



GENEALOGY OF NONVIOLENCE

*“Nonviolence is the greatest force humanity
has been endowed with”* **Gandhi**

*“History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of
this period of social transition was not the strident clamour
of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good
people”* **Martin Luther King**

*“Peace won’t come from a violent approach to violence.
Nonviolence is the only way out”* **Silo (Mario Rodriguez Cobos)**



WHAT IS ACTIVE NONVIOLENCE ?

Violence in the present world is increasing and expanding in all fields, generating a climate of fear, uncertainty, asphyxia and dark times. We are not only speaking of the physical violence of war and criminality, but also of economic, racial, religious and psychological violence, domestic and family violence and inner violence. Sometimes we hear the word nonviolence but, also due to the superficial nature of information, we don't always have a precise idea of what it is. Nonviolence is not pacifism, neither is it a simple methodology for demonstrating.

Nonviolence is not the resigned attitude of those who through fear avoid confrontation. Nonviolence is a great life philosophy and methodology of action, that has always inspired profound moral and religious convictions and today is the only coherent response to the spiral of violence that surrounds us.

Frequently nonviolence is identified with pacifism, but in reality the latter is not a method of action or a life style, but a constant denunciation against the arms race. Therefore, it is inferred that nonviolence and active nonviolence consist of a personal commitment, a style of life and a methodology for social change.

NONVIOLENCE is written without a hyphen because nonviolence is not a simple absence of violence, but rather an independent, positive value.

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These are some historical figures and currents of thought that appear in the family tree of the nonviolent movement. To study their ideas and actions is to come into contact with the process of choosing nonviolence as a methodology for action. Some of the characters may not have existed in the form that reaches us, but whatever their reality, they are important as part of the chain of inspiration and models.

■ Amenhotep IV (Akhenaton), Ancient Egypt

In the 14th century B.C. this Pharaoh led a dramatic revolution, establishing a monotheistic religion and political changes based on peace and social justice.



■ Zarathustra

1200 or 600 AC? in Persia, the young Zarathustra (said to be born from a virgin!) began to preach that there was only one true God and saviour, Ahura Mazda (Lord of Wisdom). This gave birth to Zoroastrianism as a religion. He opened the road for our present day monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Through the Parsis he also had influence on Hinduism and Buddhism. His teachings: "Think well, do good, speak the truth". An ethics of personal responsibility: "There is only one way to fight evil, by increasing kindness, and only one way to fight against darkness, by expanding the light. In the same way, only by broadening love and not fighting and opposing one another we can eliminate hatred and enmity."

■ Jainism: Ahinsa (nonviolence)

Jainism was born in India about the same period as Buddhism. It was established by Mahavira (c. 599 - 527 BC) in about 500 B.C. Mahavira like Buddha belonged to the warrior caste. Mahavira was called 'Jina' meaning the big winner and from this name was derived the name of the religion.



In many senses Jainism is similar to Buddhism. Both developed as a dissension to the Brahmanic philosophy that was dominant during that period in north-east India. Both share a belief in reincarnation which even-

tually leads to liberation. Jainism is different to Buddhism in its ascetic beliefs. Both these religions emphasize nonviolence, but nonviolence is the main core in Jainism.

■ **Gautama Buddha, India**

Born a Prince his father attempted to keep him in the Palace, away from all suffering and given to unlimited pleasure. In his youth he walked on the world where he was shocked to see so much sorrow in the form of old age, illness and death. He attempted to reach spiritual development through the known ascetic ways of the time but in failing to do so he developed the “middle path” and communicated it to his disciples. He propounded the philosophy of nonviolence, universal love and peace 2,500 years ago. Emperor Ashoka Maurya from India gave this pacifist philosophy official recognition in the 3rd century B.C. and sent Buddhist missionaries to the far-east and central Asia. For this initiative in spreading the message of peace and nonviolence, he is remembered not only by Indians but by pacifists all around the globe.

