

# Celtic Spirituality



## **My Journey with the Celtic Saints<sup>1</sup>**

My story begins in a little Anglican parish in the county of Essex, not far from the new town of Basildon. The name of the parish is Great Burstead; it is wholly unremarkable, and now a couple of hundred yards from the main road between Chelmsford and Tilbury, just south of Billericay. When I was at junior school, I embarked on a local history project, looking at the origins of the church, the buildings of which date back to the Norman period. But I found that this was not the first building on the site. I had vague memories from my project of reading of a saint who came and blessed the well by the church, being the founder of the parish.

A few weeks ago I was back in the parish for a family re-union; I went to morning communion, and picked up the church's guidebook. On the first page, I was excited to read the full facts about what I had only vaguely remembered. That there had indeed been a saint, named Cedd, who had come from Lindisfarne, Holy Island, then in the northern Kingdom of Northumbria, had become evangelist to the East Saxons, and Bishop of London, and had blessed the well next to the church, and in 653 had erected a station cross there to preach at, there not being a building there until 680ad. Cedd had also founded an abbey at Bradwell, about twenty miles away to the east, on the wild Essex marshes, and another on the banks of the Thames at East Tilbury.

The other day I was reading a local history of the area around Loch Tay, and Cedd's name came up again, connected with the local fair on August 21<sup>st</sup> at Fortingall, near Aberfeldy. So how on earth does a man living in seventh century Strath Tay come to have his name linked both to the great cradle of English Christianity, Lindisfarne, and to the history of an obscure Essex parish? The answer lies in the zeal of the original church in these islands.

In 1976, I went for the first time to Holy Island, by accident; I was feeling very down, things were not going well with relationships at university, and I turned down the offer of rugby international tickets to go away on my own for a day. I chose Berwick, but there wasn't much I wanted to do there. As I came up the market place, there was a little United bus sitting in the bus station, with the words Holy Island on the destination blind. I asked the driver what was at Holy Island, and he suggested I come aboard for the trip. It was to change my life.

Just off the island is a smaller island, called Hobthrus, and on it the ruins of an old chapel. I went and sat here, before the wooden cross, and God met me amidst the sea and the wind on that March day. When I went back into St Mary's Church, I discovered the origins of the chapel; it had been Aidan and Cuthbert's prayer cell, the place where they retired to pray, so that the high tide around them would enclose them from the pressures and needs of the people who came for the miracles they were known for.

## ***What Is the Celtic Church?***

Some historians dispute the idea that we can actually talk about a Celtic Church. It wasn't an homogeneous organisation; more a movement, or a culture. The term is used to describe the earliest native form of Christianity in the islands of Britain and Ireland, extending to the Celtic region of Brittany in France; it dates from the time of the leaving of the Romans around 400ad up to the amalgamation of the Celtic stream with the Roman Catholic church after the Synod of Whitby in 664ad. The Celtic Church continued to exist after this time, in Scotland and Ireland,

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<sup>1</sup> Colin Symes, Edinburgh. Presented at the Edge of Glory Conference, Stronghold for Men, June 2003, notes © Colin Symes and used by permission.

but in a weakened form, and was finally disbanded, in Scotland at least, by Queen Margaret around 1080ad.

## ***Why Does It Have Significance Today?***

The Celtic Church established itself as the most successful evangelistic movement Britain has ever seen. During a period of history when these islands were subjected to constant invasion, petty wars, and tribal feuds, the Celtic saints saw the gospel spread from Ireland, through Wales, Scotland, and England, reaching as far south as Tilbury on the Thames.

The Celtic evangelists faced powerful occult and pagan opposition, and backed up the preaching of the gospel with prayer for healing and signs and wonders. The renewal of interest in the Celtic Church is sourced in the need to learn from their indigenous spirituality and their powerful evangelistic zeal.

## ***Where Did This All Start ?***

The Celtic Church traced its roots back to the Desert Fathers in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire.

