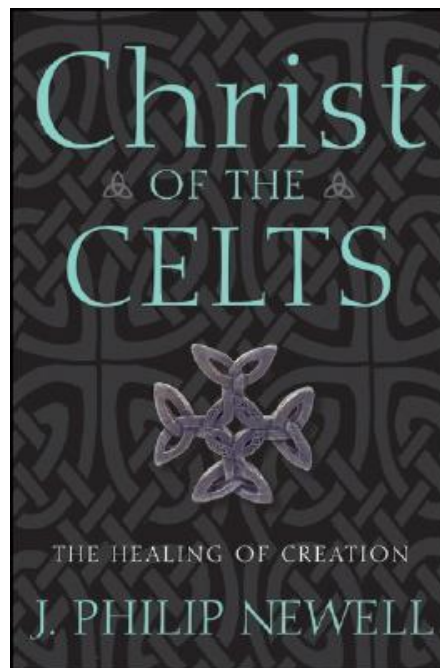




Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation

J. Philip Newell

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Christ of the Celts

"I explore the Celtic image of Christ as the Memory of what we have forgotten. He remembers the dance of the universe and the harmony that is deep within all things. He is the Memory also of who we are."

--from the Prelude

"Diagnosing the human soul with a longing for peace in the face of fear and fragmentation nurtured by global political forces and fundamentalisms, Newell offers the ancient traditions of Celtic Christianity as a way forward in healing humankind and the earth."

--Publishers Weekly

"This graceful, wise, and important book is a superb introduction to the treasures of Celtic Christianity for our time."

--Marcus Borg, author, The Heart of Christianity

Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation Details

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Author : J. Philip Newell

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From Reader Review Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation for online ebook

Aidan Owen says

An outstanding rereading of Christian spirituality, which is actually an old reading. If you're looking for Christian spirituality that is earth-centered, celebrates the creation, and doesn't rely on the pagentry of empire for its glorification, this book is a good place to start. Does Newell perhaps romanticize Celtic spirituality? Sure. Does he use the phrase "the high desert of New Mexico" about 1,000 more than he needs to? Absolutely. But the beauty of this book and the spiritual vision it offers outweighs the at-times oversimplified reading of the Celts.

Jane says

I felt myself drawn to Celtic Christianity without really knowing much about it. This book did a good job of explaining what Celtic Christianity is and really spoke to some of the problems I have felt with traditional Christian teaching. For example, I have always felt at odds with the concept of original sin. Newell explained how that doctrine led to an excuse for empire and conquering peoples (think Crusades and forced baptisms). The doctrine of substitutional atonement is also examined, how it would imply that what is at the heart of God is judgment rather than love. As Newell puts it "Christ is the companion of our soul rather than the ransom for our soul".

Fr. River says

Mk. 1:29-39 Book Review: Christ of the Celts by J. Philip Newell

"Jesus healed many. ." it appears that some where not healed. Last night I gave out 150 meals--but many others went without. In Christ of the Celts Newell talks about an inclusive spirituality--that brings our relationship to Christ into the wholeness of all creation. He summarizes that for me in his reflection on the cross:

"The cross is the greatest showing of God. It discloses the first and deepest impulse of God, self giving. The cross. .is a revelation of our true nature, made in the image of God. It reveals that we come closer to our true self when we pour ourselves out in hope for one another, when we give our heart and thus the whole of our being."

We are called to self-give, and when we do that all will be fed, all will be one in Christ. In the Magnificat Mary is challenging the government and religious leaders of her day--food was a tool of power--if people were hungry, they spent their time trying to meet that need--she calls for all to be fed, be equal. Today I see food as tool, used to control, thousands go to bed hungry in San Francisco alone. Newell's book calls us to give "our heart, and thus the whole of our being," and we do no one will materially want. Deo Gratias! Thanks be to God!?

Ellen says

I picked this up because my church is sponsoring a book group discussion of it through Lent. It was a fast read, and didn't go much in-depth to any one topic. The author seemed to rely a lot on personal stories and experiences sprinkled with quotations from early Christian writers. It was very affirming, and I enjoyed thinking about concepts such as substantiary atonement in a non-dominant way. I would have been interested to learn a bit more about the history of Celtic Christianity and how it might be integrated into a mainline belief. I enjoyed it overall, but I would probably have felt much differently if I were a serious student of theology.

