

Modern morality that gives life to vices: Glimpses of the image of moral decay in Bulgaria



Author:


Ivelina Nikolova^{1,2} 

Affiliations:

¹Faculty of Philosophy and History, Department of Theology, University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria

²Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Research Project Details:

Project Leader: T. van Wyk 

Project Number: 22153145

Project Description:

Dr Nikolova is participating in the research project, 'Reconciling Diversity', directed by Dr Tanya van Wyk, Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria.

Corresponding author:

Ivelina Nikolova,
ivelinanikolova1979@abv.bg

Dates:

Received: 03 May 2017

Accepted: 03 May 2018

Published: 31 Oct. 2018

How to cite this article:

Nikolova, I., 2018, 'Modern morality that gives life to vices: Glimpses of the image of moral decay in Bulgaria', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74(1), a4633. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4633>

Copyright:

© 2018. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

This article examines phenomena that lead to the manifestation of modern morality in Bulgaria and how aspects of this morality broke down during political changes. Included here are not only the assessments of the dramatic changes after 1990, but also the impact of globalisation on the social, political and Christian life in the country. The article considers debates surrounding the cause and effect of the moral deficit in the society. From the perspective of Christian ethics, the phenomena, political changes and its effects are assessed. This is done by considering both the European context and Bulgaria's own history.

Introduction

Our age is a time of military, political and economic alliances. Membership in these alliances is beneficial to nations on different levels. The Bulgarians wanted to be members of the EU and NATO, although they were not prepared for this step. Our weak preparation and perceived inequality with the other European countries is the stumbling block. This has disrupted any attempts to develop steadily. It has also had an influence on the European Union's intentions for Bulgaria as a possible member. The reasons for what is happening in Bulgaria stem from Bulgarian people. At the same time, this is the most difficult issue to discuss, and is often not discussed thoroughly.

In the context of the historical situation in the country, over the last 20 years Bulgarian people would try to outline some of the more striking manifestations of demoralisation in Bulgaria, the reasons behind them, as well as their effects and possible options for counteracting.

Decay in morality in Bulgaria went through a difficult period, which is still ongoing. Moral decay goes into deep crisis. In this article 'crisis' means a phenomenon or set of phenomena in the private or public plane, unstable or dangerous conditions affecting the individual, group, community or society. The crisis is considered as carrying negative changes to security, economy, politics, morality, society or the environment, spirituality and Christian life and many other spheres of human life, especially in the sudden emergence of these phenomena.

What led to moral decay in the country? The position of the sceptics and the moral nihilists

Today, many Bulgarians do not believe in the exit from the moral crisis, others are not interested in the moral decay, and still others benefit from it. In these circumstances, Christian morality is in opposition to the real moral reality. It has been sceptically rejected by those who conceived it as a limiting mechanism of the freedom of man which would not change the moral status quo. This evaluation is considered correct by many Bulgarians who are convinced that the spiritual and moral crisis in Bulgarian society can be overcome, if the Christian moral regulators are ignored. Others define the Christian morality as imperfect and not applicable in its theoretical form. This position is supported by the opponents of religious education in the country as an aspect of the national culture.

The most radical deniers of the Christian morality are the nihilists, who define it as being deprived of value. Moral nihilism is supported primarily by atheistic-minded rulers. In society it has been unwittingly supported by the morally desperate Bulgarians who have lost hope for exiting the spiritual and moral crisis (Nikolova 2010).

Both scepticism and moral nihilism form the nature of the moral decay in Bulgaria. This fact is unpleasant in itself, but at the same time it is perceived as a challenge to the church institutions

and as a test of the moral resistance of each Bulgarian. Christians do not perceive the moral degeneration as a factor that throws us in 'appalling helplessness'. They wish for it to spark the hope for social and spiritual change, despite the presence of corruption, unemployment and poverty¹ that put the society at risk of social destabilisation.

Poverty, unemployment and corruption

The weak economy in Bulgaria after 1989 reinforced the process of social instability. The standard of living of the majority of the population is significantly decreased and leads to a progressive impoverishment. Institutions, trade unions and specialised institutions explore and summarise the results of it.² The World Bank³ also carried out surveys on poverty and living conditions in Bulgaria – in 1995, 1997 and 2001 – which enabled us to track the dynamics of poverty in three different periods: before the crisis (social instability) (1995), in the crisis (social instability) (1997) and after the period of gradual economic recovery (2001).⁴ The main conclusion from these studies is that poverty follows the gradual weakening of the economy in the country. The results of the research, however, do not motivate the government to build a strategy to overcome it (Ganev 1998:2, 3).⁵ Therefore, the dysfunctional economy and poverty contribute to the deepening of the social crisis, driven by corruption, impunity and poor morals.

