

Before Gandhi: Leo Tolstoy's Non-violent Kingdom of God

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Review Article

The Kingdom of God is within You: Christianity not a Mystic Religion but a New Theory of Life.

By Leo Tolstoy

1893 (Reprint of 1894 translation by Constance Garnett, published in 1894.)

Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984

Wishing our esteemed colleague, Professor G.C. (Pippin) Oosthuizen, well on his eighty third birthday recalls another congratulation of an octogenarian. On his eightieth Count Leo Tolstoy received good wishes from an Indian barrister, M.K. Gandhi. This auspicious contact between these two great personalities led to a sequence of exchanges that resulted in the older one acknowledging the younger as his heir. There is one more point of correspondence between Oosthuizen and Tolstoy. Both had the vision of a singular truth that they pursued with razor sharp clarity. For Oosthuizen this vision was the realisation that the rise of the African Initiated Churches represented a fundamental challenge to the dominant paradigm of the history of religions. Tolstoy's vision consisted of an insight into the power of non-violence that challenged the rudiments of society. It is with these thoughts that I wish Prof. Oosthuizen all of the best on his eightieth-third birthday and present this review article to him in gratitude for his contribution to my intellectual development.

Dangerous Ideas

In 1884, five years after his Christian conversion, Count Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) published a booklet, *What I believe*. This was soon banned in Russia. Nevertheless it circulated widely in various forms and drew positive and negative responses from all over Europe and America. In the follow-up book, *The Kingdom of God is within you* (1893), Tolstoy responds to the feedback on his initial statements and rounds off his arguments. He had been working on it for two years. This was already some decades after having written *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, both considered to be of the best novels ever to have been written.

Why were his ideas so threatening to the state? The reason for this can be found in the fact that the primary impulse for his conversion was the realisation that the teaching of Jesus, 'Resist not evil' (Matt. 5:39), was seriously meant and implied the refusal to use any kind of force. As a consequence citizens were advised to refuse service in the military, refuse to pay voluntary taxes, refuse to participate in government unless compelled. Starting from his basic statement, Tolstoy discovered how this insight allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the teaching of Jesus, as found especially in the Sermon on the Mount. In a philosophical and theological sense one can observe that his principle of non-violence derived from a secularisation of the Orthodox idea of *theosis*. According to this, a person can attain perfection and participate in the divine nature by practicing self-evident, eternal truths. Of these, non-violence seemed to be the central truth.

This discovery led him to launch an incisive criticism of the Christian Church and the European State. Both were murderous and hypocritical institutions that 'hypnotized' people to use violence against their own brothers for the sake of perpetuating the privileges of the wealthy and decadent minority over the exploited masses.

His analysis had the semblance of a Marxist, but also Dickensian, division of European society in terms of rich and poor, exploiters and exploited, masters and slaves. This certainly sprang from his experience of the nineteenth century Europe. However, one can easily see how such a simplistic analysis prevented him from adopting democratic concepts, which were available at the time. Perhaps Tolstoy's major deficit is his lack of understanding of the working of democratic values and human rights.

Reading *The Kingdom* presents an uncanny *déjà vu* of conditions that led to the communist revolution three decades later, which for him would have been unthinkable. He still argued from the point of view of a comprehensive *corpus christianum*, as it existed in Russia and Europe. All social arguments were arguments from within Christianity.

Tolstoy realised that the present order in Russia could not last. The future that he foresaw was one in which a human, rational, and truly Christian public opinion would turn the tide against the hypocritical misuse of power. His own analysis fostered the belief that such a public opinion would replace the old system. As eloquently stated in his last chapter, truth would be the ultimate victor.

