

Celtic Spirituality: Its Origins and Interpretations

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A great deal of attention has been given of late to the concept of ‘Celtic spirituality’, by scholars of the early Church in Celtic lands, by theologians, and by those seeking an alternative to the doctrines of the modern Church. These latter have been the most active in popularizing the notion of a Celtic spirituality, one based on pre-Christian values and beliefs, associated with the veneration of nature as a spiritual force and possessed of a mystical and mysterious quality. Whether the proponents are part of neo-pagan cults or the Christian church, the driving force seems to be a search not only for a replacement for Augustinian-based Christian doctrine but also for an alternative to the rational, materialistic, and largely urban modern world – a search for a simpler, more ‘authentic’ faith, rooted in a celebration of the natural (from the ancient), as opposed to the artificial (from the modern), world.

It is difficult to know where to begin any discussion or overview of Celtic spirituality, since the very term ‘Celtic’ is a contentious one; for archaeologists and historians, it is too nebulous, lacking in precision and carrying with it too much romanticized baggage.¹ For scholars of Celtic literature and languages, it is largely a modern linguistic term, referring to the peoples of Europe who spoke and speak a Celtic language, a defined family within Indo-European languages consisting today of Irish Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, Cornish and Breton. Although there were some shared cultural values in art, literature and religion among these peoples, there were also distinctions, so that ‘Celtic’ is really just a handy, general term to this scholarly community and is used so judiciously (and is thus used in this paper) with that understanding. Certainly, the early peoples designated as ‘Celts’ in modern texts would not have seen themselves as such, nor would they have seen themselves as marginalised on the edge of civilization, unduly persecuted, or otherworldly in their outlook. This rather stereotypical idea of the Celt is also a modern invention, fostered largely by the likes of Matthew Arnold and Ernest Renan in the mid-nineteenth century. As Patrick Sims-Williams, in his seminal article on this

1 John Collis ‘The Origin and Spread of the Celts’ in *Studia Celtica* 30 (1996) pp 17-34; Timothy Champion ‘The Celt in Archaeology’ in *Celticism* T Brown ed (Rodopi 1996) p 6178

romantic ethnic preconception, writes: 'Renan and Arnold set up the spiritual, impractical, rural, natural and poetic Celtic peoples as the antithesis to materialism, "Saxon" philistinism, utilitarianism, excessive rationalism, artificiality, industrial urbanization, and all the other failings of the modern European world'.² This point of view, however, still affects the meaning of 'Celtic' today and the whole notion of Celtic spirituality in popular writing.

The idea of a 'Celtic Church' in early Ireland and Britain has been around for as long and there is a substantial body of scholarship on its origins and development (see Further Reading); following on this, the idea of a distinct Celtic form of Christianity has also grown. However, the concept of a single, homogeneous organization called the Celtic Church no longer has currency; recent scholarship has pointed out that the Church varied in organization and practices in Ireland and Wales, as well as early Britain.³ It is more apt to speak of the Celtic Churches, as 'Celtic Church' is a very generalized term which has led to the misconception of a unified body distinct from the early Roman Church. Nevertheless, there are some distinguishing features of the early Churches in Ireland and Britain which fed into the idea of a distinctive Celtic Christianity, and hence, a Celtic spirituality.

Christianity had reached Britain by the second century CE while Britain was under the Roman Empire; while the extent of the early British Church cannot be determined with great accuracy, it did survive the withdrawal of the Roman legions in the fifth century and the subsequent invasions of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. When Pope Gregory the Great sent St Augustine of Kent to preach to the 'Angles' in 597 CE, he met with the British bishops, as recorded by Bede in his *History of the English Church and People*⁴ (one of the main historical sources for this period). The encounter was a diplomatic disaster, but does attest to the survival of a kind of Christian ecclesiastical organization in southern Britain. In the same year, by coincidence, St

2 Patrick Sims-Williams 'The Visionary Celt: The Construction of an Ethnic Preconception' *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 11 (Summer 1986) p 72

3 Kathleen Hughes 'The Celtic Church: Is This a Valid Concept?' *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 1 (Summer 1981) pp 1-20; Richard Sharpe 'Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland' *Peritia* 4 (1984) pp 230-70; Wendy Davies 'The Myth of the Celtic Church' in *The Early Church in Wales and the West* Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane edd (Oxford: Oxbow Books 1992) pp12-21

