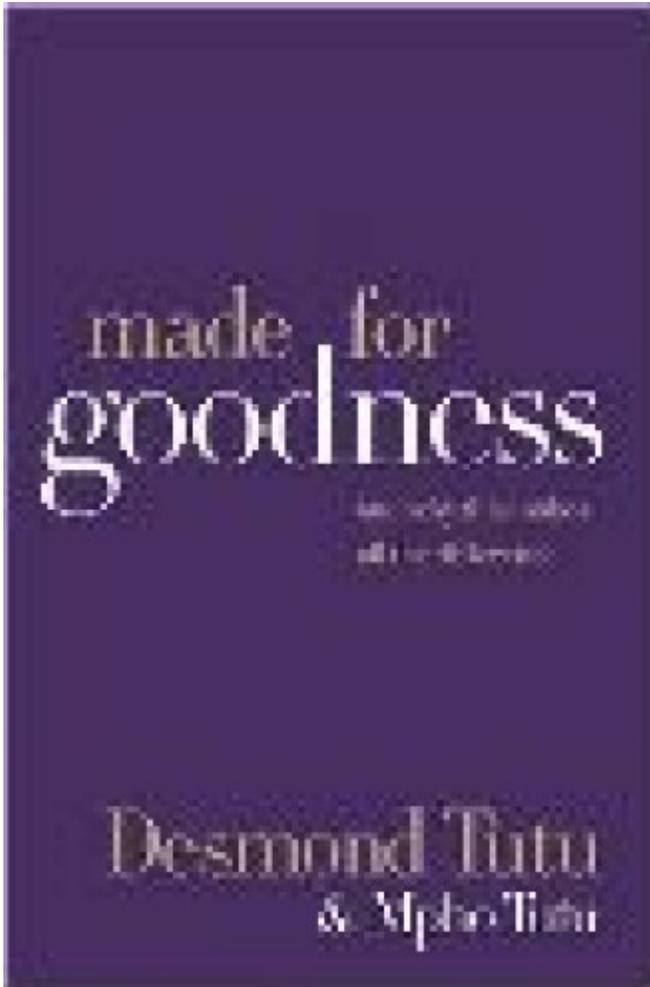


Other side of evil

By [LaVonne Neff](#) in the [April 6, 2010](#) issue

In Review



Made for Goodness: And Why This Makes All the Difference

Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu
HarperOne

It can be hard to believe that we humans are essentially good. We're amazingly proficient at destroying relationships, community, ecosystems and one another. As

Reinhold Niebuhr often observed, original sin is the one empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith. And we seem to like it that way: *Paradise Lost* is much more popular than *Paradise Regained*.

Take the conflict—the evil—out of a novel, and what's left is sentimental drivel. Take the topic of evil out of theology, and it turns into pious schmaltz. Romantic theology has little to say to the horrors of the Shoah, Cambodia's killing fields, Rwanda's and Sudan's genocidal wars, and al-Qaeda's attacks. In a precarious world, we need a theology that helps us face our night terrors.

Desmond Tutu and his daughter Mpho Tutu have seen more evil than most of us can begin to imagine. He has been in the thick of brutal struggles not only in his native South Africa, but also in Sudan, Rwanda, Northern Ireland and many more of the world's trouble spots. She works with people with AIDS, survivors of rape and molestation, victims of domestic violence, and homeless people. That is why their book is shocking: How can they say that all people "are fundamentally good," that "we are all made to inhabit heaven"?

Other writers, of course, have told us that we are basically good and that we must learn to accept or even love ourselves. Most such books—somewhat useful pep talks for the lightly depressed—are on the self-help shelves. By contrast, the Tutus' book, though written for a general audience, is solidly theological. Like Augustine and Calvin and their heirs, the Tutus acknowledge the mixture of good and bad in all of us. But where traditional theologians speak of original sin, the bad seed that spoils everything we attempt, the Tutus speak of original goodness—the good seed that can be nurtured until it eventually drives out evil. Created in God's image, we "cannot completely rip out and destroy every vestige of the godliness by which and for which we were made." And "because we are made for goodness, the instinct to do what is right must be eroded to allow us to do what is wrong."

Though the Tutus show respect for other religions and mention Jesus infrequently, readers will recognize basic Christian tenets in each chapter: God's grace is freely given; we do not earn it. God invites us to wholeness in community. When we suffer, God suffers with us. Repentance restores goodness, and forgiveness rebuilds community. God guides us when we pray. At times the Tutus, like Milton, attempt "to justify the ways of God to men," arguing that we suffer because God leaves us free to make our own decisions, even bad ones. Yet "even at that moment . . . when we have bent our wills to evil, God is as close as our breath, loving us and willing us

to turn aside, but God wills our change of heart in such a way that God does not undermine our autonomy.”

Unlike many of Archbishop Tutu’s previous books, *Made for Goodness* is not overtly a sermon compilation. Still, it’s easy to imagine him in the pulpit, passionately preaching each chapter. Beginning with a story from his own experience—“I” always refers to the archbishop, not his daughter—he segues into theological commentary and biblical exposition, adding more anecdotes as he makes his points. His message is personal and practical, not theoretical. He urges us to accept God’s acceptance, to inhabit our own lives. “Let us turn into the stillness and listen to God speak with the voice of the heart,” he says at the end of each chapter, introducing touching prayer-poems in which God invites us into goodness.

After a lifetime of fighting evil, why is Desmond Tutu now focusing on goodness? People often ask him how he keeps his faith when he sees so much injustice, oppression and cruelty. “What do I see in the heart of humanity and in the sweep of history that confirms my conviction that goodness will triumph?” he writes in the preface. “This book is my answer.” It is a perfect book for Easter. Not the cheerful holiday of bunnies and bonnets, but the Great 50 Days of joy that are built on the 40 solemn days of Lent.

“We can face evil squarely because we know that evil will not have the last word,” the Tutus write. “Ultimately, the reality of heaven cannot tolerate the existence of hell. Even our worst enemies are God’s beloved children. What kind of God could endure the sight of God’s own children screaming in eternal pain? If we believe in the good God, we must believe that we are all made to inhabit heaven. We are made for goodness.”