Tolstoy and Gandhi

The importance of Tolstoy's conviction for today does not reside in his passion for the poor or his incisive analysis of social conditions. Such sympathies have been refined over and over again over the past 110 years with mounting passion and precision. His importance is rather in his vision of a non-violent world as the next step in the social evolution of humanity. That he had indeed struck a prophetic chord, is attested by the aftermath of his non-violent philosophy. Mohandas Gandhi first read *The Kingdom of God is within you* in South Africa in 1894. This was the one book that had made the deepest impression on him ever. He re-read it in prison in 1906. Correspondence ensued between Gandhi and Tolstoy. In 1908 Gandhi sent Tolstoy a message of congratulation with his eightieth birthday. In 1909 Gandhi read Tolstoy's *Letter to a Hindu* in which he urged non-violent action instead of terrorist activities. In 1910 Gandhi gave the name Tolstoy Farm to the place in India where families of peaceful resisters formed a futuristic commune. Already while in South Africa, Gandhi had begun a Tolstoy Farm near Durban (Gandhi 1927:276ff). In the last months of Tolstoy's life Gandhi sent him a copy of his document *Indian Home Rule* written under Tolstoy's influence. Tolstoy's last long letter written before his death in 1910 was to Gandhi.

The above contacts adequately show that Tolstoy was directly instrumental in laying the spiritual foundation for that *satyagraha* movement of Gandhi. There is thus a movement from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount to Tolstoy's vision of a peaceful world, and from Tolstoy's vision to the

satyagraha of Gandhi.

The paradoxical force of forcelessness thus entered the stage of history. Whereas Tolstoy conceived the vision it was Gandhi who converted it into a political force. As Martin Green pointedly stated in his foreword to *The Kingdom*, 'every now and then, when one person induces others literally to believe in soulforce, it enters into bodies and masses and actions—a beam of light passes into solid matter and moves it'¹. What was for Tolstoy an intellectual concept was translated into political action by Gandhi, his acknowledged heir.

Tolstoy's Vision

In the following sections my investigation will vacillate between three aspects. Firstly I wish to investigate his understanding of the Sermon on the Mount as his primary source. Secondly I intend to examine his application of the Bible to his social reality. Lastly I shall present a moderate criticism of the preceding.

Tolstoy quotes the 1838 declaration of William Lloyd Garrison at length and with his apparent approval. Garrison and colleagues only acknowledged one King and Lawgiver while rejecting the notion that all governments are ordained by God (p. 4). Wars, whether offensive or defensive, were regarded as unlawful. 'We believe that the penal code of the old covenant—an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth—has been abrogated by Jesus Christ, and that under the new covenant the forgiveness instead of punishment of enemies has been enjoined on all his disciples in all cases whatsoever. To extort money from enemies, cast them into prison, exile or execute them, is obviously not to forgive but to take retribution' (p. 5). This position rests on the understanding that the 'sinful dispositions of men can be subdued only by love; that evil can only be exterminated by good; that it is not safe to rely on the strength of an arm to preserve us from harm; that there is great security in being gentle, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy; that it is only the meek who shall inherit the earth; for those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword' (p. 5).

The declaration intends to 'assail iniquity in high places', thus hastening 'the time when the kingdoms of this world will have become the

¹ *Kingdom* 1894:xi.

Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ' (p. 6). Their only weapon is 'the foolishness of preaching' (as extended through lectures, tracts and petitions). The Messiah's suffering is taken as example. Through non-violent activism they strove to become participants in his suffering (p. 7).

Another American, Adin Ballou, drew up a *Catechism of Non-Resistance*. He vigorously attacked a culture of military honour and duty. His Biblical starting point was also the injunction of Jesus not to resist evil. Thus Jesus forbade people to take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, bloodshed for bloodshed and life for life (p. 10). The Biblical references for this are noteworthy. According to the *Catechism* three passages served to illustrate the rule of retribution advocated by the men of old (p. 12, NIV):

Gen 9:6 — 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.'

Exodus 21:12, 23-25 — 'Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. ...But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.'

Deut 19:18,21 — 'The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. ... Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.'

It is understood that Jesus thus forbade what Noah, Moses and the Prophets had instructed. The new rule is: 'Non-resistance is salvation; resistance is ruin' (p. 15). This was also the message of the Quakers and Mennonites since 200 years before Tolstoy. Others in this line of thinking were the Bogomilites, the Paulicians, the Waldenses, Albigenses and the Moravian Brothers. In the 15th century a Czech, Helchitsky, argued that a follower of Jesus cannot be a soldier or ruler, he cannot even take part in any government or trade or be a landowner (p. 20). Tolstoy also cites to the same effect a book by one Dymond (*On War*, London 1824), and another one by Daniel Musser (*Non-resistance asserted*, 1864).