After the adoption of Christianity as the state religion by Emperor Constantine in 318ad, the institutional Church deteriorated rapidly, with political wrangles and power struggles rife on every side. A number of radical Christian believers rejected this watering down of the gospel, and 'dropped out' of official religion. They went into desert places, where they battled in prayer, fasted and formed communities of like-minded people. Whilst some of these people were extremist in their practices, there were many shining examples of faith among them. They tended to look back to the Apostle John as their inspiration, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and the visionary of Revelation.

**St Anthony (b251)** is a good example of the Desert Fathers; he spent nine years in hermitage, battling demonic attacks, and then emerged into a powerful healing and miracle ministry. His biography was written in the late 300's ad by Bishop Athanasius. Men and women like Anthony were the models for the Celtic church, and there was a strong link between east and west because of this, and a strong continuity with the radical Christianity of the Early Church. The Desert Fathers and Mothers formed themselves into communities, not under one common rule, but living separate monastic lives, coming together for worship, and sometimes for trade purposes, such as their basket weaving enterprises. The first monk to develop a community of some size was **Pachomius** in 323, in Egypt.

This model of monastic community was adopted by **St Martin of Tours** in Gaul about 360ad; to the concept of community he also added study and mission. And it was this monastery which so affected possibly the earliest Celtic missionary to Scotland, **Ninian (d.432)** who established a community at Whithorn, named in honour of St Martin, who died in 397. From this base, Ninian began to cover the south of modern Scotland and northern England, going among the Celtic tribe of the Picts (Cruithen). In Wales, the monastic movement found expression through the establishment by **St Illtyd** around the late 400s of the great school of Llanilltyd Fawr) Llantwit Major, which began to send missionaries out to Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany. Illtyd himself came from Brittany (Armorica), and was part of the language family of the Welsh which included British, and which spread as far as Lothian in the north and Brittany itself. From his monastery came men like **David of Wales** and **St Samson of Dol**

## **PATRICK'S BREASTPLATE**

I bind unto myself today  
The strong Name of the Trinity,  
By invocation of the same,  
The Three-in-One and One-in -Three.

I bind this day to me forever,

By power of faith, Christ's incarnation,  
His baptism in the Jordan river,  
His death on cross for my salvation;  
His bursting from the spiced tomb,  
His riding up the heav'nly way,  
His coming at the day of doom  
I bind unto myself today.

I bind unto myself today  
The virtues of the star-lit heaven,  
The glorious sun's life-giving ray,  
The whiteness of the moon at even,  
The flashing of the lightning free,  
The whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,  
The stable earth, the deep, salt sea  
Around the old, eternal rocks.

I bind unto myself today  
The power of God to hold and lead,  
His eye to watch, His might to stay,  
His ear to hearken to my need,  
The wisdom of my God to teach,  
His hand to guide, His shield to ward,  
The Word of God to give me speech,  
His heavenly host to be my guard

Against all Satan's charms and wiles,  
Against false words of heresy,  
Against the knowledge that defiles,  
Against the heart's idolatry,  
Against the wizard's evil craft,  
Against the death wound and the burning,

The choking wave, the poisoned shaft,  
Protect me Christ, 'til Thy returning.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me;  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself today  
The strong Name of the Trinity,  
By invocation of the same,  
The Three-in-One and One-in -Three,  
From whom all nature hath creation,  
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word,  
Praise to the Lord of my Salvation;  
Salvation is of Christ the Lord.

*A Carmichael; from 8<sup>th</sup> Century 'St Patrick's  
breastplate'*

**Patrick** was a Briton, who was captured from his home by Irish marauders, after the end of the Roman occupation, around 410ad. He was from a Christian family, but came to Christ during his enforced exile. Being called back to the land of his captivity, after studying under Bishop Germanus in Gaul, at Auxerre or at Lerins, he set up a community first at Sabhal (the Barn) on the shores of Strangford Loch, in 432ad, reaching out to the political powers of Ireland with the good news of Christ. By the time of his death in 461ad, Ireland had been reached, and many new monastic communities were set up, at Clonard, Armagh, Derry, Durrow, Clonmahois, Clonfert and so on, giving rise to a whole host of Irish evangelists, many of whom also came to these shores.

