

SACRED ORIGINS



CREATION, EVOLUTION, AND
THE DIVINE DANCE
OF BECOMING

SISTER ABIGAIL HESTER, OFC

Sacred Origins
Creation, Evolution, and the Divine Dance of Becoming
by
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Dedication

To the children who ask “Why?”
To the scientists who say “Let’s find out.”
To the mystics who whisper “It’s all connected.”
And to the poor, queer, and curious—
you are made of stardust and beloved by God.

Acknowledgments

With gratitude to all those who walk the dance of evolution with grace:
To the Westar Institute, Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, and Richard Rohr, whose
theological courage continues to illuminate mystery.
To the queer, disabled, and deconstructed believers who taught me that faith and science are
not enemies but co-dreamers.
To Rolando Comon and the sacred traditions of Indigenous healing that honor Earth’s wisdom.

And to my late wife Lacie—whose love evolved me.
You are starlight.

Epigraph

“The universe is not made of stuff—it is made of story.”
—Brian Swimme

“I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect intended us to forgo their use.”
—Galileo Galilei

Introduction: Why This Debate Still Matters

“In the beginning...” How many wounds have begun with those words?

For generations, the creation vs. evolution debate has been wielded not just as a scientific or theological disagreement, but as a cultural weapon. The battle lines have been drawn in school boards, pulpits, social media comment sections, and even families—where belief in evolution is equated with disbelief in God, and acceptance of science is treated as a betrayal of faith.

But what if this whole argument is a distraction from the real story?

As a queer, disabled, age-regressing Franciscan nun—who believes in both God and dinosaurs—I know what it’s like to be excluded from rigid systems. I’ve seen how both fundamentalist religion and scientific materialism can erase the stories of people like me. I’ve heard sermons where Genesis was used to uphold patriarchy and transphobia. I’ve also heard biologists mock the spiritual longing that drives people toward myth and meaning. But I’ve also read the mystics, sat in circle with Indigenous elders, and learned from thinkers like Marcus Borg, Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Berry, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and the Westar Institute—who show us a deeper way.

This book is not about choosing between science and faith. It’s about reclaiming a sacred story.

A story where evolution isn’t just a biological process but a sacred unfolding.
Where Genesis isn’t a fossil record, but a sacred poem.
Where God isn’t a puppet master but a midwife of becoming.
Where queer bodies, disabled minds, and complex identities are not mistakes but masterpieces in motion.

This book is written for those who have been told they don't belong in either camp—for the curious child who asks if God made monkeys, for the trans teenager who wonders if she was "meant" to be born this way, for the climate activist who weeps for the Earth, and for the elder who remembers a time when questions were not so dangerous.

As a Franciscan Clarean, I believe the universe is still being created. That God is not done yet. That the story is ongoing. That stardust, sea creatures, simians, saints, and sinners are all part of one long sacred dance.

So instead of a debate, let's have a conversation. Instead of drawing lines, let's connect them. Instead of weaponizing our origin stories, let's weave them.

This book is not here to argue. It's here to invite you into awe.

Let us begin again. In the beginning... not a battle. But a blessing.

Chapter 1: In the Beginning... Fundamentalism

In many Sunday schools across America, children are handed a sanitized version of Genesis: God made the world in six literal days, and that's that. The Earth is 6,000 years old. Dinosaurs boarded the ark. Evolution is a lie. Questions are dangerous. And if you disagree, you don't love Jesus.

This is not ancient Christianity. This is a modern crisis.

The version of Christianity that declares war on science is barely over a hundred years old. It arose as a reactionary movement—an anxious response to the Enlightenment, Darwinian evolution, and the rapid pace of societal change. In the early 20th century, a group of theologians published a series of essays called *The Fundamentals*, asserting a rigid and literalistic interpretation of Scripture. From these tracts, the term "fundamentalist" was born.

This movement wasn't about preserving mystery. It was about control.

The Politics of Creationism

The rise of creationism has never been solely about belief—it has always been about power.

In the United States, young-earth creationism became a cultural rallying cry for white evangelical Christians who felt threatened by modernity, civil rights, feminism, and later, LGBTQ+ visibility. If evolution were true, it would mean that the Bible—read literally—was

wrong. And if the Bible could be wrong about creation, then it might also be wrong about patriarchy. About queerness. About white supremacy. About empire.

So they dug in their heels.

Instead of allowing Scripture to be a poetic, multi-layered collection of sacred stories, fundamentalists reduced it to a flat scientific textbook. They pitted Genesis against geology and taught children to fear fossils. In the name of faith, they shut down wonder. In the name of truth, they promoted ignorance.

