

THE ORDER OF BARDS OVATES & DRUIDS
MOUNT HAEMUS LECTURE FOR THE YEAR 2020

THE WELL AND THE CHAPEL: CONFLUENCE

BY RoMa JOHNSON, MA, MDIV



RoMa Johnson, a Druid member of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, an ordained non-sectarian Christian, and a poet, has been writing and teaching on various topics of Celtic Spirituality for over 20 years.

This paper was originally intended to explore in depth the synergy between the indigenous Celtic worldview and the evolution of early Celtic Christianity, between the created world of *immanence* and the hopefulness of *imminence*. Then the coronavirus entered the world, facing us with what seem to be apocalyptic questions: *What does it mean? What do we do now?* Here, the Well and the Chapel are used as lenses through which to view ourselves and the Other, in the Time Before and the Time Ahead. *Confluence*, not the choice between, or even the evolution of one to the next, will inform our efforts to co-create a transformed world. This paper is meant to be a spiritual thought problem, exploring five areas: Worldviews—*Immanence* and *Imminence*; Justice—Sin, Responsibility and Restoration; The Three—The Sacred Feminine and the Trinity; *Immrama*—The Soul's Journey and Inspiration; and *Confluence*.

In Awen.

GREETING

Lovely to see all of you here on this day, when you could be walking the hillsides. I am RoMa. I am a Druid member of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, and I am an ordained non-sectarian Christian. I have been writing and teaching on various topics of Celtic Spirituality for over 20 years.

It is a bit daunting to write on the *confluence* of the Well and the Chapel, which for some is a conundrum if not an outright impossibility.

When I teach this as a class to Christian students, I open their eyes to the Celtic worldview. For some, thinking of the natural world as holy means a letting go of pre-existing ideas—even strong prejudices—against pagans, woo-woos, tree-lovers, or ‘hippies’ who don’t hold to the ‘True Faith,’ and whose beliefs are labeled heresy. I spend our time together helping to widen their mindset regarding the sacredness of earthly life, the sentience of plants and animals and stones.

When I broach this subject with Druids, I am confronted with the *Well What About...* issues: rage against ‘the Church’ on a macro scale, stemming from historic and karmic memories of inquisitions and genocides, and—for many—deep anger rooted in negative experiences with the patriarchy, prejudice, and phobias in the religion of their childhood.

Parenthetically, I am often met in the hall after class by Christians who question the inerrancy of their faith and feel like secret Druids, and Druids who are in the closet about finding comfort in their embedded (childhood) Christian theology.

In the spirit of Thomas Merton:

*If I were more fully attentive to the word of God I would be much less troubled and disturbed by events of our time: not that I would be indifferent or passive, but I could gain strength of union with the deepest currents of history, the sacred currents, which run opposite to those on the surface a great deal of the time!*¹

I greet you in this day.

1 Thomas Merton, *A Year with Thomas Merton*, 155

Altered perception must mean and will mean altered behavior.

John Moriaty

THE CHAPEL

A little aside from the main road,
becalmed in a last-century greyness,
there is the chapel, ugly, without the appeal
to the tourist to stop his car
and visit it. The traffic goes by,
and the river goes by, and quick shadows
of clouds, too, and the chapel settles
a little deeper in the grass.

But here once on an evening like this,
in the darkness that was about
his hearers, a preacher caught fire
and burned steadily before them
with a strange light, so they saw
about them and sang their amens
fiercely, narrow but saved
in a way that men are not now.

RS THOMAS

THE CREEL

The world began with a woman,
shawl-happed, stooped under a creel,
whose slow step you recognize
from troubled dreams. You feel

obliged to help her bear her burden
from hill or kelp-strewn shore,
but she passes by unseeing
thirled to her private chore.

It's not sea birds or peat she's carrying,
or fleece, nor herring bright,
but her fear that if ever she put it down
the world would go out like a light.

KATHLEEN JAMIE

PREFACE

Several months ago I recorded a “Tea with a Druid” in which I led participants on a guided meditative walk on a pathway that wound down and around until they came to a place where on one side of the path there stood a lovely old stone church and the other side opened to a wooded grove enclosing a holy well. Perhaps we can hold this sacred ‘place’ in our minds and hearts as we go forward.

I set out to use this paper to explore the synergy between the indigenous Celtic worldview and evolution of early Celtic Christianity, in order to identify through-lines, connect the dots. As I wrote about these ancient worldviews I was enchanted as always with the created world of *immanence* and the hopefulness of *imminence*. But as I began, the coronavirus entered the world.

I realized very early on that we, the global we of all humans, are not ever going to return to the way things were.

What does it mean?

Is Earth—now so quiet with the lack of traffic, so beautiful with the profusion of plants, so magical with the return of animals to the cityscape, so amazing with stars visible overhead—happy to have us humans locked up for a while? Is She punishing us for our terrible crimes of degradation and commodification? What does it mean that these hundreds of thousands of people are sick and dying? Whose fault is it that millions are suffering

deprivation of basic needs? Is the Old Testament's Hand of God raised on high, punishing us for not taking care of the poor, the widows and orphans?

What are we supposed to do?

In this context, I felt that my original construct was iterative and nostalgic, a nice diversion to what was happening in the world, but a diversion only. Not reassuring, perhaps not even relevant. I decided to use the **Chapel** and the **Well**² as lenses through which we can view ourselves and the Other, in the Time Before and the Time Ahead. *Confluence*, not the choice between, or even the evolution of one to the next, will enable us to co-create possibilities in answer to *What do we do now?*

Centuries of scholastic research and argument have been devoted to Celtic history and literature, and pre-Augustinian Christianity. I honor the works of greater minds than mine.

I intend to confine this paper to five areas that I believe will provide unfoldings for inspired discussion:

- I. Worldviews: *Immanence* and *Imminence*.
- II. Justice: Sin, Responsibility and Restoration.
- III. The Three: The Sacred Feminine and the Trinity.
- IV. *Immrama*: The Soul's Journey and Inspiration.
- V. *Confluence*

It is written as a faith exercise, to inspire, nurture and carry us in these perilous times.

² I will refer to *Celtic spirituality* (The Well) to denote non-creedal Natural/Nature spirituality, speaking generally, not on behalf of any Druidic Order, unless cited. I will refer to *Christianity* (The Chapel) to denote the Way, speaking generally, as differentiated from Church or Religion or any specific denomination or sect, unless cited.

*In times of chaos, weavers are needed
who can restore the fabric of life.
Starhawk*

I. Worldviews

IMMANENCE AND IMMINENCE

When asked what I perceive as the essential difference between indigenous Celtic spirituality and Christianity, I answer *immanence* and *imminence*.

