

NONVIOLENCE

THE HISTORY OF A
DANGEROUS IDEA

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MARK KURLANSKY

NONVIOLENCE

THE HISTORY OF A DANGEROUS IDEA

*Foreword by His Holiness
the Dalai Lama*



A MODERN LIBRARY CHRONICLES BOOK
THE MODERN LIBRARY
NEW YORK

TO BEAUTIFUL TALIA FEIGA AND HER ENTIRE MILLENNIAL GENERATION — I HOPE YOU RAISE HELL.

NONVIOLENTLY, OF COURSE.

To kill one man is to be guilty of a capital crime, to kill ten men is to increase the guilt ten-fold, to kill a hundred men is to increase it a hundred-fold. This the rulers of the earth all recognize and yet when it comes to the greatest crime— waging war on another state— they praise it!

It is clear they do not know it is wrong, for they record such deeds to be handed down to posterity; if they knew they were wrong, why should they wish to record them and have them handed down to posterity?

If a man on seeing a little black were to say it is black, but on seeing a lot of black were to say it is white, it would be clear that such a man could not distinguish black and white. Or if he were to taste a few bitter things were to pronounce them sweet, clearly he would be incapable of distinguishing between sweetness and bitterness. So those who recognize a small crime as such, but do not recognize the wickedness of the greatest crime of all— the waging of war on another state— but actually praise it— cannot distinguish right and wrong. So as to right or wrong, the rulers of the world are in confusion.

— MOZI, CHINA, CIRCA 470-391 B.C.

I find it so difficult not to hate; and when I do not hate I feel we few are so lonely in the world.

— BERTRAND RUSSELL, LETTER TO COLETTE, 1918

Foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama

I. IMPERFECT BEINGS

II. THE PROBLEM WITH STATES

III. THE KILLER PEACE MOVEMENT

IV. TROUBLEMAKERS

V. THE DILEMMA OF UNNATURAL PEOPLE

VI. NATURAL REVOLUTION

VII. PEACE AND SLAVERY

VIII. THE CURSE OF NATIONS

IX. A FAVORITE JUST WAR

X. THE RULE OF THUGS AND THE LAW OF GRAVITY

XI. RANDOM OUTBREAKS OF HOPE

The Twenty-five Lessons

Acknowledgments

Bibliography



FOREWORD

The Dalai Lama

I have worked to promote peace and nonviolence for many years because I believe that ultimately it is only through kindness and nonviolence that we human beings can create a more tranquil and happy atmosphere that will allow us to live in harmony and peace. Therefore, I am happy to see that Mark Kurlansky has wholeheartedly taken up these themes in this book.

I consider the cultivation of nonviolence and compassion as part of my daily practice. I do not think of it as something that is holy or sacred but as of practical benefit to myself. It gives me satisfaction; it gives me a sense of peace that is very helpful in maintaining sincere, genuine relationships with other people.

Mahatma Gandhi took up the ancient but powerful idea of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence, and made it familiar throughout the world. Martin Luther King Jr. followed in his footsteps. The author is correct to point out that both men were regarded with suspicion by the authorities they opposed, but ultimately both achieved far-reaching and significant changes in the societies in which they lived. I think it is important to acknowledge here that nonviolence does not mean the mere absence of violence. It is something more positive, more meaningful than that. The true expression of nonviolence is compassion, which is not just a passive emotional response, but a rational stimulus to action. To experience genuine compassion is to develop a feeling of closeness to others combined with a sense of responsibility for their welfare. This develops when we accept that other people are just like ourselves in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering.

It is my firm belief that if we adopt the right approach and make determined efforts, even in circumstances where great hostility has come about over time, trust and understanding can be restored. This is the approach I too have adopted with regard to the Chinese authorities concerning the issue of Tibet. Responding to violence with more violence is rarely appropriate. However, discussing non-violence when things are going smoothly does not carry much weight. It is precisely when things become really difficult, urgent, and critical that we should think and act with nonviolence.

Mahatma Gandhi's great achievement was to revive and implement the ancient Indian concept of nonviolence in modern times, not only in politics, but also in day-to-day life. Another important aspect of his legacy is that he won independence for India simply by telling the truth. His practice of nonviolence depended wholly on the power of truth. The recent unprecedented fall of oppressive regimes in several parts of the world has demonstrated once more that even decades of repression cannot crush people's determination to live in freedom and dignity.