**Columba**, was one of them; an Irish prince of Clan Connail, originally called the Fox, Crithmann, he had to leave Ireland under a cloud after a battle he had caused over an illegal copy of a book he had made. Books were precious in those times, and added to the prestige of a monastery, like great works of art have always done. Being exiled away from Ireland, he led many in Scotland to Christ, and founded the abbey of **Iona** as his headquarters; from here he evangelised the Scots, Irish incomers who had settled in the west of Scotland, and the northern Picts, based in Inverness, with the help of others such as St Cainneach (St Kenneth) who is also remembered locally in St Andrews in the Strath Kinness, perhaps, the burn of Kenneth.

### **ADIUTOR LABORANTIUM**

O help of the labourer, O King of all good,  
Who lifts up the lowly, and brings low the proud,  
My guard on the ramparts, defender most sure,  
Who, opposing all evil, keeps the faithful secure;

O Judge of all judges, chastising the stray,  
Great Father of lights, pure and life-giving way,  
Illumined with splendour, my hope's constant spring,  
My help and my strength, hear the prayer that I bring;

Though tiny and trembling and wretched I come,  
As I row through this age's dark, infinite storm,  
May Christ draw me with Him to His haven of peace,

Where He reigns, and the strains of His praise never cease.

So released from the bondage and thrall of the foe,  
At the last, to your bright paradise I shall go;  
Jesus Christ, hear the song I now gladly sing  
Through Your name, ever living, ever reigning King.

*Tune; Irish trad; 'She Walked Through the Fair'*  
*Words adapted by Colin Symes 1997 (1400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Columba's Death)*

*Latin original;*

*Adiutor laborantium,  
Bonorum rector omnium,  
Custos ad propugnaculum,  
Defensorque credentium,  
Exaltator humilium,  
Fractor superbientium,  
Gubernator fidelium,  
Hostis impenitentium,  
Index cunctorum iudicum,  
Castigator errantium,  
Costa vita viventium,  
Lumen et pater luminum,  
Magna luce lucentium,  
Nulli negans sperantium,  
Opem atque auxilium,  
Precor ut me homunculum,  
Quassatum ac miserrimum,  
Remigantem per tumultum  
Saeculi istius infinitum  
Trahat post se ad supernum  
Vitae portum pulcherimum  
Xristus;... infinitum  
Ymnum sanctum in seculum  
Zelo subtrahas hostium  
Paradisi in gaudium.  
Per te, Christe Ihesu,  
Qui vivis at regnas.*

*O helper of workers,  
ruler of all the good,  
guard on the ramparts  
and defender of the faithful,  
who lift up the lowly  
and crush the proud,  
ruler of the faithful,  
enemy of the impenitent,  
judge of all judges,  
who punish those who err,  
pure life of the living,  
light and Father of lights  
shining with great light,  
denying to none of the hopeful  
your strength and help,  
I beg that me, a little man  
trembling and most wretched,  
rowing through the infinite storm  
of this age,  
Christ may draw after Him to the lofty  
most beautiful haven of life  
... an unending  
holy hymn forever.  
From the envy of enemies you lead me  
into the joy of paradise.  
Through you, Christ Jesus,  
who live and reig*

From Iona came **Aidan** at the request of the Northumbrian king, Oswald, who had grown up on Iona and found faith there. He founded the mirror-image of Iona on the east coast, on the Holy Island of **Lindisfarne**, and from there the whole of England and southern Scotland was evangelised by men such as **Cuthbert**, **Cedd** and **Chad**.

