

## The Distortion of Petr Chelčický's Ideas through the Prism of Leo Tolstoy's Teachings

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The article examines Leo Tolstoy's distorted perspective on Petr Chelčický's ideas. The distinctive feature of this perspective is characterized by an emphasis on several superficial similarities between Chelčický's criticism of war and Tolstoy's anarchist pacifism. At the same time, the prism in Tolstoy's perspective distorts or ignores significant discrepancies in their beliefs, including very different foundations of their teachings – such as their views on Holy Scripture, the Apostolic tradition, the Church, faith, dogmas, morality, and world history. From these fundamentally divergent beliefs arise the ideas of Chelčický and Tolstoy's, which seem similar and not vice versa. This misrepresentative perspective has undeservedly gained popularity among scholars, portraying Chelčický as a precursor to Tolstoy and thereby creating a flawed historiography. This perspective is not only incorrect but also contradicts Tolstoy's own assessments and rather impoverishes the theoretical foundations for the struggle against violence in the world.

Key words: Chelčický, Tolstoy, Christianity, history, church, pacifism, violence, state

At the end of the 19th century, more than 400 years after his death, the Czech preacher Petr Chelčický suddenly gained worldwide recognition. This resurgence happened largely due to Leo Tolstoy, who praised Chelčický's ideas, pronounced him as a person who “revived Christian

truth,”<sup>1</sup> and made significant efforts to disseminate Chelčický's main work, *The Net of Faith*.<sup>2</sup> From Tolstoy's comments on Chelčický, it seems to follow that the Russian writer fully shared the Czech preacher's principal ideas. In this way, Tolstoy tried to construct a historiography of his teachings, tracing their main sources not only to the Sermon on the Mount but also to the statements of various prophets and thinkers, among whom an important place was given to Chelčický. Although Tolstoy was neither the first nor the last to claim a supposed close resemblance between his worldview and Chelčický's vision, he undoubtedly played a crucial role in the fact that Chelčický's legacy is often perceived through the prism of his, namely Tolstoyan, highly specific teachings.

Since the beginning, scholarly studies of Chelčický's legacy have primarily focused on his rejection of war, his demands that Christians abstain from secular affairs, and his criticism of the medieval papacy. In the comments on Chelčický, Tolstoy also concentrated exclusively on these topics, ignoring other subjects that were of crucial importance for the Czech thinker. But perhaps they were about uninteresting matters for Tolstoy? No, on the contrary, Chelčický's works address many issues that were significant not only to the Czech preacher but also to Tolstoy himself, for example:

- The meaning of world history;
- The significance of Jesus Christ;
- The foundational truths of Christian faith;
- The problem of the criterion of how to distinguish true Christianity from false;

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1 Tolstoy (1957b, p. 46).

2 It should be noted that Tolstoy's legacy continues to play a role in popularizing Chelčický's teachings. For example, Tom Lock, editor of the English translation of Chelčický's *O boji duchovním* (*On the Spiritual Battle*), notes, "I became interested in Petr Chelčický when I was reading Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, in which he laments the lack of information about Chelčický and exposes the 'conspiracy of silence' that surrounds the Gospel's message of nonviolence" Lock (2009, p. IV).

- The nature of the Church;
- The source and significance of the Bible for Christianity;
- The nature of the Eucharist.

Upon closer examination, it turns out that Chelčický and Tolstoy held exceptionally divergent views on these subjects, and this, for its part, led to salient differences in their critiques of violence, the state, and institutionalized forms of Christianity. In other words, the vastly different principles and premises led to what both Tolstoy himself and many researchers have seen as points of similarity between Tolstoyan ideas and Chelčický's teachings. The problem is that, to this day, pointing out the differences between these principles and premises has not, to the best of my knowledge, become the topic of any serious study.

Tolstoy regarded moral life as a complete and uncompromising rejection of violence, seeing the primary social sources of violence in the state and church-based forms of Christianity. When Tolstoy had learned of Chelčický's criticism of war, secular power, and the medieval papacy, he decided to present the forgotten Czech thinker as a herald of "true Christianity." However, the fact is that the fundamentals of Chelčický's teachings, as well as his understanding of what "true Christianity" is, were not only different but often incompatible with Tolstoy's views. Furthermore, Chelčický's criticism of war, the medieval papacy, and secular power is not as close to Tolstoy's philosophy as Tolstoy portrayed it. Actually, Tolstoy selectively appealed to Chelčický's ideas to emphasize superficial similarities with his own views – even to the point of attributing some modern concepts to the medieval Czech thinker – while remaining silent about the glaring discrepancies in their fundamental beliefs.

The discovery of these differences and the correction of historiography are long overdue and necessary tasks, but this is not all that makes my article original and relevant to the topic. Tolstoy integrated the rejection of violence into his complex, ambiguous, controversial, and contradictory religious-philosophical worldview, which is characterized by a categorical rejection of the Apostolic tradition, the Church, Holy Scripture, Christian

dogmas, and Sacraments. In contrast, Chelčický not only confessed the Apostolic tradition and Christian dogmas but also grounded his teachings in them.

Any attempt to compare the ideas of Chelčický and Tolstoy inevitably encounters various obstacles. The problem is not only in their peculiar styles and modes of argumentation but also in the fact that these two thinkers lived in different eras (the late Middle Ages and the late modern period), within distinct civilizational contexts (Western Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy), and, in addition, had different social, economic, and intellectual backgrounds. Another difficulty is that both Chelčický and Tolstoy were similar in their unsystematic and contradictory presentation of sophisticated religious and philosophical themes, the understanding of which, moreover, was in the process of continuous modifications. At the same time, the purpose of my article is not to provide a full-scale comparative analysis of their teachings, which would require far more extensive and detailed research. Below, I will just (1) examine the scopes of Tolstoy's knowledge of Chelčický's ideas, (2) identify Tolstoy's perspective on Chelčický's views, (3) critique that perspective, and (4) call attention to the inconsistencies in simplified historiography (that historiography in which Chelčický acts as Tolstoy's predecessor while the significance of carnal differences in their views on the most important issues are either ignored or downplayed).

Below, I focus on a critique of Tolstoy's reception of Chelčický's ideas, including their deliberate distortion. As I will demonstrate, even the excerpts from *The Net of Faith* translated into Russian – which essentially became Tolstoy's principal source of Chelčický's teachings – contain ideas that are radically different from those that formed the basis of Tolstoy's religious-philosophical worldview. I will refer to the Czech text of *The Net of Faith* as well as to other works by Chelčický only when necessary.