In refuting criticism against of position, Tolstoy marvels at the inconclusiveness of the clergy on the issue whether one should obey Christ's

teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (p. 30). He wrote: 'A very great deal was said in connection with my book of having incorrectly interpreted this and other passages of the Gospel, of my being in error in not recognizing the Trinity, the redemption, and the immortality of the soul. A very great deal was said, but not a word about the one thing which for every Christian is the most essential question in life—how to reconcile the duty of forgiveness, meekness, patience, and love for all, neighbours and enemies alike, which are so clearly expressed in the words of our teacher, and in the heart of each of us—how to reconcile this duty with the obligation of using force in war upon men of our own or a foreign people' (p. 31). This is then the central problem that Tolstoy addressed in his book.

Replies to Critics

Tolstoy's position becomes clear in his response to the five major objections lodged against his belief. In his dealing with these questions, the reader can gauge the outline of a 'theology'.

The *first* objection to his vision contended that Christ did not oppose the use of force, that it was permitted, and even required, in both Testaments (p. 32). Tolstoy's reaction to this response was that it mainly came from high-ranking people so intoxicated by power that they distorted everything in the Old and New Testaments that they could, and changed it into a heathen and pagan meaning and then held this forth as the foundation of Christianity. They referred to the punishment of Ananias and Saphira, that of Simon the Sorcerer, etc. to prove their point. 'They quote all the sayings of Christ's which can possibly be interpreted as justification of cruelty: the expulsion from the Temple; 'It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for this city,' etc., etc. According to these people's notions, a Christian government is not in the least bound to be guided by the spirit of peace, forgiveness of injuries, and love for enemies' (pp. 32-33).

The *second* objection came from those who acknowledged that Christ did indeed preach about turning the left cheek, and giving the cloak also. They acknowledge this as the highest moral duty. However, they maintained, the world and all good men would come to ruin if the wicked men in the world were not contained by force. This was also the position of John Chrysostom whose views were already treated by Tolstoy in his 1884 book. To this he replied: 'This argument is ill grounded, because if we allow

ourselves to regard any men as intrinsically wicked men, then in the first place we annul, by so doing, the whole idea of the Christian teaching, according to which we are all equals and brothers, as sons of one Father in heaven². Secondly, it is ill founded, because even if to use force against wicked men had been permitted by God, since it is impossible to find a perfect and unfailing distinction by which one could positively know the wicked from the good, so it would come to all individual men and societies of men mutually regarding each other as wicked men, as is the case now. Thirdly, even if it were possible to distinguish the wicked from the good unfailingly, even then it would be impossible to kill or injure or shut up in prison these wicked men, because there would be no one in a Christian society to carry out such punishment, since every Christian, as a Christian, has been commanded to use no force against the wicked' (p. 33).

The *third* objection makes a distinction between personal and social ethics, maintaining that Christ's non-violent instruction was only intended for the personal sphere. Where evil is directed against one's neighbours, you are to defend your neighbour, if need be by force.

Tolstoy replied to this by pointing out that such a distinction is completely foreign to the teaching of Jesus. 'Such an argument is not only a limitation, but a direct contradiction and negation of the commandment' (p. 34). The use of force then becomes a question of how danger to another is defined. Tolstoy points out that if this is the argument, there is no occasion for which the use of force *cannot* be justified. This was the argument for burning witches and killing aristocrats.

Jesus had put this argument to rest when he ordered Peter in Matt. 26:52 to put away his sword. Peter was, after all, not defending himself, but his Master. In the gospel narrative such a distinction between personal and public well-being is made by Caiaphas. The High Priest saw in Jesus not a danger to himself, but to the whole people – thus his statement that it is better for one man to die than for the whole people to perish.

There is one more argument against this seemingly unselfish justification for violence. How can the defence of others be presented as

² This is a remarkable statement, for it denies the doctrine of the 'total depravity'. In this sense Tolstoy is in line with the Orthodox theology, which on this point departs from Augustine and the Western tradition.

preventive violence if the violence to others had not yet been committed (p. 35)?

