

SOCIAL ETHICS AMONG SLOVAK LUTHERANS IN THE 20th CENTURY: GENERATIONAL AND PERIODIC INFLUENCES

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Abstract: This paper explores the dynamics of intergenerational change and its impact on social ethics in Slovakia during the 20th century, with a particular focus on authors of Lutheran background. The methodology selected to achieve the aims of this study is grounded in the 'theory of generations.' The purpose of this analysis is to examine how shifts in political, social, and economic realities influenced the ethical frameworks guiding societal engagements in Slovakia. Through a historical analysis of theological movements and their socio-political contexts, the study reveals a significant shift from Christian Socialism, which was prevalent in the pre-war era among Lutheran thinkers, to Christian Realism, which emerged among the post-war generation. Christian Socialism sought to synthesize Christian values with socialist principles, while Christian Realism adopted a more pragmatic approach that acknowledged the role of various social systems without asserting the exclusivity of Christianity. The findings of this study highlight the flexibility and responsiveness of social ethics to changing social realities, and the role of intergenerational dynamics in shaping these ethical frameworks.

Keywords: social ethics; Christian socialism; Christian realism; face-to-life theology; generations

Introduction

The primary objective of this paper is to explore the evolution and interrelationships of ideas pertinent to social ethics within the scope of philosophical discourse in Slovakia throughout the 20th century, a period that was marked by significant political and social transformations. Two of the most influential schools of thought that have affected the issue of social ethics in our region are Christian socialism and Christian realism. Both have significantly impacted the region's social ethics. The Lutheran church has traditionally been at the forefront of Christian socialism in Slovakia, and therefore, this paper will concentrate on representatives of this church when examining both Christian socialism and Christian realism. Understanding the historical development and dynamics of these theological and philosophical traditions is important for grasping the complex interplay between religion, ethics, and politics in Slovakia. As a secondary objective, this paper will also consider the potential influence which generational affiliations might have had on the development of these ideas. The methodology

selected to achieve the aims of this study is grounded in the 'theory of generations' or the 'problem of generations'.¹

The theory of generations

The theory of generations is predominantly a sociological concept that highlights the significance of social generations, as distinct from blood relations,² as a key framework for understanding the structures and developments of social and intellectual movements. Intriguingly, despite contributions from almost all scientific disciplines to explore this concept, comprehensive study of the theory has remained limited. Nevertheless, the practical significance of the theory becomes apparent when one endeavours to gain a more nuanced understanding of social changes and historical developments (Mannheim 2000; Eyerman & Turner 1998). Although the theory has faced critiques, particularly regarding its complexities and a predominantly Western perspective, it remains vital for our study. Specifically, this paper seeks to unearth insights to ascertain if the dynamics of intergenerational change³ significantly influenced social ethics⁴ in Slovakia during the 20th century.

While Mannheim's theory of generations is closely associated with sociology, it has also exerted an indirect influence on philosophy, particularly in instigating debates and reflections on various subjects including history, temporality, identity, and the social construction of meaning. Even though the theory of generations is not central to philosophy, it can be applied differently depending on the specific context. Notably, the theory's influence is observable across diverse branches of philosophy, encompassing the philosophy of science, epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. In moral philosophy, the theory of generations presents a unique perspective for investigating moral values and principles. It delves into how moral frameworks are established, the process of making moral judgments, and the guiding principles for ethical decision-making (Attfield 2020). By analysing the relationship between the theory of generations and social ethics, the study examines how generational consciousness and social values inform political and ideological perspectives, inclusive of religious and socio-economic beliefs. In this regard, the paper will explore how belonging to a particular generation may have influenced the embrace or rejection of ideas among selected authors.

