



Chapter One

A New Creation

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Genesis 1:1–5)

LIGHT IS GOOD. WHETHER WE WALK ON TWO LEGS or four, swim through the ocean or fly through the air, there seems to be a consensus on this.

Near the slopes of Doi Angka, the highest peak in northern Thailand, singing greets the rays of the rising sun. The chorus is from a troop of gibbons, the smallest but among the most

numerous of the ape family who inhabit this region of dense forest and deep valleys. One of the first to study the habits of these creatures whose scientific name, *Hylobates*, means “tree travelers,” was a Research Associate of the Peabody Museum at Harvard named Clarence Carpenter, who journeyed to what was then Siam with the Asiatic Primate Expedition (A.P.E.) in 1937.

We now know that gibbons are our fourth cousins—chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans are all closer kin to humankind—but, at the time, biologists believed they might have been among our direct, evolutionary ancestors. Carpenter learned that these long-armed apes are experts at living in the trees, swinging Tarzan-style among the upper branches of the thick vegetation or walking two-legged along the larger limbs closer to the ground. The youngsters play tag, very much like their human counterparts, except for being airborne. Beyond the gibbons’ acrobatics, Carpenter also found much else to admire: the apes’ stable families, the monogamous loyalty they displayed toward their mates, the casual equality they seemed to practice between the sexes.

Any form of anthropomorphism (attributing human characteristics to animals) was considered scientifically suspect at that time. Hence Carpenter tried hard to remain the detached observer. But when he described how the animals greeted each other with warm hugs and little squeals of pleasure, he couldn’t avoid the obvious: “The facial expression involves a muscular pattern which may best be described as being similar to the human smile.” If the friendly and mostly peace-loving gibbons were indeed among our forbears, they were an exemplary prototype.

Carpenter also studied the animals' singing. East Asian poets had known about the gibbons' songs for thousands of years. Buddhists regarded the creatures as the reincarnation of human souls. Perhaps they heard a note of heartache in the songs, for those who had been disappointed in love, they believed, came back as these creatures who were known to wail to the moon. But Carpenter was the first to analyze their choruses with actual recordings, calling gibbons the "birds" of the primate world because of their complex duets, compositions that can last up to forty-five minutes, longer than the average Mozart symphony.

No one knows exactly why the apes sing, but observers agree on the musical quality of their calls, with tones so pure they seem free of the vibrato that accompanies so many human sopranos' voices. An article in *Science* describes the gibbons' singing as "a polyphonic *tour de force*." The female opens with "a brilliant theme lasting twenty seconds or more" that swells in volume from the soft opening notes until it achieves a climax of intensity and pitch. The male responds, beginning with a simple phrase, which he then embellishes and harmonizes with the repeated call of his partner, following an underlying score that varies by species but on which each singer improvises freely.

As in many species, the gibbons' vocalizations seem to be related to mating and maintaining territory. But Carpenter found an aesthetic dimension in the songs as well, particularly in the early dawn hours when the calls seemed to come from everywhere and the tree tops rang with symphonies. The cries were not mournful then. Indeed, the noise at that time of day was so joyful that the researcher concluded that something about the sun's first light "cheered the hearts of the gibbons."

Light is good. Notice that God didn't merely say it was so. It wasn't a divine announcement that made the sunlight more than okay and better-than-average. Rather, there was something about the light itself—its butterscotch texture, the way it seemed to dip everything it touched in honey, sticking to surfaces and making them shine that made the light irresistibly attractive the moment God saw it.

What is it about a sparkling object—a silver spoon, a watch face, a coin, or a bit of colored glass—that grabs the attention of a marauding crow? Charles Dickens, having acquired a new raven as a companion to replace the tame bird that had died some time previously, noted that “The first act of this Sage was to administer the effects of his predecessor, by disinterring all the halfpence he had buried in the garden.” Why will a bower bird decorate its nest with a purloined collection of bright blue clothespins? The bower is not exactly a nest, but more of an elaborate museum, carefully constructed by the male, housing the most brilliant *objets d'art* that can be mustered: parrot feathers, flowers, aluminum foil, and similar bric-a-brac, sometimes stuccoed to the walls like mosaics, occasionally arranged within walls that have been painted (a wad of bark serves as brush, and dust-mixed-with-saliva as the pigment)—the whole oriented precisely against the transit of the sun. Highlights attract.