This anti-evolution stance was institutionalized through Christian schools, homeschooling curricula, and political lobbying. The infamous 1925 Scopes Trial was only the beginning. Today, we still see lawsuits over evolution in education and entire state boards of education dominated by ideologically driven Christian nationalists.

But we must be honest: this isn't about defending God. It's about defending a worldview where God looks like the powerful and condemns the different.

Who Gets Created in the Image of God?

The creation debate is deeply entangled with the question of who counts as fully human.

If you believe that God created everything in perfect, unchanging categories—male and female, light and dark, clean and unclean—then there is no room for people like me: transgender, disabled, neurodivergent, regressed, and joyfully complex. There's no space for intersex children or nonbinary bodies. There's no room for the messy, evolving, beautiful diversity of life.

But what if the Genesis story isn't about strict binaries, but about sacred beginnings?

What if the point isn't *how* God made the world, but *that* God made the world good?

In this reading, to be created in the image of God is not to be fixed or flawless—but to be free. Free to change. Free to grow. Free to evolve.

Decolonizing Our Origins

Christian fundamentalism is not the only creation story. Indigenous communities around the world have their own cosmologies—rich, poetic, land-rooted stories about how life came to be. These are not “primitive myths” to be dismissed. They are sacred maps of meaning.

As Rolando Comon and Luntiang Aghama teach, Filipino Indigenous spirituality understands creation not as a single act, but as an ongoing harmony between elements, spirits, ancestors,

and the Divine. Earth is alive. Breath is holy. Creation is cyclical. And we, too, are part of its unfolding.

To insist that only one version of Genesis counts is to colonize imagination. It is to erase sacred stories that do not conform to Western theology or imperial frameworks. It is to silence the songs of the Earth and the wisdom of the elders.

Decolonizing creation means listening again—deeply, reverently—to the stories our ancestors knew.



A Franciscan Invitation

St. Francis of Assisi didn't read Genesis with a microscope or a sword. He read it with his heart. He saw the sun as his brother, the moon as his sister, the birds as fellow preachers of joy. He understood creation not as a theological position to defend, but as a sacred relationship to cherish.

Francis invites us to reimagine the origin story—not as a battlefield, but as a garden. Not as a courtroom, but as a choir. Not as an argument, but as a song.

This book begins by facing the harm done in the name of “creation.” But it does not end there.

We will walk through science, story, soil, and Spirit.

Together, we will rediscover that to evolve is not to betray God.

It is to walk with Her.

Chapter 2: Clare, Cosmos, and Genesis

“Gaze upon Him, consider Him, contemplate Him, as you desire to imitate Him.”
—St. Clare of Assisi

When most people think of the creation story, they think of Genesis 1: a structured, poetic unfolding of the universe in six days—light, sky, land, stars, animals, and finally, humankind. But for Saint Clare, creation was not just an ancient event. It was a constant invitation to gaze upon the face of God in all things. Her theology was not one of domination, but of devotion. Not control, but contemplation.

This chapter offers a different lens—not of scientific analysis or fundamentalist literalism—but of **Franciscan awe, feminine mysticism, and cosmic belonging**.



Genesis as Sacred Myth, Not Science

The Hebrew creation story is one of the world's most powerful sacred poems. It wasn't written to explain carbon dating or fossil records. It was crafted to tell a traumatized people: *You belong. You are not an accident. Creation is good, and you are part of it.*

Genesis 1 likely emerged during the Babylonian exile—a time of cultural destruction and dislocation. In contrast to violent Babylonian myths, where the gods wage war and creation is born from murder, the Genesis poem reveals a God who speaks the world into being—not through violence, but through **language, order, and blessing**.

To read Genesis as literal science is to flatten its beauty and to miss its revolutionary heart.

Genesis is not a biology textbook. It's a liberation song.



Saint Clare's Vision of the Cosmos

Clare of Assisi, though often overshadowed by her beloved Francis, was a cosmic thinker in her own right. In her letters to Saint Agnes of Prague, she speaks of Christ as the “mirror of eternity,” urging believers to gaze with open eyes into the mystery of divine love.

Clare saw the entire universe as a reflection of God—not in a mechanistic way, but in a contemplative one. Her spirituality was not rooted in fear of chaos, but in the radical beauty of what already exists. While male theologians of her time argued over original sin, Clare lived in the glow of original blessing.

To Clare, creation was not something to be fixed—it was something to be **adored**.



The Gendered Power of Genesis

When Genesis is interpreted through patriarchal eyes, it becomes a weapon:

- “Man was created first—so he's in charge.”
- “Woman came from man—so she must submit.”
- “God made two genders—so there can be no other.”

