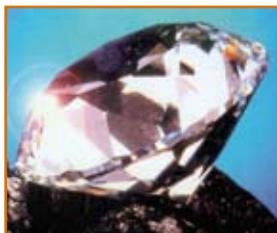


CHAPTER ONE

THE THINNESS BETWEEN THIS WORLD AND THE OTHERWORLD

CREATION AS A REFLECTION OF THE DIVINE ENERGY AT WORK

At the heart of any appreciation of Celtic Spirituality is the notion of the thinness between this world and the 'Otherworld'. We are talking here of a multifaceted diamond. One face of it is the sense of immanence between the Divine energy and creation. What we are wishing to experience more strongly in contemporary thought and spirituality has a history of articulation in all indigenous cultures, and that of the Israelites, which became the Christian inheritance.



Celtic Spirituality, like a diamond, reveals diverse aspects in its variously cut faces. Of particular sparkle is the beautiful closeness between God and creation revealed in different ways.

To touch the fleshiness of the earth is to touch sacred ground and there are hundreds of monuments to this all over the countryside particularly in Ireland. Stonehenge in England and Brú na Bóinne (New Grange) in Ireland would be the pre-eminent examples of it stretching back 5000 years. Terence Meaden likens the awesomeness of the light and shadow play exhibited at summer and winter solstices at these two places as a communion between the Sun God and Earth Mother.¹ Particularly in Ireland, there is such a numinous sense about these mounds as homes for the Tuatha de Danann (the folk

of the goddess Danu), who were inhabitants of the land before choosing to go underground and controlling the fertility of the crops as their compromise with the conquering Milesians who chose the surface of the land.²

There are numerous stories telling how at Samhain and Beltaine people cross over from the Otherworld to this and vice-versa.

The Christianisation of Samhain to Halloween or All Saints/Souls Days has ensured



England's Stonehenge, over 5,000 years old, is both a marvel in its construction and in its way of manifesting the people's fascination with the cosmos and the mystery of fertility. At summer solstice in its initial splendour the light travelled along the stone avenue and was reflected in a show of glory as it struck a concave mica dish

¹ George Terence Meaden, *The Goddess of the Stones* (London: Souvenir Press, 1991), Terence Meaden, *Stonehenge the Secret of the Solstice* (London: Souvenir Press, 1997). I felt greatly privileged by having him give me a tour of Stonehenge and Avebury while he expounded on his theories surrounding these two places. It seems to me that his attraction to the sense of the divine feminine and fertility as the profound mystery of the time resonates with Aboriginal allusions to Mother Earth and the shaping of their relationship to her. He was very interested in my discovery that the triple spiral so famously depicted at Newgrange has its own meaning for Western Desert Aboriginal women and is part of their Law Business.

² The story has been charmingly told by Sean O'Duinn based on researches regarding the Book of Fermoy. Sean O'Duinn, "Celtic Mythology and the Otherworld" (paper presented at the Celtic Vision-Conference on Celtic Spirituality, Glendalough, 1998).



The restored wall of Newgrange, Ireland. Built at a similar period to Stonehenge (5,000 years ago) it is a similar monument but this time to the winter solstice.



Initially children represented the little people or Tuatha de Danann who now lived beneath the land who would bestow fertility if they were paid their due at Samhain time. In Christian times this became Hallo'e'en, the holy eve of All Saints' Day.

that religious sentiments can sit comfortably with children at play as they go from door to door soliciting 'trick or treats'.³ But while admonitions might have been directed at children to safeguard them from evil at night, for any folk who had a parlous hold on property, possessions, and even a place to lay their heads, fear of those over them could easily lead to increased sensitivity to the spirit world around them. Storytelling around the hearth on a chill night would be one way of drawing



During a wonderful weekend of Celtic Spirituality at Glendalough we paid tribute to the old traditions.

comfort from each other as well as having a good laugh. The Christian equivalent of Lucifer versus the other angels is the flip side of the coin representing all that is otherworldly and could be held close to one's person just as surely as the hard won coppers of the day. Thus the Christian overlay of the feasts of All Saints and All Souls could be interpreted as the transformation of these old pre-Christian practices; or helping a people to maintain their heritage embracing the 'Otherworld' even as they fulfilled their Christian devotions.



