

# NONVIOLENCE EXPERIENCES



Antiquity and the Medieval Era



Working Group on  
**Christian Nonviolence**  
Christianity and Justice Research Center  
Centre d'estudis

**CJ** Cristianisme i Justícia

"Move Nonviolence" is an educational commitment to initiate a process of personal transformation before the conflicts we face in our times, creating nonviolent strategies that free up situations that are at an impasse. This tool consists of a series of videos accompanied by the corresponding educational units so that the teaching guides have the material and direction for their work. The dynamics of this document are classified into sections and their topics in accordance with their appearance in the video. In some sections we suggest suitable options for each end-user profile. This proposal is intended for groups who can be accompanied by someone with a capacity for in-depth reflection on each subject.

Acquire all the material

**www.movenonviolence.net**

Each unit plan incorporates a series of associated material accessible from the project website: [www.movenonviolence.net](http://www.movenonviolence.net). The material of this specific unit is found in: <https://movenonviolence.net/U7>.



## Learning From History

As we make our list of history's nonviolent characters, we find that we are missing evidence of women. Nevertheless, we are sure there were important women who stood out for their values and peaceful fight, but who were never described in writing due to the androcentrism of their time. For this reason, despite our efforts, this list lacks the desired party. It is important to underscore this cultural violence now, as we begin our journey through the history of nonviolence.

of the planet's animals have become extinct and that in order to speak out against this, he/she, as a famous artist, has been asked to draw on a poster a fantastic animal featuring what most stood out about each lost animal: the long nose of the long-nosed monkey, the head of the axolotl, the koala's feet, etc. The child will not know how to draw it and will have to ask the others to show him/her the animal, while also asking for the colours they've used to colour it. With everyone's cooperation, the volunteer will manage to draw the animal, which will become the group's ecology mascot. Next, the participants are asked how they felt during this activity and everyone is invited to think: when we must do something we've never done before, we need the help of others with experience: we need the "colours and shapes" that we don't have, in order to colour it. Like those who have drawn animals, if we "draw" nonviolence better today, we will be a better inspiration for the generations to come. Many people in history have practiced

### ■ CHILDREN

One child volunteers to leave the room. The others are given photos of unusual animals in full colour with the names of the animals on the back (koala, axolotl, long-nosed monkey, etc). For five minutes, each child uses coloured markers to colour his/her animal on a sheet paper, and must remember its name. When they finish, the photos are collected and the volunteer is asked to come back into the room. The volunteer is told that many

nonviolence. By learning from them, we will have the tools and ideas on how to act. It's a matter of transmitting to the next generation our sensorial experience (in colours and shapes, in this game, but in the form of nonviolence in reality).

#### ■ YOUTH AND ADULTS

Have the participants get into small groups of four people. Give each group a sheet of paper. Have everyone leave the room except the first group. Each member of that group will invent a verse of poetry, and add it to the other verses on the sheet of paper. When they finish, the second group comes in and uses its own sheet to continue the first group's

poem, and so on. At the end, have everyone come back together to read the entire poem. How did everyone feel? Have the participants act out the dynamic: each group was a generation of history composing nonviolence (a work of art). The last generation can always learn from the others. Though they don't see how those before them have done it, they do leave a historic footprint on the sheet. If we want to practice nonviolence, it is highly valuable to learn from each generation in history. As imperfect as we may be, we can draw inspiration from their works of art to generate nonviolence today.

**www.movenonviolence.net  
info@movenonviolence.net**

Working Group on  
Christianity and Justice Research Center

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**CJ** Cristianisme i Justícia

 Christian Nonviolence

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it. The members of the powerful group are invited to answer. At the end, both groups express what they have felt at each moment of the experience. When was the oppressed group freer: in the first case or in the second case? And between the second and the third cases, when were they freer? What enables the powerful to "buy" workers, despite the oppression? What will the defeated group want, regardless of who that group is? When will there be final peace? What is gained by changing the game rules (strike), as opposed to using the brute force of the tug of war?

### ■ CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The participants are invited to engage in a tug of war. They form two groups. One group will have more people and therefore be the majority group (the Egyptian workers), and the other group will be the minority (powerful people representing the pharaoh).

Download [Unit 5](#) and compare it with the strike of the Egyptians described in this section. What elements do you feel they have in common and what differences do you see? Discuss the directly related concepts, such as *legitimacy, consensus and cohesion*.



