

The Wheel of the Year
A Worship Book for Creation Spirituality

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation constitutes a Worship Book for those who wish to honor the integrity of creation in regular worship services throughout the Christian liturgical year. Eight liturgies for the Winter and Summer Solstices, the Spring and Fall Equinoxes and four “cross-quarter days,” plus a Full Moon ritual are provided, based upon what is known about pre-Christian, Celtic spirituality, the theology and four-path principles of Creation Spirituality, and suggested readings from the Revised Common Lectionary for Year B. The format used in developing these rituals is a model for small groups that wish to work in a sacred manner.

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I. INTRODUCTION

To paraphrase Bishop John Shelby Spong, the God worshiped by Christians in the early development of the Christian church is not the same Godde that is emerging among thoughtful people of faith on the threshold of the Third Millennium, C.E.¹ Christian understanding of the Christ is also evolving. While traditional, conservative, and fundamentalist “mega-churches” and mass movements appear to be mushrooming, church membership is actually declining among all the mainline Protestant denominations. Unlike the 19th Century Scottish crofters whose folk wisdom comprises the *Carmina Gadelica*,² today’s exiles from the faith are unwilling to check their minds and hearts at the church doors. Many find their way into Neo-Pagan groups, the most visible being Starhawk’s Reclaiming Cooperative, the Covenant of the Goddess, and the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPS). Many more spend their Sundays in recreational activities with their children, movies and sports entertainments, or at the real temples of the post-modern age – shopping malls.

If the institutional Christian church is to remain relevant, an approach such as the one illustrated in this Worship Book is essential. Like the shamans of neolithic and aboriginal tribes, post-modern spiritual leaders must become priests and priestesses of the cosmos. By entering and living the metaphors presented by the new cosmology of the 3rd

¹John Shelby Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile*, (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1998) pp. 56 ff.

²Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns & Incantations Collected In the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the Last Century*, ed. C.J. Moore (New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1994).

Millennium C.E., those called to such a role become entrancers, enchanters, mediators of the sacred realms.

The following sections define terms that may appear threatening, present an argument for the kind of change that Bishop Spong is calling for, and tell the story of the origins of this project. Part II lays out the elements of ritual: creating sacred space, the rhythm of liturgy when it is truly the work of the people, and the liturgical model of the four paths of Creation Spirituality as developed by Matthew Fox. Part III presents liturgies for the eight festivals of the pre-Christian, Celtic Wheel of the Year.

A. Definitions

Before most Sunday morning Christians can fully accept the Wheel of the Year as liturgically valid, some terms need to be understood: *Pre-Christian, Pagan, Neopagan, The Celts, Creation Spirituality.*

Pre-Christian. I have found “Pre-Christian” to be a non-threatening euphemism, often preferable to the term “pagan,” which usually conjures visions of a large, horned and tailed demon against a back-drop of flames. This image is a perfect illustration of what happens when a new interpretation encounters an old metaphor. The Christian Devil is nothing more than the archetypal remnant of the Celtic horned god Cernunnos, the god of untamed animals and wild places. His role as the personification of evil is nearly inseparable from the gradual evolution of human thought from a holistic tapestry of spirit and the natural world to the dualism we struggle with today between the scientific “real world” and spirit realms.

“Pre-Christian” usually reminds people of some dim time in Western Europe normally thought of as the “dark ages,” between Jesus’ death and resurrection and the Renaissance. John Crossan of the Jesus Seminar restricts “pre-Christian” time to the 30 to 80 years between the death of Jesus and the organization of a new Jewish sect that eventually took on a life of its own.³ “Pre-Christian” here refers to the time in *written* history before there was a politically powerful Christian presence in Northern Europe and the British Isles, approximately 250 to 600 C.E. It is important to realize that the Christian religious story certainly traveled from the Mediterranean Middle East into Northern Europe and the Isles with the Roman Army in the early centuries of the Common Era, but in those earliest years it was one of many religious sects in relatively peaceful coexistence with the Pagan Druids and the Roman army.

Very few people were literate. Scholars such as Caitlin and John Matthews of Oxford University are controversial precisely because their work gives equal weight to oral tradition from the same time period and even earlier. Because oral tradition cannot be documented, such work is often criticized as the hazy, written memory of what might have been. Indeed, Arthur Holder argues that there is very little that can be documented before the 12th Century, let alone the 4th to 7th centuries.⁴

³John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1998).

⁴The life of St. Brigid may be the earliest written Irish Christian story (7th Century). Personal class notes: *Celtic Christian Spirituality*, Arthur Holder, Ph.D., Professor, August 10-14, 1998.

Pagan. The first definition in the *Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, American Edition*,⁵ is “a person not subscribing to any of the main religions of the world.” From there the term descends into more and more questionable territory from the point of view of most Christians: “a person following a polytheistic or pantheistic religion. . . a hedonist . . . irreligious” The thesaurus offers only “heathen, unbeliever, idolater, infidel” – not politically correct in most Christian circles today. Tucked in at the end is the Medieval Latin meaning: a villager; a rustic – in other words, the uneducated riff-raff, from whom Jesus of Nazareth came to offer his unique brand of social and political subversion.

The long road to Christian intolerance toward the rustic, natural world is paved with hundreds of movements and hundreds of thousands if not millions of martyrs and heretics. Matthew Fox says that Thomas Aquinas was among the last to argue against Augustine and the dualists for the pagan experience that God/dess⁶ is known by knowing the natural world. “By dwelling on creatures, the mind is inflamed to love the divine goodness. We love God and know God in the mirror of God’s creatures.”⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, writing in the 12th Century, never lost sight of her experience of God *in* Creation, and inseparable from it. This is the experience not only of mystics associated with the

⁵New York: Oxford University Press, 1996

⁶I have been using this means of including the feminine with the masculine in deity since 1992. An alternative form also appearing in this paper is “Godde,” coined by a member of the online Ecunet meeting *Gaia Rising* in 1995. See <http://www.ecunet.org>.

⁷Matthew Fox, *Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1992) p. 101.

world's established religions, but of earth's people: the Celts, Native Americans, and other Aboriginal peoples.

“Pagan” is a word to be reclaimed.

Neopagan is a movement that surfaced in the 1960s with Otter Zell and the Church of All Worlds, among many others.⁸ Neopagan roots may go no deeper than Madame Blavatsky and the Occultists of the 19th Century, unless arguments about scholarship can be put aside (*see* Caitlin and John Matthews, *The Western Way: A Practical Guide to the Western Mystery Tradition, Vols. 1 and 2* (London: Arkana, 1985-86)). Neopagan writers such as Ray Buckland, Scott Cunningham, Luisa Teish, and Starhawk have done the research that can begin to fill in some of the gaps between forgotten oral traditions of Pre-Christian times and the written interpretations corrupted by Christian political bias. That work is no less important than the Jesus Seminar's continuing search for the true life and work of Jesus.⁹ The concept of panentheism, or the idea that God/dess is named and known by all creatures, that Godde is in creation, not outside it, is Pagan (and Neopagan) experience. The fight against duality and separation is alive and well and practiced daily by aboriginal folks, people searching for their roots in Africa, Asia, and Northern Europe, not to mention recovering Catholics, disillusioned Protestants, and other exiles from the Christian faith.

⁸Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon* (Boston: Beacon Press 1986).

⁹The Jesus Seminar is a project of the Westar Institute, a private, nonprofit research institute devoted to improving biblical and religious literacy by making the scholarship of religion available and accessible to the general public. To learn more about the Westar Institute, please contact: The Westar Institute, P.O. Box 6144, Santa Rosa, CA 95406 (707-523-1323).

The Celts. The “Celts” usually means the people of Northwestern France (Brittany [Bretagne]) and the British Isles, especially Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. However, the Celts were an original people who migrated from Asia Minor (Galatia) across Europe to the Isles, beginning approximately 800 B.C.E.¹⁰ Celtic cultural influence is found today from Northern Spain (Galicia) to Mexico.¹¹ Folk tales from Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and the West Country of England reflect what must have been a cataclysmic confrontation between the invading Celts or Gales and the aboriginal Picts and elusive Tuatha de Danaan – Ireland’s fairy folk, forced into the hollow hills as house elves, sprites, and leprechauns.

Such tales could be dismissed as irrelevant but for the fact that dealing with the otherworld and “the fair folk” is woven into the very fabric of daily life, even today, and is part and parcel of Celtic Christianity. For example, the Anglican hymn, “I bind unto myself today the strong arm of the Trinity,” is based on a protective invocation or prayer called a *lorica*, or “breastplate,” attributed to St. Patrick:

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

¹⁰Personal class notes, *Celtic Christian Spirituality*, Arthur Holder, Ph.D., Professor, August 10-14, 1998 (*class handout*: Simon James, *The World of the Celts*, Thames & Hudson, 1993, pp. 16-17).

¹¹A musical illustration may be heard in the compact disc, *The Chieftains: Santiago* (BMG Music, 1996).

Caitlin Matthews writes:

[W]e may assume that this form of protective spell originated with the pagan Celts or from the native peoples they assimilated

The manner in which this invocation came about is interesting. Patrick and his monks were in danger of being ambushed, so when he had to go out with eight of his young clerics and his servant, Benen, Patrick blessed them and a cloak of darkness went over them so that not a man of them appeared. All that the pagan Irish saw were a troop of eight deer and a fawn with a white bird on its shoulder. And so Patrick uttered his lorica which is thereafter called “The Deer’s Cry.”

As we see, Patrick shares both the druidic ability to create invisibility and also to shapeshift. Significantly, he further asks to be protected from the spells of women, druids and smiths. This curious statement exactly shows where the native Irish invested their magical powers: the Otherworldly women of the *Sidhe*, the druids steeped in esoteric knowledge, and the wonder-working smiths, whose knowledge of metals put them into the magical class.¹²

In Alexander Carmichael’s *Carmina Gadelica*, the otherworld of fairy and of nature is inseparable from the lives of the folk in the Highlands and islands of Scotland:

No advantage in smartness of language is to be permitted to the fairy; if it be, she is able to exercise her will on the mortal with whom she contends . . . The fairies are little lovely daring dignified creatures with green raiment. If they get an inch they will take an ell, and there is no gainsaying them . . . Think of the wren himself, how brash and bold he comes and sits on the windowsill until I give him food! . . . The poor little creature lives but from hour to hour, from hand to mouth, from day to day, as I do myself. It is matter for thought, the work of creation and the goodness of the great God of the elements to His creatures, great and small; and I! I am one of them!

¹²Caitlin Matthews, *The Elements of The Celtic Tradition* (Rockport: Element Books, 1991), pp. 102-103.