It is easy to see how the angels from the Judaeo-Christian tradition could assume the good spirit forces struggling with Lucifer and the powers of darkness.

The supreme force of safety against the forces of evil, either of this or the other world, of course was Christ,

³ The modern ritualising around these days which involves children dressing up and going from door to door requesting nuts and apples is meant to depict the quest by the Tuatha de Danann (the 'Little People') seeking payment for bestowing fertility on the crops. What might be amusing for some is taken very seriously by others and not to be messed around with!

appealed to in that mighty Breastplate of St Patrick:

*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 everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in the eye of every one that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.* ⁴

It will be interesting to see if the person who is the focus of our attention in this study, Edmund Rice, will seem as if he carries Christ in his being and whether he can inspire confidence in others that they too carry Christ with them, no matter what their circumstances.

In viewing this multifaceted diamond we are soon aware of the role of imagination in tracking different textures and overlays that ensure the thinness between these two worlds. Along with it go humour, poetry, story telling and the mystique of the feminine.

COLOURED BY CHRISTIANITY

The coming of Christianity to Ireland is often spoken of as a painless marrying of this nature religion with the story of Christ. Certainly Patrick wished to plant the structure of the European church with its bishops and priests tending their 'flocks'. However, there were no towns and cities but rather little kingdoms with king and poet ruling over little more than extended families. This seemed to be just right for the flowering of monasteries of monks and nuns. What also might have contributed to this spread of monastic settlements was the fact that celibacy was not the necessary condition of life in a monastic setting it later became. Certainly the similarity between the monastic and wider feudal lifestyle provided a framework for endowing the monasteries with the position of abbot often being an inherited position.

The love of poetry in these people was now given extra scope with the arrival of language tools for reading and writing in either the new languages of Latin and, to a lesser extent, Greek, or in their own native language. Poetry became a means of expressing the monks' joy at meeting the child Jesus or his Mother, Mary; of describing the beauty of God's creation, or merely taking time out to describe the parallels between the cat hunting and the scribe writing.

If the story might seem charming and neat, we have to make room for the sense of paradox permeat-



Patrick, though trained in the theology of the Christianity of the East, was able to appreciate the spirituality of the Celts from his early days when he was captured and forced to work as a shepherd in Ireland.

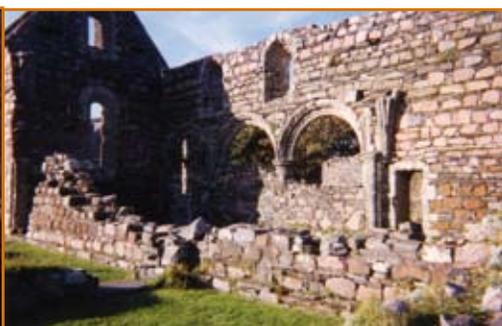
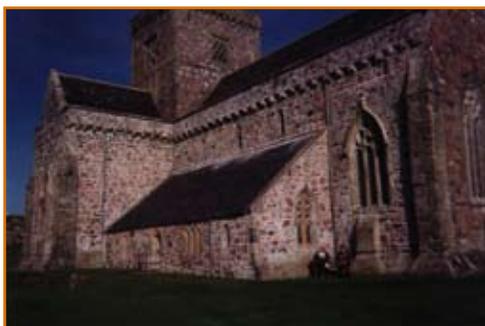
⁴ David Adam, *The Cry of the Deer: Meditations on the Hymn of St Patrick*, Sixth Impression ed. (London: Triangle/SPCK, 1994) 5.

ing so much of it. How do we explain the zest for life and beauty extolled in the lives of the mythical heroes and yet note how the lives of the Celtic saints abound with



The current beauty of Glendalough, near Dublin, reveals a rich history of monastic living initiated by St Kevin. The round tower was both look-out and refuge against the ravages of the Vikings.

