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REFLECTIONS OF LÉVINAS'S AND SARTRE'S ETHICS IN SLOVAK LUTHERAN ETHICS¹

Despite the fact that the theme of intersubjectivity is primarily a twentieth century theme and it is related to phenomenology, existentialism or discursive ethics, I believe that many essential features of intersubjectivity can be found in much earlier works. In my paper I would like to show that the given problem was already considered in the nineteenth century, in the context of reflections in Slovak Lutheran ethics, which outlined the changes in the understanding of intersubjectivity appearing in Slovak Lutheran ethics at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century². I will compare the understanding of the relation to others (or neighbours) existing in the context of Slovak Lutheran ethics with the opinions of Emanuel Lévinas and partly also with the opinions of Jean Paul Sartre.

Although Slovak Lutheran ethics represents the ethics in which the 'love thy neighbour' principle has a very important position, it is not the

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² In my paper I will touch on the problem of religion and religious faith only marginally. I assume that the religious dimension of intersubjectivity assumes, in Slovak Lutheran ethics, a primary position and undoubtedly determines the character of its reflections on the relations to others. Since I am examining Slovak Lutheran ethics, I will focus on the ethical dimension of intersubjectivity, while the theological or religious dimension is intentionally paid, more or less, little attention, although I am aware of its significance and role for believers and their relation to others (neighbours).

same kind of ethics of intersubjectivity that we find in Lévinas's works. In Lévinas's case we can speak about the hegemony of the Other, which ultimately leads to our endless and absolute responsibility: "as soon as the Other looks at me I am responsible for him and I do not even have to accept this responsibility for him, it is simply entrusted to me"³. Unlike Lévinas, Slovak Lutheran authors (for example, Ján Chalupka or Jonáš Záborský in the nineteenth century and Martin Rázus, Samuel Štefan Osuský, Karol Nandrásky and Igor Kišš among others in the twentieth century) did not formulate the responsibility of an individual for another individual as absolute; they realized the limits of our responsibility. They do not blame an individual for everything bad that has happened to the Other because they clearly realize that the Other is, to a great extent, responsible for his/her own destiny, for what has happened to him/her. It is even possible to state that nineteenth century authors (Ján Chalupka and Jonáš Záborský) put especially great emphasis on the responsibility of individuals for themselves, for their own destiny. However, this primarily relates to the individual ethical level because the Slovak Lutheran intelligentsia (and not only they) was strongly aware of their responsibility on the social ethical level, for the fate of the Slovak nation, for the preservation of its national identity.

In the twentieth century the problem of intersubjectivity and the responsibility to the Other in Slovak Lutheran ethics acquires a different dimension. In comparison with the nineteenth century, in the twentieth century we can find much greater emphasis on the awareness of one's responsibility to one's neighbour, for the fate of the country and ultimately for the fate of the world. This position can be found, for example, in the opinions of Martin Rázus, Samuel Štefan Osuský, in the context of 'facing life' theology (in this theology we can probably find the clearest example of this position in the entire twentieth century), and also nowadays in Igor Kišš's work. However, unlike in Lévinas's work, in the works of these authors we cannot find the hegemony of the Other, but rather their emphasizing of responsibility and solidarity, not only with the nation, the country or the world but also with individuals and their problems. In the first half of the twentieth century many Slovak Lutheran authors tended to perceive man as sinful and corrupted, and they had a similar perception of the world. In the first half of the nineteenth century Slovak Lutherans (J. Kollár, J. Chalupka, J. Záborský and others) perceived the world much more positively and with the hope that the world was mor-

³ E. Lévinas, *Etika a nekonečno*, Praha 1994, s. 182.

ally improving, becoming better when compared to the past. This positive vision is also developed in ‘facing life’ theology and nowadays it is especially I. Kišš who writes about the humanization of the world. In Kišš’s view, a Christian should follow in his life the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, such as love, righteousness, equality, mercy, peace, service, truth, and the preservation of life. Christian ethics, then, in his opinion, does not only have a transcendental and after-life dimension, but also an imminent and worldly dimension. He believes that in this life we can already partially experience our salvation by God if we live according to the ethical principles of the Sermon on the Mount. It is acting according to these principles that contributes to the humanization of the world, regardless of whether the acts are performed by Christians or ‘secular people’⁴.

