

Christianity and Ecology: Lessons on Sustainability from the Early Irish Sea
Seminar, St. Paul's Antiochian Orthodox Church
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St. Antony (from St. Athanasius' *Life*):

“Antony, as if stirred by God, fell in love with the Place.... [He said:] Just as fish perish when they lie exposed for a while on the dry land. . . . we must rush back to the mountain [in the desert], like fish to the sea—so that we might not, by remaining among you, forget the things within us.”

Michael Schellenberger and Ted Nordhaus in *The Death of Environmentalism*: “environmentalists need to tap into the creative worlds of myth-making, even religion, not to better sell narrow and technical policy proposals but rather to figure out who we are and who we need to be.”

C.S. Lewis: “The feeling about home must have been quite different in the days when a family had fed on the produce of the same few miles of country for six generations, and...perhaps this was why they saw nymphs in the fountains and dryads in the wood—they were not mistaken for there was in a sense a real (not metaphorical) connection between them and the countryside. What had been earth and air and later corn, and later still bread, really was in them.”

Marie Sjoestedt: “A discussion of the mythological world of the Celts encounters at once a peculiar difficulty, namely, that when seeking to approach it you find that you are already within. We are accustomed to distinguish the supernatural from the natural . . . The Celts knew nothing of this, if we are entitled to judge their attitude from Irish tradition. Here there is continuity, in space and in time, between what we call our world and the other world—or worlds. Some peoples, such as the Romans, think of their myths historically; the Irish think of their history mythologically; and so, too, of their geography.

Voyage of Bran, c. 8th-century Irish:

Yellow and blue-grey-green are spread out,
It is earth that is great.
Speckled salmon leap from the womb
Of the shining sea, on which you look;
They are calves, beautifully colored lambs
At peace without strife . . .
The expanse of the plain, the number of the host,
Beauties shining with bright quality,
A fair stream of silver, stairs of gold,
Bring a welcome at every great feast.
A pleasant game, most delightful,
They play in fair contention,
Men and gentle women under a bush,
Without sin, without crime.
Along the top of a wood has floated
Your coracle across ridges,
There is a beautiful wood with fruit
Under the prow of your little boat.
A wood with blossom and fruit,
On which is the vine's true fragrance,
A wood without decay, without defect,
On which are leaves of golden hue.
We are from the beginning of creation
Without age, without decay of earth-freshness.
We do not expect weakness from decline.
The sin has not come to us.

Breastplate of St. Patrick:

I arise today:
 in Heaven's strength,
 in Sun's shining,
 in Moon's glow,
 in Fire's sparkling,
 in Lightning's speed,
 in Wind's quickness,
 in Sea's profundity,
 in Earth's steadfastness,
 in Rock's firmness . . .
 Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me;
 Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me;
 Christ to my right, Christ to my left;
 Christ in my lying down, Christ in my sitting, Christ in my rising;
 Christ in the heart of each person who thinks of me,
 Christ in the mouth of each one who speaks to me,
 Christ in each eye that sees me,
 Christ in each ear that hears me . . .

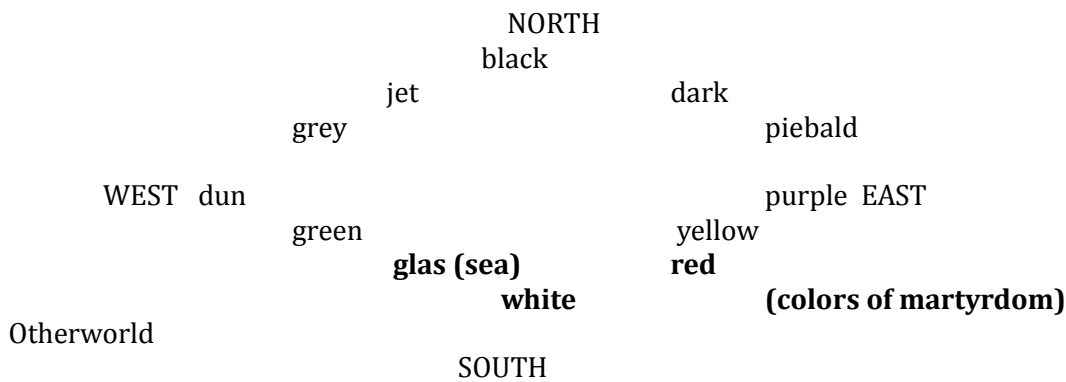
Example of early Irish nature poetry:

A hedge of trees surrounds me, a blackbird's lay sings to me,
 praise I shall not conceal.
 Above my lined book the trilling of the birds sings to me.
 A clear-voiced cuckoo sings to me in a gray cloak from the tops of bushes.
 May the Lord save me from Judgment; well do I write under the greenwood.

