LEANING BACK INTO THE EVOLUTIONARY HEART OF CHRIST

St. Mary Euphrasia counsels us to do everything as far as possible through love and we will see what great things we can effect. We can make more progress in one year in love compared with ten years living in fear. The animating principle of our institute is love. So we must explore this love in the heart of Christ.

Referring to the monastic ideal, Jean Leclercq OSB\(^1\) a scholar of medieval mysticism and a French Benedictine monk of Clairveaux Abbey says it challenges us to break open our hearts for God. Speaking about the classical path in all spiritual life, he believes that a person comes to the monastery to be “deformed”, reformed, conformed and transformed. We take the path from disintegration to reintegration. The real “monastery” is in the core of the heart and this is where the teacher lives. The transmission from the teacher to the disciple is a mysterious process. It is like catching fire from what is already burning, or falling into step with an existing rhythm. We come to catch the fire, to catch the rhythm of Christ.

As a teacher, Leclercq said Jesus accepts disciples and he wants to make them like himself. The disciple is to grow into the full stature of the teacher and then in turn becomes a teacher so that the fire keeps burning.

Leclercq leaves us with a strong image of the heart and calls attention to John’s gospel where John reclines and leans back into the heart of Christ at the Last Supper. We must do the same in our relationship with Christ. We lean back too by sinking back…back… into the centre of our being; that brings us closer to Christ, who burns at the centre of ourselves. Leclercq suggests that we do not look at Jesus in the face, that do not turn him into an object that we imitate, but take the position of leaning back into his heart so that we can enter into a true image of who Christ is. This gesture of leaning back into the heart of Christ has a great deal of spiritual intuition that cannot be found anywhere else. Many meanings have accumulated around it over the centuries and there are new meanings still emerging.

St. Mary Euphrasia found great nourishment in this image of the Heart, as well as in our charism which has such devotion to the Heart. The Dialogues of St. Catherine of Siena\(^2\) also have this focus.

St. John Eudes and St. Margaret Mary spoke of the Heart of Christ as an inexhaustible fountain whose only desire is to pour itself out.

What does it mean to experience the Heart of Christ in the 21\(^{st}\) century and to lean back into the Heart of Christ in 13.7 billion years?

Teilhard de Chardin is the one of the most significant people to speak of the Heart of Christ of in the 20\(^{th}\) century. In his book “The Heart of the Matter” he attempts to bring together science and the Heart of Christ.\(^3\) “It would be very difficult for me to express how my life developed under the sign of Christ. The more I prepared the

\(^{1}\) Jean Leclercq, OSB (1911-1993) author of a classic study on Lectio Divina and the history of inter-monastic dialogue  
\(^{2}\) The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd, 1907)  
more deeply did I see that the Heart of Christ animates all the evolutionary process; that the Heart of Christ burns through the 13.7 billion years of evolution. It is energy, a fire burning everywhere and therefore transforming the whole cosmos in love. The Heart of Christ is “amorizing” the entire cosmic milieu."

The Heart of Christ is a fire not just a metaphor; this Heart is penetrating all things and is the ultimate force of attraction for the universe. For it is always drawing the universe forward into greater intensity and complexity in love. The way the Heart of Christ draws the universe forward is through the process of what Teilhard called “creative union”. At all levels, the heart brings us into deeper relationality. As the Heart beats through the universe, it progresses from lesser to greater connectivity. Early on in the universe, small atoms came together to form molecules, from these something greater like cells developed, cells form organisms. It is always about connections and the connections become more complex.

Teilhard underlined that it is the capacity to connect that brings the universe forward. Each is sharing what is inside it. At the level of molecules, they are just sharing electrical energy. When it comes to humans, the energy we are sharing is love. Teilhard says that, for this century, as we go beyond a consciousness of separation we will create a higher “we”. We will create ourselves to be more than we are.

In early earth hydrogen and oxygen existed separately… if they remained separate nothing would have happened. Hydrogen and oxygen had to let go of some part of themselves, and out of that came water, and water gives us plants, and now we are aware of water in tears that carry our emotions. The point is that the unions are not just for themselves, they brought the planet forward. Similarly, as we keep growing in our capacity to relate to one another in ways beyond “separation consciousness” something new will happen for humanity.

When we say “we”… we are a group of individuals and in the same space together. Teilhard says in the new emergence instead of “we” being individuals in the same room, “we” are a shared consciousness in a field in which we are all together. This is a very significant shift in emphasis. It is referred to as non-dual or unitive consciousness.