Social issues in reflection of Lutheran thinkers – Christian socialism

Christian socialism is an ideological synthesis of socio-political, economic principles, and Christian ethical values, with a focus on social justice, poverty alleviation, inequality reduction, and the pursuit of the common good.⁵ Emerging in the 19th century, Christian socialism responded to the challenges of industrialization and the excesses of capitalism. It aimed to provide a Christian alternative to secular socialism, which was often critiqued for neglecting moral and spiritual dimensions. Inspirational figures for Christian socialism include Francis of Assisi and Thomas More, who despite being an opponent of the Protestant Reformation, contributed significantly through his work "Utopia," which envisioned an ideal society founded

¹ It must be stated that the 'theory of generations' is not monolithic and lacks a universally accepted approach. This reflects the diversity of perspectives and methodologies in studying generational issues, and as such, there isn't a single dominant way to approach the problem.

² A generation is defined as a cohort influenced by the significant historical events of their era.

³ The dynamics of intergenerational change refers to how different generations, specifically the pre-war generation and the generation that emerged after World War II, may have had differing views on social ethics.

⁴ Social ethics concerns issues such as poverty, justice, and unemployment.

⁵ One of the first authors who dealt with social issues in our territory (already in the 19th century) was Ľudovít Štúr, who studied it primarily in the context of his philosophical-political concepts (Krištof 2022).

on Christian principles. Among more contemporary figures, Charles Kingsley, an Anglican priest, played a significant role in advocating social reform and worker rights in the 19th century (Cort 1988; Čipkár 2005).

In the Slovak context, authors drew inspiration from international figures such as Leonhard Ragaz, Paul Tillich, and Jacques Maritain.⁶ The concept of Christian socialism evolved and reached an apex in the 20th century across various Christian denominations, especially within the Anglican, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic churches. In modern-day Slovakia, Christian socialism emerged as a significant political and social movement during the interwar period, responding to deepening socio-economic inequalities. Christian socialists aimed to enhance the working and impoverished classes' conditions, often burdened by high unemployment, low wages, and poor working conditions (Ragaz 1935; Čipkár 2005).

Christian socialism strived to address these issues through social reform, human rights protection, and promoting social solidarity. It's noteworthy that the movement's prominence in the political and social life of Slovakia was particularly significant during the first half of the 20th century. However, within the Lutheran church during this period, social issues were often considered peripheral, with a primary focus on spiritual and moral human improvement (Gluchman 1994, 69). The relegation of social issues to the periphery within the church could be attributed to the conservative nature of religious institutions that were more focused on maintaining spiritual purity than engaging in socio-political matters. While Christian socialism was not an official doctrine of any denomination, its supporters can be found across various Christian churches. The acceptance of Christian socialism was often based on personal convictions, and within the Lutheran community, there were divergent views on the extent to which Christian principles should be integrated into social and political activism. Furthermore, reflecting on the intergenerational dynamics, it's crucial to consider how different generations within the Lutheran community in Slovakia perceived or engaged with Christian socialism (Ragaz 1935; Münz 1994; Turner 2021).

Were the values and principles of Christian socialism transmitted across generations? How did the social and political changes of the 20th century affect the reception and adaptation of Christian socialism among newer generations?

Christian socialism was a pivotal movement in shaping social ethics among Lutheran thinkers in Slovakia during the 20th century. Its emphasis on integrating Christian ethical values into social and political reforms was significant, although received with varying degrees of enthusiasm within the Lutheran church. In the following sections, we will delve into how the movement evolved further and how other schools of thought, such as Christian Realism, emerged as significant influences on social ethics in Slovakia.

Development of social ethics issues in Slovak region

The interplay between generational consciousness and social ethics can be interpreted through multiple lenses. Within a historical framework, generational cohorts, such as Lutheran authors in this case, are shaped by the social, economic, and political conditions prevalent during their time. Specific historical events like economic downturns, social movements, or political upheavals, have the capacity to mold generational attitudes and values. Within the context under consideration, the critical historical events encompass those related to World War

⁶ Additionally, other noteworthy authors of Christian socialism included Christoph Blumhardt and Hermann Kutter.

II and the emergence of communism. Additionally, generations are nurtured within distinct cultural and religious settings that influence their beliefs and values. Ideas of social ethics may find greater acceptance among individuals raised within religious communities that prioritize social justice, compassion, and communal accountability. Moreover, generational attitudes can intersect with other facets of identity, such as class, race, and gender, which in turn shape individuals' viewpoints and experiences regarding social ethics.