tales of rigorous asceticism? There is poetic lyricism when describing the beauties of nature or longing for homeland in the case of Columba bound for Iona. Yet the desire to live on the isolated craggy outcrops of Skellig Michael is its own lyrical statement—an embrace of fearsome nature both within and without. Rather than seek to solve the paradox, it seems that the monks of old chose to hold the two extremes in tension and live with the consequences. Some of the stories bear this out. While one abbot is proclaiming the virtue of abstinence in drink another is celebrating the life it offers:



Iona, off the coast of Scotland, founded by St Columba. On the left the restored abbey. On the right the nunnery. Iona offers great hospitality to pilgrims wishing to retrace their spiritual roots, and allows visitors to share in the rhythm of prayer, work and play as both history and contemporary issues forge a spirituality relevant for today.

‘The drink of forgetfulness of God shall not be drunk here’, said the abbot of Tallaght. ‘Well, my household shall drink it,’ replied the abbot of Finglas, ‘and they will be in heaven along with your household.’⁵

A QUESTION OF SALVATION

A similar sense of paradox prevailed over the question of salvation. But it went even further than that and embraced the whole question of what is sacred. The lesson to be learnt from the following story seems to be that one bows down to the Mystery rather than fathom the depths of it:

St Cadoc, that curious Welsh character who founded Llanancarvan and who was reputed to be at once hermit, abbot, bard, and feudal chieftain, was educated at Liss-mor and had a passion for Virgil, whom he taught his pupils to learn by heart. “One day while walking with his friend and companion the famous histo-

⁵ Kathleen Hughes and Ann Hamlin, *Celtic Monasticism: The Modern Traveler to the Irish Church* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981) 39

rian Gildas, with his Virgil under his arm, the abbot began to weep at the thought that the poet whom he loved so much might be even then perhaps in Hell. At the moment when Gildas reprimanded him severely for that ‘perhaps’ protesting that without any doubt Virgil must be damned, a sudden gust of wind tossed Cadoc’s book into the sea. He was moved by this accident and, returning to his cell, said to himself ‘I will not eat a mouthful of bread, nor drink a drop of water before I know truly what fate God has allotted to those who sang upon the earth as the angels sing in heaven.’ After he fell asleep and soon after, dreaming, heard a soft voice addressing him, ‘Pray for me, pray for me,’ said the voice; ‘never be weary of praying. I shall yet sing eternally the mercy of the Lord.’ The next morning a fisherman of Belz brought him a salmon, and the Saint found in the fish the book which the wind had snatched from his hands.”⁶

So rather than speculate on what salvation might mean and for whom it was available the myth pointed to mystery which was to be celebrated rather than analysed. However, in referring to Virgil’s poetry as: ‘those who sang upon the earth as the angels sing in heaven’, one is left in no doubt as to the value these people placed in poetry as a vehicle for praising the Creator who blessed them with such beauty and power.

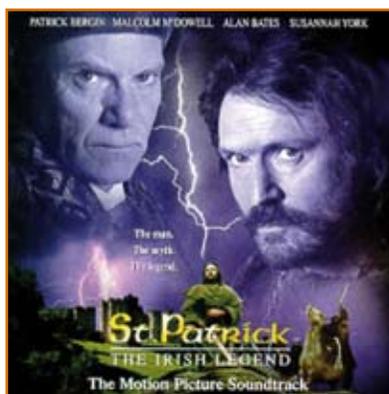
IS YOUR GOD A GOD OF BEAUTY?

Supposedly at the dawn of the Irish Christian story it is reported by Bishop Tírechán (seventh century) that the daughters of King Loiguire, Ethne and Fedelm, met Patrick and his followers at a well and initially thought they were men of the *si*, the people who come from under the earth. Intrigued they asked Patrick: ‘Are you really there? Where have you come from?’ Patrick replied to them: ‘It would be better for you to confess faith in our true God than to ask questions about our origin.’