It is my hope and prayer that this book should not only attract attention, but have a profound effect on those who read it. A sign of success would be that whenever conflicts and disagreements arise, our first reaction will be to ask ourselves how we can solve them through dialogue and discussion rather than through force.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'H. G. D. L.' or similar, written in a cursive style.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama



IMPERFECT BEINGS

We expect to prevail through the foolishness of preaching.

—WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON,

Declaration of Sentiments adopted by the Peace Convention of Boston, 1838

The first clue, lesson number one from human history on the subject of nonviolence, is that there is no word for it. The concept has been praised by every major religion. Throughout history there have been practitioners of nonviolence. Yet, while every major language has a word for violence, there is no word to express the idea of nonviolence except that it is not another idea, it is not violence. In Sanskrit, the word for violence is *himsa*, harm, and the negation of *himsa*, just as *nonviolence* is the negation of *violence*, is *ahimsa*—not doing harm. But if *ahimsa* is “not doing harm,” what is it doing?

The only possible explanation for the absence of a proactive word to express nonviolence is that not only the political establishments but the cultural and intellectual establishments of all societies have viewed nonviolence as a marginal point of view, a fanciful rejection of one of society's key components, a repudiation of something important but not a serious force in itself. It is not an authentic concept but simply the abnegation of something else. It has been marginalized because it is one of the rare truly revolutionary ideas, an idea that seeks to completely change the nature of society, a threat to the established order. And it has always been treated as something profoundly dangerous.

Advocates of nonviolence—dangerous people—have been there throughout history, questioning the greatness of Caesar and Napoleon and the Founding Fathers and Roosevelt and Churchill. For every Crusade and Revolution and Civil War there have always been those who argued, with great clarity, that violence not only was immoral but that it was even a less effective means of achieving laudable goals. The case can be made that it was not the American Revolution that secured independence from Britain; it was not the Civil War that freed the slaves; and World War II did not save the Jews. But this possibility has rarely been considered, because the Caesars and Napoleons of history have always used their power to muffle the voices of those who would challenge the necessity of war—and it is these Caesars, as Napoleon observed, who get to write history. And so the ones who have killed become the ones who are revered. But there is another history that manages to survive.

It survives, but nonviolence is in fact a marginal rejection of a marginalized concept. Political theorist Hannah Arendt, in her 1969 study *On Violence*, pointed out that while it can be universally agreed that violence has been one of the primary movers of history, historians and social scientists rarely study the subject of violence. She suggested that this was because violence was such a mainstay of human activity that it was “taken for granted and therefore neglected.” Violence is a fundamental of the human condition, whereas nonviolence is mere

a rarified response to that reality. What does this mean? If we lived in a world that had no word for war other than *nonpeace*, what kind of world would that be? It would not necessarily be a world without war, but it would be a world that regarded war as an aberrant and insignificant activity. The widely held and seldom expressed but implicit viewpoint of most cultures is that violence is real and nonviolence is unreal. But when nonviolence becomes a reality it is a powerful force.

Nonviolence is not the same thing as pacifism, for which there are many words. Pacifism is treated almost as a psychological condition. It is a state of mind. Pacifism is passive; but nonviolence is active. Pacifism is harmless and therefore easier to accept than non-violence which is dangerous. When Jesus Christ said that a victim should turn the other cheek, he was preaching pacifism. But when he said that an enemy should be won over through the power of love, he was preaching nonviolence. Nonviolence, exactly like violence, is a means of persuasion, a technique for political activism, a recipe for prevailing. It requires a great deal more imagination to devise nonviolent means—boycotts, sitins, strikes, street theater demonstrations—than to use force. And there is not always agreement on what constitutes violence. Some advocates of nonviolence believe that boycotts and embargoes that cause hunger and deprivation are a form of violence. Some believe that using less lethal means of force, rock throwing or rubber bullets, is a form of nonviolence. But the central belief is that forms of persuasion that do not use physical force, do not cause suffering, are more effective and while there is often a moral argument for nonviolence, the core of the belief is political: that nonviolence is more effective than violence, that violence does not work.

Mohandas Gandhi invented a word for it, *satyagraha*, from *satya*, meaning truth. *Satyagraha*, according to Gandhi, literally means “holding on to truth” or “truth force.” Interestingly, although Gandhi's teachings and techniques have had a huge impact on political activism around the world, his word for it, *satyagraha*, has never caught on.

