CHRISTIAN AND SECULAR CULTURE IN THE LIGHT OF (POST)-CONCILIAR ECCLESIOLOGY THEIR UNITY IN DIFFERENCE

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Abstract

The doctrine of the Second Vatican Council not only changed the Church's understanding of culture, but also changed its attitude towards the world around it. (Post)-Vatican II theology pointed to culture as the vehicle of these contacts. The point of this submission, therefore, is to demonstrate that the becoming of the Church in all its stages of formation leads to a dialogical encounter with environments that are outside the Church. Moreover. This process of ecclesiogenesis leads, on the one hand, to a necessary critique of the internal ecclesial environment, its purification and enrichment, and on the other: it strengthens secular culture and points it to spiritual and transcendent dimensions, thus influencing the integral development of the whole world, and not only in the dimension of spirituality.

Keywords: Church, ecclesiogenesis, culture, secularity, dialogue

1. Status quaestionis

Our investigations will take place in several stages. First, we will present the question of the formation of the Church, and this in the light of the Trinity. The second step is to define culture in the theological sense that flows from ecclesiogenesis. We will then show secular culture and its relative autonomy. The final step is to juxtapose the bilateral interactions of these two spaces of cultural practice, their distinctiveness but also their mutual enrichment. In conclusion, we will attempt to answer the question posed by our analyses: how and to what extent does the process of the formation of the Church and the resulting form of culture serve to reinforce an integral culture, which on the one hand is a product of man, and on the other: should shape and enrich him.

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2. Permanent Trinitarian ecclesiogenesis

In order to demonstrate the interrelationship between the formation of the Church and secular culture, we will begin with a presentation of ecclesiogenesis. The Church has its profound Trinitarian determinants, which are revealed in its ecclesiogenesis [1]. The formation of the Church is inconceivable without reference to the Trinity. This is why Catholic ecclesiogenesis (when speaking about the process of the formation of the Church), which has been going on for centuries and is the result of many factors, such as the interpretation of Revelation, the doctrine of faith, religious practices, politics, economics and culture - tries to interpret it as Trinitarian.

Even more: reflection on the personal life of the Persons of the Trinity reveals the existential truth about man, which is founded on freedom and communion, which leads to love. God is love, and man cannot live without love. Unlike other creatures, man has been endowed with the privilege of being a person, that is, with the possibility of realising life in the image of the relationship of the Persons of the Trinity.

Discovering the mystery of God and the mystery of man is a long-term process, as we have precisely in the case of the Church, which is a divine-human community. We speak of a permanent Trinitarian ecclesiogenesis, since the process of salvation of man and the world is unfinished and still ongoing. All the more so because it is partly dependent on human freedom and the mystery of sin. Sin - understood not only as man's personal abuse of freedom, but also the structures of evil and the existence and action of an evil spirit - come into play here. The whole of humanity, therefore, is in constant need of spiritual formation, which is linked both to the culture brought about by the event of the Church and to the culture proposed by non-ecclesial circles.

What then is ecclesiogenesis? Theology speaks of five stages in the formation of the Church of the Trinity: 1) the extra-temporal idea of God the Father; 2) the gathering (kahal) of the people of Israel under the Old Covenant; 3) the ecclesiogenic acts of Jesus, constituting the perfect New Covenant in his flesh and blood; 4) the universal community of the redeemed realised since Pentecost in the present earthly time; 5) the eschatological fullness of believing sisters and brothers [2].

The stages of the Church's coming into being were indicated by the Council Fathers in their constitution Lumen *gentium* No. 2, and were later put forward in catechism teaching; cf. CCC 759-768 (the first stage of its coming into being was the idea conceived in the heart of God the Father (CCC 759) and expressed from the beginning of the world in various signs (CCC 760)); then its preparation in Old Testament times (CCC 761-762), then its establishment by Jesus Christ (CCC 763-766) and finally its revelation to the world in Pentecost (CCC 767-768). The last is its eschaticity.

