

**Selected Articles From 1999 Winter issue  
of Spiritual Growth Ministries Newsletter:  
"Celtic Christianity"**

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**God to enfold me,  
God to surround me,  
God in my speaking,  
God in my thinking.**

**God in my sleeping,  
God in my waking,  
God in my watching,  
God in my hoping.**

**God in my life,  
God in my lips,  
God in my soul,  
God in my heart.**

**God in my sufficing,  
God in my slumber,  
God in my ever-living  
soul,  
God in mine eternity.**

*Carmina Gadelica 3/53*

**EDITORIAL by Andrew Dunn**

"You mean ... you mean that God is here and we don't have to keep calling out and singing 'Come'? Wow, that changes everything!" This little conversion, shift of mind-set, change of perspective made my day at a recent workshop on themes in Celtic spirituality. That's what it is really all about in so many areas of our believing and living the faith. God is here! God is everywhere and everywhen! And that changes things.

In this issue of our Newsletter we offer a range of articles and reviews written both here in New Zealand and in Britain. It has come together without too much effort for articles, although of the Brits we approached only four responded - with very stimulating material. Anyway, we trust there is something here of interest that stretches your thinking about relationship with God, what the church is like, how prayer and mission in the new millenium might be, fresh worship and the place of winsome music and all the other titbits we touch on.

One thing is certain as this year and century and millenium draw quickly to a close, and that is that there are huge changes afoot and huge challenges for the Church of Jesus Christ in western countries: an age is passing which was characterised by dominant philosophies and theologies; an era is over when the Church was central in society; the time has well passed when Christians could see themselves on the high ground; theories of how to do the faith are struggling all around us; no new movement of renewal and growth lasts for more than a moment. Congregations and denominations face challenges hard to deal with in times like this. Ministry is no easy ride. Spiritual formation involves engagement with the harsh realities of life and the exciting challenges of believing and following the Risen Lord each new day in a harsh environment.

The glimpses we are getting now of the Celtic view of the faith and how to be the Church and how to live the

life, offer us some rich encouragement from a robust past when the mission was out on the cutting edge and the Church was a vulnerable and available people of God, a "church without walls".

I trust that this offering will stimulate further reading, visioning and setting forth as the peregrini of the new millenium. Let creating God of life love you joyously, let Jesus MacMary companion you freely and the Wild Goose of God lead you wildly as they are the resonant Trinity surrounding and enjoying you in every moment of your day and night.

## **CELTIC CHRISTIANITY by Andrew Dunn**

The first Christian mission into Ireland came by way of Gaul where mission communities had been established by missionaries of the Eastern strand of the faith - from Asia minor and places like the creative mission church of Antioch. These communities were deeply influenced in their ethos and teaching by John's Gospel, John's Letters and The Revelation and by the spirituality, simplicity and asceticism of the desert hermits. One of these communities at Lyons was founded by Martin in 390AD. From there, so tradition has it, Ninian founded the monastery of Candida Casa at Whithorn in southern Galloway. In 435 Patrick began his highly fruitful mission to Ireland. They gave the mission into Ireland (and later into Wales, Cornwall, Scotland and Northern England) an incarnational faith ("the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"), steeped in God's love ("God so loved the world that he gave his only son"), deeply committed to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, wide open to the exuberant presence of God in everything and every situation of life and to the goodness of life.

Patrick and his fellow missionaries found a spiritual climate in Ireland receptive to these clear teachings on the nature of God. The results were extraordinary - within one hundred years the faith had been planted throughout Ireland and had gained wide acceptance. Ireland became "a land of saints" shaped by communities of faith with home-grown leaders who encouraged the fusion of the faith with the spiritual ethos of society. Jesus became their Druid and Great Abbot as the faith took root and spread. Around 450AD the Celtic mission developed in Wales and Cornwall; 560AD Columba and his group reached Iona on Scotland's south west coast and begin the work there. 590 AD Columbanus and others took the mission to Europe where it spread rapidly and widely. 635AD Aidan established the English base at Holy Island in Northumbria on the east coast.

Roman Christianity arrived in the London area in 597 led by Augustine of Canterbury. The clash of styles of faith, church structures, mission policy and some festival dates (e.g. Easter) led to the fateful Synod of Whitby in 664 hosted by Hilda, Abbess of Whitby. Here the Celtic leaders bowed to Roman pressures and the Roman style of leadership, church organisation and regulation became the way of the future, a disaster for the Celtic churches.

However, Celtic spirituality survived by retreating away from the Roman centres, monastries and influence as well as by going underground. It is ironic that the most obvious signs of past glory at Iona and Linidsfarne are the ruins of the monastries built to replace the Celtic mission centres there! The rebuilt Abbey and Cathedral at Iona and the decaying Nunnery come from a much later date and are Roman in style and ethos, not Celtic.

Two of the main sources of Celtic material are collections of songs and prayers published late last century and early this century. Alexander Carmichael collected poems and prayers in the Scottish Highlands and Islands during the course of his work as a customs officers. These were translated and published in the six volumes of the the Carmina Gadelica. Douglas Hyde's collection of Irish songs was published as Religious Songs. Both collections have saved the oral tradition of Celtic spirituality of both areas and form a rich resource available today.

## **THE OFFERINGS OF CELTIC CHRISTIANITY FOR TODAY:**

1. Its model of mission - spreading the faith by relationships, living the truth, sharing it around hearth, home and through families. Also by the example of the peregrini - the Spirit-led wanderers who went wherever they were led and sowed their gospel of God's love, presence and activity in the whole of life.
2. It was a "church without walls", never seeking to build large church buildings or congregations. No Celtic

church foundations larger than 20 metres in length have been found in Celtic areas built in the period from 500-1200AD. For them the heart of the faith was expressed through family connections and community relationships.

3. The "religious imagination" - that is, the frame of mind and heart that sees, knows and experiences God in life. Rationalism has devastated our age and robbed us of this delicate faculty for the loving and enjoying of God. It is this failure of the age of enlightenment that is turning our age back to richer ways of seeing and being.

4. The immanence and exuberant presence of God in creation and every aspect of life and death. "The earth is the Lords, and the fullness thereof!"

5. The trinitarian structure of Christian faith - not expressed in any doctrinaire way or as a theory or doctrine to barney about but the warm discoveries of God in the richness of ways God is God among us.

6. The central place of Jesus, his living among us as one of us, his dying on the tree (he's often referred to as "the man of the tree") and his resurrection which breaks death's power, destroys the powers of evil, darkness and fears giving hope, joy and lightness in life and service.

7. The fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit (The Wild Goose to the Celts) for worship and service were experienced and used with the ease of how it is meant to be. Prophetic messages, winning the struggle against evil and dark forces, putting on the breastplate of righteousness (cf The 8th century Hymn of St Patrick) and the armour of the faith were seen as not only for a few charismatic figures but central to the faith and experience of all.

8. The central place of the Bible for the nourishment of faith is well illustrated by the production of the Lindisfarne Gospels with their exquisite lettering and artwork.

9. The ease and naturalness with which the equality of women with men in society, faith and church leadership was accepted. This stemmed from their society and their discovery of this equality in Jesus Christ expressed in the New Testament. Brigid in Ireland was consecrated as a bishop; Hilda was Abbess of the large Whitby Abbey which housed a male Bishop.

10. It's loose-knit structure of horizontal relationships rather than the top-down structures of many of our churches today with the attendant manipulation and misuse of power this engenders.

11. Standing Places: those places central to each person's faith story as well as the great sites of the Celtic mission story throughout Britain and across the Celtic arc in Europe. What are our own, how do we honour them and use them to sustain us?

12. Interconnectedness - everything is connected and everything has its origin and its fulfilment in God. Everything is surrounded by the love of God and God delights in the goodness of every created thing. Even the destruction of sin is healed and made whole through the Cross of Christ.

13. Enjoying of the great company of heaven, the "cloud of witnesses", the saints of the past and the saints of the present.

14. The unifying nature of this way of faith. In the increasingly splintered Church of today here is a wonderful vision of the people of God.

### **AN INVITATION:**

Play with writing your own Celtic prayers! The rules are simple:

The structure is trinitarian, so name God in your three ways of describing Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the activity they are involved in at present in your life.

There are often three verses in which the content is repeated and expanded, with a concluding summarising verse.

Content is practical and personal rather than theoretical or theological.

The ethos is steeped in warmth, closeness, God's presence and protection.

The verse is often very personal to me, my family and life.

Look at the examples given in the Newsletter for guidance.

Enjoy!

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## **CREATING A QUIET GARDEN by Sue Sanders**

The recent visit to New Zealand of Jackie Locke (Assistant Director of The Quiet Garden Trust in Britain) has stimulated interest in Quiet Gardens. At present there are folk in North Otago, Wellington, Wanganui, North Shore and Northland already affiliated or thinking and praying it through.

At Albany Presbyterian Church we have paid the \$100.00 affiliation fee to the British Trust and have begun our planning. We are using the lovely wee valley and stream adjacent to our church building; we have drawn a plan as a guide for our gardening skills as we being clearing, shifting and planting later this year. Our team is keen to get started. Our plan connects the new patio area of the church into the garden and will make an excellent facility for us as well as other users of the garden.

We hope to work in conjunction with North Shore City Council as they clear up and re-arrange their part of the valley. We aim to extend the development over a few years and want to work without pressure.

Prayer is a strong need in all we do, both in the planning, use and programme for the garden. Members of our congregation are the prayer supporters behind our garden.

Our aim (as with all Quiet Gardens) is to make the garden available for people to use as a place of prayer and reflection, and to offer a listening ear when needed. We have already held two quiet afternoons with some encouraging responses. We are planning quiet afternoon events bi-monthly as weather permits beyond the winter months. The main obligation of affiliated gardens is to be available for people who want to come and spend time when the garden is open.

The Quiet Garden Trust website is worth a visit: <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/quiet.garden/>

It is also building up a network of Trust members and gardens around the world and lists these on the website.

For further information about our garden and other gardens in New Zealand write to me at 7/70-76 Fernhill Way, Browns Bay, Auckland. Ph. 09 476-1380.