All religions discuss the power of nonviolence and the evil of violence. Hinduism, which claims to be the oldest religion, though its founding date is unknown, as is its founder, does not take a clear stand on nonviolence. This ambiguity is not surprising for an ancient religion that has no central belief or official priests and has a plethora of scriptures, gods, mythologies, and cults. Hindus often repeat the aphorism “*Ahimsa paramo dharmah*,” nonviolence is the highest law, but this is not an unshakable principle of the religion. Violence is permissible in the Hindu religion, and Indra is a warlike Hindu god. But there are also many writings of Hindu wise men against violence, especially in a book known as the *Mahabharata*. Hindu sages tended to see nonviolence as an unattainable ideal. Perfect nonviolence would mean not harming any living thing. The sages encouraged vegetarianism to avoid harming animals. The Jainists, followers of a religion admired by Gandhi, keep their mouths masked to insure that they do not accidentally inhale a tiny insect. But Hinduism recognizes that even the strictest vegetarians harm plants, killing them in order to live. A saint, it is said, would live on air, but Hinduism recognizes that this is impossible. Complete *ahimsa* is not attainable. Gandhi wrote, “Nonviolence is a perfect stage. It is a goal toward which all mankind moves naturally, though unconsciously.” He believed human beings were working toward perfection. Violence was a barbaric retrogressive trait that had not yet been shed. The human being who achieved complete nonviolence, according to Gandhi, would not be a saint. “He only becomes truly a man,” he said.

This concept of man as an imperfect being who is obligated to strive for an unattainable perfection runs through most of human thought. The nineteenth-century French founder of the anarchist movement, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, wrote in his 1853 *Philosophie du progrès* “We are born perfectable, but we shall never be perfect.” The often repeated argument against nonviolence, that it is in our nature to be violent—no doubt why violence deserves its own word—lacks validity in light of the ubiquitous moral argument that it is our obligation to try to be better than we are.

Hinduism and Gandhi insist that nonviolence must never come from weakness but from strength, and only the strongest and most disciplined people can hope to achieve it. Those who are incapable of defending themselves without violence, those who lack the spiritual strength to match their adversary's physical brutality, either because of their own weakness or the determined brutality of the enemy, are obligated to use physical violence for defense. In Hinduism, passive submission to brutality is usually considered a sin.

Whenever the Chinese denounce the pacifist tendencies in their culture, they usually blame these tendencies on Buddhism. This is because Buddhism is the only important Eastern religion in China that is of foreign origin. Buddha, the sixth-century B.C. founder, was born near the Indian-Nepalese border. If pacifism is a national weakness, many Chinese have contended, surely it is the fault of foreigners. And so Hu Shi, the Columbia University educated Chinese scholar (1891–1962), said, “Buddhism, which dominated Chinese religious life for twenty centuries, has reinforced the peaceful tendencies of an already too peaceful people.” His implication was that the rejection of violence makes people passive, and many early-twentieth-century Chinese believed their people had become too passive. This ignores the fact that most religions and philosophies that reject violence do not encourage passiveness but activism by other means—nonviolence.

Buddhism forbids the taking of life, but there seems to be a wide range of interpretation of this stance. In some countries it means vegetarianism, but in Tibet, perhaps because of a lack of vegetables, it means that animals must be slaughtered “humanely.” To a Tibetan Buddhist, however, this means the opposite of what it means to a Jew. To Jews, humane slaughter is the clean slitting of the animal's throat and the removal of all blood, whereas in Tibet it means death by suffocation, to avoid the spilling of blood.

While the Buddhist interdiction on taking life was frequently interpreted in China as a condemnation of militarism, this was not the case in medieval Japan. In Japan Buddhism developed the “meditation school” commonly known as Zen. In the Middle Ages, Zen monks became warriors and monasteries became military fortresses. The original idea of Zen was the suppression of the body in order to reach a higher level of meditation. In the fourteenth century the technique was applied not only to meditation but to swordsmanship and archery. Three centuries later, Zen had become an integral part of the warrior code in Japan. This was neither the first nor last incident of a religion being perverted for military purposes.

