



A CELTIC THEMED EVENING SERVICE LITURGY

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Introductory Music

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters¹.

(John 1:1-3, Genesis 1:2)

O Lord, our Lord How majestic is your name in all the earth

You have set your glory above the heavens.

And from the lips of children praise O Lord, our Lord

How majestic is your name in all the earth.

¹ All in bold to be said by congregation or 2nd voice

CONFESSION

Creative God, breath of all life,
Through whom all things,
are created and sustained,
all sons and daughters,
flocks and herds,
all birds of the air,
and fish of the sea.

You walked this earth,
as child and Creator
You touched the soil,
quenched your thirst,
embraced this world,
brought life and light,
love and laughter,
into dark and death-filled lives.

CONFESSION CONTINUED

Creative God, breath of all life,
Through whom all things,
are created and sustained,
We bring to you our sacrifice,
of a contrite and willing heart,

Forgive us Lord for not doing what we should have done.

Forgive us Lord for the hurt we have caused for our insensitivities and lack of care.

Forgive us Lord for the destruction we have caused through our failure to care for the world.

READING

VOICE 3

Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the East, and from the West I will gather you; I will say to the North, 'Give them up', and to the South, 'Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth - everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.'

Isaiah 43.5-7

For God so loved the world that He gave the only begotten Son, so that everyone believing in Him should not perish, but should have eternal life.

John 3:16

HYMN

ST PATRICK'S BREASTPLATE

[Breastplate 1](#)

[Breastplate 2](#)

1 I bind unto myself today,
the strong name of the Trinity,
by invocation of the same,
the Three in One and One in Three.

2 I bind this day to me forever,
by power of faith, Christ's incarnation,
his baptism in the Jordan river,
his death on cross for my salvation,
his bursting from the spiced tomb,
his riding up the heavenly way,
his coming at the day of doom,
I bind unto myself today.

HYMN 2

3 I bind unto myself today,
the virtues of the starlit heaven,
the glorious sun's life-giving ray,
the whiteness of the moon at even,
the flashing of the lightning free,
the whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,
the stable earth, the deep salt sea,
around the old eternal rocks.

4 I bind unto myself today,
the power of God to hold and lead,
God's eye to watch, God's might to stay,
God's ear to hearken to my need,
the wisdom of my God to teach,
God's hand to guide, God's shield to ward,
the word of God to give me speech,
God's heavenly host to be my guard.

HYMN 3

5 Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

6 I bind unto myself the name,
the strong name of the Trinity
by invocation of the same,
the Three in One and One in Three,
of whom all nature has creation,
eternal Father, Spirit, Word.
Praise to the Lord of my salvation,
salvation is of Christ the Lord!

Source: Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal

Reflection on Power and Sex in the Christian Traditions

The history of sexual abuse within Christianity and the Clergy is not a pleasant one. When Christianity first expanded out of Judaism it spread both East and West into a strongly patriarchal Roman society with strong distinctions between the status of men and women and their roles, but also into a much more gender equal and egalitarian Persian and Zoroastrian society, where men and women were treated much more equally in society, and both sexes could hold positions of power and engage in many of the same roles.

When St Thomas and his followers took Christianity to the East they had to establish without precedent the ground rules for Christianity in a much more gender equal society. When St Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland, he did not try to impose the Roman tradition. Instead, he adapted this to suit the Brehon Law, which was the legal code for perhaps an even more egalitarian and equal society. In the Bible and in the New Testament we find that St Peter and St Paul did not agree precisely about how the Christian tradition should be integrated into the Roman World. Attempting to impose the degree of social egalitarianism which St Thomas and his followers could immediately achieve in the East, and also St Patrick in Ireland, would similarly have been a social disaster in First Century Roman society.

Judaism took its cue on sexual relationships from the story of David and Jonathan in the Bible. This is the story of a romantic relationship which broke the limits of the time. In some modern translations of the Bible the reason for the breakup is expressed in terms of distress (David wept profusely). The King James version says: "*David exceeded*". The main question that has to be asked: is this about abuses of power or abuses of sex? In another book of the Bible (Leviticus.) male same-sex intercourse is strongly condemned, and that includes consensual sex. It is not surprising that the penetrator would be condemned in the case of rape, but in the case of consensual same-sex intercourse in these grossly unequal Old Testament societies, it is the penetrated partner who is condemned: for that person has ceded power to the penetrator.