In the first half of the 20th century, elements of Christian socialism are chiefly discernible among authors affiliated with the Protestant denomination, specifically Lutherans. On the contrary, Catholic philosophical authors⁷ engaged in the discourse on social ethics, particularly in relation to Christian socialism, were considerably influenced by Catholic social doctrine that was not particularly receptive to socialism.⁸ The historical context in present-day Slovakia is distinct due to its association with Catholicism during World War II. In 1939, the Slovak state was established following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, with Catholic priest Jozef Tiso as its leader. This led to the emergence of an uncommon variant of what could be termed Christian socialism, which evolved into Christian National Socialism, the official doctrine of the Slovak state beginning in 1940.⁹ However, determining the extent to which these ideas are interrelated is beyond the scope of this paper. During this time, Lutheran authors were largely marginalized, and as Gluchman observed, their focus was predominantly on practical, day-to-day issues (Gluchman 1994, 79). Nevertheless, authors from different denominations shared common criticisms of modernity, especially regarding its economic, social, political, and spiritual aspects. They condemned egoism, excessive individualism, and collectivism, along with economic liberalism, capitalism, communism, and fascism.

This analysis will concentrate on two generations (pre-war and post-war) of Lutheran authors who actively participated in discussions concerning social ethics. Ľudovít Žigmund Seberini (Szeberényi) (1859–1941), a Lutheran author, was among the first to openly criticize Marxism from a Christian standpoint with his book "Od Marxa po Lenina. Boj moderného pohanstva s kresťanstvom" (1933) [From Marx to Lenin. Fight of contemporary paganism against Christianity]. However, the first systematic exploration of socialism emerged from Samuel Štefan Osuský (1888–1975).¹⁰ His seminal work, "Vývin socializmu po stránke sociálnej teórie" (1926) [The development of socialism in terms of social theory], published in the journal *Cirkevné listy* [Christian Letters], delves into the socio-economic and philosophical theories of the socialist movement. Osuský's work analyses various ideologies within the socialist movement, ranging from Marxism to anarchism and Christian socialism. He makes a clear distinction between socialism and Bolshevism, equating the latter with fascism. Osuský endeavoured to devise solutions to social and economic problems that the socialist movement

⁷ Predominantly Neo-Thomists who relied on the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, social and other encyclicals, and especially the Social Code published by the International Unity for Social Studies in 1927. They dedicated much attention to issues of natural, economic, and social equality among humans and discussed private property, social progress, and the role of the individual. Neo-Thomism's influence waned during the 1960s and 1970s.

⁸ It should be noted that Catholic doctrine evolved over time, with positions in the 20th century (*Rerum Novarum*; *Quadragesimo Anno*; *Divini Redemptoris*) differing from earlier stances that condemned socialism, such as Pope Pius IX's *Quanta Cura* and the attached *Syllabus of Errors* (1864).

⁹ Christian National Socialism was not Christian Socialism in the true sense of the term. However, both sought a compromise between socialism and capitalism based on Christian values. Christian National Socialism was more of a political and social movement that attempted to combine Christian principles and values with social reform and national self-determination. The concept emphasized the necessity for social justice, protection of workers' rights, and poverty alleviation.

¹⁰ The issue of social problems had been addressed much earlier, at the end of the 19th century by the Lutheran priest J. A. Fábry (Gluchman 1994, 66).

sought to address, and he considered socialism to be the most influential component of the social movement in the 20th century.

Osuský critically evaluated Ragaz's concept of religious socialism and highlighted its shortcomings. He perceived it as an unrealistic utopia detached from reality. According to him, neither religious socialism nor Christian ideology possesses the fundamental foundations necessary for tangible social change. His criticisms were centred on the goals and social consequences of religious socialism. Nonetheless, Osuský acknowledged the value in Ragaz's ideas as they shed light on numerous shortcomings and future challenges, albeit through a critical lens (Osuský 1948).