### Spreading the Opinion about Similarity

According to Tolstoy, his acquaintance with Chelčický's ideas began with a “letter from Prague,” written by a “professor of the local university.” In that letter, the unnamed professor pointed out that Tolstoy's views

were similar to those of the Czech preacher.<sup>3</sup> Initially, researchers thought that this professor was none other than Tomáš Masaryk, but some recent investigations have rejected this claim. It now appears that the letter's author was the physician, writer, and translator Pavel Durdík.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Durdík was probably the first to suggest the supposed similarity between the ideas of Chelčický and Tolstoy, which occurred in 1885.<sup>5</sup>

In 1886, another professor from Prague, Jaroslav Goll, found the affinity between the ideas of Chelčický and Tolstoy. Goll wrote a review of Tolstoy's essay *What I Believe?*, in which he casually noted that many years before the Russian novelist, similar views had been expressed by Chelčický.<sup>6</sup> In 1911, Adolf Černý, also a professor at Prague University, reacted to Tolstoy's death with a brief obituary, asserting that Tolstoy had become "the synthesis of the searching Slavic spirit" and had adopted Chelčický's position in affirming the "teaching of the rule of God and universal humanity (učení bohovlady a všelidství)."<sup>7</sup> To the best of my knowledge, the opinion regarding the close affinity between the teachings of Chelčický and Tolstoy – with a special emphasis on the categorical rejection of violence – has prevailed among Czech researchers up to the present day.<sup>8</sup>

Although Masaryk was not the author of the aforementioned letter, he repeatedly asserted the similarity between the ideas of Chelčický and Tolstoy, especially when he was already concentrating on political activity. For example, in an article published by a political magazine, he directly stated that Chelčický's interpretation of Christian love "fully anticipated Tolstoy's famous doctrine."<sup>9</sup> While Masaryk was rather critical of Tolstoy's doctrine of "non-resistance," another Czech political figure, Přemysl Pitter, devoted a small book to Chelčický, Tolstoy, and Masaryk. As an ardent pacifist, Pitter spoke enthusiastically about Chelčický and Tolstoy, declaring that "Chelčický, transferred to modern times, is Leo Tolstoy."<sup>10</sup>

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3 Tolstoy (1957d, p. 16).

4 See Maleček (2002).

5 Ibidem, p. 126.

6 Goll (1886, p. 184).

7 Černý (1911, p. 103).

8 See, for example, Hoblík (2013).

9 See Masaryk (1917, p. 37)

10 Pitter (1931, p. 13).

In 1893, after a lengthy delay, the Czech text of *The Net of Faith* was finally published in the Collection of the Department of Russian Language and Literature of the Imperial Academy of Sciences (hereinafter referred to as the *Collection*). Alongside this text, several excerpts, translated into Russian by Yuri Annenkov (hereinafter referred to as the excerpts from *The Net of Faith*), were also published. The *Introduction* to this publication, prepared by Vatroslav Jagić on the basis of a manuscript written by his Czech disciple (Josef Karásek), contained a profoundly wrong statement:

“The thinker most similar to Chelčický is Leo Tolstoy. His thoughts on the state, the Church, and the early times of Christianity are very similar in their essence to Chelčický’s thoughts on the same subjects. Moreover, both thinkers rely on a single source, i.e., the Bible.”<sup>11</sup>

Assertions of not merely similarity but near identity between the views of Chelčický and Tolstoy early became commonplace also among Russian scholars. In an article from 1906, a Slavic philologist, Alexander Yatzimirsky, despite the fact that his small paper was about Chelčický, devoted a disproportionate amount of space to uncritical quotations from Tolstoy’s text on Chelčický.<sup>12</sup> Also during Tolstoy’s lifetime, another Slavic philologist, Stepan Kulbakin, published an article with the telling title “Petr Chelčický, the Czech Tolstoy of the 15th Century.” Kulbakin’s entire article is built around the supposedly “striking similarity” between the ideas of Chelčický and Tolstoy.<sup>13</sup>

In the USSR, scholars of Czech and Russian literature rarely compared the teachings of Chelčický and Tolstoy. There is no evidence that the erroneous conclusion regarding the close affinity between their ideas had ever been questioned. On the contrary, in a brief commentary on the issue, Irina Poročkina asserted:

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<sup>11</sup> Jagić (1893, p. XXXV).

<sup>12</sup> See Yatzimirsky (1906).

<sup>13</sup> See Kulbakin (1909).

“The fact that Tolstoy so freely and confidently expounded the content of *The Net of Faith* and also sensitively captured the artistic expressiveness of this Czech monument of literature suggests the idea that the writer was familiar with Chelčický’s work in the original text and not from the Russian excerpts.”<sup>14</sup>

As will be seen below, Tolstoy neither expounded “confidently” on the content of *The Net of Faith* nor “was familiar with Chelčický’s work in the original.”

Another Soviet scholar, Lyudmila Lapteva, not only did not dispute the conclusion regarding the alleged similarity between the teachings of Chelčický and Tolstoy but, on the contrary, coined the term “Chelčický-Tolstoy phenomenon,” which supposedly points to the possibility of “the emergence of similar ideas even in completely different historical eras.”<sup>15</sup>

After the collapse of the USSR, it appears that Russian scholars have shown little interest in the topic.

The conviction that the ideas of Chelčický and Tolstoy were similar has also prevailed among researchers from English-speaking countries. Thus, Enrico C. S. Molnar, who translated the first part of *The Net of Faith* into English, pointed out:

“Basing his conviction on Christ’s teachings, he (Chelčický) fully adopted the position of the early Church Fathers and in many ways anticipated Tolstoy and Gandhi in trying to seek the source of war.”<sup>16</sup>

It appears that the historian of pacifism, Peter Brock, shared this opinion, while writing that Tolstoy was right in seeing Chelčický’s significance in the “doctrine of non-resistance.”<sup>17</sup> Another Canadian researcher, Jarold K. Zeman, began the Introduction to Murray L. Wagner’s monograph on Chelčický with a quote from Tolstoy.<sup>18</sup> Wagner himself, comparing

14 Porochkina (1983, p. 14).

15 Lapteva (1985, p. 223).

16 Molnár (1947, p. 38).

17 Brock (1957, p. 61).

18 Zeman (1983, p. 17).

Chelčický with Tolstoy, classified both as “separatists,” meaning those who sought to separate Christian communities from the state.<sup>19</sup> It appears that this faulty stance has not been challenged in the 21st century. For example, Craig Atwood pointed to the similarity between Chelčický's and Tolstoy's views, summarizing Chelčický's ideas as follows:

“The church of the true disciples of Christ should withdraw from pomp, hypocrisy, deception, and violence. Though they would suffer at the hands of the unrighteous, they would find peace in their own hearts and life everlasting. Five centuries later, Tolstoy would echo these sentiments.”<sup>20</sup>

It seems that Atwood did not realize that even the idea of the Church was entirely unacceptable to Tolstoy.

### Tolstoy's Acquaintance with Chelčický's Ideas

Tolstoy's letters and notes rather make it more complicated to answer the question concerning the depth of his acquaintance with Chelčický's ideas and even with *The Net of Faith*. The history of this acquaintance can be divided into two stages.

The first stage (1886–1894) is associated with Tolstoy's seminal religious and philosophical work, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*.

The aforementioned letter to Tolstoy dates back to 1886.<sup>21</sup> From that time, the Russian writer sought to familiarize himself with Chelčický's works. Tolstoy succeeded in his search three years later. In April 1889, he asked Nikolay Strakhov whether *The Net of Faith* had already been published by the Imperial Academy of Sciences. In June of the same year, Tolstoy mentioned that Strakhov had brought the prints of *The Net of Faith*, adding, “A very remarkable work, and, although I expected a lot from it, I was not disappointed.”<sup>22</sup>

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19 Wagner (1983, p. 51).