But these readings betray the richness of the Hebrew text and the mystery of creation itself.

What if we saw Genesis not as a hierarchy, but a harmony?

Not as a blueprint, but as a beginning?

Even the so-called "two genders" narrative collapses under careful reading. Genesis 1:27 says: "In the image of God, He created them; male and female He created them."

But the Hebrew here suggests not **two exclusive options**, but a **spectrum held within divinity itself**. God creates humanity in a plural image—"Let **us** make..."—and what emerges is not a binary, but a dance.

Trans, intersex, and nonbinary people do not defy creation—they **embody its complexity**.

The Earth as Our Sister

Francis called the Earth *Sister Mother Earth*—both nurturing and kin. Clare would have agreed. In a world where creation is not objectified, but personified, we move from extraction to reverence.

Clare's theology leads us away from dominion theology—the belief that humans are here to "rule" the Earth—and toward mutuality, humility, and sacred ecology.

When we reread Genesis through Clarean eyes, we don't see humans as the apex of creation, but as **participants** in a vast and holy cosmos.

Contemplation as Evolutionary Practice

Science teaches us that evolution is driven by adaptation and variation. But what if contemplation is part of this process too?

Clare teaches us to pause, to gaze, to dwell in the mystery of being. In doing so, we cultivate awareness—not only of God but of the deep interconnectedness of all life.

Contemplation slows down our need to conquer and accelerates our capacity to **belong**.

This is not anti-science. It is sacred science.

It is the dance of Spirit and matter, breath and biology, stars and saints.

Genesis Reimagined: A Clarean Reflection

In the beginning, there was not order or chaos.
There was love.

Love sang stars into being, wove gravity into time, folded oceans into valleys, and kissed the dust until it danced.

Creation was not a product—it was a prayer.

And every creature, every seed, every queer and curious soul was called good.

Chapter 3: Evolution Is Beautiful

“There is grandeur in this view of life... from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.”

—Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*

To many people of faith, the word *evolution* triggers discomfort, even fear. It conjures images of atheism, randomness, a cold universe where God has been written out of the script. But this discomfort is not born of the theory itself—it’s born of how we’ve been taught to read the world: as either divine or scientific, either sacred or secular.

But what if evolution was never meant to replace God?
What if it was one of the ways God breathes?

Darwin’s Dangerous Wonder

Charles Darwin never set out to destroy faith. In fact, he was a man of deep feeling, with a reverent love for nature. His journey on the HMS *Beagle* opened his eyes to the dazzling diversity of life. What he saw wasn’t chaos—it was complexity. And in that complexity, he discerned patterns, relationships, and transformation.

His theory of natural selection—that species adapt over time through variation and environmental pressures—was groundbreaking, yes. But it wasn’t soulless. It was *poetic*.

Evolution revealed a world that is *becoming*, not finished. A world where creation is not a past event, but a **present process**. Life, Darwin taught us, is not static. It changes, it adapts, it unfolds. It learns.

For me, that doesn’t negate God. That *reveals* Her.

The Sacredness of Change

In much of Western theology, change is seen as a problem. God is imagined as immutable, unmoving, and uninterested in becoming. But that's not the God I know.

The God I love is **alive**. She weeps, She dances, She evolves. She is with us in the flux, not above it. She is not the Great Watchmaker but the Great Weaver—threading possibility through the fabric of time.

Evolution is not a threat to faith. It is its mirror. Both are stories of unfolding, of mystery, of growth.

To evolve is to participate in the divine dance of transformation.

Endless Forms Most Beautiful

Darwin marveled at the endless variations of life: the beaks of finches, the shells of mollusks, the wings of butterflies. These are not mere curiosities of nature—they are sacred texts. Icons in motion.

For queer and disabled people like me, evolution tells a very different creation story than fundamentalism ever could:

- You are not a mistake.
- You are not a deviation from the norm.
- You are part of the unfolding brilliance of life itself.

Nature is full of queer strategies: seahorses that give birth, clownfish that change sex, fungi that have more than twenty genders. Evolution thrives on difference. It creates through surprise.

If nature is queer, and God is the artist behind it, then queerness is holy.

Evolution and the Christ Mystery

Catholic priest and scientist Teilhard de Chardin envisioned evolution as the trajectory of all creation moving toward union with the divine. He called this the **Omega Point**—the ultimate convergence of love and consciousness in Christ.

In Teilhard's vision, Christ is not merely the redeemer of a fallen world. Christ is the **center** and **goal** of evolution. He is the Divine Presence drawing all things forward.