Through the abuses of power In that way alone, David would have destroyed Jonathan's kingship rights. The relationship between David and Jonathan is clearly portrayed as one of romantic love. If male all same-sex intercourse as prohibited, the next question to ask is how did the love between two males continue to be expressed? The Old Testament is full of stories of strong romantic love between two males. where male same-sex intercourse is the only prohibited act. And in the whole of the Bible male same-sex intercourse is the only specifically prohibited act.

That prohibition is contained in the book of Leviticus. Here the passages are carefully constructed to make it clear that the condemnation is confined to the physical act. Also under

Jewish Law it was necessary for the act to be witnessed by another person who was obliged to warn the participants. Only if the participants continued after the warning was given could the Law (which to the best of our knowledge, it never was) could be put into effect. It is also well written up in Jewish literature the penalty could not be applied if a boy of less than nine years and one day is involved. This is horrendous unless the condemnation is understood to condemn the enforcing of power for purposes of domination, instead of the abuses of sex. That is why the abuse of power must be considered separately from and in addition to the abuse of sex. Fast forward to first century Jewish culture. Sexual abuse including pederasty was abhorred in Jewish society, but it is notable that the condemnation of male same-sex intercourse in Leviticus was cast in terms, of *“lack of respect”*.

Scholarship and learning in Jewish culture also took place on a didactic basis, where pairs of students or scholars debated the meaning of the texts. Intimacy was encouraged since this was considered to increase the depth and quality of the arguments. These first century partner partnerships, known as *“Chavruta Partnership”*, could be so strong that the two participants could be referred to as a single item (*A Chavruta*). Some were considered to be as strong as those in a heterosexual marriage. The present-day approach of the Church of England to civil partnerships comes into mind in relation to these acts. These arguments could not be used to endorse male same-sex marriages. Jewish literature does not say a great deal about this, but the idea of a male same-sex marriage was anathema: It was

equated to that of a man marrying an animal, which says much about the lowly status of women in these societies.

That also raises the question as to how these patterns were carried forward into the Christian tradition. In early Byzantine Christianity, services of *Adelphopoesis* or "*Brother making*" were held which cemented such relationships, but male same-sex intercourse remained a prohibited act. The liturgies which exist for these services show that they were similar to those for marriage: but omitted the final "*Crowning*" act. In the 9th Century, Charlemagne the Holy Roman emperor, repeatedly published early Church decrees which condemned same-sex abuses, but not same-sex acts. Christianity during the first millennium was littered with saints and others who were in strong and intimate but celibate same sex relationships. Aelred in the 12th Century encouraged his monks to passionately express their love for each other, but equally strongly condemned male same-sex intercourse. The same passionate relationships Between Rashi and Rabbi Jonathan are found in the Jewish tradition about the same time.

If we exclude the issue of male same-sex intercourse, during the first millennium both Judaism and Christianity continued to follow the first century understandings, common to Greek and other societies where decisions between moral and immoral behaviour were decided on the noble pursuit of love, and the carnal abuse of sex. This always referred to male same-sex relationships. Women had no power in these societies and did not count.

A crisis of priestly sexual abuse was reported on by St Peter Damian in the 11th Century. Many, like David, also “*exceeded*”, in their acts. Pope Leo who received the report, did little about it. The Church was also being increasingly being condemned for the profligate exercise of pomp, wealth, and power by its hierarchy. This led to the anti-clerical Cathar Revolt. Although the Cathar theology, which came from the East, was regarded as highly irregular, the Cathars also espoused a gender equality and egalitarianism that is comparable to similar societies of the present day. St Bernard of Clairvaux, who preached strongly against the Cathars admired, nevertheless admired their lifestyle. At the same time Bernald was in a strong and intimate relationship with St Malachy, the Bishop of Armagh in Ireland.

Enter St Thomas Aquinas who sought to address many of these issues, and to liberalise what the Church considered acceptable sexual activity within marriage and condemned all sexual behaviour outside it. Aquinas modelled his teaching on Aristotle and the Greek Philosophers, but Jesus was a Jew who lived in a Jewish society, and the approaches could hardly be more different.