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## Ancient Times

### 1

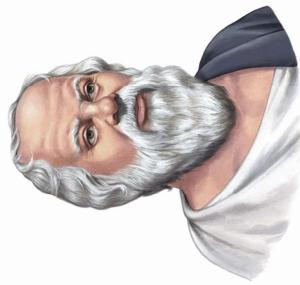
**Egypt: Strikes for Decent Wages**  
Download [U7/video](#) while reading the [transcription](#). Specifically, work together to learn about the first known act of nonviolence in the history of humankind. That act was led by Amennakht and other workers in the year 1166 BC in Deir el-Medina (Egypt), as they challenged the pharaoh Ramesses III.

### ■ ADULTS

Download [Unit 5](#) and compare it with the strike of the Egyptians described in this section. What elements do you feel they have in common and what differences do you see? Discuss the directly related concepts, such as *legitimacy, consensus and cohesion*.

After "buying more strength", the powerful group is now the larger, majority group: they pull the rope and win. In a second round, the members of the minority (oppressed) group convince their members to come back. With no sweets (source of power) to enable them to take control, they tug on the rope and the oppressed group (which is now the majority) wins. Finally, the workers are secretly advised to let go of the rope suddenly at the start of the game and sit on the ground, holding a strike, until the members of the powerful group are ready to negotiate some minimum human rights. The game begins, and the powerful group members are perplexed. If they don't understand, the guide speaks to the group on strike, asking them to explain

## Greece: Disobeying Injustice to Improve Policy



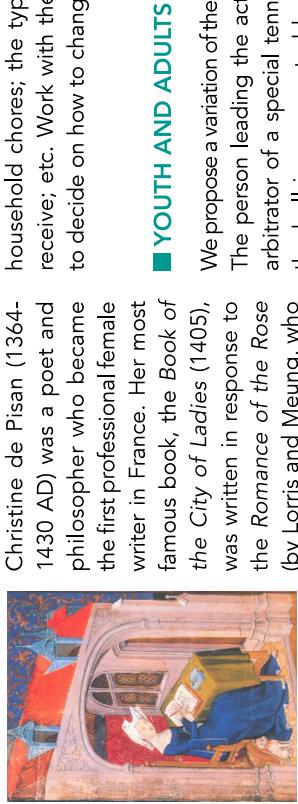
### ■ CHILDREN AND YOUTH

During playtime, we play with children or youths that we don't always know very well: some only join in for that little while. How can we integrate them? More still: how can we confront the behaviour of our classmates who discriminate against newcomers? If you believe they should be brought into the group, are you aware that you may be rejected by your group, in other words, "punished" by your own people? What will you do? Why? In what ways do you identify with Socrates?

### ■ ADULTS

Groucho Marx once said: "Those are my principles, and if you don't like them, well, I have others..." . As a group, think about what principles are in life. What are your principles? Draw a scale of 1 to 10 on a sheet of paper and put them in 'order'. How do you contrast each decision? How do you defend them against even the ultimate consequences? Present your scales in public. Mohandas K. Gandhi asserted, "Better to die than to kill". The life of the other is an absolute, but we as individuals are free to sacrifice our own lives for what we believe in. Think of historic events that were similar to the case of Socrates, where someone ended up sacrificing his/her own life to defend a conviction. Share them.

## Subversive Literature: Christine de Pisan and the Feminist Struggle



Christine de Pisan (1364-1430 AD) was a poet and philosopher who became the first professional female writer in France. Her most famous book, the Book of the City of Ladies (1405), was written in response to the Romance of the Rose (by Lorris and Meung, who reduced the woman to an object of desire). In this novel, Christine denounces the women's situation of her time, envisioning instead a women's society where women could govern and receive education.