## **IN PRAISE OF GOD THE CREATOR by Kirsty Swears**

In Psalm 148 we read a description of worship in which all living things praise their Creator:

"... Praise the Lord from the earth,  
 you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,  
 lightning and hail, snow and clouds,  
 stormy winds that do His bidding,  
 you mountains and all hills,  
 fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle,  
 small creatures and flying birds, ...  
 ... young men and maidens,  
 old men and children,  
 Let them praise the Lord, for His name alone is exalted; ..."

Psalm 148:7-12

Creation serves as a canvas on which God has drawn one of His most revealing and beautiful self-portraits, yet today we often allow ourselves to remain distanced from the natural world in which we "live and breathe and have our being". We can travel at high speed in air-conditioned comfort, along sealed roads, soothed by our favourite sounds on the car stereo. We can live in well insulated, centrally heated homes made of permanent materials which shelter us from the effects of even the most inclement weather. In supermarkets we can buy convenience food that has been pre-prepared, pre-packaged, preserved and made ready to "reheat and eat". In department stores and boutiques we can buy clothing that has been mass produced in factories by people with raw materials that we never see. If we want to talk to our neighbour we can use our telephones -

cordless, standard or mobile - and if we do not wish to talk to our neighbour we can use our answer-phone or cellular secretary. And if we should by chance, want to experience the wonders of nature for ourselves, we can view a documentary on our television set or tap into our computer and play in a man-made, virtual creation.

With all the advances in modern technology cluttering up our over-stimulated minds with synthetic wizardry, and distracting us from actual rather than virtual reality, we can too easily lose sight of the Lord who the psalmist praised and exalted. When we want to "praise the Lord from the earth", when we want to "be still and know that He is God", we have to make a deliberate, conscious effort to get away, to escape from our man-made material world with its relentless demands that constantly clamour for our attention.

In the 6th and 7th centuries, in the islands of Great Britain and Ireland, other men and women sought to be still and know God. Their world, with its many complexities and complications, was vastly different from ours, yet perhaps we can learn afresh from them the power of simplicity and the splendour of God our creator.

In the heart of that time we rather smugly refer to as "the dark ages", a Celtic culture flourished in all its terrible beauty. It was a brutal culture where lives were cut short by hunger, disease, warfare and, less frequently, on druid sacrificial altars. Yet it was also a culture that celebrated heroism, poetry, music and the arts, where poets were second only to kings in rank. It was a tribal culture with many kings and princes ruling over the men, women and children that made up the kinship-based society. Regardless of their position in society the lives of the ancient Celts were closely intertwined with the ebb and flow of the seasons. They saw themselves as an integral part of the natural landscape, embraced and often dominated by their sometimes harsh environment.

Long before Christianity was introduced to the Celts, they had an awareness of, and a belief in, a divine power who was the creator, both of themselves and of their environment. The Celts confirmed the statement made by Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans, ..."since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made..." (Romans 1:20). When the Celts received Christianity, it fulfilled an inherent longing to know the creator behind the creation. For the saints of the Celtic church: Patrick, Bridget, Ninian, Columba, Kentigern, and others less well known, the desire to know and to worship their creator God in His creation, formed an essential pillar of their faith.

Many of the Celtic saints were of noble birth, yet renounced the material privileges that came with nobility, stripping from their lives any encumbrances that could come between themselves and their God. Some lived as hermits, withdrawing from society completely in order to draw closer to God. Others were missionaries, moving within society, establishing schools and monasteries, yet retreating to isolated caves and islands in order to be refreshed anew by God's presence. All the Celtic saints drew strength and depth of spiritual experience from time spent being alone with God in the natural environment He created.

Saint Kevin, a 6th century Irish priest lived as a hermit in the Wicklow mountains, and his life illustrates the harmonious relationship with nature that the Celtic saints sought to have. This harmony with God's creation was seen as an act of worship in itself. Although born into a royal family, Saint Kevin chose to live in a small cave beside a remote lough. He dressed in wild animal skins and ate whatever food he could gather from surrounding trees and plants. The wild animals of the glen provided his only company. One of Saint Kevin's customs during his years as a hermit was to stand in the cold waters of the lough, reciting psalms and praying. On one occasion he dropped his book into the lough, but an otter immediately retrieved it for him, and no part of the book was damaged. On another occasion, while praying with his arms outstretched, a blackbird settled on the palm of Saint Kevin's hand, built herself a nest there and laid an egg in it. Ever patient, kind and gentle to all living creatures, Kevin waited until the chick had hatched and fledged before he moved. Saint Kevin was renowned for his holiness and humility and went on to establish a monastery near the site of his first hermitage. Before he died, however, he left his monastic community and returned to his lonely cave retreat, spending his final years in solitary prayer and contemplation.

The 7th century Saint Aidan, known as "the Apostle of England", was an Irish missionary saint, brought from the island of Iona by King Oswald to establish a mission to the people of Northumbria. On the island of

Lindisfarne, off the south-east coast of Scotland, Aidan established a monastery and school where future leaders of the Celtic church were educated. Aidan was described by the venerable Bede as a "moderate and discreet", a gentle and approachable man whose life rather than his words led to the people of Northumbria being converted to Christianity. Although a Bishop and a close friend and adviser to King Oswald and his successor King Oswin, Saint Aidan lived a simple life, studiously avoiding the trappings of power. At different intervals throughout his life Aidan would withdraw by himself to the small island of Inner Farne for prayer. In those times of solitary prayer, praise and reflection St Aidan was refreshed and renewed. One of his surviving prayers reveals the importance of these lonely islands to Saint Aidan.

"Lord, this bare island, makes a place of peace.  
Here be the peace of praise by dark or day.  
Be this island thy holy island".

Today, in the midst of the technological clutter that crowds our lives, we need to find places of peace, holy islands, where we can withdraw from the routines of life to draw near to God, to hear His voice again. Places where quiet miracles of God's creation can minister to our spirit. God doesn't call us to live in a hermitage like Saint Kevin, yet there is something very beautiful in the silence of solitude, being alone with God in a garden or beside a lake, in the forest or on a hilltop. Saint Aidan, although deeply involved in the affairs of the church and state, made a conscious effort to remove himself from the bustle of business, in order to be still, to be with God and in God.

When were we last able to put the incessant busyness of life to one side, and draw near to the source of life? When did we last allow God to refresh us by being still in His creation? When did we last pause to watch the breathtaking splendour of a sunrise and thank God for the gift of a new day? Perhaps if we try to instill simplicity in our lives as the Celtic saints did in theirs, if we make a conscious effort to meet with God in His cathedral of creation, perhaps then we will be able to truly join with the Psalmist in "... praising God from the earth ..."

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### **WHY NOW? by Andy Raine - Lindisfarne**

Why now, at the end of this century and millennium, is there such a rise of interest in Celtic spirituality, music, communities and theology?

Celtic art and artefacts and music etc. have an appeal which is intricate and sophisticated, yet have the overall impression of freshness and simplicity and a deep sense of roots, history and connectedness. These have been marketed by people who enjoyed their artistry and recognised their appeal. The product sells and so is marketed further, re-invented, re-packaged and marketed to the hilt, hyped and re-hyped, but still sells. This seems to be true, right across the board. Commercially, Celtic is IN. People who then discover they enjoy 'Celtic' art or music or jewellery, or whatever, develop an interest in Celtic culture in general. (There is nothing extraordinary about this - it is as predictable as lovers of Van Gogh's paintings enjoying the Don McLean song 'Vincent', or people who bought the album 'American Pie' being intrigued by the song 'Vincent' and looking out for Van Gogh prints!

So, the interest in things Celtic is initially fed by a commercially motivated marketing fad.

The climate in which this is happening is particular and timely. It is post-modern, post-rationalist and open at last to treat numinous experiences seriously. People are far more likely to ask 'Are you serious?' or 'Is this significant?' than 'Is this true?'. Growing numbers of individuals feel a resonance with the Celtic culture they are exposed to and appreciate its rich artistry, depth of significance and rootedness. They are hungry for meaning. Most of these people belong to the generations who are totally unchurched. They see Christianity as a charming but unfortunate relic from previous generations - it is usually something they have continuously dismissed as embarrassing and irrelevant without ever having examined it. A surprise awaits them, for when they examine traditional Celtic writing, arts, customs and belief, they find the most attractive and accessible elements almost invariably belong to Celtic Christianity - and it makes sense! They find a celebratory faith with a profound respect for all people and all of creation. They find a belief in numinous and supernatural experiences and a sense of the imminent presence of God. They find a quiet understanding

of the reality of the communion of saints, an acknowledgement of the insidious subtlety of manifest evil, an absolute faith in the redeeming power of the cross and a determination to acknowledge God in every detail of daily life.

They see lives that glow with faith and humorous honesty. What they read or hear about becomes more and more fascinating. They are drawn to the Christ who the Celtic golden age acknowledged (who can also be seen in the scriptures they spent so long learning and copying and illuminating).

But they see little in today's churches which reflects the characteristics of the faith of the Celtic monastics and their long-ago converts. They turn instead to the old stones, prayers and poetry as reliable sources of spiritual nurture.

A similar trend can be observed amongst Christians. Their initial interest in things Celtic may be triggered by a jewellery design, a book, an album cover, a piece of music or whatever, but as they explore a little and for the first time encounter a glimpse of authentic Celtic Christianity of a previous era it astounds them. Here is a Christianity which is alive, Bible-based, rooted in the local indigenous culture, is life-affirming, vital, contagious, comfortable with the miraculous, respectful towards the whole church, but builds in small units and invests in the lives of individuals.

The Celtic church had no concept of congregations or parishes. Accountability was relational not geographical. Instead the faith spread through families, tribes and monastic settlements. The missionaries prayed, sang psalms and told stories, and lived exactly as they preached. Looking back at it as we do, it is refreshing to notice that the Celtic branches of the church were remarkably free both of anti-Semitism and of the neurotic heresies of Augustine which have so dogged the thinking of so many otherwise Christian people. The Celtic believer acknowledged God in every activity of the day, welcomed Christ in the person of every guest, and prayed the spirit's wisdom to lighten their heart and add graciousness to their speech.