20 Atwood (2009, p. 150).

21 Maleček (2002, p. 132).

22 Tolstoy (1953b, p. 250).

The Russian authorities did not permit the printing of *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, so it was published in Paris in 1893. There, Tolstoy devoted two and a half pages to Chelčický, writing about him in glowing terms. That same year, immediately after the publication of excerpts from *The Net of Faith*, Tolstoy expressed gratitude to the director of the Saint Petersburg Public Library “for Chelčický” and wrote that he would send a “note” about this publication “here and there.”<sup>23</sup> It is difficult to come to any other conclusion than that Tolstoy received the issue of the *Collection*, which included (1) the full Czech text of *The Net of Faith*, (2) some Russian excerpts from it prepared by Annenkov, (3) Jagić’s introduction to the edition written on the basis of Karásek’s manuscript, (4) the full Czech text of *Replika proti Mikuláši Biskupcovi*, and (5) some excerpts from it translated into Russian by Jagić himself.

The second stage (1905–1906) is marked by Tolstoy’s text about Chelčický, which the Russian thinker wrote for *A Calendar of Wisdom*. Later, this brief text was placed as a preface for several subsequent reprints of the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith*.

Tolstoy’s renewed interest in Chelčický dates back to the end of 1904–beginning of 1905. On January 30, 1905, Dušan Makovický wrote that Tolstoy had told him about receiving “Chelčický,” which had been sent to him by the publisher Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov.<sup>24</sup> This is confirmed by a letter from Tolstoy to Gorbunov-Posadov, dated the same day.<sup>25</sup> On January 31, Tolstoy said to Makovický, “Yesterday I read it and marked the passages (for *A Calendar of Wisdom*).”<sup>26</sup> Perhaps Tolstoy, who had received the issue of the *Collection* ten years earlier, had returned that issue, given it away, or even lost it, which is why he asked Gorbunov-Posadov to send it to him again. That same day, Makovický translated *The Net of Faith* for Tolstoy, doing it “ex abrupto from Czech, with difficulty and with pauses.”<sup>27</sup> Although neither the extent nor the duration of these studies is known, most likely they were limited to one or several days, as Makovický does not mention them again. In February and March, Tolstoy

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23 Tolstoy (1953a p. 434).

24 Makovický (1979a, p. 157).

25 Tolstoy (1956a, p. 213).

26 Makovický (1979a, p. 157).

27 Ibidem, p. 158.

returned to Chelčický several times in private conversations and read the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith* aloud to family, friends, and guests.<sup>28</sup> On March 30, Tolstoy asked Makovický about the authorship of the Czech preface to *The Net of Faith*, to which Makovický made an erroneous assumption that Chelčický was the author. Tolstoy agreed with the wrong conclusion, pointing to the supposed “similarity of language.”<sup>29</sup>

On March 31, 1905, Tolstoy announced that he had finished writing the text about Chelčický for *A Calendar of Wisdom*. According to Makovický, Tolstoy casually remarked:

“Today I finished Chelčický. I am glad. The Czech text of *The Net of Faith* differs from the Russian version prepared by Jagić (Annenkov); perhaps the most important parts are missing, or perhaps the content is well summarized.”<sup>30</sup>

Then Tolstoy asked Makovický whether *The Net of Faith* had been published in the Czech lands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to which Makovický gave a negative answer and reported on the publication of *Postilla* there. Tolstoy responded, “What is this?”<sup>31</sup>

This demonstrates, first, that Tolstoy did not read the full text of *The Net of Faith*; second, that he was beset by doubts concerning the accuracy of his understanding of Chelčický's teachings; third, that Tolstoy mistakenly attributed the translation of the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith* to Jagić and knew nothing about *Postilla* (despite the fact that the Introduction to the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith* contains a brief description of *Postilla*!); fourth, that in spite of all this, Tolstoy wrote a text about Chelčický and, moreover, as will be demonstrated further, he made in it a categorical statement regarding all of Chelčický's writings.

In a letter to Vladimir Chertkov dated April 17, 1905, Tolstoy once again mentioned that he had written a text about Chelčický and added that he had selected some “passages” for *A Calendar of Wisdom*.<sup>32</sup> It was this

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28 Ibidem, p. 206.

29 Ibidem, p. 228.

30 Ibidem, p. 230.

31 Ibidem.

32 See Tolstoy (1957c).

text that Tolstoy placed in *A Calendar of Wisdom* as a “weekly reading” for September and as a preface to some pieces from the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith*.

Tolstoy made reference to Chelčický several more times in April, but after that, mentions became rare. One of the notable exceptions occurred in June 1905, when Pavel Biryukov read aloud to Tolstoy Chelčický’s work *O trojím lidu* (a Russian translation of which had been published a year earlier). Tolstoy enjoyed this work even more than *The Net of Faith*, and proclaimed, “There the comparisons are long and difficult to understand. Now, at first, it is simple and lively. I will read it.”<sup>33</sup> According to Makovický’s notes from 1906 and 1907, Tolstoy returned to Chelčický just a few times, mainly in connection with the publication of *A Calendar of Wisdom* and because of the republication of the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith* by Gorbunov-Posadov. Of particular interest is Makovický’s mysterious note from July 1906, when Tolstoy said to several guests:

“The Russian text (*The Net of Faith*, published by the Imperial Academy of Sciences) is not a translation but an abridged, yet very detailed and precise presentation of the original. Dušan Petrovich, you and I have compared them, and there were no deviations.”<sup>34</sup>

The comparison apparently consisted of the aforementioned “ex abrupto translation,” with which Makovický had such difficulty, and after which Tolstoy expressed doubts about the accuracy and completeness of the Russian version. However, a year later, Tolstoy praised these excerpts and, for some reason, claimed that it was “not a translation” but a “precise presentation of the original.”

In his letters and conversations, despite numerous laudatory remarks about Chelčický, Tolstoy did not go into detail about his understanding of Chelčický’s teachings. It is true that in *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, Tolstoy devoted two and a half pages to Chelčický; however, half a page describes how he first learned about Chelčický, another page is filled with

33 Makovický (1979a, p. 324).

34 Makovický (1979b, p. 174).

quotes about Chelčický from Alexander Pypin and Vladimir Spasovich's *History of Slavic Literature*,<sup>35</sup> and the remaining paragraphs retell these quotes.<sup>36</sup> As a result, the only work in which Tolstoy demonstrates his understanding of Chelčický's ideas is a short essay for *A Calendar of Wisdom*, included later as a preface to several reprints of the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith*. This text by Tolstoy will be the focus of my analysis below.