A *fourth* objection states that the demand for non-violence is indeed a valid and important demand of Jesus. However, like all other demands, human beings are not able to keep it at all times. This demand is said not to have more nor less weight than all other commands. Proponents of this view reject the position of 'sectarians' like Tolstoy who regard it as indispensable to Christian life. To this Tolstoy responds that those who wish to be deceived are easily deceived. A direct conscious breach of the command is replaced by a casual breach of it. 'But one need only compare the attitude of the teachers of the Church to this and to other commands which they really do recognize, to be convinced that their attitude to this is completely different from their attitude to other duties' (p. 36). Tolstoy further referred to the command against fornication. The clergy, for instance, would never point out cases in which that command can be broken. Not so with the command of non-resistance. Though not pointing out how any other command can casually be broken, the teachers of the (Russian Orthodox) Church are quick to point out that this command should not be taken too literally. The fact that law courts, prisons, cannons, guns, armies, and wars are under the immediate sanction of the Church, points to the fact that this command is not regarded as being on the same level as the others. This response is merely a way to conceal their not recognizing this command.

The *fifth*, and according to Tolstoy the most usual response is that it is not worth talking about the demand for non-violence. The suggestion is thus created that the issue has already been resolved and does not need any further discussion (p. 37). A certain English preacher Farrar presented an ingenious argument. He propounds that Christ had lain down 'great eternal principles, but do not disturb the bases and revolutionize the institutions of all human society, which themselves rest on divine sanctions as well as inevitable conditions' (p. 39)³.

Such then were the objections and strategies Christians put forth to suppress or avoid the contradictions that the challenge to non-violence

³ Remarkably, the same argument was much later used to explain why the teachings of Jesus suspend the creation ordinances of God which could be detected through Scripture (the Old Testament) and experience.

placed them in. Freethinkers did not fare better. There were those who misunderstood the dictum of no resistance to evil as the sum total of what Tolstoy was saying, or otherwise assuming that it also implied the relinquishing of all forms of confrontation with evil (p. 43). Some Russian critics even assumed that Tolstoy had invented the rule of non-resistance to evil personally (p. 43). He found himself being opposed by the two camps in Russia. On the one hand the 'conservatives' opposed the rule because it would prohibit them from suppressing the evil perpetrated by the so-called 'revolutionists'. On the other hand the revolutionists rejected it because it would prohibit them from overthrowing the conservatives and resisting the evil of their oppression. Many freethinkers accused Tolstoy of being so naïve as to think that a simplistic doctrine such as the Sermon on the Mount can have any bearing on advanced societies. Others accused him of ignorance of history, i.e., ignorance of all the vain attempts in the past ages to apply the principles of the Sermon on the Mount to life (45). To all this Tolstoy remarked that none of his critics seriously engaged themselves with the problem of relating Christ's teaching to life. In reality the criticism from all sides agreed on the point that Christ's teaching cannot be accepted, because it required a change of their lives (p. 46).

Tolstoy's ultimate problem was how to resolve disputes 'in which some men consider evil what other men consider good' (p. 46). He states that there is only one of two options: either one needed an absolute criterion of what is evil, or one should not resist evil. What did he think of the democratic solution of leaving the definition of evil to certain (elected) persons or assemblies of persons? To this he responds simply, because there would always be persons who do not recognize this right in the authorised assemblies, this can also not be a solution. He became convinced that the majority simply do not understand Christ's teaching, or the problems that this teaching solves (p. 47).

The Perversion of Christianity through Power

Tolstoy held that through the ages only a small minority of Christians really took Jesus seriously and followed his teaching (pp. 48-84). How did it come that the vast majority became derailed? Tolstoy's explanation made a deep impression on Gandhi, from whom we have the popular saying that he would

have been a Christian if it were not for the Christians. The background of this saying, lies within the pages of Tolstoy's book.

