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Charismatic Christianity and the appeal of Celtic Pneumatology

Nigel Scotland notes that Celtic Pneumatology has become a significant resource for charismatics and post-charismatics in recent years. The section of this article considers some of the possible origins and content of Celtic culture and Christianity. Drawing on the writings of Bede and other early Christian writers, he reflects on the many stories of the northern saints under headings related to spiritual gifts: healing and wholeness conflict with the demonic and prophetic and knowledge gifts.

Charismatic Christianity

The word 'charismatic' derives from the Greek word 'charismata' which means gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter Hocken asserted that Harold Bredesen (b. 1918) and Jean Stone (b. 1924) 'have the distinction of coining the term 'charismatic' to denote the new movement of the Holy Spirit which emerged within the mainstream denominational churches in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At the end of their article entitled 'Return of the Charismata', they stated 'we call this movement "the charismatic renewal"'.¹ Charismatic Christianity is a worldwide experience of the Holy Spirit which is rooted in the Day of Pentecost. It emphasises an 'overwhelming filling of the Holy Spirit' and the practice of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, most notably speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing but also other speaking, helping and miraculous gifts listed in the New Testament. Professor Max Turner has suggested that 'charisma' means no more than 'gift'.² Charismatic Christianity therefore emphasises the importance of the indwelling 'Charisma' or gracious gift of the Spirit and the use of the 'Charismata' or gifts of Holy Spirit.

There are a number of reasons why charismatic Christians have found themselves drawn to Celtic pneumatology. By the 1980s the charismatic movement had grown steadily and impacted on the life and worship of numbers of the historic denominational churches but at the same time many were beginning to feel the need for a more 'rooted' spirituality. Charismatics knew what they had reacted against but somehow they weren't altogether sure what they should be standing for. They still valued the filling of the Holy Spirit, the practice of the charismata and freedom in worship, but there was now a growing sense that charismatic Christianity had become introverted and insular and that the experience of the Holy

1 Hocken, P., *Streams of Renewal*, Paternoster Press, Carlisle 1997, p 185.

2 See Turner, M., *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: Then and Now*, Paternoster Press, Carlisle 1996, pp 252-255.

Spirit was an end in itself. There was increased concern that an unless the 'anointing' was related and directed into the surrounding world and its culture it would dry up like an unused well. In short, it needed to be earthed in what was objective and solid. It was at this point that some with an interest in early church history began to discover that Celtic pneumatology had something very definite to bring to this situation. The Celts like the Charismatics valued the gifts and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit but their experience of his person was much more integrated with the life of God's created universe. They loved to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit and delighted in spontaneous worship but they focused these blessings on the presence of Christ as they reverentially shared the bread and wine of the sacrament of Holy Communion. The Celts also found that they could draw on the Holy Spirit's presence through the created world around them. They delighted to stand in the sea to praise God or walk in the rain reciting the psalms or share in the Eucharist in the open countryside. Indeed Patrick had portable a communion table for this very purpose. The Celts also made much use of Christian art forms and symbolism particularly the cross as another means of allowing the Holy Spirit to direct their attention on to Christ. For the Celts appropriate physical touch was also a way of making the Holy Spirit's presence a practical reality particularly in times of sickness, worry and uncertainty. Hence they valued sacramental oil, consecrated water, icons, art forms, holy relics and sacred treasures.

