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zadok paper S133 spring 2004



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COLONIES OF HEAVEN:
CELTIC MODELS FOR TODAY'S AUSTRALIAN CHURCH



The Paper One of the ways contemporary seekers are connecting with spirituality, inside and outside the church, is through Celtic spirituality. A number of Christian writers have started to explore the relevance of Celtic themes for the mission of the church in the West. This paper applies some of their initial explorations to what is appropriate to the church in Australian culture and society. Early Celtic missionaries like Saint Patrick embraced Celtic culture wherever they could, which is a challenge facing the church in Australia as we search for identity (as a church and as a nation). Celtic church life valued communal expression, teamwork, and hospitality; virtues respected in our egalitarian, party-going Aussie culture. The Celts are perceived as being at home with nature and everyday spirituality, which suits many Australians looking for a relevant and holistic rather than other-worldly faith. The diversity of Celtic worship, recognising God's awesomeness and intimacy, and using informal gatherings, formal liturgies, and numerous means of expression, offers a refreshing challenge to much contemporary Australian worship. Celtic tradition invites risk-taking in a journey of exploring new ways of doing church for today in Australia.

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COLONIES OF HEAVEN: CELTIC MODELS FOR TODAY'S AUSTRALIAN CHURCH

AS A pastor part of my vocational challenge is to care for God's people in a particular place and to lead them in their mission in the world. This dual role creates some dilemmas, not least of which church people want to be 'looked after' which can easily leave no time for mission. And while local churches hesitate to change, our surrounding society is undergoing transformation on a scale unknown for centuries. Whereas in the past the church played a dominant role in society, it is now marginalised from the public sphere. As people move on from Enlightenment thinking and question whether science and technology can save us, they are turning to a spiritual marketplace of options for faith and fulfilment. It is a myth that secular people are irreligious—they just do not always turn to the church for spirituality.

How can our churches connect with people in this time of change? What are the unique challenges facing Australian churches? Some Australian churches have turned to American mega church models like Willow Creek and Saddleback, and these church models have been instrumental in reaching huge numbers of unchurched, American baby-boomers. But in Australia and for younger generations, we need fresh and diverse models.

One promising source for inspiring new ways of doing church is Celtic Christianity. After centuries of neglect and marginalisation by Roman Christianity, there is a revival of interest in Celtic approaches to spirituality and church life. Talks, courses, scholarship, prayer books, music, Celtic communities, and even pilgrimage trails are growing in number and influence. Ian Bradley, in his first book on Celtic Christianity, commented on some of the reasons for its popularity:

Celtic Christianity does seem to speak with almost uncanny relevance to

many of the concerns of our present age. It was environment-friendly, embracing positive attitudes to nature and constantly celebrating the goodness of God's creation. It was non-hierarchical and non-sexist. ... Like the religions of the Australian Aborigines and the native American Indians which are also being rediscovered today, it takes us back to our roots and seems to speak with a primitive innocence and directness which has must appeal in our tired and cynical age.²

It is a danger to generalise about 'Celtic Christianity' and simplistically to project back contemporary cultural ideals, or to try and recreate a Celtic world to romantically escape back into.³ Nevertheless I have found it helpful, drawing inspiration from Bradley's *Colonies of Heaven*, to look at themes in the early Christian life of Britain and Ireland and explore their relevance for church health and growth in Australia. Uncritical and anachronistic imitation is unnecessary, but Christians seeking to live out their faith in twenty-first century Australia can learn from the Celtic church. Celtic models have contributions to make not just in spirituality and prayer (for which they are perhaps best known), but also in pastoral care, worship, pilgrimage, green theology, ecclesiology, and mission and evangelism.

This paper focuses on Celtic approaches to mission and their relevance for the Australian church. Celtic Christianity recognised 'thin places' where the membrane between the material world and the world of spiritual reality is thin.⁴ White Australia, established as a colony of convicts, has easily pictured God as distant and uninvolved. We have a heritage as a colony of England, but may have found it difficult to conceptualise our destiny as a colony of heaven. How can we foster Australian churches as 'thin places'

where the Kingdom of God is brought closer to Australians? What can we learn from Celtic models for today's Australian church?