### Intention

At the very beginning of *The Net of Faith*, Chelčický formulates the basic idea of both the work and his entire teachings as, in Annenkov's translation,<sup>37</sup> to "restore the state of affairs that was before and to cling to it with God's assistance."<sup>38</sup> Chelčický compares the current state to "a heap of ruins of a demolished building," which he wants to rebuild.<sup>39</sup>

Although Tolstoy is extremely dissatisfied with the current state of affairs in the 19th century (just as Chelčický was with the state of affairs in the 15th century) and wants radical change, his vision of that change differs significantly. The Russian writer does not aim to restore any past state of affairs; rather, he emphasizes the destruction of the present state of affairs to pave the way for a radically new future. Moreover, Tolstoy's focus on the future and his belief in spiritual progress are evident in his writing about Chelčický, where he notes that Chelčický's ideas were not accepted because they were too far ahead of their time. After that, Tolstoy adds:

*"The Net of Faith* is an ancient book in terms of time, but its purpose and content are remarkably new. It is so new that contemporary people are still far from being prepared by true enlightenment to be able to comprehend it. However, its time will come – and indeed, it is already approaching."<sup>40</sup>

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35 See Pypin & Spasovich (1881, p. 880–885).

36 Tolstoy (1957d, p. 16–18).

37 Here and below, I translate into English the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith* prepared by Annenkov. I rarely use either the Czech text or Molnár's translation, since Tolstoy relied on Annenkov's version with all its advantages and disadvantages. I set aside considerations of Annenkov's translation accuracy and his method of selection.

38 Chelčický (1893b, p. 342).

39 Ibidem.

40 Tolstoy (1957b, p. 49).

This difference in principal intentions between the Czech preacher and the Russian writer can be traced to their use of metaphors. Tolstoy also employs the metaphor of a building, but instead of “restoring” it, he declares in *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* the inevitability of the destruction of the existing building and expresses the exigency to construct a new one in its place.<sup>41</sup> The meaning of the metaphor also differs. According to Chelčický, the image of a building refers to the Church as a gathering of true believers spiritually separated from secular power. In contrast, Tolstoy uses this image as an analogy for the entire human world. He seeks to replace the current world of nation-states, religions, and churches with a new one – a universal, mono-religious, stateless, non-church society that will embrace all people across a heaven-like world.

### History

The views of Chelčický and Tolstoy on the course of history are completely divergent. While Chelčický preaches a return to the purity of the Primitive Church and rejects chiliasm, Tolstoy, who does not recognize any positive image of the Church, appeals to the future, confident that the “truth of Christianity,” as he understands it, will eventually be revealed throughout the world.

The dissimilar perspectives on history and the desired future inevitably resulted in a fundamental discrepancy in the understanding and evaluation of early Christianity. Although Tolstoy, whether intentionally or not, tried to downplay these divergences, they remain evident. Thus, in the text about Chelčický, after several introductory remarks, Tolstoy writes:

“At first, the truth of Christianity in its true meaning was accepted only by a few simple, unimportant, and poor people. However, as it spread among a large number of people, including the rich and noble, it became more and more perverted. And since the establishment of the Church – beginning with the time of Constantine, as Chelčický tells us – it has become

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41 Tolstoy (1957d, p. 286).

so corrupted that its principal, true, and vital meaning has become totally obscured and replaced by superficial forms that are alien to the essence of Christianity.”<sup>42</sup>

Tolstoy presents the just-quoted words either as a retelling of Chelčický's teachings or as their disclosure; however, they not only fail to correspond to the ideas of the Czech preacher but directly contradict them. According to Tolstoy, (1) the “perversion” of the truth of Christianity was cumulative in nature, (2) this “perversion” was associated with an increase in the number of people among whom Christianity was spreading, and (3) the “perversion” reached its apogee under Constantine the Great.

In fact, Chelčický does not speak of a gradual perversion of Christian truth; rather, he tirelessly repeats about the rapid and sharp decline resulting from the rapprochement between the Church and secular power under the auspices of Constantine the Great.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, Chelčický frequently highlights the “purity and innocence” of the Primitive Church, specifying the duration of this purity as the first “three hundred and twenty years.”<sup>44</sup> In addition, Chelčický does not associate the increase in the number of Christians with the corruption of Christian truth; on the contrary, he underscores that “the breaking of the net did not occur because of the multitude of believers.”<sup>45</sup>

### **Sources of the Christian Faith: Holy Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition, and the Church**

Chelčický identifies the source of true Christianity in Holy Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition, and the Church. According to the Czech preacher, the “net,” or Christian truth, is woven from Holy Scripture. Chelčický writes:

“As a net is woven and knitted, one knot after another, until there is a great and complete net, so the truths of Holy Scripture are added one after another, until they collectively embrace both the entire multitude of believers and each in-

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42 Tolstoy (1957b, p. 46).

43 See, for example, Chelčický (1893b, p. 346, 349, 354, 356, 357, 365, 395).

44 Ibidem, p. 365.

45 Ibidem, p. 343.

dividual with all his or her spiritual as well as physical characteristics.”<sup>46</sup>

Even when considering only the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith*, Chelčický’s position remains indisputable: Holy Scripture, or the Bible, is the source of true Christianity and comprises both the New and Old Testaments.<sup>47</sup>

According to Tolstoy, the only source of “true Christianity” is reason. As early as the 1880s, Tolstoy (1) criticized the very concept of Holy Scripture, (2) rejected all existing translations of the Gospels, and (3) discarded everything in the New Testament that did not align with his teachings. Furthermore, Tolstoy not only does not consider the Old Testament to be divinely inspired but sums up its content as “the alien faith of the Jews,”<sup>48</sup> declaring it to be full of “abominations.”<sup>49</sup> Tolstoy contrasts the Old Testament with his interpretation of Christ’s teachings and, among other things, declares that “a person who believes in the divine inspiration of the Old Testament” cannot simultaneously “believe in the moral law of Christ.”<sup>50</sup>

It is important to emphasize that Tolstoy does not contrast the Old Testament with the New Testament, nor even the Old Testament with the Gospels, as he does not recognize the divine inspiration of the New Testament. Furthermore, Tolstoy has a sharply negative assessment of the epistles of the Apostle Paul, calling his teachings “false Christianity.”<sup>51</sup> While Tolstoy is somewhat more tolerant of the epistles of other apostles, he expresses strong dissatisfaction with the Acts of the Apostles, considering it “seductive.”<sup>52</sup> Regarding the Book of Revelation, Tolstoy briefly dismisses it as “nonsense.”<sup>53</sup>

However, that is not all, since Tolstoy does not acknowledge the divine inspiration of the Gospels. He considers the distinction between the cano-

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46 Ibidem.

47 Ibidem, p. 358, 374, 387.

48 Tolstoy (1957a, p. 15).

49 Tolstoy (1957d, p. 60).

50 Ibidem.

51 See below.

52 Tolstoy (1957a, p. 17).

53 Ibidem, p. 16.

nical Gospel texts and the apocryphal ones to be misleading, claims that not everything in the Gospels is of equal value, suggests that the essential elements should be separated from the unimportant, and insists that some episodes of the Gospels should be excluded altogether.<sup>54</sup> This approach led Tolstoy to compose his own “gospel,” distorting or discarding what he regarded as inconsistent with reason, including all references to the miracles performed by Jesus Christ.

