ohotny Row (also written Okhotny Ryad) is a central street/market area in Moscow historically used for public gatherings. Tolstoy places a small religious meeting there to illustrate ordinary civic encounters with police and petty administrative interference.

52 Conscription means compulsory military service imposed by the state. Tolstoy mentions it as a ‘special form of deception’ because mandatory service forces many ordinary people into an institution that enforces state violence and can numb individual moral responsibility.

53 A gibbet is a structure used historically to display the bodies of executed criminals or to hang criminals as a public spectacle. Tolstoy lists gibbets among instruments of state violence to underscore how public institutions and punishments serve as visible tools of coercion and social control.

54 Toula is an older English transliteration of Tula, a city and administrative region in western Russia. In 19th-century

accounts like Tolstoy’s it often stands for provincial centers where local officials exercised state power over peasants.

55 Orel (now usually transliterated Oryol) is a city in western Russia mentioned here as the site of recent harsh punishments. Tolstoy invokes it as an example of local episodes of flogging and repression that illustrated broader state violence.

56 The Zemsky Court-house refers to a local administrative or judicial venue in Imperial Russia associated with zemstvo-style local authority and public business. In the passage it is the site where conscription and administrative enrollments were conducted in public.

57 A droskhy (also spelled drosky) is a light horse-drawn carriage commonly used in Russia in the 19th century. Tolstoy uses the image to show the distinctive arrival of an official or cleric amid the conscription crowd.

58 A pelisse is a long sheepskin or fur coat traditionally worn in cold climates and common in 19th-century Russian dress. Tolstoy describes conscripts wearing new sheepskin pelisses to evoke their rural background and the material details of the scene.

59 ARTICLE 87 is cited from contemporary Russian military regulations to illustrate the rule requiring soldiers to obey orders without questioning their morality. Tolstoy quotes this provision to show how formal codes of discipline authorized unquestioning obedience to superiors.

60 ARTICLE 88, quoted immediately after Article 87, specifies the subordinate’s duty not to refuse orders except in narrow circumstances (as Tolstoy points out, loyalty to the

tsar). Together these articles exemplify military doctrines that prioritized obedience over individual conscience.

61 Refers to a train bound for Tula (spelled 'Toula' in the translation), a Russian industrial city south of Moscow. Tolstoy recounts meeting a troop expedition on this train being sent to suppress unrest, using the episode as a moral example of soldiers and officials en route to carry out punitive actions.

62 An important Russian city (now commonly transliterated Nizhny Novgorod) and commercial center. In the passage it is cited among places where state-sponsored repressions or acts of violence occurred in the late 19th century; Tolstoy uses such place-names to ground his critique of official brutality.

63 A knout is a heavy scourge or multi-thonged whip used historically in Tsarist Russia for corporal punishment and public flogging. Tolstoy invokes 'knouts' as a symbol of severe physical punishments associated with the older penal and police practices of Russian society.

64 Alludes to the classical story of the Sword of Damocles, a symbol of constant peril faced by those in high position. Tolstoy uses the image to describe the persistent threat of war hanging over society.

65 Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor who, according to the Christian Gospels, presided over the trial of Jesus and ordered his crucifixion. Tolstoy invokes Pilate as a biblical example of unjust state power and the human tragedies that result from it.

66 A biblical reference (Luke 13:4) to a tower in Jerusalem that fell and crushed people, used in the Gospels