Let us briefly explain these different stages of ecclesial communion. How do we understand the extra-temporal idea of the Heavenly Father in relation to the genesis of the Church? The Trinity not only brought the whole of creation

into existence, but crowned it with man, who was created in the image and likeness of God. Man was endowed with reason, freedom and the capacity to love. By abusing freedom, humankind in Adam and Eve broke the communion of Creation with God. In condoning this sin of man, God had already planned to raise this first kind of relationship with man to a higher level. Hence He planned the community of the Church, in whose space man passes from the level of Creation to the level of God's family. Hence, the origins of the Church as the desire of God the Father to create with man a community more perfect than that, which resulted from Creation, go back to the sin of the first parents.

Many writers of early Christianity wrote of the beginning of the Church as far back as Adam and Eve, or Noah, Abraham or Abel, as a righteous offering pleasing to God. They proclaimed that God created the world because He wanted the Church, that is, a state in which the permanent renewal of humanity could take place. The idea was that man in Jesus Christ (the only-begotten Son of God) could become an adopted child of the Trinity.

This idea of God offering man something more than an existence in the image and likeness of God reached a second stage in the convocation of the Jewish people. The Old Testament ecclesiogenesis reveals to us the centuries-long process of Israel's emergence as God's chosen people and as a religious community. In the first centuries of Israel's development as a nation, Israel's religion was largely linked to nature worship, consisting of various rituals and sacrifices. From the polytheistic beliefs of the peoples of the Middle East and the religious pluralism of Egypt, the Jews move towards henotheism, to eventually rigorously adhere to pure monotheism. By the time of the Kingdom of Israel, it had even assumed a monarchical character, with kings becoming not only political but also spiritual leaders. Their religiosity was certainly influenced by Egyptian culture, Assyrian culture, the Babylonian captivity, the influence of the Greek empire of Alexander of Macedonia and then the Roman Empire. Through the calling of Abraham, the Egyptian captivity and the exodus from it, Israel gradually gained an awareness of the existence of the one and only God. Its religious and state identity is strengthened by God's covenant with Moses and the receipt of the Torah, or law, providing the foundation for the awareness of being a chosen people.

The Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Covenant, the Jerusalem Temple are all clear typological images of the future Church. In Yahweh's formation of Israel as God's people, another essential element is the 'Remnant' faithful by grace (Isaiah 10.20-23; Jeremiah 31.31; Ezekiel 36.25-27; Zephaniah 3.13-14, 16-17). However Yahweh makes a covenant with his people based on law, we are dealing with a covenant of faith. God forms his people by faith. The sequence: 'Abraham - Isaac - Jacob - the twelve sons of Jacob' teaches that it is not so much about ethnicity, but about the shared experience of believing that God acts, saves, gathers his people and gives them a future. The true people of Israel are formed over time by the heirs of Abraham, not in the biological sense (resulting from blood ties), but by spiritual descendants, i.e. following his faith [3, 4].

The third stage consists of the ecclesiocreative acts of Jesus, which include: the calling of the disciples; the establishment of the college of twelve apostles, the election of Peter and entrusting him with primacy, the institution of the Last Supper, the passion and death and resurrection, and the ascension. As Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God is rejected by the majority of Israel, he constitutes a new form of the people of God: "Christ established this new covenant, namely, the new testament in his blood (cf. 1 Cor 11:25), calling from among Jews and Gentiles a people who, not according to the flesh but through the Spirit, would come together and be the new people of God. For believers in Christ, regenerated not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible seed by the word of the living God (cf. 1 Peter 1:23), not of the flesh but of water and the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:5-6), are finally established as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people, who once were not a people but are now the people of God" (1 Peter 2:9-10)" [5].

The fourth stage begins with Pentecost. Pentecost reorganises the dispersed community of Jesus of Nazareth in the context after his resurrection. He Himself before His Passover stated: "It is profitable for you that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you. And if I go away, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." (John 16.7-8) Without the departure of the glorious Lord, the pneumatic stage would not have been reached. The gifts of redemption merited by Christ begin henceforth to be sacramentally administered. It was from Pentecost that the atonement - merited by Christ's death and resurrection and placed at the disposal of the Church - began to be communicated to people of all times and generations.