The first girl asked: ‘Who is God? And where is God, and whose God is he, and where is his house? Has your God sons and daughters, gold and silver? Is he alive forever? Is he beautiful? Have many people fostered his son? Are his daughters dear and beautiful to the men of this world? Is he in heaven or on earth, in the sea, on mountains, in valleys? Give us some idea of him: how he may be seen, how loved; how may he be found—is he found in youth or in old age?’

In his reply, Patrick, filled with the Holy Spirit, said:

‘Our God is the God of all people, the God of heaven and earth, of the sea and of the rivers, the God of the sun and the moon and of all the stars, the God of the high mountains and of the deep valleys. He is God above heaven and in heaven and under heaven, and has as his dwelling place heaven and earth and the



Initially Patrick and his followers were thought to be men of the ‘Otherworld’ or the si.



In answer to the question ‘Who is your God?’ Patrick, like Paul before him, was quick to reply: ‘Our God is the God of all people, the God of heaven and earth, of the sea and of the rivers’.

6 A. M. Tommasini, *Irish Saints in Italy* (London: Sands and Company, 1937) 104.

sea and all that are in them. His life is in all things. He kindles the light of the sun; he builds the light and the manifestations of the night; he makes wells in arid land and dry islands in the sea, and he sets the stars in place to serve the major lights.

'He has a son who is coeternal with him and of like nature. The Son is not younger than the Father nor the Father than the Son; and the Holy Spirit breathes in them. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not separate. Truly, now, since you are daughters of an earthly king, I wish that you will believe and I wish to wed you to the king of heaven.'⁷

With such an offer of marriage as that who could refuse?! The questions are as intriguing as the answers! What it reveals is that these people are great lovers of beauty and have a profound sense of the cosmos. We shall return to the place of the sun in this view but need to stay with their love of poetry to describe the beauty that surrounded them.

It was in their little rhyming verses of the eighth century:

*To praise God in his might,
When the tiny mindless birds
Praise him in their flight.⁸*

It can be seen in the everyday actions of the common folk:

*I smoor⁹ the hearth
As Brigid the foster-mother would smoor it.
The holy name of the foster-mother
Be upon the hearth and the herd,
Be upon each of my household.
The encircling of God upon myself and the hearth,
The encircling of God upon myself and the door,
Upon each herd and flock,
Upon each of my household.¹⁰*



The monks resorted to poetry, their favourite tool, to describe the beauty around them including the birds who 'praise God in their flight'.

THE COSMIC CHRIST

Now if we return to the breastplate of St Patrick the full cosmic dimension is celebrated as well:

I arise today

*Through the strength of Heaven
Light of sun
Radiance of moon
Splendour of fire
Speed of lightning
Swiftness of wind
Depth of the sea
Stability of earth
Firmness of rock*

I arise today

*Through God's strength to pilot me
God's eye to look before me
God's wisdom to guide me*

7 Liam De Paor, *Saint Patrick's World* (Blackrock: Four Courts Press, 1993) 163.

8 Ian Bradley, *The Celtic Way* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1993) 57.

9 To smoor the ashes was a ritualised action, last thing at night, of applying a coating of protective ash over the smouldering peat fire which could be brushed off the next day. In this way the fire was rekindled.

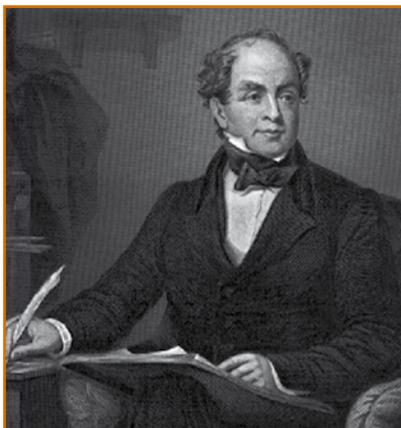
10 Caitlin and John Matthews, *The Encyclopaedia of Celtic Wisdom* (New York: Element, 1994) 329

*God's way to lie before me
God's shield to protect me*

*From all who shall wish me ill
Afar and anear
Alone and in a multitude
Against every cruel
Merciless power
That may oppose my body and soul.¹¹*