In Buddhism, as in Hinduism, there is the notion of humans reaching higher levels, and one of the ways this is accomplished is by rendering aid to all beings. But Buddhism is not the only source of nonviolent thinking in China. The position on war and nonviolence in Confucianism, a belief system developed in China from 722 to 484 B.C., is even more vague than in Hinduism. It is not even clear that Confucianism is a religion. Many prefer to describe

it as a moral philosophy. Nor is there agreement on the extent of the role of Confucius whose real name was Kong Fuzi, a contemporary of Buddha, who lived between 551 and 479 B.C. *The Analects*, a compilation of Confucius's sayings that was assembled long after his death, defined the function of government as providing food and troops and earning the people's confidence. Asked which could be suspended in hard times, he answered, "Dispense with the troops." This idea that military is essential to government but less essential than other functions runs throughout *The Analects*.

Confucius was not a pacifist, nor did he teach the power of non-violence. But *The Analects* also at times rejects the notion of state violence, saying, "If good men were to administer the government for a hundred years, violence could be overcome and capital punishment dispensed with." And when the question comes up of how to deal with neighboring barbarians, the standard rationale for military campaigns in China, the reply in *The Analects* is: "If the distant peoples do not submit, then build up culture and character and so win them, and when they have been won give them security." It is a succinct statement of the nonviolent approach to political activism.

But the strongest Chinese stand on nonviolence came in opposition to Confucius, from a man named Mozi, who lived from about 470 to 390 B.C. Mozi frequently attacked Confucianists for being aristocrats, which has led some scholars to conclude that he came from a class of slaves. But like other rebels, including Jesus and Gandhi, he may have chosen to throw in with the poorest class as a protest against their unfair treatment. While Confucius was a voice of the establishment, Mozi was a rebel. While Confucius envisioned a hierarchy of love in which the greatest affection was given to family, Mozi called for universal love, *chien ai*, and emphasized helping the poor. Mozi described the concept of *chien ai*: "He throws me a peach, I return him a plum."

Mozi saw this concept of mutual love, *chien ai*, as the key to righting the world's ills.

Whence come disorders? They arise from lack of mutual love. The son loves himself and does not love his father and so cheats his father for his own gain; the younger brother loves himself and does not love his father and so cheats his elder brother for his own gain. The same applies to the state officers and their overlords. This is what the world calls disorder. In the same way the father loves himself and not his son and cheats his son for his own profit, and so likewise with the elder brother and the overlord. This all comes from the lack of mutual love. Their case is the same as that of robbers and brigands who likewise love their own households, but not the homes of others and so rob others' homes for the benefit of their own. Like unto these, too, are state officers and princes who make war on other countries—because they love their own country but not other countries, and so seek to profit their own country at the expense of others. The ultimate cause of all disorders in the world is the lack of mutual love.

Mozi goes on to make a point that was later voiced in Judaism by the first-century A.D. rabbi Hillel and reiterated by his contemporary, Jesus, who called it the Golden Rule. Mozi wrote:

For if every man were to regard the persons of others as his own person, who would inflict pain and injury on others? If they regarded the homes of others as their own homes, who would rob others' homes? Thus in that case there would be no brigands or robbers. If the princes regarded other countries as their own, who would wage war on other countries? Thus in that case there would be no more war.

Chinese comes closer than most languages to a word for non-violence. In Taoism there is

concept embodied in the word *teh*. Not exactly nonviolence, which is an active force, *teh* is the virtue of not fighting—nonviolence is the path to *teh*.

Taoism is centered on the fifth-century B.C. teachings of Lao Tsu, who is thought to be the author of the *Tao te ching*, The Cannon of the Way and Virtue. *Tao* itself is an untranslatable word, often mentioned in *The Analects*. It is a balancing force sometimes said to be what keeps nature from tumbling into chaos. It says in the *Tao te ching*, “The ruler imbued with the Tao will not use the force of arms to subdue other countries.” But it adds that a country should have a military force for defense and that its preparedness will be a deterrent. The military should be “ready but not boastful.” This half-road to nonviolence is not nonviolence at all, since all of history shows that nations who build military forces as deterrents eventually use them—a disturbing lesson in an age of “nuclear deterrents.”

But there is in Tao, as in Hinduism, the notion that human beings evolve and the most highly evolved human beings do not need physical violence. “The skillful knight is not warlike. The skilled strategist is never angry. He who is skilled in overcoming his enemies does not join battle.”

