The Sin as Antonym to Integrity: A Brief Analytical Exercise from an Orthodox Perspective

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ABSTRACT: Starting from the observations on the advancement of modernity and the parallel regression of the authority and signification of the Christian moral values, we believe that an attempt to interpret the recent senses of the tensions between the temptation of sins and the imperative of the moral values is necessary. Therefore, our study aims to evaluate the impact of sins on the capacity and disposition of the modern man for acknowledging the values of the Christian integrity, trying to concentrate mostly on interrogations as "why" and "how" we face a distancing from the values of the moral verticality and their substitution with the human horizontality. In other words, we will discuss the theological content of the causes and predictable results of the indissoluble contradiction between the human general propension for sin and the desiderate of the moral integrity.

KEYWORDS: Sin, moral integrity, modernity, Orthodox morality

Preliminaries

Hypostasising in a relevant manner the theological concept of moral virtue, the integrity is an inseparable part of what we usually call Christian behaviour/ morality, in an indirect connection with the acknowledgment and practice of the saving faith. Despite its moral normative value, integrity will always be under dissolving pressure of the sin – a pragmatic expression of the arbitrary and tribulations of the fallen man, also of the degradation of the ontological structure of the humanity of the followers of the proto-fathers. From a conceptual point of view, integrity, although a moral virtue, can be perceived as operating on three successive dimensions: individually – punctually, in community – horizontally, and in relation with God, through Church and the Holy Sacraments. It involves distinct corridors of faith, moral, social and theological consciousness, and individual responsibility. In other words, we believe that, at least partially, integrity has its own relevance through the filter of the theological virtues, with God as "object" and: ultimate goal" (Popa 2003), because, by its large content area, it interferes with the idea of individual loyalty – honesty, devotion, fidelity, sincerity, etc., and with the necessity to transfer this in relation with the Creator and the Saviour of the world. Such analysis seems to exclusively belong to the moral theology and its dimensions; therefore our evaluation will preponderantly relate to the biblical and dogmatic references specific to the theme.

1. Integrity: a biblical-dogmatic perspective

It is well-known that, in our word, the secular ethical spirit of modernity clearly separates the moral values from Church and theology, stating in general that these values exist and can manifest separate from the individuals' religious inclinations and options and that, implicitly, they have a complete autonomy in relation with faith. Thus, the ethical modernity disregards that, in reality, the moral values have their origins in the work of God and, by incarnation, Our Saviour Jesus Christ transformed Himself in the defining Archetype of any human morality: *He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly; He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints* (Proverbs 2: 7-8). Therefore, the Christians will keep unbroken the direct and indissoluble connection between God and the moral consciousness (I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. 1 Chronicles 29:17), because the affirmation of faith and living in its spirit are, at least from one point, perfectly collinear, as St. Paul

