

## Chapter 5, Paragraph 1 Reflection

So much here that reflects Centering Prayer, and the false self; but I am drawn to the second creation story where *A-dam* is formed from the *Ada-mah*. and God breathed the breath, *ruah* or *ruach*, into their nostrils. The short passage conflates the two creation story as it includes in “our likeness” from the first story and there, after day six; it was *very good* (*A Common Rule* has ‘good’). It is the only use of *very* in the creation, the other days; three, four and five are merely good. The teaching in *A Common Rule* adroitly picks up this foreshadowing from the text; that lies in fundamental opposition to the general assertion of the innate evil and depravity of man.

Here the crux, “... and we should call it good and begin our understanding of people as a blessing...” (Paragraph 1).

This is a very Jewish understanding of the text. Throughout Christendom the text that follows became the “Fall.” Yet this is an Augustinian view from the fourth century that was adopted and adapted to the new faith. From this same reading derives “original sin” and thereby the inherent depravity of man. (Not to be confused with Paul’s lament in Romans at the end of Chapter 7 about the contest between his false self and his true self). Therefore man is not good, has no good thing in him and absent repentance, is doomed. It became a convenient recruiting tool as the stakes could hardly be higher.

Yet in Judaism and with a close reading of the text, we see something perhaps a little different. God tells Eve they will die (the Hebrew word here means a physical death, a straight line on the cardiogram, giving no etiological basis for “spiritual death”). The serpent tells Eve they will not die, instead will become aware. They eat and what happens? They become aware. The writer goes on to carefully separate the angry response of God, their passing the buck and the subsequent curses; from the specific reason for the expulsion. In 3.22 ff, “See, the man has become like one of us knowing good and evil...” and after expressing concern about their eating from the tree of eternal life, “the Lord God sent him from the garden of Eden.” It is not the disobedience that causes the expulsion, but the threat that they “will become like us.” A lot of scholarly ink has been spilled on the two references to “us.” But, for many scholars in Judaism, and elsewhere, man ascends to awareness, rather than “falling” to depravity in the Garden.

And in the *A Common Rule* text: “People are inherently good, not evil. So we understand and receive people as a blessing not a curse.”

The writer in *A Common Rule* cleverly leads with the fruits of the spirit, before beginning an examination of the transaction that must occur, or more accurately, is in the process of occurring, as we lose the false self. We see the change first and foremost within, as we become more patient, kind, long suffering ... yet the *Common Rule* focuses the fruits of the spirit even more precisely, through the lens of the two commandments from Our Lord; love God and love your neighbor.

So, we love that neighbor warts and all. He/she is not depraved. They are a blessing, even when they provoke us; even when they disappoint us. The Biblical text itself across many genres is a very long narrative of repeated blessing and disappointment. In the New Testament, Our Lord interacts with the dregs of society.

The longer we are in the *Common Rule* faithfully, the more change we note within ourselves and the less important it becomes what we are to others. It's not indifference, but a change of focus. It happens in and of itself. There is a gradual falling away of effort, of me.

The second connection is this. "People are inherently good," includes us. The *Common Rule* speaks not just to them but to the reader; you are inherently good. Call on that; be that. Who knows your many warts better than you? Accept them; turn the page, change the channel. The more you dwell on woulda-coulda-shoulda, the less you are enabled to love others. It's easier said than done, but Our Lord is quite intentional about the second commandment, "... as much as yourself." If you, in the private moments, dwell on your mistakes, you are in that moment denying the power of Our Lord, who says, "... as much as yourself."

"People are inherently good, not evil. So we understand and receive people as a blessing not a curse."

David Wynne

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