In Taoism *teh* is a perfection of nature, and, as in Hinduism, it is something few people have the strength and character to live up to. The concept is echoed in Christianity by such notions as the meek being blessed and the last being first. *Teh* holds that:

In nature the softest overcomes the strongest. There is nothing in the world so weak as water. But nothing can surpass it in attacking the hard and strong; there is no way to alter it. Hence weakness overcomes strength, softness overcomes hardness. The world knows this but is unable to practice it.

Eastern religions, which Westerners tend to regard as ethereal and only workable for the dreamiest of idealists, actually have a pragmatic side. They recognize that violence is wrong and that nonviolence is the path that ought to be taken, but they also recognize that humans are weak and imperfect and that only a few of the most evolved and extraordinary among us will choose that path and stay with it.

Judaism, a religion that is more than 5,700 years old, has many layers of both laws and commentaries on those laws. It is full of seeming contradictions, including on the subject of violence. Rabbis attempt to resolve the contradictions by ascribing priorities—certain writings are more important than others, some doctrines, some practices, some beliefs take precedence over others. Of course the arguments about which writings take precedence are without end. In Judaism there is usually room for arguments, but there are a few inviolable laws. Monotheism is the central tenet of the religion and there are no exceptions or variations, nor is any form of idolatry tolerated. It is also universally accepted that the ten commandments that are said to have been handed to Moses by God on Mount Sinai are the central and leading set of nonnegotiable laws. The first of these commandments is monotheism and the second forbids idolatry. The sixth commandment is “You shall not kill.” It is one of the shortest commandments and offers no commentary, explanation, or variations. It does not say, as many Jews claim, “except in self-defense,” nor does it say “except when absolutely necessary.” It is one of the most plain declarative sentences in the Bible. But those who wish to kill can take refuge in lesser writings. The Old Testament is full of accounts of warfare and even justifications for them. This does not change the fact that the

central law states “no killing.” Throughout the rest of the Bible, among all the battles and bloodshed, are other messages. The dictum in the book of Leviticus, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” is also considered central to the religion.

The ancient Jews did engage in warfare, but they apparently never felt comfortable about it. Unlike so many modern cultures, they did not celebrate military victories. The only holiday on the Jewish calendar that celebrates a military triumph is Chanukah. It is a postbiblical holiday celebrating the 166 B.C. victory of a guerrilla army led by the Maccabees against the Seleucid rulers of Palestine who, with the support of some Jews, had tried to dilute traditional Jewish practice. Rabbis were never comfortable with this holiday, and the writings that record it were not kept with sacred text and have only survived in Greek translation, the language of the defeated. Chanukah was always a minor holiday of very limited religious significance until modern times, when two things happened to change its role. In the 1890s, with the growth of Zionism, Chanukah was promoted because it celebrated the Jewish military conquest of Jerusalem. Like the Zen monks, the Zionists knew how to use religion in the quest for political power. Today in Israel it is virtually a political holiday.

Chanukah's popularity continued to grow, though it is still not considered a religious holiday, and it has been given new importance in modern times by retail merchants eager to sell gift items to Jews during the Christmas season. The traditional time of year for giving children gifts in the Jewish calendar used to be Purim, which falls at the end of winter. While not celebrating a military victory, this holiday is also bloodied by the hanging of the wicked Haman and his cohorts at the city gates and the slaughter of 75,000 Persians. Centuries of commentaries have discussed the unseemly grisliness of this story. But while most Jewish holidays are somber, Purim is intended to be a time for silliness, a bit like the pre-Lenten Mardi Gras in Catholicism. Drunkenness is encouraged, as is ridiculing revered scholars. The story of the book of Esther is retold on Purim intentionally as a farcical, overblown melodrama in which the good guys are cheered and the bad guys booed. Scholars and rabbis point out that “God is not present” in the story of Purim. The book of Esther is the only book in the Old Testament, aside from the love poem Song of Songs, in which God never appears. The characters do not pray, they do not ask God's help. God is not involved in this bloody operation. It has already been made plain that God does not want people to kill each other.

Generally Jewish holidays reject such violence. On Yom Kippur violence is among the sins for which to atone. On Passover, which celebrates Moses leading the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt, there is a moment of sorrow for the Egyptians, the enemy who drowned trying to pursue the Hebrews across the Red Sea. Jews are instructed every year not to hate the Egyptians. It is a fundamental tenet of Judaism that you should not hate your enemies.