The fifth stage is eschatology - dealing with the final destiny of man and the world - was already initiated in the event of creation. The texts of the New Testament are filled with the fulfilment of God's eternal plans as they are realised through the obedience of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit. The eschatological events take place at different times, overlapping one another. On the one hand, Christians await the end of time and the *parousia* of the risen Lord, and on the other; these times have already begun. In other words: Jesus, through his Spirit, is an irrevocable divine 'yes' to man and the whole world. This 'yes' begun in the mystery of the incarnation, revealed and constantly proclaimed by the Church of the Triune God, will never be undone. In uttering this 'yes' to us in this way, God has handed himself over to us so that we enter into a personal relationship with him.

It seems that theological thought about the Church is still more Christocentric than pneumatocentric. And yet the Holy Spirit is the identity of the continuation of the work of the Father and of Christ. "The Spirit of truth, will lead you into all truth. For he will not speak from himself, but will say all things whatsoever he hears, and will declare to you things to come. He will surround me with glory, because from mine he will take and reveal to you." (John 16.13-14) The creative breath of life was given to all men, animating man only materially and mentally, whereas the Spirit - which the author of the 'Adversus

haereses' calls Adoption - makes man a child of God in the likeness of Jesus Christ, makes the transition from the condition of the old Adam to the perfection of Christ ('the new Adam') [6, 7].

3. Culture in the light of (post)-conciliar ecclesiology

Vatican II and its (post)-conciliar interpretation unequivocally overcame the anti-modern mentality of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century and entered into both critical and constructive dialogue with the modern world. This came about through the Council's recognition of the progress in the history of freedom and religious liberty ("For centuries, Roman Catholicism held that only the Catholic Church had the right to religious freedom by virtue of its possession of the truth, and that religious communities not in communion with it could only be tolerated. Rome saw the basis of religious freedom in Revelation and objective moral norms. In contrast, the Second Vatican Council, in its Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis humanae*, accepted that the basis of religious freedom is the dignity of the human person discovered by reason and by Revelation." [8]), the emphasis on the legitimate autonomy of the world's cultural areas ("God's plan for the world is that people should shape the order of temporal affairs by a concerted effort and constantly improve it. Everything that makes up the order of temporal affairs, namely, personal and family possessions, culture, economic affairs, the arts and professional occupations, political institutions, international relations and the like, development and their progress, are not only aids to man's attainment of the final goal, but also have a value of their own, implanted in them by God, whether taken by themselves or as parts of the whole temporal order: <And God saw that everything he had made was very good> (Rom 1:31). This natural goodness of temporal things is given some special dignity by their relation to the human person, because they are created to serve him." [9]), the separation of Church and State and the renunciation by the Church of worldly power and privileges even legally acquired. In this document (GS No. 76) we can read: "There are, indeed, close links between earthly things and those elements of man's condition which transcend the world. The Church herself makes use of temporal things insofar as her own mission requires it. She, for her part, does not place her trust in the privileges offered by civil authority. She will even give up the exercise of certain rights which have been legitimately acquired, if it becomes clear that their use will cast doubt on the sincerity of her witness or that new ways of life demand new methods." [9, p. 592]

According to the Council, a deeper understanding of the Church and temporal affairs is achieved by paying more attention to man. It therefore placed the subject of man at the centre of its deliberations as no Council had done before. This anthropocentrism, however, does not mean that man is a rival to God. It was supremely clear to the Council that the central theme of Christian faith and Theology is the Trinity revealed in Jesus Christ, as indicated by the

Bible and Tradition. Indeed, in the texts of the Council there was a re-evaluation of the human person in the light of the ecclesiology of *communio* [10].

Man as the image of God participates in God's freedom. This freedom is the hallmark and characteristic of the personal human being. The fundamental rights of all human beings derive from the transcendence of the human condition, because God as transcendence is above state and ecclesiastical authority. And the Church is a sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument in the service of God and humanity [5]. In order for the Church to fulfil her servant function towards man and to transmit to him the gift of salvation, she must be his tireless advocate. The Church thus becomes an advocate for the transcendence of man. And since person and culture are intertwined, it is necessary to reach out to culture as a vehicle of redemption. As part of anthropology, culture belongs, after all, to the essence of the human person and through it, it is possible to achieve true and full humanity.

