

One of the greatest teachers in the Celtic world, John Scotus Eriugena in ninth-century Ireland, taught that Christ is our memory. We suffer from the "soul's forgetfulness," he says. Christ comes to reawaken us to our true nature. He is our epiphany. He comes to show us the face of God. He comes to show us also our face, the true face of the human soul. This leads the Celtic tradition to celebrate the relationship between nature and grace. Instead of grace being viewed as opposed to our essential nature or as somehow saving us from ourselves, nature and grace are viewed as flowing together from God. They are both sacred gifts. The gift of nature, says Eriugena, is the gift of "being"; the gift of grace, on the other hand, is the gift of "well-being." Grace is given to reconnect us to our true nature. At the heart of our being is the image of God, and thus the wisdom of God, the creativity of God, the passions of God, the longings of God. Grace is opposed not to what is deepest in us but to what is false in us. It is given to restore us to the core of our being and to free us from the unnaturalness of what we are doing to one another and to the earth.

Christ is often referred to in the Celtic tradition as the truly natural one. He comes not to make us more than natural or somehow other than natural but to make us truly natural. He comes to restore us to the original root of our being. As the twentieth-century French mystic-scientist Teilhard de Chardin says much later in the Celtic world, grace is "the seed of resurrection" sown in our nature. It is given not to make us something other than ourselves but to make us radically ourselves. Grace is given not to implant in us a foreign wisdom but to make us alive to the wisdom that was born with us in our mother's womb. Grace is given not to lead us into another identity but to reconnect us to the beauty of our deepest identity. And grace is given not that we might find some exterior source of strength but that we might be established again in the deep inner security of our being and in learning to lose ourselves in love for one another to truly find ourselves.

-from *Christ of the Celts: the Healing of Creation* by John Philip Newell. Photo by Chuck Summers.