**■ YOUTH AND ADULTS**

We propose a variation of the value barometer. The person leading the activity acts as the arbitrator of a special tennis match, where the ball is represented by a microphone. The participants position themselves in line, forming the net of the special tennis court. The guide utters a gender equality statement with a certain degree of ambiguity (for example: "women are equal to men", "any task can be done by people of either sex" ...). Straight away, the participants position themselves at one end of the court (in favour) or at the other end (against). Next, the arbitrator gives the ball (the microphone) to the first person who wishes to speak in the smaller of the two groups, and that person must justify with a single argument why he/ she has gone over to that end of the court. From that point on, the participants may move in closer or even cross over to the other side of the court, if they change their opinions after listening to the arguments. The groups alternate, taking turns receiving the ball, which in turn goes round to the different members of the groups at each end of the court. Finally, the arbitrator takes the ball and asks: "who wants to reformulate the statement?" The participant who wishes to speak reformulates the statement by changing a few words, to make it clear. The game starts over again with the new reformulated statement. Subsequently, the game can be started anew with a different sentence.

### ■ CHILDREN

Have only the boys in the group undergo a minor injustice (they get only half the recreation time, no snack time, etc.). Bring them together with the girls and allow them to protest, while guiding them to put themselves into the shoes of those who suffer injustice for the mere fact of being girls: discrimination in terms of their play space; in terms of their

## Subversive Literature: Lysistrata, Orthodoxy, Women's Sex Strike

The great author of Greek comedy in Antiquity, Aristophanes, wrote the play *Lysistrata* and staged it for the first time in Athens (in the year 411 BC). This is a comedy where *Lysistrata*, a Greek woman of great qualities, leads and brings together a movement of women to withhold sexual privileges from their husbands and lovers until the Peloponnesian War ends. After the painful oath, the women revolt and take control of the acropolis. *Lysistrata* is ultimately interrogated for the situation and explains that the foolish decisions of the men at war affect everyone, and the women's opinions are never heard.

The plot thickens as the men go mad, suffering from their sexual abstinence, until the unsustainable situation ultimately forces the parties involved to resolve their differences and end the war.

Do you know of any other subversive literary texts that have marked history? We invite you to read a few others:

- Antigone (Sophocles, 442 BC) is a Greek tragedy about civil disobedience.
- Legend of Ashoka (256 BC), in India, where, after the war in Kalinga, the emperor converts to nonviolence and Buddhism.
- Book of Daniel, chapter 3 (175-164 BC), where Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego disobey King Nebuchadnezzar because of his Jewish faith.

- YOUTH AND ADULTS**  
Watch the play *Lysistrata* on the big screen.  
The play has been adapted, forming this version in English: [06 Lysistrata](#)



Discuss it as a group: What did you like the most and the least? Based on your knowledge the subject, what elements of the story's strategy seem nonviolent to you? Why?

### ■ CHILDREN

Work in pairs to interview different people (the people you see walking down the street, the teachers or students at school, etc.), asking this single question: "Have you ever stopped doing something that was very important to someone in order to make that person decide to change an injustice?" If they wish to share their stories freely, take the examples. At the end, have everyone come together to assess the quantities and qualities of the answers and guide the group to think about disobedience and non-cooperation in the face of major injustices.

### ■ CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Under the directions of a group of 3 or 4 patricians, the plebeians (majority) must use their bodies to represent the letters of a social ideal ("truth", "freedom", "justice", etc.). Each time they do so, the entire group get 10 points. If they get to 50 points, a special article of clothing (cape, beret, etc.) is given only to the patricians. At the 70-point mark, they are given pastries. At the 100-point mark, cardboard medallions are hung on their necks and they are applauded. The plebeians will protest this injustice more and more. The group guide will provoke them, so that they learn from the plebeians of ancient Rome. If they decide not to cooperate and leave, the group will lose 10 points every 2 minutes, gradually losing privileges, and if they get to 0, they die. They must negotiate better rights or distribute the earnings to get the plebeians to cooperate again. At the end, everyone comes together to assess and interpret the dynamic.

### ■ ADULTS

Create a play where people act out different social, labour and civil protests, similar to those of the plebeians in the historic protest in Rome, yet adapted to the reality of the 21st century. Once the script is written, rehearse it, trying to put yourselves into each character's shoes, while at the same time connecting with the assertions of each side. How did you feel doing this? Was the script of the play realistic enough? Come together to discuss what you have learned.

## 3 Rome: Non-Cooperation to Gain Political Freedom



### ■ CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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## Ireland and India: Hunger Strike for Debts



Hunger strikes have been a major element in the path of nonviolence throughout history. During the pre-Christian era in Ireland, people commonly practised "Tros-cadh", or "Cealachán", which consisted of a hunger strike at the door of the house of the person who did not pay his/her debt. This would put the debtor in a constantly tough spot, making him/her feel ashamed and therefore spurring the person to resolve the conflict.