Many people today are suffering from what we call an 'identity crisis'. They are not in tune with the norms and values that are being pushed on them by their own societies. The identity proposed to them is seen by them as false and so they seek another. They are looking for something deeper, they want to give their lives an otherworldly meaning. In the past, this demand was unequivocally met by Christianity. Today, this is not the case.

This drama of the age, which is the rift between the Church and today's culture, was already recognised by Pope Paul VI and therefore called for the evangelisation of culture. He gave expression to this in the encyclical 'Evangelii nuntiandi' when he wrote: "it is necessary to evangelise, and not from the outside, as if one were adding some decoration or colour, but from the inside, from the centre of life and the roots of life - that is to say, it is necessary to imbue culture with the Gospel, as well as human culture, in the broadest and fullest sense /.../ where one always starts from the human person and always turns to the relationship between persons and to their union with God" [11].

This issue was also taken up by John Paul II, who - referring to the speech of Paul the Apostle in the Areopagus in Athens - encouraged a new mission in the modern areopagus of the world. The first such areopagus is the mass media, uniting humanity and turning it into a 'world village' [12]. The Pope from Poland taught: "There are many other areopagus of the modern world towards which the Church's missionary activity should be directed. For example, the commitment to peace, development and the liberation of peoples, human rights and peoples, especially minorities, action on behalf of women and children, the protection of the created world, are all areas of human activity that need to be illuminated by the light of the Gospel. In addition, it is necessary to recall the very vast areopagus of culture, research work and international relations, which facilitate dialogue and foster new plans for life. It is necessary to carefully follow and engage with these contemporary demands. People realise that they are, as it were, sailors on the sea of life and are called to ever greater unity and solidarity: the solution to life's problems comes through reflection, discussion, experience with the participation of all. This is why international organisations

and congresses are proving more important in numerous areas of human life, from culture to politics, from the economy to scientific research." [12] The new evangelisation of Europe was of particular concern to Pope Benedict XVI, who encouraged dialogue between faith and knowledge. In this regard, Joseph Ratzinger developed the ideas found in John Paul II's encyclical 'Fides et ratio' [10].

Changes in the culture - seen above all as so-called 'attitudes of rejection' - towards the Gospel message are repeatedly demanded by Pope Francis. In the current socio-cultural context, people are judged by their physical fitness and social suitability. If a person does not correspond to these criteria, he or she is rejected. The current loss of authentic human values has the effect of diminishing human evaluation and devaluing Christian solidarity and fraternity. Civilised society must overcome the 'culture of rejection' of man [Francis, *Message of XXXI World Day of the Sick*, 11.02.2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/20230110-giornata-malato.html].

4. Convergence and distinctiveness of religious and secular culture

Generally speaking, secular culture is culture unrelated to religion. In *Gaudium et spes* No. 53 the Council Fathers teach: „The word 'culture' in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labour, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time, he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires, that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family. Thence it follows that human culture has necessarily a historical and social aspect and the word 'culture' also often assumes a sociological and ethnological sense. According to this sense we speak of a plurality of cultures. Different styles of life and multiple scales of values arise from the diverse manner of using things, of labouring, of expressing oneself, of practicing religion, of forming customs, of establishing laws and juridical institutions, of cultivating the sciences, the arts and beauty." [9, p. 570]

It encompasses various areas of life, such as art, literature, music, Science, politics, sports, entertainment and other manifestations of human activity, which are developed and practised independently of any religion. This type of culture focuses primarily on man's earthly experiences, his temporal needs and desires, such as freedom, equality, tolerance, respect for others, individualism, personal and social development, learning, creativity, entertainment and sensation. Secular culture is important because it enables the development of diverse interests and lifestyles and a certain integration of society without the need for any religion. Without giving due weight to traditions and customs, it often becomes more comprehensible to modern societies. By not making high moral

demands, but by satisfying consumerist expectations, it finds a wide reception and acceptance.