Literature overview

THE mission of the Celtic movement has been the subject of a small but steady flow of books. Thomas Cahill's *How the Irish Saved Civilization* tells the complex story of Celtic evangelisation of Ireland and their influence in Europe. John Finney's *Recovering the Past* compares Celtic and Roman evangelism, suggesting the Celtic approach is appropriate for non-Christian societies. Douglas Dales' *Light to the Isles* recounts the stories of Celtic church leaders and the theology that prompted their mission. George Hunter's *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* explores Celtic history, spirituality and church planting as a model for our emerging postmodern culture. Ian Robinson's *Rediscovering the Celts* continues the discussion about what Celtic Christianity was and gives further insights into its missionary approach, for example how it penetrated the English countryside.⁵

Ian Bradley has written four books that introduce Celtic Christianity overall, the most recent being *Colonies of Heaven* which explores implications for contemporary church models suggested by the 'golden age' of Celtic Christianity in the British Isles between the sixth and eleventh centuries.⁶ This paper derives its name from Bradley's latest book and explores the relevance of some of the important themes of Celtic Christianity that are relevant to Australian church life; incarnational mission, communal life, down-to-earth everyday spirituality, diversity in worship, and the adventure of the journey.

Incarnational mission

SAINTE Patrick and later Celtic missionaries were incarnational and embraced Celtic culture. Patrick is credited with some of the earliest and most fruitful mission in Ireland. He was amazingly prepared. As an English youth he was enslaved and shipped to Ireland. After six years he escaped and later felt called to return.⁷ He thus understood Celtic language, issues and ways, and had time to reflect on how the Irish could be reached. He became an Irishman and identified with their ways, baptising not only new converts but their cultural framework: 'Patrick found a way of swimming down to the depths of the Irish psyche and warming and transforming Irish imagination – making it more human and more noble while keeping it Irish.'⁸ Despite savage criticism, he went beyond the normal administrative and chaplaincy role of a bishop and took teams around rural Ireland for evangelism and mixing with the people, especially 'pagan and sinner' types.

Saint Patrick's apostolic mission teams used elements from pagan mythology as bridges for evangelism. For example, the Celts believed in an afterlife that sometimes encroached on our own world, and so early missionaries could proclaim the hope of the Resurrection and the immanence of God in this world. They built churches on pagan sites and turned wells and springs dedicated to pagan deities into places of healing. They took an interest in the total wellbeing of the people and their culture; for example, copying not just Scripture portions for them, but the stories, songs and poems of pre-Christian Celtic culture.⁹ Patrick and many early missionaries did not fear but embraced local culture.

Celtic Christian ways of doing church thus grew out of traditional culture and were full of continuities with its pagan past. This is attractive to people influenced by alternative spiritualities, for example 'New Agers'. Embracing culture uncritically can lead to confusion and syncretism. On the other hand, much was gained by valuing and utilising rather than denigrating and destroying traditional cultural patterns. For example 'soul friends' developed along Spiritual Direction lines, possibly in similar ways to old Druidic

practices, and pilgrimage was probably at home with the naturally wandering Celtic peoples. These are disciplines that are appropriate today for postmodern culture with its hunger for spiritual guidance and society's fluidity and movement. Celtic practices widely survived partly because Celtic lands were remote from Rome and partly because early mission was incarnational and embracing of culture, and so the church took over many pre-existing cultural and social structures.¹⁰

Early Celtic mission was not totally uncritical of culture but sought to be at home in local culture. Certain pagan practices including human sacrifice and slavery were confronted. Early Christian mission included 'power encounters' with pagan priests and wizards and evil practices. (They also had a tradition of 'blessing' and 'cursing' and perhaps could help us understand the place of the supernatural and the need for 'spiritual warfare'.)¹¹ But many early missionaries recognised the value of preserving and learning from culture in order to ensure the spread of Christianity. Cahill applauds this Irish mission history that transformed lives while retaining Irish culture:

As these transformed warrior children of Patrick's heart lay down the swords of battle, flung away the knives of sacrifice, and cast aside the chains of slavery, they very much remained Irishmen and Irishwomen. Indeed, the survival of an Irish psychological identity is one of the marvels of the Irish story. Unlike the continental church fathers, the Irish never troubled themselves overmuch about eradicating pagan influences, which they tended to wink at and enjoy. The pagan festivals continued to be celebrated, which is why we today can still celebrate the Irish feats of May Day and Hallowe'en.¹²

In AD601, Pope Gregory I advised missionaries in England to retain rather than destroy old pagan sites:

The temples of idols in that nation should not be destroyed, but... the

idols themselves that are in them should be. Let blessed water be prepared, and sprinkled in these temples, and altars constructed, and relics deposited, since, if these same temples are well built, it is needful that they should be transferred from the worship of idols to the service of the true God; that, when the people themselves see that these temples are not destroyed, they may put away error from their heart, and, knowing and adoring the true God, may have recourse with the more familiarity to the places they have been accustomed to.¹³

Gregory I realised God could come to Celtic peoples through their own land and culture—they needed a Celtic Christianity they were at home with. A later Pope spoke to Australians on this theme:

Look, dear people of Australia and behold this vast continent of yours. It is your home! The place of your joys and pains, your endeavours and your hopes. And for all of you, Australians, the way to the Father's house passes through this land.¹⁴

At a time of search for national identity, the Australian Church also needs to search for and communicate Australian Christianity where the universal gospel will be 'at home' in our context.¹⁵ St. Patrick's positive view of human nature made in the image of God (rather than focusing on original sin) speaks to descendants of convicts like us Australians. Patrick looked into the heart of people and imagined what they could become, 'What he saw convinced him of the bright side—that even slave traders can turn into liberators, even murderers can act as peacemakers, even barbarians can take their place among the nobility of heaven.'¹⁶ Incarnational mission, by definition, is at home in any receiving culture. Moreover, in a land of the 'fair go' that values egalitarianism and being 'one of us', an incarnational approach is particularly appropriate. Examples of Australian incarnational mission include 'Christian Surfers' which has spread internationally, and the

'God Squad' outreach to motorcycle gangs by John Smith and other Christian bikies.¹⁷ These are 'colonies of heaven' planted in Australian soil to point Australians to God.

Communal life

PERHAPS the most significant example of the incarnational approach was in the communal life of monasteries. The Celts were less individualistic and more community oriented in a society that was rural and family-based. Initially the monastery was a more culturally appropriate unit of organization than dioceses. When Columba went to Iona in 563 he built a monastery on the site of a pagan temple. Revived as a popular centre of Celtic spirituality today, Iona was the ancestor of much of the Scottish church, and through its daughter settlement Lindisfarne also of Northern England. Monasteries were bases for evangelism and spread by planting more monasteries. Finney contends monastic structure was appropriate for a people on the move that had not yet responded to the gospel, rather than the Roman parish approach that was more suited to settled Christian communities. As the church became more established, a parish system became stronger; 'All too soon the idealism of the early days was lost in the social and ecclesiastical pressures which was pushing towards a parish church with a priest in every place. It was probably inevitable in a more settled environment.'¹⁸

Celtic life and mission was communal. Theologically, the trinity was understood communally rather than in philosophic terms. The Celts were at home with a godhead in a harmonious relationship of persons, and this challenged isolation and encouraged fellowship.¹⁹ Monastic life meant people supported one another, pulled together, prayed together and lived the Christian life together. They lived in the 'church' and went out to the world (unlike we who live in the world and go on Sundays to church). Living out their faith in community, they avoided the 'bus-church' model of weekly filing into church, facing the backs of the people in front, taken somewhere by the 'driver' out the front, paying your fare half way through, and

at the end filing out again.²⁰ It meant Christian missionaries could function in teams, with different people taking on different roles and supporting one another. Men and women, lay and ordained, could live and worship together in community, and go out from their base on preaching and mission trips, or to start another monastery.²¹ Team ministries are not just for larger churches that need a large pastoral staff to help the Senior Minister cope with the workload, but for churches like Brunswick Baptist Church that has built a team of part-time pastoral workers that complement one another in ministering care and mission in their community.

