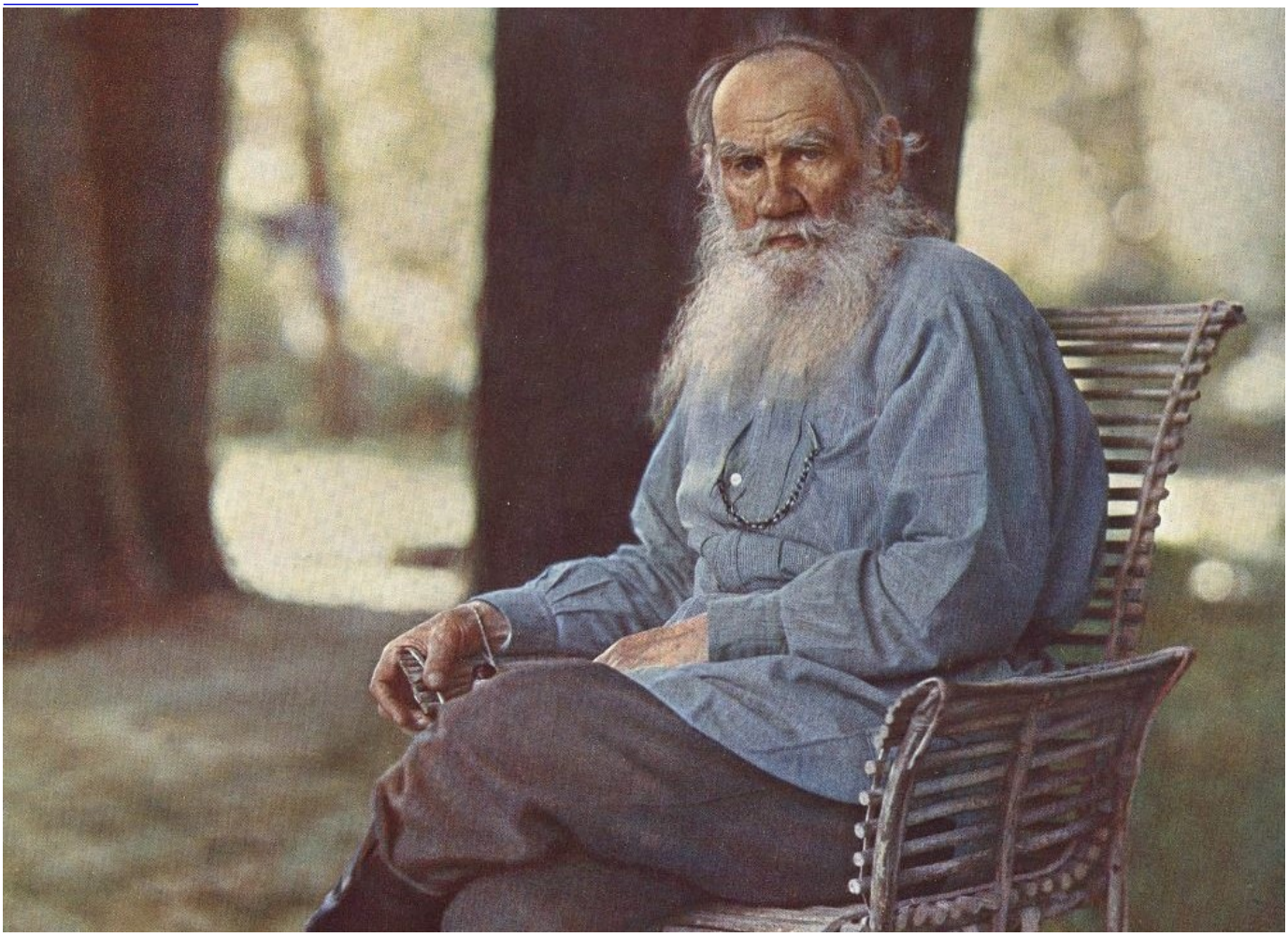
Opinion
Guest Voices



Leo Tolstoy is pictured in Yasnaya Polyana, Russia, in 1908. (Wikimedia Commons/Leo Tolstoy State Museum)



by John Dear

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In this week's episode of "The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast," Dear talks about Jesus' specific commandment on nonviolent resistance in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:39-43). Dear starts with the story of how Leo Tolstoy learned the power of this verse from the abolitionists, and then wrote his classic text, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You: Christianity Not as a Mystic Religion but as a New Theory of Life*.

There, on the first page, Tolstoy declares that Christianity has totally failed Christ because it ignores and disobeys Matthew 5:39. Tolstoy hoped to disarm the Russian Orthodox Church. Instead, he inspired Gandhi to launch national movements of nonviolent resistance, and bring the power of organized nonviolence to the world.

"This one verse of Scripture opens a new way to understand Jesus' life and teachings," Dear said in the podcast. "These words launch a permanent nonviolent revolution, because they forbid all violence. This new commandment holds the key to a new way of life and the disarmament of the world. As Dr. [Martin Luther] King explained and Gandhi demonstrated, this teaching was intended not just for individuals, but for nations and the whole world. We are commanded to figure out creative nonviolent alternatives to violence."

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Jesus throws out the old teaching, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," and calls for an immediate end to the downward cycle of violence. But he does not advocate meek submission to violence, or using the same means of violence as one's opponent and then becoming as violent as everyone else. Instead, Jesus commands "a Third Way" — active, courageous, fearless, nonviolent resistance to evil and he insists that this is God's will for humanity.

Jesus leads a nonviolence training session in the Sermon on the Mount just King later did, Dear said in the podcast, adding that Jesus is saying, "I want you to be bold, daring and creative in your nonviolence, to claim your power, confront all systemic violence and injustice, and disarm your oppressor — not kill them."

The good news is that millions of people around the world are taking Jesus at his word and engaging in grassroots campaigns of nonviolent resistance to oppression, war and empire today.

Click here to listen to the full episode.

This story appears in the **The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast** feature series. View the full series.