For Aristotle and the Greek philosophers any expression of sexual emotion was to be suppressed because it was considered to impede logical argument and purity of thought. whereas Judaism relied on these intimacies of close relationships to stimulate it. Instead of making the distinction between the noble pursuit of love and the carnal abuse of sex, for Aquinas, only marriage legitimised sexual behaviour. All activity outside it, was invariably

considered to be the progenitor of lust, leading to a falling from grace and inherently depraved and disordered acts. This created a paradigm shift in Christian teaching, and it continues to be expressed today in many parts of the Christian Church. It exonerates the authorities from the abuses of power and makes the focus of the condemnation without exception, the sexual act. Similar transformation of blame from the perpetrators to the victims I believe continue to plague the Christian Churches today.

A question to be asked is How did Jesus handle this, when First Century Judaism condemned these activities because of abuses of power, lack of respect, and not the act. That is best seen in the story of the Centurion and his slave. We are told that the Centurion loved his slave, but we are also told equally firmly that the Centurion loved the Jewish nation. So it is reasonable to assume that abuses of power or lack of respect need not be considered in this relationships. Centurions were not allowed to consort with local people and slaves were expected to provide all the sexual comforts that were necessary. In Roman society, that included same-sex intercourse. When Jesus healed the slave he did not make any reference to this, and even if he did have private knowledge that no intercourse took place, he did not tell anybody about it. Instead, he said that he had found no greater love than this, even in Israel,. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that when there is true equality and love between two partners, there should be no automatic condemnation of any same-sex relation-

ship or sexual act. That would seem to accord with the teaching of Jesus in the *“New Covenant”* where instead of decisions being made on the letter of the Law they should be based on love and intention of the act.

Eunuchs played important roles in ancient societies. Some could be given great power because they could not create dynasties to follow them. Others were given high esteem because self-castration was considered the supreme sacrifice of sexual distraction in the pursuit of religious devotion. Some, such as the self-castrated male priests of the Goddess Cults could offer themselves for men to practice on to gain fertility and the goodwill of the Goddess Cults without reproductive consequences. Others just took advantage of this sexual freedom. Judaism gave eunuchs a very high status in society, provided they remained faithful to the Jewish Law. But that applied to those who were castrated by others.. However, Jesus extended the same welcome to all eunuchs who kept the Jewish Law, regardless of whether they had castrated themselves or not. This passage caused considerable difficulties for the early Church since there is little doubt about its authenticity, and the commands are very direct. That is very different from the interpretations put today on this passage when these raw arguments are totally ignored, and they are interpreted entirely as preferential acts. Jesus had changed the letter of the law in this teaching to include give all people, including transgender people who responded to his message in the *“New Covenant”*

regardless of any surgical action or social transition, with the same inclusive welcome, with no guilt or condemnation, in the love of Christ.

The same concerns were encountered in the early Church in the disagreements about whether Gentiles must be circumcised in line with the requirements of the Jewish Law. It was agreed that they need not. In his letters Paul expressed this viewpoint in his argument that circumcision in the spirit transcends every physical act. This is again highlighted in the Apocryphal Gospel of Thomas. It also is present in the teaching of Jesus, both in relation his teaching on eunuchs and in the story of the Centurion and the slave. It fits in with the relationship between Jesus and the *“beloved disciple”* as described in the Gospel of John, and it matches the first century understanding on sexual relationships, not just in Judaism but in much of the Middle East where the moral distinctions made between the approval of the noble pursuit of love and the carnal abuse of sex. That same moral duality in our social behaviours is being applied by us now in our gender equal and inclusive societies of the present day. However, those who seek to restore this moral duality to our religious beliefs are condemned as revisionists and apostatised by those who continue to support the traditional teaching of the Church.

From the outset Christianity had to adapt itself to different cultures, and even among the Apostles there was disagreement about this could be done. The most obvious one was be-

tween Peter and Paul which early patristic literature and the New Testament attests. Although Peter fully and enthusiastically embraced the Gospel message, he still endorsed a gender complementarity which divided the social roles that men and women could occupy in society. That fits in with the social norms of Roman and Judean societies, and it is still the teaching of the present day Roman Catholic Church..