This aligns with Paul's words in Romans 8:

“The whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now...”

Creation is not cursed—it is in **labor**. Evolution is its birth process. Christ is the midwife.

From Genesis to Genes

Modern science reveals that every creature on Earth shares a common genetic ancestor. All life is related. You and I share DNA with trees, birds, and sea cucumbers. We are kin—not metaphorically, but **literally**.

Francis would rejoice in this!

Clare would contemplate it in awe!

Creation is not a pyramid with humans at the top. It's a **web**, a **spiral**, a **dance**. And we are not the climax of that dance—we are its participants.

This is not dehumanizing. It is humbling. And holy.

Evolving Toward Justice

The beauty of evolution is not just biological—it's spiritual and social, too.

- When we dismantle oppressive systems, we evolve.
- When we include the marginalized, we evolve.
- When we live in mutuality with the Earth, we evolve.

The moral arc of the universe does not bend by accident. It bends through evolution—spiritual, ethical, and communal.

As theologian James Cone once said, “God is Black because Blackness is oppressed.” Likewise, God evolves—because God is present wherever life is struggling to survive and thrive.

A Prayer for the Evolving Soul

O Creator of Cosmos,
who breathed stars and amoebas into being,
teach me to see evolution not as threat,
but as sacred invitation.

May I embrace the changes in my body,
the questions in my soul,

and the mysteries of time
as signs of Your creative joy.

Let me evolve—
in love,
in courage,
in wonder.

Chapter 4: Creation in Process: Process Theology and Becoming

“God is not a cosmic dictator, but the poet of the world.”
—Alfred North Whitehead

“God is in the becoming, not the blueprint.”
—Marcus Borg

The idea that God is static, unchanging, and aloof has dominated Western theology for centuries. We've inherited a God of immovability—male, remote, and untouched by the world's pain. This is the God of Aristotle and empire, of theological certainty and celestial detachment.

But the world we live in—the world of cells dividing, stars dying, children laughing, and oceans rising—doesn't reflect a frozen deity.

It reflects a **dynamic** one.
A **becoming** one.
A God who **feels**, who **responds**, who **moves with us**.

This is the heart of **Process Theology**—a radical reimagining of the divine that harmonizes beautifully with evolution, ecology, and the sacred journey of transformation.

God as Relationship, Not Ruler

Process Theology, pioneered by Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, invites us to see God not as the *unmoved mover*, but as the *most moved mover*. God is not the great puppet master, but the great companion—feeling every joy and sorrow of the universe, participating in it moment by moment.

In this view:

- God doesn't control the world.

- God **persuades, woos, and invites.**
- God is the lure toward beauty, compassion, and possibility.

This matches the God of Scripture far more than many realize. The God who regrets (Genesis 6:6), who changes Her mind (Exodus 32:14), who becomes flesh (John 1:14), is not a distant deity—but a **responsive, relational, processual** Presence.

Marcus Borg and the God of Metaphor

Progressive theologian Marcus Borg taught that Scripture is **more than literal**—it is **metaphorical, sacramental, and transformative**. God, he said, is not a supernatural being “out there” but the “**More**”—the sacred presence in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

For Borg and other process theologians, evolution is not heretical. It is the language of God unfolding.

Borg once said:

“Faith is not about believing the unbelievable—it’s about a relationship with the sacred.”

In that relationship, change is not a threat. It’s a sign of life.

Queerness, Disability, and Divine Becoming

If God is becoming, then queerness is not rebellion—it is **revelation**.

If God is in process, then disability is not defect—it is **divine diversity**.

As theologians like Patrick Cheng, Judith Butler, and Donna Haraway remind us, stable categories of gender, ability, and even species are human constructions. The reality of life is far more fluid. Far more sacred. And God is not threatened by this. God is **thrilled** by it.

In fact, it is precisely in the margins—in transition, in contradiction, in mutation—that God is most tenderly present.

God is not the author of suffering, but the companion of those who suffer. And in process thought, God is the **collector of beauty and pain**, eternally integrating every moment into Her own being.

Creation as an Ongoing Event

Traditional theology teaches that creation happened once, long ago. Process theology teaches that **creation never stopped**. It is happening **now**, in every breath, every birth, every spark of innovation and imagination.

We are not passive recipients of a completed world.

We are **co-creators** of an unfolding cosmos.

As Ilia Delio writes:

“God is the future pulling us forward.”

Creation is not a monument—it is a movement.

And we are part of it.