Weakening of national identity

The interest in the Bulgarian national identity is connected to the economic instability in the country and with the globalisation that affects spirituality, traditions and identity. The latter is associated not only with the idea of statehood; it is defined as 'a higher degree in the mental structure of personality' (Nedelcheva 2004). Through its national identity, the Bulgarian nation has its own specific 'unique cultural value' (Smith 2000:97, 98); a fact with a sign of national pride and self-esteem which were not experienced in its fullness during the long Ottoman rule. Bulgarians want to preserve their language, spiritual and cultural traditions, as they have preserved them as a nation. At the local level, the national identity is perceived also as ethnic.⁶ In some cases, the national and religious identity are identified as a consequence of which many define their religious affiliation also as national. Both options are manifested in the field

1. According to an analysis of Eurostat, nearly 57% of Bulgarians in less populated areas and 54% from the average populated areas or small towns live at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the period 2008–2011.

2. *Poverty in the conditions of transition*, International Labour Organisation (ILO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1998.

3. *Bulgaria: The Changing Profile of Poverty*, World Bank (Sofia 2002).

4. *Bulgaria: The challenges of Poverty (Regional analysis according to data of the multipurpose household survey, 2003)* (Sofia 2005).

5. Many researchers believe that the disclosure of corruption is related to the 'transparency of control over public resources and to the level and quality of institutional supervision of public officials'.

6. On the territory of our country there are different ethnic communities whose members identify as Bulgarians, but have their own specific characteristics in lifestyle, traditions and religion. Kabakchieva Petya. At: http://politiki.bg/?mod=osf&lang=1&c=cc_osf_heading&m=readDoc&p_id=457&p_inst=463673 (last seen 05.2012).

of morality. The main religion in Bulgaria is Orthodox Christianity, which has always combined the idea of a nation with a sense of religious affiliation, and this means willingness to stabilise morality.

The Bulgarian national consciousness cannot be separated from the religious, with which it forms a unity that gives birth to the specific identity of the Bulgarians. To the modern religious person, the devotion to the nation and the preservation of its spirituality and culture is a manifestation of personal responsibility before God and a kind of service to Him. In today's globalisation, however, Bulgarians gradually lose their national identity and their traditional morality. This is a consequence of the scepticism and the moral nihilism of the government. Throughout history, the national heroes of Bulgaria (see Stoyanova 2011:1)⁷ defended the spiritual image because they realised that morality is the main indicator of a strong state and they believed it was their duty to correct the faults in the morals of the Bulgarians. For Bulgarian national heroes of the past, the country and the church were sacred. In their devotion and sacrifice to them, they discovered the true vocation of man: to live for the sake of something immortal – freedom and faith. In the governance of today's politicians, however, the concept of justice, duty and responsibility is distorted or completely replaced. Instead of a protest against foreign will for power and a thirst for true spirituality and morality, we see venality and moral nihilism. The Orthodox Christian morality occupied a central place in the life of the Bulgarians because it is an expression of the religious consciousness. Here can be mentioned only Vasil Levski, who:

preached a combination of religiously grounded nationalism with brotherhood between the nations for winning the republican liberty; and second – his concept of freedom is not only political, but also religious and moral.⁸

According to the historian N. Genchev, the political thinking of V. Levski has an 'eschatological' perspective, that is, one that is focused on the future and for the sake of his own sacrifice: 'I've promised to sacrifice myself for the motherland liberation, not to be something special'.⁹ One hundred and thirty-five years ago, the Apostle of Freedom presciently foresaw that scepticism and moral nihilism not only have political dimensions. The release from the slavery of demoralisation passes through overcoming Bulgarians' personal spiritual weakness. The 'eschatological' future that Vasil Levski sees is the spiritual resurrection of the free personality, recognised freedom in the pursuit of spiritual perfection. And this is the Christian ideal.

7. Many developers of the moral image of Bulgaria are rebels in faith but also 'rebels in actions': Rev. Paisii Hilendarski, St. Sofronii Vrachanski, Bishop Ilarion Makariopolski, poets at the stake and gallows – Bacho Kiro Grigor Parlichev, Petko Slaveykov, Lyuben Karavelov, brothers Miladinovi, Hristo Botev; scientists without Academy – Dr. Petar Beron, Ivan Bogorov, Archim. Neofit Rilski; statesman without a state – G. S. Rakovski, V. Levski, St. Bogoridi, G. Benkovski, G. Krastevich and others. Politicians without Parliament, chetniks and voivodes without epaulettes – all in their own way, however, spiritual leaders, children of Matty Bulgaria.