Irish colors of martyrdom:

This is the white martyrdom to man, when he separates for the sake of God from everything he loves, although he does not suffer fasting and labor threat. This is the blue-grey-green martyrdom to him, when by means of [fasting and labor] he separates from his desires, or suffers toil in penance and repentance. This is the red martyrdom to him, endurance of a cross or destruction for Christ's sake, as happened to the apostles in the persecution of the wicked and in teaching the law of God.

Early Irish colors of the winds:



St. Maximus the Confessor: We are speechless before the sublime teaching about the Logos, for He cannot be expressed in words or conceived in thought. Although he is beyond being and nothing can participate in him in any way, nor is he any of the totality of things that can be known in relation to other things, nevertheless we affirm that the one Logos is many *logoi* and the many *logoi* are One. Moreover the many are directed toward the One and are providentially guided in that direction.... With examples from Scripture St. Dionysius the Areopagite teaches us to call these *logoi* 'predeterminations' and 'divine wills.'" (Trans. Paul Blowers and Robert Wilkens)

John Scottus Eriugena, *The Periphyseon*: As I frequently ponder and, so far as my talents allow, ever more carefully investigate the act that the first and fundamental division of all things which either can be grasped by the mind or lie beyond its grasp is into those that are and those that are not, there comes to mind as a general term for them all what in Greek is called φύσις [phusis] and in Latin *Natura*.

Four Modes of Time and non-Time in Patristic Models:

1. Human Time 2. Natural Time 3. Eternity 4. Uncreated Everlasting

Julia Kristeva:

[the new Western version of the Trinity from a social perspective]

had the advantage of providing a basis for the political and spiritual authority of the papacy on the one hand, and on the other for the autonomy and rationality of the believer's person, identified with a Son having power and prestige equal to that of the Father. What had thus been gained in equality and therefore in performance and historicity had perhaps been lost at the level of the experience of identification, in the sense of a permanent instability of identity. Difference and identity, rather than autonomy and equality, did on the contrary build up the Eastern Trinity, which consequently became the source of ecstasy and mysticism.

Father Andrew Louth:

These changes [in Western culture] can be placed on an axis, moving from seeing the body as microcosm reflecting in itself a cosmic story, to seeing the body as interpreter of human inwardness.

Resources for Further Reading

Early Irish and Welsh Perspectives on Christianity and Nature

Oliver Davies, ed., *Celtic Spirituality*
John Carey, trans., *King of Mysteries*
Father Gregory Telepneff, *The Egyptian Church in the Irish Bogs: The Byzantine Character of Early Celtic Monasticism*
Alfred K. Siewers, *Strange Beauty*
John Carey, *A Single Ray of the Sun*
John Carey, *Ireland and the Grail*

Patristic and Ascetic Perspectives on Christianity and Nature

St. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*
Alexei Nesteruk, *Light from the East*
St. Basil, *Hexaemeron*
St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*
St. Basil, *On the Human Condition*
St. Ephraim, *Hymns of Paradise*
Elder Paisios, *With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*
Anestes G. Keselopoulos, *Man and the Environment: A Study of St. Symeon the New Theologian*
Father Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*
Robert Draper, "Called to the Holy Mountain: The Monks of Mount Athos," *National Geographic*, December 2009 <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/12/athos/draper-text/1>

Early Irish and Welsh Stories

The Mabinogion, trans. Sioned Davies, or trans. Jones and Jones
Early Irish Myths and Sagas, trans. Jeffrey Gantz
The Táin, trans. Thomas Kinsella
Marged Haycock, ed. and trans., *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin*
Ann Dooley, trans., *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*

Tolkien and Lewis

Alfred K. Siewers, "Tolkien's Cosmic-Christian Ecology," from Siewers and Jane Chance, eds. *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages* (article pdf available on request)
Matthew Dickerson and David O'Hara, *Narnia and the Fields of Arbol*
Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans, *Ents, Elves and Eriador*

Alfred K. Siewers
Associate Professor, English
Coordinator, Nature and Human Communities Initiative
Bucknell University
asiewers@bucknell.edu, 570-523-8876