

*Confronting Sin
& Moral Evil
in a*

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Contemporary Challenge

- Ambiguity regarding sin
- Therapeutic models
- Need for a Recovery of Sin
- Which requires confession
- Forgiveness
- Reconciliation
- Ongoing conversion

Scriptural Context

- Not an original focus on sin as “crime,” but as a mis-guided search for God
- Or as a failure in the Covenant
- Or as a failure to live out our identity as a New Creation in the Christian Discipleship Community

Biblical Understandings of Sin

- Old Testament Views
 - Grounding in the Covenant
 - The Decalogue as the “Ten Holy Words”
 - Role of the prophets as call to social concern and consciousness
 - Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

New Testament Understandings

- Basic vocabulary from Hellenistic culture
- ἁμαρτία (hamartia) missing the mark
- ὑβρις (hubris) pride
- ἀδικία (adikia) “wrongdoing”
- Leading to μετάνοια (metanoia) turning towards/back, a “re-thinking”
- leading to a conversion, which can be
 - Basic and core to the person
 - as well as ongoing and deepening

Biblical concept of "trial/testing"

- Greek word *πειρασμος* (*peirasmos*) and/or *πειραζῶ* (*peirazo*)
- The primary meaning is "test or trial"
- and only the secondary meaning is "temptation as enticement to sin."

Old Testament Trials and Testings

- Individuals and whole communities are tempted. Cf. Gn 22:1-19 [Abraham],
- and in Wisdom Literature as well.
- Humans, both individuals as well as communities also "tempt" God: Israelites in the desert, Gideon, etc.

New Testament Trials and Testings

- Jesus' " temptations" in the desert
- reality (i.e., the real world has testings)
- Temptations of Jesus: to deflect Jesus from obedience to God.
- Pay attention to the paradigm of his response, seen also as a corrective or counter-example to Israel's failed response to the testings.

Summary Conclusions from the New Testament Trials

- Less danger of scruples and neurotic guilt with the biblical understanding of "trials and testings"
- Interconnection and interrelation between trials and temptations and correction by God
- In this context, consider the following from Hebrews 12:4-11

“Sin” as Seen in Jesus’ Ministry

- Call to Metanoia (Conversion) linked to...
- Call to Discipleship linked to ...
- Jesus’ own mission...
- A mission of liberation and healing
- *NOT* a mission of condemnation & punishment

Initial Development of a Theology of Sin

- Original Sin
- Species of Personal Sin, cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1855
 - Mortal (death-dealing)
 - Venial (“forgiveable”--sin by analogy according to Thomas Aquinas)
- *Primarily* sin was seen as a result of “discrete” acts committed by individuals

Sin as *Peccatum/a*

- Latin translation
- The nuance seems to be more of a deliberate act of doing evil, a “crime” against the “law.”
- The Latin probably doesn’t grasp the range of meanings of the vocabulary of sin in Greek and Hebrew.

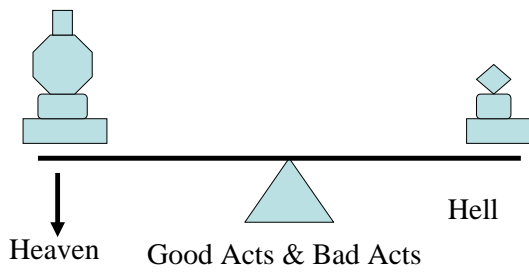
Conditions Necessary for Mortal Sin

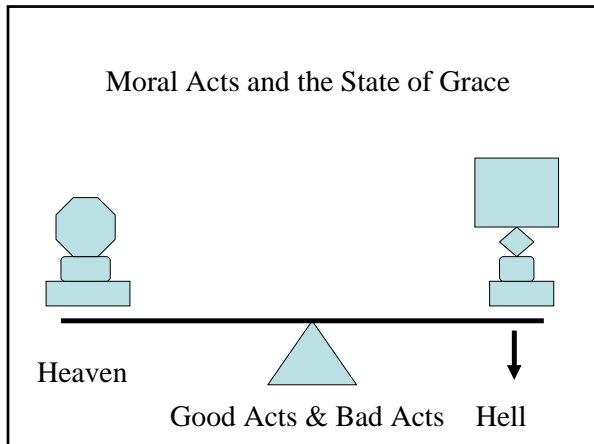
- Grave Matter
- Sufficient knowledge, awareness and reflection
- Sufficiently "Full" Consent of the Will
- These three conditions must be simultaneously present **before** the act is committed.

