

The I -Thou of Celtic Christianity

The failure of Western Christianity is her lost of community in favor of the individual. Modern Christianity was born in the Enlightenment with the I -Thou of Community giving way to the I -Me of Individualism. The world is only an inhibiting cocoon that must be shed in order for the butterfly to emerge. If the world only inhibits, it has no value and we have no need of being her stewards except for our own self-gain and preservation. Without a sense of stewardship the I -Thou of community ceases. This is true whether we speak of the I -Thou of human and nature or the I -Thou of human and human, for even the later requires stewardship.

With the I -Thou gone we are left with a Faustian search for the eternal in the moment (hedonism), or for a mere moment to preserve in our movement to the eternal (fatalism), or the urge to purge the (desire of the) moment to prepare us for the eternal (Stoicism); each limiting a genuine commitment to community and the stewardship thereof.

A lack of community is the lack of wholeness and the beginning of fragmentation. When the I -Thou is lost to the I -Me and we create the false dichotomous communities of Sacred-Secular and Body-Soul. The Sacred-Secular is not community because it is an I -Me construct. I am committed to the Sacred because the Sacred makes me Me, and the Me is committed to the secular because the secular makes Me, I. The Sacred-Secular is about how I live in Me. Body-Soul is the same as the Sacred-Secular except on a different plane of existence. The Body-Soul dichotomy requires that I work to save the my Soul (Me) and that I please (hedonism) or that I deprive (asceticism) the Body which is not I, but merely the cocoon of the I that only gets in the way of I being Me.

The *nuirt* (God-image within us) of Celtic spirituality refuses to grant the distinction between the Sacred and the Secular and the Soul and the Body, demanding instead a unity, or wholeness that gives worth to both the I of me and the Thou of Creation, for the *nuirt* can only exist in Holy Community. To separate the Body from

the Soul devalues my existence, and to separate the Sacred from the Secular devalues God who exists, according to Celtic spirituality, in all that He creates. To separate the Soul from the Body and the Sacred from the Secular is to remove God from Creation and limit the divine to the Soul. Thus we become Half-people with an incomplete God who is no God at all. God ceases to exist and we replace the void with a god of our own making full of our I -Me image. Moreover as "Half-people" we cease to exist as Person, and thus our I -Me imaged god cannot have power in that the I -Me god is patterned after that which doesn't exist. The atheist is correct, it may truly be said that the modern Christian God does not exist but as a figment of imagination.

With the outer negated in favor of the inner we can turn nowhere but to an I -Me God found either in our Self or "out there somewhere" apart from a Creation who no longer is divinely charged. Transcendentalism becomes not about a God who transcends time and space to enter into an I -Thou relationship with Creation, but about a god who merely is in the inner Me and transcends only in that our experience is limited to the I -Me conceptualization. The god who is within is not the Creator God, but about the I , or the ego. What's in it for the ego? No longer is there a Holy Community.

Celtic Christianity understood that as a Unity the Inner cannot be separated from the Outer no more than the Soul can be separated from the Body. One cannot turn from the Outer to the purely Inner and retain wholeness. Without an outer Essence the inner Essence ceases to exist. Both *are* Person. The Inner must exist wholly and simultaneously with the Outer as Person without separation. Celtic mysticism, at its best, was a mysticism that while inwardly directed was never separated from simultaneous outward movement. This is the significance of the Celtic spiral which requires simultaneous inward and outward movement, a reflection of the Celtic premise that Time and Place, either of This World or of the Other World, are not fixed in a point of existence, and that movement in one world is a simultaneous movement in the other. In other words, in Celtic spirituality the movement inward must have a

corresponding movement in the outward for the *nuirt* recognizes distinction between the two.

Instead of the I -Me moment of the Body-Soul/Sacred-Secular dichotomy, movement that is wholly Inner and Outer is the I -Thou relationship of Community found in the communal relationship of the I -Thou/God within my Wholeness and in the Wholeness of (outward) Creation. Jesus' miracles were outward expressions of inner healing, that is reconciliation of the whole I (*nuirt*) to the whole Thou/God. They were also inner expressions of outer healing, that is the reconciliation of Body and Soul into whole Person void of dichotomy of existence.

Personhood for the Celtic Christian is more than individual conscious awareness, or a nodal point of world consciousness, which while "concerned" for the world cannot view the world as anything more than the "collected consciousness" of each non-person. In such a non-Celtic view the world ceases to exist as anything other than a Thing to be appropriated for the use of the I -Me.