■ **King Asoka, India**

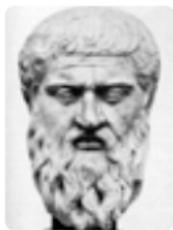


His edicts, based on Ahinsa are mainly concerned with the reforms he instituted and the moral principles he recommended in his attempt to create a just and humane society. He was born in India in 304 B.C. Eight years after his coronation, Asoka's armies attacked and conquered Kalinga. The loss of life caused by battle, reprisals, deportations and the turmoil that always exists in the aftermath of war so horrified Asoka that it brought about a complete change in his personality. After the war Asoka dedicated the rest of his life trying to apply Buddhist principles to the administration of his vast empire. He had a crucial part to play in helping Buddhism to spread both throughout India and abroad. Asoka died in 232 B.C. in the thirty-eighth year of his reign.

■ **Plato**

628 BC. In both the Republic and the Laws, Plato asserts not only that factionalism and civil war are the greatest dangers to the city, but also

that peace obtained by the victory of one part and the destruction of its rivals is not to be preferred to social peace obtained through the friendship and cooperation of all the city's parts. Peace for Plato is not a status quo notion, related to the interest of the privileged group, but a value that most people usually desire. He does not stand for war and the victory of one class, but for peace in social diversity.



■ Jesus Christ, Ancient Judea

Here are some of the nonviolent teachings attributed to him in the writings of the Apostles: "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

"You have learnt how it was said: 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.' But I say to you, Offer the wicked man no resistance. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him." Mt. 5.38-41

"If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." John. 8.7

■ The Talmud (Jewish Sacred text)

"For the sake of peace one may lie, but peace itself should never be a lie. Whoever destroys a single life is as guilty as though he had destroyed the entire world; and whoever rescues a single life earns as much merit as though he had rescued the entire world." (This passage is also in the Koran)

■ Baha'i Faith

"I charge you all that each one of you concentrate all the thoughts of your heart on love and unity. When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love. Thoughts of war bring destruction to all harmony, well-being, restfulness and content. Thoughts of love are constructive of brotherhood, peace, friendship, and happiness. Abdu'l-Baha

■ Islam & Sufism

Ibn Arabi's doctrine is that the entire universe is His manifestation. This leads to demolition of barriers between people of one religion and the other. Thus peace, friendship and love have been at the centre of this school of sufism Mansur Al-Hallaj (martyred in 922). exposed the psychospiritual doctrine of "two natures".

Sufis resist the notion that religious authority should be based on titles and offices. Rather, Sufi teachers gain acceptance and support by their insights and capacity for transmission of enlightenment to their students. The history of Sufism is filled with examples of interfaith co-operation.

■ Laura Cereta, a Renaissance Feminist



15th century writer who stressed the emotions in a genre (criticism) long assumed to be the domain of the rational faculties only attempted to reconstruct and redefine the concept of gender, proposing mutual support of women by women and the idea of a community of women, she saw housework as a barrier to women's literary aspirations and held that "all human beings, women included, are born with the right to an education" and raised the mainstreaming of women's writing into genres and venues that were once for men only and searched for ways to give access to women to public life.

■ Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484-1566)



Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, dedicated his life to the defence of indigenous peoples is today seen as one of the precursors of the theory and practice of Human Rights.

A Spanish colonist, a priest, founder of a Utopian community and first Bishop of Chiapas, was a scholar, historian and 16th century human rights advocate. He has been called the Father of anti-imperialism and anti-racism

■ George Fox, founder of the Quakers

1624 –1691. Living in a time of great social upheaval, he rebelled against the religious and political consensus by proposing an unusual and un-

compromising approach to the Christian faith.

It was as early as the 1600s that Quakers began their fight against slavery, and thus the beginning of the abolitionist movement.

On Nonviolence: "We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever, and this is our testimony to the whole world." Quaker statement to King Charles II, 1660

"A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil, that good may come of it." William Penn, 1693



■ Tom Paine and A.N. de Condorcet

Poverty, they suggested, is unacceptable and something that should and could be eliminated.

Paine 1737-1809 born in England, fought for American independence. His book *The Rights of Man* was published in UK in 1792. It was banned for its antiestablishment stance, but became a best seller. He opposed slavery and was amongst the earliest proponents of social security, universal free public education and a guaranteed minimum wage.

