NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Seminars on the Cosmic Christ will breathe life into Lenten season

Sharon Abercrombie | Mar. 4, 2013 Eco Catholic

It is nearing the middle of Lent, and your spirit matches the Midwest winter outside -- gray and frozen over. Perhaps you are bored by the same lifeless, dried-out religious services but feel too guilty to say it aloud. Maybe you are overwhelmed with anger and sadness around the suffering planet, but feel a sense of overwhelming helplessness around making any kind of appreciable difference.

Take heart. You will find people just like you at an upcoming series of Christ Path Seminar retreats [1] beginning the weekend of March 8 in Oakland, Calif. At a "Cosmic Christ and the New Humanity" session, Matthew Fox, Joanna Macy and Andrew Harvey will chip away the ice from your soul through guided meditations, rituals and movement. They will show you how to follow your heartbreak by going deeply inside to grieve and to wail.

Perhaps your tears will be for starving children in the Sudan. Or the logging of rainforests in South America. Or the mistreatment and sale of baby elephants in Zimbabwe and China. Whatever your concern might be, fuse it with passion and radical resolve to transform the world through action. Learn how to become "blessers of Mother Earth instead of crucifiers," in Fox's words.

"Becoming blessers of Mother Earth" is the basic message of the Christ Path Seminar, a new three-year program being co-convened by Fox during the 25th anniversary year of the publication of his well-known book *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. The seminars, Fox explained in a telephone interview, are built around an ancient but largely neglected theology of the Cosmic Christ.

This is an archetype, a universal way of seeing the world, he said. It is "the pattern that connects all the atoms and galaxies of the universe; a pattern of divine love and justice that all creatures and all humans bear with them. The Cosmic Christ lives and breathes in Jesus and in all God's children, in all the prophets of religions everywhere, in all creatures of the universe. It is the divine radiance that is present in every galaxy, every porpoise, every blade of grass, and every human."

Fox traces the Cosmic Christ theology to the imagery of Wisdom in the Hebrew Scriptures and within Paul and John's writings in the New Testament. It appears in the works of the Creation-centered mystics -- Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, Nicholas of Cusa, Julian of Norwich -- and in the 20th-century thoughts of French paleontologist Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

The seminars will merge the message of the Cosmic Christ with Harvey's workshops on sacred activism. India-born Harvey is a scholar of world religions and their similar mystical traditions. He is a teacher and the author of 30 books about Christianity, Sufism, Hinduism and more.

In a video on his website [2], Harvey tells of an epiphany moment he experienced one day in India following a lecture he had given on mysticism. As he walked down the street, he encountered a starving street person.

"Then I heard an angry voice inside, telling me that I had made my study of religion and practice of mysticism a

decoration for my own ego." From that moment, Harvey vowed to dedicate his life to eradicating the causes of suffering in all sentient beings.

The Christ Path seminars will take place over a three-year period in various U.S. locations, beginning in Oakland at the former University of Creation Spirituality, the site for Fox's graduate program in creation spirituality for several years. Live-streaming will be available for those who cannot travel to California, and the registration cost is $50.

"We want these teachings to be accessible to everyone," said Anne Symens-Bucher, Macy's assistant. Beyond the $50 registration fee, the seminar will experiment in the spirit of the growing "gift economy" consciousness. "We will be offering the seminar as a gift. Rather than assuming people want to maximize self-interest, our starting place is that people want to behave selflessly with a consciousness of abundance as shown by the Gospel story of the loaves and fishes."

Each workshop will combine talks with rituals and spiritual practices. In the opening event, Fox will lead a grieving ritual that he prepared for 800 people last summer at a Sounds True retreat. Fox has also created a series of chants from many world religions that reflect the concept of the Cosmic Christ.

Christ Path retreats are ideal for people disturbed by the narrowness of church doctrine, lifeless liturgies and church corruption; for spiritual seekers who are looking for a living vision of Christian mysticism; and for those who have left the church but are longing for a deep direct connection with Jesus, Fox said.

During the opening retreat, Buddhist writer, teacher and scholar Macy will lead a meditation around "Deep Time and the Cosmic Christ." By "deep time," she means going back to the origins of the universe and appreciating the creative evolution of creatures, from fins and paws to human hands. She will take retreatants forward in time, envisioning the possible dire or compassionate prospects awaiting future generations. These are alternatives, which this generation will help bring into being through our economic and environmental choices.

How does Buddhism relate to the Cosmic Christ? During a phone interview from her Berkeley home, Macy said the Cosmic Christ is identical with the teachings of the Buddha concerning the interdependence of all creatures. The Buddha nature taps into the Cosmic Christ concept that every soul has a spark of the divine compassion within his or her self, as well. This is "the best self," a concept that many people tend to forget. But it is always there, accessed or not, Macy said.

During a series of experiential exercises, she will take people through a doorway into the death and resurrection of Earth. "It takes courage to see what's happening in our name and permission," she said.

For more information, go to christpathseminar.org [1].

Future retreats will include cosmologist Brian Swimme, historical Jesus scholar Bruce Chilton, and Occupy Generation youth leader Adam Bucko. The retreats will take place in Oakland, Pittsburgh, Burlingame, Calif., and Los Gatos, Calif.

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Links:
[1] http://www.christpathseminar.org/
[2] http://www.andrewharvey.net/