The worldview of the indigenous Celts was one of *immanence*—God in everything. *Immanence* implies the sentience of all beings—humans, animals, birds, trees, stones—and all natural occurrences—storms, seasons, lunations, the rise and fall of the sea. Wisdom is intrinsic. Humans and animals communicate—and sometimes shift between states. Movements and configurations of natural life are imbued with meaning: the number of crows on a sill is a portent, the position of stones is influenced by celestial movement. Like that of all First Peoples, this spirituality is deeply rooted in place.

The very early Christian worldview centers on *imminence*, the “Heavenly Kingdom” *yet to come*. The righteous God of the Israelite religion is in a covenantal relationship with his people. As God’s earthly image, humans are collectively to rule the earth and all its creatures. To be created ‘in the image of God’ also implies a spiritual, moral, or intellectual component that transcends ordinary creaturely existence.³ Wisdom is extrinsic, sacred in Torah and mediated by priests. This belief system is deeply rooted in time: History speaks; life is contingent. Jesus enters into this world “not as a visitor from another realm, but a person in whom a new God consciousness had emerged.”⁴ The magisterial Creator God of the Hebrew Bible becomes the loving Father through Jesus the Wayshower.

ORAL CULTURE

Any writing covering this period must acknowledge oral transmission of culture.

The early Celtic world is a world without books, where knowledge is passed from mouth to ear in small gatherings. Story is performative, often depicting the inter-fluidity of humans and animals. Ancient tales bend and shape themselves to fit the attending audience, the season, and the artistry of the storyteller. Poetry is ancestral and mnemonic. There are Songs for every being, occasion and activity:

3 Preface to NRSV, vi

4 John Shelby Spong, *The Fourth Gospel*, 8

invocations to bring in; incantations to keep out; charms for healing; blessings for tasks or events; prayers for the journey. The method of instruction [of the Druids] “was by symbols, and by enigmas, or dark allegories, by ancient songs, and maxims orally delivered... but which they deemed it unlawful to reduce into writing...”⁵

At the time of Jesus, outside of the Temple hierarchy and the Roman elites, most people are pre-literate, although they surely have memorized fragments of story and song heard in liturgical rite and ritual. Worship is communal, mandated, centralized and calendarized. Story is remembrance,

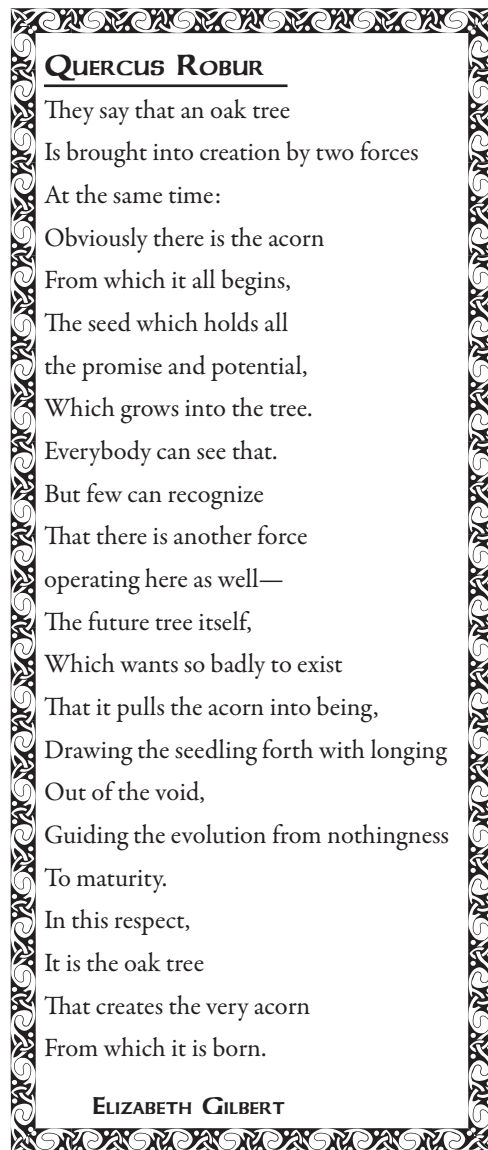
re-telling and reaffirming their history in relationship with a sovereign God. In his ministry Jesus taught through parables which were passed down orally among his followers, and only committed to writing decades after his death.

Because what we know of these ancient worldviews comes to us as oral tradition, only committed to writing years or even centuries later, we must use *envisioning* as a lens through which to reach understanding.

ENVISIONING

Let us envision *immanence* first, in the world of the indigenous Celts.

If we close our eyes we see a woman standing in machair on a cliff above the sea. Her hair blows in the wind from the West. A gaggle of wild geese clack overhead. She lives on an island along the ancient seaways in a world of earth, sky and sea. A world without roads or clocks, lit only by fire. Time is circular, cyclical, never-ending. The stars move in their long dance through the night sky. The wheel of the year ever turns in seasons of light and darkness.

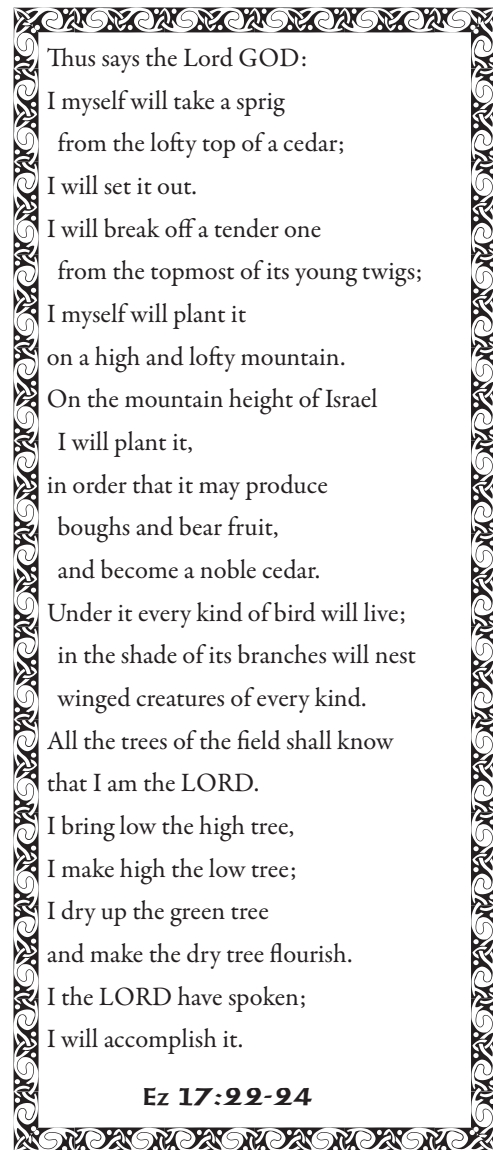


5 Edward Davies, “Celtic Researches,” found in *The Druid Sourcebook*, John Matthews, ed., 129

The cycle of life and death interweaves, always moving in change: seed into stem into leaf into flower into fruit, returning to earth as seed...

