

## Good Outweighs Bad

Ever since World War II, the question has been asked, how can we trust God in light of the Holocaust? Not an easy question to answer, but Hasidic philosopher, Abraham Joshua Heschel turned the question around, asking, in light of the Holocaust, how can God trust us? Certainly, the murder of six million Jews points to the great depravity we humans are capable of, but it is also the case that many put their own lives on the line to hide Jews from the Nazis - as well as the Allies who liberated the death camps. This points to the fact that we humans are also capable of doing great good.

This raises questions concerning the basic nature of humans. For the greater part of church history, the doctrine of original sin has been dominant in Christian thought. It is largely drawn from Paul's statement in the fifth chapter of Romans in which he writes, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people, because all sinned." The "one man" referred to is Adam, and the idea is that he brought sin into the world through his disobedience to God - and we have inherited the condition of sin from him, as it is transmitted biologically down through the centuries. At the moment of our conception, we bear the guilt of sin. (We see this exemplified in the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which means that at the moment of her conception, Mary was absolved of original sin so that she may properly, and untainted, bear the Christ child.) But the question this raises for me arises out of the fact that Adam was an allegorical figure. How can we biologically inherit from an allegory?

Early Church Fathers hinted at the idea, but it only became a central Christian idea through Augustine, in the fourth century. (The concept was not excepted by all of the Church Fathers, notably, Origen of Alexandria, one of the most brilliant of the early theologians.) In our own Reformed tradition, John Calvin's notion of 'total depravity' has been very influential, but this should not be interpreted as meaning we are inherently evil, but that there is no aspect of being human that is not open to the possibility of corruption.

I believe that at our birth we are essentially a *tabula rasa*, i.e., a blank slate, that we arrive in this world capable of both good and evil - and in the course of our lives both will manifest itself to one degree or another. The way in which we are brought up, the environment that we exist in, and the choices we make, inevitably determine the weight that each carries. My sense is that in most people the good outweighs the bad, and that when we do drift over to the dark side, Jesus calls us, and draws us over to where we can see the way to save ourselves from ourselves!

Peace and love,  
David