The Franciscan Echo

This process view aligns beautifully with Franciscan spirituality. St. Francis and St. Clare did not relate to a cold, calculative God. They related to a God of **kinship, fluidity, and joyful becoming**. They spoke with animals, danced with the elements, and lived in radical dependence on grace.

For Clareans like us, evolution and process theology are not new doctrines—they are **old songs**, heard again with fresh ears.

A Prayer to the God Who Becomes

O God who is always arriving,
who meets me not in perfection,
but in process—

Teach me to trust
the slow becoming of my life.

When I ache for control,
remind me that persuasion is divine.

When I feel unfinished,
whisper to me that You are too.

And may I find You
not in the fixed,
but in the flowing.

Amen.

Chapter 5: The Image of God and the Queer Body

“We are all made in the image of God, but for some people, the divine image is policed more than praised.”

—Rev. Dr. Pamela Lightsey

“God is not male. God is not straight. God is not able-bodied. God is beyond our categories, and yet present in every body.”

—Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

One of the most cherished phrases in Scripture is that we are made in the image of God—*imago Dei*.

But what does that mean when the “image” you carry doesn’t match the dominant norm?

What does it mean to be intersex, or transgender, or nonbinary?

To be autistic, disabled, or developmentally regressed?

To be queer in a world that insists God only comes in cisgender, straight, white, male packaging?

This chapter dares to ask the question: **Whose image do we really worship—and who gets erased?**

The Myth of the “Normal” Human

Much of Christian theology has been shaped by a narrow definition of “humanity”—an able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgender man, often white, often powerful. Anything outside this mold has been pathologized, punished, or spiritualized away.

But if we take Genesis seriously—if every human is made in God’s image—then we must expand our vision of the Divine.

- The autistic mind is not less divine.
- The trans body is not an error.
- The disabled soul is not in need of fixing.

In fact, the most expansive vision of God we will ever get comes from those who live **outside** the mold.

As Delores S. Williams and James Cone remind us, God reveals Godself in the *oppressed*, in the *excluded*, in the *bodies the world forgets*.

Queer Bodies as Sacred Icons

Theologians like Patrick Cheng, Marcella Althaus-Reid, and Emilie Townes have done vital work reclaiming queer bodies as **theological sites**—places where God is not just represented but encountered.

Cheng writes that Jesus is the “queer Christ”—one who transgresses boundaries, crosses lines, and brings life through transformation. Althaus-Reid calls us to read theology “from the closet,” refusing to sanitize the messy beauty of embodied life.

What if being made in God’s image is not about **fitting a mold**, but about **reflecting divine multiplicity**?

Queer bodies do not reflect God *in spite* of their queerness, but **because** of it.

Trans Theology and Holy Transition

As a trans woman and a permanently regressed adult, I don’t merely see transition as medical or psychological—it is **theological**.

My transition is not a rejection of God’s design. It is a participation in God’s **ongoing creation**. It is what Marcus Borg would call *metanoia*—deep transformation.

In transitioning, I did not “change who I am.” I **revealed** who I am.
And in that revelation, I saw the face of God more clearly.

Trans theology is not new. It is ancient. Jacob wrestled with an angel and was renamed. Saul became Paul. Jesus was transfigured on the mountain.

Transformation is sacred.
To change is divine.

Disability, Neurodivergence, and the Holy Otherness

For those of us with disabilities, neurodivergence, or involuntary regression, our bodies are often seen as “less than.” We are pitied, ignored, or inspirationalized.

But in Franciscan theology—especially in the spirituality of Clare—there is deep reverence for **what the world calls broken**.

God is not only found in wholeness.

God is found in the scar, in the tremor, in the need.

Disability is not a flaw in the image of God. It is a **facet** of it.

Jesus’ resurrection body still had wounds.

He did not rise perfect—He rose **real**.

👁️ The Mirror of the Divine

When you look in the mirror, do you see God?

If you have been told your gender, your body, your mind, or your story disqualifies you from bearing God’s image, hear this:

They lied.

You are God’s image.

Not a distorted version.

Not a pity case.

Not a test.

You are a mirror of God’s own mystery—complex, shifting, radiant, and real.

✨ A Queer Clarean Blessing

Blessed are the bodies that don’t match their ID cards.

Blessed are the neurodivergent minds that confuse the teachers.

Blessed are the diapers, the stims, the scars, and the sacred transitions.

Blessed are the ones who look in the mirror and wonder,

“Could this be God, too?”

Yes, beloved.

It could.

And it is.

Chapter 6: Trauma, Extinction, and Resurrection

“God is not the cause of trauma. God is the companion in it.”

—Shelly Rambo

“Nothing that has ever been truly loved is ever lost. It is transformed.”