According to Chelčický, Christian truth was initially accepted not merely by “a few simple, unimportant, poor people,” as Tolstoy puts it, but by the Apostles, who were sent by Jesus Christ to preach and establish the Primitive Church, or the custodian of Christian truth. This idea is reflected even in the title of Chelčický's work and the Gospel story he uses as the basis for *The Net of Faith*, since Christ's command to cast the net again is interpreted as Christ's command to the Apostles to preach Christianity throughout the pagan world. It was the Apostles who converted the pagans to Christianity and provided their communities with an authentic Christian organization.

While Tolstoy regards the Apostolic Tradition as often misleading and inconsistent with reason, Chelčický argues that “reasonable people should look to the foundation established by the Apostles.”<sup>55</sup> In the same way, answering the question of how to separate true faith from falsehood, Chelčický refers to the faith of the Apostles, to whom it was given “by God through Jesus Christ,” and strongly advises “not to be distracted by those new creeds to which people are now being encouraged.”<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Chelčický places special emphasis on the words of the Apostle Paul, whom he regards as an indisputable authority.

Apparently, Tolstoy's expression about “a few simple, unimportant, poor people” who accepted Christian truth “in all its meaning” was deliberately crafted in such a vague manner. On the one hand, this creates the illusion that his views align with Chelčický's ideas; on the other hand, it omits any mention of the Apostles. Remarkably, in the same *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, just below the passage where Tolstoy makes refe-

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54 Ibidem, p. 16–17.

55 Chelčický (1893b, p. 345).

56 Ibidem, p. 344.

rence to Chelčický, he declares that the Apostles did not understand the true essence of Christianity and misled people by fundamentally distorting Christ's teachings.<sup>57</sup>

Although Tolstoy occasionally cites the Apostle Paul to support his own words and even includes a quote from 1 Corinthians as one of the epigraphs to *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, in fact, the Russian writer rejects the Apostle Paul's teachings and expresses strong antipathy toward him. Already in the early 1880s, Tolstoy stated, "The Acts of the Apostles, like many of Paul's epistles, often have nothing in common with the Gospel."<sup>58</sup> Tolstoy's most detailed attack on the Apostle Paul, with criticism that often turns into outright abuse, occurred in 1907. In a short essay, Tolstoy explicitly asserts that in order to discover Christian truth, people must "free themselves"<sup>59</sup> from Paul's teachings, which he describes as "false," "immoral,"<sup>60</sup> "measly,"<sup>61</sup> "grossly superstitious,"<sup>62</sup> "fabrication,"<sup>63</sup> and "perverted,"<sup>64</sup> among other terms. He also attacks the Apostle Paul personally, labeling him a "Pharisee,"<sup>65</sup> a "preacher of lies,"<sup>66</sup> "very vain, frivolous, hot-blooded,"<sup>67</sup> and an "unenlightened, self-confident, petty-vain, boastful, and cunning Jew."<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Tolstoy claims that the Apostle Paul's "false Christianity" is not limited to the Epistles but also permeates other New Testament texts, including the Gospels, which were "more or less adjusted to the already existing Pauline teachings."<sup>69</sup> Finally, Tolstoy declares the incompatibility of Christ's teachings with the Apostle Paul's ideas, which he argues are supposedly "obvious to everybody who has comprehended the essence of the great Christian teachings."<sup>70</sup> Nota-

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57 Tolstoy (1957d, p. 44).

58 Tolstoy (1957a, p. 17).

59 Tolstoy (1956b, p. 350).

60 Ibidem.

61 Ibidem, p. 352.

62 Ibidem.

63 Ibidem, p. 353.

64 Ibidem, p. 354.

65 Ibidem, p. 350.

66 Ibidem.

67 Ibidem, p. 353.

68 Ibidem, p. 352.

69 Ibidem, p. 354.

70 Ibidem.

bly, two years before this essay, Tolstoy praised Chelčický as a hero who “really understood Christian truth”<sup>71</sup> without paying attention to the fact that the Czech preacher’s ideas are based on the Apostle Paul’s teachings.

Tolstoy’s rejection of the Apostolic Tradition is closely tied with his refusal of the very concept of the Church. This refusal became a recurring theme in Tolstoy’s works and one of the key points of his religious and philosophical teachings. Tolstoy not only criticizes Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism but also declares the incompatibility between the concept of the Church and Christianity itself. Unlike Chelčický,<sup>72</sup> Tolstoy did not view the Church as the keeper of true Christianity or as a unifying body for believers. Instead, he saw it as the cause of the distortion of “true Christianity,” the origin of divisions among Christians, and the source of violence. For example, in the essay *Church and State*, Tolstoy writes:

“There is no concept or word more godless than the concept of the Church. There is no concept that has given rise to more evil; there is no concept more hostile to Christ’s teachings than the concept of the Church.”<sup>73</sup>

*In The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, Tolstoy devotes many pages to the supposed opposition between any “church” organization and “Christianity.”<sup>74</sup>

Taking all this into account, it becomes clear why Tolstoy writes in the above quote that “...since the establishment of the church (from the time of Constantine, as Chelčický tells us) the truth has become so distorted...” thereby developing his idea of the opposition between the Church and Christianity. This idea is of such importance for Tolstoy that he attributes it to Chelčický, despite the fact that such a view was not just alien to Chelčický but directly opposed his fundamental convictions, which the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith* demonstrate very well.

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71 Tolstoy (1957b, p. 46).

72 See, for example, Chelčický (1893b, p. 408).

73 Tolstoy (1957f, p. 477).

74 Tolstoy (1957d, p. 39–67).

## Tenets of the Christian Faith

If, according to Chelčický, Holy Scripture, the Apostles, and the early Church are the sources of Christian truth, this is not the case for Tolstoy. It follows that both thinkers held radical differences not only regarding the sources of Christianity but also concerning its main content. However, Tolstoy tried to blur these differences in his writing about Chelčický:

“Indeed, unlike his predecessors Hus, Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin, in his book (*The Net of Faith*) and also in other works, Chelčický does not dispute dogmas, church and papal ordinances. Chelčický only demonstrates that the lives of people who consider themselves Christians are not Christian lives; that a Christian cannot exercise power, cannot be the owner of land or slaves, cannot wallow in luxury, cannot lead a slutty life, cannot execute other people, and most importantly, cannot kill or participate in wars.”<sup>75</sup>

Here, Tolstoy pushes the reader to the incorrect conclusion that, for Chelčický, the “dogmas, church and papal ordinances” played no significant role, and that the Czech preacher was solely concerned with the problem of aligning life with the guidelines set by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. In this push, Tolstoy goes so far as to proclaim that Chelčický did not dispute dogmas and papal decrees either in *The Net of Faith* or “in other works.” This, however, is patently false, since, on the one hand, Chelčický sharply criticizes some newly established institutions and dogmas; on the other hand, he ardently defends all Christian dogmas of the Primitive Church, and his criterion remains the law of Christ. And what is more, Chelčický approaches these matters not superficially or incidentally, but with thoroughness and careful attention.

