

Being and Becoming: Exploring Celtic Spirituality

STEVEN L. THOMASON

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Our Celtic Roots

- ▶ Celtic Spirituality is oft-misunderstood, oft-misappropriated by many modern movements seeking to claim their “otherness” (heterodoxy) as being rooted in an ancient tradition
- ▶ CS is not “anything goes” or “new age” or license to be “weird”
- ▶ CS is also not just a romantic “communion with creation” as the realm of spiritual experience.
- ▶ CS is not monolithic
- ▶ CS cannot be traced to a certain time and place of origin



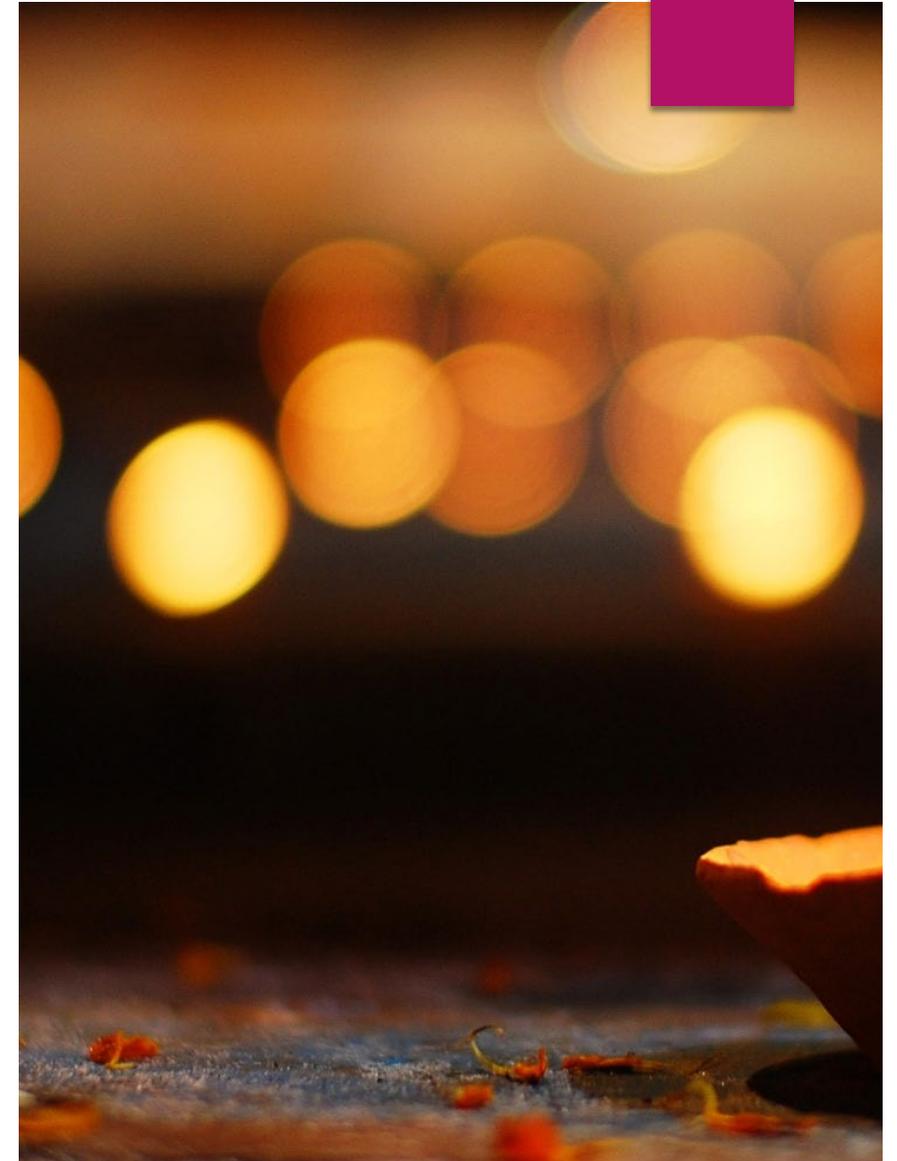
What is Celtic Spirituality?

- ▶ Celtic Spirituality is a religious tradition with a variety of expressions across time and place, pre-Christian and later Christian, but with certain consistent characteristics that aimed to not limit God or the capacity to experience God. It is, by its nature, communal, sacramental, relational, and guided by certain practices that help adherents live in fulsome ways.



First, what do we mean by “Spirituality?”

- ▶ It is an approach to life
- ▶ It is how we live out what we most profoundly believe
- ▶ It holds time lightly for a purpose
- ▶ “spiritual by not religious” is therefore a false dichotomy for CS because we all bind ourselves to something larger than ourselves
- ▶ It is not a compartmentalized piece of life, but informs every aspect of life
- ▶ It is not static, nor is it ever perfected



Who were the Celts?