Jacob Aitken says

I checked this book out from the library because 1) I am part Celt and thought it would be interesting and 2) I was interested in the argument made by others that the Celtic church had Eastern strands distinct from Latin Christianity and maybe this guy could elucidate. The book failed miserably on both points.

Have you seen the movie "Meet the Robinsons?" In the movie the frog tells the bad guy, after one of his plans fails, "I just don't think this plan was thought through." That's how this book is. A relatively good idea, strung together by some gnostic texts and cliched feminist arguments, with a little Erigena and St Irenaeus thrown in for giggles.

His initial argument isn't that off the mark, however. Quoting Erigena and St Irenaeus Newell says that Celtic Christianity sees the cosmos as a unified whole and points to Christ as the Eternal Memory and the one in whom all of reality is recapitulated. A bit Platonic, to be sure, but definitely Orthodox and exciting. Had he stayed on this level he would be okay. Unfortunately, Newell kept writing.

I don't think he understood the initial contradiction between quoting (to make the same argument) the gnostic Gospels of St Thomas and the savage anti-gnostic writings of St Irenaeus. But to be fair, Newell says he opposes gnosticism. I want to believe him but he uses every cliched gnostic and feminist argument in the book. He sets up the pure Celtic/feminine/anti-virgin Mary Church over against the evil Imperial church (think Republican Party) of Constantine. And those meany Constantinians are trying to take over the world and strip-mine matter, introduce original sin, and keep women in the kitchen! N.T. Wright has already refuted this nonsense and I won't waste time here.

I stopped reading halfway through. The book from page 60 onward is pure paganism.

EVALUATION

It's a shame, really. There really is much promise in studying Celtic Christianity. In short, this book was nuggets of gold found in piles of steaming excrement.

We need sane, serious people to write books on this topic. Legitimate Celtic expressions such as Erigena and St Irenaeus, and perhaps a Celticized form of St Maximus the Confessor is the best argument against gnosticism and imperialism.

Pam I. says

At several points in this book I wept. This is a "read again" book for me. I found affirmation in Newell's gift of words.....affirmation of humanity and divine love.

Bob Price says

Christ of the Celts is not exactly what I thought it was. While that is generally ok, here I believe there is a bit of misleading information.

I generally believe that the Celtic vision of Christianity has a great deal to offer to the church and the world. There are things we can learn from going back to reading some of the ancients. In particular, the Celtic tradition has a great deal to say about the unity of creation and the completion of salvation.

The problem with *Christ of the Celts* is that it is not Celtic nor Christian.

The author has a problem with orthodox Christianity. I can understand that and at times even emphasize with him. But when you are writing a book about Celtic Christianity, it appears odd to then dismiss everything that is Christian within that tradition.

He begins by citing old extra-canonical gospels. That's fine, but they aren't Celtic and there is no evidence that they held a great deal of sway in the Christian Church, much less ever made it the Celtic lands.

Newell is on better ground when he talks about Original Sin, because he at least quotes Pelagius, who was instrumental for a lot of Celtic Christians in their understanding. But at no point does he give witness to the vast numbers in the Celtic Christian church who held to the belief in original sin. I think the Celtic View can go a great way for helping us to correct and understand more deeply the doctrine of original sin, but Newell simply wants to reject it.

He is back on slippery ground talking about the atonement. No matter what you feel about the issue, the Bible is pretty clear that Jesus' death is presented in propitiatory/expiatory terms. There is no attempt to deal with the biblical texts, or even to present a different interpretation.

In the end, the book simply feels like the author has an axe to grind against traditional Christianity and uses the cover of 'Celtic Christianity' to appear on more solid ground.

Katherine (Kat) Nagel says

Enjoyed this, to a point, but was disappointed. I liked the emphasis on "God within all," and the importance of the personal connection with both God and the earth. I was hoping for something a bit more substantial about the history and development of Celtic Christianity, though. The historical information was fairly sparse and fragmented. The personal notes were interesting, but the book felt...twitchy, with all the jumping back and forth between historical Celtic Christianity and Newell's personal past. The most valuable part of the reading experience, for me was the discussion with friends. The book provided good hooks for bringing out personal memories and feelings.

Lawrence says

I have been reading this book along with a church discussion group. I've made my thoughts about the book known there. I have struggled with a review because I see that so many persons have liked the book. So . . .