Central to monastic life was hospitality and welcoming. The chapel and guesthouse were sometimes the only buildings of wood or stone, and were given the best positions because they were most valued. None were to be turned away who needed help or sanctuary. Guests, seekers or refugees were all welcomed, given lodgings, and included at the Abbot's table. If the Abbot was fasting, they would break the fast because hospitality was considered more important.²² There is a story or two about entertaining actual angels.²³ One abbess in particular, Brigit of Kildare, was known for her extraordinary hospitality, welcoming the great and the lowly with equal warmth and readiness to meet their needs. Her merry approach to life spilled over into an inclusive hospitality and a fondness for beer. This is the grace associated with her name:

I should like a great lake of ale finest ale
For the King of Kings.

I should like a table of choicest food
For the family of heaven.
Let the ale be made from the fruits of faith,
And the food be forgiving love.

I should welcome the poor to my feast,
For they are God's children.
I should welcome the sick to my feast,
For they are God's joy.
Let the poor sit with Jesus at the highest
place,
And the sick dance with the angels.

God bless the poor,
God bless the sick,

And bless our human race.
God bless our food,
God bless our drink,
All homes, O God, we embrace.²⁴

Brigit's life-embracing and party-loving approach to ministry are a model for getting alongside Australians, valuing as they do a good party and a hearty welcome. A Baptist monastic community in Geelong expresses welcoming Christian hospitality of the highest calibre. It is appropriate to extend hospitality generously from our churches and make visitors feel welcomed as special guests to mirror the welcome God holds out to people. Providing hospitality and care to the local community is part of the Celtic tradition of availability in which the Church is present and involved in the midst of the people, not separate from their local community.

Celtic communities often included people in community life before they believed. In contrast to mass evangelism approaches of the twentieth century, belonging came before believing for many Celtic converts. Evangelism was about helping people belong so they can believe, rather than convincing them to believe so they can belong.²⁵ This is an evangelism model appropriate for many postmodern people who long for community and who prefer to think things through for themselves—possibly in cooperation or dialogue with others but not having a pre-packaged belief system transferred from others. The Celtic way is appropriate for our situation, 'Let us together explore who God is and see where the journey takes us.'²⁶

Truth and Liberation, a local church pioneered by John Smith, is an experiment in indigenous Australian church life. It is for the Irish working class rather than middle class suburban people. Smith perceived that the Irish know how to celebrate, joke and laugh, and that the church ought to reflect this and be like a party where anyone is welcome. Jesus said different things to different people, but 'Be born again' is a less meaningful call to salvation for Aussies than, 'Hey mate, I've arranged a great party, and the guys at the top don't even want to come. They are too busy doing their own thing, too economically tied up with their own success. They're not interested. The Boss has sent me to tell you

the party's on and you're welcome—no entry fee.²⁷ Smith suggests an Irish pub atmosphere is a good model for church life—festive, good music, participatory, and welcoming everyone; 'No one is going to check your credentials. Leave your attitude at the door, come in, find your place, and feel free to express your gift.'²⁸ Commitment to authentic community and inviting people to belong before they believe are foundational for growing today's Australian churches.

Down to earth everyday spirituality

ANOTHER contribution of Celtic Christianity worth exploring for Australian church health is its closeness to nature and relevance to everyday matters. Celtic culture had long treasured the holiness of all of creation, and Celtic Christianity celebrated and continued this. Creation is celebrated as sacramental, as something through which God's presence can be seen and understood. Many of the verses in Carmichael's collected Gaelic works *Carmina Gadelica* express this awareness that the world and all it contains shows God's glory:

There is no plant in the ground
But is full of His virtue,
There is no form in the strand
But is full of His blessing...