- ▶ Ancient Greece—Keltoi were “strangers or hidden ones” who lived to the north and east of Greek “civilization”...they were known to be in Galatia in 1st C CE (modern day turkey).
- ▶ Ceilt—an act of concealing (from which the word “kilt” comes).
- ▶ Celtic peoples and tribal languages were found all over Europe, including British Isles, pagan, druid, not-institutionally religious the way we think of it now.



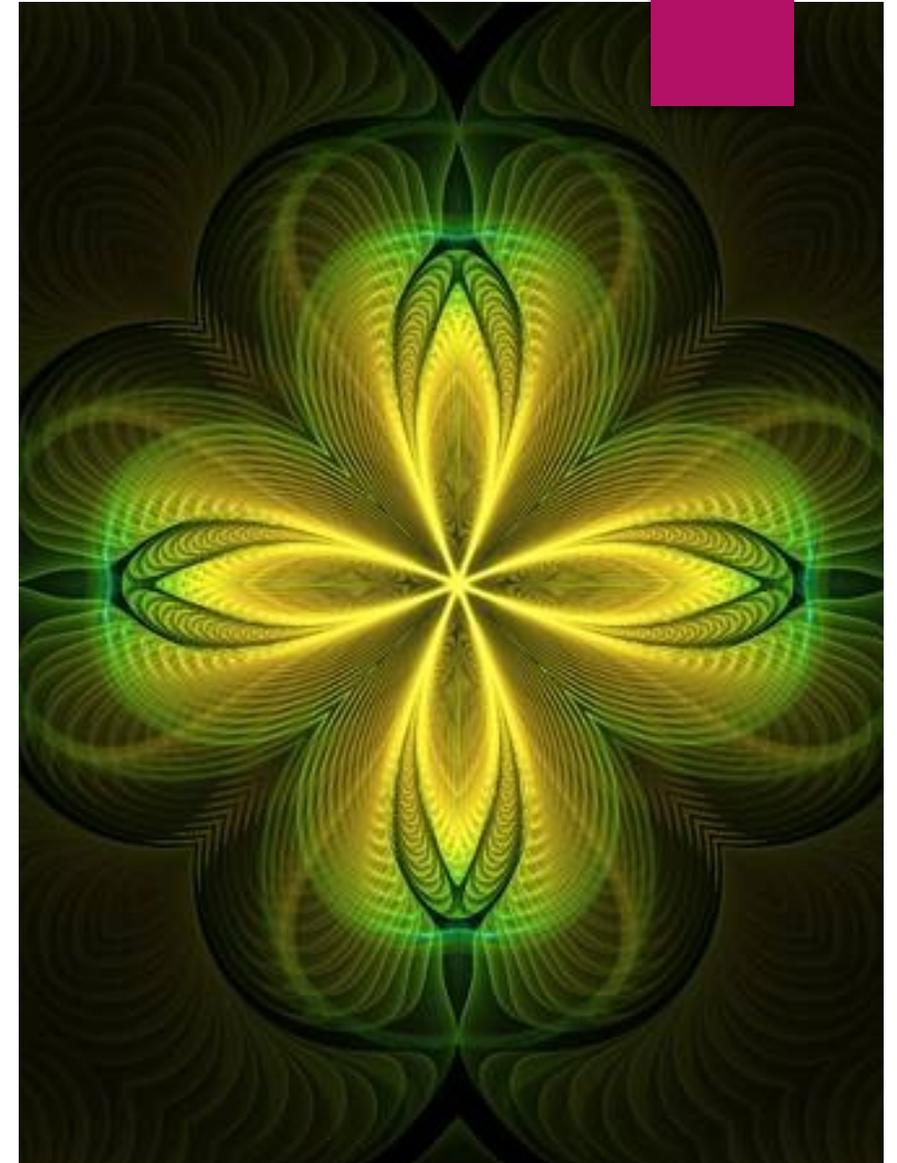
Celtic Movements and Missions

- ▶ When Anglo-Saxons pressed into Britain, the Celts moved north and west, to Ireland and Scotland...
- ▶ By 5th C, Christian missionaries brought Christianity their way, and it was integrated into tribal practices.
- ▶ The Celtic Christians then began sending missionaries east and southward:
 - ▶ Patrick to Ireland in 432
 - ▶ Columba to Iona in 560
 - ▶ Aidan to Lindisfarne in 635
 - ▶ Columbanus to France and Italy in 591...