wrote: *In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing incorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.* (Titus 2: 7-8). Practically, as other moral values, integrity originates in „revelation of God fulfilled in Jesus Christ" (Popa 2003, 59). It has foundations possible to be quantified as trinity, Christology and pneumatology: as trinity - God is perfect in sanctity (Leviticus 11:44), love (1 John 4:8-10), goodness and justice, known to the man through the supernatural revelation and, up to one point, through natural revelation; as Christology – by entirely taking the human nature and enhypostasing it (Leontius of Byzantium) in His divine-human person to pass it through death and transfigure it in Resurrection, the Saviour liberates the man from the "vicious and tragic circle of sin and death" (Stăniloae 1993, 161); as pneumatology – by living among us (Romans 8:11), the holy Ghost is the one showing the sin (*When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment* – John 16:8) to keep us on the right path through the work of the grace in the Holy Sacraments and to "reconcile us with God" and "incorporate in Christ" (Bobrinskoy 1999, 395). The man is created in the image of God (Genesis 1: 26-27) and with the perspective of His likeness. Becoming the organ used by the man "to participate to the complete divinity" (Lossky 1993, 95), the divine image of the man (Stăniloae 1993) directly expresses the "unmovable relation with God" (Matsoukas 2006, 146) which best defines the humanity, prefiguring in the same time the unique eschatological destiny prepared by our Creator for us. Due to the fact that the image is a sum of imprescriptible anthropological qualities, because "our being [...] permanently remains a participant to the divine and the divine light" (Stăniloae 1996, 269), even the fallen man will bear – maculated, deformed and fragmented, but no less authentic – the "seal of the divine wisdom" (St. Basil the Great). Implicitly, by preserving inside the light of the image of the Creator, the man will be fully compatible with the good, virtue and moral integrity, and able to acknowledge and practice as long as "his thinking, wisdom, words and love are in the image of the same powers in God" (Evdokimov 1996, 87). As result, this "remanence" of the image of God appears as capable to structure the human behaviour on valid ethical criteria, independent from nominal religious adhesions and the existence/ definition/ acknowledging of positive moral norms and rules. This conclusion can be conjugated with the thesis on the universality of the natural moral law, observed by Plato and Aristotle (Popa 2003, 72) and formulated by St. Paul: *For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law* [...]. *Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts* (Romans 2:14-15). In these circumstances, if the human functions of consciousness and reason place the integrity in the individual's responsibility, it is also more the case of the believers who, through the Decalogue and the Beatitudes, possess the positive and quantifying expressions of the moral law. If the Decalogue (Rotaru 2015, 318-322) and the Beatitudes are the defining synthesis of the positive moral law in particular religious circumstances modelled by the Old and New Testament (*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ* – Galatians 3:24), seen as a whole, the Bible will highlight the general valid imperative of assuming the religious moral values. The integrity gains a moral-ethical significance to a personal level and to a community-ecclesial level (*in all things willing to live honestly* – Hebrews 13:18 and *having your conversation honest among the Gentiles* – 1 Peter 2:12).

We will close this sequence showing that, as long as we assume the integrity as expression of the work of the grace of God to a personal level, it will get us close to God, introducing us in the divine-human space of the communion with Christ, because "the divine is present and active in the manifestation of the divine love" (Stăniloae 1993, 187). Thus, reaching the desiderate represented by the moral integrity will bring each of us closer to the assembly of moral virtues (*Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* – Titus 2:12-13). In fact, as presented in the debut of our study, to have integrity implies to be loyal, while loyalty as Christian engagement cannot be separated from the respect and preservation of the individual responsibilities in front of God and, simultaneously, to other people. This implies the continuous practice of the belief in the Holy Trinity, as taught by the Church (*Let not your heart be troubled:*

ye believe in God, believe also in me. – John 14:1), because "God is love, therefore life and light per Se, because it is the supreme unity of the trinity personal communion" (Stăniloae 2012, 25). The loyalty toward the Creator also means to assume the significance of the public divine cult (*O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.* – Psalms 95:1), the importance of worship (*Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise.* – Psalms 33:3) and of the unaltered preservation of faith in Him (*Let Israel hope in the LORD from henceforth and for ever.* – Psalms 131:3) In conclusion, although in the traditional "hierarchy" of the Christian virtues, integrity is not apparently in the ultimate space of the moral values derived from the four essential dimensions of the cardinal moral values (wisdom, justice, temperance and courage) (Popa 2003, 162), its ethical significance is somehow above the traditionally attributed position. Implicitly, integrity will belong to the divine originated values, necessary to be respected through the word of God to King Solomon as determinant element of any divine positive ethics.