4 Bede *A History of the English Church and People*. Leo Sherley-Price trans Revised R E Latham (London: Penguin Books 1968 reprint 1984)

Columba of Iona died; his community was the largest and most influential of the northern Churches and drew much support from the northern kingdoms. Columba, an Irish monk and abbot, had previously founded several churches and monasteries in northern Ireland; his foundation on Iona ministered to the Irish who had colonized the southwest coast of Scotland, the kingdom of Dalriada. The monastery of Lindisfarne was founded by St Aidan, a monk of Iona, who in 635 was sent at the request of Oswald, king of Northumbria to preach Christianity to his people, and this became the major ecclesiastical centre of the northern English kingdoms.

Augustine of Kent established the customs and practices of the Roman Church during his mission, and the churches of southern Britain adhered to those practices. The church of Columba followed a different method for the calculation of the date of Easter, a different form for the ordination of bishops, and a different style of tonsure (Irish monks shaved their heads from ear to ear, instead of the crown; this style may have been influenced by the druids, although there is no clear evidence, but it was also associated with Simon Magus, and the Irish were severely criticized for it). In the ordination of bishops, only one other bishop was required to be present, while the Roman Church required at least two (but, to be fair, one must suppose that in the early days of Christianity in Britain and Ireland, bishops were quite likely scarce on the ground). The dating of Easter was the main point of controversy, but this debate also seethed throughout the Christian Church in the early Middle Ages. However, the effect of this controversy is highlighted by an anecdote told by Bede, who remarked how the king of Northumbria, who followed the Celtic practice, would be celebrating Easter while the queen, who followed the Roman practice, was still fasting.⁵ The matter within the British churches came to a head during the Synod of Whitby in 664; the Bishop of Lindisfarne, Colman, who followed the customs of the Columban church, debated with Wilfrid, the Bishop of York, who argued for the preeminence of the Roman Church and its customs. Oswy, the king of Northumbria, ruled in favour of Wilfrid, thus aligning himself with the southern kingdoms; Colman quitted Lindisfarne and went to Ireland along with several of his supporters, where he founded his own monastery at Mayo.

In Ireland, while the Romans had never invaded, Christianity had made

⁵ Bede *A History of the English Church and People*. Book III.25

modest inroads by the fifth century, even before the mission of St Patrick who is traditionally portrayed as the 'apostle to the Irish'. Patrick's mission, however, took him to the northern parts of Ireland; there were already churches established in the southern regions. Eventually, St Patrick's foundation of Armagh, under his successors, became the preeminent church in the Irish kingdoms, and Patrick one of the preeminent saints of Ireland, along with St Columba and St Brigid of Kildare. The northern Irish churches followed the Celtic practices of calculating Easter, the ordination of bishops and the style of tonsure, but several of the southern churches followed the Roman customs. While the Synod of Whitby did not have an immediate impact on the Irish churches, it did generate debate between the *Romani* faction and the 'native' faction; by the end of the eighth century, most, if not all, of the Irish churches had adopted the Roman forms.

These 'Celtic' practices suggest an earlier form of Christianity, possibly arriving from the Eastern churches, which may have flourished owing to the distance of the British and Irish churches from the ecclesiastical centres of Gaul and Rome; these practices suggest as well an adaptation to local societies and conditions. However, it must be stressed that these differences were largely in matters of form, not teaching. Both the British and Irish church leaders were adamant in their orthodoxy regarding the doctrine of the scriptures. St Patrick, who was accused of dubious practices by the bishops in Gaul, emphasizes in his *Confession* that he has not strayed from the true faith, and successive bishops looked to the authority of Rome on doctrinal matters. So wherein does Celtic spirituality lie? And did it ever actually exist?

Part of the answer lies in modern interpretations of the meagre documentation which survives from the fifth to the eleventh centuries, the period in which the Celtic churches flourished. In the sixth century, a wave of monastic fervour swept over these churches, and the Irish embraced monasticism with a particular enthusiasm. This had led to a perception of the early Irish Church as entirely monastic⁶ and a modern misperception that the Celtic churches in general lacked a cohesive structure and hierarchy.⁷ More recent research has changed that picture to show that a structured

6 Nora Chadwick *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church* (London: Oxford University Press 1961); John Ryan *Irish Monasticism* 2nd edn (Shannon: Irish University Press 1972) [1st ed Dublin 1931]