Regarding Chelčický’s criticism of the newly established institutions and dogmas, it is sufficient to mention two works, namely *O očistci pravém a jistém a nejistém* (On the Truth of Purgatory and Uncertainty), in which the Czech preacher rejects the doctrine of Purgatory, and *Zpráva*

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75 Tolstoy (1957b, p. 47).

*o svátostech* (Instructions on the Sacraments), where he renounces the recognition of four of the seven sacraments of the Church, acknowledging only Baptism, Confession, and Communion. Concerning the defense of dogmas, it is necessary to mention *Replika proti Mikuláši Biskupci Táboorskému*, which is entirely devoted to the ardent defense of the reality of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist against those who, as Chelčický believes, were inclined to consider this sacrament as a purely symbolic act. Chelčický condemns this view as “a great sin,” “a great evil,” “a mockery,” and “an outrage.”<sup>76</sup> It is especially noteworthy that this fiery retort was addressed to Mikuláš, who, like the Taborites, probably initially shared Chelčický's pacifist convictions.<sup>77</sup> As noted above, Tolstoy had the Russian excerpts from *Replika proti Mikuláši Biskupci Táboorskému*, since they were published together with the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith* in the *Collection*.

Even in the excerpts from *The Net of Faith*, there are episodes in which Chelčický challenges papal regulations, including, for example, the Pope's authority to forgive sins.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, in the *Introduction to The Net of Faith*, published both in the first edition in 1893 and in its reprints, Jagić compares Chelčický's ideas with Hus's views, specifically on the issue raised by Tolstoy. What is even more interesting, there is documentary evidence demonstrating that Tolstoy not only read the *Introduction* but did so just before writing his text about Chelčický.<sup>79</sup> Among other things, the *Introduction* notes that although the “center of gravity” of Chelčický's teachings lies in ethics, along with that the Czech preacher “went further than Hus in most dogmatic issues.”<sup>80</sup> The *Introduction* also mentions Chelčický's defense of the truth of the Eucharist.<sup>81</sup> In other words, it is difficult to come to any other conclusion than that either Tolstoy studied the available scholarly literature on Chelčický extremely poorly or deliberately and grossly distorted the Czech preacher's thought.

76 Chelčický (1893a, p. 514).

77 See Fudge (2000, p. 82).

78 See, for example, Chelčický (1893b, p. 352).

79 According to Makovický, Tolstoy said over tea on March 9, 1905: “A little while ago, I read the biography of Chelčický and the Introduction to *The Net of Faith*” Makovický (1979a, p. 204).

80 Jagić (1893, p. XXVI).

81 Ibidem, p. XXVIII–XXX.

The question arises: why did Tolstoy, who was aware of the limitations of his knowledge regarding Chelčický's ideas, make such a risky assertion in the first place? The answer very likely lies in Tolstoy's categorical rejection of all Christian dogmas. This rejection is a persistent theme throughout Tolstoy's religious and philosophical works. It is enough to note here that in *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* Tolstoy declares the incompatibility of dogmas with the Sermon on the Mount, viewing his main task as the rejection of any dogma. There, Tolstoy directly writes, "The Sermon on the Mount or the Nicene Creed – one excludes the other."<sup>82</sup> For Tolstoy, Christ is simply a man with outstanding moral teachings. As a result, Tolstoy vehemently attacks the tenets of original sin, the divine-human nature of Christ, and redemption – that is, the core creeds of any Christian denomination. Tolstoy goes so far as to proclaim:

"People who believe in an evil and reckless god – who cursed mankind, doomed his son to sacrifice, and condemned some people to eternal torment—cannot believe in a god of love."<sup>83</sup>

In other words, Tolstoy's idea of God is emphatically non-Christian and even anti-Christian – if, of course, by Christianity, as it should be, is understood the faith in Christ as the God-man and Savior of the world.<sup>84</sup> Apparently, Tolstoy did not dare to attribute this position to Chelčický. However, in order to present his teachings as closer to those of the Czech preacher than they actually were, Tolstoy decided to make a risky and false statement that dogmas were unimportant to Chelčický.

Following the dogmas, Tolstoy also categorically rejects the Sacraments without any exception, not simply dismissing God's participation in them, but even considering them harmful. Tolstoy confesses:

"I consider all the sacraments to be ignoble and coarse witchcraft, inconsistent with the idea of God and Christian

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<sup>82</sup> Tolstoy (1957d, p. 66).

<sup>83</sup> Ibidem, p. 60.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Berdyaev (2000).

teachings, and, moreover, a violation of the most direct commandments of the Gospel.”<sup>85</sup>

For Chelčický, on the contrary, true Christianity is founded on belief in the divine-human nature of Christ and other fundamental Christian dogmas proclaimed by the Primitive Church. At the very beginning of *The Net of Faith*, Chelčický formulates the starting point for his subsequent reflections and the crucial criterion for distinguishing good from evil. According to Chelčický, this criterion is encapsulated in the Apostles' Creed:

“In the world, only Faith can preserve a human being from misconceptions and the wiles of the devil. Only Faith enables us to distinguish between good and evil. Only through Faith do we partake in spiritual and divine things. Thus, we believe that God is the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe in one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and that Christ, the Son of God, is truly God and truly man, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary and born by Her. We also believe in other spiritual and heavenly things and in the future resurrection of the dead, both good and evil. Without Faith, it is impossible to please God.”<sup>86</sup>

As can be seen, Chelčický is convinced that true Christianity is impossible without adherence to the fundamental Christian tenets. This is evident from his writings, including the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith*.

The crucial importance of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confession, and Communion to Chelčický has already been mentioned above.

### Prohibition of Violence

Both Tolstoy and researchers pay special attention to the suggested similarity between Tolstoy's doctrine of “non-resistance to evil by violence”

<sup>85</sup> Tolstoy (1952, p. 249).

<sup>86</sup> Chelčický (1893b, p. 343).

and Chelčický's criticism of Christians' participation in wars. Indeed, there is a resemblance here, but several nuances must be considered. An analysis of Chelčický's and Tolstoy's critiques of violence warrants a separate study; I will limit myself to a few theses.

Tolstoy's rejection of Christian tenets, the Sacraments, and the Church follows from his moralist position—that he places several moralist principles at the core of his perspective. According to Tolstoy, the central characteristic of a moral act is its autonomy and reasonableness.<sup>87</sup> This is why Tolstoy is convinced that people can achieve a perfect moral life through their own efforts, emphatically rejecting the need for grace or assistance from God.<sup>88</sup> These views stand in direct opposition to the convictions of Chelčický, which Tolstoy should have understood, as the belief in a person's inability to do good without God's help is evident in the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith*.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, in the Russian excerpts from *Replika proti Mikuláši Biskupci Táborskému*, Chelčický, pointing to the “sinful law,” rejects the ability of people to do “good deeds” only by their own free will and without God's grace.<sup>90</sup> In other words, Chelčický was aware of a view that was close to the position that Tolstoy voiced much later and categorically dismissed it.

