

Part One: Prologue

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION IS A CONCEPT ACCEPTED by theologians of diverse backgrounds and loyalties. It has to do with the belief that although God's self-revelation does not change, the human capacity to receive that revelation does change. It grows and develops as people progress in their ability to understand who God is and what constitutes right relationship to the Creator.

This progressive understanding led to the repudiation of human sacrifices as well as to the progress from polytheistic to monotheistic belief. And in the time of the Latter Prophets of Israel, the concept of social justice as a measure of righteousness and conformity with the will of God came to the fore. Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, and Amos told their people that the true worship of God manifested itself in the just and compassionate treatment of the helpless and powerless, not in ceremonial or sacrificial rituals. The revelation given by those prophets also concerned mankind's relationship to animal life.

God's Covenant with Animals

The abuse of animals—like the oppression of human beings—is opposed to the way of life that God has ordained. And although the world has fallen far short of the standards given by God, the Prophetic Age signaled that it was time for the human race to remember its beginnings. It was time to try to live the kind of life that God ordained at the Creation.

Through the prophets, God called the people to “beat their swords into plowshares” (Isa. 2:4) and promised a better world if they did not “oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow.” (Jer. 7:6) A world of justice and nonviolence was also a world that did not abuse animals in the name of their Creator. There was to be no more sacrifice of animals on the altars of God: “I have no pleasure in the blood of lambs and goats. . . . Take your evil deeds out of my sight.” (Isa. 1:11,16)

The advent of the Prophetic Age in Israel marked a milestone in the spiritual journey of the people of God. There was a breakthrough in consciousness and a call to justice, mercy, and compassion that still sounds in our own day. But today—as in biblical times—there is still an adamant refusal to follow that call. There is still a reactionary effort to make the worship of God a thing of ceremony and ritual rather than a matter of compassionate treatment for all creatures.

But there are those who struggle to build a world of peace, justice, and compassion for all forms of life. They try to walk in the light that the Spirit shines into our darkness. That Spirit continually seeks to lead the human race out of the violence and selfishness that made a hell out of the paradise that God prepared for all creatures.