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Civilisation, Religion and Epochal Changes of Cultures

Civilizacija, religija in epohalne spremembe kultur

Abstract: Recently, Western civilisation has been undergoing a period of rapid change. Changes are apparent throughout society, culture and religion. In this paper we show how various authors from different fields of science had understood such epochal changes, and that all of them point to the end of the modern era and the birth of something new. We have included contemporary authors and those who have written on this subject in previous decades (Guardini, Sorokin, Ivanov). The findings of Luckmann on the appearance of new forms of social religion also form part of this picture of major change. With respect to responses to major cultural change, we have focussed primarily on the Catholic Church. We are also interested in whether the quest for inspiration in the first millennium of Christianity can encourage a creative response to the crisis in Western culture. We have given some light on the one of several possible expressions of a 'new era' of Christianity.

Key words: epochal changes of culture, Middle Ages and Modern Age, social form of religion, symbol and concept, new era of Christianity, Thomas Luckmann

Povzetek: Zahodna civilizacija se v zadnjem obdobju hitro spreminja. Spremembe segajo v celoto družbe, kulture in religije. V prispevku prikažemo, kako so epohalne družbeno-kulturne spremembe razumeli avtorji različnih znanstvenih področij, ki jim je skupno izpostavljanje ugotovitve, da se je moderna doba končala in da se nahajamo na prehodu v neko novo dobo. Vključeni so sodobni avtorji in tisti, ki so o tem pisali pred desetletji (Guardini, Sorokin, Ivanov). V kontekst velikih sprememb spada tudi Luckmannova ugotovitev o pojavu nove družbene oblike religije. Glede odgovorov na velike spremembe kulture smo se osredotočili predvsem na Katoliško Cerkev. Zanima nas tudi, ali je iskanje navdiha v krščanstvu prvega tisočletja lahko spodbuda za ustvarjalno odzivanje na krizo zahodne kulture. Podali smo nekaj vidikov enega izmed možnih izrazov krščanstva 'nove dobe'.

Ključne besede: epohalne spremembe kulture, srednji in moderni vek, družbena oblika religije, simbol in koncept, nova doba krščanstva, Thomas Luckmann

1. Introduction

The world, particularly Western civilisation, has been changing fundamentally in the last decades. The changes extend to many, virtually all, parts of contemporary society and culture. The phenomena of globalisation, migration, contacts between cultures, development of new technologies and the internet, the rise of individualism and mass culture, the radicalisation of relativism and nihilism, various fundamentalisms (etc.) are just some aspects of change. Great, profound changes are also taking place in the realm of religion. There is a great decline in many forms of religious affiliation and practice in Christianity in the West. On the other hand, there are many new forms of religious and spiritual quest. The fundamental question examined in this paper is whether these phenomena are an expression of deeper changes in society and in Christianity, and whether we can speak of an epochal change in Western culture and civilisation.

The first comprehensive analyses suggesting that there is a profound change in Western civilisation were written in the early and mid-twentieth century. Interestingly, the authors from different fields of science and knowledge came to similar conclusions. Nikolai Berdyaev, Romano Guardini, Pitirim Sorokin, Arnold Toynbee, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Thomas Luckmann, scholars in the fields of (religious) philosophy, theology, sociology, history, art and art theory, and sociology of religion have highlighted various aspects of the fact that the modern era is over and that we are in a transitional period to a new age. We live in a period that has many characteristics like those of transitional periods in the past. The key works of these authors were written in a period during which there were many crises in the Western civilisation. Therefore, it is necessary to ask whether their interpretations are limited to the state of society at their time or whether, at least in some respects, they are still valid today.

According to Sorokin's (1957 [1947]) analysis of the dynamics of cultural change in that time of European history, periods of transition from one major period of culture to another in the past lasted between 160 years and more than two centuries. Transition periods are characterised by an increase in the number and intensity of social crises, conflicts, wars, revolutions and various other social and natural disasters. This leads either to the end of a civilisation or to a fundamental change in the orientation of a civilisation. In ancient Greece there were three major periods that had essentially different orientations: the 'Homeric' (pre-Socratic period), the Classical, and the Hellenist period. A similar process happened later after the end of the Roman Empire: the Middle Ages were followed by the Modern Age.