**Cuthbert** is a personal hero of mine; born around 634, just as Aidan came from Iona, he was a shepherd who was called to be a monk after a vision of Aidan. He was at first a tireless evangelist, going where others wouldn't go - including to the newly conquered city of Edinburgh (it had been captured by Oswald in 638 and taken into the Northumbrian Kingdom, and given the name of Edwin, his uncle, first Christian King of N'umbria). But Cuthbert tired of people's need, and longed to go into hermitage, which he did in 676, on the island of Farne. Then in 685, a new primate, Theodore of Tarsus called him as bishop, and he had to leave his island home to go back to work for his last two years. His memory became revered, and his healing gift outlived him, as many came to his tomb and received healing - eventually he was buried in Durham. Here is a song of Cuthbert, reflecting the battle he has as he tries to reconcile God's call with his own desire for peace and solitude.

## Song of Cuthbert

Now full nine years my prayers ascend  
'Mid howl of wind and sea,  
And on this island I have dwelt  
From mainland cares set free,  
But now has come the King with men,  
To beg me to return again -  
They want me to go back with them,  
Their bishop for to be.

A shepherd lad was I on northern hills  
In days gone by  
'Til I beheld a vision all majestic  
In yon' sky  
Of angels bearing Aidan's ghost  
To where Christ is the waiting Host  
And there I heard my calling first,  
To Mailros then went I.

In study for the Master  
Many hours I did spend,  
And preaching in rude villages  
His Spirit oft me sent,  
Great wonders in me did perform  
Of healing sick and calming storm,  
And yet more in my heart I yearned

My Master to befriend.  
In prophecy the abbot told  
That in me would a gift unfold,  
And ere I should be very old  
A bishop I would be...

But tired of the pilgrims who came  
Flocking to my door,  
I took a boat, and rowed me far away,  
Here to Farne's shore,  
And nine years I have watched and prayed,  
With seals and seabirds I have played,  
With no man's voice my peace to invade,  
But this may be no more.

Now full nine years my holy mountain  
Has this island been,  
And though I would give all  
Upon this island to remain,  
Yet God would have me do His word,  
As from that man of God I heard;  
Goodbye to sea, wind, isle and bird,  
A bishop I must be.

*© Colin Symes 1995*

Further afield, **Columbanus**, an Irish monk, got into his coracle and founded Celtic monasteries in France, at **Luxeuil**, and in Italy at **Bobbio**, to which in a later century St Francis of Assisi came to be influenced so profoundly by the Celtic attitude to creation. And the voyage of **Brendan** with his companions has become legendary with its discovery of far nations, and its evangelistic zeal.

In the far east of Czech republic is a town called Modra, and in Modra are the foundations of a church which is modelled on the church at Glendalough in Ireland; the Iro-Scottish monks got that far!

## *So It's All Men, Then ?*

Not at all ! Women held a high place in Celtic communities; among them, some of the most well known in the British Isles were **Brigid of Kildare**, who famously had the consecration service of a bishop spoken over her in error, and who was known for hospitality; **Ebba**, sister of Oswald, after whom St Abb's Head in Berwickshire is named, and who oversaw the men and women of the Coldingham communities, and **Abbess Hild**, who acted as the hostess of the great Synod of Whitby in 664ad.

Hild is connected also with the first hymn writer in the English language **Caedmon**. ; he was a cowherd who loved music, but was tone deaf. However, one night, he had a vision of a man standing before him saying, 'Sing for me' When Caedmon protested, the vision told him to sing of the creation of the world, and he began to sing a beautiful song, which was still with him when he woke; he sang it for Hild, and then went on singing, singing the Scriptures in the English language for the first time.

## CAEDMON'S HYMN (In Old English)

Nu sculon herian heofon-rices Weard,  
Metodes meahta and his mod-geþanc,  
weorc Wuldor-Fæder, swa he wundra  
gehwæs,  
ece Dryhten, or astealde.  
He ærest scop ielda bearnum  
heofon to hrofe, halig Scieppend.  
Þa middan-geard mann-cynnes Weard,  
ece Dryhten, æfter teode  
firum foldan, Frea ælmihtig.