Condorcet was a French aristocrat who joined the Revolution but was devoured by it and died in prison in 1794. He was a philosopher, mathematician and encyclopedist. Wrote in support of pacifism, sexual equality, and social services.

They both supported the French Revolution but opposed the killings.

■ Mary Wollstonecraft

She described the process by which parents brought their daughters up to be docile and domesticated.

She maintained that if girls were encouraged from an early age to develop their minds, it would be seen that they were rational creatures and there was no reason whatsoever for them not to be given the same opportunities as boys with regard to education and training.

Women could enter the professions and have careers just the same as men. ("*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" published during the French Revolution). She died in childbirth (her daughter Mary Shelly then wrote *Frankenstein*)



■ Immanuel Kant



In 1795 Kant published an essay entitled “Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch.” In his view the Treaty of Basel between Prussia and France, was only “the suspension of hostilities, not a peace.”

In the essay, Kant argues that it is humankind’s immediate duty to solve the problem of violence and enter into the cosmopolitan ideal of a universal community of all peoples governed by the rule of law.

Kant believed that peace could be gradually extended. The first step was for States to become Republican. As a second step, all Republican States would join a federation. One day, this federation would embrace all States of the earth.

He is considered to be the inspiration for the creation of the League of Nations as the way to end all wars.

■ Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), US



US essayist, poet, and practical philosopher, renowned for having lived the doctrines of Transcendentalism (that was amongst other things concerned with the end of slavery) as recorded in his masterwork, *Walden* (1854), and for having been a vigorous advocate of civil liberties, as evidenced in the essay “Civil Disobedience” (1849).

“One has a moral obligation to refuse to cooperate with an unjust social system.”

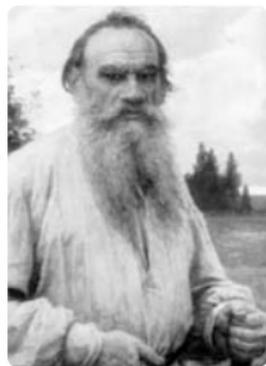
■ Leon Tolstoy (1828 –1910), Russia

He was a Russian novelist, reformer, pacifist and moral thinker, notable for his ideas on nonviolent resistance. He was born into the aristocracy but renounced its privileges.

Tolstoy’s Christian beliefs were based on the Sermon on the Mount, and particularly on the comment about turning your cheek, which he saw as a justification of pacifism. These beliefs came out of a middle aged crisis that began with a depression so severe that if he saw a rope it made him think of hanging himself, and he had to hide his guns to stop himself committing suicide.

Yet out of this depression came his radical and very original new ideas about Christianity. He believed that a Christian should look inside his or

her own heart to find inner happiness rather than looking outward toward the church or state. His belief in nonviolence when facing oppression is another distinct attribute of his philosophy. By directly influencing Mohandas Gandhi with this idea Tolstoy has had a huge influence on the nonviolent resistance movement to this day. He believed that the aristocracy was a burden on the poor, and that the only solution to how we live together is through anarchy. He also opposed private property and the institution of marriage and valued the ideals of chastity and sexual abstinence.



In one of his letters, Tolstoy noted that Thoreau had about written Civil Disobedience fifty years previously. He claims to have been influenced by the Quakers and the anti-slavery movement in the United States.

■ Mohandas K Gandhi (1869 - 1948), India

In 1889 Gandhi went to England to study law, and was graduated from the Inner Temple of London. While he was in England, a number of vegetarian friends who formed his support group persuaded Gandhi to study Indian religions and literature.

When he returned to India, however, he could not find a job; so he accepted an offer to go to South Africa. He was hired to serve as a lawyer to a rich Indian merchant who had settled there. While travelling in South Africa to his place of employment, Gandhi was madly mistreated by the white officials of the railway company because of his skin colour. As a result of this incident, Gandhi began to think about the treatment of minorities and what could be done to improve the situation.