It does not mean that the ‘facing life’ theology, or Kišš did not or do not see the problems of the world and man existing in it, including his moral problems, but they refuse to put people in the position of eternal sinners who, at every single moment, question their conscience as to whether they have done enough for their neighbours. They do not share Lévinas’s opinion that people simply cannot have a clear conscience. According to their understanding, intersubjectivity does not mean maximization of one’s responsibility for others and eternal doubting as to whether one did the maximum that one could for the other. They rather ask the question whether one did enough for the other within the limits of what one could do. This is not an endless or limitless responsibility for the other but a limited responsibility related to the fact that they understand the other as a fully-valued human being that must bear responsibility for themselves. Only when realizing this responsibility, the human being becomes a fully-valued being also in the face of God, emancipating oneself from God (of course, not in the sense of the atheistic understanding of emancipation). In this context it is possible to quote Ján Chalupka, who vigorously warns: “Let’s avoid being similar to those that make greater effort to appear than to be. Let’s not strive at being perceived by the world as being more precious, having higher status, being more clever than we really are. But let us be really as good, brave, clever as we want others to perceive us”⁵. We can perceive in this claim a certain analogy with Sartre’s existentialist thesis that man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself⁶. Of course, this is a very

⁴ I. Kišš, *Ježišova kázeň na vrchu v živote kresťana. Etické problémy 5. kapitoly Evanjelia podľa Matúša*, Liptovský Mikuláš 2002, s. 25-26.

⁵ J. Chalupka, *Kázně nedělnj a světečné I*, Pešť 1846, s. 68.

⁶ J.P. Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, London 1980, s. 28.

loose analogy because Sartre's claim has a completely different metaphysical basis than the claims of Chalupka or other Slovak Lutheran authors. Despite this, I think that the emphasis on the quest for a moral identity of individuals in their own being and actions, to a great extent, prevails in the context of Slovak Lutheran ethics in the nineteenth century as well as in the twentieth century (especially in its second half) and even nowadays. According to Slovak Lutheran authors (Ján Chalupka, Jonáš Záborský, Martin Rázus, Samuel Štefan Osuský, Karol Nandrásy, Ján Michalko, Igor Kišš and others), it forms the core of subjectivity and the moral identity of an individual.

Of course, just like in nineteenth and twentieth century Slovak Lutheran ethics, in Lévinas's conception, responsibility plays a very important role. However, while Lévinas understands responsibility as the primary responsibility for the Other that has an ontological status, in Slovak Lutheran ethics the primary moral responsibility is understood as the responsibility for oneself (in the face of God), for what one makes of oneself and the responsibility to the other, to one's neighbour is secondary. Again, this emphasis on responsibility allows one to draw a certain analogy with the Sartrian perception of responsibility that differs from Lévinas's understanding. In contrast to Lévinas, Slovak Lutheran authors do not absolve one's neighbour and do not assign to his/her existence the character of exclusiveness or sainthood. They clearly recognize the limits and faults of their neighbours. When compared to some Slovak Lutheran authors of the first half of the twentieth century (V. Rolko, E.B. Lukáč), the Slovak Lutheran authors of the second half of the same century do not criticize their neighbours for their metaphysical guilt and sins, but instead they choose a more empathetic approach. Not even in the nineteenth century, can we find any negative attitudes to the sinfulness of people and their accusation of metaphysically given sinfulness and corruption. On the contrary, however, we can very often find a sympathetic attitude, or tolerance of people's sins and sinfulness (for example, in the works of J. Chalupka, L. Štúr or, before them, in Pavol Doležal's eighteenth century works). Still, their attitude to sin and people's sinfulness did not prevent them from presenting their strong criticism of sins and offences of Slovaks of the given era, for example alcoholism, poverty, and many other miseries of the Slovak nation common at the time (Kuzmány, Štúr, Záborský).