Two books in particular sought to demonstrate the possibilities of Celtic pneumatology for those Charismatics who were feeling rootless. These were Michael Mitton's *Restoring the Woven Cord: Strands in Celtic Christianity for the Church To-day* and Ray Simpson's *Exploring Celtic Spirituality: Historic Roots for our Future*. Both were published in 1995³ and both sought to indicate the relevance of Celtic worship and spirituality for Charismatic Christianity. Mitton asserted that the early Celts were thoroughly comfortable with a God who would have readily understood John Wimber's concept of 'Power Evangelism'. On a personal note he also related that in Celtic spirituality he had 'discovered something that he had been searching for during the past twenty years'.⁴ Earlier in 1992, a group of Charismatic Christians that included a Baptist minister, an Anglican Priest and a Roman Catholic layman established the *Northumbria Community* in a large house that is situated in close proximity to the cave where Cuthbert's body is said to have been taken by monks who were seeking refuge from Viking insurgents. Then in 1994 a group led Michael Mitton and Ray Simpson launched *The Community of St Aidan and St Hilda* which aims to bring healing to the land and calls its members 'to commit themselves to reproduce the quality of the lives of the Celtic Saints'. In 1996 Ray Simpson left his Norwich parish and took up residence in a small cottage in Lindisfarne from where he holds retreats, provides resources and actively encourages interested churches to explore Celtic mission, worship and spirituality.⁵

Interest in Celtic Pneumatology was further prompted by the 'Toronto Blessing' which began with a series of meetings at the Toronto Airport Church in January

3 See Mitton, M., *Restoring the Woven Cord: Strands of Celtic Christianity for the Church of Today* Darton, Longman and Todd, and Simpson, R., *Exploring Celtic Spirituality: Historic Roots for Our Future*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1995. See also Simpson, R., *Celtic*

Worship Through the Year, Hodder and Stoughton, 1997.

4 Mitton, R., *Restoring the Woven Cord* p1.

5 See Bradley, I., *Celtic Christianity Making Myths and Chasing Dreams*, Edinburgh University Press, 1999 pp 208-210.

1994 and spread all over the world. Indeed the Toronto experience is ongoing in many places at the present time. It was and is associated with a variety of emotional and religious phenomena, most notably seemingly uncontrollable 'holy laughter', people falling and lying on the ground in a semi-conscious state, running on the spot, pogoing, roaring like a lion and jerking or twitching like pigeon. These 'religious exercises' have since become the subject of much ongoing debate not only in the wider Christian world but among Charismatics themselves. To many this was and is God moving in a 'new wave'. It's a time to 'drink' or 'soak' or in the words of one church notice-board 'to come and have a spiritual carwash'. For other charismatics the phenomena are regarded as a psychologically induced human response to preachers' rhetoric coupled with a mild hypnosis generated by lengthy sessions of calming worship songs. At best all this was held to be the 'MacDonaldisation' of charismatic Christian experience and at worst it was unbridled 'enthusiasm'. In the view of concerned Charismatics it had depersonalised the Holy Spirit. In short, the Toronto experience resulted in the emergence of 'Post-Charismatics'. These are Charismatics who still value and endorse the 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit' but they reject outright the phenomena associated with Toronto as psychological aberrations that are without Scriptural precedent. They also stand four-square against the irrationality of what R.T. Kendal rejoices in and calls the 'Yuk factor'! The Yuk factor is happy to endorse what many might take to be a fetish as the moving of God's spirit.⁶ In summary, Post-Charismatics feel that Charismatic pneumatology has 'run thin' on content and doctrine and lost its Christological focus. For the Post-Charismatics therefore Celtic pneumatology has much to offer because it gives greater weight to the rational and promotes a Holy Spirit experience that has less potential to become an end in itself. At the same time it embraces the world which the Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, helped to bring into being

Celtic Christianity

The origins of the Celtic race are shrouded in obscurity. They are generally believed to have first emerged as a distinct linguistic group in the Black Sea area about 1000BC. By 600BC they had moved from this central European base to the Pyrenees in the south, the Rhine basin in the north and as far as Ireland in the west and to what is now Rumania in the East. During the years 400 to 1000AD the Celts came to dominate Ireland, Scotland and parts of Wales and the West Country.