Christ be between me and the fairies,
My frown upon each tribe of them!
This day is Friday on sea and on land –
My trust, O King, that they shall not hear me.¹³

Even writers such as Esther DeWaal, who can hardly be characterized as an indiscriminate “New Age” spiritual guide, have been charmed by the inclusiveness of Celtic spiritual tradition. She argues:

[M]any people today, in trying to recover their Celtic roots, seem to be looking for some creation-centered spirituality that idealizes nature and presents some romantic idyll of the past. The reality would have been far different and it is vitally important to realize this. Nature can be cruel, uncertain, menacing . . . While in one breath the monastic poet celebrates the elements as showing forth the harmony and order of the creator God, he also has no illusions . . . This a fallen world.¹⁴

Nevertheless,

. . . I have found in the Celtic a worldview that touches on much that is common, shared, perhaps archetypal, in all human experience . . . [T]his way of seeing the world is common to all . . . traditional and aboriginal peoples throughout the world . . . Here, instead, everyone sees themselves in relation to one another, and that extends beyond human beings to the wild creatures, the birds and the animals, the earth itself. . . . Here is the promise of a more holistic approach to the world, of healing of the many fractures that maim and corrupt each of us and the world in which we live.¹⁵

Writers and explorers of the Celtic tradition agree on very little about the history of a “Celtic Christian Church” except that *if* there was or is one, its origins are lost in the

¹³Carmichael, pp. 513, 516.

¹⁴Esther De Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer* (New York: Doubleday, 1997) pp. 119-120.

¹⁵*Ibid.* pp. xiv-xv.

mists, and that the post-modern world, bereft of authentic spiritual or mystical experience, can easily become trapped in romance. Philip Sheldrake warns that, contrary to popular notion, there never was a real split between the Roman Church and the Irish/Celtic Church that is traceable to the Synod of Whitby in 664,¹⁶ which Sheldrake says was called to do nothing more than settle disputes between the Roman Bishops and the Celtic Bishops about the calculation of the date of Easter, and the pattern to be used for haircuts.¹⁷ On the other hand, Anthony Duncan maintains that while those issues were the stated reason for the Synod, it was really about the establishment of Roman ecclesiastical power. He laments, “[b]ut to our generation, something precious seems to have departed with the Irish monks,” who returned to Ireland rather than to Lindisfarne at the conclusion of the conference.¹⁸

These same diverse writers and scholars also agree, however, that the nature of Celtic spirituality is a context within which God/dess is revealed and experienced in the natural world, even when that world is seen as “fallen” as in the Roman/Augustinian view. Esther DeWaal struggles with this as she seeks a way to “recover the religious imagination”:

As I read stories about these lives and see the place that the wild creatures play in them, I find myself thinking about the mystery of coinherence, which I do not yet even begin to

¹⁶Philip Sheldrake, *Living Between Worlds: Place and Journey in Celtic Spirituality* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1995) p. 12.

¹⁷The Roman tonsure was a small shaved area on the top of the head. The Celtic, or Druid, fashion was to shave the whole area of the forehead back even with the tops of the ears (Anthony Duncan, *The Elements of Celtic Christianity* (Shaftsbury: Element Books, Ltd., 1992) p. 44).

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p 44-45.

fully grasp or understand, by which the creator and the whole of the created universe, both human and nonhuman, are integrated into one whole living unity, part of common creation, that links heaven and earth.¹⁹

That she manages to hang onto Fall/Redemption theology in spite of such insights illustrates not only how deeply ingrained Augustine's influence is in the West 1,700 years later, but how tough it is for traditional Christians to experience either *coinherence* (which DeWaal does not define) or *panentheism*, and then to integrate that experience with Sunday morning. Duncan observes that the 19th Century Scots interviewed by Alexander Carmichael for his *Carmina Gadelica* continued to live their daily lives as they have for centuries, calling on the Goddess (as Brigid or Mary), or engaging in ritual chanting or dance whenever they knew they were alone or unobserved, but then in their Calvinist church on Sunday they checked their hearts and minds at the door.²⁰ Perhaps what was lost at Whitby is what is lost whenever spiritual practice becomes identified with political power.

Creation Spirituality. Matthew Fox turned the Catholic doctrine of original sin upside down and inside out, replacing the concept with original blessing, and a Celtic mysticism based not on romantic notions about fuzzy memories of a pre-literate golden age, but on extensive, and continuing study and reinterpretation of the lives and teachings of the mystics: Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhardt, and Julian of Norwich. Fox essentially threw the history of the Roman Catholic Church directly into its face, claiming authenticity and truth for an inclusive, celebratory, ecstatic faith. He

¹⁹DeWaal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, p. 113.

²⁰Duncan, *Elements of Celtic Christianity*, p. 101.

has paid dearly for it, being examined, harassed, and then silenced by the Vatican, and ultimately thrown out of his beloved Dominican Order.

The framework for this theology, which buries Augustine's fall/redemption pathology in the dusty vaults of the 4th Century, is a four-path spiral that leads from celebration (*via positiva*) through the shadow (*via negativa*), to salvation (*via creativa*), and on to action/justice (*via transformativa*). God/dess is known and experienced in the mystery of creation, which can now be expanded to include what is known about the universe today, rather than being confined to the old triple-decker model, which as John Shelby Spong (and others) points out, began to unravel with Copernicus.

Christians who have not looked seriously at the faith are put off by the concept of pantheism – which means not that God *is* the earth and all that dwells therein, but that God/dess contains the universe and the universe expresses God/dess. This is a mystical concept much deeper and more powerful than the dichotomies of immanence/transcendence. The logical corollary to pantheism is that if humans are created in Godde's own image, then not only is the human soul embodied in physical being, but the soul is the context within which the body lives.

What is even more troubling for Christians, however, is that to Fox's mind, the Christ is found *not* only and exclusively in the life and person of Jesus of Nazareth, but is being expressed in the Buddha nature, or in the mind-numbing abundant sacrifice of life for life that Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry introduce in their *Universe Story*.

. . . the universe has what can be called a sacrificial dimension. When we reflect upon the omnipresence of destruction and violence throughout the layered universe,

and on the mysterious relationship of this destruction to the evocation of a great beauty, we can begin to approach such an understanding. . . .

The primal human insistence upon sacrifice can be understood as an early intuitive grasp of the essential truth in the second law of thermal dynamics. Rather than speaking of the movement toward entropy, the primal peoples would speak of the intrinsic pain that accompanies so many genuine advances. . . .

In the unbearable pressures of a star, hydrogen is burned into helium, helium is burned into carbon, carbon is burned into oxygen. Anything available as fuel is shoveled into the nuclear blast furnace to stave off gravitational implosion. . . .²¹

The defining ritual for Christians, Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper, is likewise reclaimed by Fox for a post-modern cosmology:

The Eucharist is about the universe loving us unconditionally still one more time and giving itself to us in the most intimate way (as food and drink). Interconnectivity is the heart of the Eucharistic experience: God and humanity coming together, God and flesh, the flesh of wheat, wine, sunshine, soil, water, human ingenuity, stars, supernovas, galaxies, storms, fireballs – every Eucharist has a 15-billion-year sacred story that renders it holy.

The gratitude from which the Eucharist derives its very name (eucharistein means “to give thanks” in Greek) is not just our gratitude toward the Source of all things; it is also the universe's gratitude for our presence and for our efforts at contributing, however imperfectly.

The Eucharist is heart food from the cosmos – the “mystical body of Christ” and the Cosmic Christ or Buddha nature found in all beings in the universe – to us. Christ is the light of the world, which we now know is made only of light. Flesh is light and light is flesh. We eat, drink, sleep, breathe, and love that light. The Eucharist is also our hearts expanding and responding generously: “Yes, we will.” We

²¹Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1992) pp. 59-61.

will carry on the heart-work called compassion, the work of the cosmos itself.²²

B. Relevance to Christian Worship Experience Today

Swimme and Berry argue that for any element of the Universe to survive, it must find or adapt to or create for itself a niche. At the sub-particle level, this process looks like chance. For a sophisticated biological organization such as Humans on Planet Earth, part of a Solar System in the Milky Way Galaxy, the process may be more easily understood as “will” or “intention,” which for much of recorded history has been projected upon external forces: gods, or elemental spirits. When the ancient Hebrew nation found itself enslaved and deported to Babylon, their local god disenfranchised, a new story had to be devised that would allow the people to sing their Lord’s song in a strange land. What Western Christians call “Genesis” explains the separation from God and the natural world, placing upon humans the responsibility not only for our own survival, but sets up humans as the proxy that rules the natural world in God’s name:

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have

²²Matthew Fox, *Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh* (New York: Harmony Books, 1999) p. 271.

dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.²³

Humans presume ourselves to be the only self-conscious beings on Planet Earth.

Much of the story that continues in Genesis is a cautionary tale about the consequences of acting from *hubris*, or *chutzpah*, as though we were not only “a little lower than the angels,” but God Himself. The tension between the expectation that our destiny is to dominate and subdue everything we encounter in or on or under the earth, and yet to “walk humbly with our God” is the human condition.

Much of the history of Western civilization involves the development of the idea that humans are separate from God and the natural world. Wherever indigenous people were found who still perceived themselves as part of the natural world, they were subdued, dominated, and ultimately destroyed by the “civilizing” invaders. The history of the Christian church as a political, social, civilizing organization demonstrates the same tensions. As spiritual truth became more and more identified with political and economic power, reformers turned increasingly against the world. When the natural world is perceived as fallen, evil, even enemy, whether because of natural dangers and disasters or because of man-made injustice, escape becomes the only means to salvation. Such an attitude is not conducive to sustainable environmental living (eco-justice), nor does it permit a sense of holiness.

Environmental awareness and activism is slowly being recognized as a legitimate Christian focus. In 1989, the World Council of Churches declared the Integrity of

²³Genesis 1:26-29, *The HarperCollins Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version* (London: HarperCollins Publisher, 1989).

Creation part of a trinity that encompasses Justice and Peace, emphasizing the importance of transforming traditional theology from indifference if not hostility toward God's natural world to respectful stewardship. Dialogue among seminaries, secular environmental activists, and national adjudicatories has begun. Perhaps to the surprise of the traditionally more liberal Christian denominations, Evangelical Christians took an early lead with "An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation." It says, in part:

We call on all those who are committed to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to affirm the following principles of biblical faith:

The cosmos, in all its beauty, wildness and life-giving bounty, is the work of our personal and loving Creator.

Our creating God is prior to and other than creation, yet intimately involved with it, upholding each thing in its freedom, and all things in relationships of intricate complexity. God is *transcendent*, while lovingly sustaining each creature; and *immanent*, while wholly other than creation and not to be confused with it.

The Creator's concern is for all creatures. God declares all creation "good."

. . . Men, women, and children have a unique responsibility to the Creator; . . . Created in God's image, [we] also have a unique responsibility for creation. Our actions should both sustain creation's fruitfulness and preserve creation's powerful testimony to its creator. . . .

Here is the opening for dialogue between Christian "liberals" and "conservatives," and a link to the pre-modern, pre-Reformation argument that raged among intellectuals and mystics and the Popes from the 4th to the 14th century. Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Aquinas, and Meister Eckhardt recognized the natural world to be the revelation of God/dess, and the human soul as the ultimate temple.