Little wonder that many Christians today turn to the 'Celtic' period for an example of how the gospel can be lived. Especially poignant are the glimpses of contrasts between those long-ago Roman and Celtic branches of the church evident in the controversy surrounding the synod of Whitby or the clash between Augustine of Kent and the Welsh monks.

We are repeatedly reminded that the famous Celtic double monasteries (of men and women) were invariably ruled by a woman, that Celtic bishops typically lived quietly as part of monastic communities under the rule of an abbot, that the serious minded Christian would give account of their soul to an anamchara who was probably a lay-person or monastic rather than a priest. The Celtic monks demonstrably drove out occultic druidic practices, but first won over many of the druids who were the spiritual leaders of the people and replaced their shrines with altars to the true and living God. They 'baptised' whatever in local culture was compatible with true discipleship.

In our day there is a profound need for proper study of 'Celtic' Christianity.

The Christian press and music trade are busily exploiting the Celtic boom as busily as the occultists and purveyors of witchcraft. We need intelligent and informed appraisal of how things really were. We need to refute attempts to justify contemporary bug-bears by anachronistically attaching them to Celtic history. (The Celtic saints were not concerned with ecology, for instance, they merely lived in harmony with their surroundings as they happened to be at the time. Arguably Cuthbert or Kevin or Columba would give more attention to evangelism than rainforests were they our contemporaries!)

Nor should we assume that all would be well if we could turn the clock back and live centuries ago. What suited a bygone culture may not be appropriate for our own - its practices may need adapting or incorporating or even discarding. Nor can we avoid approaching each aspect from the dubious perspective of 20th century eye-glasses. Of course we don't see things truly. We see it all rose-tinted, or misunderstand its context entirely. With these caviats, there remain many lessons to be learnt, insights to be gained and fresh challenges to bring about much-needed change.

Our iconoclastic age (the 'new age' of a total paradigm shift away from the rational to the experimental, of which the New Age movement is only a symptom and a tangential fragment, not its cause!) may share many values with the cultures Celtic Christianity took root and thrived in. Contemporary culture has a horror of hierarchy and remote power-structures, and a respect for much of what the Celtic saints embodied.

A shared interest in Celtic customs gives us, as Christians unparalleled opportunity for dialogue of all kinds. God willing, the people we meet in the course of this dialogue will find we have not a little in common with the monastics of the past - our love of Christ as quiet and strong, and embodying a determination to live exactly as we preach.

## **CHRISTIAN CELTIC COMMUNITIES TODAY by Ray Simpson**

Interest in Celtic spirituality is sweeping the English speaking world. Beyond the glut of Celtic books, artefacts, and internet rings is this spirituality actually being lived out in communities? Not a lot, but embryonic attempts to do this are increasing.

These communities and networks may be put into three categories: New Age, Nationalist, and Christian. Neo pagan, New Age, or Creation (rather than God) -centred groups essentially seek to embrace the energies of Mother Earth, to attune to them, to celebrate or even to become them. The Findhorn Community in Scotland is prominent among New Age Communities. The revival of ancient druid practices in places such as Glastonbury and Stone Henge catch the headlines, but this historical revival is present also in urban centres. Ultimately, in my view, these groups breed some form of nature worship, although Christians can learn from their criticism of the hierarchical church and its worship.

Romantic, historical or nationalistic groups echo the short-lived Celtic revival of the 19th century known as the Celtic twilight. In some of the lands known as the "six Celtic countries" (Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland, Isle of Man, Scotland, Wales) Celtic history is kept alive in organisations such as the Cornish Gorsedd or Welsh eisteddfods. The concept of an independent Scotland, Wales etc. within the European Union appeals to many people, and the tide of nationalism is running strongly. There is a Pan Celtic New Dawn Movement. Peter Beresford Ellis in *The Celtic Dawn* (Constable 1993) traces the origin of Pan Celtism, of the Celtic League founded in 1961, and outlines its philosophy and future development. Some small Christian groups in the six "Celtic countries" come in to this cluster: they find their identity by harking back, or by being anti other groups. There is now even a Muslim Celtic Alliance, which spans Celtic people in Spain and Turkey, and which has a community in Scotland.

The Iona Community was the first of the 20th century Christian Celtic communities. St. Columba, the founder of the first great mission community on the Scottish island of Iona in the sixth century, prophesied that the island would revert to empty fields, but that before the world ended it would be restored. In 1936 the island was given to the church and Church of Scotland minister George MacLeod linked his concern to find work for the unemployed with the chance to rebuild the Iona abbey and found a network of Christians who shared his concerns. The members of the Iona Community do not live permanently on Iona, they are more likely to work in the most needy areas such as the slums of Glasgow, throughout Britain and around the world. Their five-fold Rule includes prayer and Bible-reading, accountability for time, money and relationships, and action for justice and peace. Its Wild Goose Worship Group and Worship Resources are used widely beyond Scotland.

Although members of the Community come from a spectrum, it is thought that Christians who are not pacifist, or who emulate the signs and wonders ministry of Columba would not be at home in the present community. In his old age George MacLeod himself was sad that the Community had divorced the social from the evangelistic concerns which he had held together. On Iona today Catholic, Episcopal and other groups have retreat houses, as well as the Abbey and Youth Centre run by the Iona Community in the season. On Mull the Iona Community run their youth adventure camp at Camas.

The Northumbria Community had its origins in the 1970's but was formalised in its present shape in 1991. It is a network of Christians who seek to see the kingdom of God extended in Northumbria and beyond. It has

not sought to be labelled Celtic, but it has found that the Celtic saints' experience of God has made sense of their own journey. They believe they share the following emphases with the Celtic saints: "that our first calling is to seek God for himself, that people matter more than things, that relationships matter more than reputation, that who we are matters more than what we do, that a monk is defined not by his task but by what he is called to be, a man of God, that prayer and action, contemplation and mission belong together, that this is God's world with no sacred/secular divide and He is interested in the ordinary everyday happenings of life."

Members of the Community adopt a Rule of Life whose twin peaks are vulnerability and availability. Members are scattered and meet in groups in various areas. Their focal house is Hetton Hall, near Chatton, in Northumberland, England. This has a resident family, several helpers who live nearby, a chapel, a library and rooms for guests.

Smaller communities pop up all over the place, such as that founded by Sister Agnes in the remote Shetlands Isle of Fetlar. She tells her story in *The Song of the Lark* (SPCK. Triangle 1992). Now Sister Helen CSMV is founding a Celtic Christian Community on the far northern coast of the Isle of Skye which she describes as an idyllic spot on good days! David and Pam Pott head up the small Fountain Gate Community at Brockley, South East London. They share their large house with others, and with two other nearby households they seek to live a rhythm of inflow and outflow. This combines times of stillness, meditation and study with times of hospitality, teaching, and facilitating creative gifts. David is logging his experiences on long pilgrim prayer walks, and has set up an agency to develop these for groups.

(The Fountain Gate Community, 58 Geoffrey Road, Brockley, London SE4 1Nt Tel: 0181 692 8271.)

A radical community in Catholic Ireland is Aisling Aran, a loose network of people with a vision for a new church and a new society based on community. On Inis Mor, Aran Islands, and elsewhere, various households give expression to this vision whose key features are: Celtic spiritual and cultural roots; right relationship within the cosmos; gender balance; a just world; wholeness; hospitality; self-reliance and simplicity. However their priest has declared that he no longer recognises the jurisdiction of the Pope.

Celtic Christianity is now impacting the USA. Tom Sine, the church leadership guru for God-centred management of the future, tells me he is setting up a Celtic style ranch to help trainee church leaders experience community and a rhythm of work and prayer. Randy George, President of Gaelforce in Al Fresno, California, and his team have a vision of Anamcara places in cities throughout the world. These will be small, warm, candle lit places of prayer open day and night where people are available to give friendship (Anamcara is Irish for friend of the soul).

Then there are churches which seek to be communities which draws inspiration from the Celtic saints. The Celtic Orthodox Church has a monastery at Saint Dolay, Brittany, France where six monks live a truly authentic life. For twenty years they have eaten only what has been given to them. Their leader, Bishop Mael, is Metropolitan of this church which has small houses (congregations) in Britain, France, and even in Australia. They regard themselves as fully Orthodox in faith and in apostolic succession, but, wishing to have an ethos which is indigenous to the Celtic lands, they do not place themselves under the jurisdiction of an Eastern patriarch.

In Sussex, England, New Churches have spawned Celtic-inspired communities under the umbrella of the Revelation Church network.. Two of their pastors tell their story in *New Celts: Following Jesus into Millennium 3* (Roger Ellis and Chris Seaton Kingsway 1998). The Internet advertises a maze of new churches, mostly in the USA, who take to themselves the Celtic label, and there are a few in Britain, such as The Charismatic Apostolic Fellowship of St Luke & St Columba. Its pastor, Rev. Alan Munday invites people who seek to remodel existing churches or start new ones on what he calls Neo-Celtic lines to network by sending a blank email to <[celtchrist-subscribe@onelist.com](mailto:celtchrist-subscribe@onelist.com)> or by logging in and subscribing on the website at [www.onelist.com](http://www.onelist.com).

I myself was one of seven founders of the Community of Aidan and Hilda in 1994. It is a network of Christians who aim to cradle a Christian spirituality for today which draws inspiration from the Celtic saints,

and which weaves together the evangelical, catholic and charismatic strands in the church. Any one may become an Explorer of its Way of Life, which combines a biblical cutting edge with contemplative simplicity, love of creation and the use of spiritual gifts, seeking to apply this to their personal circumstances with the help of a soul friend. Those who make commitments become full members by taking what we call The First Voyage of the Coracle. We are bound together by the Common Way of Life, the community gatherings and magazine, and by our two small houses in the English Midlands and at Lindisfarne, where I have a small retreat cottage. We are currently seeking to purchase a larger property here to be used as a Community House which will offer training and hospitality as did St. Aidan's first seventh century monastic community here. There is a Chapter in the USA and we have our first few members in New Zealand.