2. The evil and the sin as deficit of goodness and virtue

Beyond the many meanings and concrete dimension given by the church based on the Holy Scriptures, the sin starts from disobeying God – the main meaning attributed by St. Theophilus of Antioch – in order to lead the man, against his profound nature (St. John the Damascene), to the abandonment of the communion with the Creator (St. Basil the Great). Estranged from God and the fellow beings, the man fallen under the reign of sin weakens his thinking and his good deeds capacity (*He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.* – 1 John 2:10) and implicitly the capacity to assume and respect the essential referential of the moral consciousness. Under the pressure of the sin, as under the effect of vices (prior to the sin), the man's willingness and capacity of keeping alive the virtues will suffer. Therefore, the sin will be opposed, will reject and marginalise or isolate the inner resources of the fallen man which, enlightened by grace, could activate the theological and moral virtues. Implicitly, the individual engagement for integrity will diminish or lack its areal and the formatting impact in society; not once, the communities reflect the deficit of honesty and honour. Thus, we will closely follow the content and the theological meaning of the sin, those „details" possible to increase the transparency of its „interaction" with the virtues, in general, and especially with the moral integrity.

a). After the fall and due to the fall, the creation knows " a movement to divergence and decomposition", so the world "does not have any more the initial malleability and the man does not have any more the force of spirit to lead it to the full state of communication environment between God and the man and between people" (Stăniloae 1996, 324-325). This is how father Dumitru Stăniloae described the generated by the disobedience of the proto parents, an apparently personal gesture, which has a series of considerable ontological implications on the man and on the world. By falling, "the man stopped the divine grace from flowing" (Philaret of Moscow). Naturally, the ontological perspective on sin does not exclude the strictly individual and moral perspective, which are, as underlined by Vl. Losski, inseparable. We will insist on the existential dimension and implications of the sin (Paul Evdokimov), because "as long as the soul remains troubled by sins, there will be order and harmony nowhere" (Saint John the Chrysostom 2007, 178), which is equal to the limitation/ annulment of the virtues in community. In fact, the "coats of skins" mentioned in Genesis 3:21 (*Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.*) perfectly synthesize the new human condition after the fall of Adam, the existence of the fallen man, dominated by sufferings, death and decay (Lossky 1993, 192). Like the sin, the "coats of skins" are not a "natural constitutive element" of the human being (Moşoiu, 2000, 151). They are added by God to replace the grace which "covered the people better than any coat" (St. John the Chrysostom); it is the visible sign of the thick materiality hypostasized by the man in his body and soul after the fall (Nallas 1994, 28-29). This materiality must be understood not only as a direct divine punishment generating the "coat woven by God" (St. Roman the Melodist), a "disintegration of the human nature" (Lossky 1993, 191),

but also as cure and "new possibility given by God to the man to survive in death after losing the life"(Moşoiu 2000, 153).

b). The theological perspective on sin will be corroborated closely with the problem of the evil, because the fall – "we are offspring of a dark nation", as St. Macarius of Egypt said – brought the quasi-permanent vulnerability of the man in front of the evil. Practically, using – in an abusive way, in our opinion – the perfect liberty given by God, the man-made room for the evil and the world became "opaque (Dumitru Stăniloae), while the sin transformed in a too often accessed reality and a real way of living. In the good world created by God, the evil is not an attribute, not even for the Devil, although it cannot be denied that the evil "created a new state, a new way of being – being bad" (Lossky 1993, 160), provoking the darkening of the Cosmos and "the night aspect of the beings" (Evgheni Trubeţkoi); this does not belong to "the essence of the reality" and not even to a part of it (Stăniloae 1996, 310). Even if the evil eliminated any possibility for the bad spirits to assume the goodness – this is not possible for the man, who "preserves inside an eternal piece of the good", we cannot speak of an essential bad nature, because, as father Stăniloae wrote, the origin of evil will only reside in the freedom of will and action of the creatures who, at one point, manifested in a bad manner.