Our time has many similarities with late Hellenism when there was a fundamental change in the Roman Empire. The western part of the Empire underwent a catastrophic change. The situation was different in the Eastern part: instead of the predominant sensate culture of late Hellenism, an ideational supra-culture based on Christianity prevailed in Byzantium after the turbulent period (a detailed analysis of the types of cultures according to Sorokin (ideational, sensate) will be

shown below). In the West, the culture of the Middle Ages, which is also ideational, slowly began to develop (Sorokin 1957, 118–121). Both cultures were creative responses to the crisis of the sensate culture.

In the Catholic Church, the shift from Christianity typical of the modern era is marked by the Second Vatican Council. However, already in the late 1940s, Cardinal Suhard in France and Giovanni Battista Montini in Italy had spoken of an epochal change. A few years after the Council, Pope Paul VI said at the presentation of the Roman Missal: »So let us not speak of a ,new mass', but rather of a new age in the life of the church.« (1969)

In the first part of the paper, we will show how the various major periods of culture and epochal socio-cultural changes were explained by the above-mentioned authors. Later, we will attempt to examine whether their interpretation can explain at least some aspects of the dynamics of life in modern society and culture. We are particularly interested in the issues of Christianity, especially the aspect of Christianity's creative response to a changed culture.

2. On cultural change in contemporary Western society

A few decades ago, Jean-François Lyotard and many other authors of the so-called postmodern thought in philosophy, social science, and culturology wrote about the great change in Western society (e.g. Harvey, Jameson, Vattimo; see Bahovec 2009, 23–41). For a time, it seemed that this would become the predominant discourse of the social sciences, but today some prefer to use the term ,late Modern Age'.

Among modern social scientists who have tried to capture social change more comprehensively, Zygmunt Bauman should be mentioned. His thesis is that we live in a time of ,liquid modernity' (Bauman 2000). With this phrase he wanted to include many of the characteristics of contemporary, rapidly changing Western society, such as growing individualism, uncertainty, weak rootedness in a specific cultural tradition, widespread relativism, consumerism, etc. It can be said that the phrase ,liquid identity' includes his previous reflections on topics of postmodern society, postmodern ethics, life in fragments, etc.

It should be noted that Bauman was looking for a way out of the uncertainty, fears and difficulties of contemporary society, and was trying to identify the path to the future with more hope. Interestingly, in the last chapter of his last posthumously published book, *Retrotopia*, Bauman (2017, 164–167) made references to the thinking of Pope Francis expressed in three speeches on Europe and in the pastoral letter *Evangelii Gaudium*. Close to him are the Pope's reflections on the globalization of indifference, responding to social inequality, and implementation of a social economy. He considers the ,capacity for dialogue' to be particularly important. In the Pope's words Bauman recognises an active approach that includes the contributions of all people and pays attention to social justice. Regarding dialogue Bauman (166) emphasises: »All of us need to take part in planning and build-

ing the culture of dialogue capable of healing the wounds of our multicultural, multi-centred and multi-conflictual world.« In other words, Bauman emphasised that a culture of genuine dialogue is a way that enables genuine encounters between people and cultures, encourages creativity and thus empowers people.

The challenge of dialogue as an encounter is a theme that also emerges in Toynbee, who first used the term 'postmodern era' in his magnum opus *A Study of History* (1936–1954). According to Toynbee, the future of the next generation will be substantially shaped by »intimate encounters between religions«. Whatever comes from this great event, it will establish a new era of human life in this world (Widgery 1961). Genuine dialogue is also an acceptable response to Huntington's thesis on the clash of civilisations; the future of religions and civilisations depends upon the dialogue (Osredkar 2018).

Let us also mention another aspect emphasised by Pope Francis, which is an integral part of the Pope's thought and attitude. In his speech to the Roman Curia before Christmas 2019, he stressed:

»One could say that today we are not living an epoch of change so much as an epochal change. The situations that we are living in today therefore pose new challenges which, at times, are also difficult for us to understand. Our time requires us to live problems as challenges and not as obstacles: the Lord is active and at work in our world.« (2019)

According to Ivereigh (2019, 315) pope Francis spoke in similar terms already after the Fifth General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Aparecida in 2017.

