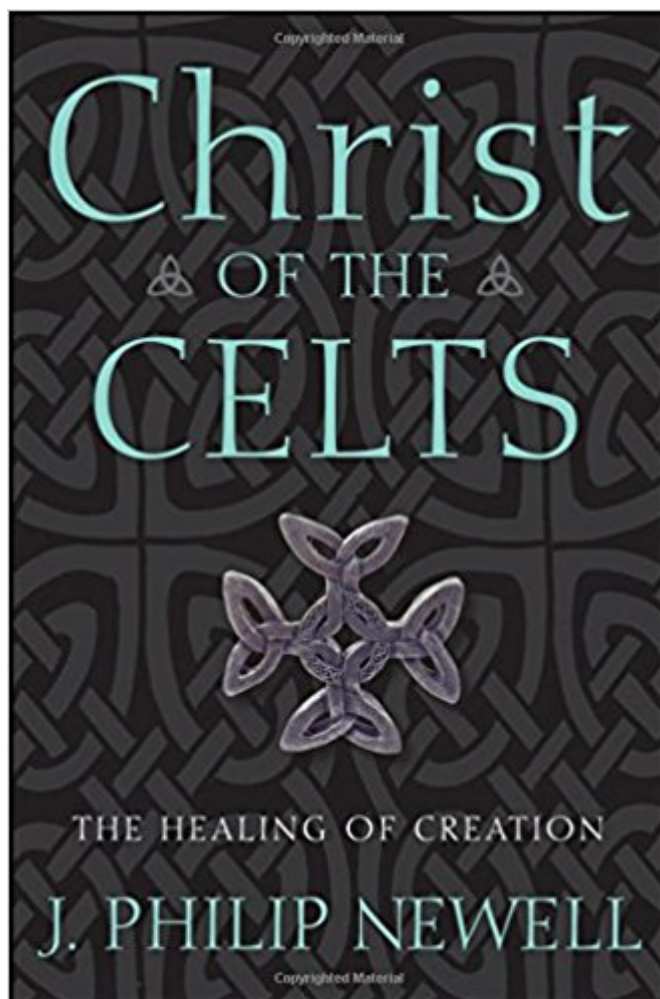


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# Christ Of The Celts: The Healing Of Creation



## Synopsis

Christ of the Celts "I explore the Celtic image of Christ as the Memory of what we have forgotten. He remembers the dance of the universe and the harmony that is deep within all things. He is the Memory also of who we are." --from the Prelude "Diagnosing the human soul with a longing for peace in the face of fear and fragmentation nurtured by global political forces and fundamentalisms, Newell offers the ancient traditions of Celtic Christianity as a way forward in healing humankind and the earth." --Publishers Weekly "This graceful, wise, and important book is a superb introduction to the treasures of Celtic Christianity for our time." --Marcus Borg, author, The Heart of Christianity

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## Customer Reviews

Diagnosing the human soul with a longing for peace in the face of fear and fragmentation nurtured by global political forces and fundamentalisms, Newell offers the ancient traditions of Celtic Christianity as a way forward in healing humankind and the earth. An international retreat leader who is the former warden of Scotland's Iona abbey, the author of *Listening for the Heartbeat of God* argues we discover unity as we become connected to one another and allow ourselves to be surprised by the Presence that is within creation and within the human soul. Drawing on ancient and contemporary sources both within and outside the conventional Christian canon, Newell is critical of, and offers alternatives to, ancient Christian doctrines like creation ex nihilo (out of nothing), original sin and substitutionary atonement. Although the volume has some winning and touching anecdotes about the writer's own spiritual journey and heroes, it is frustratingly gauzy in parts. Written with an

inviting sensitivity to other faith traditions, this introduction to a Celtic Christ will most likely appeal to those who find Christ-tinged creation spirituality in an interfaith context appealing. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Diagnosing the human soul with a longing for peace in the face of fear and fragmentation nurtured by global political forces and fundamentalisms, Newell offers the ancient traditions of Celtic Christianity as a way forward in healing humankind and the earth. An international retreat leader who is the former warden of Scotland's Iona abbey, the author of *Listening for the Heartbeat of God* argues we discover unity as we become connected to one another and "allow ourselves to be surprised by the Presence that is within creation and within the human soul." Drawing on ancient and contemporary sources both within and outside the conventional Christian canon, Newell is critical of, and offers alternatives to, ancient Christian doctrines like creation ex nihilo (out of nothing), original sin and substitutionary atonement. Although the volume has some winning and touching anecdotes about the writer's own spiritual journey and heroes, it is frustratingly gauzy in parts. Written with an inviting sensitivity to other faith traditions, this introduction to a "Celtic Christ" will most likely appeal to those who find Christ-tinged creation spirituality in an interfaith context appealing. (May) (Publishers Weekly, March 2008)

Countless Americans already know Newell's inspirational voice -- calling to them to re-engage their spiritual senses through popular books like *Listening for the Heartbeat of God*. Now, Newell takes a startlingly different approach toward readers and offers a full-fledged manifesto that seeks to reshape the way most Western Christians think about the core of their faith.--(<http://www.readthespirit.com/explore/2008/05/166-conversatio.html>)

J. Phillip Newell is a prolific writer on Celtic Christianity and spirituality. The title *Christ Of The Celts* (2008) suggests a work on Christology however the book covers many current theological themes. This book follows the successful pattern of Newell's other books such as *Listening to the Heartbeat of God* (1997). Newell addresses a different topic in each chapter, and then introduces comments from Celtic writers to offer fresh perspectives to current questions. This straightforward structure make Newell's books easy to read and also pleasing to the reader because they widen theological perspectives. For example, when was the last time you read a book that quoted Pelagius? The opening chapter explores the theme that Christ is the memory of what we of have forgotten. The writings of the ninth century theologian John Scotus