7 Ian Bradley *The Celtic Way* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd 1993)

organization, not entirely monastic, did exist.⁸ Nevertheless, certain monastic foundations, such as Armagh and Kildare, which were large and wealthy, held considerable power and influence within the Irish Church. They were able to support major libraries, scriptoria, and schools for the training of young novices. Native Irish culture valorized wisdom and learning in an oral tradition, and one may suppose that such values bolstered the flowering of learning within the Church, in a literate and Latin tradition, so that the great Irish monasteries became important centres of learning in the seventh century. Literacy extended to the vernacular tradition as well, and a large body of vernacular literature, both secular and religious, has survived in various manuscripts. Unfortunately, much of this literature, in Irish and Latin, remains untranslated or in dubiously translated editions, some published over a hundred years ago. Only slowly are reliable, modern editions and translations being produced. Many of the modern interpreters of Celtic spirituality have thus relied upon faulty texts and outdated research. Furthermore, many of the sources for the fifth to the eleventh centuries are in manuscripts which date from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, thereby adding to the problems of interpretation.

If the Lives of the saints are anything to go by (and most of the manuscripts are from the later period), the saints of the early Irish Church exercised a rigorous asceticism, reminiscent of the practices of the Desert Fathers, coupled with intensive prayer and meditation. Although most monks lived communally, the eremetical life was idealized as one of the best ways to serve God; on the other hand, the monastic communities are often portrayed offering shelter and hospitality to rich and poor alike (a custom and cultural value in accord with native tradition). The problem of dates is most apparent here, as the Lives give the impression of the Church as a static entity; in reality, the structure, organization and monastic life underwent several changes over the centuries. But, apart from the portrayal of a virtuous life, devoted to charity, service and the denial of worldly goods, one can also read in the Lives stories of conflict between monasteries, between saints and kings, and between saints and druids. The Irish saints were far from the gentle, simple, mystical, and otherworldly figures which some like to associate with Celtic Christianity; indeed, they were never hesitant to punish their enemies or fight for their territory and privileges.

8 Richard Sharpe 'Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland' pp 230-70

Another way in which the monks of Ireland chose to serve God in the sixth and seventh centuries was in the form of pilgrimage as part of their ascetic practice; the concept of *peregrinatio pro amore Dei* was based partly on God's command to Abraham to leave his country, and Christ's injunction to his disciples to leave their homes and families for His sake. This idea of pilgrimage was well suited to missionary efforts, and several Irish monks travelled to the continent, eventually settling in monastic communities.⁹ The most famous such pilgrim, St Columbanus, preached throughout Francia in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, and established major foundations such as Luxeuil and Bobbio.¹⁰ But this idea of pilgrimage, of wandering wherever God took them, gradually lost favour (a historical point largely overlooked by Bradley in his praise of Celtic pilgrimage¹¹). From the latter half of the eighth century until the tenth, a reform movement arose in the Irish Church, under the rubric of the *Céli Dé* or *culdees* (roughly, 'servants of God').¹² This movement looked to a less worldly, more stable and more stringent form of monastic life (which says a great deal about contemporary life in the monasteries), and it is from this period that the hermit life becomes idealized and ascetic practices (without the need for wandering in exile) more severe.

It is also from this period that a considerable body of hymns and lyric poetry appears. Many of the poems celebrate the simple hermit life, living in quiet isolation in the wilderness and celebrating the natural world of God's creation. The many references to nature in this poetry make it highly appealing to those today who are concerned with ecological and environmental issues, and it is easy to see how this poetry can be interpreted as an ancient Celtic veneration for the earth, or a Celtic Christian reverence for nature and the need to protect it (a collection such as Bamford and Marsh's *Celtic Christianity: Ecology and Holiness* is an example of this latter movement¹³). One of the most famous hymns of this period, *St Patrick's Breastplate*, calls upon the protection of Christ who is present everywhere and in all things. Yet, it must be pointed out that these poems were composed

9 Kathleen Hughes 'The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage' pp 143-51

10 Donald Bullough 'The Career of Columbanus' in *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings* Michael Lapidge ed (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press 1997) pp1-28