Paul was much more radical. His statement: *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* and his treatment of the runaway slave represents his willingness to break these boundaries. Thomas also had greater problems since the application of these traditional values would not work in a more egalitarian society. His forced departure to India around AD 62 suggests that no agreement was reached. The Apocryphal Gospel of Thomas has challenged many scholars. However, it makes more sense if it is read in the light of these disagreements. Here, Peter is demoted to the status of a *“wise messenger”*, women are given a more prominent role and have a greater understanding, The term in one of its sayings: *“to make Mary male”* would not have been taken literally at the time. It meant that as well as men women also have souls, and that Mary, like all women should be given the same rights and equalities of all men in society. In short, this reads as a Gospel for a much more egalitarian society and a much more egalitarian Church.

In our present day we try to read all of these through the challenges of history, re-interpretation and tradition. The Eastern Church, which at one time was much larger and widespread than the combined Roman Church was largely wiped out from the 14th cent. onwards and only a small remnant remains. Like St Thomas, St Patrick took Christianity to Ireland, however links between Celtic Christianity and the Ancient Church of the East are stronger than one might expect. Celtic Christianity took inspiration from the Desert Fathers in Egypt and Northern Africa. But the initial foundations of the monasticism and lifestyles of the Desert Fathers belonged to this Ancient Church of the East. Irish missionaries then re-evangelised much of Northern Europe, so Celtic Christianity does not just belong to Ireland but a representation of how Christianity developed outside the Roman world.

Christianity would have floundered if both these traditions were pursued without compromise. But Paul was a fixer, and he admitted this himself. To the Jews he acted as a Jew, to the Romans, he acted as a Roman. Paul wrote his letters as offers of practical advice, not of Christian dogma, and the constraints he imposed on the public perception of Christians and Christianity allowed it to survive in a hostile world. For Paul the early churches should be beacons of light and full inclusivity shining out into this hostile world.. Sadly today the reverse is often the case.

In 1298 the distinguished East Syriac scholar Abdisho bar Brika wrote in his *“Book of the Pearl”* that the East Syriac Christians had *“never changed their faith and preserved it as*

they had received it from the apostles, and are called Nestorians unjustly, especially since Nestorius was not their patriarch and did not understand their language” . The Roman Church claimed that the Church of the East was heretical because it used the teachings of Nestorius. For a Christianity that expresses the full inclusivity of the teaching of Jesus we should look instead to the Celtic Church.

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The full analysis is available in a series of annotated presentations in Gilchrist, S. (2022):
“Christian Communities, Transgender People and Christian Traditions”
<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/037B-PresDoctrinesDisputesTransPeople.pdf>

PRAYERS

WONDER

Beneath the surface of your story,
is an inescapable fact,
You entered this world,
as vulnerable as any one of us,
in order to nail that vulnerability to the cross.
Our fears, our insecurities, and our sins,
all that can separate us from God,
exchanged by your Grace for Love.
We cannot comprehend the reasoning,
only marvel that Salvation comes to us,
through a baby born in a stable,
who reaches out to a world in need.

PRAYERS 2

TRANSFORMATION

VOICE 2

**There is a transformation that takes place,
within the warmth of your embrace,
That certain knowledge that you are,
refuge, shelter, fortress, and stronghold,
against which no army can succeed,
That you are Brother, Sister, Mother, Father
the love that knows no bounds,
That you are God,
And I am lost outside of your arms.**

PRAVERS 3

VOICE 3

TIMES

Lord of the morning,
of dawn chorus,
rising sun,
mist on water.

Lord of the noontime,
of chattering voices,
laughter and fun,
sparkling water,
everyone.

Lord of the evening,
of quiet breeze,
setting sun,
gentle waters,
day that's done.

HYMN

LORD OF ALL HOPEFULNESS

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-D_aT8CXyc

1 Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever child-like, no cares can destroy,
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

2 Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
Be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

HYMN 2

3 Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

4 Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

INTECESSIONS

Circle us, Lord

Circle us with the light of your presence, bright within this dark world,
Enable us to be overcomers of fear and temptation,
Enable us to be victors over sin and despair,
Enable us to become that which you would desire.