Therefore, by detaching from any substantial explanation, rejecting the existence of the evil as principle opposed to the good, the Church will perceive the evil as the sign of an "ontological minus" discussed by the Patristic tradition. In fact, the unequivocal affirmation of an existential dimension of the evil is imposed as determinant for the coherence of any theological discourse. If "the evil had been connected as being with the body and the world", the "incarnation of the Son of God would have been meaningless" (Stăniloae 1996, 318). Consequently, as St. John the Damascene wrote, "the evil does not exist as nature", but only as "absence of goodness, as the darkness is the absence of light" (Saint John of Damascus 1993, 49). By not existing as nature, the evil can claim to be only the absence of goodness and its origins not in an exterior cause possible to be ontologically quantified, but only in the will of the fallen man, a will with an integrity seriously damaged by the loss of the communion with the Creator. This will lead to a paradoxical situation, as highlighted by St. Gregory of Nyssa while developing the thesis according to which the non-being (i.e. the evil, the sin) will "possess" the being (*i.e.* the man), dominating it as "power vitiating the creation", still real and active due to the subjectivity of the human will (Lossky 1993, 192). In these conditions, the evil and the sin must be perceived as two coplanar realities, "united" in the same incompatibility with the being and originating in the lack of goodness and virtue. Therefore, we will see the sin as "a disease of the will, mistaken a phantom of the goodness with the goodness itself" (St. Basil the Great) and as a "lack of perfection of our virtues" (Sf. Dionisius the Areopagite), because, as St. Augustine wrote, "nihil est malum nisi privatio boni" (Popa 2003, 182). Implicitly, the origin of the sin will reside in the subjective will of the man and in the freedom of the human beings expressed and concretised as decision and action. Still, the will cannot be separated from the nature. Therefore, before the fall, the nature of the man "was able to desire only the goodness" because it "reached only toward God". The new humanity assumed the property of disorganisation and disharmony as attributes of the being (Lossky 1993, 149), will impose its arbitrary freedom of choice and decision. This is the source for the reality of the sin and evil and for the universality of the sin (*There is none righteous, no, not one*. Romans 3:9). The positive law will relief, quantify and restore the sin ("in St. Paul's thinking, the sin becomes real through law ") (Evdokimov, 1996, 101), implicitly expressing the "pedagogical" desire of God to help the fallen man; "the law in the biblical meaning [...] is a manifestation of the desire of God, a gift of grace, and not a legislation with social finality" (Popa 2003, 102). If the will is responsible for the sin (Rotaru 2015, 595-608) and the fallen human nature is the main source and materialisation ("the sin entered on the territory of grace" (Lossky 1993, 161), *so every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed* – James 1:14), it is perfectly true that the temptation can originate in the direct work of the bad spirits or in the negative influence of the material world (Popa 2003, 185). We underline that the work of the evil spirits will remain hidden, because "the demons talk to us

in a hidden way for us not to feel from where comes the war" (Mihail Psellos). Its goal is decisively marked by the hate for the good creation of God and is represented by the narrowing of the horizon of eschatological becoming of the man. "By spreading darkness on this life" and "by opposing to the path to the light" (Stăniloae 1996, 316), the Devil will not hesitate to use lies and deceit to reach its destructive goal.

      c). The sin is a hypostasis of the evil. It gives to any situation lacking the good the visible aspects concretised in crime (*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.* 1 John 3:4), corruption (II Peter 2:19), rebellions and disobedience or other similar deeds. The sin can only provoke a reaction of rejection from God (*The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity*. Psalms 5:5). This only shows the antagonism between God, the source of good and archetypal Goodness and any context, deed or action containing the evil. Beyond the fact that He disavows the lack of goodness and rejects the man that tolerate or practice it, God *is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him*. (1 John 4:16). To Him, who listens to the prayer of Micah (*Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea*. Micah 7:19), we owe our salvation. He did not impose a justice based on His omnipotence, but He gave us our Son to be sacrificed and to be resurrected: *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8) the faith and practicing the virtues quantified in good deeds, because the man, as member of the sacramental body of Christ, the Church, "has the right and the obligation to activate the infinite possibilities that are offered to him [...] through the Holy Ghost" (Yannoulatos 2013, 1560. Therefore, the virtues, including the moral integrity, once assumed from the Christological perspective of the Church, will place the man in the blessed situation of "caring for the other as for the self, as the Father does not separate from the Son and the Holy Ghost and they do not consider to be separated from the Father" (Stăniloae 1996, 54). Proceeding like this, the man will rediscover and re-appropriate at least a part in the good to which he renounced under the pressure of sins, because "the good is the fruit of good faith and of the love for virtue" (Saint Kiril of Alexandria 2005, 597) . Weakening the influence and the area of the emptiness where the evil resides, the practice of the virtues will have its place in the human ascension to Christ - "it is specific to God to do good deeds, and to the man to consent to those good deeds" (Saint Maxim 2010, 115).