This system of persuasion cannot only be found in Europe; it has also been practiced since ancient times in India, where it is documented as far back as the 5th century BC under the name "dharma". Though prohibited by the British government in 1861, this tactic is still used today in certain places.

### ■ CHILDREN

In groups of 3 or 4, try to find ways to solve the following conflict. You lent a valuable object to a classmate and that person hasn't returned it to you. What would you do to recover the item in a non-violent way without forcing the person? Where do you see the difficulty? Here are a few questions to help keep the dialogue going, get the group to understand the conflict and find solutions:

Have you thought about why the person is acting this way? Is there any way to help him/her with his/her problem or explain to that person your situation, to get the person to

return the borrowed object? Be creative in inventing ways to get it back. At the end, you can discuss how hunger strikes have been used throughout history as a way to demand rights in the face of serious life-or-death injustices.

### ■ YOUTH AND ADULTS

Work as a group to try to understand what a hunger strike is and in which cases it would be an acceptable and effective act of nonviolence. Then define the words pressure and coercion. Here are a couple of guidelines to end the debate:

- **Pressure:** Influence that obligates someone to do or say something he/she does not want to do or say, but that excludes any damage to the person's physical integrity, moreover protecting his/her basic needs.

- **Coercion:** Force that violates or punishes the other person through pressure or damage.

Can a hunger strike constitute an act of nonviolent pressure to demand what is fair? Can nonviolence accept coercion? Guide the debate by parsing out the requirements of such an action (a case of extreme injustice, social support to the perpetrator, the need for a technical and support team, etc.). Make a clear distinction between the hunger strike and suicide: a hunger strike does not aim for death and in fact values life; it is the last resort to force a change, as it considers that solving the flagrant injustice is even more necessary than life itself.

## Ramon Llull: Interfaith dialogue

A prolific writer, theologian, philosopher, mathematician and poet born from a well-to-do family in Mallorca (1232). Despite his contradictions as an advocate of non-violence, particularly due to his support of the Crusades, Llull proposed an interfaith dialogue with Jews and Muslims that greatly resembled nonviolent communication, at a time of violent fighting among the religions. His aim was to convert others to Christianity, not using weapons, but rather through reasoning and dialogue. For this reason, he decided to learn the languages of others, avoid discrimination among the agents of the dialogue and work to find shared points among the religions, while understanding the differences from the point of view of a greater and unified truth. His activity as a preacher, first as a layman and from age 63 onward as a Franciscan of the Order of Friars Minor, his book *The Gentile and The Three Wise Men*, and his opening of monasteries to study the thought of other religions and their languages, were very specific actions of dialogue that sought to mitigate violence.

### ■ YOUTH



05

Look at the picture: what does it aim to illustrate? Next, form groups of three people and have the groups find information on the main characteristics of a religion. Each group should work on a different religion. Recreate a dialogue the way Llull did in *The Book of the Gentile and The Three Wise Men*. Do you think the principles are incompatible? Does listening and enriching yourselves mean giving up your own beliefs? The guide may propose having the group accept the commitment to try to listen to others.

### ■ ADULTS

Set up a guided tour at some religious centre that you do not know or that you feel is very different from your own religious beliefs. If possible, try to see that the tour guide is a follower of that religion and knows it well. After the tour, have the group meet up in a different place. How did you all feel? Following Raymond Llull's steps, do you see any points in common between that religion and your own beliefs?

### ■ CHILDREN

The surprise room can be set up to contain a calculator, a glass of water, some gloves, a book, a computer keyboard and a telephone. Six children volunteer to be blindfolded and stand in a line. One by one, they are taken to silently touch a single object. Each child is led to a different object, so that none of the objects are repeated. Next, still with the blindfolds, they are asked to say out loud what room their objects belong to (the person who has touched the book can say a library; the one who has touched the glass of water

# 5

## Moz: The Defence of Peace in China

perspective of Christian ethics. The group guide places three signs with the titles of the three types of nonviolence mentioned above at three corners of the room. The participants come together in the fourth corner, and when each sentence is read aloud, they must take one step forward in the direction of the type of nonviolence indicated by the initial number(s), or in the opposite direction if they disagree with it, in keeping with their beliefs:

(1) I will use nonviolence depending on its efficacy in helping me to achieve my goals.