Man is an allusion to the divinity of the God-head; woman is a reference to the humanity of the Son of God. Thus, humankind, man and woman, is enthroned over creation and all creatures are in the care of men and women. Humankind, in this way, is more than creation. It is the guardian of creation. *Hildegard of Bingen*.²⁴

Distinction and variety in the world is intended by God, who brings things into existence in order to communicate and manifest the divine goodness. One solitary creature would not be adequate. Therefore God makes creatures many and diverse, so that what is lacking in one may be supplied by another. . . . Even the very ones who were experienced concerning Divinity . . . praise God as the Cause of all things from the many things caused. They praise God as good . . . as the sun . . . a star . . . fire . . . water . . . air . . . and dew; . . . cloud . . . stone . . . rock . . . and all the other beings attributed to God as cause. And the Divine One is none of these beings insofar as God surpasses all things. *Thomas Aquinas*.²⁵

[N]either in the kingdom of heaven nor on earth among all the splendid creatures that God created in such a wonderful way is there any creature that resembles him as much as does the soul of a human being. *Meister Eckhardt*.²⁶

This aboriginal, pagan theology of earth-centered, mystical unity between God/dess and creation finally capitulated to the dualists, who saw the world as separate from its Creator, and who controlled the political and economic power to enforce that view. In Sermon Thirty-two, Eckhardt preaches to the choir – to and about “good people” – who buy and sell in the Temple. They are caught in a “merchant mentality”

²⁴Gabriele Uhlein, *Meditations With Hildegard of Bingen* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1983) p. 103.

²⁵Matthew Fox, *Sheer Joy*, pp. 97, 182.

²⁶Matthew Fox, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhardt's Creation Spirituality in New Translation* (New York: Doubleday, 1980) p. 450.

that wishes to bargain with God. One can only bargain with God who believes that God is a separate entity.

Behold how all those people are merchants who shun great sins and would like to be good and do good deeds in God's honor, [but t]hey do these things so that our Lord may give them something or so that God may do something dear to them.²⁷

Fox comments, “[A] merchant mentality, based on dualisms of subject/object, seller/buyer, money/thing, is all about objects. Any work we ever do can be destroyed by this attitude.”²⁸ When we see the world and our work as object to be bought and sold, we no longer have compassionate relationship with any aspect of our world. We claim ownership of the earth, the air, the fire, the water, and sell the elements of life itself to one another. When we attempt to make deals with an interventionist god, we are bargaining with a projection of our own weakness, which leads not to redeeming compassion, but to faithlessness and fundamentalist terror. Bishop John Shelby Spong writes that the final nail in the coffin of the concept of a personal, interventionist god was the discovery of the nature of the solar system by Copernicus in the 16th Century,²⁹ which followed the disruption of the Hundred Years War and the destructive horror of the plague. But the desire for such a god dies a long, slow death, and commands the blood sacrifice of thousands of martyrs and heretics.

²⁷Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 451.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 458.

²⁹Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*, pp 31-34.

In order to recapture, or to re-experience Godde as both Creator and Creating, both within the universe and containing the universe (*panentheism*), Earth-bound humans must begin to recognize (again) the rhythms of the Sun, Moon, Stars, and Seasons, but in the context of post-modern cosmology. When we recreate these astronomical metaphors, we become attuned to our place in the Universe as subject, as Self, as relationship, which leads to compassion and justice. We are far more likely to pay attention to local issues such as urban sprawl, with the accompanying wash-out of starlight; we are far more likely to notice that the Sun does seem to move about in the Sky – and we may wonder why our winters are no longer predictably cold, giving vegetation a Sabbath Rest. We may begin to pay attention to what impact our lifestyles have on the Planet and on one another, and we may begin to modify our habits.

Swimme and Berry conclude their *Universe Story* by reminding us that humans are uniquely able to offer conscious celebration, a “cosmic liturgy,” because we alone discover, appreciate, and then mediate the “awesome qualities of phenomenal existence. . . . Our own special role is to enable this entire community to reflect on and to celebrate itself and its deepest mystery in a special mode of conscious self-awareness” (p. 264).

C. Origins

During commemorations of the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' landfall in the Western Hemisphere in 1992, I heard our Native American voices crying out for the return of the treasures of their people, precious pearls stolen by the invaders from Europe; whole cultures over-run, sacred sites looted, old ways invalidated and

nearly lost, and a Truth rose up from the Earth beneath my feet. We who are Europeans – conquerors, destroyers, consumers, takers – have forgotten that we are Tribes of the Earth too. We have forgotten our own native roots. We European/Caucasian folk need to reclaim our own tribal traditions to the extent we can. We have taken enough from Aboriginal people the world over. We must not appropriate their newly-rediscovered traditions yet again. We must find our own.

To that end, I began a personal study of feminist theology and Celtic spirituality. Rev. Rosemary McCombs Maxey, a Musgokee-Cree Indian and United Church of Christ pastor, and I formed a small group that spent two years exploring Native American and Celtic alternatives to the usual Sunday morning worship service. This work culminated in a presentation of a paper to the Third National Women's Conference of the United Church of Christ in Boston, June 1996, on the subject of women's true work and the elements of sacred ritual. The paper was based on Matthew Fox's then-recently published book, *The Reinvention of Work*³⁰ and *Healing Wise* by Susun Weed.³¹ I knew I had struck a powerful nerve when the paper was attacked by representatives of Biblical Witness, a fundamentalist sect associated with the normally liberal United Church of Christ. Part of what they objected to was my call for an alternative form of worship that includes the magical metaphors associated with the natural world on Planet Earth: the four directions – East, South, West, and North; the four elements – Air, Fire, Water,

³⁰Matthew Fox, *The Reinvention of Work A New Vision of Livelihood for Our Time* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1994).

³¹Susun Weed, *Wise Woman Herbal: Healing Wise* (Woodstock: Ash Tree Press 1989).

Earth; and the seasons as experienced in the Northern Hemisphere, marked by the Sun-determined Winter and Summer solstices, the Spring and Fall equinoxes, and four astronomical “cross-quarter” days that fall at the half-way points between the major seasonal markers throughout the solar year.

One does not have to be a fundamentalist to be wary of incorporating such metaphors into a church service. Mainline Protestant churches are especially suspicious of anything that seems “touchy-feely” or emotional. What both groups fail to realize, however, is that while metaphor is real, it is not literal. Metaphor is the gateway on the path to the truth, it is not the truth itself.

“Ritual signifies that something more is going on than meets the eye – something sacred. . . .” celebration, teaching, healing. The important thing is whether a shift in awareness occurs, creating a point of departure, an opening for a numinous or magical experience that can never be obtained by cultivating intellectual skills; the world of magical perception has to be explored experientially, with wholehearted participation of the entire being.³²

Twentieth Century occultist, Dion Fortune, defined magic as “the art of changing consciousness at will.”³³ In order to change consciousness, relationship has to be experienced on a profound level where boundaries are blurred between self and other, between spirit world and waking world. “[In] . . . a new ecology of consciousness . . . the challenge will be to break through the Cartesian illusions that have generated the impression of separation and detachment. Relationship is the key insight of

³²Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991) pp. 42-43.

³³Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1989) p. 10.

ecology. . . . [I]t is time to move on and to revise the destructive myths that are guiding us.³⁴ These myths include the idea that nature has no soul; that provable science (or the masculine ideal of scientific logic) is superior to instinct (or the feminine concept of intuition). These myths have robbed Christian worship – especially Protestant Christian worship – of emotion, or “spirituality.” During the late 1990s, a popular way to describe this “Cartesian illusion” of human separation from the cosmos was “disenchantment.” The solution, which appeared in an article published in *The Christian Science Monitor* of May 28, 1997,³⁵ was [or is] “re-enchantment” or “entrancement.” Richard Mouw, dean of the Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena California, is quoted: “Both on the elite level and at the popular laity level . . . people are going back to pre-modern sources of Christian spirituality . . . we’ve heard about the disenchantment of the universe. What people desire is a re-enchantment.” That can mean a naive longing for a time when God walked with us in the Garden. It can also mean learning to experience in worship the metaphor offered by the natural world so that the alienation we feel might be eased.

This entrancement comes from the immediate communion of the human with the natural world, a capacity to appreciate the ultimate subjectivity and spontaneities within every form of natural being. We are discovering anew our human capacity for entering into the larger community of life, something that we have not experienced in any adequate manner since our Neolithic origins.³⁶

³⁴Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art*, pp. 98, 118.

³⁵Robert Marquand, “Worship Shift: Americans Seek Feeling of ‘Awe,’” p. 1.

³⁶Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art*, p. 268.

II. THE ELEMENTS OF RITUAL

A. Sacred Space

1. *Setting*

In a post-modern world, work for livelihood has little if any connection to spiritual life, and community is defined more as association or affiliation rather than physical proximity: the “gay community”; the “pagan community”; the “African American community.” Members of “cyber communities” may have no physical contact with one another, but carry out their work and the exchange of ideas through email. Mainline Protestant Church membership is no longer defined by neighborhood or “parish,” and “denomination” is becoming less important than the social or spiritual purpose of a particular local church body. In such a world, groups meet and then disband, forming “base communities” or covens, or house churches, or task forces, which may or may not meet in the same physical space each time. Church buildings would seem to be ready-made sacred spaces, but even a sanctuary should be rededicated each time it is used, especially if many different groups have access to it.

The first task in preparation for ritual is to establish a sacred space so that the people can be focused and centered, and participate fully in the task at hand. From the most ancient of times people have created sacred space for sacred work in circles. European folklore tells of “fairy rings” found in forests, magical spots where a clearing seems to have been made in a circle. The Avebury Ring, Stonehenge, and other remnants of sanctuary sites can still be visited, used, and studied. Ancient Celts, who believed that the spirit world was only thinly veiled from the everyday waking world, marked

boundaries between those worlds with circles surrounding a central pillar. After the 9th Century the pillars were often replaced by standing high crosses, but the symbolism of the quartered circle is pre-Christian. “[C]alendar and compass, time and place, are combined in the union of cross and wheel.”³⁷ The Ring is an ancient symbol of eternity, wholeness, completion, safety. Black Elk, the Lakota Medicine Man who’s story was first published in 1932 by John G. Neihardt says this about Circles as sacred space:³⁸

You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation, and so long as the hoop was unbroken, the people flourished. The flowering tree was the living center of the hoop, and the circle of the four quarters nourished it. The east gave peace and light, the south gave warmth, the west gave rain, and the north with its cold and mighty wind gave strength and endurance. This knowledge came to us from the outer world with our religion. Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man [sic] is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. Our tepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nation’s hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children.

³⁷Sheldrake, *Living Between the Worlds* pp. 49-50.

³⁸John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972) pp. 164-165.

The quickest way to create sacred space is to join hands. If more space is needed, after joining hands, step back to the limit of arms' reach. If even more space is needed, take three steps back. Multiples of the prime number of three are mythically sacred, including the traditional Christian Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit; or of the Goddess: Maiden, Mother, Crone; or of life itself: birth/rebirth, fulfillment, death. The circle can be as large as necessary; nine feet in diameter is a traditional size among Neopagans. A solitary person can create sacred space simply by extending arms out and turning around.