The theme of the epochal change of Western culture is more than a century old. In the field of theology, Romano Guardini was one of the first to write about it. In his work from 1939 on the Christian view of the world, he wrote that we live in a time »when the Modern Age is coming to an end« (Guardini (1991 [1939], 18). Guardini was very attentive to attempting to offer a proper treatment of both the Modern Age and the Middle Ages. Such an approach does not correspond with the prevailing view of understanding these two epochs. In the spirit of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the Middle Ages seem to be 'dark', and the Modern Age has brought light. Guardini pointed out: to claim that one historical period is better or worse is »a dubious thing to do. /.../ What justifies one historical period versus another is not that it is better, but the fact that its time has come. That is also good and means progress.«

3. Different orientation of the great periods of culture

Auguste Comte was one of the first to write about the epochal socio-cultural changes. According to his analysis, which originated in the mid-nineteenth century, the development of societies (and each particular science) is governed by the law of three stages. A theological stage is dominated by religion and mystic.

Metaphysics stage is represented by »an attempt to discover truth through the process of reason«; leading cognition is abstract-rational. In the positivistic stage, »the mind abandons its search for essences and absolutes and contents itself with the discovery of relationships between phenomena, that is, with the construction of science« (Hubert 1961, 151). Transitions do not happen in all areas of society and culture at the same time. The transition from the theological to the metaphysical stage occurred in Western civilisation around 1300. According to Comte, with Descartes (1596–1650) natural philosophy reaches the positive stage, while moral philosophy remains in the metaphysical stage; in most societies, the positive stage began to dominate at the end of the eighteenth century.

Comte belonged to the optimistic and evolutionary thinking of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, especially due to the First World War, revolutions, the flu epidemic and later the economic crisis, the image of the world had changed. In this context, it is not surprising that Oswald Spengler in his *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (1918 and 1922) recognised many elements of decay and pessimism in Western European socio-cultural change, especially in Germany.

According to our assessment, the first comprehensive sociological analysis of the socio-cultural dynamics of Western civilisation was made by Pitirim Sorokin (1957). Sorokin classified societies according to their cultural mentalities; an important aspect is what society recognises and accepts as the highest, most fundamental reality. The highest truth can be the truth of faith (e.g. mysticism, supra-rational intuition, ideation), the truth of ideal reason (perfect ideals), or the truth of senses and perceptions (empirical realities). There have been periods in history when one type of cultural mentality dominated a particular civilisation (ideational, idealistic or sensate) or a combination of two may prevail. Sometimes, however, cultures do not have a predominant orientation. The change is not linear.

Sorokin showed that three coherent periods of culture can be recognised in all social phenomena: they are very clearly expressed in art, philosophy, ethics, religion, and to a large extent also in social relations, law, economics, etc. In the history of ancient Greece, the cultural mentality of the period preceding the classical period is perhaps most clearly defined in the works of Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The world of gods and prophecies is more real to Homer's heroes than a world of ideals, of reason or a world accessible to the senses. Both worlds are connected, there is communication between them. The key source of cognition is ideation and symbolic mentality. According to Scheler (1998, 44–48), ideation is an original insight that extends »beyond the boundaries of our sensory experiences« and is independent of inductive reasoning.

The classical period of ancient Greece was different: it was dominated by the idealisation of reason (rational ideal). In the fifth century BC, the creative achievements of such a mentality were expressed in art (architecture, sculpture, theatre), in the systems of truth (philosophy, ethics), and to a large extent in other aspects of society, including politics. According to Sorokin, the key feature of this cultural

mentality is the human reason; the idealisation of reason can make a synthesis of the otherworldly reality and this world. The source of ultimate reality and knowledge are no longer gods, but ideals that are accessible to reason. The divine world is not denied, but the world of rational ideals is truer than supernatural cognition, ideation, mythological cognition.

The difference in understanding the source of rational knowledge (in ancient Greece) was perfectly expressed in art by the Renaissance painter Raphael in the fresco *The School of Athens*. The central two figures point the finger to a key source of knowledge: Plato to the world of perfect ideas, Aristotle to nature, the empirical world. In fact, already in Aristotle we find the beginnings of the epochal shift of Greek culture, the transition from the classical era to the period of Hellenism, when the main source of knowledge becomes sensate empirical knowledge.

