



Water from an Ancient Well: Celtic Spirituality for Modern Life

Kenneth McIntosh

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Using story, scripture, reflection, and prayer, this book offers readers a taste of the living water that refreshed the ancient Celts. The author invites readers to imitate the Celtic saints who were aware of God as a living presence in everybody and everything. This ancient perspective gives radical new alternatives to modern faith practices, ones that are both challenging and constructively positive. This is a Christianity big enough to embrace the entire world.

Water from an Ancient Well: Celtic Spirituality for Modern Life Details

Date : Published June 1st 2011 by Anamchara Books

ISBN : 9781933630984

Author : Kenneth McIntosh

Format : Paperback 350 pages

Genre : Spirituality, Religion, Christianity, Nonfiction, Business, Amazon

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Darrell Grizzle says

Water from an Ancient Well by Kenneth McIntosh is one of the most quietly wise books I've read in a long time. "Like a Celtic knot, this book is meant to be enjoyed in a nonlinear fashion," McIntosh states in his introduction. Each chapter is a self-contained essay on a particular topic in Celtic Christian spirituality, with stories, theological-historical background, and applications for today. A lot of my favorites are here: St. Brigid of Kildare, the Gaelic hymn "Be Thou My Vision," the Celtic sunwheel cross, St. Columba, St. Brendan the Voyager, even Merlin the Magician. Quotes from C. S. Lewis, "the great Celtic theologian of modern times," are peppered throughout the book. My favorite chapters are the ones about the pantheism of John Scotus Erigena ("Every Bush Aflame: God Revealed in Nature") and the one about "Furred and Feathered Neighbors: Creatures of Grace," which shows how St. Columba, St. Brigid, and others related to their animal neighbors. If you're not familiar with Celtic Christian spirituality, Water from an Ancient Well is a great introduction. Even if you are familiar, this book is a great way to revisit some of these stories, poems, and prayers and learn new ones.

Joel Fry says

Reading this book was such a refreshing experience for me. I had truly been struggling with finding a sense of value in pursuing a spiritual practice until I bought this book from Mr. McIntosh at the Tucson Celtic Festival. Reading these honest, simple, joy-filled, and edifying views on the truly Christian life felt like having a weight lifted from my soul. I find that so much of modern Christian literature is woefully lacking a genuine appeal for spiritual maturation or true inward development, but the reflections written here are heartfelt, rooted in ancient tradition, and practical methods for becoming a more humble and compassionate follower of Christ.

J.L. Canfield says

McIntosh beautifully combined the history of Celtic Spirituality with a practical way to apply it to living today. This is a book I recommend reading to everyone. I suggest that if you do read it, then do so slowly, savor it, reflect on it. Interesting side note, I wish I had read the part regarding U2 many months ago. I did what I called a U2charist service, using the music and video clips from several of their songs. Why? Because despite being labelled as a rock band (they are), if you pay attention to the lyrics, you grasp they are truly a Christian rock band.

Leah says

"Celtic Spirituality Survey"

For quite some time the ancient and more contemporary insights of Celtic spirituality have interested me.

I've done some reading that's specifically in the field, and perused other books that reference and apply those understandings. However, Kenneth McIntosh's *Water from an Ancient Well* is a kind of mini-encyclopedia or maybe a survey that provides stories, theology, and applications in each chapter, as well as an excellent sense of the earthbound, heaven-oriented way of living together (and occasionally in solitude) that continues developing and spreading. One thinks of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, but Celtic geography has ranged much further to France, Spain, Switzerland and Germany; the author reminded me how I've explained to more than one of my classes that the Galatian church the Apostle Paul addressed was an ethnic church, a gathering of Celts or Gauls in diaspora. What a beautifully, fully integrated way of life this can be, with little or no separation between divine and mundane, sacred and secular!

Celtic Saints' heartfelt devotion to Jesus of Nazareth has been passionately recorded in their poetry and prose; in return, some people, especially Roman Catholic, have their own devotion to a particular saint: Patrick and Brigid are popular choices. A draught from this "Ancient Well" is a drink of trinitarian Christianity, but no way does it exclude incorporating other viewpoints and perspectives. There are Celtic knots, tapestries and intricately ornate metal jewelry, all of which are familiar in this 21st century. How many churches have - how few churches do not display? - a Celtic cross that superimposes the cruciform symbol of the Incarnate Son upon a radiant disk of the created sun? Similar to Eastern Church bodies, Celtic theology interprets Jesus Christ's atonement with a Christus Victor model, rather than one of other possibilities Western Christians have read into scripture.

McIntosh writes in an easy-going, conversational style, as if we were sitting around a warm fire listening to him talk about these topics. Approximately a dozen finely executed black and white line drawings help illustrate the author's narrative; endnotes reference the chapter as well as providing a wealth of further reading. Fourteen 2-column pages of index topics help demonstrate how complete this book is. I did say it amounts to a mini-encyclopedia, or it could be introductory Celtic Spirituality 101; even if you're already very familiar with the subject, this would be an excellent book to keep on your bookshelf.