In those days, apartheid, or racial segregation, was the law and policy of the government of South Africa. So after Gandhi settled his employer's legal matters, he began to organize the Indian community to demand their civil rights.

During his 20 years in South Africa, Gandhi developed his principles of nonviolent resistance. He led this struggle in nonviolent confrontations with the government. The rules of nonviolent resistance that he laid down are:

1. No hitting back (no retaliation),



2. Endure personal pain and suffering, even death,
3. Express love and forgiveness toward the oppressor, and
4. Harbour no intent to harm or humiliate the oppressor, but rather a desire to settle (reconcile) differences.

After gaining many civil rights reforms, Gandhi left South Africa and returned to India in 1914. At first he travelled widely in the country to see for himself the conditions in which the poor lived, and to learn from them the ways in which he could help.

Then he began to protest the British government's rule over India. He supported the farmers of the Champaran district in their fight against the British landlords who were their oppressors. He won a fair settlement and a good price for the farmer's produce. He successfully mediated a labour dispute in the textile industry in the city of Ahmedabad. When the district of Bardoli refused to pay what they considered unfair taxes, Gandhi encouraged other districts to do the same in support, believing that this would overthrow the British government. However, when some of his supporters rioted and killed 22 policemen in Chauri-Chaura, Gandhi called off the rebellion. He felt personally responsible for the killings, and he did not want to kill the British to achieve peace and justice for his people. He believed that killing to get what you want was wrong, and he chose to fail, rather than achieve independence for India. He continued to stand by his principles of nonviolence, and earned the title of Mahatma - "The Great Soul."

During the second World War, the Moslem League broke from Gandhi and demanded that India be divided into two countries - one mostly Moslem and one mostly Hindu. Since every city, town and village had mixed populations of many religions and sects, Gandhi did not agree with their position. He felt that this division would lead to war, and in 1947, when the British divided the country into India and Pakistan, his prediction came true.

During this time of civil war, Gandhi resided in the state of Bengal, in Eastern India. He brought peace to that part of the country. He then went to Delhi and accomplished the same thing there, after which he planned to move to the newly created country of Pakistan and plead for peace. But on January 30, 1948, his peaceful mission ended. He was assassinated by a fanatic he had helped free from British rule.

■ The Suffragettes

In Britain and the United States they worked for decades to win equal-

ity in voting rights, first through calm persuasion and, when that failed, through civil disobedience, a tactic that protesters would adopt later. They broke street lamps, cut telephone lines and slashed museum paintings. One suffragist threw herself under the king's horse during a race and was killed.

In March 1913, 5,000 women staged a suffrage pageant in Washington, withstanding a mob's attacks until cavalry troops intervened. "Nothing less than riots," was an associated press correspondent's description.



Eight months later in London, a protest at parliament became "black Friday," which a historian described as "a battle between the police and not the unemployed, the homeless or the destitute -- but middle- and upper-class women of all ages." Not all agreed with the escalation or the Pankhurst style of leadership and a number of members left the group in 1907 with Despard, Edith How Martyn, Teresa Hillington-Greig, Octavia Lewin, and Caroline Hodgson to form another militant, but this time nonviolent, organisation: the Women's Freedom League which engaged in acts of civil disobedience.

Suu Kyi remains in detention, having rejected an offer to free her if she will leave Burma and withdraw from politics.

■ Aldo Capitini, Italy

He was during Mussolini reign very active in covert, anti-fascism propaganda among the youth of central Italy. He wrote a book where he stressed the infinite potentialities inherent in any layman, since a great experience of liberation may start from an interior process, although oppressed by a negative society; a characteristic statement of this period is : "God is not truth, God is to choose". Although he did not belong to any political party, his life became an example among the Italian anti-fascists, He observed that "the fundamental question is not the knowledge of the method but to have the will, to be open to the spirit of nonviolence".

In 1961 he launched a peace march, (at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis) Perugia – Assisi (28 km). For the first time the march collected together all eminent friends of peace, although coming from very different ideologies (philosophers as N. Bobbio and A. Calogero were his



close friends). This event started an Italian tradition: the peace march was reiterated several times (twice in 1999) as the most important national peace action.