Many rituals have been devised to draw the boundary, or cast the circle, from the most simple as described above, to complex dances including drumming, or tracing the perimeter with cornmeal, flour, rocks, or using a magical tool such as a wand or dagger. When using a multi-purpose area or a church sanctuary, the space may need to be reclaimed. First, lay out the general path for the perimeter of the circle, then take a broom dedicated to the purpose and sweep the space. Then take a bowl of water and sprinkle the perimeter and/or the participants. This usually invokes laughter and fun – which helps to banish negative thoughts and feelings from the space – or to use archaic mythical language – banishes the evil spirits or demons so that the space is claimed for the sacred work. Christians may be reminded of their Baptism, symbolizing their dedication to Godde and acceptance into Community.

Despite present-day sophistication about the nature of our solar system, the sun still seems to come from the east and move to the west, bringing warmth, light, growth, life. To move in the same direction should enable humans to do the same work as the sun. So the circle is cast in alignment with the most elemental of observable natural

phenomena: sun-wise (deosil), clockwise, or moving to the right. This is an opening movement. In magical or mythical terms, we are opening the door to the place between the worlds of spirit and mundane where sacred work can be done. In the same vein, when the circle is closed at the end of the ritual work, the movement is often counter-clockwise, against the sun, or *widdershins*, to use the old Saxon word, returning to the everyday world once more, and ending with a blessing or a sending forth: *Our Circle is open and unbroken. Merry Meet, Merry Part, and Merry Meet Again! Blessed be.*

From the 11th through the 18th Centuries, the Christian Church (including Protestant reformers) was engaged in a massive program in political and social control in an attempt to rid the world of heresy, witchcraft, and non-Christian religious practices (I would include the Crusades in this policy). The fledgling colonial Americas were not immune, as the history of the village of Salem, Massachusetts, attests. Estimates of deaths in Western Europe during this 700-year holocaust range as high as nine million men, women, and children. Sometimes entire villages were razed and then burned, down to the last cat. The horror was carried out by the Office of the Doctrine of the Faith (the Inquisition), and institutionalized in the *Malleus Maleficorum*, or “the Hammer of Witches,” developed in 1486 by Dominicans Spengler and Kramer. The *Malleus* remained part of Catholic Church doctrine until the latter half of the 20th Century.

During those times, it was essential for practitioners of persecuted traditions to return the appearance of the space to its original purpose or configuration so that the sacred rites would be kept secret and the participants safe and secure. Now it is important to do so wherever a ritual is held in a borrowed space, whether a park or camp, or a

meeting hall, or even a church, if the purpose of the circle is not the same as the purpose of the space in which it is cast. In the case of a park or a camp, it is simply good manners to clean away all traces of our presence there.

2. *Altars*

Among progressive and feminist theological circles, the word “altar” raises the specter of appeasement and unwilling sacrifice to an interventionist god (or goddess). The word is “from the Hebrew verb for ‘slaughter’ (*i.e.*, to cut up the animal killed according to Jewish ritual) [and is] the most prevalent designation of the altar – independent of the sacrifices made on it.”³⁹ Altars in Christian churches have represented inaccessibility and exclusiveness, placed behind iron screens (roods), and at the top of flights of steps. The symbolism may have begun with the experience of finding god/dess on the mountaintop, or on the highest ground – reflecting the triple-decker cosmos of the ancient world. Later, the “high altar” was a reminder of the lowliness, the worthlessness, of the sinner/supplicant.

“Worship table” is one preferred substitute, which steers us away from the context of such texts of terror as the story of Abraham’s attempted sacrifice of Isaac. Some churches have used a communion table as a central focus, symbolizing the importance of the community of faith. Tables have been moved down from the chancel, and have been deliberately designed to be of a height suitable for including children. In Celtic tradition sacred places such as cross-roads or other places of continuous worship or specialness are

³⁹Emory Stevens Bucke, ed., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 96.

marked by building a “cairn” or erecting a stone menhir. But “Altar” also connotes a holy place set aside for holy activities. Other ancient Hebrew sacrificial altars included earth, bronze, or incense. “Personally, I look at an altar as a place of remembering, not sacrifice. I place objects there that speak to my heart and remind me of that which is beyond image or words. Just a creative human focus for a divine intent. I vote for reclaiming a wonderful word.”⁴⁰

Whatever the word, ritual objects, decorations, icons, and other reminders or triggers for ritual remembrance must go somewhere. In a sacred circle, the “cairn” or “altar” can be placed in the center. In linear spaces, the focal point can be the 4th side of a square. If desired, cairns or altars can be created at the cardinal points, and may contain representations of the qualities of each of the seasons or directions.

B. The Rhythm of Liturgy

1. Sacred Work

In Greek, the word *liturgy* means “the work of the people.” Liturgy or ritual may be the human work *par excellence*. Ritual is the primary means by which a people get their inner houses in order, both as individuals and as a community. It is the primary tool by which macrocosm (our relation to the whole of the universe) and microcosm (our personal and more local relationships) come together . . .⁴¹

This “sacred work” is life itself: creating, planning, healing, prayer, worship.

Post-modern people have forgotten that all work – what we do – contributes to or has an impact on the great work of the creating, renewing cosmos.

⁴⁰Mary Boardman, personal communication.

⁴¹Fox, *The Reinvention of Work*, p. 250.

Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*, may be the only reliable example of aboriginal Celtic liturgy. In a blend of pagan and Christian prayers, incantations, work songs, and festivals, daily life is inseparable from the natural and the spirit world. From the blessing of the kindling and the laying of the fire in the morning, to the smoooring (banking) of the fire and the prayer for safety of the household at night, Mary, Jesus, St. Michael, Bride (the nursemaid of the Baby Jesus – the goddess Brigit), and the angels are invoked:

I will raise the hearth-fire
As Mary would.
The encirclement of Bride and of Mary
On the fire, and on the floor,
And on the household all.

Who are they on the bare floor?
John and Peter and Paul.
Who are they by my bed?
The lovely Bride and her Fosterling.
Who are those watching over my sleep?
The fair loving Mary and her Lamb.
Who is that anear me?
The King of the Sun, He himself it is.
Who is that at the back of my head?
The Son of Life without beginning, without time.

I am smoooring the fire
As the Son of Mary would smoor;
Blest be the house, blest be the fire,
Blest be the people all.

Who are those down on the floor?
John and Peter and Paul.
On whom is the vigil tonight?
On the fair gentle Mary and on her Son.

The mouth of God said,
The angel of God spake,
An angel in the door of the house,
To guard and to keep us all
Till comes daylight tomorrow.
Oh! may the angels of the Holy One of God
Environ me all this night.
Oh! may the angels of the Anointed One of God
Encompass me from harm and from evil,
Oh! encompass me from harm this night.⁴²

The following spell for a successful hatching contains a dose of pagan magic:

I will rise early on the morning of Monday.
I will sing my rune and rhyme,
I will go sunwise with my cog
To the nest of my hen with sure intent.

I will place my left hand to my breast,
My right hand to my heart,
I will seek the loving wisdom of Him
Abundant in grace in broods, and in flocks.

I will close my two eyes quickly,
As in blind-man's buff moving, slowly;
I will stretch my left hand over thither
To the nest of my hen on yonder side.

The first egg which I shall bring near me,
I will put it withershins round my head.
I will lift the egg down in my right hand,
There shall then be one in the cog.

I will raise my left hand on high,
I will stretch it without halt quickly,
I will lift two eggs down hither,
There shall be then three in the cog.

I will stretch my right hand again,
I will lift it with the time three,
I will seek ruling from the King,

⁴²Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, pp. 94-95.

Then verily there shall be six in the clutch.

I will raise my left hand the second time,
I will lift four with it down,
In name of Christ, King of power,
There shall then be ten in the cog.

The right fist of strongest claim,
I will lift with it two in my fingers,
Thus at ceasing my brood will be complete,
Beneath the breast of the speckled big hen.

I will put soot on their two ends,
And I dumb as the dumb the while,
In name of Creator of sea and hill,
In name of saints and apostles all.

In name of the most Holy Trinity,
In name of Columba kindly,
I will set the eggs on Thursday,
The gladsome brood will come on Friday.⁴³

The Moon cycle is more relevant to the rhythm of daily life, as it waxes to Full, turns, and wanes to Dark, turns to New, and repeats. Alexander Carmichael reports,

There are many traces of moon beliefs and of moon homage still current in the Western Isles. An old man surnamed Robertson in Eigg said:

“The men of old would not kill a pig nor sheep nor goat nor axe-cow at the wane of the moon. The flesh of an animal is then without taste, without sap, without plumpness, without fat. Neither would they cut withes of hazel or willow for creels or baskets, nor would they cut tree of pine to make a boat, in the black wane of the moon. The sap of the wood goes down into the root, and the wood becomes brittle and crumbly, without pith, without good. The old people did all these things at the waxing or at the full of the moon. The men of old were observant of the facts of nature, as the young folk of today are not.”

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 109

He continued: “The new moon was propitious for clipping hair, for cutting peats, for reaping corn, for shearing sheep, and for many things of that nature. . . .⁴⁴

*She of my love is the new moon,
The God of life illumining her;
Be mine a good purpose
Towards each creature in the creation.*⁴⁵

These rhythms are followed today by gardeners, including the National Park Service schedule for pruning trees and other maintenance activities in the Washington, D.C. area. But spiritual rhythms defined by the Moon’s metaphor of birth, fulfillment, death, and rebirth have no place in officially-sanctioned Christian religious liturgy. Neopaganism, however, especially the various forms of Wicca, or “the Craft,” not only celebrate the Sun cycle Wheel of the Year, but also incorporate Moon cycles into monthly ritual. Starhawk describes the qualities of the Moon:⁴⁶

THE MOON

Rules: Woman; cycles; birth; generation; inspiration; poetry; emotions; ravel, especially by water; the sea and tides; fertility; rain; intuition; psychic ability; secrets; dreams

New or Crescent Moon – the Maiden, birth and initiation, virginity, beginnings, the hunt

Full Moon – the Mother, growth, fulfillment, sexuality, maturation, nurturing, love

Waning or Dark Moon – the Crone, the woman past menopause, old age, deep secrets, wisdom, divination, prophecy, death and resurrection, endings

The day is Monday.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 283.

⁴⁵*Ibid.* p. 284.

⁴⁶Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, pp. 254-255.

The following Liturgy for the Full Moon illustrates how post-modern Christians, who are well-aware of the science that defines cosmology today, can discover the qualities, the metaphors, the powers that the Full Moon may evoke.

LITURGY FOR THE FULL MOON

INVOCATION – *Opening to Possibility (Inside)*

Responsive Call to the Four Directions

One: We who are creatures of Earth face the East, from where we first perceive the Light.

All: Light of Light, Light of Inspiration, Light of Earth's Sun, Light of Earth's Moon, Starlight, Firelight, Cosmic Light that speeds on the Winds from the Center of the Universe, Empower us. [Light the East candle]

One: We who are creatures of Earth face the South, from where we first perceive the Fire.