Judaism, too, teaches of the possibility of perfection. Someday, it is said, the perfect human, the Messiah, will come and show mankind the way to perfection. By tradition, the Jews were to return to Israel only when the Messiah appeared, not following World War I. Reform Judaism does not predict a Messiah but an entire messianic age. According to the angry prophet Isaiah, at some point in the future, when God is finally listened to, nations “shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift sword against nation, nor ever again be trained for war.”

Though most religions shun warfare and hold nonviolence as the only moral route toward political change, religion and its language have been co-opted by the violent people who have been governing societies. If someone were to come along who would not compromise, a rebel who insisted on taking the only moral path, rejecting violence in all its forms, such a person would seem so menacing that he would be killed, and after his death he would be canonized or deified, because a saint is less dangerous than a rebel. This has happened numerous times, but the first prominent example was a Jew named Jesus.

THE PROBLEM WITH STATES

If the force of arms is considered the only means of authority, it is not an auspicious instrument.

—LAO TSU,

the Tao te ching, fifth century B.C.

Jesus, like Mohammed after him, looked at the great complexity of Jewish law that had been layered over millennia and said that implanted in the law were certain clear precepts of right and wrong. Others offered the same clarity. Hillel, a Babylonian Jew who lived about the same time as Jesus, also preached a message of simplicity. Like Mozi, Hillel was said to have come from particularly humble origins. He studied by climbing to the roof of the school, literally eavesdropping on lessons, because he had no money to register as a student. Hillel became the head rabbi of Palestine, from which position he constantly wrestled with the conservative rabbinate. In a stance that is unusual even today, he was extremely open to converts. One aspiring convert, apparently frustrated with the verbosity of Jewish law, challenged him to recite the Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel responded, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. The rest is commentary on this. Go and study.” Hillel's followers became the dominant political force among the Jews.

Jesus and his followers were clearly influenced by Hillel. Hillel's summary of the Torah became Jesus' “Golden Rule” in the Sermon on the Mount: “In everything, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Jesus taught the doctrines of Judaism. Where he differed was in priorities. As with traditional Judaism, his first priority was the love of God. But his number two was the love of man. Jesus believed that love should be given to all fellow humans unconditionally. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' most succinct sermon, which he delivered seated, in the traditional manner of a rabbi, he made clear that he did not want to reject Judaism but to revive it and have its most important laws more rigorously observed. “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.” His first example was the interdiction against killing. But he went even further. Even being angry at a fellow human being was sin. In Jesus' view of Jewish law, there was no room for violence of any kind, even emotional violence, and weapons, military, and war were clearly illegal. The righteous person who walked in God's path loved everyone, even his enemies.

Jesus was seen as dangerous because he rejected not only warfare and killing but any kind of force. Those in authority saw this as a challenge. How could there be authority without force? This was trouble for the rabbinate, and was even more trouble for the military occupiers, the Romans. Jesus built a following that was attracted to his uncompromising point of view—the kind of people who are called troublemakers. He was tortured to death by the Romans in a manner so grisly and violent, it was surely designed to repel his followers. But they insisted that Jesus had died forgiving his torturers.

Death by crucifixion is believed to be a Phoenician invention. Unarguably a horrifying death, it was thought by the Romans to be a humiliating and degrading one as well, and they did not use it on Roman citizens. Those first Christians would not have used the symbol of the cross, a weapon of violence, much less a crucifix, which was a depiction of violent death. They were led by a fisherman, and their symbol was a fish.

The early Christians persisted in an uncompromising and narrow interpretation of Jewish law. In the book of Matthew is written, "You have heard it said: An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, resist not him that is evil." The rejected eye-for-an-eye formula is not a peripheral piece of Jewish commentary, it is from the book of Exodus. Major Old Testament figures, including not only David but Samson, Joshua, and Gideon, were military men. But slowly the idea emerged among the followers of Jesus that they should hold Jewish law to a higher standard and that though warfare had been tolerated, it would be no longer.

A split, the first and probably the most important of many schisms in Christianity, occurred between Jesus' disciples Peter and Paul. Paul, whose original name was Saul, and Peter, who was originally named Simon, were both Jewish. But Paul, unlike Peter, was not one of Jesus' entourage and never knew him. While Peter was a fisherman in Galilee, Paul was a religious scholar from Asia Minor. And yet it was Peter, the fisherman, who wanted the followers of Jesus to remain Jewish and apply Jesus' teachings to the perfection of Judaism. Paul, the Hebraic scholar, wanted to open up Christianity to the world, pursuing converts wherever they were found, a most un-Jewish approach.