The Romans first established the province of Britannia in 50AD but they never really exerted much influence north of Hadrian's Wall which had been built for defensive purposes in 122 A.D.. Celtic peoples were chiefly located in the geographical regions of Ireland, Scotland and Wales. However by the time of Bede Celts were settled in many parts of England and the influence of Celtic Christianity stretched as far south as the Thames estuary. It is probable that Roman

6 See Kendall, R.T., *Out of the Comfort Zone* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2005) especially pp 154-155 where he describes how Rodney Howard Brown prayed for Randy and Nancy Wall. Nancy was 'left with an urge to utter Ho! Involuntarily whether at home, church

or in a restaurant'. She asked Kendall why she had this urge. He replied, 'God does this to see if you want the anointing more than anything else in the world'. She immediately cried out, 'Ho!, Ho!, Ho!'.

administrators and soldiers were the first to impact the indigenous Celtic peoples of the province of Britannia with the Christian faith. Their influence was supplemented by monks from Gaul.

In 409 Rome was taken by the Goths and from that point on Roman rule came to an end in Britain. After about 410 onwards the Roman military began to withdraw from England and the country was invaded by Angles, Saxons and Jutes from various parts of Europe. This meant that for much of the fifth and sixth centuries Celtic Christianity was pushed north and west by the pagan invaders. Expressions of Celtic Christianity were nevertheless in evidence in the British Isles until about 1000 AD but it was most prominent in the period before the Venerable Bede completed his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in 731. The golden age of Celtic Christianity is usually regarded as mid fifth to the mid seventh century. This was the era which saw the best known of the Irish and British Saints. Patrick's arrival in Ireland in or about 432 and marks its start. Others followed in his steps – Brigid, Ninian, David, Columba and Aidan whose death in 651 represents the end of the era.

With the coming of Augustine, the monk from Rome, sent by Pope Gregory in 597, the influence of Roman Christianity began to mingle with and eventually predominate over the Celtic expressions of the faith. Bede detects two campaigns from Rome against the Celtic tradition. The first was about the beginning of the seventh century under Augustine of Canterbury against the British Church in the West; the second was made at the time of Bishop Wilfrid at the Synod of Whitby in 663 when the issue turned on the date of Easter.⁷

As has been noted Charismatic Christianity places particular emphasis on the Holy Spirit experience and the practice of the Holy Spirit's gifts. What therefore follows is an examination of the appeal for Charismatics of these two aspects within the life and worship of the Celtic Church. The principal sources for this are found in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, his *Life of Cuthbert* written in 716 and the writings of Patrick, most notably his *Confession* written about 470.

The Venerable Bede (673-735), a priest and monk at Jarrow, was the first great English Church historian. He wrote of the period between Caesar's invasion of Britain in 55BC and the year 731 and described the situation in both Britain and Ireland. He makes mention of a British King called Lucius who ruled under the Romans and who sent a letter to the Bishop of Rome in 167 asking to be made a Christian. Before Bede began his work, he collected and sifted his materials which included ancient traditions and sources, recent letters and acts of church councils.

However, although Bede checked and sifted his witnesses, he is rarely questioning of the evidence they produced or the stories which they related. De Paor criticised Bede's work on the ground that he took some of his information from Gildas, a Welsh monk, who wrote about 540 AD and whose knowledge of the events a century and a half before his own time was very far from perfect.⁸ Against that, it should be noted that Bede did have access to the library at Jarrow, which was almost unequalled by any in England and he did cross-check his evidence with other sources and with other individuals whom he knew personally. In summing up his account of Aidan in Book 3 of his *History*, Bede made it clear that

7 See Chadwick, N.K., *The Age of the Saints in the Celtic Church*, OUP, London 1963, p 121.

8 De Paor, L., *St Patrick's World*, University of Notre Dame Press, Dublin 1993, p 11.

he aimed to be faithful to his sources. He wrote, ‘...as a truthful historian, I have given an accurate account of his life, commending all that was excellent and preserving his memory for the benefit of my readers’.⁹