Hers is an agricultural community, deeply tribal, tied to the land. Wealth is measured in cattle; there is no coinage. Seasonal festivals on the solstices and quarter days, are held in the Cathedral of Earth and Sky.

There is no concept of “God” as separate and apart. All life is *immanent*—intrinsic, inherent, innate. The mythic pantheon of Celtic “gods and goddesses” represents—in a sense we can scarcely grasp—mysteries in and of creation personified: the shining sun is *Lugh* bringing light to the world; the storm is *Cailleach Bheur*, scratching at the window, wailing at the door.



Now let us envision *imminence* in the world at the emergence of what we now know as Christianity.

If we close our eyes we see a young man standing on a dusty road not far from an inland sea. He isn’t “happy,” wouldn’t understand the word. He isn’t hopeful or dreaming of a future. He has barely enough to eat—in the good times.

His is a fractured world of scarcity, fear, and political unrest here at the far reaches of the Roman world. He and his family are subjects of the Roman Empire, victims of political oppression, economic exploitation, and chronic violence.

Time is linear—there is a deeply remembered past, and a present, ritualized and celebrated on holy days (interspersed with garish Roman festivals), but survival needs preclude any thoughts of a future. Death is the end of life.

In his community rumors abound of rebellion, of the End of Days, with an undercurrent of Messianic fervor spoken in fear and whispers, a sense that a savior—imagined as heroic, military and brave—will come to them

soon to overthrow the oppressors and lead them to freedom, as of old. They remember captivity and exodus.

Jesus comes into this world to teach through signs and wonders about changes coming *soon* to bring about an “alternative world in which everyone has enough and no one needs to be afraid. The gospel phrase for this is the ‘kingdom of God,’ the heart...of Jesus’ message.”⁶ In Jesus, death is overcome. The kingdom of God is at hand. Story bears a message and a promise.

So here we have two distinct worldviews. In this paper I call them The Well and The Chapel.



The Well: born in a context of natural abundance, enchanting in its myths and hero tales of shape-shifting and otherworldly journeys. Wisdom is brewed in the cauldron of Cerridwen, and knowledge comes from direct experience. **Trouble comes** when the natural world is out of balance. Druidry has its origins in the Well.



The Chapel: born in the context of a subsistence economy under foreign dominance. Wisdom comes from Torah: God, both just and merciful, a direct actor in history, speaks directly through the prophets. The role of the people is to remain in right relationship with God. **Trouble comes** when this relationship is ruptured. Christianity has its origins in the Chapel.

6 Marcus Borg, *Evolution of the Word*, 9-10

II. Justice

HUMANKIND'S ROLE IN THE CREATED WORLD

At this critical moment of earthtime we are engaged, indeed ravaged by the coronavirus plague, global warming, environmental degradation and animal extinction. One of our first instincts is to

CHARGE OF THE STAR GODDESS

I who am the beauty of the green earth,
And the white moon among the stars
And the mysteries of the waters,
I call upon your soul to arise
And come unto Me.
For I am the soul of nature that gives life
To the universe.
From Me all things proceed, and unto Me
They must return.
Let My worship be in the heart that rejoices,
For behold—
All acts of love and pleasure are My rituals.
Let there be beauty and strength,
Power and compassion,
Honor and humility,
Mirth and reverence
Within you.
And you who seek to know Me,
Know that your seeking
And your yearning will avail you not,
Unless you know the Mystery.
For if that which you seek, you find not
Within yourself,
You will never find it without.
For behold, I have been with you
From the beginning,
And I am that which is attained
At the end of desire.

STARHAWK

look around and see *who's to blame?* followed closely by some form of proposed retributive justice. But, as Philip Carr-Gomm once said to me, "Even if we beat ourselves up for it, castigation is not enough." To look at this from a spiritual perspective, let's examine how the Well and the Chapel differ regarding both humankind's role in the created world, and our responsibility for the current crises, trusting that these insights will enable us to draw from both traditions as we seek a way forward in a changed world.



"Druidry promotes an attitude of immense respect for life and for the interconnectedness of all things. It sees time and space combining to form the matrix through which the Divine is incarnated."⁷ This resonance can be accessed and manipulated: shamanic ceremonies, and rituals performed in grove or circle directly interact with the elements and natural forces on an esoteric level. Healing comes about through the power of earth's bounty: herbs and flowers, stones and fire, dancing and poetry.

Druidry grew as “more and more people became aware of the extent to which we were destroying the earth, and sought spiritual ways which revered the earth and nature. Druidry celebrates the natural world, and rather than focusing on how to transcend our physical existence, it focuses on celebrating our life on earth...”⁸

When the earth is no longer experienced as a living organism, where plant and animal beings are no longer seen as sentient, humanity loses this sense of connection to the Mother. Geopolitical imbalance, consumerism and commodification of the bounty of the earth result. The problem is global. Responsibility rests on the human race. Blame is placed on the imbalance of power.



In the Hebrew Bible the Hand of the Creator God acts in nature on *behalf* of his people. Straying from right relationship (wickedness) will bring on God’s judgment and punishment enacted, *through* the natural world.

Historically, Christians believed literally that in Gen 1:26 the Creator gave humankind dominion over the earth and all that lives therein. This concept of “being the boss” of nature, what the Irish mystic John Moriarty names ‘our calamitous biblical ambition to rule over and subdue all things.’⁹ has led to an unequal relationship between humans and the natural world, a lack of respect and a loss of not just the innocence of the original Garden, but a separation from the *immanence* of God. Historically this has allowed for manipulation of nature and natural forces in the name of science and progress.

In his parables, Jesus uses nature and the created world as metaphor to describe humankind’s ideal relation with the Father God.

| *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.* Matt 10: 29

| *Consider the lilies of the field...* Matt 6: 28

For in the time of Jesus, the plight of the people was more pressing than environmental concerns.

8 Philip Carr-Gomm, *Druid Mysteries*, 5

9 John Moriarty, *Out of Ireland*, 91

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Matt 25: 34-36

Responsibility for the welfare of other humans is humanity's charge. To not take this responsibility is a sin. Participation in humanitarian works, as well as a deeply personal prayer life is the gateway to the Kingdom of God.

Look at the animals roaming the forest:
 God's spirit dwells within them.
 Look at the birds flying across the sky:
 God's spirit dwells within them.
 Look at the tiny insects crawling in the grass:
 God's spirit dwells within them.
 Look at the fish in the river and sea:
 God's spirit dwells within them.
 There is no creature on earth
 in whom God is absent...
 When God pronounced
 that his creation was good,
 it was not only that his hand
 had fashioned every creature;
 it was that his breath
 brought every creature to life.
 Look too at the great trees of the forest:
 Look even at your crops.
 God's spirit is present within all plants as well.
 The presence of God's spirit in all living things
 is what makes them beautiful;
 And if we look with God's eyes,
 nothing on the earth is ugly.

