



## Gospel According Tolstoy

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By the fall of 1879, Count Leo Tolstoy, the 51-year-old author of "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina" had arrived at the conclusion that he had achieved nothing of lasting value and that his life was meaningless and evil. From this point until his death in 1910, Tolstoy embarked on a spiritual journey, a search for God and the nature of truth, that became the dominant theme of his life and subsequent writings. The publications of his new-found religious and moral beliefs and his condemnation of capitalism, private property, and the division of labour eventually incited the anger of the tsarist government and led to his excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church. In early 1880 Tolstoy began work on a detailed study of the Gospels that he completed in 1891. This three-volume text entitled "A Harmony, Translation, and Investigation of the Four Gospels" consisted of an analysis of the Greek Gospels, as well as a critique of the Russian Orthodox translation of the Gospels. Structuring his work around the life of Jesus, Tolstoy ends each section of this analysis with his own version of the portion of the Gospels in question. In "The Gospel according to Tolstoy", Patterson has taken those summaries from the original work and has put them together to form Tolstoy's version of the teachings of Jesus. Patterson has also included Tolstoy's introduction to his original work and his concluding argument against the Resurrection, in which he explains his views on the essence of Christianity. In order to situate Tolstoy's version of the Gospel within the larger space of his religious views, Patterson's introduction explains the primary features of Tolstoy's thinking as it unfolds in his other religious texts. He includes an explanation of Tolstoy's method of reading the Gospels and the philosophical outlook underlying that method. The introduction, therefore, is intended to bring out the reasons for the idiosyncratic rendition of the Gospel that Tolstoy finally prepared. Because Tolstoy's religious thought is central to everything he wrote during the last 30 years of his life, a reading of "The Gospel According to Tolstoy" will assist students and scholars in their efforts to understand such major later fiction as "The Death of Ivan Ilyich", "Father Sergius", "Master and Man", and his third major novel, "Resurrection".

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