When we look a little more closely at the predilection the Irish had for monasticism we can see how this poetic yearning flowed through the pens of many a scribe. However, in tracing their affinity for seeing creation as both divine play and enticing the human response of longing, there opens out a full flowering of this creative impulse in all those of a literary disposition, often mixed with patriotic fervour. When we move beyond the rich Middle Ages period to the Enlightenment era, and follow the footprints of poetry reflecting the intimacy between God and creation, we find the byways well marked. Among the most beloved was Thomas Moore (1779-1852).¹² In writing his own introduction to a published anthology of his poetry he strongly declared his social activism lest anyone mistake his parlour orations for weakness:

To those who identify nationality with treason, and who see in every effort for Ireland a system of hostility toward England—to those, who, nursed in the gloom of prejudice, are alarmed by the faintest gleam of liberality that threatens to disturb their darkness...—to such men I shall not deign to apologise for the warmth of any political sentiment which may occur in the course of these pages...¹³



Thomas Moore, Irish romantic poet, but yet using his pen to fight for Ireland's cause.

If not the first, Moore became one of many poet-patriots (including O'Reilly, mentioned in the previous footnote). One of the main instigators of the Easter Uprising of 1916, Padraig Pearse¹⁴ (1879-1916), was another who was inspired by the love of nature to seek justice for the people. They became known as poets and martyrs for their country. In this segment Moore relishes both the landscape and the friendship that accompanies it, the more poignant owing to the shadow of oppression cast upon it:

11 Adam, *The Cry of the Deer: Meditations on the Hymn of St Patrick* 3-4. This is beautifully celebrated in song as part of *The Pilgrim* a Celtic Suite for Orchestra, Soloists, Pipe Band and Choir composed by Shaun Davey (who in lighter vein composed the music for *Waking Ned Divine!*).

12 Note Thomas Moore was almost an exact contemporary of Edmund Rice (1762-1844) who enjoyed his poetry immensely, even if later critics do not.

13 John Boyle O'Reilly, ed., *The Poetry and Song of Ireland*, 1st ed. (New York: Gay Brothers & Co., 1887) 29-30. West Australian readers might recall the editor as the famous O'Reilly who escaped from Fremantle Prison as part of a Fenian plot in 1869 and sailed to America. See e.g. Thomas Keneally, *The Great Shame: A Story of the Irish in the Old World and the New* (Sydney: Random House, 1998).

14 In the remarkable Allen Library of the O'Connell Schools in North Richmond Street (Edmund Rice's headquarters in Dublin), I was shown the roll book that Padraig Pearse had filled in for his class ending on Holy Thursday of 1916. By the close of class at the end of the day he was in revolution mode. The Easter Uprising was bloodily put down. Pearse and his companions were executed for treason, a bad miscalculation by the British. 'They were men of such beautiful character—such literary attainments—mystics who kept the light burning' was how they were eulogised. Kenneth Neill, *An Illustrated History of the Irish People* (New York: Mayflower Books, Inc., 1979) 171.



John Boyle O'Reilly, pictured here in Mountjoy Prison.

In 1866 he was convicted of 'failing to report a mutiny' among the military. Among other Fenians his sentence of execution was commuted to life imprisonment. His escape from Fremantle Prison is now passing into Western Australian folk lore. Once in America he was able to return to his literary pursuits including editing the large tome 'The Poetry and Song of Ireland' in 1887.



Padraig Pearse, school master and rebel. One of the leaders of the Easter Uprising of 1916 he was executed soon after. 'Mystics who kept the light burning' was how they were described.