It must be added, however, that despite its lack of links with religion, it does have some areas relating to spirituality and transcendence. Many people who are not connected to any church or religion are searching for value and meaning in their lives. Transcendence, i.e. transcending the boundaries of human experience and perception of one's surroundings, is achieved through various fields and areas of life, such as art, literature, Philosophy or Science. All these seek knowledge about the world, about man and his role in the Cosmos, and develop the capacities of the human spirit. Hence, secular culture often uses spiritual values inherent in religion, such as love, empathy, respect and kindness.

The Second Vatican Council recognised the achievements of secular culture and stated that it serves to enrich the Church. The secular experience of history, scientific achievements, the values of various human cultures, philosophies, other disciplines - and even the Church's adversaries - help her in her difficult ministry, to grasp revealed truth ever more deeply, to understand it better and to present it more correctly in changing times. The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World in No. 44 states: "Just as it is in the world's interest to acknowledge the Church as an historical reality, and to recognize her good influence, so the Church herself knows how richly she has profited by the history and development of humanity. The experience of past ages, the progress of the sciences, and the treasures hidden in the various forms of human culture, by all of which the nature of man himself is more clearly revealed and new roads to truth are opened, these profit the Church, too. For, from the beginning of her history she has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various philosophers, and has tried to clarify it with their wisdom, too." [9, p. 560-561]

Over the centuries, the Church has significantly influenced the development of secular culture by promoting values such as mercy, love of neighbour, respect for human life from the moment of conception, concern for the indissolubility of marriage, fidelity, equality, kindness, honesty. Christians also inspired art, literature and music, being for many decades patrons of artists who created works of religious art. At the same time, secular culture has sometimes been a source of inspiration, but also a source of controversy for the Church, since some aspects of it, such as freedom of speech, breaking conventions and rituals, disrespecting tradition and undermining stability were and are contrary to Christian values and indications.

Today, the Church and secular culture have different goals, but often co-operate in achieving social good, in aspects such as the fight against social inequality, poverty, hunger, illiteracy or discrimination. By integrating societies, by promoting moral order, Christians support secular culture in many ways by continuously transmitting to it the teachings and values that flow from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Church and secular culture are two different areas of life that often intermingle but maintain their distinctiveness. The Church, as a religious institution, focuses on faith, on spirituality and morality, on

extraterrestrial life, and on the recognition of God's revealed law as superior to legislated secular law.

Every form of separation and unification of the two entities carries a danger. The most frightening, Cardinal Henri de Lubac (1896-1991) notes, are perfect symbioses. The apparent good is then easily transformed into latent evil. One never knows whether it is the Church that masters the world or the world that masters the Church. All too often believers become conformed to the world. The ancient Greeks and Jews did not know the split that entered humanity with the Gospel of Jesus, for it was the Gospel that marked the distinction between what we today call 'spiritual' culture and 'secular' culture. The separation between Christian thinking and the political system has meant that the unity of the state has disappeared and internal divisions have appeared, which will never cease to shake both state systems and human consciences [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/20230110-giornata-malato.html].

The questions arise: why do we need this split? Is balance even possible or necessary? To ask further, do we need such an apparent and false unity? We need to realise what is actually imbuing our thinking? Jesus brought a spiritual culture of freedom to man, thereby calling him into another world. And secular culture today does not quite bring man into an integral space of freedom, because on the one hand it offers freedom without responsibility, and on the other: paradoxically, it enslaves him through increasingly sophisticated forms of totalitarianism. Hence more and more resentment, accusations and anger against believers, because they become a sign of opposition, while in fact they are the salt and light of extra-ecclesial secularism [13].

In the light of post-conciliar ecclesiology and anthropology, the present era cannot be clearly classified. There is no justification for valuing contemporary secularism merely as decay and decadence or as the Promethean opposition of the subject to the divine order - as has long been the custom in ecclesiastical circles and, in part, unfortunately, still is. Since the time of Descartes and Kant, subjectivity should not be wrongly equated with arbitrariness. On the contrary, in the tradition of Christian thinking, the philosophy of subjectivism has brought anew both theoretically and practically the inalienable dignity of the person. Therefore, the many positive humanist achievements of the present day must not be denied [10].