3. Morality and modernity

It is known that in the modern world the human condition suffered mutations and structural and hierarchical replacements, resulting, for the "recent man" (H.-R. Patapievici), openly claiming autonomy from God, transforming reasoning in the instrument for the exploitation and domination of the universe, in a declaration on the "death" of the Creator (Manolache, Țăreanu 2020, 44-49). In fact, modernity brought the expansion of the civil society that "is completely silent when it comes to God", as Olivier Clément wrote.

      a). Lacking a relation with a referential vertical axis – because the "recent man" is convinced that a simple look to an existing God is an inhibition of the desire for freedom (Popescu 2005, 481) – the contemporary world is in a situation of absolutizing values of material-utilitarian origin, as the individual welfare, the consumerism, the productivity, and the work efficacy. As father Nicolae Achimescu wrote, "the modern world transformed the material progress and the efficacy into a myth", converting them to values with a so-called universal value and, perhaps even more symptomatic, to "safe paths to access the access to a terrestrial paradise" (Achimescu 2013, 185). The profoundness of the dissemination of this real axiological metamorphosis in evil is appreciated by the cardinal and the academician Jean Daniélou as a huge "mystification" of the relations of the "recent man" with his Creator. Implicitly, if we assume a systematic theological perspective, modernity appears as "the reality of a strictly horizontal life, radically lacking the possibility to affirm a transcendent principle more or less credible" (Patapievici 2001, 87). The "recent man" will become, despite the illusion of freedom, a victim of

the artificiality of his own axiology. "Reduced to the temporal flux of production and consumption" (Ică jr. 2005, 692) and finding himself, sooner or later, closed in a space of an existence without an authentic horizon of eschatological expectancies, "the recent man" will regret that he chose to forget or ignore his Creator, because "even if dead, God remains the unavoidable reference of the world" (Patapievici 2001, 87). Trying to escape from a narrow world and to pass through the world he created, the man will try, not once desperately, to find God, being more or less aware that, in this way, he will find himself, rediscovering and putting to work the imprescriptible call to religiosity and faith. Still, despite the dramatic situation the "recent man" is traversing, the non-religious "spirit" of modernity is a reality that cannot be ignored. Therefore, we will shortly analyse this state in an ethical plane, underlining the dissolving effect generated by modernity in the field of moral integrity.

b). In a context where God is more and more seen as a "useless epistemological hypothesis" (Patapievici 2001, 42-43) and the anthropocentrism becomes the dominant paradigm for understanding and explaining the Universe, modernity caused the "separation of the man from a consecrated ancestral order – cosmic, social, and moral, an order that always gives meaning and also offers a well-defined place for the man in society" (Achimescu 2013, 363). Consequently, redefining and restructuring the traditional axiology will organically accompany the expansion of modernity to a global scale. As the French sociologist Raymond Boudon highlighted, "morality [...] became irreversibly laic starting from Kant and the illuminist philosophers" (Achimescu 2013, 362). The acceleration of the historical passage to modernity brought the elimination of the moral values from the field of action of faith and religious practice, simultaneously with the postulation of their non-ecclesial and non-liturgical dimension. The process of separation from the religiosity of the discourse and moral action follows the course of the autonomation of the rational knowledge in relation with the supernatural/revealed knowledge. In fact, acknowledging among the firsts this perspective, the French philosopher Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) insisted on the fact that "the religious dogma does not represent per se a reason of the behaviour", therefore "the only legitimate path for moral convictions and behaviour is reasoning" (Stere 1977, 187).