Under Paul's influence the Christians moved further away from the body of Judaism, further away from everyone. They became an odd and distinct cult on the outer margins of society, uncompromisingly dedicated to pacifism. Theirs was a unique antiwar posture. Even the pious and spartan Jewish sect known as the Essenes did not entirely denounce weapons.

The early Christians are the earliest known group that renounced warfare in all its forms and rejected all its institutions. This small and original group was devoted to antimilitarism, another concept, like nonviolence, that has no positive word. This anti-militarism was never expressed by Jesus, who, in fact, did not much address the issue of warfare, though he did denounce the violent overthrow of the Romans. Warmongering Christian fundamentalists have always clung to the absence of a specific stand on warfare, ignoring the obvious, which is that the wholesale institutionalized slaughter of fellow human beings is clearly a violation of the precise and literal teachings of Jesus. In the days of the great Western debate on slavery, slave owners used a similar argument—that Jesus had not said anything about slavery. But obviously the buying and selling of human beings would not constitute treating others as you would have them treat you.

For 284 years, roughly the same span of time as from the end of Louis XIV's reign in France to the beginning of the twenty-first century, Christians remained an antiwar cult. Christian writers emphasized the incompatibility of warfare with Christian teachings. Some characterized warfare as the work of evil spirits and weapons as cursed. They labeled the taking of human life in warfare murder. The Jewish War of A.D. 66–71 was viewed as God's punishment of the Jews for sinful ways, and the pursuit of war, and by extension the pursuit of power politics, was said to be activity for "the Gentiles," unworthy of a Christian. The

attacked the pomp of Rome as a glorification of warfare.

The first-century Christian writer Ignatius called for an abolition of warfare. This would happen, according to him and other Christian writers, once the world embraced the teaching of Jesus Christ—to love one's enemies, to do good even to those who do evil, to respond to evil with goodness. Such determined love and goodness was not meant to be pacifistic but a program for actively fighting evil. Given their stance against soldiers and soldiering, even against police work, it is striking that Christians sought and got converts among the Roman Legions. Some historians believe that it was converted Roman soldiers who first brought Christianity to Britain.

Origenes Adamantius, popularly known as Origen, the second-to-third-century Christian philosopher from Alexandria, clearly stated, “We Christians do not become fellow soldiers with the Emperor, even if he presses for this.” Christians would be loyal to the emperor, but they would not fight his wars. According to Origen, a Christian might pray for the success of a military state, even pray for the success of a military campaign, but could never participate in the military or in the government of a state that used military power. He did not condemn the military but only believed that it was forbidden for a Christian to participate. Christianity was about the promotion of love, and early Christians believed that love and killing were incompatible.

Though no one doubted Origen's sincerity—after all, he had castrated himself in pursuit of personal purity—his was a dangerous position in a militarized state. Like many subsequent states, the Roman Empire was so invested in its military might that it found it difficult to conceive of a loyal citizen who would not participate in the central program—warfare. Origen understood this, since his father had been put to death for beliefs similar to his own. Origen himself, the most influential Christian thinker of his time, author of some 800 works, was imprisoned and tortured and died from his mistreatment shortly after being released, about A.D. 254.

Not all Christians were good Christians. Some were described by other Christians as “behaving like Gentiles.” Starting in the mid-second century, under the reign of Marcus Aurelius, a notable persecutor of Christians, some Christians did become soldiers and others became magistrates. Apparently there was an attempt to force Christians into the military, for about this time the first evidence is found of Christians refusing to serve—Western history's first conscientious objectors.

In general, Christians were becoming more troublesome rather than less. Their habit of seeking converts among the legions was a direct threat to empire building. Most soldiers, upon converting, refused to continue military service. Tertullian, a Roman centurion's son who converted to Christianity in 197, openly spoke of converting soldiers so that they would refuse to fight.

Active practitioners of nonviolence are always seen as a threat, a direct menace, to the state. The state maintains the right to kill as its exclusive and jealously guarded privilege. Nothing makes this more clear than capital punishment, which argues that killing is wrong and so the state must kill killers. Mozi understood that the state's desire to kill had to do with power. He wrote: “Like unto these, too, are state officers and princes who make war on other countries—because they love their own country but not other countries, and so seek to prof

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