Pre-Vatican II Notion of Sin

- State of Grace and State of Sin were often presented as a sharply dichotomous position, like the "on" or "off" light switch
- One day you could be in the state of grace, then the next in mortal sin, then back in grace, and so on
- Belief that the act alone changed the balance...

Moral Acts and the State of Grace





But Is This a Sound Vision?

- While this approach seemed to fit very well with both the notion of sin as a grievous act
- And with the notion that our good acts pleased God
- Is this approach actually in accord with the best possible understanding of how God is, and how God deals with us? ...

Scriptural Context for Moral Living

- Searching for God
- Finding God and Following God
- Expressed in a Covenantal Relationship
 - Remaining faithful to God
 - Turning back to God
- For Christians this is done in the Discipleship Community
- Yet the Pre-Vatican II moral manuals stressed an individualistic, act-centered vision of morality

Enduring Treasure

- Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Sound Vision

- Matt 6:22-23 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

Necessity of Choice

- Matt 6:24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

God *ALONE* Knows Our State

- Jeremiah 17: 9-10: "The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse-- who can understand it? 10 I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings."
- 1 Cor 4: 3b-5: "I do not even judge myself. 4 I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me."

Therefore, Judge Not!

- 1 Cor 4: 5: "5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God."

Parables of God's Mercy

- Lost sheep
 - Not good business sense
 - We are each one of us unique and therefore absolutely valuable to God
- Lost Drachma
- Merciful Father and the Prodigal Son

The Our Father

- Prayer of the disciples: the Our Father ("Lead us not into temptation"):
- This should *not* be understood as a wish for no trials in this world.
- Rather Jesus is teaching his disciples to ask God not withdraw from them,
- and to guard them against temptation by ungodly powers.

And one more Gospel passage...

- Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt. "Two men up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee... prayed 'God I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner?' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 18: 9-15

How does this passage speak to us??

Insights of Vatican II Theology

- Helps us to see more clearly the *Relation* aspect of the States of Grace or Sin
- Takes more seriously the core nature of this relationship and how our individual acts can either strengthen or weaken this relationship
- Helps us differentiate sin along a *spectrum* of venial to serious to mortal

Fundamental Option Theory

- Post-Vatican II attempt to give a sounder theological anthropology
- And a sounder understanding of the true reality of sin and its effect on our relationship with God
- Does not change the fundamental understanding of sin itself
- But rather the vocabulary for speaking about this reality of sin

Our Transcendental Nature

- Basic to F.O. theory is the premise that all adults to become truly human must orient themselves to what they consider to be the ultimate absolute in life, either God or a false god (such as money, power, etc.)
- This basic choice is “athematic” since no one can see his/herself in totality
- Only God can see the person in this way

Types of Freedom & Acts

- Basic or Core
- Enables the human person to orient him/herself to the Absolute
- *Cannot* be intentionally “chosen” or “seen” in a given moment in time, such as “I now dedicate my life to Jesus”
- Categorical (act-centered)
- Can be lessened by other factors such as fear, passion, sub-conscious factors
- But which is intentional & discernible by the person

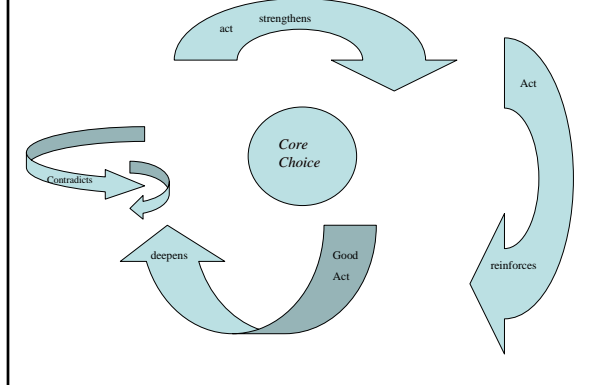
Types of Individual Acts

- Acts which are *consistent* with the F.O.
- Therefore strengthening it
- These acts can be of varying degrees of importance
- And involve varying levels of freedom
- Some examples..
- Acts which are *inconsistent* with the F.O.
- Therefore weakening it
- These acts can be of varying degrees of importance
- And involve varying levels of freedom
- Some examples..

