

## **Mutation**

Like the songwriter of a generation ago, the Hebrew author of the first chapter of Genesis might confess: *Don't know much about biology; don't know much about geology . . .* But he sure had a poetic flair for describing the origin of our world: *In the beginning, . . . the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the sea. And God said . . . Let the waters be gathered together into one place and let the dry land appear.* He then goes on to portray the creation first of vegetation, then animal life and finally human beings. In broad terms that's pretty much how modern science describes the sequence of our evolution: life emerging from the sea and advancing through plant and animal stages to culminate in *homo sapiens*.

Despite the similarities, however, there's really a big difference between Genesis and modern science, because science prosaically views the origin of the world as a purely physical event whereas the Hebrew author writes of it as also a dramatic event. So where he speaks of God's Spirit hovering over a primeval sea, it's not simply a watery sea he's speaking of. No! For him the sea serves also as a symbol of *chaos and suffocation*. And if you wonder why, just go take a look at the Pacific on a gray, stormy day - the waves assaulting the rocks as if they would chew them to pieces. Or imagine yourself adrift at night far out in the middle of its mindless waves, the big fry feeding on the small fry right beneath you and you yourself likely to be swallowed up without a trace.

So - when the Hebrew writer tells of the Spirit of God hovering over the sea and commanding it to back off to allow dry land and life to emerge, he sees nothing less than God's colossal love lifting us out of some primeval whirlpool that would otherwise suck both us and the Garden we inhabit back into nothingness. And his purpose? To shape each of us into an immortal and somehow immense miniature of himself - creators everyone!

Nor are biblical authors in general so naive as to think of creation as simply a past event. The Bible is very aware of our human tendency to go *rushing back* (like lemmings) into that impersonal sea whence we came. Take for example the people in the Noah story. Repudiating their humanity, they choose to live like predators and soon we find them sinking beneath a Deluge of their own making. All except Noah, who, retaining his sense of justice and humanity, stands safe upon a mountain top while the waters of the Deluge recede and God has to create his world all over again - not from scratch but with the help of the zoo Noah salvaged in the Ark!

Or consider the later Israelites, who slavishly allow themselves to get caught in the undertow of dictatorial Egypt and end up gasping for life and liberty - until God has to intervene once more to lift them out of the waters of the Red Sea and direct them and all humanity toward their destiny of eternal intimacy with God and each other and nature itself. Given this Old Testament imagery, perhaps you can now see why the New Testament writers chose to describe the commencement of Jesus' career today in terms of his rising out of water while the same Spirit of Genesis hovers above him. They did it because they sensed in the arrival of Jesus a fresh beginning for the human race - the ascent, out of primeval suction, of that invincibly caring human being God has been trying to create ever since *homo sapiens* set foot upon this earth. That's what we celebrate today - a mutation students of evolution have yet to recognize and revere.