

# FOLLOWING THE PATH OF SELF-SURRENDER TO ACHIEVE INTEGRITY<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Since their birth the human beings are fiercely fighting to survive and to achieve prosperity. During their entire life, the purpose is to obtain a higher comfort, which they perceive as a way towards perfect happiness. Focusing on this goal, men often overcome the voice of their moral consciousness and make all the efforts to reach their targets, even by sacrificing their human relations or their own character. Based on these human nature tendencies, Christianity comes to completely reverse the values: instead of stubbornness it suggests self-surrender and replaces the anxious control of life with a constant and deep faith in God.

**Keywords:** *success, stubbornness, self-surrender, humbleness, give up control*

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## **Introduction: Fight, Power, Self-Assertion**

The human being is not used to admit defeat. By their nature, people possess an instinct of survival, which can always identify, even one step ahead their final encounter with death, unknown strategies of victory, or, at least of avoiding the ultimate collapse. The human being is born to fight, to win, to possess, to control. Regardless of its awareness, the need and instinct of fighting, of triumph and possession, are the ones that strongly guide man in life. The control upon the others, the surrounding world and upon its own life, guarantees the safety in front of the unknown. Since Antiquity until today, in the name of this ardent struggle to survive

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and adapt to systems of values that are considered vital for surviving, people have fought to death for anything: conquests, kingdoms, power, rights, ideas and happiness. Therefore, in many places of this world and during different times of history, the defeat has been seen infinitely more embarrassing than death itself.

Self-assertion seems to be the purpose of each living creature that possesses life on earth. And this self-assertion entails the denial of the other person, until their annihilation. I succeed to the detriment of the other person; in this way I win, I survive and I am successful. In the article entitled "*The Gifts of Humility*", Costică Brădăţan, Professor of Humanities at Texas Tech University, wrote that one of the peculiar ways of self-assertion is power, and this, based on a common view, "if it is not expressed, felt, showed and absorbed, it is void. Power does not actually exist until it leaves a trace in the minds and bodies of the others." (Brădăţan, 2019). In this way, based on the lack of educational factors, the human interaction is basically nothing more than a battlefield.

The meetings of the Homo sapiens usually "turn into orgies of self-assertion. Our quest for power shapes the way we act and behave, how we think and what we feel. And, in the process, it corrupts us – however slightly or imperceptibly, and ever so sweetly. Given power's insidious nature, even its lightest touch may be too much for one's integrity. In the long run, like life itself, power is a deadly disease. To become properly human, we need to go against both" (Brădăţan, 2019)

Today, more than ever, one of the main challenges is represented by the accelerated rhythm of all the changes: from the economic, personal or social life, from the thinking and behavioural patterns. The need to quickly adapt is crucial in order to keep up with society. Therefore, the peoples' strategies to honourably assert themselves into the world are increasing and diversifying, in order to resist. The personal development, among these, teaches the human being how to fight against the adverse forces – not on the battlefield with the war enemies but with the internal ones, generated by the modern western life style: anxiety, milestones' relativisation, restlessness. Either way and whatever adverse forces might feel, the human being remains on the life field as a fierce fighter, at any cost, wanting to keep control on happiness, fulfilment and success. Since birth and until death, the stubbornness is the indelible mark of the human nature.

## **Self-Surrender, Forsaking, Self-Denial**

But what if stubbornness, power and self-assertion are not the true ways towards success? What if these are only the expression of an alienated and deceived human nature within its ambitions? What if real success is actually achieved in a totally different manner?

In the human psychological structure there is a certain tendency towards something that transcends the visible reality, whether we call it “the world” (Ecclesiastes 3:11) within ourselves or the religious instinct. The predilection for religion is an innate characteristic of the human being, whatever expression might take: deeply repressed or fully lived. On the other hand, a man’s identity and personality are very complex, based on the self-development process, and people think and understand things more or less judgemental, more or less intuitive, more or less symbolic, without excluding the relevance of any method of understanding reality (critical thinking, intuition, symbolic thinking): each one has its role and field of application (Maftei, 2020).