Beth says

I read this book as part of my sabbatical reading list. It is wonderful! It brought to light and remembrance how many of my theological understandings and preferred styles of worship are not "weird" or "new-age" but rather rooted in the deep history and worship of these ancient believers. I truly appreciated the way Kenneth McIntosh related the ancient world and practices to their current counterpoints.

Seth Thomas says

Over the past year, I have grown increasingly aware of and excited by the Celtic stream of Christianity. Drawn out by a trip to Ireland this past summer, my fascination has been awakened by encountering texts and stories, prayers and songs of this tradition that speak of the goodness of God, the beauty of Creation, and the calling of humanity in joyously shepherd, bless, and engage these gifts for God's glory.

Water From An Ancient Well: Celtic Spirituality for Modern Life, by Kenneth McIntosh sits among the most helpful resources I have discovered, describing the history and characteristics of the Celtic stream of Christianity. This branch of the faith, which grew out of the Iron Age, adapted the established religious and cultural practices of the inhabitants of the modern day United Kingdom. The work of St. Patrick, John Scotus

Eriugena, and the foundations set out by Pelegrus, established a vibrant, earthy, embodied, and, what I would argue, an orthodox articulation of the Christian faith, without colonizing or destroying ancient practices, but by weaving the work of the Early Church and the Hebrew faith in to everyday life.

I appreciated McIntosh's approach to sharing the story of the Celtic faith because of his attention to the way the stream of the Celtic story winds and weaves throughout all of life. Chapters range from practical to theological, spinning stories from ancient Celtic traditions with modern day examples of the integration of Celtic history, theology, and philosophy. I particularly appreciated the chapter "Water into Wine: Signs and Wonders", in which McIntosh speaks of the presence of miracles in our daily lives, encouraging a deepening of our awareness for God's presence in our midst and the possibility that we might witness the miraculous and mighty works of the Spirit by our tuning in to what we can already observe around us.

As well, descriptions of the Celtic structures of community, particularly the Anamchara or "soul friend", strikes me as significant, especially in this disconnected, isolating world I experience most days. Speaking of a bond between two friends that is deep and lasting, "The ancient Celtic Christians believed these soul friendships were necessary for normal spiritual growth. As Christ followers, deep, rich relationships connected them to one another, and the Spirit flowed in a constant current between them" (p. 222). Whether we choose to recognize it or not, many of us long for this type of relationship with a fellow brother or sister. The Celts encouraged a freedom to engage it and experience it as a devotional, life-giving practice, throughout life. I wonder at how, by changing my expectations and looking for this type of connection in my own friendships today, I might be able to encounter something more of truer friendship and even deeper connection with the Spirit of God.

I found *Water From An Ancient Well* fascinating and a great supplement to other books on Celtic Christianity I have read over the last year. It is a great resource for an overview and deepening of awareness of the Celtic stream and is rich with references for further reading, both out of other contemporary texts and even some of the ancient documents. McIntosh makes great use of the *Carmina Gaedlica*, Alexander Carmichael's compilation of historic oral traditions of the Celtic peoples. McIntosh also quotes heavily from a man he describes as a modern Celt, C.S. Lewis, illustrating how deeply interwoven the thinking of this great stream is with even our most respected thinkers of the modern age.

Other great resources on Celtic Christianity that I would encourage reading for more depth and insight:

- *Christ of the Celts* by J. Philip Newell
- *Celtic Daily Prayer* from the Northumbrian Community
- *The Celtic Way of Prayer* by Esther DeWaal

Check out Kenneth McIntosh's publishing company, Anamchara Books for more info:
<http://www.anamcharabooks.com/>

Amos Smith says

I found numerous life giving stories in McIntosh's book. I also found surprises, such as the presence of co-ed monasteries in Ireland, the pilgrimage of Irish Nobles to the Egyptian Desert, home of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, and the "Christus Victor" approach to the Cross, which was most common among the Celts. I found these streams of thought insightful and liberating. And the spiritual practices illuminated in the book illuminated my spiritual path.

Kelly says

I received this book for free through Goodreads Giveaways.

David Ryan says

Read with my reading partner in preparation for our trip to Ireland -- it was a bit of a light read.

Anthony Rodriguez says

Last month, I was given the opportunity to read "Water from an Ancient Well: Celtic Spirituality for Modern Life" by Kenneth McIntosh.* This book is a look at spiritual practices through the unique lens of the Christian tradition within Celtic peoples. The Church among Celtic people has an important and vibrant history that helped to revitalize the rest of the European Church after years of darkness. The unique aspects of the native culture that stuck with Christian theology led to some distinctives in their traditions, adding new flavor to spiritual practices that we might otherwise not think much. This book was a worthwhile read for a number of reasons. It also had some areas of weakness that I rubbed against while reading.