Emil Boleslav Lukáč, another author from the pre-war generation, explored social progress which he believed was contingent on Christian values. He asserted that social progress is unattainable without Christianity as Christian values such as brotherhood, solidarity, and love for one's neighbour are essential for bridging the gap between the rich and poor. In his work "Kam ho položili" (1943/47) [Where They Put Him], Lukáč rejected Ragaz's notion of religiously oriented socialism. He believed that socialism and Christianity could not be integrated into a singular functional social system. However, he succeeded in reconciling Lutheran dualism through the synthesis of Christianity and humanism (Hatala 1948, 416). Ľudovít Čečetka, another representative of Christian Socialism in Slovakia, demanded to take a Christian-critical stance on social problems and argued that socialism and Christianity meet on the common platform of a humanitarian effort to improve the human condition. Therefore, Christianity, according to him, should come closer with Christianity. The fact that in modern society there has been a mutual alienation has brought negatives to both of them (Čečetka 1947). Čečetka, like his contemporaries, believed that Christian principles should guide social reform and that the church has a responsibility in addressing social problems.

Rudolf Košťál (1913–1991) is regarded as the pioneer of Christian socialism as the principal school of thought concerning social ethics in the region. In his work, Košťál emphasizes that the social question is a central issue of modern times, and that Christianity is obligated to address it. His main work, "Kresťanstvo a sociálna otázka" (1946) [Christianity and Social Question], outlines a Christian social program that closely aligns with the social teachings of the Catholic Church. According to Košťál, Christian socialism can only emerge through the revival of Christianity. He believed that a synthesis of Christianity and socialism is plausible. Interestingly, both Catholics and Lutherans criticized Košťál's approach. Lutherans accused him of failing to differentiate between Lutheran and Catholic teachings, and for deviating from the Lutheran doctrine of dualism (the two kingdoms doctrine). Catholics, on the other hand, criticized him for his perceived attacks on Catholicism (Košťál 1946).

Ján Hano and Július Madarás are among the final representatives of the pre-war generation of Christian socialism. Hano saw Christian socialism as a middle ground between Christianity and socialism, whereas Madarás adopted a more overt stance against secular socialism (Letz, 2010; Gluchman 2008, 147). Hano contended that capitalists, in their relentless pursuit of wealth, held nothing sacred and disregarded religious values. He accepted socialism as a tool for reducing social disparities but rejected the Marxist ideology associated with it. Hano emphasized that the goal of Christian socialism is a spiritual revolution that embraces both Christianity and socialism (Gluchman 1994, 93–96; Hano 1947).

The pre-war generation was characterized by critical evaluations of Marxist socialism, Marxism, and Bolshevism, and believed that Christian socialism could either solve or contribute

to solving social ethics issues. In contrast, the post-war generation faced a broader and more urgent array of social issues. The authors of the post-war generation had to contend with political and ideological pressures from Marxist socialism and sought alternative strategies to address social ethics issues. They found their answer in Christian realism.

Post-war generation

Christian realists distinguished themselves from Christian socialists in several notable ways, primarily through their refusal to assert the exclusivity of Christianity as the solution to societal issues. Instead, they contended that the role of religion was to foster an environment in which adults could be nurtured into becoming actively engaged individuals who were capable of viewing the world and its problems through a realistic lens, without overemphasizing the role of Christianity. Notable representatives of Christian realism in Slovakia included Ján Michalko, Karol Gábriš, and Július Filo (Letz 2010).

Gluchman posits that a salient distinction between Christian realists and Christian socialists lies in the former's ability to more cogently articulate their theoretical assumptions, thereby establishing a more solid foundation for addressing real-world problems. Contrary to the Christian Socialists who primarily adapted the Swiss model of religious socialism to fit the Slovak context, Christian realists devised innovative approaches that aligned with the political, social, and economic realities that emerged post-1948. This approach evolved into what became known as face-to-life theology,¹¹ which is rooted in the teachings of the Lutheran scholar, Paul Tillich (Gluchman 1994, 98–106).