Alongside the official teaching of mutual co-operation between the Church and the world, there is still much reluctance to co-operate with secular culture. It must also be added that reluctance and lack of openness also exist on the secular side. There is a lot of resistance in some circles of believers to a pluralistic and democratic society. There is a lot of nostalgia for the icon of the Church as the only social force before the fall of communism in 1989. This resistance and resentment is crowding out the culture of dialogue on both sides. If there is no dialogue, there will not be the much-needed different forms of tension in culture either. For it is not a question of artificial symbiosis or false

unification, but of the proper development of both ecclesiastical and secular subjects.

5. The development of the Church and the ways of secular culture

The permanent ecclesiogenesis demonstrated above leads us away from a narrow view of the Church as a closed and completed reality. The Church - which is the event of the giving of both the Trinity and of man - is an ongoing process, where we are gradually moving away from a simplistic image of God and a distorted understanding of man. As it opens itself more and more to secular forms of culture, the community of believers cannot fail to be critical of them too. "O you unintelligent Galatians! Who has bewitched you, you before whose eyes the image of Jesus Christ crucified has been drawn? This one thing I would like to know from you, have you received the Spirit as a result of the fulfilment of the Law by means of works, or from the fact that you have given heed to the faith? Are you so unintelligent that, having begun in the spirit, you now wish to end in the flesh?" (Galatians 3.1-3) Not only in the first Christian communes, therefore, but also today many baptised people are attracted to the delusion of secular culture.

This reflection is intended both to stimulate a questioning of the processes of alienation of ecclesial life that are taking place in the societies of the European Union and to provide a voice of protest against the various forms of populism and fundamentalism that are emerging with all their intensity within the Church itself. Certain forms of piety spreading in the Church must be criticised, as must the sometimes excessive academicism of Theology, which forgets its service to the people of God, uncritically allowing itself to be drawn into an ideological detachment from reality. Theology must separate itself from pseudo-scientific academic discourse, for it will not serve to solve the existential problems of the world in the light of God's revelation, but neither must it forget the call of man to enter the way of the cross and resurrection, the call to the Eucharistic experience and the cultivation of the interior life. Both of these above-mentioned dangers - both in the Church and in state organisms - are the spread of an adulterated culture and thus do not lead man to freedom. It is in this perspective that the unity of Church and world must be seen as such, but at the same time their total separateness and specificity. It is in the space of culture that both entities can serve humanity.

In this tension between spiritual culture and secular culture, it is by no means a question either of ecclesiasticising the world or making the Church worldly. Every attempt to synthesise these two different cultures proves misguided when it collides with the reality of sin and the structures of evil present both in the world and in the Church. Every such attempt sooner or later confronts the truth of the cross [10].

The mysteries of iniquity, the workings of the evil spirit and personal human and social sins are not accepted in secular culture. What do we mean by the sin of a human person? Personal sins (individual or private) refer to moral

transgressions committed by an individual. These are actions or thoughts that go against a person's moral or religious beliefs and are typically considered to be offenses against God or one's own conscience (example: lying, stealing, cheating, anger). By social sins, on the other hand, we mean moral wrongs that have a broader impact on society as a whole. They are systemic or structural in nature, affecting not just one person but entire communities or societies. Social sins often result from collective actions, policies, or cultural norms that perpetuate injustice, inequality, and harm to marginalized or vulnerable groups (examples: racism, sexism, discrimination, poverty, corruption, exploitation, and environmental degradation).

Theology teaches that sin is a personal act of the human person. And the sacrament of baptism takes away all sin, but it does not remove its temporal consequences, which take the forms of weakness of character, sickness, death and propensity to evil. Not only does the world not want to hear the truth about personal sin, but also about the structures of evil that are revealed in a threefold form. In the first sense, the concept of social sin encompasses the evil of every individual sin - even the most intrinsic and secret ones, which injure not only the sinner himself, but all humanity. Secondly, social sin means all sins that damage one's neighbour and community, violating, for example, their inviolability or social justice. Thirdly, social sin is all situations and structures when groups, communities or nations act against each other [14, 15]. Therefore, man's earthly pilgrimage will never be a full experience of the condition of Heaven, because we abide in the world, in its and our sins. However, in the ecclesial space we experience healing through the Word of God and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

The fourth current stage of the Church's development - the stage of the Holy Spirit - reveals a much broader perspective than secular culture could offer. The Holy Spirit is the continuation of the person and deeds of Jesus. 'The Christology of the Spirit', where Jesus is the one who receives the Spirit in all its fullness (cf. Mathew 3.16, Mark 1.10, Luke 3.22, John 1.33, Acts 2.33) and offers him (John 16.14), is combined with the 'Christology of the Word', where the Spirit is the one who carries out the work of the divine Nazarene [16]. Human nature is too entangled in the contamination of sin to transcend itself without God's grace. Entangled in a merely horizontal perspective, it has no pneumatic vertical reference.