—Richard Rohr

Evolution isn’t all butterflies and blossoming. It’s also extinction, disaster, and death.

Over 99% of all species that have ever existed are now gone. Life on Earth is shaped as much by what has been lost as by what survives. In this chapter, we face the reality of pain—personal, planetary, and theological—and we ask: **Where is God in the trauma of creation?**

The answers may not come in neat packages. But they do come in stories—of survival, of memory, and of sacred becoming.

The Theology of Extinction

For many Christians raised on a six-day creation narrative, extinction is an uncomfortable truth. What kind of loving Creator lets entire species vanish?

But extinction isn’t failure—it’s part of the story. Dinosaurs reigned for millions of years. Trilobites filled ancient seas. Giant dragonflies once soared through prehistoric skies. These creatures were not accidents. They were glory.

And then, they were gone.

But the story didn’t end.

New life emerged—not in spite of loss, but through it.

Evolution is resilient. It does not erase trauma—it **transforms** it.

Trauma and the Body of the Earth

The Earth carries trauma in its crust—meteor scars, volcanic eruptions, mass die-offs. And we carry trauma in our bodies: abuse, disability, colonization, generational pain. The land remembers. So do our bones.

As theologian Shelly Rambo writes in *Spirit and Trauma*, trauma defies linear resolution. It loops. It lingers. It rewrites time and memory.

In a process theology of trauma, God is not the one who **allows** suffering, nor the one who magically **fixes** it. God is the one who **dwells within it**. Who weeps with the Earth. Who aches with us.

God is the wounded healer who bears the extinction of species, the genocide of peoples, the burning of forests, and the forgotten graves.

The Cross as Evolutionary Moment

If we want to talk about divine evolution, we must talk about the cross.

In traditional theology, the cross is often presented as a transaction—Jesus paid a price so we wouldn't have to. But in liberation and process theologies, the cross is **solidarity**. God suffers **with** the crucified—human and nonhuman.

The cross is not about divine punishment. It is about divine presence.

And the resurrection? It is not about denial of death. It is the **integration** of it.

Jesus did not rise without wounds. He rose **with them**. Transformed. Embodied. Whole in His brokenness.

Evolution doesn't erase trauma. It carries it into new life.

Climate Collapse and Apocalyptic Compassion

We live in an age of human-caused extinction. The Anthropocene is marked by melting ice caps, mass displacement, ecological grief, and species loss at an unprecedented rate.

It's tempting to despair. To shut down. To numb.

But evolution teaches us something radical: **life adapts, life surprises, and life resists**.

And the gospel calls us not to escape Earth, but to **embrace Her** in Her pain. To be midwives of resurrection even as systems collapse.

This is not optimism. It is **apocalyptic compassion**.

It is saying: “Even in the rubble, God is becoming.”

Resurrection Is Evolutionary Hope

Resurrection is not the reversal of death. It is the **transcendence** of it.

It is what happens when the caterpillar dissolves in the cocoon—not just changing clothes, but becoming a new being.

When we speak of resurrection, we are not clinging to false hope that things will go “back to normal.” We are naming the **possibility that love survives even extinction.**

That queer bodies, disabled minds, regressed souls, extinct creatures, and whole lost cultures are not erased in God—but **remembered, re-membered**, and transfigured.

Nothing beloved is ever truly lost.

A Lamentation and a Blessing

O God of the burning Earth,
who cradles lost species and wounded children,
hear our lament.

For every rainforest burned,
every creature gone,
every trauma left unspoken,
we cry out:
This should not have been.

And yet,
in your mercy,
nothing is wasted.

Let our pain be planted.
Let our grief take root.
Let our wounds become wings.

Chapter 7: Ecological Conversion and the Climate Crisis

“The Earth is not a problem to be solved; she is a living being to whom we belong.”
—Thich Nhat Hanh

“Hear both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.”
—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*

If evolution teaches us anything, it is that **life is interconnected**. Nothing exists in isolation. The air we breathe was exhaled by trees. The soil we walk on holds the bones of ancestors. Our DNA carries the stories of stardust and sea creatures.

And yet, in our modern world, we live as if we are separate from the Earth—as if we are entitled to dominate, extract, and discard what we do not understand.

This rupture—between humanity and the Earth—is not just ecological.

It is spiritual.

It is colonial.

It is theological.

In this chapter, we explore what it means to undergo an **ecological conversion**: a turning back to the Earth as sacred, kin, and wounded healer.

The Climate Crisis Is a Moral Crisis

Climate change is not just a scientific issue—it is a justice issue.