Paul Tillich (1886–1965), a prominent German-American theologian and philosopher, is widely recognized for his contributions to existentialist theology and Christian existentialism. He was particularly influenced by the Social Gospel movement early in his career, which sought to employ Christian principles in addressing social problems, and which aligned with Christian socialist values, particularly in advocating for economic and social justice. Tillich was actively engaged in religious socialist movements in Germany, which aimed at reconciling Christian teachings with socialist principles.¹² His theology was also deeply imbued with existentialist notions, particularly the concept of existential anxiety. He viewed economic and social issues as sources of existential angst and believed that addressing these issues was crucial to tackling broader human existential concerns (Tillich 1960).

Slovak proponents of face-to-life theology were particularly drawn to the pragmatic elements of Tillich's theology. In a period when Christianity in the region was undergoing transformation post-1948, Tillich's teachings offered viable alternatives. With regard to Marxism, Tillich adopted a balanced perspective, acknowledging the merits of Marx's critique of capitalism and the promotion of economic justice, but expressing reservations regarding Marxist materialism and its view of religion. Notably, unlike Ragaz and Tillich, representatives of face-to-life theology refrained from overt criticism of political socialism. It is imperative to highlight that while the pre-war generation was closely aligned with Ragaz's Christian socialism, the post-

¹¹ In the English translation it is also possible to find the terms "theology facing life" and "service theology". One of the earliest reflections on this theology can be found in Miroslav Kýška's work "Teológia tvárou k životu v službe cirkvi a svetu" [Theology facing life in the service of the church and the world], which was defended in 1984.

¹² In the dissertation thesis titled "Kresťanstvo a socializmus v raných spisoch Paula Tillicha" [Christianity and socialism in the early writings of Paul Tillich], the former dean of the Evangelical Lutheran Theological Faculty, Dušan Ondrejovič, mediates the reflection of the perception of these issues in our region.

war generation exhibited a pragmatic inclination towards Tillich. This shift can be partially attributed to confessional differences—Ragaz was Calvinist while Tillich was Lutheran—but primarily to Tillich’s more conciliatory stance towards Marxism and socialism.

Face-to-life theology, which can be regarded as a Slovak variant of Christian realism, emerged within a highly specific historical and cultural milieu, and addressed particular challenges. Ján Michalko defined the principal tenets of this theology in his 1953 article “Teológia tvárou k životu“ [Face to Life Theology]. He characterized humans as frail, fallible, and sinful, yet also as proactive, accountable, and dedicated individuals striving to infuse the world and human relationships with the virtues of love and justice (Michalko 1953; Gluchman 1994). In the post-war era, societal issues evolved and differed from those of the pre-war era. The pre-war generation grappled with poverty, pauperism, and unemployment, which were ostensibly eradicated post-1948. The post-war generation, however, was preoccupied with promoting active Christian participation in worldly affairs. Christian involvement, rather than socialism, was deemed essential in providing social service to others.

Both Gabriš and Michalko advocated the notion that assistance is perennially required by someone, somewhere. Consequently, the binding thread of this generation was activism, a renunciation of passivity, and a celebration of love (Gabriš 1972; Michalko 1953). Despite minor divergences—for instance, Michalko emphasized global solidarity, Gabriš underscored collective cooperation, and Nandransky highlighted commitment—these differences did not detract them from their shared objectives. Another shared characteristic was their uncritical acceptance of socialism and deliberate oversight of its shortcomings (Gluchman 1994). As Michalko asserted, Christianity’s role in society is manifested through spiritualism, realism, activism, optimism, universalism, and humanism; social aid, which was previously within Christianity’s purview during the pre-war era, became either a state or socialist domain, or was deemed redundant.