Nevertheless, nowadays, the strictly rational thinking, based on facts seems to possess supremacy and to prevail over other ways of reaching the Truth. Moving away from any form of sacredness seems, for many people, an intellectual asset and an expression of wisdom. Unless, by any chance, getting closer to sacredness endangers the stubborn and persistent desire of the human being to assert itself in life.

Although it seems hard to accept, Christianity supports the opposite of stubbornness, power and self-assertion, as their ultimate strategy of success. Instead of obsession Christianity suggests self-surrendering and humbleness rather than power, and, instead of fighting, it promotes forsaking and the lack of control. This is the culmination of Jesus’s teaching, a craziness in many peoples’ eyes, and very hard to understand and assume in others’ eyes – both in the past, in the historical times preoccupied by surviving, and today, in the period of humanity that is obsessed with success and fulfilment. Can humbleness, or losing control upon our own life, be the path towards success, or at least a step to accomplishment? Aren’t, by any chance, our ambitions and concern for success and fulfilment against us?

As professor Costică Brădățan observed in his above-mentioned article, can we “fulfil our humanity not only by self-assertion (that would only tighten our bondage), but also through self-denial”? (Brădățan, 2019).

Jesus said “And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Luca 9:23).

As the Holy Scripture says, this self-denial, forsaking and loss of control, this selflessness, although entail the most vulnerable exposure in front of the adversity and seem a threat to the survival instinct, do not constitute a state of inactivity, withdrawal or isolation in front of the life’s requirements. They do not mean either passivity, negligence nor inability. We do not refer to any kind of encouragement to resignation, indifference or weakness. Christianity did not refer to the human being as an insignificant and worthless creature, degrading it under the excuse of the sin punished in the human nature. On the contrary, Christianity highly values the human being and does not recommend a meaningful life, without values and brightness. Yet, it brought another strategy of success: a totally different mechanism compared to the one humanity was always directed to, a strategy where the concepts of *value* and *brightness* were semantically reshaped.

“The forsaking or self-denial and the worship of God for a lifetime is the experience of sacrifice as total belief in the Saviour Jesus Christ”; in this regard, Saint Paul the Apostle said: “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14), (Constantin, 2015). Jesus himself was the supreme inspiration of the self-surrender existence, that contradicts any human vision. “Why did God become man, so that His own death could redeem the people?” was the question of Anselm de Canterbury, in his writing *Why Did God Become Man?* (Anselm de Canterbury, 1997). Out of love for the human being and to restore a broken relationship, the one between man and God, Jesus has left his divine nature and has taken a human body. For love, He lived doing the Father’s will and working for the people. For love, he told to the crowd of people gathered on the Mount of Olives: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:4). For love towards the humanity He said: “But go ye and learn what that meaneth, «I will have mercy, and not sacrifice»” (Matthew 9:13). For the same cause He expressed a supreme kindness that reached into the souls of people. Regardless the fact that the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus or the Roman centurion looked for him, He provided

his support for the deepest needs of all these people, understanding their pain and questions, as nobody did it before. He showed all these people the path to make peace with God. He taught them the art to live authentically and to have a prosperous life: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus' disciples were advised with love: "For without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). He set free the religious practices, of those times, from the artificial deeds and gave a supreme commandment: "That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). In the name of the same love to the mankind, when He was thirty-three years old, crucified on the Hill of Calvary (Golgotha), He was shouting: "It is over!", while the curtain from the Temple was breaking, as a sign of fulfilment of His mission. The "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) was sacrificed.

Those who have met and followed Him, lived in the same self-denial. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30), said John the Baptist, a well-known and exquisite prophet from those times, when he found Jesus and understood the unique significance of His mission. It is not easy to admit that another man is better and more skilled than you are, yet, it is a proof of honesty and humbleness. In this way, from the Christian perspective, this attitude proves how somebody has reached the Christian standard and, therefore, it is a step to success.