Light is good, although some do prefer the dark or what Genesis calls “the lesser light” that God created to rule over the night. Marine catfish are known to serenade each other with choruses that resemble the sound of a percolating coffee pot on summer evenings at the time of the new moon. Newly hatched sea turtles follow the moon's silvery beams which lead them from the

sandy nests where they were born down the beach and into the sea (which is why beachfront development is so threatening to the little Leatherbacks, who no longer know which light to follow). And gibbons, also, are depicted in the antique art of China reaching into iridescent, liquid pools, drawn by the shimmering lunar reflection. God set both moon and sun into the dome of the sky to separate the light from the darkness. And the catfish, the turtles, and many others, liked the arrangement.

Don't roosters sing at dawn, and songbirds trill at the first hint of rose in the east? Anyone who has ever taken a walk through the fields on a crisp clear day has pretty much the same reaction. That's how I usually start the morning. Going for a walk is actually my dog's idea, and the path we trace is almost always the same: into the park at the end of our street, then along a grassy trail flanked by sumacs, occasionally looking across the lake toward the hills of the Adirondacks before eventually looping back home. Though the route is familiar, four-foot never seems to get tired of it, and I don't think I could ever grow weary either. I like to watch the sunlight catching the whitecaps, the purple shadows of clouds moving across the mountain tops. I've even heard the loons, with their almost human cries, near the lakeshore. What are the birds communicating, do you suppose? What they seem to be saying, at least to me, is that to understand Genesis we need to read it in the present tense, not the past. The sunlight this morning is just as fresh and unprecedented as on the first day it was made. It's an achingly beautiful world, the Bible tells us, and we can trust our instincts on this.

The Bible has often been called "the Good Book." The section that Christians revere as the New Testament has

sometimes been called “the Good News.” But what’s so good about it? What makes this old volume of myth and poetry worthy of our time and consideration? The Bible is an enormous storehouse of writings and, as such, it’s bound to be full of conflicting ideas and differing opinions. But if there is one teaching that is primary to the Jewish and Christian scriptures, important enough to give it priority right at the very beginning of the book, it is that life is good. It’s a wonderful creation.

God was so pleased with the creation of the first day, in fact, that there was a quick executive decision to make some more. So, according to the book of Genesis, there came to be dry land, waters, and the firmament of heaven. Thus the stars and planets and the seasons were created. On the fifth day, God said: “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let the birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” And on the sixth, God said: “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth.” And God saw that it was good.

Isn’t there a nature lover in all of us? Why else do so many people watch public television specials or subscribe to *National Geographic*? Did you know that a coyote will extinguish fires in the wild? (Most other animals are deathly afraid of flames, but the coyote is gifted with both the intelligence and the thick coat to roll on a small fire and suffocate it before it spreads.) Were you aware that Japanese macaques amuse themselves in wintertime by rolling snowballs? (So far, these mischievous monkeys have never been caught having a snowball fight.) And did you realize that red squirrels tap maple trees to get the syrup? (As any Vermont farmer knows, the sap needs to be boiled and the water evaporated to

make it palatable for pancakes, but the squirrel accomplishes the same feat by biting through the bark on a warm afternoon, then returning a day later when the oozing sap has been distilled and the sugar concentrated by the sun.) There is something fascinating in information of this kind. We human beings seem to be drawn toward the creatures of the wild like moths toward a flame . . . or crows toward a key chain.

I know I am. My daughter Holly and one of her young friends were hiking with me last fall on one of those brilliant October days in New England when the landscape seems more sharply etched than usual when we saw a garter snake, black and yellow-striped, hurrying across the leaf-strewn trail. With the help of a forked branch, I gently grabbed the reptile behind its head and lifted it to show the girls. Many people are afraid of snakes, and this may be one of the inborn fears we share with other apes. Clarence Carpenter, for instance, observed that gibbons are terribly frightened of pythons, their primary predator in the wild. Young apes in captivity who have never actually been preyed upon will exhibit much alarm in the presence of a large snake, while remaining relatively calm when around other, potentially intimidating creatures that pose no natural threat. Perhaps the role the serpent plays in the Garden of Eden is based on a long ago memory, from a time when snakes in trees were definitely to be avoided. If the two fifth-graders were afraid, however, they certainly didn't show it. Each handled the harmless creature and expressed surprise at how smooth and dry it seemed. We set the slithering serpent back on the ground where we found him, and he vanished in a flash; but he'd given us a memory that wouldn't soon be gone, recalling for me a similar encounter. A man was

backpacking with his son when they chanced upon a six-foot rattler, sunning on the rocks. They stood stock still, hardly breathing, and carefully circled around the enormous viper before continuing on their way. “Dad,” the young boy said to his father when they were in their sleeping bags some hours later: “This was the best day of my life!” The snake had given the child something that his life in the city wasn’t able to offer—a sense of the world as it was originally created, before the Fall and beyond good and evil, nature undomesticated and untamed.