(1) I will use nonviolence purely to take the power away from those who oppress.

(1 and 2) I will not be a vegetarian; I don't feel it's necessary to implement nonviolence in the personal realm, but rather only in the social and political realms.

(1 and 2) The other party of the conflict ought to be included in the solution, to achieve final peace. We must respect their human dignity and remember to keep reconciliation on the horizon.

(3) I will try to live without harming any other form of life in my personal decisions.

(3) I want to work on my inner self, to transform myself and be a completely non-violent person.

At the end, everyone looks around at where the participants have ended up within the "geography" of nonviolence. You can have the group sit in a circle and talk about what they have felt and learned, and find out whether this activity has changed the way they think about things. Working all together, the participants brainstorm to come up with the names of important people in the history of nonviolence (they can be those they have learned about in unit 6 or others), and think about what type of nonviolence they have practiced and why. For debate: if a person has not set the goal of reconciliation for ultimate peace, can pragmatic nonviolence be considered a "complete" form of nonviolence?

## 5.1 Mozi: The Defence of Peace in China

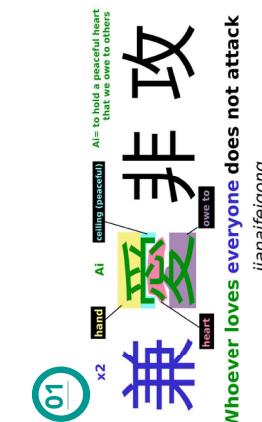
## 5.1.1 Mozi: The Defence of Peace in China

Master Mo (Mozi, "zi" signifying "master", 470-391 BC) was born in the Chinese state of Lu. Though he was educated in Confucianism, he disagreed with it because of the excessive rites and aristocracy, which he believed would not help to make the world a better place. He started a pacifist path of his own based on simplicity and unconditional universal love (free of dependence on reciprocity), ethics and social order. He denounced offensive war and guided his followers to prevent war through defensive techniques. In his writing *Condemnation of Offensive War*, which was the first work in Chinese literature to speak out against war, he asserts a famous pacifist argument: it is deeply self-contradictory to severely punish a person who murders another person and at the same time, leniently tolerate a government that murders thousands of people when at war.

**ADULTS**

Warm up the session with a big cardboard Injustice thermometer. We are the disciples of Mozi and we must "take the temperature" of the country where we live, in keeping with two of his principles: Actions must be governed by love for everyone, rather than by interest, and it is unfair to treat different people differently, according to their jobs, how much money they have, etc. Form ten groups and assign each group a set of opposites: rich/poor; famous/unknown; civil/military; natives/immigrants; royalty/townspeople; educated/literate; honourable people/de-linquents; heterosexuals/LGBTI+, with beliefs similar to/completely different from my own; governors/citizens. As disciples, each group will then discuss how the two principles reveal injustices within the polarity itself (for example: we treat famous people differently than the way we treat the poor, etc.), and find three real cases (actually experienced, from the media, etc.) that exemplify those injustices. Afterwards, when the injustices are shared, if the rest of the group feel that the examples provide good arguments for the injustice, another degree is coloured in on the thermometer, starting with 35° C. At the end, think about this: Does the country have a fever? Invent nonviolent "medicines" to bring the fever down.

## 5.1.2 Children and Youth



**Whoever loves everyone does not attack**  
*jianfeigong*



This chengyu (Chinese saying) represents Mozi's philosophy of love, which went beyond family ties. Hence, he gave love (the character Ai) a new, universal meaning (literally double love); in other words, without making any distinction between people (rich/poor, etc.). The proverb means that those who love all people resist without attacking anyone, for

## Medieval Age. Abbot Oliba: Using the Laws to Reduce Violence

Abbot Oliba was a Benedictine monk of noble origin who lived during the expansion of feudalism (10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuryAD) and became the Bishop of Vic. During this period, there were frequent violent disputes among the nobility, the peasants and the Church regarding the ownership and management of the land. Abbot Oliba was the mediator of some of those disputes until 1027, when the Synod of Toulous (currently belonging to France) organised the Assembly Peace and Truce of God. These truces maintained the sagreries (protected areas within a thirty-mile radius around the churches, where violence was prohibited under punishment of excommunication), and established periods of truce from Saturday to Monday. Hence, during the long weekends, all the people of the county of Roussillon were called to refrain from combat. Moreover, people were asked not to attack churches, monasteries, clergymen or the members of the congregation, who attended religious worship.