When Teilhard died, his litany to the Heart of Christ was found on his desk:

Heart of Christ
Sacred Heart
Motor of Evolution
Heart of Matter
World Zest
Heart of the Worlds Heart
Focus of ultimate energy
Heart of Jesus
Heart of Evolution
Unite me to Yourself.
What does it mean for us to experience Heart exchange in the 21st century, as we move into greater creative union and a new understanding of “we”, as shared consciousness, as shared consciousness in Christ?

What are the contours of the heart of Christ? There must be a unique pattern that Christ’s Heart holds in the universe.

Thomas Berry said if Christ has a cosmic dimension, the cosmic Christ, then the universe must have a Christic dimension because it goes in both ways.

Reflecting on how the universe has a Christic dimension, Gail Worcelo presents this through the following NINE THRESHOLDS (PATTERNS):

- Baptism, Temptations, Transfiguration, Agony, Crucifixion
- Descent into hell, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost.

The nine thresholds are historical and are also mystical, because if we live a life according to Christ we are going to be experiencing these moments in the interior of our own lives. But because Christ is cosmic, the universe is also sharing in this pattern, this pattern is coherent and has intelligence. When we follow Christ this pattern gives us coherence and gives us direction. This pattern is the pattern of the Heart. It gives us direction and it gives the universe direction. “He is before all things and in him all things hold together.” Col: 1:15 In him, everything is coherent.

Let us reflect on each of these NINE Thresholds/Patterns.

1. At Baptism, Jesus entered the waters of the Jordan, was baptized at the hands of John the Baptist and emerged as the unified one, as the Life Giver. He is the one who makes his life single. He is only here to do the will of God. Through Christ, we can say the universe becomes aware that it is one with itself. It is not a “plu-verse”. The whole universe becomes aware that it is one. When we are living this aspect of the Heart, we move through life, not divided, but in a consciousness of unity.

2. In the Temptations, Jesus spent forty days and nights in the desert. He undergoes severe temptations, but does not give in. He does not betray himself. He is true to himself. In relation to the universe, we understand that this is a universe that does not betray itself and when we are living in this dynamism, we do not betray ourselves either.

3. In the Transfiguration, Christ takes the disciples up the mountain. He is transformed, and they do not want to leave. They are in awe. The universe becomes aware that it is allured, and is held in awe of God’s penetration of it. When we see the face of God, we feel the attraction of that love that says I want all of you for myself. Likewise, God says to the universe, you are mine.

4. In the agony in Gethsemane, Christ suffers an ordeal. Christ has to let go. We could also say that of the universe, because this pattern is part of the universe. The universe understands that every advance requires an ordeal, e.g. the supernova explosion underwent an ordeal so that the universe could
develop. At every level, there is an ordeal before you can advance. In our lives, it is not that easy to say “not my will but yours be done.”

5. In the Crucifixion, Christ dies and out of the profoundest love gives his all. Out of this pattern, the universe also realizes that the whole of life is sacrificial, it is cruciform. Through the ages, things die so that other things can live. In our lives the kind of death of the ego which we have to undergo, may be the death of a small self but it leads to greater life.

6. The harrowing of Hell comes out of the medieval era; it was in the old creed where Christ descends into hell. In this pattern, this quiet love infiltrates the deepest place of darkness, all that it considered lost in hell, and folds it into love. Christ does not abolish hell, it is still there, but Christ has reconciled all this darkness into wholeness. Through this pattern, the universe understands that there are some boundary conditions e.g. death. For us especially as Good Shepherd people, this pattern shows that we can be love even in the darkest places of this planet; that we may not be able to change the conditions in which we find ourselves, but we can definitely reconnect them and bring them into the whole.

7. Christ rises from the dead in the Resurrection and his form changes. Through this pattern, the universe becomes aware that the end of physical form is not the end of life. For us, when we consider this pervasive pattern in the universe, we realize that when our physical form dies that it is not the end of our lives.

8. In the Ascension Christ ascends into heaven. Through this pattern the universe realizes that it is continuously reaching for higher expressions of itself. For us this is the call to continually evolve.

9. Pentecost is the perpetual outpouring of the Spirit. In this pattern, the universe becomes aware that it is a perpetual outpouring and it never diminishes. When we are truly living this pattern in our lives, we witness to being this perpetual outpouring. As long as we are truly in the pattern of Christ, we can do amazing things in the world, because we have so much energy and the energy does not diminish.

The contours of the Heart of Christ…
It is a Heart that is undivided,
is true to itself, it is a surrendered Heart,
it is a sacrificial Heart,
a Heart that can go into the darkest places;
a Heart that is perpetually outpouring itself in love.