Now we must praise the kingdom of  
heaven's guardian  
The might of the Creator and his purpose,  
The work of the Father of Glory as he of  
each miracle,  
Eternal Lord, established the beginning.  
He first created for the sons of the earth  
Heaven as a roof, holy Creator.  
The middle earth, mankind's guardian,  
Eternal Lord, afterwards adorned  
The earth with people, the Lord Almighty.

Another surviving work of the Northumbrian period is the Dream of the Rood, or Cross, written, some say by Caedmon, but others say by those who followed him in his school. It reflects also the tremendous devotion to the cross which sprang up in the seventh century, resulting in many preaching crosses being erected. One fascinating thing about poem of praise is that fragments of it are actually incised in runes onto the standing cross in the church at Ruthwell, near Annan, on the Solway Firth. Here are a few lines from it, to give you the feel of it;

Warriors carried me there on their shoulders, until they set me upon a hill;  
many foes fastened me there. Then I saw the Lord of mankind  
hastening with great zeal, wishing to mount me.  
There I durst not then bow nor burst  
at the Lord's word, when I saw earth  
trembling. I might have  
felled all foes, but I stood firm.  
There disrobed the young hero --that was God almighty--  
40 strong and unflinching, and stepped up on the gallows,  
brave in the sight of many, for he would redeem mankind.  
I trembled as the man embraced me; neither durst I bend down to the earth,  
to fall to the ground. But I had to stand fast.  
As a cross I was raised; I bore up the mighty King,  
Lord of the heavens; I dared not bow down.  
They drove me through with dark nails: upon me the marks can be seen,  
open wounds of malice; neither dared I injure any.  
They mocked us both together. I was all stained with blood,  
flowing from that man's side after he had yielded up his spirit.  
Much I endured on that mount  
of cruel fate. I saw the God of hosts  
horribly racked. Shades of night  
had clouded over the body of the Lord,  
that bright radiance; shades went forth,  
dark under the sky. All creation wept,  
mourning the fall of the king; it was Christ on that cross.

*Adapted by Colin Symes 2003*

# ***What are the Celtic Church's Distinctives ?***

## **Organisation**

The Celtic Church was not an organisational hierarchy, unlike the Roman Catholic Church; because of this, some historians have doubted whether we can even talk about a homogeneous *Celtic Church*, since it had no central control. However, it's clear to see a line of descent from Ninian through Patrick and Columba to Aidan and the Evangelists of Lindisfarne, even though there may be differences in practice as the church adapted to different cultural patterns around it.

## **Communities**

The Celtic Church had no parish system. Instead, believers gathered into communities, usually around leading teachers and gifted men, such as Columba, Aidan and Illtud of Wales. A common term for these communities was *muinntir* (pronounced *mine-cheer*), meaning people of an extended family, with their leader being called the *Ab* or father (as later, Abbot).

As well as the monks and nuns of these communities, bishops were appointed, to oversee the spiritual welfare of the Church. But they were not seen as princes of the Church; rather, they were seen as servants, known for their humility and self-sacrifice. And when they were in the community, they were subject to the *Ab*, as the rest were.

Members of a *muinntir* were encouraged to form close relationships with someone to whom they could be accountable and with whom they could pray and share their hearts; these were known as *anam-chara* (*soul-friend*), and gave great strength to the communities. Thomas Cahill gives this kind of relationship as the origin of private confession which spread throughout the RC church, the tradition up until then having been to publicly confess and be shamed.

Both marriage and celibacy were held in high esteem, and members of communities were encouraged in their giftings.

## **Prayer and Fasting**

The power-house of the Celtic Church and mission was their commitment to a life of prayer and fasting. The written prayers we have from their era indicate a strong devotion to the Trinity and a constant invocation of God's powerful presence.

Spiritual warfare was a constant reality for them, and often men and women would devote themselves to long times of prayer, even years, as in the case of Cuthbert's nine years on the Isle of Farne.

*Contemplative prayer* was a common experience among Celtic believers; that is, prayer which *listened*, which *waited for God* rather than constantly bringing requests to Him.