According to Tolstoy, the rejection of violence is a necessary condition, or even the foundation for moral action, while one's attitude toward violence is a criterion for evaluating the validity or invalidity of particular philosophical or religious teachings. From this rejection Tolstoy derived his criticism of the Old Testament, the law of Moses, and the idea of Christ as the Judge of “those who are living and those who have died.” It is no coincidence that Tolstoy, for example, writes:

“A person who believes in Christ as God, who will come again in glory to judge and execute those who are living and those who have died, cannot simultaneously believe in Christ, who commands us to turn the other cheek to the wrongdoer, re-

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87 See, for example, Guseynov (2012).

88 See, for example, Gelfond (2020).

89 See, for example, Chelčický (1893b, p. 342, 358–359, 401–402, 405).

90 Chelčický (1893a, p. 525–527).

frain from judging, forgive, and love our enemies.”<sup>91</sup>

In Tolstoy's thought, morality as a whole—and the rejection of violence as its central element—are fundamental, self-sufficient, absolute, and universal. For Tolstoy, violence is always evil, everywhere, and under any circumstances. Tolstoy is not ready to accept the Old Testament, many provisions of the New Testament, and the teachings of the Apostles precisely because, in them, God appears as one who allows or engages in what Tolstoy considers acts of violence. In other words, Tolstoy judges the Bible, the Apostles, Christians, and even God on the basis of their attitude toward what Tolstoy regards as violence. He believes that the absolute prohibition of violence (or rather, what he terms “violence”) must apply not only to all people—past, present, and future – but also to God.

The answer to the question of “What is violence?” and the nuances of the rejection of violence in Chelčický's teachings differ in many ways from those presented in Tolstoy's works. Chelčický explicitly declares an absolute prohibition for Christians to participate in wars and to directly support the coercive apparatus of secular authorities. According to Chelčický, this stance follows from the doctrine of Christ's person and the radical transformation brought about by Christ's life, death, and resurrection. In relation to the incarnation of Christ, the events of the Old Testament were a preparatory stage during which what is now called violence was not prohibited.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, Chelčický regards the law of Moses as a “good law” for the Old Testament's era.<sup>93</sup>

Thus, while recognizing the absolute nature of the prohibition for Christians to participate in wars, Chelčický does not consider this prohibition to be atemporal and universal. He allows for violence by authorities in the pre-Christian world and, after the coming of Christ, by non-Christian authorities in cases of defense against brutal attacks by criminals.<sup>94</sup> For

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<sup>91</sup> Tolstoy (1957d, p. 60).

<sup>92</sup> Chelčický writes, “The will of God is to preserve the temporary well-being of people through authorities, but David and other pious kings also contributed to the spiritual well-being of their subjects. They did so by teaching their subjects the law of God, while also using compulsion against those who were disobedient. The Jewish law was carnal and did not forbid the use of corporal punishment” Chelčický (1893b, p. 368).

<sup>93</sup> Ibidem, p. 362.

<sup>94</sup> Ibidem, p. 359.

Chelčický, God is exempt from the prohibition of violence, or, rather, the term “violence” is not applicable to God’s actions in principle. This is why even in the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith*, Chelčický’s threefold division of justice can be traced: (1) the secular court of authorities, which employs violence and in which he forbids Christians to participate;<sup>95</sup> (2) the Christian court, based on love;<sup>96</sup> and (3) the Last Judgment, where each person’s fate will be determined – either to heavenly bliss or to hellish torment. Moreover, according to Chelčický, justice and the Kingdom of Christ are tightly linked with the idea of the Last Judgment, to which the Czech preacher repeatedly appeals and about which he warns those he criticizes with so much energy.<sup>97</sup>

Thus, in contrast to Tolstoy’s views, the rejection of violence in Chelčický’s thought, although absolute for Christians, is derived from the will (law) of God and is neither self-sufficient nor universal in nature. This is obvious even from the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith*, yet it is ignored by Tolstoy.

### Violence and the State

Tolstoy and many scholars present Chelčický’s criticism of the state as another key point of similarity between Chelčický’s and Tolstoy’s teachings. Here, it is important to note that during Chelčický’s time there were no “states” in the sense that Tolstoy often uses it, since in the time of the Czech preacher neither modern nation-states nor modern empires had taken shape.<sup>98</sup> While Tolstoy, in his four-page text on Chelčický, uses the word “state” (государство) seven times and once the expression “state power” (государственная власть), Chelčický refers to kings, kingdoms, emperors, and secular authority but not to the “state” (stát). Although Annenkov twice uses the word “state” (государство) in the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith*, in both instances they are inaccurate

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95 Ibidem, p. 347.

96 Ibidem, p. 346.

97 Ibidem, p. 358–359, 363.

98 See, for example, Nelson (2006).

translations: the first translates the word “království” (kingdom),<sup>99</sup> and the second translates the word “zemiech” (land).<sup>100</sup>

Intensifying the above-quoted words concerning Chelčický's rejection of war, Tolstoy adds a new detail that refers to the question of the state. Tolstoy writes:

“He (Chelčický) demonstrates that the union of Christianity with the state, as it is currently observed, has wrecked and destroyed Christianity. But it should be the other way around: Christianity, when united with the state, should destroy the state. And he (Chelčický) proves that this is possible – that the absence of state power not only does not destroy the order in people's lives but destroys the disorder and evil from which people suffer.”<sup>101</sup>

In this passage, three theses are attributed to Chelčický by Tolstoy: (1) the complete unification of Christianity with the state has destroyed Christianity; (2) the state is the source of evil and violence, bringing disorder; and (3) consequently, the state must be destroyed through unification, or rather, absorption of the state by Christianity. However, only the first thesis has some points of contact with Chelčický's thought, and, as will be shown, even this is true only with reservations. The other two theses reflect Tolstoy's ideas, which are alien to Chelčický's views, as is obvious even in the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith*.

1. It should be noted that Tolstoy speaks of the “destruction of Christianity,” and the term “destruction” implies the end of its existence. In addition, following his rejection of the idea of the Church, Tolstoy does not refer to the union of the *Church* and the state but rather to the union of *Christianity* with the state. As explained above, Tolstoy considers even the Apostles to be those who misinterpreted Christ's teachings and misled people. Given this, it is unclear what kind of “destruction of Christianity”

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99 Comparing the Russian translation (Chelčický (1893b, p. 352) and the Czech original text (Chelčický (1950, p. 47).

100 Comparing the Russian translation (Chelčický (1893b, p. 352) and the Czech original text (Chelčický (1950, p. 50).

101 Tolstoy (1957b, p. 48).

Tolstoy had in mind; rather, his ideas suggest that “Christianity,” in his very specific understanding, either never truly existed or was destroyed at the root by the Apostles.

For Chelčický, the Apostles are the first faithful teachers of the Church and the disseminators of Christian truth. The turning point for him is the infiltration of secular power into the Church during the time of Constantine the Great. Chelčický does not claim that Christianity has been destroyed, but rather that the original purity of the Church has been lost.