■ **Albert Einstein, Switzerland**

Einstein believed in nonviolence and opposed World War I. As he put it, “a moral attitude to life, love of justice and knowledge, and a desire for personal independence influenced me.” Thus, he supported Jews and their desire for a homeland in Palestine, not as a political state, but as a place where Jews could develop their culture and share the land with their neighbours.



■ **Martin Luther King, US**



Martin Luther King, Jr. came from a hard-working, honest and well-educated middle-class family. He studied the writings of Mahatma Gandhi during his student days, and realized that Gandhi’s methods of nonviolent resistance were the correct tools to use to gain civil rights for poor minorities. To those who accused him of

causing trouble, King replied that the downtrodden and mistreated people can only get justice and peace by agitating nonviolently until their grievances were redressed.

The Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-1956 gave the Reverend King his first chance to practice nonviolent resistance to unjust laws. Rosa Parks, a black seamstress, refused to give up her seat in the bus to a white passenger, which was required by the law in the south at that time. For this she was arrested and summoned to court. The black citizens of Montgomery, Alabama decided to boycott the buses for one day. This boycott proved to be so successful that they continued it. They refused to ride the buses at all until they were given what they considered to be civil rights under the law. All they asked for was courteous treatment from the bus drivers, seating in the buses to follow an orderly pattern. That included white people in the front and blacks in the back of the bus, and jobs for black drivers, especially on the bus routes populated by minority citizens.

Dr. King was named the leader of this boycott. During the 382-day or-

deal, he succeeded in getting his people to walk, ride mules or bikes, and to car-pool, but never to ride the bus to work, school or play. During this time, Dr. King was harassed, imprisoned, and humiliated. His home was even bombed, but he never retaliated physically. He taught his followers to use peace, not violence, to win their battles. The highest court in the land, the Supreme Court, finally heard the case, and decided that the cause was just. The buses of Montgomery were finally integrated. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace in 1964.

■ **Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, Northern Ireland**

The two women led marches in which Protestants and Catholics walked together in demonstrations for peace and against violence. Williams and Corrigan “have shown us what ordinary people can do to promote peace.” They had the courage to take the first step. “They did so in the name of humanity and love of their neighbour; someone had to start forgiving. ... Love of one’s neighbour is one of the foundation stones of the humanism on which our western civilisation is built.” It is vitally important that it “should shine forth when hatred and revenge threaten to dominate.” Theirs was “a courageous unselfish act that proved an inspiration to thousands, that lit a light in the darkness...” Nobel Peace Prize 1967.



■ **Patrice Lumumba, Congo**

Independence speech: “...We are going to put an end to suppression of free thought and see to it that all our citizens enjoy to the full the fundamental liberties foreseen in the Declaration of the Rights of Man. We are going to do away with all discrimination of every variety and assure for each and all the position to which human dignity, work, and dedication entitles him. We are going to rule not by the peace of guns and bayonets but by a peace of the heart and the will...”



■ **“The Mandela Conundrum. South Africa**

Nelson Mandela’s initial campaign against apartheid was based on nonviolence. Then he judged that sabotage and even the arms struggle



had their place in the fight against one of the most violent systems the world has known. He received the Nobel Peace Prize (Nobel apparently created the award to make up for inventing dynamite). Much of the campaign that led to the end of apartheid was in fact based on nonviolence: international pressure, civil disobedience and Mandela's own refusal to leave prison (by not renouncing violence) which further increased the international pressure. Should

he take his place in this tree of nonviolent leaders? This debate may help us clarify many issues."

■ Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma

The sources of her inspiration were Mahatma Gandhi, about whom she had learned when her mother was the ambassador to India, and her father, Aung San, the leader in Burma's struggle for liberation. She was only two when he was assassinated, but she had made his life a centre



of her studies. From Gandhi she drew her commitment to nonviolence, from her father the understanding that leadership was a duty and that one can only lead in humility and with the confidence and respect of the people to be led. Both were examples for her of independence and modesty, and Aung San represented what was called "a profound simplicity"

(Nobel Peace Prize speech). At the ceremony for Aung San Suu Kyi in December 1991, she was still being held in detention by the military dictatorship in Myanmar (Burma) and could only be represented by her two sons, her husband and her picture facing the audience.