11 Ian Bradley *The Celtic Way* pp 70-83

12 Peter O'Dwyer *Céli Dé: Spiritual Reform in Ireland 750-900* (Dublin: Editions Tailliuria 1981)

13 Christopher Bamford and William Parker Marsh edd *Celtic Christianity: Ecology and Holiness. An Anthology* (Edinburgh: Floris Books 1982 reprint 1991)

in a learned, literate ecclesiastical milieu by clerics who were well schooled in Scripture (in which the celebration of God's creation is not absent) as well as Latin and vernacular Irish poetry. *St Patrick's Breastplate* is an example of the Latin genre of the *lorica* prayer, based on Ephesians 6:10-18, although it also contains features which are considered part of Irish Gaelic tradition¹⁴ (Bradley goes further to assert its uniquely Celtic outlook in its invocation of all of creation¹⁵). Several of these hymns and lyrics were published by Alexander Carmichael in *Carmina Gadelica* in 1900,¹⁶ and by Eleanor Hull in *The Poem Book of the Gael* in 1912, and these translations have been most influential in the modern interpretation of Celtic spirituality, with the emphasis on simplicity, a non-hierarchical church, the love of nature and the immanence of God in the natural world.¹⁷ As Donald Meek has pointed out, it is an interpretation to suit the needs and desires of the modern world, rather than an accurate portrayal of the early Church in Britain and Ireland – the difference between Celtic Christianity and Christianity in Celtic-speaking lands.¹⁸ Meek also points out that modern Celtic spirituality is likewise much influenced by people such as Rudolf Steiner and Teilhard de Chardin (for example, in the idea of the sacredness of matter). Modern Celtic spirituality, then, according to Meek, is as much a recreation as a reinterpretation, rather than a recovery of a genuinely ancient form of spirituality.

A counterpoint to this view are those of James Mackey. Mackey firmly believes not only in the existence of a distinct Celtic Christianity but also in its recoverability;¹⁹ further, he sees in Celtic Christianity a link with the pagan past through primal religion, to which pagan Celtic religion belongs, in his opinion.²⁰ Mackey explains primal religions as the original spiritual impetus of humanity, which Christianity did not put an end to; rather, Christianity built upon primal faiths wherever it went. In Ireland, the early Celtic primal

14 N D O'Donoghue 'St Patrick's Breastplate' in *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* James Mackey ed (Edinburgh: T and T Clark 1989) pp 45-63

15 Ian Bradley *The Celtic Way* pp 47-8

16 Alexander Carmichael ed *Carmina Gadelica* 6 vols (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd 1900-71)

17 Donald Meek 'Modern Celtic Christianity' in *Celticism* T Brown ed (Rodopi 1996) p 147

18 Donald Meek 'Modern Celtic Christianity' pp 143-4

19 James Mackey 'Introduction: Is There a Celtic Christianity?' in *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* James Mackey ed (Edinburgh: T and T Clark 1989) pp 1-21

20 James Mackey 'Primal Religion and Christianity in Celtic Tradition and Literature' in *Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples* Cyril J Byrne Margaret Harry and Padraig O Siadhail edd (Halifax: D'Arcy McGee Chair of Irish Studies 1992) pp 39-40

faith influenced Christianity in the Irish Church, albeit unconsciously, through the *filii*, the professional class of poets who were also the keepers of traditional history, genealogy, and tribal lore.²¹ Many of them did enter the Church and no doubt did influence learning, and the emphasis on wisdom and learning, in Irish monasteries. As an example, Mackey points to the strong belief in trinitarianism in the Irish Church (which did exist; St Columbanus, for example, reveals such an emphasis in his writings²²) in which he sees a connection to the triadic systems in Celtic mythology.²³ (One of the legends of St Patrick has him explaining the idea of the Trinity to the pagan Irish using the three-leaved shamrock as illustration.) Mackey also sees much of the basis of a Celtic Christianity and spirituality in the teachings of Pelagius,²⁴ who was declared a heretic by the Roman Church in the early fifth century. This point is further explored in the same volume in an article by M Forthomme Nicholson.²⁵ Pelagius was, by all accounts, a Briton by birth, possibly from somewhere in Wales, and it seems that because of his origins, his theology on original sin, infant baptism, and grace, which ran counter to the thinking of St Augustine of Hippo, is considered to be 'Celtic' and possibly even pre-Christian. There are, however, no contemporary documents from the British Church of the fourth century to confirm that his beliefs were grounded in a Celtic Christian theology and, despite Nicholson's efforts otherwise, there is still too little known about pre-Christian Celtic beliefs to be able to assert any influence from that quarter on Pelagius's thinking. Furthermore, the major points of Pelagian thought, regarding divine grace and freedom of will, continued to be explored and discussed by theologians from the Middle Ages to the present,²⁶ so that an absolute polarity between Augustine and Pelagius is a somewhat inaccurate perception.