It is generally acknowledged however that Patrick, Columba and other Celtic saints had their reputations enhanced with additional accounts of the miraculous by later generations for varying reasons. Sometimes it was to strengthen the status of a particular See or to promote their relics as a means of increasing pilgrimage and ratcheting up monastic income. Bradley is of the view that Bede ‘almost certainly over-exaggerated both the peculiar missionary zeal and the monastic character of the Irish church’.¹⁰ Leaving aside these criticisms for the present, it has to be said that many of the miracles in the Celtic Church which Bede records are not out of keeping with the writings of his contemporaries. Additionally, many of them resonate with the miracles reported by Luke in the Book of Acts.

The Holy Spirit Experience in Celtic Christianity

Contemporary Charismatic Christianity is generally held to begin with an overwhelming presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. This kind of experience was by no means unusual among the Celts. Early in the fourth century, shortly after the martyrdom of Alban, Bede related that Germanus, a bishop who had come from Gaul, was ‘filled with the Holy Ghost, called on the name of the Trinity’ and restored a girl’s eyes ‘in the sight of them all’.

Patrick (385-461) was a British man who was captured in a raid and taken to Ireland as a slave for six years. He then escaped to Gaul where he trained as a monk. He eventually found his way back to Britain from where he was commissioned to take the gospel to Ireland. Towards the end of his life he wrote in his *Confession*: ‘He who wants can laugh and jeer, but I shall not keep silent nor keep hidden the signs and wonders which have been shown to me by the Lord before they took place as He who knows all things before the world began’.¹¹

Patrick is quite clear that these miraculous occurrences were accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. He reminds his readers at the beginning of his *Confession* that Jesus ‘poured out on us abundantly His Holy Spirit, the gift and pledge of immortality, who makes those who believe and obey to be sons of God and heirs along with Christ’.¹² Patrick recalled how when he first reached Ireland as a captive, he was able to pray before dawn in all weathers, snow, frost and rain ‘because the Spirit was fervent within me’.¹³

On occasion Patrick was profoundly conscious of the Holy Spirit praying from deep within his own spirit. His description of this experience is not dissimilar from that recounted by people who pray in tongues or who enter a state of constant intercession by praying the Jesus Prayer. Patrick related.

I saw Him praying within me and I was, as it were, inside my own body and I heard His voice above me, that is to say above my inner self, and He was praying there powerfully and groaning; and meanwhile I was dumbfounded and

9 The sources for the descriptive material related to the lives of the Celtic saints are Bede’s *History* and Bede, *Life of Cuthbert*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1986, unless otherwise stated.

10 Bradley, I., *Celtic Christianity*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1999, p 27.

11 Patrick, *Confession*, Declaration 45.

12 Patrick, *Confession*, Declaration 4.

13 Patrick, *Confession*, Declaration 16

astonished and wondered who it could be that was praying with me, but at the end of the prayer He spoke and said that He was the Spirit ... The Spirit helps the weaknesses of our prayer; for we do not know what to pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with unspeakable groans which cannot be expressed in words. (Romans 8.26) and again: 'The Lord our advocate intercedes for us.' (cf 1 John 2 v 1)¹⁴

When he later reflected on his time in Ireland as a captive exile, Patrick wrote that God protected him from all evils 'because of His Spirit dwelling in me'.¹⁵

In his *Life of Cuthbert* Bede also stressed the work of the Holy Spirit. He wrote that it was the bishop's in the habit to go round the diocese 'giving saving counsel in all the houses and hamlets of the countryside, and laying his hand on the newly baptised so that the Grace of the Holy Spirit might come down upon them.'. On another occasion Bede reported that Cuthbert (634-687) arrived in a certain village where 'he preached twice to the milling crowds and brought down the grace of the Holy Spirit by imposition of hands on those newly regenerated in Christ'. It is clear therefore that in the years up until the time of Bede that Christian people sought for and cultivated a conscious awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives. Equally, it is evident that they expected the charismata or gifts of the Holy Spirit to feature in the Church's life, ministry and worship.