*Fasting* was regularly practised twice a week, on Wednesday and Friday, from rising until the afternoon prayertime (about three o'clock). This became so much a part of their lifestyle, that in the Scots Gaelic language, the words for Wednesday and Friday are still *Diciadaoin* (Day of the First Fast) and *Dihaoine* (Fast Day), with Thursday being *Diardaoin* (Day Between Fasts) !

However, there was no great legalism attached to the practice, which was broken if guests were being entertained or if physical need required.

This lifestyle, then, was the source and engine of the dynamic outreach which the Celtic Church undertook.

## Evangelism

The Celtic mission was unstoppable in its zeal and fervour; monks would travel, on foot, or across seas in small leather coracles, to find those who had not yet heard the good news of Jesus Christ. They preached to Kings and Chieftains without fear, and saw them turn to Christ, and open the doors for the gospel to their peoples. ( At Bamburgh, in Northumbria, King Oswald translated into Anglo-Saxon for the Gaelic-speaking Aidan when he first arrived from Iona.)

The missionaries were not just preaching, either, but powerfully demonstrating, often against pagan occult powers, the authority of Jesus' name. So at the court of King Brude of the Picts, near Inverness, Columba was pitted against the evil druid Briochan, who called up a storm to engulf Columba's boat; Columba showed God's power by sailing into the storm and through it, convincing the onlookers of the power of God to deliver His people.

In Brittany, Bishop Samson came across a group of peasants dancing around a pagan standing stone; he warned them of the dangers, and was laughed at until a young boy was thrown from a horse, seriously injured. Samson prayed for the boy and saw him healed, and then proceeded to carve a cross into the standing stone, to mark Christ's victory at the place !

By the time the founder of the Roman mission abbey at Canterbury, Augustine, arrived in 597ad, the year Columba died, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall and Brittany had been reached by the Celtic mission, and by the middle of the seventh century, the Lindisfarne base had sent out Cuthbert to Northumbria, Chad to the Midlands, and Cedd to East Anglia, with his base at *Othona* (Bradwell-on-Sea in Essex, where Cedd's original building still stands ) and a house at Tilbury, looking across the river Thames to Kent, base of the Roman mission!

## Spiritual Gifts

The Celtic Church was no stranger to God's supernatural intervention. Prophecy, healing, angelic visitations, words of knowledge and wisdom and miracles were all seen as part of God's economy, especially in a society where evil supernatural powers were also at work.

The Celtic Church adopted the *Wild Goose ( An Geadh-Glas)* as their symbol of the Holy Spirit, a motif which can be seen in much of their art work. Patrick experienced the reality of the Holy Spirit praying in him, as he relates in his *Confession*.

*'On yet another occasion I saw a person praying in me. I was as if seemed inside my body and I heard him over me, that is, over the inner man. There he was, praying with great emotion. All this time I was puzzled as I wondered greatly who could possibly be praying inside me. He spoke, however, at the end of the prayer, saying that He was the Spirit. When I awoke, I recalled the words of the apostle; the Spirit comes to help our inadequacy at prayer. For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our plea with great emotion in a way that cannot be put into words. Again; the Lord who is our advocate expresses our plea.'*

In addition, the Celtic church believed that echoes of Godliness and divine power survived the saints, and thus miracles were seen at places and graves connected with wonder-workers such as Cuthbert, after their lifetime.

## Creation as Sacrament

Because the Celtic Church had not been infected with a dualistic outlook on creation, they did not see matter as evil, nor the spiritual world as divorced from the material. Thus, they looked on Creation around them as one great hymn of praise to its Creator, reflecting His nature and character, whilst not actually being God itself.



Because the Celtic believers lived in a rural world, life was lived in **rhythm with creation** and was made up of work, worship and rest, with everything cloaked in prayer. Thus, many Celtic prayers are associated with simple events such as rising in the morning, lying down at night, cleaning a hearth or baking bread. You get this insight particularly at Holy Island, where life is lived in harmony with the rhythm of the tides, and all activity has to be undertaken with an eye to the sea.