8. Vladimir Pankov, <http://www.freemacedonia.net/statia.php?sn=544&t=1&> (last seen 05.2012).

9. Vladimir Pankov, <http://www.freemacedonia.net/statia.php?sn=544&t=1&> (last seen 05.2012).

Today, Bulgarian people understand that the sound policy and strong economy of the country can be successful if they are based on correct moral strategy. It will define the presence of Bulgaria on the world stage.

The main question that we cannot answer clearly is how to practically realise the idea for application of the universal Christian morality in conditions of irresponsibility, crime and unpunished corruption. Few Bulgarians realise that the scepticism and moral nihilism lead not only to economic or demographic crisis but above all to a crisis of the spirit. The possible exit starts from changing ourselves; with the cleaning of the 'old leaven, so that you may be a new mass' (1 Cor 5:7).

Social consequences of moral decay in Bulgaria

For Christians, demoralisation in Bulgarian society has one major source – it starts from the demoralisation in spirituality and morality and ends with the recommendation being verified through the Christian centuries: to overcome the demoralisation of spirituality first in ourselves and then in our closest with whom we live and in the environment in which we work – family and school.

The beginning of the rocking in the moral foundations of Bulgaria is associated with the beginning of the transition when the Bulgarian society was attracted by attractive patterns of behaviour, inadequate to the Bulgarian culture and morality. The inevitable conflict between the new and traditional moral values enhanced the multiplication of demoralisation from one area to another; thus, it affected all areas of personal and social life: the decline of morality in the family leads to moral deficit in the upbringing of children, to the emergence of amoral substitutes, to the neglect of Christian culture, etc. Alarming are the findings on the scope and depth of the demoralisation in the family life. It is registered by the arising alienation between its members, in the lack of communication between them and in the 'double standards' of their relationships: the hypocrisy and distrust are two characteristic manifestations.

Family destabilises because there is no motivation for giving birth and upbringing of children and a sense of mutual responsibility between spouses. Only a few believe that the church wedding adds a real spiritual stability to the family life. Partnership between a man and a woman 'on a voluntary basis', built on the principle of 'contractual commitment' (Castels 2006:124; Giddens 2004:114), is one of the signs of a weakening of the stability of the family. The responsibility in the sexual relationships between the man and the woman is reduced. People talk about the risks of uncontrolled sexual behaviour, while it is being promoted through courses on safe sexual intercourse. The topic about continence and its spiritual significance is a taboo for the modern man. This suggests that the majority of people live without considering the moral principles.

Consumer morality: Values and excess demands

Bulgarian society is marked by a selfish morality, which is manifested by mercantilism, consumer culture and hedonism. In this process, the most important is the physical survival of the nation. The economic capital of Bulgarian society is designed to meet individual needs.

The modern **eclectic** morality brings up in Bulgarians an ambivalent attitude to Christian morality and forms utilitarian behaviour in them, according to which 'it does not matter if someone steals, lies or kills, it is enough that such action is effective and leads to the desired goal' (Benson & Engeman 1975:2). This morality leads to the presence of multiple styles of life that are found everywhere: in the appearance, in the hypocritical behaviour, violence and in the irrepressible desire for power and glory. The replacement of the morally valuable with the rough pragmatism renders the very concept of 'value'. The content of the maxim 'to be' is defined by the practical dimension of the expression 'to possess'. The acquisition of material goods is one of the most important values, and the personal benefit has a regulatory nature. In the selfish morality of modern man, justice and love is understood as an obstacle to his success (Petrova 2000:24, 25). The value-depleted morality is in opposition to the Christian morality;¹⁰ it is controversial and without alternative. Secondly, it is not built on the principle of good as a self-value but on the passion of man to possess. Thirdly, it cannot express the truth, opposing to the lie because it is controversial.

Modern morality is artificially separated from religion, thus demonstrating its independence from it, losing its versatility.

The result of all this is the emergence of the so-called 'consumer society', which is mainly interested in 'material wealth and consumer culture as forms of the good life'. The lifestyle of that society replaces the spiritual values with custom values. Each commodity that people buy has 'spiritual values'. Even ordinary food products are associated with personal spiritual experiences and sensitive feelings. Their consumption promises joy and good mood and even stabilises family relationships.