PELAGIUS

SIN

Many students interrupt me at this point to say that the notion of individual brokenness and sin drove them from the Church. They cite the words of confession: *erred and strayed, offended, and no health in us, miserable offenders*,¹⁰ and a myriad of other sources that espouse original sin and the fatal flaw of sinfulness in every human, necessitating the substitutionary atonement of Jesus.

Two influential theologians, neither of whom lived at the time of Jesus, used mankind's sin as the cause of any and all evil in the world. The first, *Augustine of Hippo* (354-430) wrote extensively, almost gleefully, of man's sinful nature. He authored the theology of original sin: that every human is born in sin and as a sinner. His mission was to centralize and codify nascent christianities into one Church, establish the Church's authority and supremacy, and cast out any non-conformists as heretics. Second, *Anselm of Canterbury* (1033-1109) authored what is known as the theology of

substitutionary atonement, wherein fallen man is wholly ruined; Jesus suffered crucifixion to atone for human sin, satisfying God's just wrath against man's transgression. Although many of today's Christian Churches consider these concepts to be articles of faith, they were not taught by Jesus.

10 *Book of Common Prayer*

In sharp contrast to Augustine, *Pelagius* (360-418) the seminal Celtic teacher (excommunicated by Augustine as a heretic) wrote: “Christ is the fulfillment of the Wisdom tradition... freeing the good that is in us; the *image of God* can be seen in every newborn child and exists in every person; redemption, therefore, can be understood in terms of a releasing of what we essentially are.”¹¹

Pelagian theology continues to be followed throughout Britain even to the present day in Celtic Christian communities, such as Northumbria and Iona, and many others.

A NOTE REGARDING LITERALISM

Literalism, holds to the *inerrancy* of the written word. Fundamentalists believe that every word of Scripture is the direct word of God, totally true and unchangeable. In ancient times, not everyone celebrated the transition from oral transmission of culture to the written word. Philosophers, poets and mystics held their teachings in memory, believing, as has been noted, that once something was written down, it lost its voice and was no longer alive. The written word was immutable, dead, frozen. “The very idea of the mystical means that words cannot capture it,” writes Spong. “Literalism commits us to the presumption that any religious form can not only capture truth, but explains it fully. It is out of the distortions that literalism inevitably creates that most religious violence originates. ...Literalism is thus always the enemy of faith. ...The Scriptures point to truth, but they cannot capture it. ...Literalism can never, ever see.”¹²

Jesus did not teach original sin, nor did he teach that anyone was out of reach of forgiveness. He did teach about the shepherd risking his life to save a lost sheep, but not taking the sheep's place.

JUDGMENT

Many of us are deeply distressed and angry about the immediate global, national and personal issues facing us during this time of the pandemic. We are driven to assign blame. The question of *who's to blame?* is invariably followed closely by some form of proposed retributive justice.

It could be assumed that the Well would naturally favor restorative justice and restitution; and that the Chapel would favor retaliatory justice, even if followed by reconciliation. On closer look these generalizations do not always hold true.

In our pursuit of *confluence*, a healthy open exploration between Well and Chapel of our *if onlys*

11 J Philip Newell, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God*, 11

12 John Shelby Spong, *The Fourth Gospel*, 63

and our *what ifs* regarding our role on earth and our compelling need to solve could serve to abnegate this drive toward blame and lead to possibility thinking.

Shall we write the *gwersi* of reconciliation?

A PUZZLE

The return to balance through active outer world, direct action with Nature—sounds like a masculine approach. Inner, transcendental relationship with God—sounds like a feminine approach.

And yet, the natural world is seen as Feminine: Mother Earth, Gaia, who is fertile, fecund, providing, nurturing and receptive; and the heavenly Kingdom is seen as masculine, ruled by a Father god who is both just and merciful, but must be approached through mediation.

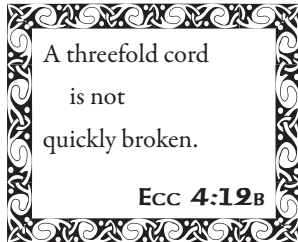
In the Well, Awen is drawn down; in the Chapel, Spirit is prayed up.

Well and Chapel energies crisscross here. Can we use our faith actively, our actions prayerfully? Could we be so bold as to envision a *confluence* such as:

...the Son of God who would be born among us, who would walk among us:

*He will be welcome in all worlds and in all dimensions of any one world. To all mysteries and secrets he will have answers. When he needs to, he will be a dragon, he will be a wolf. Not limiting himself to one way, to one way only, of experiencing himself and the world, he will be a speckled salmon in a pool that mirrors mountains. The sea calling him, he will be a seal. A swan in a lake alone he will be. Seeing a silver-antlered stag walking to a river to drink, a swineherd will say to his fellow, that's him, that's the Son of God... People will think of him as they do of rivers and mountains, always with us."*¹³

*Between the seen and the unseen,
between this and that,
the Three.*



III. The Three

TRIADS

“Three was the favorite number of Celtic folklore and hagiography. It was considered a powerful symbol of spiritual strength and intimacy with God, and it represented spiritual synthesis, the reconciliation of apparent opposites.”¹⁴ Triple spirals appear in flowers, on stones and in cloud formations. We who are composed of soul, heart and mind live in a world of earth, sea and sky. Riddles and triads are a standard form for imparting wisdom. “The triad was developed to express moral and spiritual truths, enabling different ideas to be juxtaposed in the most unexpected ways.”¹⁵ Triads are found throughout the OBOD *gwersi* (teaching lessons), such as:

The three Foundations of Spirituality:

Hearth as Altar,

Work as Worship,

Service as Sacrament.

Knowledge is nothing without wisdom,

Wisdom is nothing without understanding,

Understanding is nothing without compassion.

Three sources of new life: a woman's belly; a hen's egg; a wrong forgiven.

Three vats whose depths no one knows: the vat of a king; the vat of a wealthy bishop; and the vat of a poet's imagination.

Three slender threads on which the world swings: the thin stream of milk from the cow's udder; the thin stalk from which corn springs forth; and the thin string of grace by which God holds us up.¹⁶

¹⁴ Edward Sellner, *Wisdom of the Celtic Saints*, 40

¹⁵ Robert Van de Weyer, *Celtic Fire*, 118

¹⁶ Ibid, 118

Three is the sacred number for the Divine Being. Threefold protections and the threefold template of the soul, are found in both Well and Chapel.

Let us *envision* the Three through Story, as a way to reach understanding.



THE TRIPLE GODDESS

Once and always there are three sisters:

Macha, mighty warrior Queen, sovereign of her realm, bearer of light. Kings come to her for counsel, Warriors train under her direction. When she walks abroad, everything grows and prospers, but she withholds prosperity from unjust rulers.

The game of *Change* never stops,
the ball is always in play:
now soft, now hard,
now silken, now coarse,
ephemeral as smoke,
polished as a river stone,
new as an acorn,
old as a shroud,
hard as a jewel in a ring,
soft as a placenta,
small as a mustard seed,
vast as the night sky.