According to Tolstoy, Christ taught in terms of simple, direct truths that could be understood without proof. It is only when the simple truth cannot be accepted by human beings that a process begins by which the truth is increasingly obscured. 'The most difficult subjects can be explained to the most slow-witted man if he has not formed any idea of them already; but the simplest thing cannot be made clear to the most intelligent man if he is firmly persuaded that he knows already, without a shadow of a doubt, what is laid before him' (p. 49). The latter statement provides the reason why complex theological doctrines, supported by supernatural miracles, had to be contrived. One reason for the development of the Church was to provide an organisation that could propagate these. Thus the notion of 'church' is in his opinion inherently anti-Christian. The same applies to the doctrines of the Church. He argues that if a man can be saved by a doctrine of redemption, by sacraments and by prayer, then he does not need good works. It was a case of 'the Sermon on the Mount, *or* the Creed. One cannot believe in both' (p. 75). He also remarks, 'I have often been irritated, though it would be comic if the consequences were not so awful, by observing how men shut one another in a delusion and cannot get out of this magic circle' (p. 77). Tolstoy describes an example of this. At the Optchy Hermitage he observed how a monk refused to give the Gospel in Russian to an old man seeking some religious reading material for his grandson. He rather offered accounts of relics, holidays, miraculous icons, etc. (p. 78).

Tolstoy drew a sharp distinction between the natural and the supernatural. He commented: 'The proposition that we ought not to do unto others as we would not they should do unto us, did not need to be provided by miracles and needed no exercise of faith, because this proposition is in itself convincing and in harmony with man's mind and nature; but the proposition that Christ is God had to be proved by miracles completely beyond our comprehension' (p. 54). The need for miraculous manifestations in order to rationalise what the human mind refuses to understand, is already present in the Bible itself. When the question 'whether to baptize or not the uncircumcised' arose among the disciples and led to the meeting in Jerusalem according to Acts, 'the very fact of this question being raised showed that those who discussed it did not understand the teaching of Christ,

who rejected all outward observances...’ (p. 54). Once the correct principle was established by the meeting, the decision had to be guaranteed by supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit, descending on them as tongues of fire. Though in the narrative order of Acts the meeting only followed after the outpouring of the Spirit, Tolstoy maintains that Acts was written long after the events and that the logical order of events was the reverse of the narrated order (p. 55).

In contrast to the convoluted doctrines of the Church that needed supernatural proof and guarantees furnished by revelations, the teachings of Christ are direct and simple. In this regard Tolstoy introduced the concept of truth. The latter made such an impression on Gandhi that it became his key concept. Gandhi’s autobiography was subtitled as ‘The story of my experiments with truth’⁴. For Tolstoy truth is something that does not require any proof, especially not supernatural proof, but appealed directly to a person. He explained: ‘In the place of all the rules of the old religions, this doctrine [of Christ] sets up only a type of inward perfection, truth and love in the person of Christ, and—as a result of this inward perfection being attained by men—also the outward perfection foretold by the Prophets—and the kingdom of God, when all men will cease to learn to make war, when all shall be taught of God and united in love, and the lion will lay down with the lamb’ (p. 50). From Scripture Tolstoy quotes two passages to illustrate the direct simplicity of truth as professed by Jesus:

John 7:17 — If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

John 8:46 — ... If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me?

By keeping the words of Jesus one shall know whether they are true. Guided by truth, a person can progress toward perfection. No proofs of this doctrine were offered in Scripture except its truth. The only fulfilment of this teaching consists in walking in the chosen way, ‘in getting nearer to inward

⁴ Gandhi, M.K. [1927] 2001. *An autobiography, or The Story of my Experiments with Truth*. Translated from the Gujarati by Mahadev Desai. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.

perfection in the imitation of Christ, and for outward perfection in the establishment of the kingdom of God.' This is the essence of the teachings about the lost sheep and the prodigal son. Blessedness consists in progress toward perfection (p. 52). This is also the meaning of sayings like, 'Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth,' 'No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God,' 'Rejoice not that the spirits are subject to you, but seek rather that your names be written in heaven,' 'Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect,' 'Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness' (p. 52). Fulfilment is found in uninterrupted progress toward the attainment of ever higher truth (p. 52)⁵.

A New Theory of Life

In line with contemporary theories, Tolstoy proposed a theory of life consistent with his belief system. According to this theory, mankind develops through three stages. First man has an *animal* view of life, then a *pagan* view of life and finally a *divine* view of life. The animal view of life only concerns the individual and his impulses. The pagan view of life embraces society and its rules, but the divine view of life embraces the whole world and extends to the principle and source of life—to God. For Tolstoy, 'these three conceptions of life form the foundation of all the religions that exist or have existed' (p. 89). The 'man' (sic Tolstoy) who holds the divine theory is ready to sacrifice his individual and social welfare out of love. He worships God in deed and truth. Tolstoy sees it as inevitable that society would eventually develop from the second to the third phase. One could either appropriate this truth through spiritual insight, or acquire it over an extended time through trial and error. Yet great philosophers and