The I -Me is at the heart of Eastern philosophy and Hegelian thought, as well as certain Hegelian strains of mystical Christianity. In each the Soul seeks to enter into union with the Holy Sacred, yet as we have noted above the Holy Sacred has ceased to exist other than as in divine Nothingness. The problem with Eastern religions (as well as the Hegelian philosophy of a mystical union of Oneness with the divine Nothing) is that the Thou-Less is only a spark of divinity with no humanity, aloof from the temporal which ceases to exist. A Thou-Less Oneness is void of Community.

Celtic Christianity, like Judaism, recognizes that although God indeed does exist in divine Nothingness he is incarnated in the somethingness of the World. While not fully able to be known in his Nothingness God may be fully comprehended - which is not to say fully known -- in the analogical logic of the mind, which is a function involving our full Personhood. Yet, the God of the Known is also simultaneously experienced in His Nothingness in the comprehension. This is why God told Moses, not his name - for names define and limit

- but his Essence of Unknowable Knowability and Knowable Unknowability. To remove either is to leave us with a being who is not God at all. In Celtic Christian thought this is the function of the *núirt*, which is simultaneously both the Essence and the Body of Personhood. It is for this reason that Celtic Christianity affirms the bodily resurrection of Christ as well as the dead, a belief held as well by Celts of the Old Way. Celtic spirituality holds to the premise that we too, in a real sense, are both Knowable and Unknowable, but as with God it is the Oneness of the Knowable-Unknowable that gives us our Personhood.

All I -Me dichotomies have at their center the idea of "I deal Cosmos" in which the person must set aside his individuality in order to enter. Yet in setting aside his individuality/self he is not entering into Cosmic Community, which must involve both the Creator and the created (Creation in her entirety), but into *individual* oneness with the cosmos, leaving behind the mass, which as a whole can find no salvation. Hence Community must be destroyed in order to find cosmic unity. The one finding cosmic unity is now lifted above and out of Community and has no obligation to Community or her reconciliation (healing) — and while perhaps not destroying Creation, Creation has no importance in one's salvation and therefore is not in need of healing stewardship. In fact, to be concerned about the healing of Creation would remove the person from oneness with the cosmos because Creation as a temporal entity does not and cannot exist within the oneness of cosmos.

Celtic Christianity, as a I -Thou proposition, postulates a Oneness of the Cosmos that includes Creation in Community. In Celtic spirituality Oneness can only find expression in Community which is always three, I -Thou-Thou, not the I -Me (which is two of one), or the Thou-Less (which is two of nothingness and may be expressed as Thou-Non-I). The Celtic concept of Community is Trinity, just as the Triadic gods of the Old Way were community: Father, Mother, Child, a community of Trinity that has within each aspect another triadic community (Muse, Nurse, Hag). For the Celts of all ages "three" is the mystical number of wholeness, of community. "Two" is one less than wholeness. The I -Thou-Thou of Celtic spirituality finds

wholeness in the *Nuirt* (I)-Numinous (God)-Creation. Here is a wholeness that cannot divide Body from Soul or Sacred from Secular, or for that matter, the *nuirt* (the Body-Soul union) from the Holy, or the Holy from Creation. As the *nuirt* finds expression in both the Person and in Nature singularly, Person cannot be separated from Nature nor can the Holy be separated from either Creation or Person. This is a true community, divinely inseparable and unseparable.

The Rhine mystic, Meister Eckhart, suggested that Community, which for Eckhart was Trinity, Creator, Redeemer, was possible only in the Nothingness of primordial God, but even as Community came with the negation of the I-Thou, it could only be consciously recognized in the I-Thou-Thou of the corporeal world. The finite cannot cease to exist in favor of the infinite, nor can the infinite cease to exist in favor of the finite without destroying the other, and in so doing destroying not only community, but also Self and God, for the I-Thou-Thou ceases to exist if the I-Thou can only be found in the temporal or the spiritual. Conversely then, the I-Thou of the temporal can only be realized in the I-Thou of the spiritual, and the I-Thou of the spiritual can only be realized in the I-Thou of the temporal. This truth is what drove Celtic mysticism. The Celtic mystic was first and foremost a pilgrim moving along a temporal path. Yet, as he moved along the temporal he sought to find within the temporal those "thin places" where the mystical Nothingness of God could be experienced. However, the mystical experience could only be understood in the context of the temporal. It is in the I-Thou-Thou relationship of this temporal world that the I-Thou-Thou relationship of the spiritual world is fully realized, and that realization is known as Community.