Think of the air just after
a wild wet storm:
at what moment does it change
from battering to utter sweetness?

RoMa JOHNSON

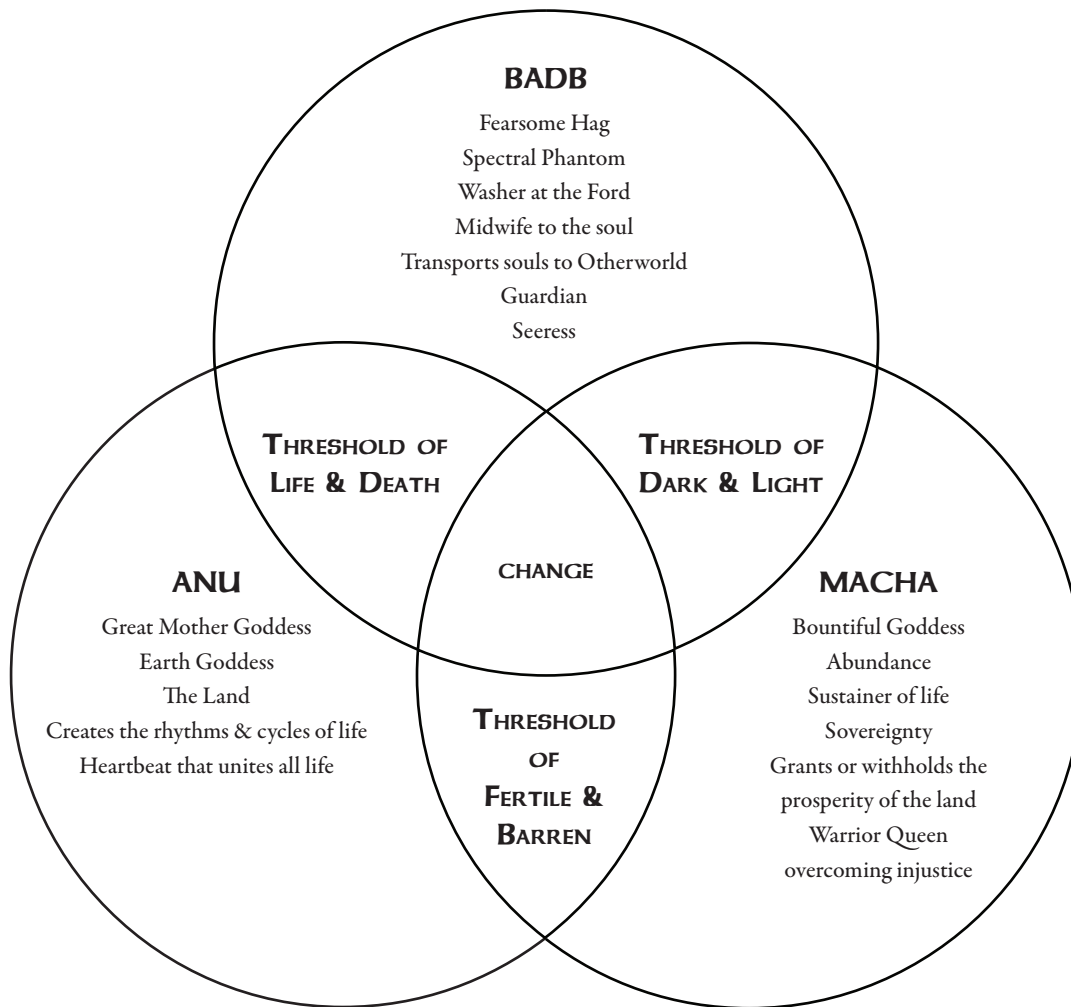
Anu, Earthmother, bearer of life, the Heartbeat that unites all life, healer. Deeply wedded to the Land, she lives among the plants and animals and birds as well as the stones and stars and works through the wheels of the heavens and the seasons of the year.

Badb, the fearsome wisdom Hag, lives in storms and dark secret places, foretells the outcome of battles and the fate of warriors. As ugly crone, she frightens people, reminding them of finite things, as fierce guardian she escorts the soul to the Summerlands when time to leave this life.

Envision the sisters playing with a magic ball that takes on the qualities of whoever holds it; as it passes from one sister to another it changes as it flies between them. When the ball passes from the Queen to Earthmother it morphs from barren to fertile; when it passes from Earthmother to Hag it crosses the threshold

of life and death; when it sails from Hag to Queen it changes from darkness to light. And so forth. And back and forth.

There is a mystery to this story: The sisters are all One Being; The Three.





THE TRINITY

Once and always the Story is told:

Creator God, some say King, some call Father, the ineffable, all-powerful, who names himself

I AM WHO I AM. Ex 3:14 Who has seen him?

*a great wind, so strong that it was splitting the mountains
and breaking rocks into pieces before the LORD,
but the LORD was not in the wind;
and after the wind an earthquake,
but the LORD was not in the earthquake;
and after the earthquake a fire,
but the LORD was not in the fire;
and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.* 1 Kings 19: 11-12

takes human form, **incarnates**, names him Son:

*A wonder child, born with angels overhead,
A wonder worker, who walks among,
A truth-teller in a lying world,
A preacher of peace in a violent land,
A bringer of food to the hungry,
Water to the thirsty,
Who heals the sick and blind and lame and shunned,
Who untangles the message from the history and hierarchy
Lifts it up and is killed for it;*