Changeability of the F.O.

- The Fundamental Option *can* change
- Though since the F.O. is the core relation between a person and their transcendental absolute (e.g., God or idol) this relation would not change easily
- Yet, if the relation is weakened enough it might shift...

Fundamental Option & Individual Moral Acts



Analogy of the Marriages of Bob & Carol and Ted & Alice

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bob & Carol marry • Marriage relationship has more "downs" than "ups" • Each becomes progressively more self-centered • And hateful to the other | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ted & Alice marry • Marriage relationship has more "ups" than "downs" • Love bond is strengthened and grows • Each grows closer to the other |
|---|---|

But comes an act of infidelity

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bob is unfaithful to Carol • This is a single, serious act • A final straw • Which symbolizes and effects the end of the relationship | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ted is unfaithful to Alice • This is a single, serious act • But since their marriage is strong • Though weakened the union survives |
|--|---|

Insights of F.O. Theory

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Ministries in the New Testament

- Ministries founded in “charisms”—special “graces”
- Diversity: each person is unique and has his or her special gift and task
- Yet, the variety of gifts are held together in the unity of the Spirit,
- And exercised for the good of the community

Fishers of Persons

- What does it mean to “catch” someone?
- Not in the web of sin, but in the net of God’s grace
- Thus, the primary Gospel response to sin and injury is *not* punishment and retaliation, but forgiveness and reconciliation.
- St. Paul speaks of this as being a “ministry” of the Church, and in this spiritual ministry we are all “ambassadors of Christ” (cf. 2 Cor 5: 18-21).

But Are We Overlooking Something?

- The initial development of the theology of sin, and the sacramental, canonical, and theological responses all focused on the individual paradigm
- Is this paradigm fully accurate?
- Are there aspects overlooked?
- Does this capture the full range of Biblical views on sin and sinfulness?

Social Sin and Structural Evil

- Insights from Liberation Theology
- A “Thicker” Description of Sin and Evil
- However, This Requires a “Paradigm Shift”
- 2 Key “Sticking Points”
 - Sinful “Structures” which go beyond individual, moral acts
 - Social sinfulness which goes beyond individual personal culpability

Tensions Regarding Social Sin

- Difficulties connected to Liberation Theology
- Problematic of Social Analysis
- Ambiguity regarding Culpability
- Lack of a tradition of a theology of social sin
- How to Respond Sacramentally?
- Need for a theology of social grace

Where To Go From Here?

- Need to grapple with these tensions honestly
- Need to resist “retreating” back into the “individual sin” paradigm alone
- Need to recover a deeper biblical sense of sin, prophecy, conversion, and reconciliation

What Might Shift?

- If we move to integrate the Sacred Claim, what might change?
- Different emphases?
- Different insights?
- Different pastoral responses?



Spirituality for the Ministry of Reconciliation

- Basic twin dynamics
 - Sin-->repentance-->conversion (on the part of the sinner primarily)
 - Sin--> forgiveness-->reconciliation (on the part of God, and the community)
- Confession of sin--not denial; forgiveness of sin--not “obliteration” of the fact of sin

Spirituality for the Long Haul

- We are still a pilgrim church, an *ecclesia semper reformanda*.
- Thus, need to deal with, but also live through,
 - my own sins
 - and the sins of others,
 - and of the institution

Further Marks of this Spirituality

- Spirituality of discernment and dialogue
- Spirituality of growth and liberation
- Spirituality of involvement
- Spiritual of ministry: Ambassadors of Christ

The Most Important Pastoral Guideline

- For and with whom, is reconciliation most necessary?
- Keep in mind that the key to the whole pastoral encounter is *not* deciding who is “right” or even what the “correct” decision is,
- But rather, how can this person be brought into deeper communion with God and God’s family
- Thus, center on reconciliation!