Later in European history, a similar dynamic is repeated: with the Renaissance the Modern Age was replacing the Middle Ages. Perhaps even more profound was the change at the end of antiquity. Christians did not follow the mentality of either the ancient classics or of Roman naturalism but developed a symbolic art and a symbolic mentality of their own. According to Sorokin, ideational art was predominant in Christian art from the sixth to the twelfth centuries. A key element of such art is a symbol: »By the very definition the ideational art is that in which visible signs are mere symbols of the invisible world.« (Sorokin 1957, 119) It should be added that the symbol as a mode of expression in art and theological reflection has been typical since the beginning of Christianity (e.g. the symbol of the fish). One of the first peaks of symbolic creativity was expressed in poetry by Ephraim of Syria (c. 306-373), also called 'Harp of the Spirit' (Brock 1999).

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, the first part of the epochal change had taken place. It is related to the relatively short time of the second half of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, if we look only at Italy, where the creative geniuses who shifted the mentality lived. For example, Giotto di Bondone (c. 1267–1337) in fine arts, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) in theology, Dante Alighieri (c. 1265–1321) in poetry. It seems that the new understanding of the world is clearly expressed in a single aspect: the issue of perspective. Around 1300, there was a shift in painting from an 'inverted perspective' to a natural perspective, that is, as we perceive it with our eyes. Interestingly, in the frescoes in the Lower Church of the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, Giotto still used an inverted perspective in some scenes and a natural one in others (cf. Tomei 1998, 18–21). The shift to a natural perspective is part of a broader shift to a realistic representation of space and the naturalistic expression of human faces and bodies.

Why do we find this aspect so important? Early Christian art sought to show the connection between heaven and earth. Art also expressed this with an 'inverted' perspective, that is, as how concrete events and persons are 'seen' from heaven. Such art achieved its first creative peaks already in the fifth and sixth centuries (for example, the mosaics in the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome and in various churches in Ravenna). The same style can be found until the

twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when mosaics were created in the church of Monreale in Sicily (Norman art), Santa Maria in Trastevere and San Clemente in Rome. The same mentality is expressed by the frescoes in the crypt of the Cathedral of Anagni (South of Rome), which Ravasi (1995, 18) called the Sistine Chapel of the Middle Ages.

The anthropocentric perspective of the Modern Age opened the way for a different creative genius than medieval man. Guardini (1992) emphasises: »With the Renaissance, biblical revelation ceases to be the undoubted basis of personal and public life.« This is not to say that faith has disappeared from people's lives. On the contrary, for those who remain faithful, faith »gains even new strength and maturity«. However, religion »no longer constitutes a generally accepted norm of existence«. Although religion »became questionable or lost all meaning for a growing number of people«, decent people respected religion. After the First World War, »this also changed«. In this way, Guardini summed up the changing attitudes towards religion and Christianity from the beginning to the end of the modern era.

It is important to add that change did not happen throughout society all at once. For example, the peasant population, at least in Slovenia and many parts of Europe, lived a simple popular religion for most of the modern era. However, the great change in religiosity was first explained in sociology by Thomas Luckmann. In *Invisible religion*, published more than half a century ago in 1967, and in later works he showed that this shift was not a minor change, but an expression of a new social form of religion. Luckmann called it privatisation of the religion.

4. On the relationship between the sacred universe and social structure: changes in social forms of religion

In the mid-twentieth century, many sociologists of religion observed a decline in religious affiliation and practice. This was interpreted as part of broader secularisation processes. Thomas Luckmann's explanation was different: he was the first sociologist to interpret the change of religion as the emergence of a new social form of religion. More specifically, one social form of religion was in decline, the other on the rise.