As Christ transcends death, returning to the Father;¹⁷

Sends the Holy Spirit

as Wisdom,

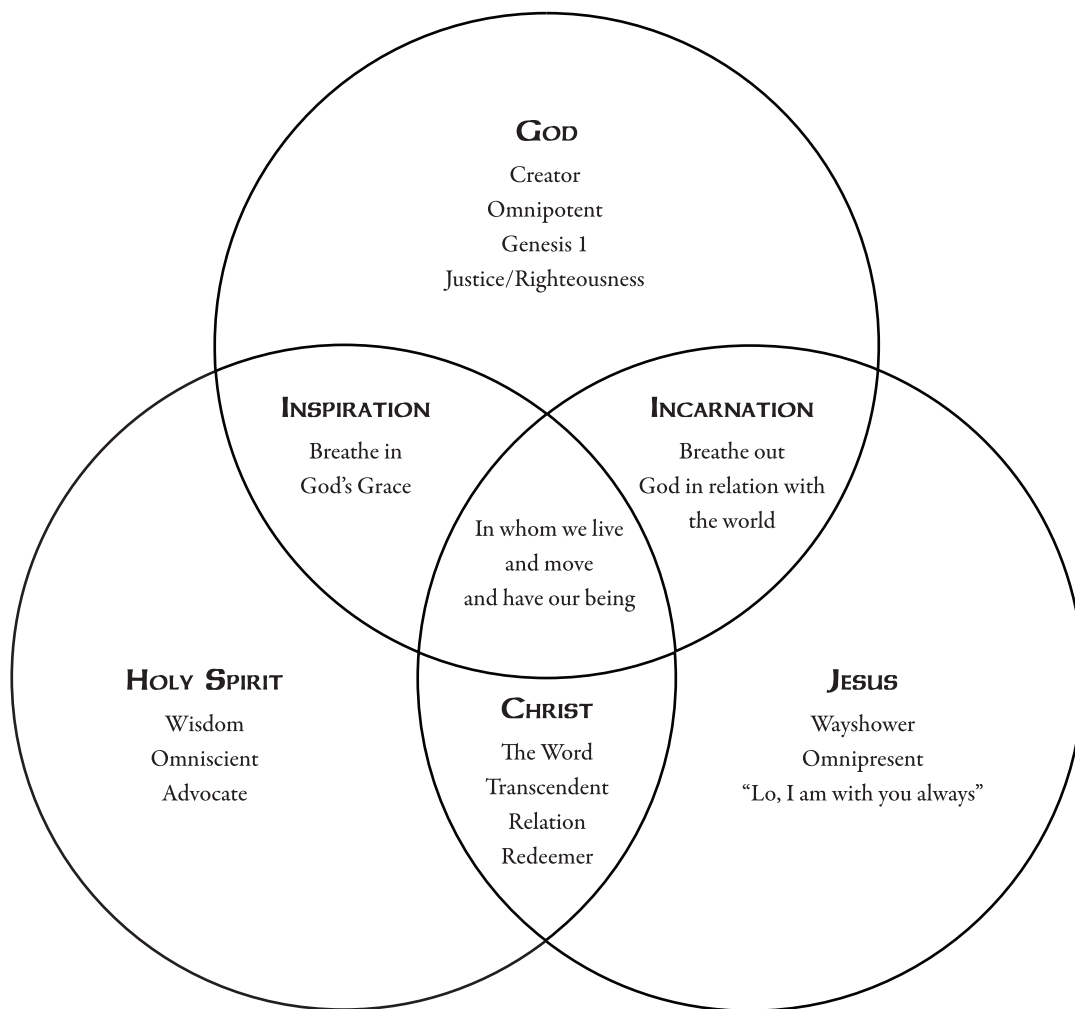
as Advocate,

as breath,

as water,

“to teach you all things and bring to remembrance all that I have said.”¹⁸

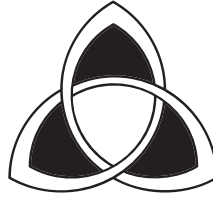
There is a mystery here: the Three in One.



17 “The resurrection was really the dawning of a new consciousness, the birth of a new vision of humanity, the mystical act of achieving oneness with that which is eternal.” Spong, 313

18 Ibid, 187

“It is believed that the triple obsession of the Celtic peoples had a determining effect upon the eventual doctrine of the Trinity, which was formulated in the fourth century by the Gaulish bishop St. Hilary of Poitiers.”¹⁹



In later times, Christians used the terms God-ever-powerful—*Omnipotent*, God-everywhere—*Omnipresent*, God-all-knowing—*Omniscient*. The relation of the individual to the Trinity is “to live and move and have our being”²⁰ in the center, in covenant and constant communication with the Three.

It does not need pointing out that the Triple Goddess and the Trinity are lyrically Female and Male. What if we were to refuse to enter the battle of the sexes, and remove the mantles of maleness and femaleness? Can we imagine God as ambigendered, approachable in multiple ways? Can we envision a Father Nature? Can we envision a Mother God in her Queendom? Our modern culture has inculcated us with a binary, gendered vision that has inhibited us from seeing wholeness.

WHERE IS THE THRESHOLD BETWEEN THE THREE AND THE TRINITY?

Historical theological arguments remain contentious to this day, some important examples being Druidic justice juxtaposed against substitutionary atonement, the disavowal of original sin and the fallen world in Pelagius’ theology of *Imago Dei*, and the theology of god as immanent or transcendent, yet early Christianity flourished in the rich soil of indigenous Celtic spirituality.

Adaptations and correspondences do not appear as straight through-lines, rather they are interwoven and interpenetrating:

The Wild Goose is the Holy Spirit, is Awen;
The life cycle of the Oak is inherent in the Cross and resurrection;
The baptismal River feeds and is fed by the Well;
The Cauldron of Wisdom is the Chalice of the Holy Feast.
Amairgen’s poem echoes in the I AM statements of Jesus;

19 Caitlin Matthews, “The Circuits of the Soul in Celtic Tradition,” from C&J Matthews, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Wisdom*, 299

20 Acts 17: 28

I am the Wind that blows across the sea;
 I am the Wave of the Ocean;
 I am the Murmur of the Billows;
 I am the Bull of the Seven Combats;
 I am the Vulture on the Rock;
 I am a Ray of the Sun;
 I am the Fairest of Flowers;
 I am a Wild Boar in Valour;
 I am a Salmon in the Pool;
 I am a Lake on the Plain;
 I am the Skill of the Craftsman;
 I am a Word of Science;
 I am the Spear-point that gives Battle;
 I am the god who creates in the head of man
 the Fire of Thought.

THE SONG OF AMAIRGEN

I am the bread of life.
 I am the light of the world.
 Before Abraham was born, I am.
 I am the gate for the sheep.
 I am the resurrection and the life.
 I am the way and the truth and the life.
 Let anyone who is thirsty come to me.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

*The shelter of the sacred Grove and the sanctuary of the
 Chapel mirror one another;*

*Bridgid and Mary meet, midwife and mother, at the
 birth of the divine Child;*

*The Wheel of Life and the mystery of rebirth turn and
 turn in eternity.*

And more, always more.

John Scotus Eriugena (815-877), a Celtic Christian theologian taught, “Just as for God all is God, so for created beings everything—the whole of creation, everything that is and is not—is a theophany, marvelously showing forth the divine while at the same time concealing it.... God speaks through it.”²¹ His biographer, Bamford sets forth the ‘heart’ of Celtic Christianity: *In all... not as separate paths but as... strands unfolding in a single pattern.*²²

CHANGE

Between every two states, events or places there is a third, liminal space, where the thing is not the thing anymore, nor is it yet the next thing.



In pre-Christian Celtic spirituality change appears in three ways: As threshold: the hollow in the hill that leads between this world and the Otherworld; the veil between the living and the dead; twilight between day and night; the eve of an event, the turning of the sea from ebb to flow, liminal and

21 Christopher Bamford, *The Voice of the Eagle: The Heart of Celtic Christianity*, 152

22 Ibid, 42

numinous, indicating the presence of mystery, to be crossed with caution and awareness.

As *shapeshifting*: fluidity between human and animal form; poetic birds; heroes interchangeable with gods; sentient sea monsters, indicating the infolding of form, to be accessed as a curse or a blessing at

one's peril.