What is good about this book? Well, it made me think more deeply about our natural goodness and "Edenic" nature as opposed to our natural badness through original sin. Mr. Newell opts for natural goodness. OK. But he's unable or unwilling to explain the badness (i.e., sin). I would say that what looks like our natural goodness is, in reality, the strength of God's love for us and not any particular merit or goodness of our own.

Mr. N. also made me think about the crucifixion and the doctrine of "substitutionary atonement". Well, I did come to focus on the expression of love that the crucifixion represents as well as the promise of the resurrection. I do appreciate his bringing me to this river and making me drink.

Otherwise, Mr. N. provokes me to no end. His warbling and labile manner repulse me. His endless repetition is boring. I stop listening because I am drowning in his words and easy emotions. But most of all, I do not trust him. I do not trust that what he says about Celtic Christianity has any basis. I learn what he feels, but I have no idea what Celtic Christianity is about. And this makes me angry. I have read and prayed one Celtic prayer transmitted to me through a publication of the Episcopal Church. On the basis of this prayer, I suspect that Celtic Christianity had a tradition of a deep and magnificent spirituality. Mr. N. does not even touch on it. I simply learn a lot about his feelings.

Rebekah Gamble says

I thought when I picked up this book that I would be reading a historical account, well researched, like some of this author's work. That's not what the book is. Instead it's more of a collection of experiences, mostly based on how the author feels about his family, that helps a person 'feel' Celtic Christianity. This wasn't really what I came for and so I wasn't completely happy, but if you take it for what it is, it's done well. After all, what's more holy than the family?

Kate Davis says

A beautiful exploration of the re-birthing of Celtic spirituality in our world today. Christ, here, is not one a sacrifice, but a manifestation of love. This is a spirituality that recognizes the links between God and the earth, states that the word 'God' is a metaphor, and embraces other faiths as pointing to the same truth.

I'd highly recommend the chapter "Paying the Piper" for a small sample of Celtic spirituality; I cried all the way through that one.

olga-maria says

Stunning. Challenging. Beautiful. Inspiring. Clarifying. Helpful. <3

Jim says

Do you struggle with traditional theological teachings, especially doctrines like original sin and substitutionary atonement? Does it bother you that Christianity has historically devalued creation and even supported its destruction? Are you concerned about a gospel that only centers itself in salvation of the human soul?

Then this book is for you. If you let it, this book will help shift your thinking about those and other issues, hopefully setting you on a path of recovering a whole gospel for the whole of creation. This is a well written, incredibly moving, and short book (read it in a half day) which will help you reframe the way you think about the Christian faith.

Wendy says

A book to be read slowly and again. Newell reveals Christ in ways that feel mystical and natural at once. Seeking unity with the earth and others using rhythm, heartbeat, drum beat and song. Drawing upon the ancient Celtic traditions, interweaving the feminine spirituality and masculine tradition and the teachings of George MacLeod and Teilhard de Chardin as well as ancients Irenaeus and Eriugena -- we are challenged to reconcile the church with the earth. A bold and old calling to our original oneness.

E. says

In January I thought I had decided on a book for our Lenten study at church, when I came across this at a Soul Desires bookstore display during our denomination's Winter Convocation for Nebraska clergy. Our Lenten theme has been "A Healing Spring" and this book's focus on healing and on some of the doctrines related to Lent--sin, atonement, salvation--seemed a very good fit.

The book generated lively discussions among our church members, some of whom never liked Newell's feeling-oriented, poetic approach and writing style. Others really liked that. I enjoyed how reading the book did nudge some of our thinkers out of their comfort zones.

Newell believes that our time requires a new way of Christian thinking and practice and that sources for that

new way can be found in the ancient way of the Celts, which is views very broadly. Among the key sources in this book are the Gospel of John, some Gnostic texts, Irenaeus (interestingly an opponent of the Gnostics), Pelagius, Columba, Aelred, Julian, Eriugena, and Teilhard.

This new way of being Christian will reject some of the traditional approaches to sin, the cross, and salvation, while drawing on a more holistic approach that is sensitive to nature and other religions. He finds touchstones with other indigenous people groups.