Perhaps this attraction to the natural world is something we’ve inherited from our own primate past. In the Kakombe valley, in Africa, there flows a mighty waterfall. The water has worn a deep cleft in the rock, plummeting eighty feet in a straight drop that sends geysers of mist into the air, showering the flowers and ferns that grow nearby with a delicate spray of droplets that catch and reflect the sun in ever changing patterns of wind, water and light. Chimpanzees can regularly be found by the falls, dancing in slow, rhythmic motion, throwing heavy rocks and branches into the pools (like kids who just want to make a splash!), and swinging far out over the stream on the overhanging vines. Jane Goodall, who has seen the chimps cavorting many times in their secluded forest retreat, says that the wet, remote beauty of the place fills her with feelings of awe: a sense that she is on holy ground. In her book *Reason for Hope*, she wonders if the chimpanzees also sense the magic and majesty of their surroundings and if their swaying to an unseen beat is inspired by the almost living rush of water and its mesmerizing, hypnotic quality, endlessly changing yet always the same.

We Great Apes like to dance. The German psychologist Wolfgang Kohler, who studied captive chimpanzees on Tenerife in the Canary Islands early in the last century, often saw the animals circle single-file around a central pole, wagging their heads and keeping time with an accented footstep to the rhythm of their own bodies in a primitive ring dance, often decorating themselves with garlands of rag or string or bits of vegetation to add to the drama of their choreography. Dian Fossey, known for her research on the mountain gorilla, once saw these wild creatures create a percussion ensemble, one clapping her hands and another slapping himself beneath his chin to produce a click-clacking of teeth as a third youngster turned “pirouettes” to the accompaniment. More recently, Adam Clark Arcadi, an anthropologist from Cornell University working in the Kibale National Park in Uganda found male chimpanzees thumping with their palms on the huge buttresses of the trees that grow there, producing satisfying, bass register booms with their hand-drumming. Each animal created individualized rhythms that could last anywhere from a few seconds to half a minute and be heard up to a mile away. Chimps at the nearby Tai National Park also drum, singing along with pant-hoots as well. Whether consciously or unconsciously, creatures like these seem to delight in their world. The earth revels in its own splendor.

As a clergyman, I know that a good many people spend their Sunday mornings worshipping G.O.D. (the Great Out Doors). Truthfully, who can blame them? For those of us who grew up as Christians or Jews, in a culture influenced by the Western religious tradition, the Bible has had a profound and lasting influence, shaping our values, affecting our attitudes, and molding our

expectations about the world. But even for “people of the Book,” the Bible is not the only source of our spirituality. The other is the book of Nature, the revelation of the great cosmos itself. The sky, the hills, the trees, the plants, and animals who seem so similar and yet so different from ourselves are perpetual sources of awe and amazement. Before there were any written scriptures, the earth was our teacher and soothsayer. For many of us, it remains so today.

My own heart soars in the outdoors. That’s why the first chapter of Genesis is one of my favorite books of the Bible. Whoever wrote it had a simple, earthy spirituality. And in contrast to some other religions which tell us that the universe is *maya*—tricky, illusory, deceptive—Genesis tells us that the created world, in all its multitudinous diversity, is to be cherished and embraced...

*We give thanks for the earth and its creatures,
And are grateful from A to Z:
For alligators, apricots, acorns and apple trees,
For bumblebees, blueberries, bananas and beagles,
Coconuts, crawdads, cornfields and coffee,
Daisies, elephants, and flying fish,
For groundhogs, glaciers, and grasslands,
Hippos and hazelnuts, icicles and iguanas,
For juniper, jackrabbits and junebugs,
Kohlrabi and kangaroos, lightning bugs and licorice,
For mountains, milkweed and mistletoe,
Narwhals and nasturtiums, otters and ocelots,
For peonies, persimmons and polar bears,*

*Quahogs and Queen Anne's Lace,
For raspberries and roses,
Salmon and sassafras, tornadoes and tulipwood,
Urchins and valleys and waterfalls,
For X (the unknown, the mystery of it all!)
In every yak and yam:
We are grateful, good Earth, not least of all
For zinnias, zucchini and zebras,
And for the alphabet of wonderful things
That are simple as ABC.*

“The Alphabet of Gratitude” is my own creation, but the catalogue in Genesis is even more exhaustive, listing fruit trees of *every kind* on earth, plants yielding seed of *every kind*, *every* living creature that moves, of *every kind*, with which the water swarms, and *every* winged bird of *every kind*, the wild animals of the earth of *every kind*. “And God saw that it was good.” There is nothing complicated about this kind of life-affirming, earth-centered spirituality. It requires no esoteric insights. A healthy animal can understand it.