Gwion Bach

fleeing Cerridwen, runs from her as a hare;
she comes after as a black greyhound bitch.

He swims from her as a salmon;
she comes after as an otter.

He flies from her as a dove;
she comes after as a hawk.

He hides as a grain of wheat;
as hen she swallows him down.

She gestates him, gives birth;
he is born as Taliesin.

ADAPTED, FOUND IN
RJ STEWART AND R WILLIAMSON

As *time-shifting*: a year and a day *there* may be centuries *here*; once upon a time may be yesterday or tomorrow; an old goddess may reappear as a holy woman and again as a saint and return to the beginning of time; a soul may journey backward or forward along the knot.



In Christianity change comes as divinely inspired, divinely wrought, whether as sign or wonder, suffering

or trial. Early Christians believed in angelic beings who served as guides at crucial turning points. “The numerous references to miraculous deeds show that miracles are not dependent so much upon the saints’ own abilities as upon their compassion—and upon their crying out in prayer to a merciful, all-powerful God. The underlying theological lesson is this: it is important to unite our life with God’s, and all sorts of amazing things happen when we do.”²³ In Celtic Christianity mysticism is “a moving away from an understanding of God as ‘a being’ to an understanding of God as ‘Being itself.’”²⁴

23 Sellner, 29

24 Spong, 7

Peregrini
 I am the map you strive so hard to read.
 I am the staff conveniently found
 near the dangerous crossing.
 I am your boots and
 the dust on your boots.
 I am the high breeze bringing
 ice air from the mountain.
 I am the castle keep of your destination.

 I am the coracle upon the fearsome wave.
 I am the dragon rising from the deep.
 I am the petrel wheeling.
 I am your tiny knife,
 your one drop left of sweetwater
 against a terrible thirst.
 I am your sextant
 as I am your star.

 I am the dawn in this unfamiliar place.
 I am the glory paths you see
 from sun through clouds to streets below.
 I am the coming rain.
 I am the night without dreams
 in a strange bed.

 Pilgrim,
 when you return to tell your story,
 all your tales shall be of me.

 Even in your loneliness and fear,
 even as you stop to wipe your brow,
 I preen in all my dangerous beauty
 before your eyes.
 You are my adventure
 Through Myself.

RoMa JOHNSON

*The way is known, if not by you,
 You'll come ashore where you're meant to.*

IV. *Immrama*

THE SOUL'S JOURNEY AND INSPIRATION

We are entering a place where two ways meet:
 the old place of the Time Before and the new place of
 Promise. Until very recently we scheduled days, weeks,
 months and years ahead, living on a linear timeline from
 “now” to the “future.” At the time of this writing we are
 living without a clear future. Even as kings and would be
 kings, prognosticators, politicians and pundits talk of
 “re-opening” and “the new normal,” we are faced with the
 incalculable scale of the pandemic and its unforeseeable
 effects in the years to come. We long for a better world to
 come, and we know we will have to build it. We can do this
 only by leaving the known behind, answering a compelling
 need to go and certainty of purpose.

Pilgrimage is the entranceway to a changed world.



PEREGRINI PRO DEI AMORE

Among early Christian monastics in the 3rd and
 4th c. CE, there was a compelling urge to live the Way as
 taught by the Desert Fathers and Mothers, who removed
 themselves from the world to serve only God. Some went to
 extremes of deprivation and isolation as hermits; others

were well known throughout the Levant and were visited on pilgrimage. Their words of wisdom were

When you reach the sea,
the moment the waves begin,
there you must surrender to what will be
and wait for the sign.
Wherever the boat begins to lead,
that way you must go from then on.
It will be meant.

GEOFFREY MOORHOUSE

widely circulated and most assuredly inspired the Celtic monastics.

*Yet how do you go into the desert when you live on
an island?*

By going to the sea.

The tales of the *peregrini pro Dei amore*—

voyagers for the love of God— tell of monks pushing off
into the North Atlantic in small leather boats, with no map,

guided by God to destinations unknown. The stories of the voyaging Saints tell of faith, acceptance, and intent. Theirs was no restless or aimless wandering. They did not *set out* to discover and chart new worlds—although they certainly did—nor to colonize, except to say that they formed communities on stony outcrops such as Skellig Michael and all throughout the coasts of the Northern Isles.

Peregrination was not a form of martyrdom, for they believed, “Martyrdom is always by the will of God. You are not to seek it from the start.”²⁵ The purpose of the voyage was not to *spread* the word of God, but to *live* the word of god, to live *in* God. And so they put their lives in the hands of God.

Here we have the Story as told in mythic language:

On Aran there is a famous stone... [There] is something odd, even something miraculous about this rock. In Dreamtime, this stone, transforming itself, would be a boat for the wonder-working, big, strong saints, strong in muscle and mind, who came and went between the islands, who came and went, miracles happening everywhere about them, between the islands and the mainland.

Ireland and the Great World are distant from each other by only a single footstep. But in that footstep are perilous journeys. In it are initiations. In it are caves and transformations... In it are eachtras. In it are immrams.

We sometimes think we will never reach home. And in one sense of course we don't, for the person who set out isn't the person who,

Lifetimes later,

Fish lifetimes later,

Bird lifetimes later,

*the person who set out isn't the person who, precariously human, comes shoreward home in his stone boat.*²⁶

OWL WOMAN

How shall I begin my song

In the blue night that is settling?

In the great night my heart will go out,

Toward me the darkness comes rattling.

In the great night my heart will go out.

Brown owls come here in the blue evening,

They are hooting about,

They are shaking their wings and hooting.

Black Butte is far.

Below it I had my dawn.

I could see the daylight
coming back for me.

The morning star is up.

I cross the mountains
into the light of the sea.

OWL WOMAN (JUANA MAXWELL)

It is hard for us to get our modern minds around a concept like “meant,” much less enter the coracle, whether of leather or stone, and set forth.

In the inner world of the Chapel, *immrama* denotes a faith journey through Centered Prayer, self-denial or directed study of sacred texts, the path of the mystic. Celtic Christians refer to this as listening to the heartbeat of God.

Well pilgrimage takes the form of the Hero's Quest or magical journey, involving feats of strength or endurance in quest of a prize, help from a Wise One, rescue of a person in need, and sometimes permanent metamorphosis.

On the inner level, the soul travels through poetry or illumination of song, divinatory sleep, inspired spells, and imbibing the wisdom from the elements themselves. First People cultures throughout the world have initiation rites that include vision quest or shamanic intervention.

At this writing, travel is not possible. Yet the soul must journey. We must go beyond mental thought to an imaginal reality, to a mystical Otherworld in order to see clearly. In many ways we are *peregrini* on a global scale, pushing off onto the open sea of what's to come, through personal, national, geopolitical *foundering seas and impenetrable fog*.