Those most impacted by rising temperatures, droughts, and floods are the poor, the Indigenous, the disabled, the elderly, and the displaced. While corporations and the wealthy profit from carbon emissions, it is children in the Global South who suffer.

This is not a coincidence. It is the legacy of empire, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy.

As Franciscan theologian Ilia Delio writes, “We cannot have a new Earth without a new humanity.” And we cannot have a new humanity without dismantling the systems that got us here.

Franciscan Kinship: All My Relations

St. Francis called the sun his brother, the moon his sister, and even death his sibling. For Francis, creation was not a commodity—it was **community**.

Franciscan spirituality invites us to **decenter the human** and to embrace what many Indigenous traditions have long taught: that we are not superior to the Earth, but **siblings within it**.

This kinship is not poetic fluff. It's an ethical framework.

When you see the river as your cousin, you don't pollute it.
When you see the tree as your grandmother, you don't cut it down for profit.
When you see the soil as sacred, you tread lightly and give thanks.

Ecological conversion begins not with guilt, but with **belonging**.

Decolonizing the Creation Mandate

Genesis 1:28 says, "Have dominion over the Earth." For centuries, this verse has been weaponized to justify colonialism, deforestation, and ecological abuse.

But dominion does not mean domination.

The Hebrew word *radah* also means to **shepherd**, **care for**, or **protect**. The true creation mandate is not to conquer, but to **cultivate**.

We must unlearn the imperial theology that treats the Earth as a disposable stage for human salvation.

Instead, we must listen to the Diwasas, the spirits of the land, the songs of the elders. As Rolando Comon and Luntiang Aghama teach, Earth is alive and speaks—if we dare to listen.

Healing the Earth through Sacred Simplicity

One of the most radical things you can do in a capitalist culture is **live simply**.

Simplicity is not poverty. It is clarity. It is rootedness. It is choosing what matters most.

As Franciscans and Clareans, we are called to:

- Buy less and share more
- Eat with reverence and reduce harm
- Grow gardens, heal soil, and compost shame
- Trade convenience for compassion
- Choose local, herbal, ancestral, and ethical care

This is not purity culture. It is *participatory healing*.

You don't have to save the world alone.
But you are **not powerless**.

Mutual Aid, Permaculture, and Sacred Activism

Climate despair is real. But so is **climate courage**.

- In community gardens in food deserts
- In Indigenous land back movements
- In queer eco-villages and herbal clinics
- In protest camps at pipelines
- In Franciscan circles that reclaim shared life

The Earth is not just dying—She is **fighting back**.

To join Her is to become a co-creator of resurrection.

We are not called to be saviors.

We are called to be *kin*.

A Prayer of Ecological Conversion

O Breath of the Forest,
wake me from numbness.

Let me fall in love again
with rain, with root,
with worm and wind.

Teach me to live with less,
and to bless what remains.

Let my life be a prayer
of soil, sweat, and song.

Chapter 8: Teaching a New Story

“Those who tell the stories rule society.”

—Plato

“We are in between stories... The old story is no longer effective, and the new story is not yet fully told.”

—Thomas Berry

We are story-shaped people. We live by narratives—about who we are, why we’re here, what matters, and what’s possible. The battle between creationism and evolution is not merely academic; it’s a **clash of stories**. And for far too long, both sides have offered false binaries.

In this final chapter, we explore how to teach a *new story*—one that is spiritually rich, scientifically grounded, radically inclusive, and fiercely just. A story where God is not threatened by science, and science is not stripped of mystery.

Beyond the Binary: Not Bible vs. Science, But Both

Many of us were raised with two competing stories:

1. **Creationism:** God created the world in six days. Evolution is a lie. The Bible is literal, and science is suspicious.
2. **Secular Scientism:** There is no God. Life is random. Meaning is an illusion. The Bible is a myth, and faith is foolish.

Neither of these stories is enough.

What we need is a **third way**—a story that:

- Affirms the poetry of Genesis
- Embraces the evidence of evolution
- Centers justice and kinship
- Welcomes mystery
- Makes space for diverse spiritualities and embodied experiences

This story doesn’t demand certainty. It invites **wonder**.

Interfaith, Indigenous, and Decolonial Voices

Creation is not just a Christian concept. Every culture has its own cosmology. In Filipino Indigenous traditions, for example, the universe is shaped by the dance of elements, ancestors, spirits, and land. The Diwata are not primitive ideas—they are **sacred presences**. To ignore these stories is to **colonize the imagination**.