Comparison and conclusion

Both Christian Socialism and Christian Realism were grounded in Christian ethics and values. They both emphasized the role of Christian teachings in shaping moral and ethical behaviour in society. Both movements having in focus social ethics issues showed concern for social justice and sought to address societal problems. They emphasized the role of the individual and community in working towards a more just and equitable society. Both Christian Socialism and Christian Realism were critical of unchecked capitalism. They questioned the societal impact of economic systems that did not incorporate ethical considerations. Both movements engaged with socialist principles to varying degrees. Christian Socialism sought to synthesize Christian values with socialist principles, while Christian Realism did not dismiss socialism and recognized the need for economic justice but did not wholly embrace it. Christian Socialism tended to advocate for a synthesis between Christian values and socialism, believing that socialist principles could be in line with Christian ethics. On the other hand, Christian Realism was more pragmatic and did not assert that Christianity held the exclusive answer to social problems. It acknowledged the role of different social systems, including socialism, without endorsing any one system exclusively.

The pre-war generation focused on issues like poverty, unemployment, and critiques of Marxist socialism. The post-war generation, influenced by Christian Realism, was more concerned with the active participation of Christians in society, social engagement, and personal responsibility. The theology of face-to-life, which was an outcome of Christian Realism in Slovak region, was

concerned with issues that were allowed to it. This theology was the result of the social and political constraints that existed in the region after 1948. In this context, while Christian Socialists viewed Christianity as an integral framework for solving societal problems, Christian Realists viewed the role of religion as assisting in nurturing engaged individuals who could address societal issues without overemphasizing Christianity. Christian Socialists were generally critical of Marxist socialism. In contrast, Christian Realism, especially as influenced by Paul Tillich, had a more nuanced view of Marxism. It appreciated Marx's critique of capitalism and the idea of economic justice but held reservations about Marxist materialism and views on religion.

Christian Socialism in the Slovak region was influenced by a range of thinkers including Catholic and Lutheran theologians. Christian Realism, particularly in its face-to-life theology form, was significantly influenced by Paul Tillich, a Lutheran theologian. Christian Realism emphasized activism and rejected passivity. It encouraged individuals to actively participate in society to bring about love and justice. Christian Socialism focused more on the synthesis of Christian values with socialist principles as a solution to social issues.

In summary, Christian Socialism and Christian Realism share a foundation in Christian ethics and concern for social justice, but diverge in their attitudes toward socialism, the role of Christianity in society, and their focus on societal issues. The transition from Christian Socialism to Christian Realism in the Slovak region reflects the adaptations and responses to the changing social, political, and economic contexts of the times.

Based on the provided study it can be inferred that the dynamics of intergenerational change played a substantial role in the issue of social ethics in Slovakia during the 20th century. In the early part of the 20th century, the pre-war generation in Slovakia was influenced by Christian Socialism, which emphasized addressing issues such as poverty, unemployment, and critiquing Marxist socialism. This generation leaned towards synthesizing Christian values with socialist principles to tackle social issues, believing that socialism could be aligned with Christian ethics. They viewed Christianity as an essential framework for addressing and solving societal problems. However, post-World War II, the social and political landscapes changed dramatically, and this led to a shift in perspectives on social ethics among the subsequent generations. The post-war generation in Slovakia adopted a different approach. Face-to-life theology which came from Christian Realism was a reaction to the social and political constraints of that time and evolved in response to the need for a more pragmatic approach towards social ethics.

Christian Realism did not claim the exclusivity of Christianity in solving social problems. Instead, it recognized the importance of preparing and nurturing engaged individuals who could address societal issues realistically, without overemphasizing the role of Christianity. This approach was influenced by Paul Tillich's theology, which was more benevolent towards Marxism compared to the Christian Socialist perspective. The post-war generation focused on activism, rejecting passivity, and emphasized love and justice as key values. This shift from Christian Socialism to Christian Realism reflects the dynamics of intergenerational change in Slovakia during the 20th century. The changes in political, social, and economic realities after World War II shaped the ways in which the post-war generation addressed social ethics issues. The emphasis shifted from integrating Christian values with socialism to a more realistic and pragmatic approach that recognized the role of different social systems in addressing societal problems.

In conclusion, the dynamics of intergenerational change had a substantial impact on social ethics in Slovakia during the 20th century. This was manifested in the shift from a Christian Socialism framework in the early part of the century to a Christian Realism approach in the latter part, as society adapted to the changing social and political contexts.

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