The spiritual communication between people weakens. Communicating via Skype and chat replaces live communication and the spiritual connection between them. People perceive themselves as virtual personalities, often change their roles, and live as different people, losing themselves in cyberspace. The Internet has become a means of survival in the crisis, of seeking solace in a world that is visibly real and relieved of stress. This is probably one of the temptations about which St. Jonah Theologian (1 Jn 2:16) writes. In the 21st century the 'lust of the eyes' is new, because it is not associated with the desire for material wealth alone and causes bad passions. The virtual world is the tree of 'knowledge of good and evil', which is longed for because

¹⁰In Bulgaria there are other Christian confessions, but we focus on the Orthodox religion.

our eyes see it immediately and they are tempted by its virtual 'wealth'. Its fruits are nice because they teach us new 'morality', give us a new 'knowledge', releasing us from liability. Thus, values are formed, 'moral' in their own way: good is close to the consumer and the care for the elderly and sick is replaced by the virtual sending of SMS 'to short number' that saves effort and money. It is not important to show love in action, but to look as if we love: 'it is smart is to be responsive' (Boltz 2004).

With regard to the current state of Protestant communities in Bulgaria, 'The beginning of the Protestant sermon in Bulgaria coincides with the period of the second great awakening in America' (see Chadwick 2001; Michalski 2003; cf. Kanev 2002:75–95). However, the mission among the Bulgarians did not achieve the expected result and missionaries are disappointed by the fact that Bulgarians do not respond to efforts aimed at 'religious revival', but rather are absorbed by the idea of secular education and national liberation. Over time, however, they are convinced that the revival movement among Bulgarians is impossible, given the relations between generations of Bulgarians, which is formed for centuries in blind obedience to the 'authoritative representatives' (secular and spiritual). So the formation of religious identity of the Bulgarian Protestant community is a complex and long process filled with many internal contradictions, challenges and disappointments. The Protestant community in Bulgaria is located in a complex situation, given the processes of fragmentation and challenges such as ethnic churches, new theological concepts and, last but not least, 'unchurched' believers.

A crisis in Protestantism is observed in several indicators: the lack of a unified doctrinal framework based on fundamental theological principles of Protestantism; lack of consensus among the different denominations on important theological questions; enhanced process of moral, social and denominational fragmentation; a deficit in serious theological developments of the Bulgarian Protestant theologians; and marginalisation of Protestants in the religious life of the country.

Catholics in Bulgaria are a minority religious community that has existed for centuries in our land. Very often it exists in history, in the public mind and in the vision of some institutions as something alien and kidnapped for Bulgarian conditions. But the fact should not be forgotten that it played a positive role in history and is part of Bulgarian history and reality. Roman Catholics in Bulgaria face the same difficulties in religious and spiritual aspects as Orthodox Christians and Protestants. They struggle against spiritual decline, lack of moral orientation and spiritual stagnation. They struggle to assert and reclaim the Christian roots of Roman Catholicism and warn of the consequences of their eventual oblivion. They fight against relativism, which destroys the unity of society and a calling for the need for a new alliance between faith and reason, overcoming the medieval distinctions.

Gypsies in Bulgaria are experiencing crisis associated with their ethnic distance from social life. Prejudices through this prism are considered as more or less important tendencies to maintain social distance. The study of social distances in Bulgaria is emerging as practice and underwent rapid development after the beginning of the transitional period. All studies that have been devoted to the relationship between the main ethnic groups of a country usually speak of ethnic distances

The results, taken by themselves, can be rather misleading if you do not follow the dynamics of the development of ethnic distances from the beginning of the transitional period until now. Unfortunately, one of the specifics of the stereotypes that can be easily adopted for the truth of a community and to realise the model of 'self-fulfilling prophesy' is that if people define certain situations as real, they become real in their consequences. Under this scheme, a number of sociological studies were conducted in the period 1992–2004. They show the dis-rostranyavaneto model of 'learned helplessness': the poor are; we are hungry; nobody wants to work; we are ignorant; children have nothing to wear. The model leads to passivity of the labour market, dropping out of the education system and increased forms of deviant behaviour, which, in turn, enhances anti-Roma attitudes and increased social distances.

Spiritual crisis is overcome through universal dialogue between religions. Bulgaria knows well these dimensions: dialogue and coexistence between culture and religion are the foundation of modern development. The dialogue and the peaceful coexistence of religions in Bulgaria can be an incentive to exit from economic and financial catastrophe that is experienced in Bulgaria as a human and spiritual process.