Characteristics of Celtic Spirituality

- ▶ Monastic—always in community, ascetic (ascesis=to live vs. gnosis=to know)
 - ▶ Anam cara—soul friends became important as means of living out the call
 - ▶ Roman monastic tradition: Do as I say...and expected to be obeyed
 - ▶ Celtic monastic tradition: Do as I do...and hope to be followed
 - ▶ “New Monasticism” is taking root, communally, guided by practices (regulum)



Sacramental

- ▶ Sacramental—secular vs. sacred is anathema. Holy worldliness in which nothing is removed from the realm of the sacred
 - ▶ Nothing is outside of God's love and grace
 - ▶ God can be seen in creation—the five senses is how we come to know God
 - ▶ Esther de Waal: “The Celtic approach to God opens up a world in which nothing is too common to be exalted and nothing is so exalted that it cannot be made common.”
 - ▶ What naturally follows then are prayers for ordinary activities of life—rising from bed, getting dressed, eating, walking, etc.



Contemplative/Missional

- ▶ “being sent” (mission) is living in the story while living out the story...but always tethered to the monastic rhythms of life
- ▶ We are human beings, not human doings...
- ▶ Thomas Merton: “The monk is not defined by his task, his usefulness; in a certain sense he is supposed to be useless, because his mission is not to do this or that job but to be a man of God.”
- ▶ Aidan found Lindisfarne Island helpful in reminding the community of this...half the day the island is cut off from the mainland, where work might be done...balance between doing and being, all so that in seeking God we might better serve God...



Hospitality

- ▶ When Aidan moved to his hermitage on Inner Lindisfarne Island, he built a guest room for God.
- ▶ When King Oswald gave Aidan many gifts, he gave most of them to the poor...
- ▶ Meet and greet all persons, avoiding the need to categorize them (nothing is not sacred)



Creation Affirming

- ▶ Columbanus: “If you wish to understand the Creator, first understand His creation.”
- ▶ Not pantheism, where worship is of the stones, but affirming wonder and praise for the creator of the stones...
- ▶ Celtic spirituality holds a strong sense of place, and honors “thin places” as holy ground...
- ▶ Identity is bound up in living in harmony with the land, with all creation...which is why it is so popular today (even if often misappropriated)



“Spiritual Warfare”

- ▶ Perhaps not the most preferred language, but understood from the ancient Druidic culture that life was lived in the midst of good and evil battling for power, and we are at risk of becoming pawns in the warfare. How do we resist it?
 - ▶ The five senses striving to find God in our midst...body, heart, practice, prayer
- ▶ Blessing: thinking and wishing well on others
- ▶ Cursing: thinking and wishing ill on others
- ▶ Sign of the cross becomes bodily reminder/protector
- ▶ Rhythms of the day help us remain focused

Trinitarian

- ▶ Central to it all: that Community began in the heart of God...that all community flows from this God of Relational Love.
- ▶ Patrick's Breastplate: I bind unto myself today the strong name of the Trinity.
- ▶ Ancient Celtic statement of faith: "God is Father, Son and Spirit. Therefore God is Three in One. Therefore God is Community. If we are made in the image of God, Then we will find our fulfilment in Community (in relationships of love)."
- ▶ Another ancient profession: "God the Father is for us, God the Son is with us, God the Holy Spirit is in us."



Love of Learning

- ▶ Engaged with scripture, not just as exercise of gaining knowledge, but striving for wisdom...wisdom to live well, with Jesus as Lord, companion, and friend.
- ▶ Celtic monasteries encouraged creativity as part of ascetic discipline, giving rise to ornate books (Book of Kells, Cuthbert's gospel book), poetry, art, storytelling, and development of symbols



Concept of Time

- ▶ Time is sacred, but also not just chronological...it is held by the “Forever Now God” who was, and is, and is to come—the great I AM—who has given this moment to you as a gift. What will you do with it?
- ▶ Not rushed then—the rhythms provide a sense of time that is fulsome, sufficient to be who you are created to be, and to do what you are created to do.
- ▶ Very different than “not enough time to do _____”
- ▶ Every person has always had 24 hours in a day, 60 minutes in an hour...and in the sense of the “Forever Now God” we are companions on the way with Columba, Aidan, Hild, and all the pilgrims who have walked the paths we walk...



Nature of Spirituality

- ▶ “Spirituality is not a formula, it is not a test, it is a relationship. Spirituality is not about competency, it is about intimacy. Spirituality is not about perfection, it is about connection. The way of the spiritual life begins where we are now in the mess of our lives. Accepting the reality of our broken flawed lives is the beginning of spirituality, not because the spiritual life will remove our flaws but because we let go of seeking perfection and, instead, seek God, the One who is present in the tangled-ness of our lives. Spirituality is not about being fixed, it is about God being present in the mess of our unfixedness.” -Mike Yaconelli
- ▶ Everyone, then, is spiritual...



Questions and Conversation...