Spiritual Gifts in Celtic Christianity

Of the charismata or gifts of the Holy Spirit which were in evidence in this early Celtic churches, healing and wholeness, conflict with the demonic and prophetic and knowledge gifts appear to have been particularly prominent.

Healing and Wholeness

The writings of Bede and Patrick abound with examples of healing. In the case of Bede however it has to be said that some of his sources may have suffered from embellishments either through word of mouth or as written creations in the years before he encountered them in his researches in the monastic library at Jarrow. Leaving the possibility of such fabrication aside for a moment, what is not in question is the fact that Bede himself evidently valued the gifts of the Holy Spirit and believed them to be a vital aspect of the church's life and worship.

The New Testament emphasises healing as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Bede certainly gives many instances of its use in the Christian churches in the years before his own time. For example, he related the case of a youth whose arm was healed by the power of the cross, which King Oswald (d. 642) had erected before going into battle in 634. Some years after the King's death, this young man, a brother named Bothelm from the Church at Hebron, who Bede stated 'is still living', slipped on the ice and fractured his arm which caused him agonising pain. At length another brother decided to go up to the site of the cross and brought back a piece of its revered wood. At supper he passed a few strands of the old moss that grew on the surface of the cross to the injured man. He had nowhere to put it and so thrust it next to his breast. When he awoke next

14 Patrick, *Confession*, Declaration 25.

15 Patrick, *Confession*, Declaration 33.

morning he was perfectly healed. Bede went on to relate several other miraculous cures that took place at the site of Oswald's death. 'Many people', he wrote, 'took away the very dust from the place where his body fell, and put it in water, from which sick folk who drank it received great benefit.' Bede felt this to be no surprise, for during his life time Oswald 'never failed to provide for the sick and needy and to give them alms and aid'. A paralysed young girl was healed on being laid down at the place of Oswald's death and even a horse that happened to fall at the spot was soon restored and ready to ride. Stories about other Celtic saints also featured miraculous healings. St Brigid (c450-523) of Ireland cured a child who was mute.¹⁶ It was not always the actual person who caused the healing. The relics of the saints, or a visit to a saint's tomb, often brought about miracles. Bede gives the account of a man named Baduthegn who suddenly became paralysed on one side of his body from head to foot. The man crawled on his hands and knees to the tomb of Saint Cuthbert. He prayed and fell asleep there, and when he awoke he was completely cured. Another individual with a tumour on his eyelid was suddenly cured by the goodness of God and by means of Cuthbert's relics. Cuthbert brought healing to a woman who sipped water that he had blessed and to a bed-ridden man called Hildmer who ate bread which he had blessed and to Aelfflaed, a nun who was unable to walk, who touched a linen cincture which he sent to her. Whilst not all Charismatics or Post-Charismatics will be happy with the use of relics there is something of importance here. There has been a tendency among some Charismatics, possibly stemming from Protestant roots, to shy away from the physical. To be able to sip water that has been consecrated in the name of the Trinity or to hold a small wooden cross can be a powerful aid to the faith of someone who is sick or discouraged.

Cuthbert not only healed people but his prayers also brought healing to the land. Bede recounted how Cuthbert went to live alone on Farne Island, a few miles to the south east of Lindisfarne. He was, says Bede, 'the first brave man to live there alone', for the island 'had no water, corn or trees and being the haunt of evil spirits was very ill-suited to human habitation'. However, when Cuthbert arrived he ordered all the evil spirits to withdraw, and the island became quite habitable and 'a rich crop quickly sprung up'. Here we observe an important outward thrust to Celtic pneumatology with obvious practical implications for C21st Christianity. For Charismatics who feel that their worship or personal experience of the Holy Spirit has become too introverted, Cuthbert and his associates present us with a pneumatology that seeks to bring healing of the created order.