All: Fire of Hearth, Fire of Compassion, Fire of Earth's Sun, Fire of Earth's Moon, Starfire, Earthfire, Cosmic Fire that speeds on the Winds from the Center of the Universe, Empower us. [Light the South candle]

One: We who are creatures of Earth face the West, from where we first perceive the Water.

All: Waters of Life, Waters of Emotion, Waters of Earth's wells, Waters of Earth's storms, Primal waters, Cosmic Waters that speed on the Winds from the Center of the Universe, Empower us. [Light the West candle]

One: We who are creatures of Earth face the North, from where we first perceive our grounded Mystery.

All: Soil of Earth, Rocks of Earth, Caves of Earth, Fecund Earth, enfolding Earth, protecting Earth, Cosmic Earth that speeds on the Winds from the Center of the Universe, Empower us. [Light the North candle]

Hymn:

Bring Many Names (Brian Wren) New Century Hymnal (NCH) 11

Reading: Psalm 8; Psalm 136:1-9; Psalm 148: 1-8

JOURNEY BETWEEN THE WORLDS

Hymn: *God Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens* NCH 556
(tune: Holy Mana)

Readings:

Thomas Aquinas:

Some people presume that because God works in every active thing it is God alone who does the work and that no created power produces anything real. For example, that fire does not burn, but that God does. This is impossible, however. For such a situation would destroy the causal structure and interplay of the universe. And it would lead to positing a weakness in God, since it is from strength that any cause gives the power of causing to its offspring. Furthermore, if causal powers in fact did nothing and God did it all, then things would simply not have any power. They would be shams if you took away their proper activity, for they exist for their work. Thus, when speaking of God's universal causality, we must be careful to safeguard the proper activity of creatures. God attributes power of action to created things, and this is not out of a weakness on God's part, but rather out of God's most perfect fullness, which is sufficient for sharing with all beings.⁴⁷

Brian Swimme:

Newton and others early in the modern period regarded the Moon as a conglomeration of stable, unchanging atoms. With such a conception it is easy to hold that the Moon simply forms a wall off of which the light from the Sun bounces. But when we examine the physical processes of "light," "atoms," and "bounce" we find a much more complex and even astounding dynamic.

First, the elementary particles and atoms are not permanently existing objects, but are events that are vibrating at extremely rapid rates ... particles exist in one location and then exist in another location *without traversing the space in between*. So, as bewildering as it might sound to us, it is more accurate scientifically to say that the particles and atoms are flashing into existence, surging into existence, and then just as suddenly they are dissolving from their place to surge forth in a nearby location, all

⁴⁷Fox, *Sheer Joy*, p. 258.

happening so rapidly that the unassisted human eye cannot catch the movement.

The Moon is not a dead object, but is instead an ongoing scintillating event.

Second, it is false to think of photons as “bouncing” the way a ball would bounce ... Instead, the photons from the Sun “interact” with the particles of the Moon. ... Thus, it is not true to say that the photons of light arriving here from the Moon have just been bounced from the Sun. Moonlight comes from the Moon, for moonlight is *created* by the Moon.⁴⁸

Meditation Under The Moon (*Outside*)

Light Central Fire

Chant: *Fire Flow Free*

Fire Flow Through Me

Fire Flow Free

Fire Flow Through Me

Fire Fire Fire Fire

Fire Fire Fire Fire

Kiva

(repeat until the fire is going)

Sit or lie on the ground around the fire, facing the rising Moon

Chant: *Gathered Here in the Mystery of this Hour*

Gathered here in silver moonlight

Gathered here in the Wonder and the Power

Spirit Draw Near!

NCH 742

GUIDED MEDITATION

Sea Raven

We have learned from Thomas Aquinas that the natural world has its own power and integrity, and from Brian Swimme that the Moon is not simply a dead object that reflects the light of the Sun, but a living Being that creates its own light in interaction with the Sun. Suppose we also could create our own light in interaction with the Moon – for we are also living beings, radiating light. We too have power and integrity. What Power might we realize in interaction with the Moon?

The Moon has been a source of Magic Power for millennia. And what is Magic? Sometimes folks try to use Magic to manipulate or change the natural order. We all know that doesn't

⁴⁸Brian Swimme, *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996) pp. 101-103.

work. But Magic is also another word for Transformation. Dionne Fortune, an occultist from the early 20th Century, defined Magic as the Art of Changing Consciousness at Will. So, to put it simply, Magic really works to transform the Magician. In this meditation, I invite you to experience changing consciousness – to begin to transform our perception of ourselves and our relationship with the Moon.

Start by making yourself as comfortable as possible. You may sit in a chair, or lie on your back on the ground, but whatever your position, be sure that you can easily gaze at the rising moon.

Moonbeams have been a pathway to dreams since time began. Remember?

*Wynken, Blynken and Nod one night
Sailed off in a wooden shoe,
Sailed on a river of crystal light
Into a sea of dew.*

Now that everyone's remembered how, begin to follow the path into the moonlight. Feel how the Earth holds your body, like your mother's lap, or maybe your Father's backpack, or your grandfather's old wooden shoe.

Now as you go, imagine that you are looking DOWN and OUT at the Moon and the Stars.

You may feel a little dizzy, as you step out or down into the moonbeams. Take a deep breath. You will not leave the Planet. Take another deep breath. Relax into the certainty and safety of Earth's gravity. Feel how your weight is not heaviness, but the Power that keeps your body here. Take a third deep breath.

Now open yourself to the Moonlight.

Without light there is no life anywhere in the universe. For life comes from light. And because we know that there is light everywhere in the Universe, we know that there is life. Imagine how the photons from the Sun interact with the photons from the Moon, and how the photons from the Moon interact with the photons in your body.

We come from the light. We are made of light. Breathe in the Power that lives in the Light. What is the nature of that Power for you? For plants, it's photosynthesis – the breakdown of sugars to energy. What is the Power the Light brings to you? What transforms in your life when the Light interacts with it? What is the Light that you shine before your community? Your family? What is the Power you would like to bring back from the Moon?

Now begin to come back, finding your way along the Moonbeam, or riding the Wooden Shoe back to where your body lies, safely bound to the earth. Look away from the moon, to the earth around you. Move your hands and feet, reconnect to the earth, and when you are ready, be sure you are firmly grounded, and open your eyes. Those lying on the ground, roll over on your side and push yourself up on your hands, then sit up.

Before we end this portion of the ritual, let's pass the decanter of water around the circle. Hold it up to the Moonlight, and infuse it with the Power you brought back with you. If you wish, you can say the Word of Power that you are adding to the water.

Dakota Hymn

NCH 3

RESPONSE (*Inside*)

Offertory

Offering of Bread, Wine, and other Gifts

Doxology: *O Creator of the Cosmos* © 1999 by Sea Raven

(tune: Bonny Portmore)

O Creator of the Cosmos

We bring the gifts of humankind

Food and money, creative passion

All the works of our minds

As we return from Worlds of Spirit

To the World we travel through,

May we listen to your Wisdom

In all that we do.

Communion

Words of Institution (from Matthew Fox's *Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh*, p. 271)

[Pour wine, break bread, feast; decant the Moonwater into small bottles for each one; and share prayers and intentions for the group and community.]

CLOSING

Hymn: *Spirit of Gentleness*

NCH 286

DISMISSAL

- One: We who are creatures of Earth face the North, from where we first perceive our grounded Mystery.
- All: As we return, we will remember. [Extinguish North candle]
- One: We who are creatures of Earth face the West, from where we first perceive the Water.
- All: As we return, we will remember. [Extinguish West candle]
- One: We who are creatures of Earth face the South, from where we first perceive the Fire.
- All: As we return, we will remember. [Extinguish South candle]
- One: We who are creatures of Earth face the East, from where we first perceive the Light.
- All: As we return, we will remember. [Extinguish East candle]
- ALL: *Peace! Shalom! Amen! Hoh! Blessed Be!*

2. *Elements of Ritual*

Ritual as described and defined by Fox includes four elements: invocations, attitudes toward the spirit world, symbols and metaphors by which we penetrate other worlds, and our response to our spirit allies.⁴⁹

Invocation. When God is defined as transcendent, or removed from daily life, we must call God to come to us, but to invoke a panentheistic God/dess means to call upon our deepest selves to open to the presence, which includes the integrity, the wholeness, and relatedness of all creation. Because we cannot live outside of the biosphere of our home planet, it makes sense to also invoke or awaken our awareness to the elements of the natural world: the earth, the air, the fire, the water. Because we are creatures of space who become disoriented without some sense of place, it makes sense to also call the four directions of North, East, South, and West. We may also want to include above, below,

⁴⁹Fox, *Reinvention of Work*, p. 253.

and within, thereby making seven, which is an ancient holy number. People depending on their knowledge of the natural world for survival would instinctively call on those aspects that have the greatest impact or the most direct influence on well-being. For example, travelers on foot or by animal means would be very much attuned to direction, or orientation. The first skill one learns in survival training is how to find North, and from there to orient oneself to find safety: food, shelter, assistance. Direction is also important because weather patterns move in a particular way, normally from West to East. So the concept of The Four Winds – the Four Directions – is basic. It’s also logical to consider the fact of the Earth beneath our feet and the Skies above. So we call on the directions from which the four winds blow (North, East, South, and West) – and perhaps the powers coming from above and below – to attend to us, listen to us, lend their powers to us in our special need. Thus we quarter our ritual circle, or spherical space, recreating the cosmic conditions of our home biosphere.

Attitudes toward the spirit world. Modern Christians have been taught to reject “the spirit world” as superstition if not heresy.

One of the peculiar developments in our Western world is that we are losing our sense of the divine side of life, of the power of imagination, myth, dream and vision. The particular structure of modern consciousness, centered in a rationalizing, abstracting and controlling ego, determines the world we live in and how we perceive and understand it. . . .⁵⁰

When God/dess is defined not as a specific entity with specific qualities, but pantheistically as containing and contained and revealed by the Universe, and we align

⁵⁰Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art*, pp. 42-43.

ourselves with that power, we are empowered.⁵¹ For example, in Isaiah 6:1-8, the prophet tells the story of his experience of being called by God to do God's work.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!

Isaiah's "attitude toward the spirits" is clear. Compared to God, he can only confess that he is a man of unclean lips.