According to Luckmann (1991; 2003), religion played a central social role in archaic societies and in the first civilisations of city-states and early empires (Egypt, Mesopotamia). Transcendent realities »legitimised the entire social structure«, from family to public life (2003, 278). Both the first social forms of religion, archaic and traditional, had the characteristic that »the logic of the sacred universe dominated all institutions« (1991, 175). The general differentiation of the social structure into functionally specialised institutional domains (politics, economic, religion) was the main source for radical change in the relationship between the sacred universe and the social structure. According to Luckmann (2003, 279), such development had »pre-modern roots in the Roman Empire«. In the post-Constan-

tinian period religious institutions were monopolised by a specialised institutional domain. The most important examples in the religious domain were Christian churches. In the European Middle Ages »institutionally organised religion was not only the main source of life's meaning and of soteriological hope. /.../ As an institution it also exercised power, partly directly by the intimidating force of some ideas (for example, the fear of hell), partly indirectly by co-option of secular authority.« (2008, 181).

Institutional specialisation of religion in the form of Churches and sects survived as a dominant social form of religion for approximately a millennium and a half. The situation changed through the social processes of functional differentiation. For Luckmann (2003, 279), the process of »general functional specialisation of institutions« should not be interpreted as the spread of secularisation, but »as the emergence of a fourth, privatised social form of religion«. Religion was increasingly individualised and privatised. »Privatisation of religion is most directly associated with two of the basic components of the overall process of modernisation. One is the long-term effect of functional specialisation of institutional domains upon religion; the other is the modern variety of pluralism.« (1999, 235) In this social form of religion faith and spirituality, both either individualised and personalised, are much more important than in institutional religion. The old social forms did not completely disappear but lost their dominant role. For example, in Europe, both key institutionalised religion, Christian Churches, and political religions of the nineteenth century have become marginalised in the sea of subjective individualised religiosity of small transcendence of the spirituality of self-realisation, positive thinking, new age, esotericism and occultism, psychological substitutes for spirituality, etc.

We should take note of the difference which Luckmann did not point out: there is a big difference between the spirituality of individualism and the spirituality of the person. Individualistic spirituality does not unite individual people into permanent groups, it remains attentive to itself. A typical example of such spirituality is new age spirituality (Bahovec 2009). To live spirituality as a person, however, means to belong to a community and to be in relationships with others. Personal spirituality is lived in connection with community, culture, history, etc.

5. The dynamics of the main principles of knowledge and the return of symbol

We have seen that the fundamental shift of the Modern Age was already expressed by the Renaissance. Even before the Renaissance, however, there was a shift, which was briefly described in theological anthropology by Ladaria (2011, 16): »From the Symbol to the Summa; with this short sentence we try to summarize the evolution of theology between the end of the patristic era and early scholasticism.« The shift was due to the need for systematisation of the contents of Christian doctrine. Rosemann (2017, 77) described the same dynamic with the term »from story to system«.

The great creative work of medieval theologians, according to Špidlik (2004, 165–166), can also be understood as the formation of a perfect synthesis of the three fundamental pillars of European culture: the Greek way of thinking, Roman law and the religion of the Bible. »In fact, the purpose of the medieval universities was to unite all sciences in a *Summa philosophico-theologica*. Unfortunately, this vain effort finished in a failure. At the beginning of the new period the *Summas* were replaced by encyclopaedias while the single universal science divided into different branches.«

From this we can conclude that it makes sense to talk about the three dominant leading principles of knowledge or three (coherent) approaches to understanding the whole of culture. The first way is denoted by the keywords symbol and story (also supra-rational intuition, ideation, myth, mysticism), the second is denoted by *summas*, the third is encyclopedic knowledge, conceptual logic.

Symbol was abolished by the Renaissance, when »it was no longer pre-Socratic-mythical in the foreground, but the abstract logic of extinct Greek culture« (Rosenberg 1987, 35). The Renaissance and, later, Enlightenment view of the world ‚liberated‘ reason from God, connecting reason primarily with abstract ideals and later with the laws of nature; conceptual logic replaced symbolic. According to Rosenberg, Protestants in particular ‚hurried to forget‘ the symbolic understanding of the world. In Catholicism, the symbol did not completely disappear, however, it has ceased to be either the central or predominant way to understanding nature and God. It is necessary to add, so Rosenberg (1987, 30–31) says, that there is a great difference between a symbol and an allegory. The symbol always connects two realities, the sensory-perceptual and the deeper level, which transcends that reality; »The real symbol /... / contains something beyond – it is a pure representation of the primordial source.« The allegory is agreed: »it lacks the transcendence and spontaneity of the symbol«. For an allegory to mean something, it needs a »conscious-rational confrontation of the self with what the allegory wants to represent. If this is not the case, the allegory is completely irrelevant and uninteresting.«