2. Tolstoy’s ideas about the state are contradictory. For example, he admits that “the justification of the necessity of state violence by protecting people from perpetrators” has some grounds.<sup>102</sup> At the same time, he tends to equate the state, power, and violence, asserting that “to rule means to violate”<sup>103</sup> and portraying any state as the main, if not the sole, source of violence at the social level. Moreover, he compares state officials to robbers, even in the context of the Roman Empire.<sup>104</sup> The situation becomes completely confusing because Tolstoy unequivocally favors robbers over state officials. This is especially noteworthy given Tolstoy’s rejection of violence, which one might expect to be consistently categorical regardless of who commits the violent act. However, this is not always the case with Tolstoy. Although he does not justify robbers or, for example, terrorists, unlike state officials, they find some kind of excuse in his writing, as Tolstoy portrays their violence as a derivative of state violence.<sup>105</sup>

Chelčický does not consider those he usually calls “earthly kings” (králi zemskými) or “secular authorities” (světské moci) to be inherently evil and sources of violence. He is only convinced that a person who has come to know and profess Christ can live without relying on these authorities, although it is necessary for such a person to coexist with them. Chelčický repeatedly emphasizes that secular authorities are established to provide, and in some cases do provide, protection from violence.<sup>106</sup>

Chelčický does not formulate Tolstoy’s later inversion, which attributes the violence of criminals to the existence of the state. On the contrary,

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102 Tolstoy (1957d, p. 142).

103 Ibidem, p. 190–191.

104 See, for example, Tolstoy (1957f, p. 479–481).

105 See, for example, Tolstoy (1956c, p. 263).

106 See, for example, Chelčický (1893b, p. 371).

Chelčický acknowledges the need for non-Christian societies to have earthly authorities in order to prevent evil (which criminals could commit) as well as to protect society from “final destruction.”<sup>107</sup> Moreover, Chelčický thinks about life under secular authority as preferable to life in a gang, and he does not present secular authorities as a source of violence or as an absolute evil. For Chelčický, the root of violence is not in secular authorities but in the fallen and sinful nature of humans. Therefore, according to Chelčický, for those outside Christianity, earthly authorities “are necessary for the preservation of the human race on earth, which would perish as a result of sinfulness if the kings did not restrain it. So, the kings are needed as medicine, as a plaster for a purulent ulcer.”<sup>108</sup>

Furthermore, for Chelčický, evil does not lie in secular power itself, but in its conflation with the Church, which does not need such power. This perspective differs significantly from that of Tolstoy, who rejects the very idea of the Church and equates the state with violence.

3. What has just been said led Chelčický and Tolstoy to different practical conclusions about how to act in relation to the state.

Tolstoy declares the harmfulness of the state and not only denies any obligations toward it but also believes that everyone has a duty to work toward its destruction, albeit without resorting to violence. In short, Tolstoy's project consists of mixing the earthly and the sacred into moralized teachings.

Chelčický does not call for the elimination of secular power; on the contrary, he emphasizes its inevitability and the duty of Christians to fulfill their obligations toward it, if, of course, these obligations do not contradict Christ's teachings. Chelčický's project involves the separation of the sacred from the earthly – that is, the distancing of Christians from secular power on significant spiritual and practical matters. This perspective is also evident in the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith*, although Tolstoy left it without attention.

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107 Ibidem, p. 359.

108 Ibidem, p. 372.

## Conclusion

Tolstoy's understanding of Chelčický's teachings is characterized by incompleteness and limitations, primarily because it is based almost exclusively on the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith*. Although Tolstoy had access to translations of two additional works by Chelčický, as well as to several academic texts on Chelčický's teachings, he either did not study them seriously or deliberately disregarded them. The latter seems the most plausible explanation for why Tolstoy does not mention *Replika proti Mikuláši Biskupci Táborskému*, the Russian excerpts from which were published alongside those from *The Net of Faith*.

Tolstoy confined himself to Chelčický's criticism of wars, the medieval papacy, and secular power, without mentioning several other important topics on which the views of the Russian writer and the Czech preacher differ markedly. Even regarding the themes "under consideration," Tolstoy did not so much convey Chelčický's ideas from the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith*, as he adjusted them to his own perspectives on these subjects, at times going so far as to directly attribute his personal views to Chelčický.

Even the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith* demonstrate a wide range of divergences between the ideas of Chelčický and Tolstoy. These differences concern not minor issues but the very foundations of their teachings. The most glaring discrepancies involve questions about who Christ is, the foundations of Christianity, the nature of faith, and more. Thus, Chelčický and Tolstoy differed radically in their assessments of the Apostles, the Church, Holy Scripture, Christian tradition, and various practical aspects of life. Despite some similarity in their criticism of violence and secular authorities, even the Russian excerpts from *The Net of Faith* clearly display that this resemblance is very far from complete and is characterized by multiple important nuances.

Tolstoy's opposition to ecclesiastical and traditional forms in favor of his concept of "true Christianity" not only fails to be convincing but also restricts the possible foundations for the principal rejection of violence – an essential rejection the world needs so much. Instead of embracing diverse theoretical and doctrinal bases for the rejection of violence, Tolstoy

attempted to anchor it in his highly pretentious, controversial, and contradictory views on God, religion, faith, the Bible, Christianity, the Church, history, and more. Some of these controversies and contradictions catch the eye even in Tolstoy's attitude toward Chelčický's teachings. On the one hand, Tolstoy emphasized that "true Christianity," in its rejection of violence, was discovered by Chelčický. On the other hand, Tolstoy either failed to notice or deliberately ignored that, contrary to his categorical assertions, Chelčický discovered it by affirming the Old Testament as a part of Holy Scripture, relying on Apostolic teachings, professing various dogmas, practicing some Sacraments, striving for an ecclesiastical form of Christianity, and expressing views on faith, sources of morality, and world history that differed from Tolstoy's.

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## Abstrakt

### **Zkreslení myšlenek Petra Chelčického prizmatem učení Lva Tolstého**

Článek zkoumá zkreslený pohled Lva Tolstého na myšlenky Petra Chelčického. Charakteristickým rysem tohoto pohledu je zdůrazňování několika povrchních podobností mezi Chelčického kritikou války a Tolstého anarchistickým pacifismem. Zároveň však toto Tolstého „prizma“ zkresluje nebo opomíjí významné rozdíly v jejich názorech, včetně zásadně odlišných základů jejich učení – jako jsou jejich postoje k Písmu svatému, apoštolské tradici, církvi, víře, dogmatům, morálce a světovým dějinám. Právě z těchto zásadně rozdílných východisek vycházejí myšlenky Chelčického a Tolstého, které se jeví jako podobné, nikoli naopak. Toto zavádějící pojetí si nicméně neprávem získalo popularitu mezi badateli, kteří tak Chelčického vykreslují jako předchůdce Tolstého, čímž vytvářejí chybnou historiografii. Tento pohled je nejen nesprávný, ale také odporuje samotným Tolstého hodnocením a navíc ochuzuje teoretické základy boje proti násilí ve světě.

**Klíčová slova:** Chelčický, Tolstoj, křesťanství, dějiny, církev, pacifismus, násilí, stát

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