

Listening for the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality, by J. Philip Newell, 112 pp. (Paulist Press, 1997).

This little gem, one of many books recently donated to our Lending by Don Cuvo, presents a Christian way of being whose wisdom has seldom been understood or valued. The author of this book holds positions within both the Anglican Church and the Church of Scotland. He gently leads us through the whole history of Celtic Christianity: the teaching of 4th-century Pelagius in a new and positive light (I never knew he was a Celt!); a little-known Synod of the Church in Northumbria in 664 A.D.; the gradual banishment of nature mysticism from medieval Church practice; the survival of Celtic ways of being as oral tradition in Ireland and as monasticism on the Isle of Iona in the Scottish Hebrides; and its re-emergence in the imaginative novels of the 19th-century writer George MacDonald and in the life of a renowned 20th-century Scottish preacher, George MacLeod. Many of us have enjoyed this tradition without recognizing it, through our exposure to C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*.

But what *is* 'Celtic spirituality,' anyway? The book's title gives us a clue--it is a spirituality that "seeks God by looking towards the heart of life, not away from life." God is seen as "the Life within all life and not just as the Creator who set life in motion from afar ... The image and likeness of God [is] at the heart of all people (as opposed to just the baptized or the chosen)." It is a creation-centered spirituality that interweaves the divine and the material, time and eternity. Someone steeped in the Celtic way of being listens for the goodness in others, sees the action of God within all things, and strives to overcome the evils that obscure the positive essence of reality.

The Northumbrian Synod in 664 was convened by King Oswy to settle disputes between the Celtic mission and the Roman mission in his territory. The Celtic mission claimed it was following the tradition of St. John, who leaned close to Christ at the Last Supper and listened to his heartbeat; did not John the Evangelist say that the Word of God is the light that enlightens every person who comes into the world? The Roman mission claimed the superiority of St. Peter as the rock upon whom Christ built his Church. The Roman side won the day, but the author of this book argues persuasively that both traditions are important, especially in our days.

Listening for the Heartbeat of God can be found in the Spiritual Life section of the Lending Library (which is organized in alphabetical order according to author).