Unlike in Lévinas's work, in which the Other is the criterion of our thinking, decision making and actions, in Slovak Lutheran ethics in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and even nowadays, one's neighbour

does not have the status of a criterion or an aim that should control and conduct our behaviour. The neighbour becomes one of the means of realizing the intention to fulfil our purpose in the world. Some might object that this approach is in conflict with Kant's categorical imperative that states that man must always be perceived as an end in himself and never merely as a means⁷. The objection may be correct, but one cannot say that Kant's deontological ethics is a theme that is clearly present in twentieth century Slovak Lutheran ethics. For example, Igor Kišš rejects the Kantian approach to ethics as artificial because it can lead to absurd decisions and conclusions⁸. According to Slovak Lutheran authors, the duty of man, especially, is determined by the need to fulfil one of the fundamental theses of the Lutheran faith, i.e. Luther's doctrine of justification by faith requiring believers to do good as an expression of their gratefulness for salvation. In this context, a significant role for responsibility to others is created, which, however, is not metaphysical and absolute but is a result of man's free decision to do good. In this respect, it is possible to state together with Sartre that "Man makes himself...by the choice of his morality"⁹.

In Lévinas's work the need to help other people, to take responsibility for them, rescue them, prevails, since people are understood, to a great extent, as weak and limited beings. Generally, it is possible to state that in nineteenth century Slovak Lutheran ethics, just like in twentieth century (especially works from its second half) and contemporary Slovak Lutheran ethics, a rather positive image of people, faith in their abilities and possibilities prevails, which, in the case of some representatives of 'facing life' theology, has transformed into a thesis about people as co-creators of the world. For example, Karol Nandrásky perceives people as responsible and active agents of the earthly life and the process of creation of human history. In Nandrásky's opinion, by their activity, people fulfil a divine mandate and take part in the divine direction and control of the world. The world can be as God wants it to be only with the help of people realizing His intentions. According to Nandrásky, this can be achieved only thanks to the fact that "God opens people's potential, however not on the basis of some earthly certainties and recourses but in direct opposition to them, as the power of love that determines people's life"¹⁰. Similarly, Kišš

⁷ I. Kant, *Ethical Philosophy*, Indianapolis, Cambridge 1983, s. 97.

⁸ I. Kišš, *Deontológia alebo teleológia v etike*. W: *Hodnoty a súčasné etické teórie*, red. V. Gluchman, Prešov 1996, s. 133-139.

⁹ J.P. Sartre, *Existentialism...*, s. 50.

¹⁰ K. Nandrásky, *Boh je láska!*, „Cirkevné listy“ 1975, r. 88, cz. 5, s. 74.

also concludes that people have been given a special status in the world of creation, to be God's partners in the process of creation, to help to develop this earth into flourishing and completion, to build towns, fertilize fields, to make the earth inhabitable. According to Kišš, people were created in God's own image, which means that people are also the creators that form this earth¹¹. According to him, a Christian should primarily strive for love, peace and quietude, but this does not mean to be passive, or not to resist evil by violence, or to lapse into some form of quietism. Kišš bases his belief on the fact that "in the realm of individual ethics the Christian should be a person of the Sermon on the Mount – mild, forgiving, kind, gentle. But if he faces things that are not acceptable in ecclesiastical or social life, he must know how to be strict, to stand on principle, and, if necessary, fight vigorously against evil. These two ethics are not in mutual conflict since God also acts in this way: he is kind sometimes and strict at other times"¹².

In contrast to Lévinas's understanding of responsibility for the Other, which is metaphysically given to us and precedes our free will while it determines our relation to others in a significant way, in Slovak Lutheran ethics our responsibility to others is the result of our free will and free decision for others. In respect to the responsibility for ourselves we can speak of a metaphysical dimension of the responsibility that is given to us as a divine mandate or a metaphysical moral duty. In Lévinas's conception, responsibility is a moral 'knot' of one's subjectivity, but in the context of Slovak Lutheran ethics it is possible to say that responsibility is, at most, a secondary quality for which one decides, chooses and which becomes part of one's decision for the life that complies with the moral commandments from the Decalogue or the Sermon on the Mount. In this case we again can see an analogy with Sartre's understanding of choice which, according to him, is an authentic and free manifestation of people's choosing their being, existence and ultimately also the responsibility that results from their choice¹³. In this respect Slovak Lutheran ethics, with its understanding of responsibility as the function of will, or choice is closer to Sartre's than to Lévinas's conception of responsibility. It does not mean, however, that this conception is identical to Sartre's vision of responsibility resulting from choice, which, according to him, is an absolute and profound responsibility. The religious belief of Slovak Lutheran

¹¹ I. Kišš, *Človek ako spolutvorca stvorenia*, „Tvorba“ 1991, r. 1, cz. 5, s. 5-6.

¹² Tenže, *Ježišova kázeň...*, s. 34-35.