Weaknesses: There is not a very strong critique of Celtic spirituality. The plethora of legends passed along are very clearly legends, but McIntosh doesn't really say whether or not the reader should accept the legends as historically true. Often, I think it is besides the point for him. But he does, at times, tend to discuss these events as if they were true. He generally fails to deconstruct the real weaknesses in Celtic theology that they may have carried with them because of their prominent pagan spiritualities before Christian introduction. For example, McIntosh fairly roughly glosses over panentheism and even seems to nod approvingly in its direction. Panentheism is rarely regarded as anything more than heresy and usually very quickly morphs into pantheism or what we might call New Age spirituality these days. McIntosh does not, of course, approve of pantheism, but he doesn't exactly build a firm theological wall between it and panentheism. A more thorough-going critique would have been more helpful throughout the book. I've read enough about Patrick and the Celtic Church, and indeed the Medieval church in general, to know that, as with every age, there was real problems with their approach. There's nothing terrible about this. It's part of being human. I wish McIntosh had brought to the surface the human nature of the Celtic Christians, and not just the legendary gloss.

Strengths: There is real vitality in Celtic practices and views of the world that are very helpful to modern Western Christians. The acknowledgment of every place and every moment as a potential intersection with the Divine is a lovely thing. The hope to see the "thin places," where the spiritual world bleeds into the physical world created spiritual expectation and a sense of place that makes theology more present and tangible. The moments of ritual prayer scattered throughout the day is an open invitation for the Spirit of God to speak to His people. The various prayers that Celtic Christians had for various tasks and times of day could be viewed as empty religion, but prayerfully engaged, they become constant reminders that this world is God's and we are His people. There is a simplicity and child-like wonder to Celtic spirituality that McIntosh captures very well. I even enjoyed his format that allowed the book to function as almost a

handbook for reference to spiritual life that makes the book easier to handle and more practical. McIntosh doesn't expect you to read the book from cover to cover (though this is how I engaged it), but rather to flip around to read about a topic that you'd like to read. I think this is a great idea, especially for his topic.

McIntosh presents an informative and thorough glimpse into Celtic Christian spirituality, even if he is overly simplistic and almost naive in his approach. For the thoughtful Western Christian who is looking for new/old ways to invite communion with the Spirit, there are likely very helpful pieces to this book. I was grateful for his thorough research and storytelling ability in the book, as well as the invitation I felt in its pages to invite God into the minutiae of my day and see it come alive with God's presence. In this, the Celts really can be our tutors. And wise tutors they are.

*I think I'm required to disclose that I was given the copy for free for the purpose of review. I am not, nor will I be paid for this review in any way.

Willa Grant says

I picked this book up at the library & I am enchanted with it. It is not a particularly "deep" book but it was encouraging for me as I am looking for a more Celtic slant to refresh my spiritual life at a Roman Catholic Church. My Celtic heritage is not one I celebrate much in my social life but I really enjoyed reading this & I have found that it was uplifting & gave me some solid ideas to bring Celtic worship & belief into my everyday life. I will get a copy of this little gem to add to my home library.

Jack says

What a fantastic book! I read this in a few days. It was a very easy read -- the text flows very smoothly. A great book for an introduction into Celtic Spirituality. Highly recommended.

Seth says

"Water from an Ancient Well", is refreshing in the sense that it is very much Christ centered. You will get some history of the ancient Celts - from their influences, outlook on life, to their everyday awareness of the presence of Christ. Every part of their day was used as a way to turn to the Lord. The subtitle of the book is Celtic Spirituality for Modern Life and the author does a tremendous job gleaned from the life of the Celtic Christians and presenting practical applications for our modern lives today.

Although this book is more than a devotional I found it to be similar in depth and content as "Practicing the Presence" by Brother Lawrence, "Letters of a Modern Mystic" by Frank Laubach and "Longing for God" by Richard J Foster as well as other similar writings.

Let me also say I really enjoyed this book because it showed how the Celtic Christians lived and breathed Christ as their life. They saw Christ in all things and all things pointed to Christ. I have found this to be the most liberating reality to know Christ as my life and not just a part of my life. This book shows what that looks like and looked like in the lives of the Celts and how we can experience that ourselves today.

To see the full review go [Here](#)

Thanks to SpeakEasy for providing this book for review.

Steve Robinson says

Hands down, the best book I have ever read on Celtic Christian spirituality. An excellent book for those of us seeking a deeper walk with God through the history and inspiration of the early Celtic church.

Pat Loughery says

This is an intriguing and interesting contemporary addition to the Celtic Christianity library.

Kenneth McIntosh has taken a good approach for this subject: Tell stories, tell some history, illuminate application for contemporary life. Why more books on celtic faith don't tell stories is a mystery.

The text is a very good overview of the nature of Celtic faith for a contemporary audience. It's broad and not particularly deep, but tells its story well - it calls the listener to a holistic, embodied faith that is missing from much of Western Christianity. It sets the Celtic faith in its cultural, historical and religious context very well, and is particularly strong at describing the unique nature of NATURE in this stream of faith. Chapter 7 (God revealed in nature) and Chapter 8 (Furred and Feathered neighbors) are highlights.

The chapter on the everyday nature of Celtic prayer was a disappointment - far too brief and shallow - and should be supplemented with one of the other excellent resources on the subject.

I teach a graduate level course in Celtic spirituality and am using this text as one of our two primary texts (with Esther de Waal's Celtic Way of Prayer), and supplemental readings. McIntosh's work compares well with several works by Ian Bradley, Ray Simpson and other contemporary writers on the subject.