## **THE HOLY ISLAND**

Enclose me, cast me off by this pure flow  
Of living water's separating tide,  
From every commerce with the world I know,  
And leave me at my Saviour's wounded side.

Here turmoil may but glare at my repose  
From earth's crass, teeming, noisome further shore;

Though all my darkest heart my Father knows,  
He grants me space to bide here and adore.

What need have I of man's fickle acclaim,  
Which wanes and dies like unsubstantial fire ?  
Here close me in with Jesus, only name  
Whose sound can satisfy my soul's desire.

*© Colin Symes, February 1999*

They saw the creatures around them as fellow servants of God. So, on one occasion, Cuthbert chided a young companion for not sharing a fish with an eagle who had just miraculously presented it to them for food.

On another, Columba instructed a brother on Iona to give shelter to an injured bird which had fallen on the shore on its flight across the water, as an expression of God's love for His creatures. Or there is the bull which has been bewitched into giving milk by a sorcerer, which is restored to health by the saint's prayers.

And there is the famous story of Cuthbert being warmed at Coldingham by sea-otters after he had come out of the cold North Sea where he had been singing psalms during the night.

Creation is therefore seen as an outward expression of God's nature and character, sustained by His upholding Word, and declaring His visible glory. It is not seen as a decaying, disposable utility to be exploited by man, which came with the later dualistic thinking.

This view of creation was later brought to the fore again by Francis of Assisi in the twelfth century.

## ***Why Should 21st Century Believers Be Interested in Sixth Century History ?***

History is prophetic; it is the unfolding chronicle of God's purpose - it is *His-story*.

To know the Celtic Church is to uncover the roots of faith in the nations of the British Isles. At a time when narrow nationalism threatens to divide us, the Celtic Church holds up the vision of a network of strong international relationships which saw Scots blessing Ireland, and vice-versa, Gaels preaching to Englishmen, and Welshmen becoming key founders in French churches, yet still relating to people on the basis of their cultural allegiances, even to what we might regard as petty fiefdoms.

The Celtic Church teaches us

- ☐ *community over institution*
- ☐ *word together with wonders*
- ☐ *creation as sacrament,*
- ☐ *prayer as the power house*
- ☐ *Monastery and mission - rhythm*

We should therefore be encouraging folk to know more of these important facets of our spiritual heritage, in a time when we face many of the same threats, because of the resurgence in paganism, which they faced in first bringing the good news to these shores.

## ***Further Reading***

*Restoring the Woven Cord*  
Michael Mitton

*An Introduction to Celtic Spirituality*  
Ray Simpson

*Rediscovering the Celts*  
Martin Robinson

*How the Irish Saved Civilisation*  
Thomas Cahill

*The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*

Ven. Bede (pub. Oxford Classics)

*Life of St Cuthbert*

Ven. Bede

*Life of St Columba*

Bishop Adomnan of Iona

*Various Collections of Prayers in Celtic style*  
Rev David Adam, Vicar of Holy Island.

*Life of St David*

Rhygyvarch

*Life of St Samson of Dol*

Bishop Tigernomail

*Carmina Gadelica; Highland Prayers*

Collected by A Carmichael

## **Rune Before Prayer**

I am bending my knee  
Before the Father who made me,  
Before the Son who saved me,  
Before the Spirit who cleansed me  
My shelter and shade,

Through your own Anointed One,  
O God,  
Meet from your bounty our need,

God's love  
God's grace,  
God's smile,  
God's peace,  
God's mind,

God's fear  
And God's desire

To do on the earth of the Three  
As the angels and saints do in heaven

In shade or in brightness,  
In day or in darkness,  
Each hour in your kindness,  
Show us Your face.

Old Gaelic Prayer from  
Carmina Gadelica

*Translation by Colin Symes*

*Colin Symes is one of the leaders of Community Church Edinburgh, and has been working for the church for twenty years now, having graduated with a B.D. from Edinburgh University in the late 70's. Historian, linguist, worship leader, counsellor and Dad, he is an active member of the Newington Churches Council.*

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