Bede also recounted healings by Bishop John, first of Hexham then of York. The information was given to Bede personally by Berthun, the bishop's deacon. Among many instances, a dumb youth who had many scabs and scales on his head and was partially bald, began to speak freely after 'the bishop took him by the chin and made the sign of the holy cross on his tongue'. Later 'with the assistance of the bishop's blessing and prayers his skin healed, and a vigorous growth of hair appeared'. When he was at York, John blessed and prayed over a nun who was lying in bed with a wounded and badly swollen arm. Just as the bishop was leaving, 'the pain left her, the swelling subsided and the girl gave thanks to our Lord and

16 Liam de Paor, *St Patrick's World*, Four Courts Press Ltd., 1993, p 212.

Saviour'. Another individual with a tumour on his eyelid was suddenly cured by the goodness of God and by means of Cuthbert's relics. On another occasion he prayed for one of his clergy who had fallen from his horse and cracked his skull. The bishop spent the night with him in prayer asking God to restore him. Early next morning the priest was able to sit up and talk and within a short while was again riding his horse.

Conflict with the demonic

Early Celtic Christianity both understood and grappled with the demonic. The Celts lived in a world that they felt to be populated not only by Christ, angels and saints, but also with demons and wicked spirits. It has been suggested that part of the reason for this may have been the pagan religious practices and backgrounds out of which the Celts had been converted. Ian Bradley posited that the pattern known as the Celtic Knot was used to ward off the devil's powers. Patrick, when evangelising the Irish, had many a conflict with the forces of darkness. For instance when he came to the heathen city of Tara he discovered there was an idolatrous feast which was kept at the same time as Easter. By tradition no one could light a fire before one was kindled in the King's house. Unconcerned by this pagan custom Patrick began his Easter celebration with an enormous fire. The result of this was that the King went with a number of his counsellors and wizards to remonstrate with Patrick. One of the wizards called Lochra spoke against the Catholic faith in 'the most arrogant terms'. In response, Patrick shouted out aloud, 'O Lord, who can do all things ... may this impious man who blasphemes your name, be now carried out of here without delay.' Almost immediately the man fell headfirst and crashed his head against a stone and died.¹⁷

Patrick recorded another instance during his labours in Ireland when he was attacked by the devil. He wrote in his *Confession*: 'I was asleep, and Satan attacked me violently, something which I shall remember as long as I am in this body; and there fell on top of me a huge rock, as it were, and I was completely paralysed'. He was, he says, on shouting out, aided by Christ and his Spirit and set at liberty.¹⁸

Celtic Christians developed a range of prayers and rituals to invoke God's protective powers against evil and fear. In times of danger some would draw a circle round themselves and their loved ones.¹⁹ Using their index fingers they would point and turn round sun-wise while reciting a prayer. The breastplate prayers, of which the one attributed to Patrick is best known, seek in a similar way to surround those who pray with the protective clothing of God's presence. This of course has clear Scriptural precedent in Ephesians chapter 6 verses 1 – 10 where Christians are exhorted by the apostle Paul to take to themselves the whole armour of God. The verses of Patrick's breastplate show clearly the wide range of powers which the Celts invoked for protection – the strong name of the Trinity, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the angelic hosts, the faith of the confessors and the word of the apostles.

17 Muirchu, *Life of Patrick*, paragraph 17.

18 Muirchu, *Life of Patrick*, Declaration 20.

19 Bradley, I., *The Celtic Way*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1993, p 47

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.

