

Tell Yourself a Self-Correcting Story

Perhaps I'm just making this up - reading into the Bible something that isn't actually there - but one of the things I love about the stories in the Bible is that they are self-correcting.

That is, just when the Holy Spirit has gifted me with a blinding revelation of **THE Truth**, **THE Way**, and **THE Life**, another part of the Bible will correct my unqualified self-confidence.

After many decades of resisting the notion, I am becoming a believer in the Calvinist Doctrine of Total Depravity. That is, even my best and "purest" ideas will always be faulty, always be limited, always overlook some crucial point, always be tainted with self-justification and self-righteousness; never be fully and only reflecting God's glory and purposes.

That is why the story I tell myself needs to be a self-correcting story. That is, it must contain within itself, the seeds of its own correction. Because the story I tell myself will inescapably and unavoidably contain within itself the seeds of my own (and my world's) self-destruction.

I'm glad the Bible is itself a self-correcting story, because, quite frankly, I don't think I am capable of inventing one on my own.

And living such a story is often painful, because the "self-correcting" part usually happens **AFTER** the big mistake has been made, after the innocent oversight has happened, after the hurt has been caused, after the damage has been done, after impulsiveness and neediness and stupidity have had their way. And all too often, even the "self-correcting" needs a second or third or fourth correcting. Sometimes, there is no correcting - at least not in this lifetime. Many actions do lead to irreparable loss. A self-correcting story will not hide or lessen this tragic truth.

We in the church aspire to a high and holy calling. We also live in an age that has believed in unending progress and ever increasing prosperity; of errors without consequences or costs; of plans without unforeseen or unpredictable results. We live in an age of unfettered hubris.

We have bought into a success story not a self-correcting one. However, it appears that climate change, world food shortages, and rising fuel prices are creation's way of correcting the story we have been telling ourselves.

Our United Church has been pretty good at seeing the corrections that are needed "out there." I do wonder though at our ability to see the log in our own eye - to see the corrections that are in the story we tell ourselves. And to face the painful, irreparable loss that confronts us in the corrections we need to hear.

David Ewart,
www.davidewart.ca

Aside. The Calvinist Doctrine of Total Depravity is NOT that everything is completely depraved; that nothing has any good in it. The Doctrine is that, at best, everything (except God) will be a mix of some good and some depravity; some corruption; some fault. In terms of Process Theology, we would say that the lure of God is present in every moment of experience, but so also are other lures. And no moment of experience is ever free of these other lures. And indeed, the act of coming into actual reality - of becoming a finite, realized possibility, unavoidably means excluding some aspect of God's unlimited goodness.

Further Aside. Presumably the Doctrine of Total Depravity is itself also depraved. What a great self-correcting story! If this Doctrine is "true," it must also be faulty; our understanding and application of it must also contain, unavoidably, some error.

One More Aside. Presumably the Doctrine of Total Goodness is a corollary of Total Depravity. That is, God alone is only and fully good. But because God's lure is present in every moment of experience, every moment has the goodness of God present in it - Total Goodness; and also other lures - Total Depravity.