The Almighty dotes on creatures of every kind. Asked what his long study of biology had taught him about the Creator, one famous entomologist replied that God must have loved beetles! His response was tongue-in-cheek, but still perfectly consistent with Genesis, pointing to the fact that with over 350,000 species identified (and perhaps several million still to be discovered), beetles are more numerous than any other beings on earth. Many are familiar, like fireflies and ladybugs (of which there are two thousand distinct varieties). Some are less well-known, but no less

beguiling, like the wood-boring beetle the naturalist Henry David Thoreau writes about in the final chapter of *Walden*:

Everyone has heard the story which has gone the round of New England of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years, first in Connecticut, and afterward in Massachusetts,—from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as it appeared by counting the annual layers beyond it; which was heard gnawing out for several weeks, hatched perchance by heat of an urn.

For Thoreau, the insect's emergence after so many decades of lying dormant was a sign of the regenerative powers in nature, and in us: "Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this?" Resurrection is this creature's specialty. Beetles first appeared on earth about 250 million years ago. They were pollinators of some of the world's earliest flowers and remain the earth's "disposal crew," transforming dead and decaying matter into the stuff of fresh beginnings. When Mount St. Helens erupted in Washington, burying the surrounding foothills under boiling lava flows one hundred feet deep and obliterating all signs of life, beetles were the first to recolonize the burned-over landscape, riding in like hang gliders on the wind, their tiny corpses creating the detritus to nourish the plant life that followed. In their book *An Inordinate Fondness for Beetles*, Arthur Evans and Charles Bellamy observe that many of the scientists who study these remarkably diverse and imaginatively adapted insects "refer to their passion for

beetles in terms of joy, excitement, wonder, delight, thrill, satisfaction, and fulfillment.” To those with eyes to see, no aspect of the creation is too humble to elicit astonishment.

Life celebrates itself. But alongside this benign doctrine of life’s goodness, there is another view articulated in the Bible. For after the plant and animal kingdoms have been created, God then says: “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth.” Human beings alone resemble God, in short, and this resemblance sets them over and apart from all other creatures.

Little besides parochialism can support such a claim. As pre-scientific peoples once considered the earth to be at the center of God’s starry handiwork, so they felt themselves to be the crown of all creation. Today we know better. Other animals dance and make music, love their mates and cherish their offspring, much like ourselves. They seem to experience life’s spiritual dimensions as well, sharing in the qualities we usually suppose to be uniquely human. A friend who worked in Africa with endangered species showed me a photograph he had taken of a Mandrill, sitting quietly and gazing at a setting sun. The fading light apparently affected the baboon as it would you or me; the Mandrill stopped to muse, experiencing a moment of contemplation or enchantment. Because they seem so perfectly at home in their world, many animals might even be considered more “godlike” than ourselves: freer and less guarded and more centered in the moment. Nevertheless, the idea that *Homo sapiens* alone bears the *imago dei* would have far-reaching and destructive consequences,

especially in the hands of the Greek philosophers who would shape Christian theology, replacing the earthy spirituality of Judaism with an outlook that despised the things of this world.

Plato began the process in his *Timaeus*. There, he explains that in the beginning the universe was twofold, divided between an invisible realm of thought and the visible world of matter. Between them was a demiurge, who first fashioned the primordial elements of wind, air, fire, and water, and then shaped these into a cosmos with the earth at the center, surrounded by rings of planetary spheres in ascending order. Next the demiurge made a world soul, infusing it into his creation as the animating principle of life and motion that sends the stars on their courses. Men also received a portion of this soul, although in weakened and diluted form. And man's task on earth was to subject the mundane sensations of the body to the higher promptings of the soul. If he succeeded, the soul would shed its corporeal envelope at the time of death and return to its more fitting home among the stars. Men who succumbed to sensuality during their lifespan on earth, however, would be reincarnated in their next existence as women. And women who surrendered to the appetites of the body would be reborn as "brutes." The process would continue, Plato believed, until the soul finally succeeded in mastering a body, at which time it would finally leave behind its material husk and assume a disembodied career in the sky.