Moreover, the self-surrender means to admit that your own vision upon things might not be the only one or the most appropriate one; it refers to the approval of someone else's perspective that can be better than your own. Thus, rigidity is avoided and flexibility is allowed. Self-surrendering means to give up on your fears and anxieties, admitting that "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." (1 John 3:20). Otherwise you can remain fearful. Or, it can also entail overcoming the level of comfort, understanding that sometimes we have to act against any restrictive fear, just like Peter over the waters; otherwise you stagnate and remain the same. In the Christian view this is also a step forward to success.

The Bible comprises several examples of persons, that one way or the other, through their actions, have experimented the self-surrender. Joseph is an eloquent example for self-surrender, meaning that sometimes you must remain in the dark, not in the shining light of the

sun (Genesis 39-41). But in the dark, outside the scenery, the hidden and subtle things are growing clearer. Success also crosses this path, maybe even mandatorily. When Jesus, with His divine nature, accepted to be crucified for a generation of ungrateful people, He surrendered. *Carrying your cross* means self-surrendering.

According to Christianity, the path to success paradoxically crosses this self-surrender, identified as the *cross* embracing. There is no wining outside this, no matter how great is the temptation to avoid it. The cross is unique and customized with our personal dilemmas. But it is real.

Psychotherapy observes that refusing to accept the circumstances that we do not like, and fighting against them, lead to deficient thoughts and behaviours, marked by anxiety, phobias, obsessive-compulsive attitudes, addictions, etc. The self-denial or the self-surrender brings freedom. This refers to a deep bond with the spiritual life and a certain detachment from the material things. We live in two worlds, one of them being the opposite of the other one, a material and physical world that is present and another spiritual world. In most cases we live without problems in both worlds. In other circumstances, one of them will have to prevail over the other one, and this is the moment when puzzling choices are required. This is the time when we have to let go of what our senses are dictating that we must possess or do, and accept that bread is not the only thing necessary for the human being, but every word that comes from God. Giving up the bread and accepting the Word of God as your nourishment, this is sometimes the self-surrender. And it is the great step to success.

Only when we admit failure within the ideal concept of perfection, imposed by the world, we are ready to undertake Christ's imperatives, to carry His good yoke, to undertake His burden that is light. The labour and burden given by this world's ideals find their rest in Christ. And Christ did not promise a perfect life in this world, but a new one, under different circumstances. And this new life is not based on perfection seen as an exploitation of the ethical values – to be punctual, serious, etc., but on what is left after we observed our failure in this respect – meaning humbleness, tolerance, kindness. He promised to change the focus from this life to the eternal life, in the Kingdom of God – His Kingdom that is present now in the man's heart and His Kingdom that is about to come.

Based on the Bible, the man's weakness is the power. An inability or a crisis, where God is admitted and called, becomes a victory. When associated with the grace of God, the human weakness overcomes any achievement that people believe they can accomplish using their own resources and adapting mechanisms. Self-surrender, under these circumstances, means to understand that our strategies are limited, but God's ways are infinite. This is the decisive step towards success. Moreover, according to the Christianity, the supreme model of success is the one of Jesus, included in the writings of René Chenu-Repond:

“Jesus remains unchanged during this constant change and uncertainty. What He teaches us is a truth that never changes and remains final. That is why I believe in Him. I can trust His truth because it is the truth of God. (...) As opposed to the world's vision upon the real truth – many truths that we encounter are manipulated -, Jesus does not hide nor idealize anything. He does not use suggestive methods and does not simply comfort us by promising a life after death. He does not promise a utopia, but rather honestly, realistically and sincerely reveals the truth for us. But He never leaves us in resignation and lack of hope. Unlike other ideologies, concepts about world and life, philosophers and religions, that sooner or later prove to be false, since these cannot provide people with the answers they are looking for, Jesus shows us the way. He is the only solution for a meaningful life. (...) I believe in Jesus because I am certain – and this is what I have always lived – that He takes care of me. When in fear and difficulty I can always address Him, praying for consolation, strength and support. Consequently, He brings me relief and peace: «Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light» (Matthew 11:28-30)”.

## Conclusion

Struggling so fiercely for ourselves, we are, in fact, fighting against us. Looking to monopolize everything is not the investment recommended by Christianity. We actually preserve only what we have offered to the others. “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matthew 16:25).

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