¹³ J.P. Sartre, *Existentialism...*, s. 29-30.

authors prevents them from adopting such a position because an absolute and profound responsibility is mainly the responsibility of God and people cannot bear the absolute responsibility for their decisions and actions since they are 'only' co-creators of the world.

Lévinas subordinates the subjectivity of an individual to intersubjectivity, but in Slovak Lutheran ethics, intersubjectivity becomes the fulfilment of subjectivity since, only through relation to one's neighbour, can an individual fulfil the requirements of the Decalogue or the Sermon on the Mount delineating the moral context of contemplation, decision-making, behaviour, and actions of a believer. Subjectivity and intersubjectivity are complementary because otherwise they would lose their meaning. In Slovak Lutheran ethics, the authenticity of an individual is primary, but this authenticity can be fulfilled only through the individual's relation to others. However, in no way should this aim at the absolution of requirements, or duties to others, which could ultimately lead to the negation of the authenticity of the acting moral agent. In Lévinas's case we can state that the subordination of the subjectivity of individuals to intersubjectivity leads to the suppression of authenticity of acting moral agents because they lose themselves, dissolve in the Other. In Lévinas's understanding, an individual becomes a moral agent only in the Other, while in the understanding of Slovak Lutheran ethics, individuals become moral agents independently of others, but their status as moral agents broadens through their relation to their neighbours or through their responsibility to their neighbours. In this case, responsibility is understood as responsibility to the neighbour not for the neighbour, which makes Slovak Lutheran ethics significantly different from Lévinas's conception. Through the responsibility to our neighbour we can share responsibility, but the decisive role is played by the one whom we want to help, i.e. the neighbour. To take responsibility for others means to accept the duty to direct or control their life, and ultimately accept the responsibility for the good or happy living of their life, which then leads to interfering with the lives of others, to their enslaving. Slovak Lutheran ethics do not aim at this since it understands people as free, rational beings and especially as beings capable of functioning as co-creators of the world in which they exist. That is why it favours the responsibility to one's neighbour and humankind rather than the responsibility for one's neighbour or humankind.

Clearly, the theme of authenticity of individuals, their freedom, choice and intersubjectivity has been present in Slovak Lutheran ethics from the nineteenth century onwards. It has gone through certain developments and changes, undoubtedly related to the developments and changes experi-

enced by the human community through this period, or the Slovak nation or the Lutheran Church itself. However, it can undoubtedly be stated that Slovak Lutheran ethics puts emphasis first of all on individuals, their self-creation in the process of thinking and decision-making, behaviour and conduct, which brings, among other things, the requirement of the realization of one's responsibility, first of all for oneself, but also to others. I think that, essentially, this moment has determined the character of Slovak Lutheran ethics in the course of its development from the nineteenth century till the present day and is one of the key moments in the religious as well as ethical and moral life of Lutheran believers.

Dyskusje nad etyką Lévinasa i Sartre'a w słowackiej etyce ewangelickiej

Problematyka intersubiektywności odgrywała szczególną rolę w nauce w XX wieku, co jest związane nie tylko z popularnością fenomenologii, egzystencjalizmu czy etyki dyskursywnej, bowiem wiele głównych wątków intersubiektywnego dyskursu pojawiło się w nauce dużo wcześniej. W artykule została opisana obecność tego problemu w słowackiej etyce ewangelickiej już w XIX wieku, a zarazem wskazana możliwość zaobserwowania ewolucji w zrozumieniu tego zagadnienia na przełomie XX i XXI wieku.

Autor zwraca szczególną uwagę na te okresy w słowackiej historii kultury i myśli, w których ważną rolę odgrywali: XIX-wieczny intelektualista Ján Chalupka, w XX wieku Jonasz Záborský, a w początkach obecnego stulecia Igor Kiss. Problematyka człowieka autentycznego, jego wolności, wolnej woli oraz intersubiektywności wywarła zatem wyraźny wpływ na słowacką etykę ewangelicką jeszcze w XIX wieku. Można więc stwierdzić, że etyka ta kładzie szczególny nacisk na jednostkę, jej samokreację poprzez procesy poznawcze, podejmowanie decyzji, przejawiane zachowania oraz podejmowane działania, które doprowadzają między innymi do coraz większego uświadamiania odpowiedzialności nie tylko za siebie, ale także za innych.