*There is not in the wide world a valley so sweet
As that vale in whose bosom the bright waters meet!
Oh! The last rays of feeling and life must depart
Ere the bloom of that valley shall fade from my heart.*

*Yet it was not that nature had shed o'er the scene
Her purest of crystal and brightest of green;
'Twas not the soft magic of streamlet or hill,
Oh! no—it was something more exquisite still.*

*'Twas that friends, the beloved of my bosom, were near,
who made every dear scene of enchantment more dear,
and who felt how the best charms of nature improve,
when we see them reflected from looks that we love.*

*Sweet vale of Avoca! How calm could I rest
In thy bosom of shade with the friends I love best,
Where the storms that we feel in this cold world should cease,
And our hearts, like thy waters, be mingled in peace!¹⁵*

Poetry was the very acceptable vehicle for underlining penmanship of the Divine One at play with creation and constantly bringing forth a world of much beauty even if sullied with human machinations. Warrior strength and subtlety then came into its own seeking to restore justice where the Creator was being thwarted by human greed.

¹⁵ O'Reilly, ed., *The Poetry and Song of Ireland* 34.

ANAM CARA

The beauty of friendship is another facet of the diamond reflecting the brilliance of the Trinitarian God.

The theme of friendship whether of a natural bond or anam cara (soul friend) is a rich one in the Celtic story. The saying: ‘A person without a soul friend is like a person with his head chopped off’ has been ascribed to St Brigid; but, irrespective of the merits of that, it underlines just how crucial this bonding is and how the heroic tales of the mythic figures and the saints underline it. Certainly, in Edmund Rice it will re-emerge as crucial to appreciating how he saw his mission and was encouraged to follow it.

The different literary genres of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries abound with themes of love of nature and justice-seeking in the form of patriotism. We look below at the notion of hospitality to the poor and how this was yet another facet of the diamond which was so lustrous because of the heightened sense that this was God’s creation: it demanded justice for all, or at least hospitality to those who were suffering scarcity for any reason at all. Celtic Spirituality in its pre-Christian form had no trouble proclaiming that what you saw was not all you saw. Not only was it possible to see through creation to an Otherworld but that, in the beauty of creation and how it might be adorned, the divine is made manifest. With the coming of Christ this was made more certain. However, there seemed to be two additions. Creation might be holy but that did not stop people from wanting more of it than was their share. In fact greed and avarice seemed to be natural consequences of a longing that was part and parcel of the beauty of creation. The major sagas of Celtic folklore including that between Maeve and Cúchulainn pointed to the double-edged sword that land and possessions were. The pioneering Celtic monks were sensitive to beauty even as they desisted from its allurements. Not only did they choose wild places to dwell in but undertook fasts and penances. This was not so much because they despised the fleshiness of creation but because they aspired to treat it with due reverence.

HOSPITALITY TO THE POOR

The other gift of Christianity to the Celtic fascination with creation was its enhanced sense of showing hospitality to the poor. It might well have been part of a sharing charism which went before, just as the Indigenous people of Australasia are famous for it; but in the Christian dispensation when property rights were defended with fire and sword, these early Celtic Christians pointed to this new reality. The new Christian folklore contained endless examples of it. There was Brigid who gave away her father’s sword to a leper in need, and Aidan who gave away his horse, in full liveried splendour, which had been recently gifted to him by the king, to a beggar. In both cases the authorities who questioned them about the foolishness of such actions came away humbled by a sense that they were the ones who were overpowered with such simplicity and reverence for God’s lowly ones.

The Iona Community today, mindful of this tradition of hospitality have made it a special quality which they practise most graciously. A Celtic Rune of Hospitality used by them is:

I saw a stranger at yestere’en,
I put food in the eating place,
Drink in the drinking place,
Music in the listening place,
And in the sacred name of the Triune
He blessed myself and my house,
My cattle and my dear ones,
And the lark said in her song

Often, often, often,
Goes the Christ in the stranger's guise

As David Adam so aptly says: 'The Celtic Church did not so much seek to bring Christ as to discover Him: not to possess Him but to see Him in "friend and stranger"; to liberate the Christ who is already there in all His riches.'

And after the evangelisation of Scotland by Columcille and his disciples it is not surprising that they have their version of what hospitality to the poor means:

The Lyke Wake Dirge
If ever thou gavest hosen and shoon
—Every night and all,
Sit thee down and put them on;
And Christ receive thy soul.

If hosen and shoon thou never gavest nane
—Every night and all,
The whins shall prick thee to the bare bane;
And Christ receive thy soul.