Eriugena are cited to remind us that *“We suffer from the soul’s forgetfulness”* (pg.44). Christ come to show us the face of both God and man, and to reveal our deepest identity. He came to wake us up and to call us back to relationship with Him. In Chapter Two, Newell argues that the doctrine of original sin has wrongly given us the sense that our deepest essence is opposed to God. Here the thought of the Celtic theologian Pelagius is introduced to remind us that God is at the center of our lives. In addition, Pelagius opposed the doctrine of original sin because he believed that if the soul was defined as evil and sinful, this would undermine the essential goodness that God created in each person. Chapter Three points to the goodness of nature and that nature itself comes from the goodness of God. Here Irenaeus of Lyons is cited to demonstrate the close links between the sacred and the natural. These are also themes of the great Celtic thinker Eriugena who linked the deepest energies in our bodies and souls to the deepest patterns and rhythms of the earth as expressions of God. Chapter Four explores the doctrine of creation out of nothing. The Celtic writers did not believe creation came from nothing. Eriugena’s writings by contrast stressed two “books of God which we need to listen to together: the word of revelation, and the book of creation. In Chapter Five, *“The Sound of Love”*, Newell discusses the importance of listening. Here Newell cites the work Dame Julian Norwich, one of the greatest of English mystics, who was raised in Northumbria, an ancient foothold of the Celtic church. According to Newell, Julian taught that the more we listen, the more we come in touch with ourselves and with God. Julian’s famous phrase that *“all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well”* (72) is rooted in the knowledge that God’s love will never cease or disappear from the longings of each soul. Chapter Six discusses the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement. Newell argues that this understanding of the substitutionary atonement is directly opposed to our deepest experiences of forgiveness and that we need to find a *“new language to speak about the way in which Christ leads us into the experience of forgiveness”* (80). Newell suggest we look at the *“Cross”* to find this new perspective. The cross displays love and also discloses the cost of that love. *“To offer the heart is to offer the self. And so the cross, in addition to being a revelation of the nature of God, is a revelation of our true nature, made in the image of God. It reveals that we come closest to our true self when we pour ourselves out in love for one another, when we give our heart and thus the whole of our being”* (85). This is the master theme of the book; a turning away from a focus on individual salvation, to a

salvation for the whole world. Chapter Seven, "The Hymn of the Universe" describes how God's presence is everywhere, and at the very center of creation itself. This is shown in the life of two great church figures from the last century. One is George MacLeod the founder of the Iona Community. Another is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the French mystic and priest. A final chapter questions a view of salvation which is limited to the individual and champions the need for a whole salvation. Newell's books are easy to read—they are extremely well written and crafted. That is not to say they don't raise difficult questions because they do. This book is clearly controversial because it questions many "traditional" doctrines such as creation out of nothing, the Fall, and the substitutionary view of the atonement. However on reflection, these are theological themes upon which there have always been great debate and discussion. What is most laudable about Newell's books is that he is trying to address the issues and questions of modern Christians (for lack of a better term) with the writings of many great Celtic writers. In addition, these themes made the reader question and think about how many of these theological doctrines were made in the first place and how they can be crafted again.

Not qualified to offer a review but I can say that this book has some very transformational ideas in it. I have read harsh reviews that complain it is too simplistic or does not contain enough "meat". I would contend that you will be very satisfied if you read this book with an open heart. It will challenge most people's ideas about sin and atonement. If you're interested in expanding your thinking, especially if you are a Christian who is looking for a deeper connection to your deepest spiritual roots, this introduction to Celtic thinking and ideas will be for you. Very readable. You WILL underline things in this book even if you were always told not to write in books. You won't be able to help yourself.

I got this on CD to listen in my car. The message and the delivery, spoken by the author, is simply beautiful. I listened all the way through three times before I was forced to stop as a friend wanted to borrow it. J. Phillip Newell is a remarkable person and he tells the Celtic story with humility, passion and humor. He leaves the dualistic, judgmental, angry and patriarchal God of what he calls Mediterranean Christianity behind and introduces a God of spirit, love, femininity (as well as the masculine) and creation. Gone are the church-invented doctrines of Original Sin and creation ex nihilo. This book is a feast—a love feast—and should be on the reading list of every seeking person, whether Christian or not. It's a life changer.

Excellent volume! Brilliant, accessible, and highly thought-provoking book by one of the world's foremost, contemporary voices on the Celtic tradition.

Philip Newell has a wonderful way of anchoring his teachings with stories. We are reading this in a Sunday morning group, chapter by chapter, and his stories evoke stories of our own. I had already read the book more than once, and this time I am more impressed by his writing than before. The interjection of other voices, de Chardin and MacLeod specifically, is a little jarring simply because Philip's own style is so strong. His style is "more poetic than doctrinal", as he says of Celtic spirituality. Altogether a lovely book, with a significant message for those still in religious communities and those who have opted out as well.

How refreshing to read a new look at Christianity as practiced by the Celts of the first few centuries. How wonderful to read about a creation based spirituality within our own tradition, one that included mysticism, feminism and the assertion that human beings are essentially good, not needing salvation from original sin.

I was expecting to like this one better based on reading "Listening for the Heartbeat of God" first. This one is consistent with that, but very flowery language, almost poetry. Just not what I was looking for. And it is a bit of a stretch for me to think of inert matter as holy no matter how much I see the connection to God in nature.

In this book, J Philip Newell presents the view of the life and death of Jesus that was held by Celtic Christians prior to the time when Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire. It is a beautifully written book and a "must read" for thoughtful Christians to whom the doctrines of Original Sin and Substitutional Atonement are at odds with their view of a loving Creator in whose image we are all formed. Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation

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