Rev. Ray Simpson was founder of the Christian Church in Bowthorpe, Norwich, to which six streams, both Catholic and Protestant, are covenanted, and of Bowthorpe Community Trust. In 1994 he was appointed Honorary Guardian of the new Community of Aidan and Hilda, and in 1996 he moved to Lindisfarne, where he nurtures the Lindisfarne Mustard Seed Project from his cottage, Lindisfarne Retreat. This seeks a new cradling of Celtic spirituality through retreats, soul friendship, church audits and provision of resources for schools and churches. He is author of Give Yourself a Retreat and of other popular books published by Hodder and Stoughton which include:

Exploring Celtic Spirituality: Historic Roots for our Future.

Celtic Worship Through the Year.

Celtic Daily Light.

Celtic Blessings for Everyday.

His book Soul Friendship: Celtic Insights into Spiritual Mentoring.

will be published by Hodders in July 1999.

Further information may be obtained from the web site

<http://www.ndirect.co.uk/~raysimpson>

## **CREATING CELTIC WORSHIP by John Hunt**

### **The Celtic Spirit**

The Celtic Spirit is one of awe, wonder and delight in God's presence, love and goodness in the natural world, in our neighbours and in our own life and heart.

In that Spirit: the people will be greeted, the prayers will be offered, the Scripture will be read and the Faith proclaimed.

Worship will be characterised by an affirmation and celebration of God's love in every person and in every place: the risen Jesus leading and accompanying us through whatever is troubling us, through crucifixion to resurrection, to our flowering.

### **Background**

The high period of Celtic Spirituality, up to the year 800 in Ireland, the Hebrides, Scotland and the North of England probably saw worship offered in the Roman rite, celebrated in Latin. Our major resource, the short prayers/poems in the Celtic tradition in Carmichael's collection 'Songs of the Gaels' translated from the Gaelic, were not from corporate worship but rather accompanied every action through the day. The chief source for worship in the Celtic Spirit today, comes out of the Iona Community of the Church of Scotland, centred in the Abbey on the Isle of Iona. Here the spirit of Carmichael's material is offered in liturgy.

### **Elements of Worship in the Celtic Spirit**

The Celts knew God through their senses: God will be known in symbols, flowers, candle- flames, food and drink, dance, music... as well as in words and silence.

The prayers will acknowledge and affirm God's loving engagement in our everyday life. In the idiom of Carmichael's collection, they will be short, pertinent, perhaps with phrases repeated like a chorus, Trinitarian, sometimes between verses of a gentle song or hymn.

Frequently the Scripture, particularly the Psalms and the Gospels draws our attention to God with us in the natural world. Taking for example 'Consider the lilies', we can provide a flower for each person to hold and consider what God might be saying to him or her. We will engage in the seasons and rhythms of the earth: knowing God's love in the endings and new beginnings, the promise, the constancy.

Many times the Scripture Reading involves bread, or water or wine which can be consumed as we seek to enter into the experience told. Often in the Scripture we find God's presence expressed in lamp-light or fire which we can set up in worship.

The Celts expressed their faith not in creeds, but in stories, songs and poems. In worship stories will be told; sometimes stories which can be understood in several ways, leaving the listener to take his or her message.

The Reading will be offered in preaching imaginatively, inviting people to discern and embrace what good news God might have there for him or her.

When someone became part of a Celtic Christian community, he or she would be offered an Anamchara or soul-friend who would accompany that person on their faith and life journey. The anamchara would be alongside, ready to encourage, comfort, sometimes admonish or delight in their special friend. Worship might include some gentle sharing with the person alongside.

Hymns and songs will celebrate God's love and goodness. Music will be reflective, evocative, touching our deep places.

The worship will nurture our faith, hope and love, and our spirit, to alert us to God with us and enable us to go confidently and gladly into the week beginning.

I remember hearing, someone who had been to Israel was asked, "Tell me about Jerusalem!" and he answered, "It's Hilly." Much more could be said. I am conscious I have offered only a glimpse of Celtic Spirituality and Worship. If you care to explore further, you will find the Spirit moving and creativity bursting out like the springtime.

#### **Resources:**

The Sun Dances by Alexander Carmichael. Floris Classics.  
A short collection from the Carmina Gadelica.

The Iona Community Worship Book . Wild Goose Publications.  
The Abbey Services of the Iona Community.

Books of contemporary Celtic prayers and worship resources by David Adam, vicar of St Mary's Church, Holy Island.

We Spirited People by John Hunt. The Caxton Press.  
The Celtic Spirit in our own life and story in New Zealand.

#### **PRAYING IN THE CELTIC TRADITION by Fay M. Johnson rsm**

If we want to pray in the Celtic tradition, we may need to do some footwork! The Celts seem to have had a driving urge to be constantly on the move, physically. As they became imbued with the Christian faith, this urge took on the added dimension of an inner spiritual journey and resulted in the great evangelistic thrust of the Celtic churches. We can trace the Celts back to at least 300 BC at which time they seem to have been the dominant race in Central and Southern Europe. It was probably to a branch of the family that Paul addressed his letter to the Galatians since "Gaul, "Galatia" and "Celt" all derive from the same root-word.

The Celts would have easily understood the biblical assertion that "here we have no abiding city". (Hebrews

13). They would have recognised Jesus, not so much as destination, but rather as "The Way" (John 14). Life was seen as a journey in which the outer body and the inner soul sustain each other. The journey was always to discover more of God rather than to actually find God. From the evidence of the characters carved on their high crosses, we can deduce that they loved the biblical stories of the great travellers - Abraham, Noah, Moses and even Jonah, the reluctant pilgrim! They understood that these people already knew God but set out on an adventure to discover even more of him. Their physical journeys matched their spiritual journeys.

Celtic monks often set off with no destination in mind, simply travelling, as one wrote, "for the love of God, for the Name of Christ and for the salvation of souls". They travelled on foot rather than on horseback so that it was easy to stop and share their faith with those they met. In contrast to our attitude of journeys with timetables, luggage and speed, they would savour the journey, enjoy the views, talk with others, pray as they went and share their faith.

The story is told of three Irish monks who, in the year 891 AD, drifted for seven days at sea, landing in Cornwall. When challenged by King Alfred they said, "We stole away because we wanted for the love of God to be on pilgrimage, we cared not where". These perpetual wanderers left everything to go into the unknown to discover more of creation and more of themselves. As they did so, both the transcendent God "beyond" and the immanent God "within" were being met. The journey was a sacrament, "an outward and visible sign of an inner and spiritual grace." Leaving all human props and shackles behind, both they and those they met discovered the secrets of spiritual growth.

The height of asceticism among the Celts was considered to be exile and perpetual pilgrimage for the sake of Christ. We rightly associate corporal austerity with Celtic spirituality. The ancient penitential pilgrimage to Loch Dearg with its three day fast is today still very much alive, as well as the pilgrimage to Cruach Phadraig, the mountain of penance traditionally associated, as is Loch Dearg, with St. Patrick.

Pilgrimage has become fashionable again in our time. Each year hundreds of thousands travel to the ancient Celtic sites of Iona, Lindisfarne and Whithorn. They have believed the words of the psalmist "Blessed are they who have set their hearts on pilgrimage". ( Psalm 84:5). Regrettably however, the great danger now is that Celtic sites are overrun with those who are tourists rather than pilgrims, with all the crass commercialism that brings. It is always difficult to know what to expect before arrival. At most sites the atmosphere will be quite different in winter and summer, and when it is crowded or deserted. We need to remember how ascetic the Celtic missionaries were. To visit on a cold, grey, lonely winter's day may be more helpful than during the summer holidays!

We might think about making a pilgrimage. Whether the journey is across the sea to Kildare or simply a short ride to a local shrine, the same journey is being taken when one is on pilgrimage. Pilgrimages lead to sacred places where the human and divine meet and a pilgrimage in space and time may aid the inner journey. The power of pilgrimage derives in part from the voluntary leaving behind of the normal world and entering into another realm. The sacred space provides an atmosphere for attentive listening in which normal time-frames are eased, daily routines and preoccupations are absent. A community of travellers flows past boundaries, even national ones. The stages of the journey allow the pilgrim to be more and more attentive to the centre and the call of God in life. The pilgrimage becomes a free, protected space - in - motion where pilgrims playfully engage the symbols and open themselves to transformation. It is a contemplative activity. And it is a prayer of the feet.

God has no favourite places,  
There are no special things.  
All are God's and all is sacred.

We each have our own sacred places which could become centres of pilgrimage. A visit to one's birthplace, or the birthplaces of others who are significant in one's life. Family graves are places of sacredness. Marriage vows and religious life vows have hallowed places. Childhood scenes, places of healing, and spots where God's presence was deeply experienced can be destinations for pilgrimage. We leave home, close the door on what is familiar and journey to a place where we are open to God's touch once more. The distance travelled is not important. The invitation is: to go and see, to imagine, to learn, to meditate, to pray and to try and

identify the principles behind these special places which can be translated for today. Above all, the invitation is to go ready to be changed by the God who lives in these places, and who also lives with us where we spend the rest of the year.

We are on pilgrimage and all pilgrimage is an opening to the same centre. That centre is within us and it is where we meet God and come to know ourselves fully. In their book *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Victor and Edith Turner have described pilgrimage as "extroverted mysticism" and mysticism as "introverted pilgrimage". The two are closely linked. Whereas the pilgrim physically traverses a mystical way in which concreteness and historicity dominate, the mystic sets forth on an interior spiritual pilgrimage, the goal of which is nothing less than union with God, a goal beyond conceptualisation. Fundamental to all pilgrimage is the interior footwork, what the Turners refer to as a "phased interior process". It is through this interior footwork that we are enabled to pause and pay attention to the personal symbols which populate our route. We are brought in touch with levels of life where God heals and calls to union. God is met and the self is born on this journey.

