

a new cosmology:

# NATURE as the first Bible

a reflection by Richard Rohr, OFM  
**The Great Chain of Being**

“Of Christ’s fullness, we all have a share.” (John 1:16, Colossians 2:9)

The Great Chain of Being was the medieval metaphor for ecology before we spoke of eco systems! This was the philosophical/theological attempt to speak of the circle of life, the interconnectedness of all things on the level of pure “Being”. If God is Being itself (*Deus est Ens*), then the “Great Chain” became a way of teaching and preserving the inherent dignity of all things that participate in that Divine Being in various ways. It was not intended to teach hierarchy, or levels of consciousness, as much as inherent sacrality, continuity, and communality. This was the Biblical *pleroma* or fullness (Genesis 2:1, Ephesians 1:23).

Such a graphic metaphor held all things together in an *enchanted universe*. To stop recognizing the “*imago and similitudo*” (Genesis 1:26) in any one link of the chain was to allow the entire coherence to fall apart! It would soon become a *disenchanted universe*. If we could not see the sacred in nature and creatures, we soon could not see it in ourselves, and finally we would not be able to see it at all (modern atheism). “*Uni-verse*” = to turn around one thing. The Great Chain of Being resolved the early philosophical problem of “the one and the many”.

- Link 1 The Firmament/Earth/Minerals within the Earth.
- Link 2 The Waters upon the Earth (Snow, ice, water, steam, mist).
- Link 3 The plants, trees, flowers, and foods that grow upon the Earth.
- Link 4 The animals on the earth in the skies and in the seas.
- Link 5 The human species, capable of reflecting on the other links.
- Link 6 The Heavenly realm/Communion of Saints/Angels, and Spirits.
- Link 7 God/The Divine Realm/The Mystery that creates a *uni-verse* as such, which needs a Center, Source, and Ground for any coherence.



OLD COSMOLOGY



NEW COSMOLOGY