Another figure invoked as a purveyor of a Celtic Christianity is John Scotus Eriugena, who flourished in the ninth century. Eriugena's philosophy, in which he saw in the created world a theophany, also got him into trouble with the authorities, but it is difficult to pin down anything specifically Celtic

21 James Mackey 'Primal Religion and Christianity in Celtic Tradition and Literature' p 45

22 Donald Bullough 'The Career of Columbanus' pp 23-4

23 James Mackey 'Introduction: Is There a Celtic Christianity?' p 45

24 James Mackey 'Introduction: Is There a Celtic Christianity?' p 17

25 M Forthomme Nicholson 'Celtic Theology: Pelagius' in *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* James Mackey ed (Edinburgh: T and T Clark 1989) pp 386-413

26 Joanne McWilliam 'Pelagius, Pelagianism' in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* Everett Ferguson *et al* edd (New York: Garland Press 1990) pp 704-8

in his views. Both Pelagius and Eriugena were educated men for their times; both were well schooled in scriptures and nothing in their writings veers sharply from scriptural teaching. Eriugena's philosophy shows the influence of Greek thinkers, especially Neoplatonist writings, and he was one of the most learned clerics in Greek in the Latin West. His chief work, *Periphyseon*, or *The Division of Nature* 'presents one of the most sophisticated Christian Neoplatonist systems of the Middle Ages'.²⁷ Yet Pelagius and Eriugena, when seen within their historical contexts, each contributed in their way to contemporary theological debates.

On the matter of the role of women in the Church, especially the ordination of women, Celtic Christianity and spirituality are considered to be more 'woman-friendly' than the modern Church allows. Indeed, it is a popular notion that women in Celtic lands enjoyed an unusually high status and that this also led to their greater participation in the Celtic churches. Women in early Ireland and Wales did have more rights and freedoms relative to Greco-Roman societies, but not unusually so in relation to other societies in northern Europe or in the ancient world of, for example, Egypt. In fact, women in Anglo-Saxon England had greater rights over their persons and property than Irish women, a situation which the Normans effectively dismantled. The figure of St Brigit, the founding abbess of Kildare in the fifth century, is often held up as an example of the power and influence of women in the Irish Church. In one of her legends, at her consecration as a nun, the presiding bishop mistakenly reads the orders of a bishop over her, leading some to assert that she was, in fact, a bishop and that women were ordained under Celtic Christianity. This anecdote, however, is from a ninth-century Life of St Brigit – too late to be considered evidence – and in the context of this Life, the story is told to highlight the authority and status of the abbess of Kildare through Brigit. The office of abbess of Kildare was an important one, and the abbess did hold the status of bishop, but not the office. This meant that the abbess was entitled to the hospitality rights and honour-price (the compensation paid for injury or death, determined by social status) of a bishop. Kildare, too, was the main rival to St Patrick's church of Armagh in terms of size, wealth and power, so it is not surprising that the hagiographers of St Brigit sought to elevate their saint as much as they could. The use of St Brigit as an empowering female figure has its own difficulties, since she shares the same name and certain characteristics of a Celtic goddess named Brigit. To some, she is simply the

27 Oliver Davies ed and trans *Celtic Spirituality* (New York: The Paulist Press 1999) Introduction p 58

goddess usurped by the Christian Church, and she has been 'recovered' as such by goddess-centred cults. The intricacy of the association between saint and goddess has not yet been fully explored, nor has Celtic primal religion and its relation to Christianity in early Britain and Ireland, so that assertions of 'pagan' influence on Celtic spirituality must be treated with some care.