If ever thou gavest meat and drink
—Every night and all,
The fire shall never make thee shrink;
And Christ receive thy soul.

If meat and drink thou never gavest nane
—Every night and all,
The fire will burn thee to the bare bane;
And Christ receive thy soul.

NO DUALISMS

This is what modern writers like John O'Donohue and others mean when they say: 'the Celtic mind was not burdened by dualism...The dualism which separates the visible from the invisible, time from eternity, the human from the divine, was totally alien to them.' This insight is an important one to grasp because as we look at Edmund Rice against this Celtic landscape it will enable us to appreciate why feeding and educating his impoverished students was not in some way a lesser priority to saving their souls as some would like to see it.

And it seems that despite his falling out with institutionalised religion a writer such as James Joyce, if he were to be a true observer of his people, could not help but inject the unity between secular and sacred into his writing. There is one two-in-one scene in *Ulysses*: A beautiful romantic scene at the beach is juxtaposed with the sacredness of Devotions and Benediction being celebrated in the church just over the road at Sandy-mount. On the one hand there is the playing of ball on the strand with little sub-plots of girls competing for the affections of the gentleman joining in the game and the twin children competing to get the biggest kick in 'till at last Master Jacky who was really as bold as brass—there was no getting behind that—deliberately kicked the ball as hard as ever he could down towards the seaweedy rocks'.

No sooner are we at home with this little domestic scene than our attention is drawn to the fragrant incense wafting through the open church window adjacent,

...and with it the fragrant names of her who was conceived without stain of original sin,

spiritual vessel, pray for us, honourable vessel, pray for us...And careworn hearts were there and toilers for their daily bread and many who had erred and wandered, their eyes wet with contrition but for all that bright with hope for the reverend Father Hughes had told them what the great Saint Bernard said in his famous prayer of Mary, the most pious Virgin's intercessory power that it was not recorded in any age that those who implored her powerful protection were ever abandoned by her'.

In the meantime 'the twins were now playing again right merrily for the troubles of childhood are but as fleeting summer showers...'

Whether one sees in this juxtaposition the split between the secular and the sacred and would see in the chanting of the litany a desire to seek refuge from the 'vale of tears' which so many lived in is open to question. I lean to the view that James Joyce is forced to see the two scenes as part of the whole. Popular piety, by this time, was very heavenly oriented but no matter what the preachers might have been saying the incense and the mantras were a vehicle for allowing the people to place Christ and his mother in the midst of their trials and tribulations, not as an escape, but as a means of weaving them into the web of life and seeking their intercessors' protection in the process.

In spiralling fashion we have seen something of the multifaceted diamond which reveals the 'thinness' between the divine realm and the human. Back through the mists of time we observe the numinous presence of other beings whose dwellings are marked by the mounds and dolmens. The choirs of angels and archangels became the Christian overlay while the main feast of Christmas and Easter heightened the drama of the pre-Christian ceremonial. Nature herself in all her beauty and storminess inspired that awe and wonder which has provided the palette of colours for the visual and literary artists, but especially the poets who have always enjoyed a greater prominence than anywhere else. With the advent of Christianity the Christ child and his mother became the ultimate expressions of this imprint of God on creation and they were quick to see Christ's special relationship with the poor. Consequently, 'hospitality to the poor' became a key trait in ensuring there be no flaws in God's creation. However, as nature, once it becomes property can be so alluring, there rose up communities of monks and nuns who radically tried to temper this allurements with ascetical practices not to despise beauty of form but to be more single-minded in its appreciation.

POINTS FOR REFLECTION

1. What Do you think accounts for the modern interest in Celtic Spirituality?
2. What are the different facets of the diamond of Celtic Spirituality? To what extent do they hold appeal for you?
3. Literature and, particularly poetry, has always been a good vehicle for exploring spirituality. What are your favourites in this regard?
4. What role are the maths and sciences playing in enhancing our spirituality today?
5. Is 'hospitality to the poor' just about feeding and clothing them?