DUALISM

An apocryphal tale from the Saints' voyages has always intrigued me.

26 Moriarty, 147

THE ISLE OF SHEEP

*We sailed through stormy seas and gale force winds,
 past islands whose craggy cliffs rose hundreds of feet above the sea.
 After many days we came upon an island divided in half by a stone wall.
 In the middle was a shepherd, surrounded by flocks of sheep.
 On one side of the wall all the sheep were white.
 On the other side, all the sheep were black.
 As we watched, the shepherd picked up a white sheep and tossed it over the wall,
 and this sheep turned black in color.
 And then the shepherd tossed a black sheep over the other side of the wall,
 where it turned immediately into a white sheep.
 We tested this phenomenon by throwing a white stone on one side of the island.
 The stone turned black.
 When we threw a black stone on the other side of the island,
 it turned white.²⁷*

THE BRIGHT FIELD

I have seen the sun break through
 to illuminate a small field
 for a while, and gone my way
 and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
 of great price, the one field that had
 the treasure in it. I realize now
 that I must give all that I have
 to possess it. Life is not hurrying
 on to a receding future, nor hankering after
 an imagined past. It is the turning
 aside like Moses to the miracle
 of the lit bush, to a brightness
 that seemed as transitory as your youth
 once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

RS THOMAS

After the simple stone test, the Saints turned their boat and sailed on, assumedly content to leave the mystery unsolved. Why were the sheep separated? Who was the shepherd? What purpose was served in the hooking and tossing?

I am struck by this story and how it has survived in many forms and tellings for these hundreds of years. How it remains so pertinent in our current situation where we see everything as either/or, good/bad, profitable/unprofitable, and we build walls around our beliefs in the form of laws, treaties, currencies, and borders. And religions.

Dualism presents an unsolved dilemma. "Dualism is what happens when cognitive dissonance becomes

unbearable, when the world as it is, is simply too unlike the world as we believed it ought to be. That explains the human tendency to lapse into dualism. Dualism resolves complexity.”²⁸

When we identify as *one* or the *other* we fragment the whole. Dualism is not sustainable. Our souls must undertake *imramma* in order to dis-enculturate ourselves from The Isle of Sheep in order to *envision* and *plan* for a world other than this.

28 Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, 48

*For here we have no lasting city,
but we are looking for the city that is to come.*

Heb 13:14

V. *Confluence*

THE CHANGED WORLD

A pathway leads down and around to the place where on the one side stands an old stone church and on the other side a sacred well. At this time, some imagine the grove as endangered, the church standing empty.

Adherents of both Well and Chapel worry that the end is nigh. “Global Warming!” “Extinction Rebellion!” chant the former; the latter preach *Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder.*²⁹ God is angry or Gaia is fighting back, time is running out; the planet is doomed.

What does it mean?

According to Ehrman, apocalypticists subscribe to four major tenets:

Dualism, where everything in the world is divided into two camps, good and evil;

Pessimism, the belief that we cannot improve our lot, therefore we should not think we can make things better;

Vindication, wherein someone (God, a messiah, a UFO?) will execute judgment on earth and all who live in it; and

Imminence—it will happen very soon, it is right around the corner.³⁰

In this context, I submit this paper as a spiritual thought problem, using the Chapel and Well as lenses through which to envision a way to co-create a transformed world.

I meditated on this at length, envisioning two beautiful rivers coming together into one transformational, transcendent flow. I named this flow *confluence*:

Confluence of our nostalgia for earth, sea and sky and our longing for a new heaven on earth.

Confluence of the creation-affirming *immanence* of Well and the spiritualized *imminence* Chapel.

Confluence of our shared responsibility for balance and right relationship.

29 Rev 4: 5

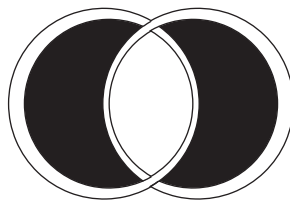
30 Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem*, 215-219

Confluence of our visions of peace and a restored earth.

Confluent co-creation through faith and action.

THE THREE

I now see very clearly that a two-into-one model leaves open too great a chance for a return to dualism. **I left something out. I left out the Three.** There are not two rivers flowing into one; *confluence* must be two-into-Three, a *vesica piscis* of Chapel and Well, its liminal space between filled with AWEN.



Both Well and Chapel have unlimited access to the generative, creative power of Spirit. Awen serves as the doorway to transformation and as transformation itself. Spirit as Wisdom gives us the eyes to see and the ears to hear. Awen propels us onward and nurtures us as we go.

Take a walk back down the path to where we first saw the Chapel and the Well. Envision celebration: light streaming from the chapel windows and open door, perfume wafting from the flowers around the decorated well, the sound of music. Imagine tears flowing down the faces of the people: tears of lamentation for that left behind and tears of joy for the newness of the world.

What are we supposed to do?

I grew up in farm country; you couldn't celebrate something until you finished your chores. So here's a list:

If there's a light somewhere,
turn it on
If there's a lantern to be held high,
strike the match
If there's a candle near the bed,
let it burn through the night,
for the forces of hate march
hand in hand
with the soldiers of lies.

If there's a breath of air called peace,
let it seep from the crack where it is hidden.
If there is a Woman's Way,
let women chant it now
for we grow ever more fearful.

Along the edges of the dark plain
armies amass;
men count the heads of the enemies they will slay
and bless the god who rides with them to battle.

What holds at the center of the circle?

Momma,
if there's a lamp to be lit,
bring an ember from the hearth...
set it to the wick...
breathe softly as the darkness creeps away
taking all these ghouls and madmen with it.

If there's a lamp to be lit,
spark me.

RoMa JOHNSON

CHORES

Listen

in the Chapel, in the Grove,
in the stillness and the cacophony,
amid the stridency and the blame,
amid the assertions of righteousness.
Listen to the wind in the grass,
the birds in the morning,
the stream under the street.

Think

Let the *if onlys* come to inform you,
let the *what ifs* come to inspire you.

Draw up a Plan

an outrageous, bodacious, foolish and inordinate
plan,
add charts and graphs
and bells and whistles.
Now draw up another one.

Reach

across the chasm of isms.
Reach out. Find an *anamchara*
who shares your vision.
Now find a dingbat, dumbfuck, outrageous
proponent of what you most despise.
Reach out.
Float one of your plans.

Act

We must light up the Chapel,

We must un-silt the Well.

You earthdancers, carry a goblet of water across the road,

You monk, carry a candle to the well.

You righteous, observe,

You cowards, follow along,

You Bards: chant your long poetry,

You Ovates: interpret the omens,

unleash the hidden truths,

You Druids: draw up a new codex

to take to the King,

You Christians, *put on the breastplate of faith and love,*

*and for a helmet the hope of salvation.*³¹

There is work to be done,

and it is holy work.



I'll meet you on the path.

RoMa Johnson

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