Other women, such as St Ita of Killeedy and St Samthann of Clonbroney, were also celebrated in their Lives as influential abbesses, but their foundations never achieved the same stature as Kildare. Still, women undoubtedly played a positive and significant role in the early development of the Church in Ireland and Britain, as they did in the very earliest development of Christianity; in Ireland, it just seems that their prominence lasted longer. However, the Celtic Churches in their fullest development, from the eighth century onwards, cannot be considered any more or less favourable to women than the Church anywhere else.²⁸ Certainly, positive images of women in the Church can be found elsewhere.²⁹

Oliver Davies presents a reasonably balanced and scholarly view of the whole notion of Celtic spirituality. In his view:

the Christianity that developed in the Celtic countries during the early Middle Ages is characterized by a strongly incarnational theology, with an emphasis in diverse ways on physicality and materiality that supports both asceticism and sacramentality... nature appears as a theme to unusual degree, and enjoys its own autonomy, rather than purely serving the human ends of atmosphere and mood. Human creativity is drawn to the center of the Christian life in Irish art and Welsh poetry, both of which stress the role of the imagination. Features such as the Brigit tradition offer positive and empowering images of women, even if the relation between these and contemporary social realities is complex. At the theological level these different aspects find a unity in the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity, which profoundly shaped the religious imagination of the early Celtic peoples.³⁰

28 Lisa Bitel *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1996) pp 167-203

29 Jo Ann McNamara and John Halborg edd and trans *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 1992)

30 Oliver Davies ed and trans *Celtic Spirituality* Introduction p 11

While Davies repeats the usual thematic concerns associated with popular Celtic spirituality, he asserts that these are a ‘patterning of emphases’ which make up a distinctive spirituality, rather than a divergence from or polarity to accepted Christian teaching, to which both the early Irish and Welsh adhered, and he makes more of an effort to place the evidence in its historical and social contexts. For Davies, as for popular writers like Ian Bradley, Esther de Waal and David Adam,³¹ Celtic spirituality has an exuberant, life-affirming characteristic which can offer positive alternatives to some of the current problems many find with modern western Christianity, in issues of gender, an overwhelming rationality to the detriment of the imagination, and the separation from nature.³² Davies, however, looks to the original sources from the early Irish and Welsh churches and is concerned with offering accurate and reliable translations, a move which Meek strongly advocates,³³ so that any interested person, whether scholar or student, can be guided by the more authentic material available.

That there is something we can call, for lack of a better term, ‘Celtic spirituality’ now seems evident, but that it must be treated with caution and proper understanding, based on original sources and sound scholarship, is also evident. There is no doubt that the proponents of the modern, popular form of Celtic spirituality, such as Bradley, de Waal and Adam, can reach out in a positive way to their readers and can offer viable answers to the problems of the modern world, but they can also be misleading in their search for, and assertion of, legitimacy in the ancient Celtic world. Celtic spirituality certainly had a foundation in biblical sources and highlighted particular aspects of scriptural teaching, such as the immanence of God in the world, the doctrine of the Trinity, the ascetic life in devotion to Christ, and the celebration of creation; it was also very likely affected by some of the cultural values held by the Irish and Welsh, but further research is necessary in both these areas. It may be that authentic Celtic spirituality cannot be fully regained, but in our attempts to uncover it, by careful and well-grounded studies of the sources, we may come to a better understanding of the original and how it can speak to our modern world.

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31 Ian Bradley *The Celtic Way*; Esther de Waal *A World Made Whole: The Rediscovery of the Celtic Tradition* (London: Fount Paperbacks 1991); David Adam *The Cry of the Deer – Meditations on the Hymn of St Patrick* (London: SPCK 1987)

32 Oliver Davies ed and trans *Celtic Spirituality* Introduction p 24

33 Donald Meek ‘Modern Celtic Christianity’ pp 143-57

Further Reading

Oliver Davies' bibliography in *Celtic Spirituality* (1999) provides a comprehensive guide to both primary and secondary sources for the study of Christianity in Celtic lands. James Mackey has continued his enquiries into Celtic Christianity and primal religion in 'Magic and Celtic Primal Religion,' *Zeitschrift für celtische philologie* 45 (1992) pp 62-84, and 'Christian Past and Primal Present' *Etudes Celtiques* 29 (1992) pp 285-297, his partial reply to *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* by Kim McCone (Maynooth 1990), a controversial study which looks at the influence of Christian tradition on early Irish literature. Although somewhat dated, Kathleen Hughes' *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London 1966) is still one of the most important historical studies on the subject, and John T McNeill's *The Celtic Churches: A History AD 200-1200* (Chicago 1974) is a good, readable history. To these may be added Maire Herbert *Iona, Kells and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford 1988); Charles Thomas *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (London 1981); Lisa Bitel *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (Ithaca NY 1990); and Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester 1982). This list is by no means exhaustive, and is merely a representative sample of the scholarship available and accessible to the interested non-specialist.