Plato's pupil Aristotle (circa 384–322 BCE) refined this vision, distinguishing in his treatise *On the Soul* three grades of soul. To plants he assigned a "vegetative soul," which enables them to carry on the basic operations of nutrition, growth, and reproduction. Animals possess, in addition, a "sensitive soul" that

animates their bodies and endows them with feeling. But according to Aristotle, only human beings have a soul that permits them to think and reason. Therefore, Aristotle states in *On the Forms of Animals*, “of all living beings with which we are acquainted, man alone partakes of the divine, or at any rate partakes of it in a fuller measure than the rest.”

Christian thinkers adopted these conclusions. The fourth century theologian Augustine also distinguished “three grades of souls in universal nature,” declaring in *On Christian Doctrine* that “a great thing truly is man, made after the image and similitude of God, not as respects the mortal body in which he is clothed, but as respects the rational soul by which he is exalted in honor above the beasts.” Aquinas, the greatest doctor of the Church in medieval times, was able to discern five varieties of soul—vegetative, sensitive, appetitive, locomotive, and intellectual—but likewise agreed that:

Man is said to be after the image of God not as regards his body, but as regards that whereby he excels other animals.... Now man excels all animals by his reason and intelligence. Hence it is according to his intelligence and reason, which are incorporeal, that man is said to be according to the image of God. (Summa Theologica, First Part, Question 3, Article I, “Whether God Is a Body”)

Such distinctions are far removed from the spirit of Genesis, which states plainly that animals and humans alike were created as *nefesh chaya*, or “living beings.” Yet Christian thinkers preferred Hellenistic subtlety to Hebraic straightforwardness. Later scholars,

when drafting the King James Version, rendered *nefesh chaya* as a “living soul” when applied to Adam (Gen 2:7) but translated exactly the same phrase as “living creature” when applied to animals a few verses later (Genesis 2:19). The Hebrew word *v’yirdu*, which is usually given as “dominion” in English, was similarly misinterpreted. Dominion did imply “ruling over,” but only as a wise king rules over and protects his subjects, or as God reigns over creation, sustaining, cherishing, and safeguarding every living thing. Scripture was certainly never intended as a license to clear-cut the forests, pollute the oceans, or drive other species to extinction. Nevertheless, the assumption of human superiority would become firmly entrenched and the Bible employed to assert our lordship over the creatures of the earth.

The doctrine that animals are inferior to humankind was never really a part of Eastern religion, perhaps because of the very different creation stories found in Asia. In the theology and philosophies of the West, the universe is “made,” either as a monarch makes an edict, through divine pronouncement, or as a craftsman makes some useful object, for example as a potter shapes a pot. Both images can be found in Genesis, and Plato’s demiurge as well as Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover are also creators who stand separate, over and against their creations. In the East, on the other hand, the world comes into being more organically. The Tao (literally, “the Way”) grows into the ten thousand things and every feature of the universe is a living expression of the Way. Whatever was most natural and spontaneous, least the product of artifice or contrivance, was to this way of thinking closest to the Source.

Under these circumstances, other creatures are often regarded as teachers and models suitable for human emulation. For instance, *Tai chi chuan*, the ancient discipline of meditation and self-defense, was supposedly invented by observing a snake and a crane in mortal combat. Its motions are patterned on the effortless fluidity of animals in their natural setting. Other animals were also highly esteemed. Gibbons, for example, were compared favorably with saints and sages for their good manners and serene disposition. In a Taoist text from the eighth century we read:

These dark gibbons are raised in the lofty mountains of the south. Roaming about without a fixed place, they are always filled with joy and full of good cheer. When clouds and mists obscure the sky they are silent together, but as soon as wind and rain have passed they will vie with each other in calling. That sound purifies the thoughts of the mountain recluse, and it will move the traveler to tears. No stern punishments menace them, but they enjoy the friendliness of family relations. For their food they depend on what they find, and their bodies are protected by a natural cover. They are subject to neither taxes nor levies, they neither sweat nor toil.