Interestingly, the symbol has returned to Western culture in arts and sciences which were not associated with Christianity. It was ‚revived‘ by French symbolist poets and later by a large part of European art. It was introduced to psychology by C. G. Jung. His in-depth psychology marks a broader turning point that occurred in many parts of Western culture, including the search for alternative spirituality (Bahovec 2009). It is good to remember that this part of postmodern culture seeks inspiration, and often a way of expression, in either the Christian Middle Ages or the mythical-symbolic periods of ancient civilisations, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Asian, and other. The great change expressed by the search for ‚spirituality‘, in our view, is alive in both alternative ‚spiritual seekers‘ and in Christianity (Platovnjak 2017). It is a cultural shift that cannot be stopped. In the last chapter, let us briefly look at some of the features of this shift in our approach to Christianity.

6. Conclusion: Christianity of the ,new age‘

Christianity in the present times is anything but homogeneous or monolithic. There are differences that are sometimes so great that they seem to be more important than what is common. While it seems that some differences can be attributed to a different understanding of Christianity, some appear to be due to aspects of contemporary culture. Contemporary postmodern culture is so pluralistic and diverse that the features of pluralism are also expressed in Christianity.

We have already mentioned that the Second Vatican Council represents the response of the Catholic Church to a new social situation and to a new culture. According to Pope Benedict XVI (2005), the council is also now a source of inner renewal of the Church. In the concluding part of his speech to the Roman Curia, he emphasised:

»Thus, today we can look with gratitude at the Second Vatican Council: if we interpret and implement it guided by a right hermeneutic, it can be and can become increasingly powerful for the ever necessary renewal of the Church.«

Interestingly, the theology that co-shaped conciliar thought was largely inspired by the early period of Christianity and by the Church Fathers. We can also say: then and in our time a part of Christianity finds inspiration for life and creativity in the life, theology, art and culture of early Christianity and the Middle Ages. It seems that what Psalm 19,3 expresses is being fulfilled: »Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.«

Interestingly, a century ago, Berdyaev (1999 [1924], 14–20) defined the cultures of the Modern Age and the Middle Ages as the ,day period of history‘ and the ,night period of history‘. Night is not meant as darkness or even ,the dark Middle Ages‘, but in the »deeper and ontological sense of the word«. Berdyaev (19) attributes to the New Middle Ages »the transition from the rational thinking of the new history to the supra-rational thinking of the medieval way«. In other words, the transition is marked by a shift from the logic of the concept to the logic of the symbol.

Vyacheslav Ivanov, one of the most important Russian symbolist poets and theorists of symbolism, a great Christian thinker who lived in Italy for a long time, called the two cultural epochs the organic and the critical epoch. The critical epoch is characterised by conceptual thought, priority is given to the ideas and to (abstract, objective) reason. In the organic period, priority is given to life and symbols. Moreover, life can have different expressions. It can be quite Dionysian, focused solely on enjoyment in this world. It can, however, be expressed as an unconditional gift, a creative altruism. In the context of the great change of culture, it is appropriate to recall that Christianity overcame ancient culture with trust in life: although they were often tortured and this resulted in physical death, Christians trusted in life, namely eternal life. Martyrs are not witnesses of death but of life.

Ivanov (2018, 197–200) pointed to a fundamental difference within the symbolic mentality. The subjectivist and idealistic symbolic mindset emanates from itself, from the thinker's own subjective perception of reality, from his own emotional experiences or from rational ideas. Realistic symbolism is different. With realistic symbols, the symbolist expresses the reality that is beyond him, but addresses him. The real source is the invisible, otherworldly reality (*realiora*), which the symbolist is trying to express in this world (*realibus*). The symbol in this sense is a source of inspiration that embraces the whole man. Rupnik (2001, 135–136) adds that »symbolic cognition supports the mind of merciful and active love«. In this sense, the symbol is shown not only as an expression of art, but also as a mentality and a source of a way of life, of culture.