Cuthbert, like Patrick, was acutely conscious of a personal conflict with the devil and evil spiritual forces. While preaching on one occasion he warned his hearers to be on their guard whenever they heard the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven being preached. For, as he went on to say, the devil 'has a thousand crafty ways of harming us.' A little later Bede described how the wife of Hildmer, King Egfrid's sheriff, was possessed of a devil. 'She was', says Bede, 'so sorely vexed that she would gnash her teeth, let out frightful howls, and fling her arms and legs about'. 'It was', Bede reported, 'a terrifying sight to see her.' However as the man of God came to Hildmer's house the situation was transformed. Bede records that 'as they approached the house the evil spirit, unable to bear the coming of the Holy Spirit with whom Cuthbert was filled, suddenly departed' and the woman's affliction vanished. Bede wrote of Cuthbert: 'He became famous for miracles, for his prayers restored sufferers from all kinds of disease and affliction. He cured some who were vexed by unclean spirits not only by laying on of hands, exhorting, and exorcising – that is by actual contact – but even from afar, merely by praying or predicting their cure, as in the case of the sheriff's wife'. Cuthbert, Patrick and other Celtic church leaders demonstrate a thoroughly positive Trinitarian and Christocentric way of dealing with the forces of evil. At the same time Bede does not give the impression that the Celts were overly captivated by the demonic or engaged in lengthy exorcism sessions. Yet they nevertheless had a quiet authority which recognised that the power of God's Spirit was released through godly and prayerful living.

Some years later Wilfrid (634-709) who was nurtured in the Celtic traditions of the monastery of Lindisfarne, became bishop of York. But he then spent further time at Lyons and Rome and became an intransigent supporter of Roman church customs against the Celtic ways of northern England. After his return to his native homeland he was imprisoned at the command of King Egfrid. He had not however lost his Celtic openness to the Holy Spirit. When therefore the wife of the sheriff who had put him behind bars was in a paralysed and dying state, Wilfrid agreed to be taken to her. He sprinkled her face with holy water and poured some drops into her mouth. She thanked God aloud and then like Peter's mother-in-law, ministered to them.²⁰

Prophetic and Knowledge Gifts.

Celtic Christians also valued and practised prophetic and knowledge gifts. In his *Confession* Patrick recounted eight visions which he saw in dreams, all of which

²⁰ Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Wilfrid* (circa 720), chapter 37.

were direct messages from God. The most vivid and most important in so far as his life's direction was concerned was his divine summons to return to Ireland and to proclaim the gospel. His call as he described in his *Confession* is written in the style of Paul's vision of the man in Acts chapter 16 verse 19 saying come over to Macedonia and help us.

And then I saw, indeed in the bosom of the night, a man coming as it were from Ireland, Victorinus by name, with innumerable letters, and he gave one of them to me ... And while I was reading aloud the beginning of the letter, I myself thought indeed in my mind that I heard the voice of those who were near the wood of Foclut, which is close by the Western Sea. And they cried out thus as if with one voice, 'We entreat thee, holy youth, that thou come, and henceforth walk among us.'²¹

One of Patrick's contemporaries, St. Ailbe, prophesied the coming of a great bishop. He noticed a pregnant woman in the congregation and then was filled with the spirit of prophecy. He told the priest, who was unable to speak at that moment, 'This is why you are unable to speak: God wished that first you would hear the news of the infant whom that woman carried in her womb. He will indeed be a chosen one of God, a renowned bishop and he will be called David'.²² David was born soon after and later became the principal bishop in Wales.

Visions while awake were common among the Celts. Columba (521-597) who landed on the island of Iona in 563 with twelve disciples and founded a new monastery was said on several occasions to have seen angels. He wrote that 'Heaven has granted to some to see on occasion in their mind, clearly and surely, the whole earth and seas and sky'.²³ In his *Ecclesiastical History* Bede gives an extended account of the Irish monk, Fursey, or sometimes Fursa, (d. 648). He was born in Ireland and first came to England fairly late in his life, sometime after 630 and was welcomed by King Sigebert of the East Angles who was encouraged by the work of Felix at Dunwich. Fursey proved to be an effective evangelist and established a monastery probably at Burgh Castle near Yarmouth. Bede relates that many were 'inspired by the example of his goodness and the effectiveness of his teaching.' Many unbelievers were converted to Christ and a large number of believers were provoked to greater love and faith.