“I am indeed aware of the fact that man is called the most important of all creatures,” the author concludes: “But how could one ever gauge the universality of mysterious Nature?” Of course, the Chinese were familiar with the apes’ music. When Li Yueh played his *ch’in*, a seven-stringed lute popular fifteen hundred years ago, his pet gibbon Shan-Kung accompanied him with singing. One official of the T’ang Dynasty observed that the

gibbons' calls "have an eerie quality that penetrates your liver and spleen, and they reproduce the notes of our pentatonic scale." Because of their elusive habits, dwelling in the tops of trees and seldom seen at ground level, gibbons also became associated in popular culture with the realm of mystery and invisible powers. Many believed the animals possessed semi-magical properties, like skill in swordsmanship and the martial arts, or exceptional longevity due to their cultivation of *chi*, the subtle life force that was believed to circulate throughout the cosmos. But others admired the apes for more mundane reasons, like the degree of attachment they displayed toward their loved ones. According to one story:

When the lord Huan entered Shu, and had arrived with his fleet at the Three Gorges of the Yangtse River, one of his subaltern officers caught a young gibbon. Its mother followed the boat all along the bank, crying pitifully, and would not give up even after a hundred miles.

Finally, the mother died of grief, throwing herself down into the boat from a high bank and perishing in the fall. Anecdotes of this kind generated a heightened level of empathy for the sufferings of these creatures, and while the practice of keeping young gibbons as pets was widespread, many came to regard it as cruel, partly because the preferred method of capturing an infant (then as now) was to shoot the mother in order to seize her offspring, but also because captivity seemed to maim their free-ranging spirits. A Buddhist monk reproached himself in this way when his pet ape's life came to a premature end:

*You could be happy only when near your towering mountains,
You had been yearning for far plains and dense forests.
You must have suffered deeply being kept on leash or chain,
And that was why your allotted span of life was cut short.*

This was at least one monk who found new meaning in his devotional recitations: "Sentient beings are numberless. I vow to liberate them all."

Animals also played an important role in the creation stories of many indigenous peoples. Among the Cherokee, it was an aquatic beetle who dove beneath the primordial seas that covered the planet to bring up the first muck and make solid ground where civilization could begin. The peoples of the Pacific Northwest regarded Raven as the creator of human beings, who emerged from a clamshell. For those of the American Southwest, the Coyote worked together with Raven to place two burning bundles of hay in the sky, which became the sun and moon, dispelling the darkness and bringing light.

The Creek say that the Creator made the animals, birds, and creeping things in the beginning, putting the world in perfect balance. But many moons passed and the animals called to their Maker: "We thank you for all that you have given us, for all the beauty that surrounds us. However, everything is so plentiful that we have nothing to do but wander here and there, with no purpose to our lives." That was when the Creator fashioned men and women, weak and helpless beings who needed wisdom and guidance in order to survive. And this gave the animals a reason for living: to care for these untutored humans, to teach them how to find food and shelter, and to show them the secrets of healing.

Animals can teach us once again the lesson we seem to have forgotten, that the earth does not belong to us, but we belong to the earth. And the creation myths of other cultures—of East Asia and native peoples—offer an important corrective to our own Western traditions, which have been shaped excessively by the otherworldly *mythos* of the Greeks. Such tales help us to remember that the sun was not given to nurture only one species, but meant to shine on all.

Perhaps the only way to save our world is by recognizing that this is not our world at all. Other living beings are not our property. The precept that we possess no title deed to the soil or air or water is prevalent among modern environmentalists, but this is also a rule articulated repeatedly in the Bible:

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it. (Psalm 24:1)

All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the Lord. (Isaiah 66:1)

For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine. (Psalm 50:10–11)

Indeed, the whole earth is mine (Exodus 19:5)

Scripture teaches clearly that the earth belongs to God. It is a goodly world, not ours to desecrate or despoil or grind up for profit, but a gift held in trust. Will we ever learn to behold the beauty of all creation and treat other beings with the respect they deserve?

If we do then, on that day, humankind will finally have seen the light.



In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void and darkness covered the face of the deep, and a mighty wind swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God called the light Day and the darkness Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so.

Days passed into years. And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together God called Seas.

Millennia came and went. And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great whales and every living creatures that moves. And God blessed them, saying "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds and animals multiply on the earth."

And where the waters poured down from the dome of the sky, like a waterfall from heaven, the chimpanzees danced. And as the morning broke over the forest, filling the canopy with soft green light, the gibbons sang with joy. For all

creatures looked upon the work of God, and saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind, who shall be a mirror of my creation." And so God made human beings, female and male, and within their souls placed the light and the darkness, and within their veins God placed the seas, fashioning their bodies from the tissue of every living thing.

God blessed them, and said to them, "Love the earth and preserve it, for you are related to every living creature: the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and those that creep upon the ground and the wild animals of every kind." And it was so. Then God saw everything that had been made, and indeed, it was very good.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on that day, God celebrated, saying to humankind, "Honor creation and keep it holy." And God rested, placing the world in our hands.