This is not a scholarly book or a thorough history of Celtic thought. I found it primarily devotional, prompting us to feel and think about various aspects of our faith and spirituality. I was drawn to his personal stories, particularly those dealing with his son's mental illness. The book was part spiritual memoir and confession.

The one doctrinal topic that I found most interesting was his insistence that in traditional Western Christianity, Jesus is often presented as contrary to nature, body, and humanity. "Christ was being presented, at the end of the day, as a deserter of creation and a forsaker of the human journey." Instead, Christ should lead us to affirm our humanity and our bodies and to locate the divine within ourselves--"at the core of the gospel is the truth that we are most deeply divine precisely when we are most deeply human."

Dougald Blue says

If you consider yourself a "mainline Christian," this book will challenge your presumptions.

John Philip Newell -- who, incidentally is a regular guest at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Va. - is the former Warden of the retreat center on the island of Iona. He is today considered one of the most adept proponents of Celtic Christianity in the world.

His premise is that while mainline Christianity developed alongside the imperial presumptions of the Roman Empire, the Celtic people were outside that mainstream, and in fact fought against it. The result was a radically different view of the faith than that traditionally held today by most Christians.

I won't give up it's secrets, the book is too compelling and too eloquent to presume such. Read it, and your eyes will be opened to new vistas.

Sagely says

I'm not sure at all how to review this book. Parts of it touched on deep, forgotten joys and secret hopes. Other parts set off all my warning bells and made me tense.

Philip Newell offers a great summary of *Christ of the Celts* in the final pages of its "postlude":

Throughout this book, I have been pointing to a way of seeing that has characterized the Celtic tradition over the centuries. Particularly, it is a way of seeing Christ that is distinct from most of our Western Christian inheritance. It views Christ as coming from the heart of creation rather than from beyond creation. And it celebrates him as reconnecting us to our true nature instead of saving us from our nature. Much of this seeing has been influenced by the writings and perspective of John the Beloved, who in the Celtic world represents a vision of the sacred unity of life, all things coming forth from the Heart of God's Being. John is symbolized by the eagle in flight. It is as if he sees the oneness of creation and the Light that is at the heart of all life from a great height.

You can pick up there many of CoC's themes. Oneness, wholeness, *recapitulation*. Newell makes great arguments for revamping our understandings of original sin, creation ex nihilo, religious pluralism. I appreciate these arguments, and I resonate with many of them.

Still, I feel uneasy. This is new territory for me. I'm not sure what is revelation and what is fever dream.

CoC will be a book I continue to wrestle with. I hope it opens me more to the goodness of nature. I love one line in CoC, drawn from Eriugena: "Nature is being; grace is well-being." That alone is enough to open my heart in new ways. We'll see what else this text works in me.

CH says

I love Philip Newell's writing; I often feel that we are kindred spirits. Additionally, I am deeply drawn to Celtic Christianity. Two themes that recur in Newell's writing is the reframing of the doctrine of original sin and a new understanding of what the Cross of Christ means for us today. The doctrine of original sin is damaging to both humanity and creation. It is the root of so much human suffering in the world and has caused incredible damage to millions of folks trying to follow the spiritual path of Christianity. Newell, like Fr. Matthew Fox, focuses on what it means to be created in the image of the Divine, and likewise, what the image of Cross of Christ calls us to. This is great reading for those who've been hurt & damaged by traditional Christian Doctrine, as well as, for those who think deeply about theology and are trying to find a way to be faithful to their experience in the world and to the Spiritual Path of Christ. It's a great read!

Debra Waites says

I find it interesting that as I was reading this book, I also began reading on October 9 Matthew Fox's Original Blessing, which dovetails nicely with Christ of the Celts.

This book tells in a succinct way how the Celts worshipped the Christ in a creation theology. It recognizes the unity of what many of the mystics espoused. An easy read. Was not life changing, but an encouraging affirmation of a path that I have tended to walk more often than not.

Tim says

This is an extremely interesting book. I admit to having been skeptical that it would achieve any depth when I started it, but found myself drawn into J. Philip Newell's engaging and insightful (to me) discussion of Celtic Christianity and the ways that it differs from the standard western Christian traditon.

I found Newell's discussion of Celtic notions concerning original sin and substitutionary atonement to be particularly interesting. If you have ever wondered about Celtic crosses, this book will help you grasp their significance. This short book is well worth reading for those who are interested in religion and spritiuality.