Moral decay in politics

There is hardly a Bulgarian who is indifferent to morality in politics. Today such reflection is extremely topical; it attracted the attention of historians, acting politicians, sociologists, political scientists, journalists and public figures. There is also a Christian evaluation on this. Discussed are the criteria for moral behaviour, the interaction between political morality and the morality of the society, the ethical values in history, the means to control morality, etc. Bulgarian people will not dwell on the specific assessments of politicians or political events, but they will try to look for the causes of the moral decay in politics. What caused it?

Politics is a special unit of the Bulgarian state, which can neither directly nor indirectly be separated from morality, which means that politicians are also not exempt from moral responsibility. In them, moral decay manifests itself most vividly. In recent years, politics has emerged as the only place in the state with increased moral hazard. Politics and morality not only interact with each other but also limit themselves. The lack of sustainable moral scale in the

relations between politicians is one of the reasons for the scepticism and the moral nihilism in society. Today, few people believe in the application of effective principles of *political ethics*. This concept loses its content. Today, politics is seen as a separately formed community of politicians who call themselves elite and whose interests are in conflict with the interests of society.

The reflection on morality in politics takes place at two 'levels'. The first is the moral evaluation of political *actions* and their effectiveness, and the second is the *private life* of politicians. The moral decay in political life is a consequence of the emerging devaluation of the personal and political lives of the people involved in political affairs. As a result, they tend to use a language saturated with high moral sense, without committing their actions directly with the requirements of the morality. The immoral behaviour in one area of human life is always carried to the other; the personal morality of a person cannot be isolated from the public.

There are various reasons why morality in politics is not at the desired levels. The politician has state resources, which in some cases are tempting. He faces a choice: whether to remain an honest politician or not. Extremely difficult moral dilemma; this is where the person appears as moral or immoral. Immoral action has no moral justification even when there is a political excuse. Modern political morality, however, does not offer better forms of control, and in some cases it manifests itself as an ideological ethics. Morality has never been a goal of the Bulgarian political activity, but a means to hide immoral acts.

Politicians should clearly recognise the value of universal morality, to be convinced of the benefits of its applicability. If Bulgarians look at the past, they will find a number of images of good and moral politicians. In his address to St. Tzar Boris-Mihail, St. Photios, the Patriarch of Constantinople, wrote the following:

The more power a person has, the greater he must be the first in his virtues. The one who does the opposite, makes three very bad things: destroys himself, incites others to do evil and causes people to blaspheme God for giving such man this much power. So everyone should avoid bad deeds, and mostly those who have the power ... Some say that the dignity of a ruler lies in the making a small city a big one. But it may be a greater dignity to turn it from corrupt to honest. For the first often depends on the circumstances and the second can be done only by those who rules well. Emulating such person, with your good deeds you will be able to make the ones you rule more virtuous ... Do not do anything lawless to please even friends. Because if they are honest, they will hate you, and if they are sneaky, you will suffer double damage by doing good to evil men and becoming hateful for the good ... Take care of all – for the good to become the best and to receive their deserved honor and advantages; for those who are not like that – to improve themselves spiritually and to get rid of the dishonor of which they are entitled by law. Because this is the task of the actual power and supervision ...¹¹

11. *The Life of His Holiness Patriarch Photios of Constantinople*, (Sofia: Orthodox Publishing House "St. Apostle and Evangelist Luke", 2003), 37.

Pop-folk 'culture' as an alternative to culture

The moral devaluation of Bulgarian culture in general cannot be clearly discussed. Culture is a key aspect of human personality and a means of creating values. It includes art, literature, traditions and rituals, morals and language development, and last but not least, its history.¹² All these factors build the ethnic and national character of the nation. Culture determines the different areas of public and private life and at the same time is defined by them. As an important mechanism for the integration of the people in society, it most closely interacts with morality.

The relationship between culture and ethics today is a matter of current debate in the context of the demand of models for intercultural cooperation in a globalising world. The demoralisation in the country, however, is reflected at all levels of cultural life, which increases the risk of collapse of the foundations of culture. In recent years, this process has escalated in Bulgaria as well.

Culture in Bulgaria devalues because during the transition period (about 1989–2000) no strategy was established for the preservation and stimulation of the cultural identity of the nation. Political actions around the preparation for the inclusion of the country in the European Union also reinforce fears and paralyse hopes that Bulgaria will be able to preserve its cultural and national wealth not only within its borders but also within the European Union. The Bulgarian national culture brings its own contribution to the treasury of humanity because it contains features that other nations do not have; they give us a national value and prestige.