Symbols and metaphors by which we penetrate other worlds. Isaiah's vision is told in words and symbols that meant something to Isaiah and to the people to whom he later told the story and brought his prophecies of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation: "the wolf shall lie down with the lamb, and a young child shall lead them." Post-modern cosmology offers a special challenge. Swimme and Berry's *Universe Story* both offers and asks for metaphors that empower spiritual work. Finding the words requires considering the attributes of each of the elements and allowing them to speak to us about their individual natures. Different cultures and people are going to come up with

⁵¹However, it is important to realize that "divine power is potentially demonic. We must develop the Original Blessing awareness and not be naive about evil. When we are connected to the Great Work [of justice/compassion] we combat the evil" (class notes, August 1999, *The Spirit of Aquinas*, Matthew Fox, Professor). A more thorough discussion of this point is beyond the scope of this project. Suffice it to say that, in the words of Thomas Aquinas, "Good is more powerful than evil. As long as we are living, we can never be so stuck in evil that divine grace cannot get us out. Part of the goodness of human nature is that it is always capable of being restored from evil to justice. This goodness remains in spite of any fall from grace" (Fox, *Sheer Joy*, p. 234).

different experiences about the meaning of the South Wind, or the Eastern Sea, or the Western Sun, or the Northern Lights.

Generally, for North American Europeans and Northern European Celts, the Four Elements of the Four Directions are Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. It is a short imaginative reach to ascribe specific qualities or personalities to each of the elements – and very shortly the Tribe has a pantheon of gods upon which to call for assistance in every aspect of life. For example:

Earth: North, strength, sustenance, stability, mystery, winter, crone, Hecate
Air: East, spirit, thought, freedom, inspiration, spring, maiden, Diana
Fire: South, passion, warmth, safety, community, summer; mother, Demeter
Water: West, emotion, cleansing, healing, autumn, Jesus

Each of these elemental qualities may be observed in particular animals, birds, fish, trees, flowers, herbs, insects – and it is possible to realize that we are surrounded by a universe that supports and sustains our lives. We start to dream about animals and other personifications of the natural world as we look for solutions to problems. Being symbolic people, we are soon looking beyond the natural world for what created the natural world, and we discover transcendent great spirits as well as immanent ones.

It is another short intellectual hop to realize that some of us are better at getting results from this natural pantheon of power than others, so we begin to listen more to them and we have spiritual leaders: priestesses, shamans, counselors, clergy. The trick is not to abdicate our autonomy, but to keep our own senses alive. If the shaman or the pope strays too far from our own experience of the truth of our own lives, she loses credibility – unless her position is assured by a system.

The “people” may become their own mediators, using art as meditation and as a means to discovering the existence and the nature of the inner self, from which springs the knowledge of cosmic relationship, but how can we know that what we are mediating is grounded in truth? What is needed is a willingness to let go of old concepts about what is legitimately religious. Caitlin and John Matthews discuss the role of the magician as mediator:

Unfortunately, there are no ethical standards approved by occult examining boards to which the aspirant can appeal. Those who dismiss the whole esoteric world as evil and misguided are fearful because of this very lack: nor should the esotericist be complacent on this score. If you have no teacher, no tradition behind you, how can you be sure that your work is truly aligned with the Will of God, however you understand that term?

In his role as mediator the magician embodies the answer to this problem by becoming a co-worker in the progressive state of the cosmos. . . . Through ritual the inner impulse becomes externalized; the magician becomes the representative both of humanity and the orders of creation: his magic a visualized prayer technique.

. . . . [I]t is an occult truism that if the magic performed is not in accordance with God’s will then the work will rebound on the sender; some say, threefold . . . magic has its own rules which need to be discovered by each individual experientially. The principle of operation is that no one is harmed, that nothing is unbalanced by the activity of the magician.⁵²

Suzi Gablik echoes the Matthews:

In the visionary mode, myths from all times and cultures are available to us; we touch into a seemingly magical dimension from which emanates a sense of the mysterious and the sacred; we have experiential access to the past or

⁵²Caitlin and John Matthews, *The Western Way: A Practical Guide to the Western Mystery Tradition* (London: Penguin Books, 1986) pp. 306-307.

the future, and the limitations of our cultural conditioning are transcended. Visionary seeing is a force against the literal mind, which believes that things are only as they appear. It is a movement into a larger, timeless dimension that honors, from the deepest levels of consciousness, our connection with archetypal forces and powers beyond the local self.

. . . . The solitary, ritual journey into wilderness, facing the unknown in total isolation, has always been a classic part of shamanic training, since it engages one directly with fear; the intensity of the experience can often dissolve ego-boundaries that normally separate inner from outer. . . .⁵³

Then the shaman brings her experience back to the people, and the people create its ritual reenactment. Ritual in the Christian church setting must spring from that source if the church is to continue to be considered a spiritual leader in a post-modern paradigm. Ritual opens us to relationship. Relationship allows us to know and understand the other: to change consciousness at will; to penetrate the spirit world; to work magic.

Response to Spirit Allies. Isaiah's response is to accept that God has purified him, and has presented him with an opportunity to serve.

Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven." And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

For Christians, the spirit ally is Jesus as the Christ, and the defining ritual is the sacrament of the Last Supper, or the Eucharist. The response traditional Christians are called to make is to symbolically participate in the sacrificial death of Jesus and

⁵³Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art*, p. 52.

resurrection of the Christ and thereby to be saved from the fall-redemption cycle of life. In a post-modern original blessing interpretation, Christians are empowered to carry on the transforming work begun by Jesus that is reflected in the renewing mystery of Creation.

The Eucharist is heart food from the cosmos – the “mystical body of Christ” and the Cosmic Christ or Buddha nature found in all beings in the universe – to us. Christ is the light of the world, which we now know is made only of light. Flesh is light and light is flesh. We eat, drink, sleep, breathe, and love that light. The Eucharist is also our hearts expanding and responding generously: “Yes, we will.” We will carry on the heart-work called compassion, the work of the cosmos itself.⁵⁴

C. The Four Paths of Creation Spirituality as Liturgy

The preliterate peoples understand ritual as “the work of the people.” . . . “In our culture everybody works four hours a day and the rest of the day we make things.” What is it that they are making? Rituals and preparations for rituals: gathering feathers and paints to adorn the body so that the human body in ritual might be as splendid as the birds and reptiles they admire; gathering and preparing food for the feast that always accompanies a ritual; making the musical instruments that will accompany the ritual; fasting and doing quiet work in order to center the heart and bring it full to the ritual; teaching the young their roles in the ritual.⁵⁵

Ritual springs from a deep need that we can only call spiritual because it transcends the merely psychological or mind, and gets into the part of ourselves we call “heart,” which can only be accessed when the mundane world with all of its demands is kept away. Some rhythm or pattern for the ritual time together may be more important

⁵⁴Fox, *Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh*, p. 271.

⁵⁵Fox, *The Reinvention of Work*, p. 256.

than the nature of the physical space. Pre-Christian Celtic life honored the border areas between the worlds of light and darkness, life and death, the world of “faery” and the human world, thresholds, doorways, transition points, states of consciousness. The day begins at twilight; the year begins either at the last harvest (Samhain/Halloween), or at the turning point of the Winter Solstice (Yule/Christmas); holidays begin on the evening before. Early Celtic Christian monasteries followed a liturgical day that began with Vespers, then followed a rhythm of work (in the fields or the scriptorium), study, worship, and rest.

The liturgies in this book assume a three-hour format, in which the first hour is for gathering and preparation for ritual; the second hour is the ritual itself; and then the third hour includes a shared meal, providing time for reacting to the ritual and incorporating its work into everyday life, building relationships, and attending to the business of the group. This pattern is similar to monastic rules for work, study, celebration, and rest described above. Traditional Sunday morning church activities follow a similar pattern: Sunday school (for adults and children); choir rehearsal; the Service; and coffee hour. Most Sunday mornings begin at 9:30 or 10 a.m., and conclude at 12:30 or 1 p.m. – a three-hour block of time.

The Four Paths of Creation Spirituality provide a liturgical framework that is familiar: *Via positiva*: Celebration; *Via negativa*: Confession; *Via Creativa*: Enlightenment, or Empowerment; and *Via Transformativa*: Response. Any worship service in the Christian tradition contains these four elements, in approximately that order. Not only do these individual rituals follow this rhythm, but the entire three-hour

working takes participants through the same four-path experience. *Via positiva* – celebration – meeting, greeting, anticipation, preparation; *Via negativa* – confession – submitting or surrendering the self to the process of the ritual; *Via Creativa* – Enlightenment, or empowerment springs from the experience of the ritual; and *Via transformativa* – response – inspires participants to continue the work among themselves, and in the world outside the ritual circle.

Following is an example of the working circle held on February 20, 2000, in the Sunday School wing at Bunker Hill Presbyterian Church in Bunker Hill, West Virginia. The purpose for this particular group meeting was to plan the liturgy for the Spring Equinox.

In preparation for the working circle, a queen-sized purple throw was spread on the floor, favorite ritual objects were placed in the center, including a small sculpture from a local artist entitled “Flying Spirit Woman,” and other special stones. Candles representing the four directions were set at the quadrants. Red, black, and white candles representing the season of Candlemas, the Celtic Pagan Goddess and Christian Saint Brigid, and the feminist trinity of Maiden, Mother, Crone were also placed in the center.

We smudged ourselves with cedar, sage, sweetgrass, and tobacco (representing the four directions and the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water), and then sprinkled one another with “Moonwater,” which is easily created by placing a bowl of water outside under the full moon overnight.

At the last moment, one of our members came down with walking pneumonia, so we included a healing moment for him in the work. A blue candle was blessed by each one and given to him to take home after the ritual.

GAIA WORKING CIRCLE

Sunday February 20, 2000

Bunker Hill Presbyterian Church
Inwood, WV

(Lay the purple cloth, with the red on top of it. Flying Spirit Woman, red, black & white candles, moonwater, rocks, smudge. Smudge around the circle with cedar, sage, sweetgrass, and tobacco. Baptize by passing the Moonwater)

Invocation

*To Wisdom I call out, Wisdom I invoke
Wisdom I embrace, Wisdom that once spoke
in every wheeling star in every sturdy oak
Show your face again, Sophia
Remove your shadow cloak*

– Timothy Roderick

Song: Be Thou My Vision (United Methodist version)

Let the work begin

Plan Ostara
Healing Circle for Mike – Bless and Light the Blue Candle

Closing

Song: We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky (NCH #563 Tune: Endless Song)

Feast and open the circle.

III. THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

A. Introduction

This Worship Book is intended as a model and inspiration for worship planners and leaders who wish to honor the rhythms of the natural world while remaining within scriptural Christian tradition. The liturgies were created using recommended readings for Year B in the Revised Common Lectionary for the Sunday closest to each of the actual dates for the Solstices, the Equinoxes, and the four cross-quarter days in between those major seasonal markers, beginning with All Saints (Samhain/Halloween), and ending with the Fall Equinox (harvest). While the Western institutional Christian Church may have forgotten its agrarian seasonal focus, the Lectionary readings still reflect the incorporation of local pre-Christian or pagan practice. Once the nature of the Wheel of the Year is understood, the readings from Years A and C will also be found to be relevant, providing a rich source for ongoing seasonal celebration in the life of any local church or spiritual affinity group. In addition to the Revised Common Lectionary readings, other sources such as *Carmina Gadelica*, *The Universe Story*, poetry and quotations from the Rhineland mystics, and contemporary writers were used whenever appropriate.