We are all on pilgrimage, journeying to a place where the human and the divine meet. True pilgrimage is about what goes on within the inner self. In this life, the journey has no ending and it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive. Once we think we have "arrived", our souls have died. We can never say "I have grown sufficiently as a Christian disciple," nor can we keep relying on experiences or insights or revelations of twenty years ago. It is only the reality of our present spiritual journey that gives any credibility to our witness.

Reflection for would-be pilgrims:

\* Do I need a building, a room, or an outdoor spot where I can be centred?

\* Is there a place I can be where my mind roams, life sorts itself out, and I can feel connected?

\* Is it also a place where I can just be attentive to mystery, to God in my life, without a thought or image?

Such an environment is invaluable for its power to heal and renew me.

## **PRAYER & SPIRITUALITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH by Joy MacCormick**

In early January the second conference on this theme, presented by the Centre for Early Christian Studies, the Australian Catholic University, was held in Sydney. The first had been held in Melbourne three years earlier.

Invited speakers this year were:

Rt.Rev. Rowan Williams FBA, Bishop of Monmouth - theologian.

Rev. Brian Daley SJ - a professor of theology teaching at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana - a specialist in the Greek Patristic tradition.

Professor Pier Franco Beatrice - a distinguished scholar who teaches Early Christian Literature at the University of Padua.

Dr Joan Barclay-Lloyd - Reader in Art History at La Trobe University, Melbourne.

Rev. Professor John McGuiken - priest of the Romanian Orthodox Church and Professor of Early Church History and Byzantine Theology at Union Theological Seminary, New York.

Professor Elena Giannarelli - Associate Professor, Dept of Ancient Studies, University of Firenze, Italy.

Papers were also presented by some 55 others from all over the world and covering an equally wide range of topics - choosing just 12 of these to attend was a real challenge.

Among those I chose were:

The Secret Oral Tradition of Jesus in Clement of Alexandria's "Stromateis".

The Pre-Christian Origins of Early Christian Spirituality.

An Unorthodox Spirituality? Magic in the world of the Christian in the 4th Century East.

Reconstructing Celtic Spirituality: Searching for a Western Early Church.

Invocation and Immolation: The supplicatory use of Christ's name on Crucifixion Amulets of the Early Christian Period.

What was Prayer for Early Christians?

The conference programme included some experiential content as well as intellectual. There were two concerts of Sacred Music, the opening of an Icon exhibition and a marvellous Festal Dinner. Liturgical feasts were provided too; the opening doxology sung by the clergy and choir of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Orthodox Vespers sung by the Archbishop and choir of the Antiochian Orthodox Church, Armenian Vespers sung by the Archbishop and choir of the Armenian Apostolic Church - all of which have active congregations in Sydney. We also shared in Vespers for the Baptism of Christ - a reconstruction of the ancient cathedral office of the Roman Church (before the fragmentation of the Western Church).

For me, as one currently engaged in exploration of the roots and boundaries of my faith, one of the highlights of the conference came right at the beginning - in the opening address. This was given by a former Anglican, now Roman Catholic and the Abbot of Holy Trinity Benedictine Abbey, New Norcia, Western Australia, who has the delightful name of Placid Spearritt. (In Sydneyspeak pronounces identically to "Spirit"!!). He reminded us that the Church has always existed in a context of time and culture and that in our time we might define the "Early Church" as that of the first 400, maybe up to 800 years. As we explore that Early Church we reflect on the things they regarded as important and the things that tended to divide them. Part of our present context is the approach of the millennium and the various prophecies associated with that event. At great risk he would dare to move into prophetic mode and to prophesy that in the year "say 2 million" the world would still exist, humanity and the Church would still exist and that any conference on "The Early Church" would include the Church of today. Such a conference would also explore the issues which concern, unite and divide us. He would further dare to prophesy that in that day Christians would still proclaim that God is Love

There is one God, somehow understood as also three

God became human, died and rose again

God dwells in the heart of all who love

and that they would still meet together to break bread and share wine in remembrance - but that the issues which concern and divide us now, such as Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination and Church Structure would have moved to, or off, the periphery.

This conference brought together international scholars with deep involvement in the Church or no involvement at all, Church leaders with much or little interest in scholarship, lay people of all kinds, a wide range of denominations, and Churches ancient and modern - some 200 or so of us. I hope to attend the next such conference to be held in Melbourne mid 2002. Is anyone interested in joining me?

## **A MODERN CELTIC COMMUNITY by Gayle Stevens**

It seemed perfectly appropriate on this cold windy night to be groping our way in the dark towards the little rough hewn log chapel set amongst the trees. We drew our coats more tightly around us as we sat quietly in the candlelight with our companions participating in the gentle ebb and flow of night prayers.

What was unusual and very delightful was that this was not the end of the day at an Anglican or Catholic retreat house but a modern Celtic community. Set in the beautiful Northumbrian countryside close to Holy Island just below the Scottish border, was a place where we discovered fellow travellers from our own roots who were also seeking to follow God's leading within the desert and Celtic monastic tradition.

A personal visit to the Northumbria Community became a foregone conclusion when we read their description of "Vocation":

"Dynamic and erratic, spontaneous and radical, audacious and immature, committed if not altogether coherent, ecumenically open and often experimental, visible here and there, now and then but unsettled institutionally. Almost monastic in nature, but most of all enacting a fearful hope for human life in society".  
(William Stringfellow)

The journey itself to the mother house of the community, called "Nether Springs", was an integral part of the experience easily missed by one who tends to focus on the destination rather than the journey. We were deposited unceremoniously off the train at Berwick-on-Tweed, a small station serving a delightful coastal Northumbrian village and we eventually arrived at "Nether Springs" after a cold 2 hour wait and a 20 minute

drive into the countryside.

Our arrival coincided with meal time and we crowded into the small, warm, informal dining room/kitchen. Many apologies were offered for our long unforeseen wait and we were aware that this was not a well ordered retreat house but a loving family of whom we had become a welcome part even if only for a few days.

A "Nether Springs" brochure states, "We have not sought to replicate the Celtic Church nor, when we talk about a new monasticism, are we talking about joining a religious order or the need for the renewal of the old monastic institutions; what we are seeking to embrace is the "heart" of monastic spirituality and its application in our contemporary setting".

If the "heart" of Celtic spirituality is welcome and simplicity then they are accomplishing their goals. As well as simple adequate food and accommodation they model a simple way of life, a return to the essential values such as having time planned into their day for reading, recreation and formal prayer.

Like a beehive, the community was full of constant activity. They were not exempt from the struggle to maintain balance between the outer life and the inner. We met a group of pastors doing a retreat; Bible Society members planning their "Storytelling" workshops with community members; a well known musician taking time out and other local community members at every meal that we had not met previously. Its vibrant life flowed all around us. "Nether Springs" has hosted 5,000 people since its inception in 1992.

Living in community ourselves, we were keen to learn and explore how the community was structured but information was harder to glean than expected. We had the feeling this was due not to resistance but a kind of shell shock. Our visit had closely followed two rather major crises in this group and we empathised with them as we sensed them grappling with the inevitable shadow side of their life and calling. We did discover that membership, which extends all around the UK., involved commitment to a "rule" or "Way for Living" encapsulated in the two values of availability and vulnerability. I can't think of any two values that would more effectively counter the spirit of this age.

## **IONA by Lois McMillan**

... a place where "... earth and sea and sky in harmony of colour, the air of the eternal seeping through the physical ..." [The Whole Earth Shall Cry Glory, p11, Iona Prayers by Rev. George Macleod] touches those who visit, and reaches beyond. I quote George MacLeod, who, in this century was responsible for the emergence of an ecumenical Christian community on Iona.

Although I live near "Camp Iona" in North Otago, that was not what drew me, a few northern hemisphere summers ago, to visit the small island of Iona in the Inner Hebrides of Scotland.

On an evening in the summer of 1956-57 I sat in a Palmerston North auditorium crowded with young "Kiwis". A lasting memory of George MacLeod on that evening, is of a man of powerful presence speaking passionately of his work for Iona. By then he had been working for over twenty years to show how the everyday, ordinary things of life and faith are part of the harmony that is Christianity. During three decades the ruined monastic buildings of the Abbey have been rebuilt by skilled and unskilled workers, lay and ordained. The message first brought there by Columba in the year 563 had thereby flowered once more.

A generation after my interest had been drawn to the Iona story, I heard some of Macleod's passion echoed by a family member, as he spoke of his visit there. He spoke of an affinity to the place - part of his spiritual and genetic heritage. My dream of one day going there began to become earthed in planning.

Music is an important part of my Christian nurture. The haunting tune and 1989 words from the Iona' Community's "Love from below", sung at a Christmas gathering around the same time, were arresting and a further pull to its source.

Iona - a place of pilgrimage, a place where life is seen as journeying.

The quality of pilgrimage began for me as we boarded the ferry at Oban. As we crossed to the Island of Mull there were geographical reminders, links in our family histories. Then followed a drive on a road typical of N.W.Scotland, sealed, but one way with passing bays, requiring a speedy learning of the skill of anticipating who should give way. We had a ferry to catch! Leaving behind our car (no visitors cars on Iona) we embarked on a brief ferry trip from Mull across to Iona, seeing the Abbey just as the pictures show, rising from the low, almost tree-less island.

Next morning a walk to the Machair (raised beach), which is common land overlooking the "Bay at the Back of the Ocean", made more real the arrival of Columba and his twelve monks at a nearby bay, "Turning the Bck to Ireland" and establishing a centre around the present site of the Abbey. From there, they conducted a mission to the Picts in the North, the Anglo-Saxons in Northumbria and throughout Europe.

Our afternoon trip in an open boat to the uninhabited island of Staffa in rough conditions with several passengers being sea-sick, made the prayers of the hardy sea-going, pastoral Celts for God's protection as they journeyed, take on a new relevance for me. In our time on Iona, each time I walked by Martyrs Bay, the scene of Viking raids, I was reminded that life and faith proceed through brutal times as well as peaceful.

