

## Handout: Celtic Spirituality

Celtic spirituality is marked by the belief that what is deepest in us is the image of God.

Sin has distorted and obscured that image, but not erased it. All life is an expression of God. To learn of Him, therefore, is to listen to the heart of life. Celtic belief, in line with the mysticism of St John, emphasised that God is the light of life. Repentance is a turning to what is most deeply planted **within** us, the light that has not been overcome by darkness. Redemption is the journey of being reconnected to the light of God within.

Standing in the mystical tradition of St John, Celtic tradition teaches us that creation is essentially an utterance of God. (See John's Gospel Chapter 1). All things at heart are a birth or embodiment of God's Word and the goodness of God is at the heart and inception of all life. All life is interwoven, past and present, seen and unseen.

Not only is the life of one species interdependent on the life of another, but the whole fabric of creation is woven through with the thread of God's light. God expresses the light of creation into being and yet is beyond creation; He is both immanent and transcendent. Thus, the Celtic tradition points to the Mystery as both brilliance and darkness.

There is no real divide between the visible and invisible worlds. The veil that divides them is as thin as gossamer. A sense of 'thinness' between the material and spiritual realms, in which something of the eternal is glimpsed in and through the temporal, marks Celtic spirituality. It is a spirituality that looks not away from life to find God, but deep within.

A reverencing and respect for creation is central to this. 'To see with the eyes of the heart' is a phrase often used in the Celtic tradition and great emphasis is placed on our relationship with God's creatures. All ground is holy, for within it is the goodness of God.

Celtic spirituality deeply affirms the unbounded side of life. It seeks a wild naturalness of place and acknowledges the untameable power of the elemental forces. There is a strong sense of the wildness of God. The standing crosses, often in wild, exposed sites, were focal points of worship. Earth, sea and sky were the temple of God.

The love of pilgrimage is central to the Celtic tradition. The ideal of the 'peregrini' was defined as 'seeking the place of one's resurrection,' the search often leading us to wild and untamed places within ourselves as well as in nature. Celtic Christians believe that God takes us to the edges of life....Often it is only when we are willing to go to the edges that we truly meet others....At the edge we see horizons denied to those who stay where they are comfortable....The edge is in fact always the centre of spiritual renewal.

*From 'The Book of Creation: The Practice of Celtic Spirituality' by Philip Newell  
And 'Celtic Spirituality: Rhythms, Roots and Relationships' by Ray Simpson*