Although citizens of the European Union, for the most part, seem to be prone to an eclectic religion, Bulgarians still believe that the faith of a certain nation (in this case Orthodox faith) does not prevent us from participating fully in the social and spiritual processes of Europe (see; Petrova 2006).¹³ This is a reason to believe that the role of Christianity in preserving the cultural values of the nation is great. 'It forms also the cultural elements of communication between people and styles of behaviour. These are valuable benefits for Bulgarian membership in the European Union, which gave it the ability to adapt more easily to new social, political and cultural conditions and at the same time to manage to preserve its national culture. However, the opposite also happens, and Bulgarians increasingly lose their national culture.

Pop-folk is not a new phenomenon. In the early centuries immoral behaviour was accompanied by appropriate music. Even women themselves who have sexually entertained men were taught 'as singers or musicians and they associated sexual services with entertaining music'.¹⁴ The pop-folk 'culture' is a way of a dialogue between more people who in the situation of a crisis feel united by something. Specialists

12. More about the content of the term "culture" and its importance in the history.

13. More about the place and the role of the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria.

14. Body as a commodity - history of prostitution. <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,3922071,00.html>.

make a parallel between 'pop-folk' as a unifier of the nation today with folk music, which performed the same functions during the Ottoman rule:

As a whole, the boom of the folklore in the period of the Ottoman rule is a strong indicator of the increasing resistance and activation of people's power. Folklore has become a major means of building and strengthening of the Bulgarian ethnic identity in a peculiar way of survival.¹⁵

This finding is correct, because historically pop-folk originated in the process of transition, when Bulgaria went through years of deep social and spiritual breakthroughs. This type of 'culture' serves the cause of the instinctive self-preservation of specific passions and inclinations that are the faintest signs of the lack of humanity in man. This means that the pop-folk is emerging as a result of internal oppression and the struggle of society to cope with it. More Bulgarians have the need to emulate this type of 'culture' because they see in it an easy way to express themselves and to experience as consumers of sensations.

Besides this, it dulls the aesthetic sense of good and beautiful, the pop-folk 'culture' desensitising Bulgarians to the beauty in life. Therefore, the pop-folk 'culture' is an expression of the creative crisis of the spirit, which is unable to perform its highest function – to ennoble man, which means to create culture:

The pop-folk 'music' is the most inappropriate 'music' in a time of grief. (Cyr 22:6)

For the Christian silence in times of moral decay

Based on the aforementioned discussion, Bulgarians find the following fact: Bulgarians are silent about the moral and spiritual crisis, are silent during the crisis, and are silent when they need to find a way out of the crisis. They are also silent because of the difficult experience of the crisis, and this is understandable because such spiritual states paralyse the internal resources of man. But it looks as if it is typical for Bulgarians to be in a silent state despite the crisis. When Bulgarians look into the faces of people on the streets, they recognise the silent presence of many involved only with themselves, closed within themselves, unwilling to share and left unshared. Bulgarians are silent about the hardships in life because they do not notice them; this is a typical feature of Bulgarian psychology. The Bulgarian nation has a complex and dramatic historical destiny, which is why national character is very specific; sometimes the nation hesitates, sometimes it is submissive and patient. There are many reasons why they learned to keep quiet. Among other things, the historical silence of the Bulgarians means a lack of personal way in its history. Always suppressed, oppressed by the stronger opponent, it is taught in obedience and silence. A nation that is accustomed to its silence during severe trials and crises can hardly find its way during the crisis.

15. Diyana Petkova, http://members.tripod.com/nie_monthly/nie2_01/pop-folk.htm.

The Bulgarian way diverges from that of many Slavic nations, as well as with the way of the Western civilisation.¹⁶

We have to walk the road ourselves, where hidden Christian and Bulgarian spiritual forces remain and our inner intransigence to what preserves us as a nation. This is the way to Christian identity, as it has preserved us in the conditions of five centuries of Ottoman rule and in almost 20 years of our testing of deep political and spiritual changes. Even the deepest crisis cannot drown the quiet whisper of Christian identity, which the Bulgarian nation has heard during its turbulent historical way.