Iona is a place of interconnectedness. And there is continuity in this place, where

"From year to year, from century to century,

in Celtic praise,

in Roman chant,

in hymns of latter days ..." [ ibid p52]

people have gathered to worship, to learn, to work and deepen their awareness of the Living God. As we explored the restored buildings, my attention was drawn particularly to the cloisters where the many capitals of the new columns have been carved with individual designs from nature. The interconnectedness of nature and the Spirit is shown in this way by twentieth century craftsmen. We who inhabit the islands of Aotearoa - New Zealand, also live close to the earth, sea and sky, often finding God in and through creation and the every day, ordinary things of life.

The heart of Iona is the Abbey worship. On two occasions I found myself seated in the choir seats gazing at the sturdy mellow stone wall opposite - a parable for me, seeing larger stones supported by smaller ones, each stone different in shape, placement, size and shade, yet each having its place in the whole. At Sunday morning worship, a large community-baked round flatish loaf and large pottery chalices of wine were processed in, as the table was made ready for the inclusive communion.

"Bread is blessed and broken

Wine is blessed and poured

.....

Here, for those who want Him -

Christ the Lord." [Love From Below, Vol.3 of Wild Goose Songs]

Christ was present to me at Iona and continues to be made real in what proceeds from the "Wild Goose" publications of the Iona Community. There are thousands of people throughout the world who are linked with Iona in some way.

Perhaps I shall return there one day,

Surely, I shall return in Spirit.

## IONA IMPRESSIONS

(1) Our first stop was at the Nunnery, once the home of a small community and now ruined for nearly three hundred years. It was a still, sparkling morning after rain at night and amongst what was left of golden stone walls was a beautiful garden. A gentle peaceful place.

We walked through the village and on past white stone cottages sitting square among the rocky landscape and Angels Hill, where the angels appeared to St. Columba as he was praying. Then we came to the Machair, a common grazing ground for the island. A wide sweep of smooth grass pinpointed with small wild flowers

with a glorious view over the Bay at the Back of the Ocean. So much sky, and that amazing luminous light.

George MacLeod said that Iona was one of the "thin places" where the line between the Kingdom and now, the past and the present, is blurred and you can sense them both. Up the hill to Loch Staoineig and down through the heather to Columba's Bay. We sat at the edge of the rocky beach and thought of the saint and his friends pulling their little coracle over the stones. Their beloved Ireland behind them - the unknown ahead. Unknown to them, but known to Christ the one who had led them on and was walking with them. I paddled in the chilly North Sea and was awed by the privilege of being in this place.

I was struck by the quote of a pilgrim to Jennifer Lash in her book "On Pilgrimage. A time to Seek" Bloomsbury 1998:

"To visit places that have inspired man from earliest times is to receive a little of the energy that has accumulated there .... and possibly add to it.

*by Janet McKinlay*

(2) I saw the ancient ruins of Iona Abbey restored by the faith and stubborn persistence of one man and his friends. A place of great beauty, of deep deep silence, and yet I was aware of a gigantic sound, unheard but present, surrounding us.

I saw a motley crew straggle in and out of boats to get there and become a warm community of faith in the five days we were there.

I saw hundreds of puffins ride cheerfully on a dark green, grey stormy sea, after a wet and choppy ride in a small boat to the Island of Staffa - More exciting and real than a perfect day.

For me, all these things were a reminder that God is truly in His creation.; that there is a reassuring continuity to our Christian faith; that there is a real discoverable unity to be found in other Christians who are strangers and that there is a strange comfort in disturbance.

*by Cath Trotter*

## **SAYINGS AND POEMS WITH A CELTIC THEME**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... All things came into being through him ... What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ... and the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory ... full of grace and truth.

*John 1:1 & 14. NRSV.*

God is love, and whoever lives in love lives in union with God and God lives in union with them.

*1 John 4:16*

This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us.

We too, then, ought to give our lives for each other!

*1 John 3:16*

Because of the Spirit that God has given us, we know that God lives in union with us.

*1 John 3:24*

Praise the Lord, my soul!

All my being praise his holy name!

*Psalms 103:1*

'I am the first and the last',  
says the Lord God Almighty,

who is,  
 who was,  
 who is to come.

*Revelation 1:8*

God is light, and there is no darkness at all in him.

*1 John 1:5*

GOD IS EVERYWHERE AND EVERYWHEN!

Jesus said,

I AM

- the bread of life.
- the light of the world.
- the gate.
- the good shepherd.
- the resurrection and the life.
- who I am.
- the way, the truth and the life.
- the real vine

Before Abraham was I AM!

A CELTIC RUNE OF HOSPITALITY:

We saw a stranger yesterday  
 We put food in the eating place,  
 Drink in the drinking place,  
 Music in the listening place,  
 And with the sacred name of the triune God  
 He blessed us and our house,  
 our cattle and our dear ones.  
 As the lark says in her song:  
 Often, often, often goes the Christ  
 In the stranger's guise.

A PRAYER:

I open my heart to Christ in the stranger,  
 To Christ in the guise of a colleague in anger  
 I open my heart to the one who is wounded,  
 To Christ in the hungry, the lonely, the homeless.

I will offer a generous heart to all.

*Acknowledgement: Ray Simpson - Exploring Celtic Spirituality.  
 Historic Roots for Our Future. Hodder - 1995.*

GOD IS FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT - TRINITY:

Three folds of the cloth, yet only one napkin is there,  
 Three joints in the finger, but only one finger fair  
 Three leaves of the shamrock, yet no more than one shamrock to wear,  
 Frost, snow-flakes and ice, all in water their origin share  
 Three Persons in God; to one God alone we make prayer.

*Hull. The Poem Book of the Gael. Chatto 1912.*

The sacred Three  
 To save,  
 To shield  
 To surround  
 The hearth  
 The house,  
 The household,  
 This eve,  
 This night,  
 Oh! this eve,  
 This night,  
 And every night,  
 Each single night.  
 Amen.

*Carmina Gadelica I. P.236-7*

The Three who are over my head,  
 The Three who are under my tread,  
 The three who are over me here,  
 The Three who are over me there,  
 The Three who are in the earth near,  
 The Three who are up in the air,  
 The Three who in heaven do dwell,  
 The Three in the great ocean swell,  
 Pervading Three, O be with me.

...

I lie down tonight,  
 With the Triune of my strength,  
 With the Father, with Jesus,  
 With the Spirit of might.

*Carmina Gadelica Floris Books 1992.*

A PRAYER FROM THE HEBRIDES:

God to enfold me,  
 God to surround me,  
 God in my speaking,  
 God in my thinking.

God in my sleeping,  
 God in my waking,  
 God in my watching,  
 God in my hoping.

God in my life,  
 God in my lips,  
 God in my soul,  
 God in my heart.

God in my sufficing,  
 God in my slumber,  
 God in my ever-living soul,  
 God in mine eternity.

*Carmina Gadelica 3/53*

Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
 Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
 Christ to seek me, Christ to win me,  
 Christ to comfort and restore me;  
 Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
 Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
 Christ sustaining all who love me,  
 Christ uniting friend and stranger!

I bind myself to God today,  
 the strong and holy Trinity,  
 to know his name and make him known,  
 the Three-in-One and One-in-Three;  
 From him all nature has creation.  
 eternal Father, Spirit, Word:  
 praise God, my strength and my salvation;  
 praise in the Spirit through Christ the Lord!

*From St Patrick's Breastplate. C.F. Alexander trans.*

Be thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;  
 Naught be all else to me, save that thou art,  
 Thou my best thought, by day or by night,  
 Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my battle-shield, sword for the fight;  
 Be thou my dignity, thou my delight,  
 Thou my soul's shelter, thou my high tower;  
 Raise thou me heaven-ward, O Power of my power.

*Ancient Irish. Trans. Mary Byrne 1880-1931.*

"Prayer becomes as natural as breathing. The material is shot through with the spiritual; there is a within-ness of God in all life. The whole earth is sacramental: everything is truly every blessed thing ..." *Ronald Ferguson. Chasing The Wild Goose. 1989.*

#### QUOTES FROM ESTHER DE WAAL:

The rediscovery of the Celtic world has been an extraordinary revelation for many Christians in recent years, an opening up of the depths and riches within our own tradition which many of us had not before suspected.

I'm taken back to early Christianity where I encounter something basic, primal, fundamental, universal before all divisions, party labels and denominational divisions.

We find a lay spirituality, a household religion in which praying is inseparable from an ordinary, daily working life.

I have been taken beyond the rational and intellectual and cerebral for this world touches the springs of my imagination (Cf Merton's "imagination is a discovering faculty").

As I prepare a meal or fix a door,  
 I encounter Christ of cup and saw.

*John Hunt. We Spirited People. P.63.*

As we have explored the various strands of the Celtic Church, we have done a lot of looking back. And yet as I have written this, I felt as if I were looking forward ... (to) the kind of church that is required to carry the gospel to the coming generations.

*Michael Mitton. Celtic Spirituality in the Lives of its Saints. p.147.*

Jesu MacMary, have mercy upon us;  
 Jesu MacMary, thy peace be upon us;  
 Where we shall longest be,  
 with us and for us be,  
 Amen, eternally.

Jesu MacMary, at dawn-tide, the flowing,  
 Jesu MacMary, at ebb-tide, the going;  
 When our first breath awakes,  
 Life's day when darkness takes,  
 Merciful God of all, mercy bestowing,  
 With us and for us be,  
 Merciful Deity,  
 Amen, eternally.

*McLean. 26.*

#### BEFORE PRAYER

The Father who created me  
 With eye benign beholdeth me;  
 The Son who dearly purchased me  
 With eye divine enfoldeth me;  
 The Spirit who so altered me  
 With eye refining holdeth me;  
 In friendliness and love the Three  
 Behold me when I bend the knee.

*McLean 52*

#### A CHILD'S PRAYER

As I lay me down to sleep  
 I pray thee Lord my soul to keep.  
 If I should die before I wake  
 I pray thee Lord my soul to take.

*Edith Henderson.*

#### GOING TO BED

I lie down this night with God,  
 And God will lie down with me;  
 I lie down this night with Christ,  
 And Christ will lie down with me;  
 I lie down this night with Spirit,  
 And the Spirit will lie down with me;  
 God and Christ and the Spirit  
 Be lying down with me.

