

**Review: Ian Bradley, *The Celtic Way*, Darton Longman Todd,  
London, 1993**

Pages: 131

**Celtic Paganism Masquerading as Christianity**

According to the Bible there is no ‘Celtic’ Christianity, only Christianity. From the outset therefore this religion becomes a blend of a non-Christian influence with true Christianity.

The source of these influences is clearly pagan, seen in its symbology (intertwining serpentine knots of reincarnation), close affinity with nature (syncretised druidism) and theology (Gaia worship, mysticism, and compatibility with the Roman Catholicism heresy).

**Preface (pp. vii-x)**

Iona and Lindisfarne were famed centres of evangelism during the Middle Ages.

‘Green Theology’ is linked to Celtic Christianity.

It was non-hierarchical, community-based, and often led by women.

Celtic Christianity flourished in Britain between the sixth and eleventh centuries.

The author learned much from two Roman Catholics while in Edinburgh.

**I) Procession of Saints and Scholars (pp. 1-30)**

The Celtic knot hearkens back to pagan times and signifies the endless cycle of existence.

The Celts believed eternal things frustrated the devil and so venerated constant running water. The knot's tightly-drawn spirals were for encirclement and protection.

St Patrick didn't have a drop of Irish blood in him.

St Columba grew up in Northern Ireland (not Scotland) and St David was from Wales.

The Gaelic-speaking Irish colonised west Scotland, the Picts north-east and the central Highlands, and the Cymri (Britons) southern Scotland, England and Wales.

The Romans called Scotland Caledonia.

The Celts were called κελτοι by the Greeks and *Galli* by the Romans. They may have arisen from around the Black Sea about 1,000BC.

England is said to have reverted to paganism 5<sup>th</sup>C AD when the Romans departed.

Joseph of Arimathea brought the Holy Grail to Glastonbury and built the first above-ground Church in the world.

The first Christian Celt St Ninian was educated in Rome.

The Celtic Church mainly used Latin. It produced St Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon (AD178-200).

Gaul introduced monasticism to Western Europe.

The Book of Kells echoes Egyptian, Coptic, and Syriac church icons. Intertwined serpent motifs were popular in East and West traditions.

The Irish Church was organised by monasteries rather than parishes.

Pilgrimage is derived from the Latin *peregrinatio*.

Bridget goddess worship was transferred to the figure of St Brigid, the first Irish woman priest. Brigid was also said to be the midwife of Christ at the inn.

The historical Brigid lived AD450-523 and founded a monastery at Kildare.

St Columbanus was born in Leinster AD540 and joined a community at Bangor. At 45, he took twelve monks and established a monastery in France by rebuilding a ruined pagan temple to Diana. At Bobbio, Northern Italy in 614 he established one of Italy's largest monasteries. St Francis of Assisi visited this monastery.

St Columba built a monastery on Iona on top of an old Druid temple. which grew to a building housing 150 monks. When the weather is bad the whole island is completely cutoff from the mainland.

Royal patronage was extremely important for Celtic missionaries.

In 617, Northumbrian prince Oswald was given sanctuary by Irish monks on Iona. Upon retaining the province in 632, he invited Aidan from Iona who established Lindisfarne on a tiny island off the Northumbrian coast.

In AD596, Pope Gregory I sent forty monks led by St Augustine to England, who arrived in Kent in 597 and were well received by King Ethelbert. Augustine went to Arles to be consecrated Archbishop of England.

Augustine failed in trying to take authority over the Celtic Christians of Wales and South West England.

Celtic monks followed the Druids by shaving their hair on the front but letting it grow on the back. Roman monks preferred a circular bald pate.

Whitby, AD664, was the debate between Celtic and Roman Christians where Rome took control.

Archbishop of Canterbury Lanfranc (1070 to 1089) outlawed clerical marriage and enforced celibacy among monks and priests.

The Vikings laid waste to Iona in AD802.

Benedictine monks came to Iona in AD1203 and built the Norman Abbey.

The 'Celtic Church' was not institutionalised like the Roman Church.

## **II) Presence and Protection (pp. 31-50)**

St Patrick's Breastplate is a famous Irish hymn ('I bind unto myself today the strong name of the Trinity'). Patrick is said to have recited the hymn as he faced the warriors of Laogaire, pagan high king of Ireland, on the hill of Tara.

The Celtic Cross has a circle symbolising the sun.

Celtic Christianity is somewhat pantheistic.

*Mac Muire* is "Mary's son" in Gaelic.

Pagan divinities were often grouped in threes which made syncretism with druidism easier.

St Columba testified on more than one occasion that he had seen 'holy angels at war in the air against the adversary powers.'

The Celts were destined to be subjugated by the Anglo-Saxons and then the Normans.

A 'Christianised' ritual is the *caim*, where in times of danger people would draw a circle around themselves with the index finger of their right hand.

### **III) The Goodness of Nature (pp. 51-69)**

Iraeus said 'If the Word has been made man, it is so that men may be made gods.'

Pelagius was born in Britain or Ireland around AD350 and died AD418 in Egypt. He both rejected predestination and original sin. Augustine quotes him as saying 'Evil is not born with us'.

Palladius was sent to Ireland around AD431 to counter Pelagian influences.

John Scotus Erigena was born in Ireland in the early 800s and denied a literal hell.

### **IV) Monks and Pilgrims (pp. 70-83)**

Monks would genuflect 200 times on average each day.

St Patrick is said to have replaced Dubthach the Druid as adviser to King Laogaire.

Irish monasteries were less troubled by Anglo-Saxon and Viking interference.

Celtic monks travelled throughout the British Isles and Europe driven by missionary zeal.

### **V) The Power of Imagination (pp. 84-99)**

Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner argued that Christ dwells in an 'anonymous' way in the hearts of many who would never call themselves Christians.

### **VI) The Way Goes On (pp. 100-134)**

Celtic Christianity came under the spell of Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.