There is another truth. The silence of the Bulgarian people during the moral and spiritual crisis is not only an expression of resignation to the situation and inability to react. In its silence it keeps the secret of the innermost, which cannot simply be said because it is its 'creed' – this is its Christian faith. The Christian conscience of the Bulgarians has been immersed in mystical silence and deep stillness, characteristic of the Christians. Not even one truth have the Bulgarian people guarded at the cost of their lives in the millennial history of Bulgaria as much as the truth of their faith. This faith has not been destroyed over the centuries because it is decorous and defended with their lives. It is the big secret that Bulgarians can hardly utter today and try to live it because it is abandoned somewhere in human souls, and because of its long-lasting silence they are afraid that they cannot utter it properly. But they all recognise that it is 'silent knowledge' for victory over the moral and spiritual crisis. It is a forgotten old truth that must be remembered again and applied in Christian lives with new strength. This means that in new ways, they need to rethink the forgotten old, to go back in time when the spiritual tradition of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was a powerful factor in the formation of the spiritual and moral image of the Bulgarians and to draw useful conclusions and evaluations. The new ways of renovation of the 'old' morality and the return to the 'old' Christian tradition and culture mean revisiting the past, correcting old mistakes and their practical non-application in the future.

Many oppose the moral and spiritual crisis without thinking of their meaning. Every crisis is a test of the human spirit and only the opposition to the injustice is not a solution to the problem because the true spiritual change does not occur and the *new beginning* was not set. People should no longer be silent about their mistakes and openly admit their guilt with remorse, but also be convinced of the desire for change.

Repentance, forgiveness and faith – Opportunities to overcome the crisis

In the Holy Scripture, the word 'crisis' (in Ancient Greek 'Κρίσις') is translated in many places as 'judgement': 'For this cause there will be no mercy for sinners when they are

16. Ibid, p. 110.

judged' (Ps 1:5); 'Now is the judgement on this world' (12:31); 'For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household' (4:17). This means that the state of spiritual and material crisis, where a large part of the world is found, is retribution for the deeds of the people. The crisis is actually an evil that God allows, to talk sense into us, to repent and ask him for forgiveness.

Christians perceive the spiritual crisis in the country as another call of God to rethink social deeds and to change Christian and social lifestyles. According to St. Nikolay Velimirovic:

the cause for the current crisis and, more specifically for the current court of God has always been the same: the apostasy of mankind from God. Exactly the sin of this apostasy has created the crisis, and God allowed it, in order to make people come to their senses, to become more spiritual and to return to Him. For modern sins bear contemporary moral and spiritual crisis. God really uses modern means to punish people today. He strikes banks and financial exchanges. Overturns the tables of the merchants of money around the world, as once he did in the Temple of Jerusalem. He creates unprecedented panic among traders and they fight, worry, frighten. And all this in order to awaken their senses.... Deprived of material security, they would think more about their souls, would realize their sins and would worship the Almighty. How long will the crisis last? Until the spirit of the people change, until the proud culprits for this crisis bow before God, until people understand to translate the incomprehensible word 'crisis' in their own language and exclaim with a sigh of repentance, 'the judgment of God!'.¹⁷

The end of the spiritual crisis begins with the spiritual change in man. There are two types of people: those who live morally and those who reject Christian morality. With the terminology of the apostle Paul, the man who constantly updates his life is a *new man*, as opposed to the *old man* who lives far from God. This spiritual and moral division the apostle Paul defines by the definitions *outward* and *inward* (man): 'but though our outer man is getting feebler, our inner man is made new day by day' (2 Cor 4:16). He continued:

That you are to put away, in relation to your earlier way of life, the old man, which has become evil by love of deceit; And be made new in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, to which God has given life, in righteousness and a true and holy way of living. (Eph 4:22-24)

Until humans learn to forgive, until we realise our mistakes and repent them, until we cease to live in unbelief, we cannot understand that we are not capable to set a fresh start in life; it begins with a deep inner change. Repentance is confession for the deserved *judgement* of God and the punishment for crime. Moral crisis is the moral judgement of God for its wickedness.

In the Old Testament, the word used for repentance is 'šûb', with the meaning of 'back again', 'coming back'. It is meant as a general change of life, a return to God, which means complete spiritual transformation in man. In the New Testament

17. Nikolay Svabski Velimirovich, <http://www.pravmladeji.org/node/551>.

language, the repentance (*metanoia*) relates to the overall change in thinking and behaviour. As a radical restructuring of the way of life, repentance is not a recommendation of God with wishful nature but a call for moral renewal. If baptism is 'making you free from the sense of sin before God' (1 Pt 3:21), the repentance is a pledge not to repeat past mistakes. It is a special covenant with God to start a new life.