There is no life in the sea,
There is no creature in the river,
There is naught in the firmament,
But proclaims his goodness...

There is no bird on the wing,
There is no star in the sky,
There is nothing beneath the sun,
But proclaims his goodness...²⁹

Celtic respect for nature and everyday life meant that Celtic worship was often in the home or outdoors and not just inside a Romans-styled church whose walls blocked out the sights and sounds of nature. This was not just because of rural remoteness but the Celtic view of redemption saw the heavenly in the earthly and found the spiritual in the earthy and everyday. The Celtic church did

not need special buildings to worship the creator of earth and heaven.³⁰ Truth and Liberation's building has walls of mud brick, vertical supports of Australian gum tree planks, two open fireplaces, and soup cooking during the service for a communal meal afterwards. Their architecture identifies with the Australian bush in an attempt to capture an affinity with Australian culture.

Part of the earthiness of Celtic Christianity is its relevance to domestic and public spheres of life. The Celts were conscious of the divine presence in all things. God was discovered in the everyday as much as in formal worship and special celebrations. They did not merely retreat from the world to find God but found God in the ordinary events of life. Prayers and blessings covered spiritual and 'secular' spheres. The Anglo-Celt George Herbert wrote this prayer in the mid-seventeenth century that expresses that every task can be blessed if done for God's glory:

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything
To do it as for thee...

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
Makes that and th' action fine.

Contemporary Celtic writers continue this tradition with prayers for everyday life covering computers ('I programmes my computer with the love of God'), cars ('May it bless the earth it will travel on') and exams ('I bless this exam in the name of the Designer of Truth').³¹ Nothing is too ordinary or unspiritual to be incorporated in the earthiness of Celtic spirituality.

The everyday and earthy nature of Celtic spirituality is at home in Australia. Australian spirituality has come to be grounded in ordinary events and daily experiences including public issues, sport, hospitality, mateship, and any and all issues under the Aussie sun. Australian writers have written extensively on everyday spirituality. John Smith writes that biblical salvation is holistic, delivering people from the destructiveness of a meaningless world and coming under the care

of a loving God who wants to be involved in all of life from sex to art, business to family, and recreation to justice.³² John Gaden affirms an all-of-Australian-life spirituality that relates to our context:

In place of a God concerned with narrow piety and petty morality or else a God totally remote from the harsh realities of daily life, many Australians have exulted in a vital immanent Spirit, who is experienced in the sensuality of good food and drink, in sunshine and physical exertion, of crowded arenas and rowdy bars. But they have also been awestruck at craggy mountains and raging seas and been appalled by wilting deserts and relentless bushfires. They have been touched by the struggling underdog, stood by those in need, and learned how hard it is to survive.³³

Healthy churches will help members foster an earthy, passionate spirituality that relates to everyday life—such down-to-earth spirituality is at home in Australia.

Saint Patrick's Breastplate is the most famous Celtic prayer. One of a number of breastplate or lorica prayers that draw on the armour of God imagery in Ephesians 6:10-17, it reveals something of Celtic Trinitarian theology, Celtic love for nature and Patrick's approach to spiritual challenges and temptations. It shows confidence in God as the Lord of all or 'the Creator of Creation' who will deliver us from evil, whether spiritual forces or everyday temptations.

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation
of the Trinity
Through belief in the threeness,
Through confessing of the oneness,
Of the Creator of Creation.

I arise today
Through the strength of Christ's birth with
his baptism,
Through the strength of his crucifixion with
his burial,
Through the strength of his resurrection
with his ascension,

Through the strength of his descent for the judgement of Doom.

I arise today
Through the strength of the love of
Cherubim,
In the obedience of angels
In the service of archangels,

In hope of resurrection to meet with reward,
In prayers of patriarchs,
In prediction of prophets,
In preaching of apostles,
In faith of confessors,
In innocence of holy virgins,
In deeds of the righteous.