The National league for democracy was formed, with Suu Kyi as general secretary. It promoted a policy of nonviolence and civil disobedience. Defying a ban, Suu Kyi made a speech-making tour throughout the country to large audiences.

Suu kyi continued to campaign despite harassment, arrests and killings by soldiers. She was prohibited from standing for election.

There was a famous incident in Irawaddy delta when Suu Kyi courageously walked toward soldiers' rifles aiming at her. She was placed under house arrest, without charge or trial. Despite her detention her party won the elections with 82% of parliamentary seats. The military Junta refused to recognise the results.

She was granted 1990 Rafto human rights prize and was the winner of 1991 Nobel peace prize.

■ Shirin Ebadi, Iran

“As a lawyer, judge, lecturer, writer and activist, she has spoken out clearly and strongly in her country, Iran, and far beyond its borders. She has stood up as a sound professional, a courageous person, and has never heeded the threats to her own safety.

Her principal arena is the struggle for basic human rights, and no society deserves to be labelled civilised unless the rights of women and children are respected. In an era of violence, she has consistently supported non-violence. It is fundamental to her view that the supreme political power in a community must be built on democratic elections. She favours enlightenment and dialogue as the best path to changing attitudes and resolving conflict.” (Nobel Peace Prize speech)



■ Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, Russia

Leader and president of the USSR 1985–91. He attempted to revive the faltering Soviet economy through economic reforms (perestroika) and liberalise society and politics through glasnost (openness) and competition in elections, and to halt the arms race abroad through arms reduction agreements with the USA. He pulled Soviet troops out of Afghanistan and allowed the Soviet-bloc states in

central Europe greater autonomy, a move which soon led to the break-up of the USSR and end of the Cold War. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1990 for promoting greater openness in the USSR and helping to end the Cold War. He launched with other Peace Prize winners the “Decade of Peace and Non Violence for the children of the world” programme for the first 10 years of the new millennium to be dedicated to Education for Non Violence, now run by UNESCO.



■ Rigoberta Menchú, Guatemala

It was announced in October 1992 that the Nobel Peace prize would go to Rigoberta Menchú, a Mayan Indian of Guatemala “in recognition of her work for social justice and ethno-cultural reconciliation based on



respect for the rights of indigenous peoples.” That Menchú did not turn to violence, but to political and social work for her people is the reason why she received the prize. She became an active member of the Committee for Campesino Unity and then helped found the Revolutionary Christians. Menchú explained that “we understood revolutionary in the real meaning of the word ‘transformation.’ If I had chosen the armed struggle, I would be in the mountains now.” Although she has admitted her book contains some events later proven to be not true, the Nobel committee accepted it as a true representation of the lives of Guatemalan Indians, if not her real biography.

■ **Mario Rodriguez Cobos, pen-name Silo, Argentina**



An Argentinean thinker and writer who, as a response to the violence around the world and especially the military dictatorships of South America, launched a nonviolence movement in his hometown of Mendoza. Throughout the sixties his thinking developed to the point where the first public exposition of his work was made in 1969 in a location called Punta de Vacas in the Andes mountain range with a speech called “The Healing of Suffering”. His movement has developed since then and has developed expressions in the political, social and cultural fields through the formation in many countries of the Humanist Party, the Community for Human Development and the Humanist Centre of Cultures, each of which bases their activities on the principles of nonviolence and anti-discrimination. Today, the philosophy of this Movement is known by the name New or Universalist Humanism and can be distilled down to two primary principles:

1. Solidarity - Treat others the way you would like to be treated.
2. Coherence - Think, feel and act in the same way.

Other projects of Education, Health and Development continue growing in more than 120 countries in most of the continents. Although Silo has retired from active participation in the Humanist Movement he continues to write and is taking his deeply spiritual Message of Nonviolence and of social and personal simultaneous change to all the corners of the Earth.