

At the beginning of the book of Genesis we are given a picture of humanity newly-made. The Garden of Eden, the Man and the Woman, the delighted discovery of the world and of love, the naming of the animals and birds and insects, the peace between us and the nature around us. It is very beautiful; but every time we have tried to paint a picture of it, we produce something that seems like a dream: unreal, out of touch, almost irrelevant.

For many centuries people took this ancient story to be a piece of history, a description of what actually happened when God decided to make human beings. This idea too now looks very old-fashioned, and our understanding of how humanity evolved over millions of years has taken its place as the answer to the question, *How did we get here?*

If the story is not intended to answer our questions about evolution, what is its aim?

Like all dreams -and I think this is one -the Genesis account reveals massive truths. When we dream, we are letting the truth play itself out in our minds, in dramas too terrible sometimes to be shown the light of day, and too wild to obey the rules of the waking mind. Things impossible to admit to the conscious world emerge with perfect freedom in o~ dreams.

The dream of a lost perfection, of an innocent and utterly fruitful life is not a piece of history. It's a dream that lives in every one of us, no doubt framed by our experience of being a beloved baby, who was constantly caressed, fed, served and comforted. Then we grew up into the harsher world of demands and rules, strictures and responsibilities. We got to know wrongdoing and falling short, and missing the mark, and criticism and judgment. We lost our innocence, and we felt exiled and disappointed, a fallen person. This is the real world, this is where we are actually living. .

When the people went into., exile, many of them said simplistically that God had deserted them, that he had found himself too weak to save them, that their destiny had foundered in ruins. The more perceptive, led by the inspired prophets, knew that it was God himself whose hand had decreed their exile; that he was bringing them low in order to raise them on high. When they returned to their ancient faith, they would experience the God who redeems and saves. And this is what lies behind the strange joy of the seventy-two disciples as they return to Jesus; the Gospel had been alive in them, and they had seen its effects in the ones they had found, who had welcomed the message and tasted the hope of redemption. But famished field and blackened tree Bear flowers in Eden never known. Blossoms of grief and charity Bloom in these darkened fields alone. What had Eden ever to say Of hope, and faith, and pity, and love Until was buried all its day, and memory found its treasure-trove? Strange blessings never in Paradise Fall from these beclouded skies.