I arise today
Through the strength of heaven:
Light of sun,
Radiance of moon,
Splendour of fire,
Speed of lightning,
Swiftiness of wind,
Depth of sea,
Stability of rock,
Firmness of rock.

I arise today
Through God's strength to pilot me:
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to protect me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me,
 from snares of devils,
 from temptations of vices,
 from everyone who shall wish me ill,
 afar and near,
 alone and in multitude.

I summon today all these powers between
me and those evils,
Against every cruel merciless power that may
oppose my body and soul
Against incarnations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,

Against spells of witches and smiths and
wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts the
body and soul.

Christ to shield me today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that there may come to me abundance of
reward.
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ
behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ
above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit
down, Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of all who think of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks
to me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation
of the Trinity,
Through belief in the threeness
Through confession of the oneness,
Of the Creator of Creation.³⁴

Diversity in worship

AS WELL as being incarnational, welcoming and down-to-earth, Celtic spirituality recognised the majesty and awe of God in worship. They prayed to God as immanent but still praised God in the heavens. One of today's most popular hymns 'Be Thou My Vision' began as a medieval Irish prayer that captured both awesome respect and close intimacy towards God. An early English translation includes these verses expressing God's greatness and transcendence alongside God's intimacy and protection:

Be thou my vision,
 O lord of my heart.
None other is aught
 but the King of seven heavens.
Be thou my father,
 be I thy son.
Mayst thou be mine,

be I with thee.

Be thou my battle shield,
 be thou my sword.
Be thou my dignity,
 be thou my delight.³⁵

Celtic spirituality and worship draws on an ancient tradition that has an appeal for postmodern times. With its profound respect for creation and the Creator, Celtic worship connects with those who want to honour and care for the environment. With their rhythmic form, earthy moods and vivid imagery, Celtic styled prayer can speak to the mystic as much as the postmodern secularist. Celtic spirituality has a vibrant difference about it that stands out from standard worship forms. For example, the sixth century Irish monk Saint Ciaran is attributed with this litany of repentance that is full of God-centred images:

'According to the multitude of your mercies,
cleanse my iniquity.' (Psalm 51)

O star-like sun, O guiding light, O home of
the planets,
O fiery-maned and marvellous one, O
fertile, undulating, fiery sea,

 Forgive.
O fiery glow, O fiery flame of Judgement,
 Forgive.

O holy storyteller, holy scholar, O full of
holy grace, of holy strength.
O overflowing, loving silent one, O generous
and thunderous giver of gifts,

 Forgive.
O rock-like warrior of a hundred hosts,
O fair-crowned one, O victorious, skilled in
battle,

 Forgive.³⁶

Celtic forms of prayer offer worshipful space that speaks of heavenly matters in ways that may particularly connect with Australians today. A reformed prayer life is at the heart of creating colonies of heaven on earth—whether in eighth century Ireland or in twenty-first century Australia.

Celtic worship patterns included formal liturgy in monasteries (in Latin) and popular devotional worship in homes and outdoor

gatherings (in the vernacular). Bradley suggests they did not attempt to merge the two forms in inclusive worship mixing formal with informal, timeless with contemporary. Rather than merging traditional services with contemporary worship, he suggests a similar 'twin track' approach to worship today:

There is no need to snipe at cathedral choral evensong for being elitist and inaccessible to many. So was the worship in Celtic monasteries. Nor is there any call to condemn modern worship songs and choruses as simplistic repetitive duties. So were many of the prayers and charms used by Hebridean crofters and fishing folk in their homes and places of work. Both styles of worship are equally honest and valid expressions of the deep-seated human instinct to communicate with God and voice petition and praise. They reflect the fact that people are on different stages of their faith journeys and express their worship in radically different ways.³⁷

The diversity of Celtic worship was shown also in its expression—not through theology and dogma as much as poetry, parable, music and art. Their example of using indigenous forms of communication points the way for today's Australian church to use technology alongside storytelling and multimedia alongside dance. Just as the Celts used icons as visual symbols to facilitate spiritual transformation, today's Australian church could use drama, art, video and computer-generated clips, and a diversity of media to express the gospel.³⁸ The diversity and earthiness of Celtic spirituality can help the Australian church connect postmodern seekers with God. Bradley comments:

We need above all to have more sense of heaven in our worship and to make the places where we worship, whether churches or homes, colonies of heaven in which earth and heaven meet, the glory shines through the grey, ordinary things are rendered extraordinary and hope keeps breaking through. Then perhaps people will come to worship with a sense of excitement and expectancy rather than out of a sense of duty.³⁹

Conclusion

FINALLY, the Celtic tradition can inspire us to trust God and take risks. The Roman way was generally to be careful and to control the direction the church took. Pope Gregory, for example, instructed Augustine to bring the Celtic church's liturgy into line with other churches. The more natural Celtic approach was to be flexible and allow for diversity. The Celts had a sense of adventure that took risks, went on pilgrimages, and did not hesitate to venture new things for Christ. Many Irish monks setting off on pilgrimage cast off from home and security without any clear destination, readily plunging into the unknown and trusting themselves to God's guidance and protection.⁴⁰ Abraham queries whether Celtic Christianity can be applied in the modern West without monasteries and the Celtic Christians,⁴¹ but principles like incarnational mission, inviting people to belong to community, everyday spirituality and diversity in worship are foundational for growing today's Australian churches. Julie McGuinness' 'Reflections on Life's Road' suggests something of the hopeful direction of a Celtic journey applicable to us Aussies seeking new ways of doing church:

Some people travel in straight lines:
Sat in metal boxes, eyes ahead,
Always mindful of their target,
Moving in obedience to coloured lights and
white lines,
Mission accomplished at journey's end.

Some people travel round in circles:
Trudging in drudgery, eyes looking down,
Knowing only too well their daily,
unchanging round,
Moving in response to clock and to habit,
Journey never finished yet never begun.

I want to travel in patterns of God's making:
Walking in wonder, gazing all around,
Knowing my destiny, though not my
destination,
Moving to the rhythm of the surging of his
spirit,
A journey which when life ends, in Christ
has just begun.⁴²

Endnotes

1. Inspired by Ian Bradley, *Colonies of Heaven: Celtic Models for Today's Church*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 2000.
2. Ian Bradley, *The Celtic Way*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1993, vii-viii.
3. Further study of primary documents in their original languages is needed to understand the true shape and history of Celtic Christianity. Yet with the revival of interest in Celtic spirituality and the way it has adapted to changing times, it is appropriate for the global church to examine the source of this popularity and to see what we can learn from contemporary Celtic spirituality (whether or not it accurately reflects earlier forms). On the challenges of historical study of Celtic Christianity cf. Marion Bowman, 'Contemporary Celtic spirituality', *Belief Beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and the New Age*, Ed. Joanne Pearson, Open University, Ashgate, 2002; Bradley, *Colonies of Heaven*, vii-ix, 123-125, 145; Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Dreaming Dreams*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1999; Elizabeth Culling, *What is Celtic Christianity?*, Grove Spirituality Series no.45, Bramcote, 1993, 3-7; John Finney, *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1996, 4-5, 27; Donald E. Meek, 'The faith of the fringe: perspectives and issues in 'Celtic Christianity'', *Belief Beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and the New Age*, Ed. Joanne Pearson, Open University, Ashgate, 2002; Loren Wilkinson, 'Saving Celtic Christianity', *Christianity Today*, 24 April 2000, 78-85.
4. Philip Shelldrake, *Living Between Worlds: Place and Journey in Celtic Spirituality*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1995, 84.
5. Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1995; Douglas Dales, *Light to the Isles: missionary theology in Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Britain*, Lutterworth, Cambridge, 1997; George G. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West ... Again*, Abingdon, Nashville, 2000; Martin Robinson, *Rediscovering the Celts: The True Witness from Western Shores*, HarperCollins, London, 2000.
6. Bradley, *The Celtic Way*; Ian Bradley, *Columba, Pilgrim and Penitent*, Wild Goose,

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