From the time of Francis Bacon's work 'Novum Organum' (1561-1626), a method based on experiment and induction entered the world of science. Unilateral empiricism effectively removed the spiritual world. Hence, the present postmodernity is so strongly threatened by practical materialism, hedonism, relativism, ultimately turning into nihilism. In this situation, Christians must protect modernity from its self-destruction and transmit to it a message and a new orientation resulting from the supernatural revelation about the dignity and vocation of life given by God. Profane criticism thus belongs to the inalienable dimensions of ecclesial and Christian existence [10]. The Church, whose soul is the Holy Spirit, is guided by Him to bring out the word of

Revelation again and again and to transmit it in history. The Christian life, conceived in the womb of the mystical Church, is ultimately a life according to the Spirit, since all those led by the Spirit of God are His sons and daughters (Romans 8.14) [16].

This pneumatic stage finds its summit most clearly in the Eucharist, for in it the Church is born and expresses herself. "From the same Spirit from which Christ is born from within a pure mother, the Christian is also born in the womb of the Holy Church", Leo the Great wrote as early as the fifth century [17]. Just as sin destroyed relationships and oriented man selfishly, so in the Eucharist there is a restoration of man's bonds with the Holy Trinity, with other people and with the whole created world. This Eucharistic communion of spirit and love is a negation of mutual strife, pride and individualism. The Eucharist is the first fruits of a new creation that man cannot achieve on his own; it is participation in a new way of being [18-21]. This newness is due to the epiclesis, that is, the invocation of the Holy Spirit, transforming the relation of persons and culture, their existence into a relation of reference to God, which brings man into the triadic condition of existence. As the action of the Spirit transforms material food (bread and wine) during the Eucharistic transubstantiation into immortal food, so the corporeal man is transformed into a spiritual man.

Through being led by the Spirit, the Church experiences a constant purification. It renews in itself the awareness that, in relation to the world, it is not an absolute but an instrument; that it is not an end but a means; that it is not a mistress but a poor handmaid. In and through the Spirit, the community of faith gains an awareness of pro-existence; of being both for itself and for the world. The pro-existence of the Spirit becomes the pro-existence of the Church and, through it, of the world [22].

The false paths of secular culture in the 21st century are even more clearly revealed when we recall the fifth stage of the Church's development, which is eschatology. Our modern world - after the collapse of the modern faith in progress and the catastrophes of the twentieth century - needs a breather and a new surge of hope that does not come from man. Even Sigmund Freud, in his 1930 book 'Das Unbehagen in der Kultur', showed that culture cannot exist without renunciation of pleasure and consumption [23]. Pure entertainment culture is a kind of 'non-culture'. The eschatological perspective is inalienable for the further development of humanity, both the believing part and the non-believing part.

6. Conclusions

The Second Vatican Council and the subsequent (post)-conciliar theology introduced significant changes not only in the understanding of the Church herself, but also in her attitude towards the outside world. The starting point of the reflection is to show the emergence of the Church, which involves five stages in the ongoing formation of a community of disciples of Jesus Christ. Each of these ecclesial stages remains in a different relation to the non-religious

environment, which also has its own achievements and enjoys its own autonomy.

This article is an attempt to demonstrate the necessity and inalienability of the dialogue between the Church and the world, which is to take place especially in the cultural space.

Throughout its history, the ecclesial community of the Triune God remains in tension with the surrounding world. On the one hand: Christians and the world around them have many points in common in their mutual service to every human being and to the whole of creation, and on the other: Christianity in its uniqueness remains absolutely and utterly different, from what the world with its secular culture is.

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