As result, we shall not be surprised that nowadays "God is not necessary anymore [...] as reason for a moral life". While " the moral values present interest no more, being replaced by other values as success, efficacy, power, pleasure, and libertinage" (Achimescu 2013, 297). In these circumstances, eliminating God as source and authentic reference of any morality, on one hand, and the arbitrary bringing in of the utilitarian consumerist axiology, on the other hand, as underlined by the German philosopher Niklas Luhmann, "religions does not induce a morality anymore; instead it allows to be judged by"(Marga 2003, 27). Still, although it does not claim absolute authority, placing itself above any other instance, including the Church, the ethics of the "recent man" is far from lacking misunderstandings, because, under the pressure of the values of the secular world (Rotaru 2006, 251-266), "the consciousness of sin is lost, the moral consciousness weakens and the distinction between good and evil is not made anymore" (Popescu 2005, 481). The good and the evil appears to the "recent man" as emptied by any possibility to objectify, falling in subjectivism and relativity. As Zygmunt Bauman highlighted, "the moral self is the most important victim of technology" (Achimescu 2013, 182), because, in a world dominated by the logics of the new technology, "the people are transformed in objects, in medical, psychological and sociological acceptations" (Paul Tillich). The modern civil society solicits and imposes to the "recent man" technical and technological aptitudes and abilities, which can be industrially quantified and commercially valued, and less moral qualities. Thus, acknowledging and practicing the virtues will become, in the best version, a strictly private matter dominated by subjectivity and relativity. Modernity is different from the traditional society also "through a freedom beyond the conventional limits" (Nechita 2010, 61). The continuously accentuated estrangement of the human being from the self, fellow beings and God drastically narrows the individuals' unilateral directing toward the self, own needs and utilitarian interests, so the ultimate sense of living in the societies dominated by modernity will be "'to mind its own business" (Achimescu 2013, 182-183).

Integrity will pass through the process of self-dissolution of the religious contents and implications, similar with all the moral values. Therefore, from the three-dimensional scale described above, integrity will be limited to its social implications. Implicitly, integrity will lose its connection with the transcendence, because this type of connection can be valid only if God is understood and felt as "the third dimension where the man finds profoundness and foundation" (Gustave Thibon). Reduced to community acceptations, integrity will be confounded with the juridical imperative of respecting the legal regulations and norms, socially defined and accepted, being confounded with the prescriptions of the public law.

Conclusions

As any other virtue, either theological or moral, integrity is closely connected with faith, because it comes from God (Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 1:29) and from the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost (Ephesians 6:23, 1 Corinthians 12:9), faith, once integrated in our being and converted to good deeds from love, cleanse us from sin, as *through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins* (Acts 10: 43). Therefore, only acknowledging faith and living it in the divine-human space of the Church, the man, even the "recent man, will find the inner resources to oppose and fight temptation and sins. (Ephesians 6: 12-13, Hebrews 12:4). In fact, to have integrity means not to give in to temptations leading to dishonour and lack of correctitude and to reject them, adopting an intransigent position in face of the sins (*Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good* – Romans 12:9), also confessing the sin (*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* – 1 John 1:9) and repenting for the bad deeds (*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.* – Acts 3:19). The universal character of the sin (*They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.*– Psalms 14:1) is opposed by the cosmic dimension of the work of the Son of God, Who, by dying to resurrect, made *that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* (Romans 6:6). As a result, believing in Jesus Christ, *Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father* (Galatians 1:4), confessing our sins and repenting, we will be filled with virtues and good deeds the deficit of good in our consciousness, from where the bad thoughts and deeds come.

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