Teaching a new story means:

- **Centering Indigenous cosmologies**
- **Learning from African, Asian, Latin American, and diasporic theologies**
- **Honoring queer, disabled, and neurodivergent creation stories**
- **Refusing to let Western Christianity be the only voice in the room**

As educators, preachers, caregivers, and community leaders, we must ask: **Whose story are we telling, and who is missing from it?**

What We Teach the Children

If you teach a child that Earth is disposable, they will treat it like trash.

If you teach a child that God only loves straight, able-bodied boys, they will learn to fear themselves.

If you teach a child that science is evil, you rob them of awe.

But if you teach a child:

- That they are stardust and soul
- That God delights in their questions
- That Earth is their sibling
- That Jesus loves all bodies and all brains
- That they are part of a sacred evolutionary dance...

...you will raise a generation that walks with reverence, courage, and compassion.

Ritual, Practice, and Sacred Pedagogy

Teaching the new story isn't just about *information*. It's about *formation*.

We need:

- **Rituals** that connect us to the Earth
- **Songs** that celebrate diversity and interdependence
- **Story circles** where everyone's experience matters
- **Hands-on science and art** that awaken the senses
- **Community gardens, compost bins, and protest signs**

This is not "liberal education."

This is **spiritual survival**.

And it is prophetic.

We Are the Story Now

We are the bridge generation. We carry the trauma of the old story and the seeds of the new.

Let's be bold enough to teach that:

- God evolves with us
- Earth is not a resource but a relative
- Queer, disabled, and divergent bodies are sacred texts
- Wonder is not naïve—it is **revolutionary**

The world needs a story that holds both science and Spirit, both suffering and hope, both tradition and transformation.

Let's tell that story.

A Benediction for the Storytellers

Go now, beloved,
storytellers and seekers,
gardeners and gatherers of holy possibility.

May your words heal what empire tried to erase.
May your teachings awaken awe.
May your breath echo the first breath of creation.

And may the Divine Dance of Evolution
continue in your becoming—
beautifully, boldly, blessedly
ever onward.

Prayers for Creation and Cosmic Belonging

Prayer to the God of Stardust

O Holy One,
who breathed galaxies into being,
let me remember I am dust—
not disposable, but divine.

In my body, let the stars sing.
In my soul, let Earth rejoice.
In my becoming, let Your image evolve.

Amen.

Prayer for Ecological Conversion

O Earth-Mother,
forgive me the plastic I've buried,
the oil I've burned,
the kin I've forgotten.

May I walk lighter,
live simpler,
and belong deeper.

Teach me to weep with the whales
and rise with the wind.

Amen.

Blessing for Queer and Trans Bodies

You are not a mistake.
You are a new song in the symphony of life.
Your difference is not deviation.
It is divine revelation.

May you walk in the freedom
of the ever-evolving God.

Amen.



Recommended Reading & Resources

Theology & Spirituality

- Marcus Borg, *The God We Never Knew, The Heart of Christianity*
- Ilia Delio, *The Emergent Christ*
- Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*
- John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*
- Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*

Queer & Liberation Theologies

- Patrick Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*
- Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*
- Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*
- James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*

- Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Omnigender*

Science & Cosmos

- Brian Swimme, *Journey of the Universe*
- Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*
- Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot*
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

Indigenous & Earth-Based Wisdom

- Rolando Comon, Luntiang Aghama
- Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy*
- Starhawk, *The Earth Path*
- Thich Nhat Hanh, *Love Letter to the Earth*



Glossary of Terms

Process Theology – A view of God as evolving, dynamic, and relational, rather than static or controlling.

Imago Dei – Latin for “image of God”; the idea that every person reflects the Divine.

Ecological Conversion – A transformation of heart, mind, and lifestyle toward deeper care for the Earth and all living beings.

Queer Theology – A way of doing theology that centers LGBTQ+ experiences and critiques binaries and normativity.

Creation Spirituality – A theological tradition emphasizing the goodness of creation, panentheism, and the cosmic Christ.

Mutual Aid – A justice-based, non-hierarchical form of community care and resource sharing.



About the Author

Sister Abigail Hester, OFC, is a queer, disabled, trans nun and founder of the Order of Franciscan Clareans—a new monastic movement rooted in love, liberation, and holy simplicity. She is a theologian, caregiver, herbalist, and prophetic storyteller who blends Franciscan spirituality, queer theology, and ecological justice in all her work.

Through books, sermons, and sacred activism, Sister Abigail invites marginalized people to see themselves not just as included—but as essential to the sacred story of life.

You can follow her ministry and writings at:

 <https://franciscanclareans.blogspot.com>

 Support her work at: coff.ee/abigailhester