⁵ Seemingly two different streams of thought are here combined. One the one hand, we find a reflection of the doctrine that a person can through exercise become ever more holy. On the other hand we find a secularised version of the doctrine in the Orthodox tradition which is called *theosis* and presents the ideal for a Christian. By more and more partaking in divine nature one eventually attains *theosis*. More than any other theory, this provides the explanation for Gandhi's strenuous fasting and asceticism in order to 'see all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face' (Gandhi 1927:420).

men of science—Kant, Strauss, Spencer and Renan—did not understand the significance of Christ's teaching in the advancement of the third stage. They did not understand that his teaching is the institution of 'a new theory of life'. They did not believe that Christ actually had meant what he said in Matt 6:25-34 ('do not worry about food or clothing') or Luke 12:33-34 ('sell all you have') (pp. 93-94).

In this regard two misconceptions arise. The first is that the teaching of Christ consists in rules that are to be followed (which of course they cannot keep and therefore seek to alter or abandon). The second is that the aim of Christianity is to teach humanity to live together as one family and that the love of God can be omitted in this process.

Tolstoy argues that we are so far removed from the Christian ideal that we are not in a position even to judge the truth of this. For pursuing the truth, he suggested the image of crossing a rapid flowing river in a small boat. If you wish to land on the opposite side as close to the place from where you had set out, you better not go with the flow of the river, but row against the stream. You may not land where you aim for, but it will be farther upstream than when you just follow the stream. In the same way a person aiming at divine perfection should go against the urges of his animal and pagan nature (p. 98). True life, according to previous (pagan) religions consisted in following laws; 'according to Christ's teaching it consists in an ever closer approximation to the divine perfection held up before every man, and recognized within himself by every man, in ever closer and closer approach to the perfect fusion of his will in the will of God, that fusion toward which man strives, and the attainment of which would be the destruction of the life we know' (p. 98). One should never be deterred by the loftiness of the ideal. 'To let go the requirements of the ideal means not only to diminish the possibility of perfection, but to make an end of the ideal in itself' (p. 99). Perfection consists in setting free the Son of God, which exists in every man, from the animal, and in bringing him closer to the Father (p. 100).

Elsewhere Tolstoy speaks of the 'endless road to perfection' (p. 101) indicated by the five commandments of the Sermon on the Mount. These are (1) not to desire to do ill to anyone, (2) perfect chastity, even in thought, (3) to take no thought for the future, to live in the present moment, (4) never for any purpose to use force, (5) to love the enemies who hate us. These are

attainable stages on the road to perfection.

Scientific minded people, as well as communists and positivists, seek to reduce the Christian teaching to a rational love that benefits the whole of humanity. For Tolstoy this is merely the second phase, viz., the social/pagan phase of human development. Love on the animal level, is purely directed to the self. On the second level it is directed to family and clan (pp. 102-104). Humanity is a fiction and it is impossible to love it as the pagan view demands, he says—'in reality the possibility of this love is destroyed by the necessity of extending its object indefinitely' (p. 106). Something more is necessary. 'Christian love is the result only of the Christian conception of life, in which the aim of life is to love and serve God' (p. 107).

By statements such as these, it becomes overly clear that Tolstoy is not a humanist or a rationalist. Though rejecting the need for supernatural proof for the Christian view of life, the object of love in the divine sense is not found 'outside self in societies of individuals, nor in the external world, but within self, in the divine self whose essence is that very love, which the animal self is brought to feel the need of through its consciousness of its own perishable nature' (p. 107). This is indeed a mouthful. It is this statement that allows the reader an understanding of the title of the book, pointing to the way in which the Kingdom exists within a person. Whereas social love is something external that demands the suppression of the internal animal love, divine love is also internal, but in a deeper and more real sense than animal love. Living in Christ-like love is living according to your real inner nature. The aim of humanity is to subject the external self to the internal self (cf. p. 107). Love is the essential faculty of the human soul. Man loves not because it is in his interest to love, but because he cannot but love (p. 108). Happiness does not depend on loving this or that object, but on loving the principle of the whole—God, whom he recognizes within himself as love, and therefore he loves all things and all men (p. 108).