Hymns, incantations, songs, and chants were most often selected from *The New Century Hymnal*, developed by the United Church of Christ.⁵⁶ While hymnals from other denominations such as the United Methodist and the Presbyterian Church USA were also used, the working group found the UCC's *New Century* to have the most inclusive and

⁵⁶*The New Century Hymnal* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1995).

modern language and universal metaphor. Again, these liturgies are intended as a guide, not an exclusive or limiting choice. One of the most important tasks in creating liturgy is the selection of appropriate music, and *The New Century* is only the latest hymnal to be published. There will be and are many other resources.⁵⁷

Instruments used in these liturgies include drum, harp, piano, and musical ensemble (cello and flute). Introducing drumming to traditional Christian worship must be done gently, but in the context of a special service celebrating a festival in the earth's natural cycle, drum, chant, and even dance can work beautifully if the participants have a chance to be prepared for something different, and if there are familiar elements to provide an anchor and a connection to what is "normal." Otherwise, such celebrations get relegated to "youth" or "alternative" or "experimental" categories and only the "youth" or the "alternative" or adventurous types in the membership will attend. If the contemporary institutional church is to remain relevant and responsive to current concerns about environmental or ecological justice, no one should be left out of the process. The same point may be made regarding the use of electronic music, CDS, and tapes, which are also part of these liturgies. Every church has had discussions about organs and organists versus pianos, guitars, and classical ensembles. Many churches, especially new church starts or fledgling congregations, may have no choice. What is important is whether the music reflects and honors the purpose of the worship service.

The working group that developed the liturgies included a core group of eight people (including myself), plus four others who attended occasional gatherings, but did

⁵⁷See especially, the works of Brian Wren, Hope Publishing Company.

not participate in the planning. The core group included: Rev. William Painter, Th.M., D.A.S.D., Presbyterian Church (USA), and Louisa Painter, Ed.S., D.A.S.D., both of whom are Healing Touch Practitioners and Spiritual Directors from Harrisonburg, Virginia; Rev. Victoria L. Moss, M.Div., Chaplain, Davis & Elkins College, Elkins, West Virginia; Rev. John E. Harris, M.Div., Pastor of Bunker Hill Presbyterian Church (USA), Bunker Hill West Virginia; Rev. M. Michael Morse, M.Div., retired United Church of Christ, and Carolyn A. Morse, Office and Properties Manager, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Washington, D.C. (both of Gaithersburg, Maryland); and Rev. Dr. Mary E. Kraus, Pastor, Dumbarton United Methodist Church, Georgetown (Washington, D.C.).

The members of the working group committed to a “Celtic year-and-a-day,” beginning Sunday, October 17, 1999, with a Samhain/All Saints ritual, and ending the formal work on Sunday October 29, 2000, again with Samhain/All Saints. Because there are 8 celebrations in the Wheel of the Year, and 12 months, we were able to plan ahead for most rituals, and could accommodate the inevitable scheduling difficulties.

At first glance, these liturgies may be perceived as working best with a small group, such as a “house church,” a Sunday School class, or other specialized study, especially given the space constraints presented by installed immovable church pews, and unapproachable chancels in many traditional sanctuaries. However, two of the liturgies were used as Sunday morning worship services. Both of these services were videotaped.⁵⁸

⁵⁸The tapes are attached as Appendices A and B, respectively.

The Imbolc/Candlemas service was held at Wellspring United Church of Christ, Centerville, Virginia, on February 6, 2000. Wellspring is a “new church start” 30 miles west of Washington, D.C., which meets in a firehouse. The congregation is committed to be radically inclusive of cultures, races, varying degrees of physical abilities, and gay and lesbians. Their worship space is recreated each Sunday in an upstairs meeting room behind a Bingo hall. The chairs are set up in a horseshoe pattern, with a “worship table” at the end of a size and height to allow children to participate in liturgy.

The Lammas/Lughnasad/ First Fruits celebration was held at Bunker Hill Presbyterian Church (USA) on July 30, 2000. The Bunker Hill congregation and its pastor are an adventurous and open people, very willing to work within the constraints of a tiny 150-year-old sanctuary, pews bolted into place, and a typical “high altar” chancel that is both unapproachable and inaccessible. In addition, the Presbyterian Church (USA) requires certain language and creeds to be included if a worship service is to be legitimate. We were able to include the highly traditional forms of creeds and prayers in the “loaf mass” liturgy, and found room for creation-centered imagery even in the formal demands of the Presbyterian Eucharist. Where there is a will, there is a way!

The other six liturgies were held on Sunday evenings in the Sunday School wing at the Bunker Hill church, at Dumbarton UMC in Georgetown, and at the home of Michael and Carol Morse in Gaithersburg, Maryland. All were open to attendance by guests and friends.

As time went on, the group fell into some liturgical habits: favorite hymns that centered us for worship; convening sacred space by burning a smudge of cedar, sage,

sweetgrass, and tobacco; sprinkling (or flipping one another with) moonwater; creating a central ritual focus with particular sculptures and special candles representing the four directions and elements; a Eucharist that evolved into a free-wheeling, celebratory sharing of bread and wine. Planning circles followed the three-hour format and included the elements of ritual described above: the first hour was for gathering and preparation for the work to be done; the second hour was devoted to creating the future ritual(s); and the third hour included a shared meal and preparation for the journey home.

B. Liturgies for the Wheel of the Year

In the 1526 edition of the English Sarum Missal, the summer and winter solstices, the spring and autumn equinoxes, and the passage of the sun through the zodiac, rubbed shoulders with the feasts and fasts of Holy Church.

Tactfully, the Church had ‘baptized’ the old pagan feasts. *Oimelc* [Imbolc] was celebrated as the Feast of Saint Bride (who herself assimilated the pagan goddess of her name). *Beltane* became the feast of Saint Philip and Saint James, *Lughnasad* the feast of Saint Peter’s Chains or Lammas (loaf-mass, the first-fruits of harvest), and *Samhain* the feast of All Hallows.

The winter solstice on the 21st of December was now the Feast of Saint Thomas; the summer solstice on the 21st of June (belatedly on the 24th) became the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist; the spring equinox (the 21st of March) was belatedly Lady Day on the 25th; and the autumn equinox was the feast of Saint Matthew. In 1526 the slippage caused by the Julian Calendar then in use showed the solstice and equinox dates as the 14th of December, 11th of March, 13th of June and 14th of September, thus giving the Church’s original game away!

Our Lord, as He said, ‘came not to destroy but to fulfil,’ and all that was best and true in paganism was embraced and fulfilled. This is beautifully expressed in *the Beltane Blessing*:

*Bless O Threefold true and bountiful,
Myself, my spouse, and my children,
My tender children and their beloved mother at their head,
On the fragrant plain, on the gay mountain sheiling,
On the fragrant plain, on the gay mountain sheiling,
Everything within my dwelling or in my possession,
All kine and crops, all flocks and corn,
From Hallow Eve to Beltane Eve,
With goodly progress and gentle blessing,
From sea to sea and every river mouth,
From wave to wave, and base of waterfall ...
Carmina Gadelica⁵⁹*

The Wheel of the Year in this Worship Book is:

Pre-Christian Celtic Festival	Christian Liturgical Parallel
Samhain (Halloween) Honoring the Ancestors	Feast of All Saints
Winter Solstice	Christmas
Imbolc	Candlemas; the return of the light; Epiphany
Celebration of Spring Equinox: Ostara	Easter; Resurrection; Life, Death, Rebirth
Now is the Month of Maying: Beltane	Communion as a Feast of Love; Pentecost
Summer Solstice	Midsummer; Growth, Commitment
First Fruits: Lammas/Lughnasadh	Abundance; First Fruits of the Spirit
The Fall Equinox: Mabon	Harvest

Each of the following eight liturgies begins with a brief introduction, a note about preparation, if necessary, and then the ritual as actually carried out by the Gaia Circle.

The sermon for the Lammas liturgy (Service for the Lord's Day) was written by Rev.

John Harris; all other meditations were written by Sea Raven.

⁵⁹Duncan, *The Elements of Celtic Christianity*, p. 92-93 (footnote omitted).

SAMHAIN/ALL SAINTS

This time of year in the old, pre-literate, pre-Christian world was a time of growing dread. Old people, babies, animals – may not make it through the coming wintertime of deprivation and cold. This time of year is the New Year for Celtic people because they see beginnings in the between-times – in the dusk that leads to night and the new day; in the summer that fades to Winter where in the darkness the new light is born.

Preparation for Ritual

Convene Sacred Space

Let's form a circle and convene sacred space by joining hands with the left hand up to receive, and the right hand down to give – this allows the energy to flow easily from person to person among us and around the circle.

Let's introduce ourselves by name. Throughout the evening we will get to know one another a bit better, and if we stay together over the next year, we'll know each other very well.

Now let's take a deep breath together, you might want to close your eyes, and make this first connection as a group.

Now let's take another deep breath together and expand our group mind out to include this entire building where we will be working this evening – so that we are surrounded by our intention to create a safe and sacred space around us.

And a third deep breath together, grounding ourselves and solidifying our connection to one another and opening ourselves to the energies that each one of us brings to the circle.

Create a Wreath

The Wreath symbolizes a portal, or opening, between the worlds of spirit and the everyday world. It is also a protective device when hung on a door or wall, and will keep negative spirits outside the house. It is also a practical device for keeping culinary or medicinal herbs handy.

The wreath we make tonight will be used in our ritual to look between the worlds from normal consciousness to the realms of spirits and ancestors, and then to look back out into our modern, waking world, to which we will return and bring Wisdom's messages.

The herbs are from my garden, and are especially suited for magic or spiritual purposes:

Sage represents Immortality, longevity, wisdom, protection

Rosemary represents Protection, love, lust, mental powers, exorcism, purification, healing, sleep, youth

Vervain represents Love, protection, purification, peace, money, youth, chastity, sleep, healing

Comfrey represents Safety during travel, money

Basil represents Love, exorcism, wealth, flying, protection

Rue represents Healing, health, mental powers, exorcism, love

Valerian represents Love, sleep, purification, protection

We will weave them into the grapevine frame to use during the Ritual.

Create the Cairn

Cloth, Wreath, masks, tea lights surrounding a black central candle, chalice, bread, wine, candles representing the four directions and elements

WINTER SOLSTICE

Think of a time, not so very long ago, when all you knew was what you saw happening around you. The seasons come and go; the moon waxes and wanes; the sun rises and sets; the stars circle the heavens above, the earth sits solidly below, and under the earth is the realm of the dead. The Druids tell us that the fires we light on the hilltops call the Sun into its journey through our skies. As the Winter approaches, the Sun retreats as the God sends his power elsewhere. Perhaps he visits the Underworld? Perhaps he will not return. In the very early times we turned to the Moon Goddess for light to hunt the deer and the boar. Their rich fatness kept us warm as we waited to see if the God would return. We gather in the early morning darkness to watch where the light will fall as the Sun rises this day. The Druids tell us that the Sun's first ray will fall precisely in the center of the Temple we have dug into the Hill...