In a similar way Guardini (1965, 60) wrote about the future of Christianity. He sees the fundamental challenge at the end of the Modern Age in searching for a different understanding of nature, person and culture. Guardini seems to have foreseen a development that has become part of life at the present time. Nature must once again be seen in its relationship with God, as a creation. In nature we can read again, like St. Ephraim of Syria, symbols that connect this world and the heavens (Brock 1999). These two aspects are well expressed by the integral ecology of Pope Francis. On the one hand, it is about changing life in relation to nature, the fruits of the earth and the exploitation of natural resources, which is the theme of ecology. On the other hand, the relationship to the Creator must again be recognised in nature, that is, the symbolic (spiritual) reading of creation, culture and history must be revived.

In terms of understanding the human being, Guardini is a personalist. 'Who is man' is one of the fundamental issues of the present. Is a human being an individual who performs roles, or is it a person, with dignity, rooted in culture and history? The revival of the personal principle can be recognised in many expressions of the modern Church. For example, the Slovenian pastoral plan *Pridite in pogledite* (Come and See) (2012) emphasises the need to move to a personal and communal (communion) faith, to build communion ties and to see parishes as community of communions.

In a broader context, the acceptance of the personal principle is also recognised in the emphasis expressed by the last popes and the Church: the emphasis on the experience of faith and life, discernment, synodality. These are all terms that emphasise the person and the community, not just the teachings. By the way, it is interesting that sociological data show a decrease in the ritual aspect of the Christian faith and in membership of the Church. However, if we look at the data in the European Values Study (EVS) in Slovenia in 1992 and 2011, we can also see the opposite trend (EVS 2017 didn't have these questions). There has been a large increase in the proportion of people who take time to pray (from 45 % to 54 %) or often pray or meditate (from 12 % to 23 %). Of course, these data do not speak only about the Christian faith. Many people today have different religious beliefs. According to EVS data, the share of the population who believe in a personal God has not changed significantly during this period: it fluctuates between 22 % and

24 %. The proportion of people who believe in Spirit or life force, however, increased from 44 % to 50 %. The share of people who do not believe in God or in spirits or life force has decreased from 15 % to 12 %. Another aspect of the growth in faith are participation in pilgrimages.

Regarding the new importance and role of culture (in a broader sense) within the Catholic Church, probably one of the major steps is made in the encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI. Culture is the central element of the relationship between religion and life, which is why it is so important to develop true inculturation as the encounter between faith and culture. In this sense, the synthesis formulated by the Latin American Church at the Aparecida meeting (2007) is interesting. It places special emphasis on the role of the people, the poor, living popular religiosity and culture.

Regarding Christian art, an important vision was expressed by Pope John Paul II (1985) in his address to artists. Perhaps even more influential was his decision to renovate his private papal chapel. This is the reason why the mosaics in the *Redemptoris Mater* Chapel were created. The mosaic is an expression of the spiritual and artistic vision of Tomaš Špidlik and Marko Rupnik. It is surprising that in twenty years so many people have recognised this form of liturgical art as something close to them.

Let us add two notes to this. First, it is likely that many have accepted this style of mosaics because they are part of a broader shift in Christian art and culture, a shift toward the symbolic art and the symbolic mentality. Perhaps mosaics are close to many people also because they are grounded in the theology of Špidlik, who took remarkable steps in this direction. In particular, he managed to connect the theology of the Christian West and East, and to create a kind of synthesis of different time periods, from the patristic to the present. The connecting aspect of his theology is the symbol, as expressed also in his last work (Špidlik and Rupnik 2010): the central part is dedicated to the relationship between symbolic theology and art.

We believe that it is essential that we think about the future of Western civilisation, culture, and Christianity with an attitude of openness. We have presented one of the directions of change, which we believe is quite creative and has some good responses to the crisis of Western culture. Which direction, among many, will prevail in the Church, in Western civilisation and in the global world, and how humanity will respond to many crises, is a question to which the future will give answer. The direction of cultural changing presented is not predominant, but because it has some of the characteristics of a creative minority, it seems to us worthy of attention.

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