Coming of the Kingdom

In extensive arguments over several chapters Tolstoy explored the moral bankruptcy and internal inconsistency of various sectors of modern society. The superficial arguments in favour of war, the immense material and human waste involved, the dehumanisation of society come under scathing attack.

European society, with all its technological advances (Eiffel Tower and the telegraph), is indeed a house built on sand (Matt. 7:24-27, p. 186). If ruling people meant the use of force, it also meant doing to others what you would not like done to unto you. Consequently, ruling means doing wrong (p. 242).

It is inevitable that human conscience will develop and inaugurate a new order. That this is possible is shown by many examples from history. The acceptance of the Christian view of life will emancipate men from the miseries of our pagan life (as formulated in the title of Chapter 9, p. 208). Such emancipation will not only depend on individual improvement, but on the establishment of a public opinion. When this Christian public opinion is put into action, it could happen that the worst elements in society gain the upper hand. The most cruel, the coarsest and least Christian elements could overpower the most gentle, well-disposed and Christian elements and rise by violence to the upper ranks of society (p. 247). This would inaugurate a process in which the seduction of power can become explicitly clear and be criticised. 'Men who are in possession of power and wealth, sometimes even those who have gained for themselves their power and wealth, but more often their heirs, cease to be so eager for power and so cruel in their efforts to obtain it' (p. 248). Under the constant influence of Christian opinion society would be Christianised over a length of time. 'Power selects and attracts the worst elements of society, transforms them, improves and softens them, and returns them to society. Such is the process by means of which Christianity, in spite of the hindrances to human progress resulting from the violence of power, gains more and more hold of men. Christianity penetrates to the consciousness of men, not only in spite of the violence of power, but also by means of it' (p. 249).

For the change to a Christian society it is not necessary for everyone to become a Christian. Only a critical mass of Christian minded people are necessary (p. 251-254). Tolstoy foresees this to happen in the world as a whole. 'To bring under the sway of Christianity all the savage nations outside the pale of the Christian world—all the Zulus (sic!), Mandchoos, and Chinese, whom many regard as savages—and the savages who live in our midst, there is only *one means*. That means is the propagation among these nations of the Christian ideal of society, which can only be realized by a Christian life, Christian actions, and Christian examples. And meanwhile, though this is the *one means* of gaining a hold over the people who have

remained non-Christian, the men of our day set to work in the directly opposite fashion to attain this result' (p. 259). Colonialism is therefore condemned in the strongest terms. When exactly this change in world history will occur, remains uncertain—as Christ has already explained to his disciples (in Matt. 24:3-28, p. 277). In the interim time man has to obey God rather than men (according to Acts 4:19 and 5:29, p. 366).

'The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity by contributing to the establishment of the kingdom of God, which only can be done by the recognition and profession of the truth by every man. 'The kingdom of God cometh not with outward show; neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, Lo there! for behold the kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:20,21).'

Conclusion

It would be easy, though futile, to dwell on the theological and political deficiencies of Tolstoy's vision. On about every thought and idea as expressed in *The Kingdom* volumes have been added over the past century. His prediction of a Christian public opinion that would change history foundered on the senseless violence of the World Wars and the Communist revolution in Russia.

Tolstoy also did not develop his ideas into a comprehensive system, nor did he bother to relate them to the theological tradition of the past two millennia. He wished to make a singular point, and that he did most eloquently. If it were only for his influence on Gandhi, his work would be remembered as a landmark in intellectual history. However Tolstoy's work will gain in importance in the future for another reason. The reason is that he raised a moral issue in a fresh and relevant way and applied it relentlessly to society. Tolstoy's statement that the majority of the people of the world have not understood the problem of violence and how Jesus solved it remains as valid as ever. Until we have a new world order in which peaceful means of settling matters have displaced the senseless use of violence and force, this will grow in importance. How to deal with a host of war mongers, rogue states and killers of the innocents in our present world, that is the problem that Tolstoy solved by a very simple and direct injunction: 'Do not resist evil!' Gandhi was honest and brave enough to face this challenge and laid the foundation on which other great men such as Dr. M.L. King jnr. and chief Albert Luthuli could build.