*Carmichael. New Moon. 142.*

AFTER COMMUNION:

Leader:

Heaven is intertwined with earth. Alleluia!  
We have taken the divine life into ourselves.  
Alleluia!  
And so now each my say:

All:

I rise up clothed in the strength of Christ.  
I shall not be imprisoned, I shall not be harmed;  
I shall not be down-trodden, I shall not be left alone;  
I shall not be tainted, I shall not be overwhelmed.  
I go clothed in Christ's white garments;  
I go freed to weave Christ's patterns;  
I go loved to serve Christ's weak ones;  
I go armed to rout out Christ's foes.

Leader:

The saving streams from the pierced heart of Christ save you.  
The Sacred Three shield you from all ill-will;  
protect you from all that destroys;  
and lead you always along Christ's paths.  
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All: In the name of Christ. Amen.

*Ray Simpson. Celtic Worship Through The Year. Hodder 1997. P.80.*

THE PEACE

Deep peace, pure white of the moon to you.  
Deep peace, pure green of the grass to you.  
Deep peace, pure brown of the earth to you.  
Deep peace, pure grey of the dew to you.  
Deep peace, pure blue of the sky to you.  
Deep peace of the running wave to you.  
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.  
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.  
Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.

*Fiona MacLeod - 1855-1905.*

The Father crying  
The Son dying  
The Spirit sighing  
God for me.

The Father grieving  
The Son giving  
The Spirit living  
God for me.

The Father weeping  
The Son heaping  
The Spirit keeping  
God for me.

*Rodney Duncan*

The warmth of the sun  
- fill me with God's Love

The moistness of the rain  
- refresh me with Christ's new life

The freshness of the wind  
- blow through me, the presence of God's Spirit

*Ruth St. George*

Christ of love and life and laughter  
Christ of hope and healing peace  
Christ of family, faith and fellowship  
- be with me hour by hour

*Ruth St. George*

God of every bird and flower  
God of every seed and tree  
God of waves and hills and city  
God who made and loves both you and me.

*Ruth St. George*

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## **OF THINGS MUSICAL by Mark Stephenson, London**

Many commentators, both secular and Christian, have suggested that we are living in the post modern world. Despite the incredible technological progress of recent years, some are left with a sneaking suspicion that the 'modern way of life' is not all that it's cracked up to be. Progress, for all it's benefits, has not yielded answers for the questions that lie beyond the rational.

By way of a response to this modern nervousness or soul searching, there arises a desire to look back in the hope of finding something from the past that can help anchor our soul and sense of reality.

The resurgence of the fashion and music styles of the 70's is not just a cruel joke to force those of us less than trendy to rifle our wardrobes once again and be hip in the 90's. It's also a sign of that desire to look back and find some sense of stability through the clothing, music and even hair styles! And it doesn't just stop at the 70's. This looking back of the 90's touches more than fashion and styles. There is both a rise in a desire to search out cultural roots and a resurgence of interest in spiritual matters.

One of the areas where these dimensions come together is in music. And music with a Celtic influence or flavour has become extremely popular, not just in the United Kingdom, but all over the world - everywhere settlers from these fair shores landed. Many of Anglo-Saxon extraction have finally discovered that they do have a culture. And that culture has it's own musical distinctiveness, often closely related to it's spirituality. The gently flowing melodies with a dreamy, mystical edge. The stirring, multi-layered, percussive rhythms. The light and bright dance music. Irish and Scottish influences have certainly cracked the modern music

charts, and all these features have been captured and updated by artists such as Clannad, Enya, Capercaillie, Riverdance, and The Corrs, to name but a few.

This music offers something that touches the soul and the spirit in a way that strikes more than a musical chord. It is music that alludes to the cultural roots of various groups that make up the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Music has been an instrumental influence in affirming identity. It's 'OK to be Irish / Scottish / Welsh / English'. It's great to celebrate one's roots in the distinctive styles of one's music.

There is also an edge in this musical style that inspires response - to dance, to sing, to shout. My wife and I had been in London for 2 months when we had the opportunity to go to Riverdance. We expected the dance to inspire us, but were surprised at the variety and power in the music written for this event. During one particularly strident, militant instrumental piece, I have to confess to having been stirred. As a musician and a Christian, I encountered in this experience a glimpse of what could be possible in praise and worship. As the last chord sounded, we, along with a good majority of the crowd erupted not only in applause but in shouts of joy! For me, it was a declaring, victorious, celebrative shout! Yet this was a secular concert! There is something in this music.

Meantime, there has been a renewed interest in all aspects of Celtic Christianity. Perhaps for similar reasons, Christians have sought to look back at the early Christian era in these isles, in the hope of discovering something of their roots as well as rediscovering insights that will give light to today's Christian experience.

Celtic Christianity with it's heart for community rather than institutionalised religion, it's relationship with creation and the environment and the focus on a holistic approach to life and faith touches many Christians in the 90's. The musical expression related to this era and it's influence in modern music writing is continuing to grow.

Groups like Iona, Eden's Bridge, Maire Brennan [former singer with Clannad] are producing a mix of music styled in a more traditional Celtic vein as well as 'Celticising' more modern chorus's. Even New Zealand artists are getting in on the act. UK based Carolyn Stilwell along with the group Loose Goose have produced the 3 track CD Bird of Peace.

One can also hear features of Celtic style in music produced by other artists. Whether it's Jenny and Alex Legg with the track There is Love, This is Love on the True Stories album or English Christian band Delirious on their album Live and In the Can.

While it's not easy for many Christians in the UK to name any 'Celtic worship chorus' currently doing the rounds in their local church, there is no doubt that Celtic musical styles readily lend themselves to the free worship style. Those flowing, mystical type melodies or militant rhythms can often feature in times of extended worship. Therein may be another reason as to why Celtic Christian music has increased in popularity. It may be touching something of the heart of what God is doing in this day.

In their book Prophetic Lifestyle and the Celtic Way, Andy and Jane Fitz-Gibbon suggest that Celts were very prophetic people. They lived with a great sense of the presence of God with them at all times and that He communicated with them on a daily and very ordinary basis. In their book, they encourage Christians to consider the lessons that can be learnt from Celtic Christianity so as to be able to live on the cutting edge of hearing God and responding to His word.

Following the various movements in recent Church history, the times and anointings of the ways God has moved, there is now a sense that we are experiencing something of a prophetic anointing in the church at the moment with an increase in the awareness of the importance of hearing God and allowing the 'rhema' as well as the 'logos' to impact and shape our life and mission. It is into this anointing that the Celtic music style seems to fit philosophically so well.

Whether reflective and musing, or strident and militant, the strains of the Celtic music style are adding a new dimension to the praise and worship music in both the recording studio and the free worship of church gatherings. In the process, the hearts of the saints in the UK and Ireland are being touched on a number of

levels. The inspiration afforded by Celtic influence is releasing a style of music that not only impacts the church but lends itself to crossover into the secular music market - into the hunger in the heart of every man and woman. Music, including that with a Celtic flavour, is one of the creative channels by which God inspires and touches people redemptively today.

Prophetic Lifestyle and the Celtic Way, Andy and Jane Fitz-Gibbon,  
1997, Monarch Publications UK. [ISBN 1 85424 385 3]

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## BOOK REVIEWS

MODERN CELTIC PRAYERS - David Adam

*Reviewed by Neil Churcher*

I remember how excited I was when I first came across David Adam's books of Celtic prayers. I bought two - probably more than I could afford at the time - and carried them home with great anticipation.

I tried to devour them in the way of many other exciting books, but found that I could not. One, "The Cry of the Deer", was a book of meditations on the Hymn of St. Patrick. It would not be devoured. It had to be savoured, sipped and held on the tongue like a good wine. In the end, I took it on a retreat with me and made my way through the first two of its twelve rich sections, each complete with its prayer exercises.

Since then I've used David Adam's books both in personal prayer and in liturgies and continue to find them rewarding.

David Adam is Vicar of Holy Island and is one of those who have reawakened many people to the value of the circling rhythms of Celtic prayer. Other titles are "The Edge of Glory", "Tides and Seasons", "Modern prayers in the Celtic tradition", "The Eye of the Eagle", Meditations on the hymn "Be thou my vision", and "Power Lines: Celtic Prayers about work".

Possibly the greatest benefit I've found from these books is that they have helped me move away from others' writing to create my own prayers and to live in the certainty of the Presence as I pray.

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WE SPIRITED PEOPLE by John Hunt

*Reviewed by Barbara Sampson*

In the midst of a surge of interest in Celtic Spirituality, John Hunt's book 'We Spirited People' offers a refreshingly New Zealand perspective on the topic.

His approach is grounded in Celtic Spirituality - the vision that the earth and people are good and filled with God's love. The daily reflections are earthed in this familiar landscape. We visit the corner grocer, smell the thermette boiling over a driftwood fire, play games of 500, watch the glory of a sunset, learn to deal with oxalis, stand around the piano and sing. Connections are made with our roots, and those who arrived here before us from the other side of the world.

In this collection of morning and evening reflections, John Hunt takes us into his own life and experience through simple yet moving stories. Stories at times deeply personal. Stories about pain and struggle, birth and celebration, death and sorrow.

He writes with a warm transparency. At the age of four he was hospitalised and forcibly separated from his comforter, and then from his parents because of an epidemic outbreak. Unable to see his parents for a month, this 'brave and good boy' did not cry, but when he was discharged from hospital he took a stutter home with him. That problem dogged him for the next 20 years; the fear of rejection and abandonment remain with him even now.

It is into such personal brokenness and fragile self-worth that Celtic Spirituality has breathed nurture and

wholeness for the author.

Our stories are different, and yet there are connections here that we recognise, common ground which we all share. John Hunt weaves together in a natural way the threads of his own experience, the common experiences of us all, insights from the Celtic tradition, good words from the Scripture and couplets for our heart.

This is no armchair theology with high-sounding phrases and expressions. This is down to earth, simple, clearly focused spirituality that gives prayerful attention to the created world all around us and helps us discover God in the midst of the ordinary. This is robust belief and trust that nurtures the spirit, sustains us through the struggles and hard times, and helps us to stand tall.