Once when Fursey was ill 'God gave him a vision in which he was directed to continue his diligent preaching and to persevere with his routine of vigils and prayer'. Prompted by what he saw, Fursey lost no time in constructing a monastery on a site given to him by King Sigbert. On another occasion, Fursey had an experience which appears to have been something akin the Apostle Paul when he was caught up in the third heaven.. Fursey entered a trance and felt that he had quitted his body. He was then carried up to a great height and told to look down on the world. From this vantage point he saw four fires burning in the air and was informed that they were Falsehood, Covetousness, Discord and Cruelty. He was then informed that these fires destroy men's bodies and that after death everyone must make due atonement for their sins by fire.

21 Patrick, *Confession*, Declaration 23.

22 De Paor, L., *Op. Cit.*, p 234.

23 Bradley, I., *The Celtic Way* p 93.

Aidan, (d. 651) another Irish monk, came to England about the same time as Fursey and settled in the north of England at Lindisfarne. He was consecrated a bishop and encouraged by King Oswald made long journeys on foot establishing missionary and teaching centres. Aidan evidently had a strong gift of prophecy since on one occasion he burst into tears and foretold the death of Oswald's successor, King Oswin. Aidan declared, 'the King will not live very long; for I have never before seen a humble King. I feel that he will soon be taken from us, because this nation is not worthy of a King'. Bede noted that not very long afterwards the bishop's foreboding was borne out by the King's death. Bede goes on in his narrative to relate how Aidan foretold a storm at sea and gave the seafarers holy oil to calm the waves. He summed up Aidan's life stating that 'he took pains never to neglect anything he had learned from the writings of the evangelists, apostles and prophets, and set himself to carry them out with all his powers.' There is no doubting that the Celtic churches took the prophetic with seriousness. Knowledge and prophecy certainly helped to envision evangelistic enterprise and church planting. What we don't know from Bede and the other early historians is to what extent prophecy failed or led men and women into extremes of behaviour.

Conclusion

In summary, it is clear that while some of what Bede relates may have been embellished either by himself or by those from whom he derived his information, miraculous stories of charismatic gifts were regarded as an important and integral part of the Christian faith. It must also be remembered that Bede claimed in his own words to be 'a truthful historian' who accurately recounted the facts as he knew them to his readers. What he appears to do, is to use his historical sources in a similar way to the gospel writers. Sometimes there is extended narrative but at certain points there are core events which are presented in a form and style which he anticipates will persuade the readers of the truth of the Christian faith.

Contemporary charismatic Christians clearly share the Celtic experience of the Holy Spirit that awakened their awareness of Christ's presence and deepened their love and respect for the earth's resources. Some Anglican and Roman Catholics Charismatics can fully identify with those Celts who had an almost sacramental view of the universe and literally found themselves able to imbibe God's presence as they delighted in the landscape and the changing of the seasons. Not only were they respectful of the land, they prayed and worked for its healing and transformation much in the way that contemporary Charismatics have been doing in parts of Africa and South America.

In the matter of conflict with the forces of evil there is much in Celtic life and worship which resonates with contemporary charismatic experience. Celtic Christians shared the charismatic heightened awareness of the presence of evil and spiritual conflict in both the socio-political and domestic spheres. It does however seem to have been the case that the Celts did not share the tendencies of the more extreme section of contemporary Charismatics, some of whom display a capacity to interpret everything which goes amiss as the work of malevolent beings.

From this brief survey it is clear that Celtic pneumatology has a wealth of riches to give to both Charismatics and Post-Charismatics. At a moment in time when many are re-assessing and seriously questioning aspects of their Holy Spirit experience, Celtic Christianity offers a solid Trinitarian, contemplative, practical and applied biblical Pneumatology which is rooted in British ecclesiastical and historical tradition.

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