

18<sup>th</sup> April 2021

## Bad

**“There was a little girl  
Who had a little curl  
Right in the middle of her forehead,  
When she was good  
She was very, very good,  
But when she was bad she was horrid.”**

*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow,*

As quoted by B R Tucker-Macchetta in ‘The home life of Henry W Longfellow’ (1882)

The Longfellow verse above was reputedly composed for his second daughter, and we’re told that he would sing it to her while she was a babe in arms. What tune he used remains unknown, but his words, and the sentiment they contain, are an accurate appraisal of the human condition – even evident in a little child. It’s what theologians call “original sin”, what St Paul was wrestling with in his Epistle to the Romans when he wrote:

*For I do not do the good I want to do,  
but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.*

The cartoonists of D C Thompson have it right when they depict the legendary “Oor Wullie” sitting on his up-turned bucket with a little devil on one shoulder and a little angel on the other. Which influence will win?

In every act of worship I’ve attended there has been, in one form or another, a prayer of confession. The mid-17<sup>th</sup> century proverb suggests that “Confession is good for the soul”. Whatever effects my confessions have on my soul’s eternal welfare, I know that confession is good for *me*. Before I turn to the nature of forgiveness and work out its significance for me, I need to make an honest appraisal of my own life. I *can* be “very, very good”. But I also know that I can be bad, very bad, *horribly* bad, too.

We all struggle with the bad side of our character. So, let’s give ourselves to confession, take time to make an honest appraisal of who we are and how we live our lives. Let’s recognise the little devil on our shoulder that can make us horrid! And we might even find we have a little angel on the other side cheering us on to be “very, very good” once again.

### **A prayer for today**

*Loving God, when I look at my life, I’m genuinely sorry for the bad things I’ve done.  
Keep me aware enough to acknowledge this part of me, and then to let it go. Amen.*

*An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>*