

The New Cosmology and CLC

Pat Carter



Pat Carter has been a member of Sodality/CLC since her high school days. She has served in various roles at the local, regional and national levels including President of CLC-USA. Currently she is the graphic designer of Harvest and web master for CLC-USA's web site.

Pat is a spiritual director and mentor in the Bridges Program in St. Louis as well as being a member of the board.

She is the single mother of a 19-year-old son, Josh. She works as a graphic designer for an order of women religious as well as having her own graphic design business.

She designed a 2004 calendar based on the creation story. It can be downloaded from her web site: www.jpccarter.com.

*“Given the invitation to ritual that lies at the core of a new cosmic story and given the peril that the earth is facing, our religions dare not fail at sharing their common wisdom and praying together from the heart.”**

I read this passage from *Creation Spirituality* by Matthew Fox as I was returning home from the Spiritual Directors International Conference in Miami. It put into words the experience I had from both SDI Conferences that I have attended. It is with this group of people, all spiritual directors from a variety of faith traditions, Christian and non-Christian, that I sense the most complete awareness and embodiment of the unity of all things in the One expressed in the diversity of individuals and faith traditions. All are held sacred as we try to learn from each other's unique expression of the divine. “Everything Belongs” as the title of this year's conference states.

So it seems especially appropriate that this issue of HARVEST, focusing on the new cosmology, follows the one on interfaith dialogue. There seems to be an intrinsic connection between the two.

It is also appropriate that this issue comes out between the celebration of International Earth Day, April 22, 2004, and World Environment Day, June 5, 2004, when the world focuses on the health of our planet.

What does the new cosmology have to say to CLC as it struggles to understand itself as an apostolic body? This is a question I asked myself as I participated in the SDI Conference and became aware of the emerging spirit from the group. It occurred to me that a common consensus among the group developed spontaneously over the weekend. They didn't come together to figure out what their mission was. They simply came together, shared, reflected, honored each other and an awareness of the group's unique role simply emerged. There is an almost non-verbal understanding that as individual directors and as a body, we are entrusted to tend the holy in the world and help it to deepen its relationship with its Creator and open itself to its co-creative role. Spiritual Companionship is not something SDI members do; it is an expression of their essence and unique presence in the cosmos. It is how they approach all aspects of their lives, not only their directees.

And this awareness grew organically without goals, objectives, time lines, newsprint or discernment processes. Not that these aren't good and useful tools, but they are basically left-brain activities. (Although I feel an argument could be made that true discernment is more of a right-brain activity as we become aware of movements and ‘feelings.’) It grew out of a contemplative spirit.

CLC has been struggling to understand ‘common mission’ and ‘becoming an apostolic body’ for a long time. Perhaps the problem is that we have been trying to figure it out (a rational, left-brain approach), rather than encounter the mystery (a contemplative, right-brain approach). All the faith traditions hold a mystical, contemplative experience as important in relating to the divine— an experience in which the individuals abandon themselves to the encounter without words or expectations. It is not planned or controlled; it is spontaneous gift. The most we can do is to create the space for it to happen. And at times, God doesn't even wait for us to do that much —we are knocked off our horses.

* Matthew Fox, *Creation Spirituality, Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth*, Harper, San Francisco, 1991, p. 31

Approaching this sense of being an apostolic body from the context of the new cosmology offers a new perspective. If we begin with the awareness that the universe is relational—everything is connected—then the question becomes: What role do we play in this relational universe? In the human body, cells from the moment of conception are somehow organizing themselves into a variety of entities with specific roles to play in the growth and functioning of the body—organs, blood, nerves, bone, etc. What resonating energy draws a cell to become a bone rather than a brain? If we imagine CLCers as cells in the universal body, the Body of Christ, and CLC as a particular entity with a specific role within that body, then we might identify the resonating energy that draws us to mission. We are drawn together and exist for the growth, functioning and evolution of the universal body which in Ignatian terms would be the Kingdom, just as the various parts of our human bodies exist for the well-being of the whole. We are, by our very existence, an apostolic body or organism within the universal body. There is nothing to figure out. We simply need to surrender to this mystery.

What we do need to discern is how we as a lay Ignatian body are called to respond to the current reality of this universal body. Just as the various parts of our human body respond differently, depending on what is happening to the larger body — we breathe faster or slower, sweat more or less, produce hormones, etc. — CLC is called to respond differently in different circumstances. Each individual responds to the context in which he or she is and each community also responds to its context just as cells in the heart and in the brain would respond differently to the same situation the body is experiencing; because the heart and brain have different functions for the well-being of the whole. But we also need to have the context of the whole to respond in a way that leads to the well-being of the whole. If the body is running a race, but the heart decides to go into a restful mode, the body won't get far.

Here is where discernment and other Ignatian tools such as the examen, when used as right-brain activities, help us to connect with and become aware of the movement within our contexts and open ourselves to God's desires for this universal body and our role in its evolution. It calls us to seek the greater good, the Magis, and discover our resistances so that we don't become resting hearts in a racing body.

It seems to me that what the World Assembly is calling us to is to contemplate more fully the unique essence that CLC is so that we can be that presence in the universe that God desires us to be.