Later, Abbot Oliba held a new synod in 1033 in Vic, prolonging the days of truce from Thursday to Monday and extending protection to the local people who attended the market. Throughout the 11<sup>th</sup> century, these practices spread to Occitania, where Assemblies of Peace and Truce were also held in Narbonne and Nice. All these measures made Abbot Oliba, the great grandson of the founding count of the county of Barcelona, an important figure in the history of peace in Catalonia.

Watch [U7/video](#) of this unit, as an introduction to the session. Next, also watch this video produced by the International Red Cross on International Humanitarian Law: [O3 Rules of war \(in a nutshell\)](#). Finally, set up a group debate to establish the points in common between The Peace and Truce of God and International Humanitarian Law. The aim is to update the experiences of peace and nonviolence with recent realities of the current world. What causes and what objectives are shared by these two initiatives, which are nearly a thousand years apart?



## St. Francis of Assisi: Generating Peace Within to Disarm Conflicts

### ■ CHILDREN

Watch this description of feudalism: [O2 Feudalism](#). Have the group work with the context of the era: what were the rights and duties of each class? Draw a mural together. Now watch [U7/video](#) of the educational unit. Next, act out an Assembly of Peace and Truce of God.

### ■ YOUTH AND ADULTS

Watch [U7/video](#) of this unit, as an introduction to the session. Next, also watch this video produced by the International Red Cross on International Humanitarian Law: [O3 Rules of war \(in a nutshell\)](#). Finally, set up a group debate to establish the points in common between The Peace and Truce of God and International Humanitarian Law. The aim is to update the experiences of peace and nonviolence with recent realities of the current world. What causes and what objectives are shared by these two initiatives, which are nearly a thousand years apart?



St. Francis of Assisi represents *holistic nonviolence*, which starts from within and radiates outward, extending to people, animals and nature in general. He lived during feudal times (12th-13th centuries), amid violent conflicts and the oppression of the poorest people, which led to widespread poverty. St. Francis proposed a poverty- and love-based lifestyle that recovers coherence, compassion and the inclusion of the enemy. This love for fellow beings was a challenge in a milieu of injustice, and particularly within a corrupt ecclesiastic reality that was in need of change and reform. St. Francis called for an inner peace that would then be expanded and extended to others. Through his ceremonies and prayers, he came to intercede in conflicts including those of Arezzo, Bologna, Siena and Assisi, soon becoming known for his skills as a peacemaker. In the middle of the crusades against the Muslims, in 1219, he went to Egypt with the intention of mediating with the Sultan Al -Malik Al-Kamil, who received him as a man of peace. His magnetism not only captivated people, but all of nature. A trace of this virtue can be seen in the legend of the Wolf of Gubbio. St. Francis proposed a key conversion: to choose fraternity with all living beings as a permanent lifestyle.

### ■ YOUTH AND ADULTS

For the youngest ones, we propose this poetic story: [04 A Day in the Life of St Francis](#). Have the group discuss it all together: According to St. Francis, what does peace consist of? Philip believes peace is the result of its having been preached. In contrast, St. Francis believes it is the path itself: to create harmony and to love all the living beings that we encounter in our lives. How can we spread peace where we are? Offer a few examples.

**■ YOUTH AND ADULTS**  
In front of the group, make a distinction among the three types of nonviolence:

(1) Pragmatic nonviolence, where nonviolence is a method used to take the power of the other. There is no ethical consideration in this case. Rather, nonviolence is chosen over violence simply for its efficacy. (Examples: Henry D. Thoreau, Gene Sharp...).

(2) Socio-politically ethical, which includes ethical principles to transform society and politics. (Ex: Leymah R. Gbowee, Martin L. King...).

(3) Holistically ethical, where nonviolence is an integral way of life, to stop harming all forms of life, even when taking personal decisions. (Examples: Mohandas K. Gandhi, Lanza del Vasto...).

Offer a brief summary (with the help of the introduction) of the biography of St. Francis of Assisi: his would be an example that aspired to holistic nonviolence, from the specific