How many of us are aware that during moral crisis if we manage to forgive those responsible for Bulgaria, we will largely overcome depression? Difficult to forgive are acts which violate human dignity, but nothing gives humans so much spiritual satisfaction as forgiveness. It reveals the moral maturity of the one who forgives. Forgiveness in a crisis is more effective than the best strategy because the one who forgives restores the human dignity of the guilty persona and affirms its own. In the preservation of the infringed human dignity, the practical philanthropy appears. That which gives humans the moral right to forgive is the experienced spiritual suffering, but also the desire not to cause future spiritual pain for another person. Forgiveness is also a spiritual release of the negative emotions and inner tension, which requires special spiritual preparation and change of lifestyle. It is not only a farewell to the immoral life that spiritually oppresses and humiliates humans, but it is also a promise to no longer enter the old way.

The greatness of humans consists in the act of responding to pain with humility, hatred with love, anger and rage with the dignity of forgiveness, to disbelief – with faith.

Today, many live without faith, in a deep period of moral and spiritual crisis, and do not believe they can overcome it. However, if faith is non-active, that only means that Bulgarians have to believe in a new way. This does not mean changing the contents of faith and finding new behaviours to practice it. Faith is not an elementary form of behaviour and thinking; nor is it an outdated phenomenon inherent to the weak in spirit and the 'frail' Christians. Maybe we should put it between the will and knowledge. Both assumptions are not entirely correct. The range of meanings of faith affects all human actions. Faith is always present where humans meet the unknown. The subject of faith is what cannot be seen with physical human eyes, and which is not revealed immediately. Difficulty and inner anxiety are also treated with faith, not by artificial moral strategies.

Today, Bulgarians need a new strategy to overcome the moral and spiritual crisis and to build new people with new morality and faith. Only spiritually regenerated people can execute it.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that she has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced her in writing this article.

References

- Benson, G. & Engeman, T., 1975, *Amoral America*, Carolina Academic Press, Durham.
- Body as a commodity – History of prostitution, viewed 25 April 2017, from <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0.3922071.00.html>
- Boltz, N., 2004, *A consumption Manifesto*, KH, Sofia, 15.
- Castells, M., 2006, *The power of identity*, vol. II, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.
- Chadwick, O., 2001, *The early reformation on the continent*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Ganev, G., 1998, 'Corruption in contemporary Bulgaria: An analytical overview', *Sofia* 10(1), 55–63.
- Giddens, A., 2004, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Kabakchieva, P., n.d., *National identity and European citizenship*, viewed 31 March 2017, from http://politiki.bg/?mod=osf&lang=1&c=cc_osf_heading&m=readDoc&p_id=457&p_inst=463673
- Kanev, P., 2002, 'Religion in Bulgaria after 1989. Historical and sociocultural aspects', *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* 75(1), 75–95.
- Michalski, S., 2003, *The reformation and the visual arts: The Protestant image question in Western and Eastern Europe*, Taylor & Francis, London.
- Nedelcheva, T., 2004, *Identity and time*, Sofia. Quote by K. Baychinska, S. Savova, 2003, 'Statuses of national identity and values of the Bulgarian adolescents', *BAS Magazine* 2, 32.
- Nikolova, I., 2010, *Crisis: verification of our moral stability*, Faber, V. Tarnovo.
- Pankov, V., n.d., 'Personal dimensions of nationalism', *Vardar. Macedonian-Bulgarian review*, viewed 31 March 2017, from <http://www.freemacedonia.net/statia.php?sn=544&t=1&>
- Petkova, D., n.d., *Pop-folk, national mass culture?*, viewed 29 March 2017, from http://members.tripod.com/nie_monthly/nie2_01/pop-folk.htm
- Petrova, E., 2000, *The transition: Instrumentalization of morality and amoralisation of lifestyle*, IK Orion-Press, Sofia.
- Petrova, E., 2006, *The revival of religions and the future of orthodox*, IK Orion-Press, Sofia.
- Smith, A., 2000, *National identity*, Penguin Books, London.
- Stoyanova, D., 2011, 'National spiritual leaders – Our national capital', *Culture, Art and Literature* 10, 15–20.
- The National Statistical Institute, 2005, *Bulgaria: The challenges of poverty (Regional analysis according to data of the multipurpose household survey, 2003)*, viewed 20 April 2017, from <http://www.nsi.bg/en/content/5661/bulgaria-challenges-poverty>
- The World Bank, 2002, Report: *Bulgaria: The changing profile of poverty, 2*, viewed 20 April 2017, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/410631468016207317/Bulgaria-A-changing-poverty-profile-poverty-assessment>
- Velimirovich, N.S., n.d., *For the crisis in the modern world – Letter to priest K*, viewed 31 March 2017, from <http://www.pravmladeji.org/node/551>