As the Universe story unfolds to our increasing knowledge, we have a nagging fear that our personal gods are too small to have created such wonder. We fall into despair and make agreements with the ones who profess to mediate, or who claim the power to walk between the worlds of Spirit and Waking Consciousness. Soon our Chieftains and High Kings claim Sovereign power for themselves, and we are disenfranchised. We repudiate the old wisdom and accuse our mystics of heresy. Then comes a Man sent from God whose name was John ...

Preparation for Ritual: On our Christmas Cairn – or Solstice Altar – is a central red candle surrounded by nine tea lights. The candles representing the four directions and the elements are placed around the ritual room.

IMBOLC/CANDLEMAS

Imbolc is the name of the Old Religion Cross-Quarter day celebrating the rebirth of the Sun. The young God now begins to grow and gain power, as the Mother Goddess Moon begins to relinquish her prominence – the light changes. The days lengthen. The first calves or lambs or baby goats are born, meaning that there is milk for human babies and old folks who managed to survive the winter, just in time to be sure they will live another year.

As metaphor for that increasing sunlight, and the increasing power of the Moon, we light a Yellow Candle.

When the Christian missionaries encountered these traditions, way before anything was written down, the wise ones in the Celtic lands of Ireland and Scotland simply included these celebrations in the Liturgical year. Brigid – the Celtic Goddess of Dairying, smithwork, and poetry – was incorporated into the Catholic Saint Brigit – who acted as the wet nurse for the baby Jesus.

St. Brigit's day is February 1, Brigid's Day/Imbolc is celebrated on February 2, and the whole wonderful cosmological metaphor has been completely corrupted by "Puxitawny Phil" – the official groundhog who gets frightened by his shadow and dives back underground to delay Spring for another 6 weeks – i.e., until the "official" Equinox. The actual astronomical cross-quarter day, when from our point of view, the Sun reaches 15 degrees in the constellation Aquarius, is approximately February 4. More patriarchal and chauvinistic church leaders decided that Candlemas should be 40 days after the birth

of Jesus, so that Mary could be allowed back into the Temple – now that she is “purified” from the dirty earthy business of giving birth.

It is interesting that the United Church of Christ (UCC) picked the first week in February as Women’s week. I doubt they did it because of the Old Religion cross-quarter metaphor. But isn’t it a nice coincidence? Or was it? I think we are influenced by subtle archetypes despite our great sophistication, which denies that we have any connection to anything in the natural world.

The Women’s Open & Affirming Candlemas, which I developed in the mid-1990s for Hope UCC, in Alexandria, Virginia, introduces the concept of Sophia as the feminine personification of the Wisdom of God. *Wisdom’s Feast*, a hard-to-find but valuable resource for Christian exploration of Feminine images of God/dess and the Wisdom tradition, contains a whole program of Bible study and liturgy developed by Hal Taussig, Susan Cole, and Marian Ronan.⁶⁰ Hal Taussig is a Fellow with the Jesus Seminar, and is also on the faculty at the University of Creation Spirituality (UCS). His course, *The Historical Jesus and the Cosmic Christ*, which he team-taught with Matthew Fox in August 1998, was probably the most influential course I took at UCS. It had the greatest impact on my personal theology and life metaphor.

In that class, I learned that Jesus is thought to have been a sage in the wisdom movement of his time, and that it is highly likely that he participated in and hosted ceremonial banquets in the Greek style, during which he taught, and exchanged views

⁶⁰Susan Cole, Marina Ronan and Hal Taussig, *Wisdom’s Feast: Sophia in Study and Celebration* (Theological Book Service, January 1997).

with the participants. The difference with Jesus' banquets, however, is that his table was open and inclusive of women, slaves, rich, poor, healthy, sick, priest, and pagan. We all know what his particular teachings resulted in for him. The danger is not as dire today, but clergy can still lose their jobs, as we well know.

I think that Wisdom/Sophia is an excellent metaphor for modern Christians who want to work with feminine imagery for Godde, and for Christians looking for ways to ritualize our relationship to the Planet and to experience a living Cosmology that can inform a living theology/thealogy.

Let us open ourselves to the Word and the Wisdom of God.

Preparation: CD: *Hildegard of Bingen: Symphoniae Spiritual Songs* Sequentia (BMG Music, 1989) track 8 "O virtus sapientiae." to be played during the Candlemas ritual; on the worship table: pitcher of goat's milk, earthenware goblets for common cups, a crystal bowl of honey, basket of French bread.

OSTARA/SPRING EQUINOX

The Feast Day for St. Patrick, the Celtic monk who brought Christianity to Ireland, is March 17 – just in time to bring people into the church for Lent instead of celebrating the Spring Equinox – and perhaps distract their minds from the old pagan fertility rites involving the Sheela-na-Gig. This is the time of the Spring's return; the joyful time, the seed time, when life bursts forth from the earth and the chains of winter are broken. Light and dark are equal; it is a time of balance, when all the elements within us may be brought into a new harmony. The Prince of the Sun stretches out his hand and – in the Greek stories – Kore (Persephone) returns from the Land of the Dead, cloaked in the fresh rain, with the sweet scent of desire on her breath. Where they step, the wild flowers appear; as they dance, despair turns to hope, sorrow to joy, want to abundance.

The Celtic name for this festival time is OSTARA. Christians adopted it as the commemoration of the death of Jesus and the celebration of his resurrection as the Christ.

May our hearts be opened with the Spring!

Preparation for Ritual: On the altar/worship table: Green plants, flowers, white and green candles, a large pitcher of moonwater, a small bowl of moonwater containing Morning Glory seeds that have soaked overnight and are beginning to soften or sprout, small clay pots filled with moist potting soil (one for each person attending).

BELTANE

Beltane – Walpurgis nacht – April 30 – is an ancient festival of fire celebrating the sun and fertility. It is a “cross-quarter day,” a time midway between the Spring Equinox and the Summer Solstice. Like Samhain, or Halloween, which marks the transition between the worlds of Summer and Winter– Life and Death – in the Celtic tradition, Beltane marks the transition from Winter to Summer, Death to Life.

Love and Death is an archetypal pairing of what is seen as opposites in our human perspective – which makes a separation between the worlds of conscious living and dream. This time of the year is another threshold time that allows us to move easily across that threshold: the veil between the worlds is thin.

Preparation for Ritual: Two fires laid either in pots, or in pits with a path between them inside the ritual space; a maypole may be erected in advance, with enough variously-colored ribbons attached, *or* we used a 4-foot length of dowel stick and took turns holding it aloft as the dancers wove the ribbons (*see below*). This ritual also uses the now-dried herbal wreath made at Samhain. Such items become artifacts of the community.

SUMMER SOLSTICE

Flowering, blossoming, high summer finds us between the worlds of greatest light and the threshold of darkness. We create a wreath from roses and ask: What is now flowering, blossoming, needing cultivation? What are we willing to sacrifice for the blossom to develop into the first fruits of Lammas?

LAMMAS

August 1 is the time in the year that is halfway between the Summer Solstice and the Fall Equinox. In the Northern hemisphere, this is the time of the first harvest of the year. Pre-Christian Celts celebrated the sacrifice of “John Barleycorn” – the seed that has died so that the grain may grow. In Ireland, the festival is called “Lughnasad,” and is a reminder that “Lugh,” or the light, is fading quickly toward the winter darkness. This is the day when Celtic Christians celebrate the “Lammas,” the Loaf Mass, using communion bread made from the first grain harvest of the year. The “first fruits” is a powerful metaphor for the Christ – as Paul writes: Jesus has become the risen Christ, the first fruit of those that sleep.

Preparation for Ritual: This liturgy was used as the 11 a.m. Sunday morning service at Bunker Hill Presbyterian Church (USA) on July 30, 2000. The congregation was encouraged to bring food for the food bank, and produce to share from gardens and local farmers markets for a potluck dinner after the service.

MABON/THE FALL EQUINOX

Once more we come to the time of balance between light and dark, but now as the animals begin to hibernate, and the last of the harvest is completed, we know that the darkness of winter is coming. We do not see the darkness as a gift.

Preparation for Ritual: For this ritual, it is necessary to create a labyrinth, either of rope, or other materials, or to visit a labyrinth that is easily accessible. We used a rope labyrinth kit, and laid it out behind the picnic pavilion at Bunker Hill Presbyterian Church. Kits are available from The St. Louis Labyrinth Project, 3124 Gurney Avenue, St. Louis Missouri 63116; tel: (314) 771-2209; web: <http://www.1heart.com>.

IV. CONCLUSION

My personal encounter with the reality of human impact on the environment happened when I spent an extended weekend before Memorial Day 2000, in a rented cottage with Vicki Moss and John Harris, on Ocracoke Island, in North Carolina's Outer Banks. I had not visited the island for several years, and have wonderful memories of miles of open, empty beach, and succulent sea food cooked over campfires in the Park Service campgrounds among the dunes. I especially remember a particular birthday, when a friend and I bought "jumping mullet" from the local fish market, and learned the best-kept secret of the island people. Jumping mullet is the poor man's lobster, and the best portion is the meat along the back fin, which must be sucked from the bones after the fish is baked over coals in a blanket of herbs and flour.

Last year, there was no local fish for sale. The fish-wealth is gone; there is only farm-raised seafood, trucked in from out-of-state.

This realization is as devastating to me as the time I learned at age 5 that I had to give the man a nickel if he was going to give me a popsicle. The five-year-old's first lesson in the merchant mentality is directly related to the absence of jumping mullet in the waters off the United States barrier islands 50 years later. We think that if the fish are gone from one place, we can buy it from another. If the oceans are empty, we can create factories where seafood can be produced on a massive scale. If the plankton and krill at the bottom of the oceanic foodchain are gone, we can devise fish food from corn, grown in the cleared and burned rain forests in countries that have no other way to acquire

money to feed their growing populations, which demand more and more food, clothing, shelter, and livelihood.

In the past, all cultures celebrated the change of seasons, the rhythm of life, birth, death, rebirth, planting and harvest. Now, because of disenchantment, or lack of relationship, with the natural world, our seasonal celebrations have become opportunities to shop. The media reports that the Christmas 2000 shopping season was a failure, perhaps implying that we are to feel guilty for not buying more at a time that began as a celebration of the renewal of life and light.

The time has come for the Christian Church to enter a new era of thinking and acting from an understanding of current cosmology. Before that can happen, some hard work must be done in Christian education regarding not only scientific fact, but what scholars are learning about the man Jesus and his life and teachings while he was here on the Planet.

Along with the hard intellectual work, the experience that the worlds of myth and metaphor are equally valuable and accessible is essential. Reconciling our relationship with our natural world means honoring the natural world as the sacred revelation of Godde, which leads to living in sustainable economic balance. When we are willing to open ourselves to numinous experience that arises when consciousness changes from observer and consumer to the realization that nothing can separate us from this Godde, we are empowered to work for justice/compassion.

I offer these liturgies as a beginning.

Blessed be.

Washington, D.C., February 2001

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