Personal prayers, silent or aloud for courage, strength, and freedom for ourselves both individually and in community, to pray for and act on the goals we are called to embrace. To recognize what we should do to bring the Gospel mission of Christian love to the world.

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation

Circle us Lord with the light of your presence

INTERCESSIONS 1

Circle us, Lord

Circle us all with your joys of inclusion,
Share to all people your joy and your love,
Share your delight in the richness of gender,
Share that in love we all are as one,
Enable us to bring to all people, regardless of race, class, income, sex, or gender your full inclusion in God's Love.

Personal prayers, silent or aloud, for the healing of social divisions and inequalities in society based on, race, class, income, sex, or gender so that we may build a world of full inclusion in the Gospel of Christian love.

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation,

Circle us Lord with the light of your presence.

INTERCESSIONS 2

Circle us, Lord,

Circle our family within the shelter of your outstretched arms,
Protect them in each moment of their daily lives,
Protect them in the decisions that they face,
Protect their homes and relationships.

Personal prayers, silent or aloud, for wellbeing, healing, and peace of mind for family, friends etc, and for members of our communities.

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation,

Circle us Lord with the light of your presence.

INTERCESSIONS 3

Circle us, Lord,

Circle all people with Your love and hope,
Create a desire to listen to the Gospel message,
Create a willingness to understand and respond,
Create a need to reach out to the Christ Child.

Personal prayers, silent or aloud, for the world, governments, organisations, and societies, including our own, that each may create lives renewed in the love of Christ.

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation,

Circle us Lord with the light of your presence.

INTERCESSIONS 4

Circle us, Lord,

Circle this world with the joy of your Salvation,
Where there is sickness and disease bring healing,
Where there is hunger and despair bring hope,
Where there is torture and oppression bring release,

Personal prayers, silent or aloud, for healing and recovery, for all people in all countries. For groups we know and those we do not. All who face famine, violence, illnesses, including those who face despair, oppression, and hopelessness, that they may find love, care, and hope.

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation,

Circle us Lord with the light of your presence.

CORRYMEELA PRAYER FOR COURAGE

***Courage comes from the heart,
and we are always welcomed by God,
the Croí* of all being.***

***We bear witness to our faith,
knowing that we are called,
to live lives of courage,
love and reconciliation,
in the ordinary and extraordinary,
moments of each day.***

***We bear witness, too, to our failures,
and our complicity in the fractures of our world.***

May we be courageous today.

May we learn today.

May we love today.

Amen.

**** Croi (pronounced Cree) is the Irish word for heart.***

SHARING

Form a (virtual if necessary) circle, holding out or joining hands²

***Almighty God,
My protection be,
Encircling around me.
Let evil be quelled,
That grace may abound,
So, in me and each other,
God's Peace may be found.***



(You may then share the Peace with each other as you wish)

² The Celtic Church developed a special type of protection prayer, the Caim Prayer or Circle Prayer, it is where we get the word "Calm" from as praying this prayer would banish the storm and create calm. It was a way to surround oneself with God's protection and blessing and remove any evil. It was often prayed in by 'drawing' a circle around oneself as you prayed, at every 90 degree, turn. This is an example of a Celtic circle Prayer:

LORDS PRAYER

**Heavenly Father, heavenly Mother,
Holy and blessed is your true name.
We pray for your reign of peace to come,
We pray that your good will be done,
Let heaven and earth become one.
Give us this day the bread we need,
Give it to those who have none.
Let forgiveness flow like a river between us,
From each one to each one.
Lead us to holy innocence,
Beyond the evil of our days —
Come swiftly Mother, Father, come.
For yours is the power and the glory and the mercy:
Forever your name is All in One.**

Parker J. Palmer

BLESSING

May God the Father, bless us,
may Christ take care of us,
the Holy Ghost enlighten us all the days of our life.
The Lord be our defender and keeper of body and soul,
both now and for ever, to the ages of ages.

Æthelwold c 908-984

[Closing Music: Irish Blessing](#)

(Move to next slide)



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