John Hunt is a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, serving in St Giles, Christchurch. He is in demand to lead seminars and retreats on Celtic Spirituality throughout New Zealand, and will be a welcome guest at our ACSD training event in Wellington in September.

THE PATTERN OF OUR DAYS : LITURGIES AND RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP - Kathy Galloway (Ed) , Wild Goose Publications, 1996

CLOUDS & GLORY: PRAYERS FOR THE CHURCH YEAR (YEAR A)  
S.P.C.K 1998 - David Adam

*Reviewed by Warren Deason*

Two books coming from men & women grounded and nourished by the Celtic spiritual tradition. The first of these, edited by Kathy Galloway, comes from the Iona Christian community. It offers both a collection of liturgies, which occupies about half the book, and a collection of other resources for worship. This is an extremely imaginative collection and fulfills well the editor's concern that our worship be both creative and engaging. In fact, in your haste to get to the resources, you shouldn't overlook the little three and a one half page essay on worship by the editor which prefaces the collection.

The liturgies include services that acknowledge the varying paths in our spiritual journey; that offer healing; that help us stand prophetically for justice and that remind us that Christ's community is a place of refuge and enlightenment. The liturgy for economic justice brings a remarkably appropriate challenge to current NZ economic policy. It includes some words from George MacLeod, founder of the Iona community, written some fifty years ago about "the money boys who run our world". If you've read the recent book by NZ political writer Bruce Jesson, "Only their purpose is mad" which is subtitled "The money men take over NZ", you'll see a chilling relevance.

The section of resources gathers the prayers and reflections under nine headings; beginnings and endings of worship; short prayers; prayers for forgiveness; words of faith; thanksgiving; concern; litanies and responses; cursing and blessings; and reflections, readings, meditations. There are some gems here. Try -

"This day" (p119); :This day you will be with me in Paradise. Who, me Lord?. Not me. I am a thief. I've stolen ladies' handbags, young girls' virginity. I've diddled the books and sold arms to Africa ..."

"Birth" (p128): to be heavy with hope, to carry the weight of the future, to anticipate with joy, to withdraw with fear until the pain overcomes, the waters break, and the light of the world is crowned".

and "Thomas (p146) Stroke the cheek Thomas of the little girl sold in prostitution in Thailand. Touch Thomas the gaping wounds of my world ..."

As you can see the, the language and imagery are often sharp, punchy and earthy. Some modern liturgy, while trying to be relevant and contemporary, ends up being pretentious, but there is little sign of that in this collection. The writers genuinely attempt to help us see who we really are, recognising both our potential for good and our limitations and our brokenness and encourage us to respond to a God who "meets us out there on

the borders as much as in what is familiar and reassuring".

I looked forward to David Adam's collection of prayers having read most of his other collections of prayers and reflections from the Celtic tradition. The title "Clouds and Glory" itself raises in the reader an anticipation of the Celtic imagery that had been so much part of his other work. But I was disappointed. Perhaps reading it alongside the Iona collection didn't help. Adam's book lacked the sharp, evocative and enticing language and imagery that was a feature of the other selection. Most of the prayers are intercessory and are ordered according to the church year and inspired in some degree by the appropriate lectionary readings. Nothing at all wrong about that but they could have come from any collection of resources for worship rather than being inspired by the Celtic way as the title leads the reader to expect. A reasonable resource to add to your collection but you might already have similar material from other sources.

### KNOWING THE TOUCH OF JESUS

Author / Illustrator : Christine A. Hattle

Available from the Author : PO Box 4228, Palmerston North and from Pleroma Christian Supplies Price: \$23.95

*Reviewed by Ruth Rosser*

An attractively presented book of 20 reflections each with:

- a pencil drawing, cartoon or photograph
- a prayer reflection
- suggested scripture passage(s) for meditation / reflection

The Author shares her exploration of some of the many ways God touches our lives and reveals his presence with us on the journey.

In times of celebration, shadow, wilderness, certainty or change, Jesus is there giving life, showing compassion, cleansing, providing, welcoming, beckoning us to follow.

Ideas are given for using the book and there are suggested questions for personal reflection.

THE CELTIC WAY OF PRAYER (The Recovery of the Religious Imagination) Esther de Waal, Hodder & Stoughton 1996

CELTIC LIGHT (A Tradition Rediscovered) - Esther de Waal

Fount paperbacks 1997. Previously published as A World Made Whole 1991

*Reviewed by Clarice Greenslade*

Esther de Waal grew up and currently lives and writes in the Welsh Borders. Consequently her work is rich in extracts from early Welsh Celtic writings as well as from the more familiar Scottish and Irish sources.

It is a scholarly work - original, carefully researched and footnoted, and never giving in to the quite common tendency to "sentimentalise and sanitise" the Celtic world. So her work never minimises those aspects which are less attractive to us today - the awareness of dark forces, the strong emphasis on sin, the asceticism. There is a faithfulness and integrity about de Waal's work which does not come to the Celtic world with its own agendas.

However this does not mean for a moment that these books are dour and dull. They are extremely readable. The style is lively and engaging, and de Waal has a particular gift for making clear memorable summary statements:-

"a religion which did not call men and women out of their environment but redeemed them within it ..."

" prayer was not a formal exercise, it was a state of mind ..."

" this is a Christianity of the laity ..."

" never ... any denial of the brokenness of the world ..."

" a corporate and shared spirituality ..."

" a God whose all-inclusive love allows everything the freedom to be itself, and yet also brings all together into one whole ..."

Another attractive quality of de Waal's work is the way in which the humility of her stance is in contrast to the confidence of her scholarship. She does not approach Celtic spirituality as an expert but as a pilgrim, acknowledging time and again how much and how needfully she is learning from it. Her obvious love of it and indebtedness to it gives a warm and personal tone to her work.

De Waal's books often let the Celtic world speak for itself. They are simply packed with its writings - prayers, poems, songs, stories; while de Waal's contribution is to make them more accessible to us in our very different world with its very different world-view.

Although there is inevitable overlap between the two books I would have been very sorry not to read both. Each contains much material not in the other, and their themes "a world made whole" and "the recovery of the religious imagination" are looking at the material from quite different angles, both of them I believe, aspects of spirituality which, whether consciously or not, we are simply longing for in our modern world.

These are books which I have greatly enjoyed, and greatly value.

## **BOOKS IN BRIEF**

All the books of prayers and meditations by David Adam are a rich resource. His latest is *Clouds And Glory* - prayers for the Church Year. Year A. S.P.C.K. 1998

*Celtic Art in Pagan and Christian Times* - J. Romilly Allen. Senate 1997

*The Celtic Way* - Ian Bradley. DLT 1993

*Columba - Pilgrim & Penitent* - Ian Bradley. Wild Goose. 1996

*Carmina Gadelica* - Alexander Carmichael. Originally 6 volumes published between 1900 and 1961; now available in full in 3 volumes.

*New Moon Of The Seasons - Prayers From The Highlands and Islands*. Collected and translated by Alexander Carmichael. Selected for this Floris Books edition by Michael Jones. 1992

*What Is Celtic Christianity?* - Elizabeth Culling. Spirituality Series No.45. 1993

*We Spirited People* - a personal enriching and uniquely New Zealand guide in Celtic Spirituality. John Hunt. Caxton Press. 1998

*Praying with Celtic Christians* - George McLean. Triangle PB. 1996

*Listening For The Heartbeat of God - A Celtic Spirituality*. J.Philip Newell. Paulist Press. 1997

*Celtic Crosses of Britain and Ireland* - Malcolm Seabourne. Shire Publications 1994

*Wisdom of the Celtic Saints* - Edward Sellner. Ave Maria Press. 1993

*Living Between Worlds; Place and Journey in Celtic Spirituality* - Philip Sheldrake. Cowley Publications.

1995

A World Made Whole - Rediscovering The Celtic Tradition - Esther de Waal. Fount PB. 1991

The Celtic Way of Prayer- The Recovery of the Religious Imagination - Esther de Waal. Hodder PB. 1996

A Celtic Resurrection - The Diary of a Split from the Church - Robert Van De Weyer. Fount PB. 1996

The Celts - Artists and Storytellers - Quantum Books. 1998

Celtic Christianity in Early Medieval Wales - The origins of the Welsh Spiritual Tradition - Oliver Davies. 1996

Celtic Christian Spirituality: An anthology of Medieval and Modern Sources - Edited by Oliver Davies and Fiona Bowie.

Celtic Christianity: a Sacred Tradition, a Vision of Hope - Timothy Joyce

The Soul of Celtic Spirituality In The Lives Of Its Saints - Michael Mitton  
23rd Publication 1996. Also published in Britain as Restoring The Woven Cord

Exploring Celtic Spirituality - Historic Roots For Our Future Ray Simpson. Hodder 1995

Celtic Worship Through The Year - Ray Simpson. Hodder PB. 1997

Celtic Daily Light - Ray Simpson. Hodder PB. 1998

Celtic Blessings for Everyday Life - Prayers for Every Occasion - Ray Simpson

Celtic Insights Into Spiritual Mentoring - Ray Simpson Hodder PB. July 1999

The Wild Spirit - Russ Parker. Triangle PB. 1997

Resources Website for a wide range of devotional aids and prayers, theological papers and books:

[www.ndirect.co.uk/raysimpson/Pages/resources.html](http://www.ndirect.co.uk/raysimpson/Pages/resources.html)

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## **CELTIC SERVICES IN NEW ZEALAND**

Rotorua: St John's Presbyterian Church, 3 Services on Sunday 10 October

Wellington:

Ngaio Union Church on 3rd Sunday of the month. 7.30pm

St.Peters Anglican Church, Willis Street 4th Sunday of the month (except Dec & Jan)

Christchurch:

St Giles Presbyterian Church, Papanui weekly at 7pm.

St Marys Anglican Church, Addington, 3rd Sunday of the month 7pm (except Dec)

Christchurch Cathedral, Lunch Hour Eucharist. Weds 12.05

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