

George Fielder MacLeod (1895-1991) taught that we should look for God not away from the material world in some spiritual realm but rather more deeply in the life of the world. The spiritual is not opposed to the physical, he believed, for God is to be found in the material realm of creation, not on an escape from it. For that reason, as he liked to say, 'matter matters', whether that be the matter of our physical bodies, the matter of creation or the matter of bodies politic, because the spiritual is to be found at the heart of the material. P. 75

Similarly, in relation to the tendency to distance God's life from our life, MacLeod emphasized the fact that we are in touch with God every moment that we live, 'for the simple reason that God is life: not religious life, nor Church life, but the whole [of] life.... God is the Life of life.' Spiritual awareness, then, was about being aware of God in the midst of the change and movement and flow of life, in the rising of the morning sun, in the work and relationships of daily life, in the great struggles of society and nation, in alertness to the interior life of the soul, in times of rest and sleep and even dreaming. God is at the heart of all life, in both the visible and invisible. ... This was not pantheism. It was rather to believe, like Scott, Eriugena and other Celts before him, that God is the Being on which all being rests, the Light within all light, the Life at the heart of all that has life. P. 76

It was during this period that MacLeod moved from a fairly straightforward form of High Presbyterianism towards a more mystical as well as a more political spirituality. This combination of the mystical and the political is what is so remarkable about MacLeod. The true mark of Christian spirituality, he now declared, 'is to get one's teeth into things.... Painstaking service to humankind's most material needs is the essence of Christian spirituality.' In other words, to move more deeply into life, and especially into its places of struggle and suffering, like those he was seeing in Glasgow, is to move closer to the life of Christ, the light that is within even the darkest of situations. The word 'spiritual', he believed, was often dangerously misunderstood. People generally imagine that 'to go mystical', as he put it, is to turn away from the affairs of the world. It is rather to go more deeply into life, to find God at the heart of life, deeper than any wrong, and to liberate God's goodness within us and in our relationships, both individually and collectively. P. 79

'Whatever wakes my heart and mind, thy presence is, my Lord.' Our innumerable 'nows' are our points of contact with God. ... One of MacLeod's most moving accounts about the importance of being aware

and alert to the present concerns his daughter's first day at school. It speaks of the experience we have all had, at different points in life, of missing the moment:

I was busy. I was writing letters. I was self-important. My little daughter was going to school that morning for the first time. She came into my room, in her first school uniform. I said, 'Your tie is not quite straight.' Then I looked at her eyes. She wasn't crying. She was unutterably disappointed. She hadn't come for tie inspection. She had come to show she was going to school for the first time. A terrific day, and I had let her down. What is that bit on the Gospel? Whosoever shall offend against one of these little ones ... better for a millstone to be tied around his neck and that he be cast into the sea. I ran downstairs. I said all the right things. I crossed the road with her. I went to school with her. I had missed the moment, missed the point. I will always see these eyes. Sometimes when I am very busy. Sometimes when I am writing letters. I am forgiven, but I won't forget. P. 80

For MacLeod, it was precisely at the pressure points of life that God is to be looked for. As he liked to say, God is to be found on the high street of life, in the busyness of our lives. One of his favourite stories was that of the boy who tossed a stone through a stained-glass window of the Incarnation, nicking out the letter 'e' in the word 'Highest'. Instead of 'Glory to God in the Highest', the inscription now read 'Glory to God in the High St'. That, said MacLeod, is how it should have been left, or perhaps with a swivelling panel for the letter 'e' so that it could say both. P. 81

A prayer of MacLeod's during the rebuilding of the Abbey on Iona draws on the themes of the community:

It is not just the interior of these walls,  
it is our own inner beings you have renewed.  
We are your temple not made with hands.  
We are your body.  
If every wall should crumble,  
and every church decay, we are your habitation.  
Nearer are you than breathing,  
closer than hands and feet.  
Ours are the eyes with which you, in the mystery,  
look out in compassion on the world.  
So we bless you for this place,  
for your directing of us,  
your redeeming of us, and your indwelling.  
Take us 'outside the camp', Lord,  
outside holiness,  
out to where soldiers gamble, and thieves curse,  
and nations clash at the cross-roads of the world....  
So shall this building continue to be justified. p. 82f.

One of MacLeod's best-known prayers was modelled on the ancient 'Breastplate' hymn of St Patrick, in which Christ is seen in all things:

Christ above us, Christ beneath us,  
Christ beside us, Christ within us.  
Invisible we see you, Christ above us.  
With earthly eyes we see above us,  
clouds or sunshine, grey or bright.  
But with the eye of faith  
we know you reign,  
instinct in the sun ray,  
speaking in the storm,  
warming and moving all creation,  
Christ above us....

Invisible we see you, Christ beneath us.  
With earthly eyes we see beneath us  
stones and dust and dross....  
But with the eyes of faith,  
we know you uphold.  
In you all things consist and hang together.  
The very atom is light energy,  
the grass is vibrant,  
the rocks pulsate.  
All is in flux;  
turn but a stone and an angel moves.  
Underneath are the everlasting arms.  
Unknowable we know you, Christ beneath us.  
Inapprehensible we know you, Christ beside us.  
With earthly eyes we see men and women,  
exuberant or dull, tall or small.  
But with the eye of faith,  
we know you dwell in each.  
You are imprisoned in the ... dope fiend and the drunk,  
dark in the dungeon, but you are there.  
You are released, resplendent,  
in the loving mother, . . . the passionate bride,  
and in every sacrificial soul.  
Inapprehensible we know you, Christ beside us.

Intangible, we touch you, Christ within us.  
With earthly eyes we see ourselves,  
dust of the dust, earth of the earth....  
But with the eye of faith,  
we know ourselves all girt about of eternal stuff,  
our minds capable of Divinity,  
our bodies groaning, waiting for the revealing,  
our souls redeemed, renewed.

Intangible we touch you, Christ within us.

Christ above us, beneath us,  
beside us, within us,  
what need have we for temples made with hands? P. 84ff.

The major characteristics of Celtic spirituality can be found in MacLeod's mysticism.

1. The first was his conviction of the essential goodness of creation and of the image of God in humanity.
2. The second characteristic of Celtic spirituality MacLeod shared is the belief that, although creation is essentially good and humanity at its deepest level still bears within itself the image of God, the world and each one of us is also streaked through with terrible darkneses.
3. The third characteristic of MacLeod's Celtic spirituality, or way of seeing, was his sense of the immediacy of the spiritual realm, of God's presence in the whole of life. P. 86ff.

*A Veil Thin As Gossamer* was the final prayer of George MacLeod's to be read at that informal gathering at the Abbey on the day he died:

*Be thou, triune God, in the midst of us as we give thanks for those who have gone from the sight of earthly eyes. They, in thy nearer presence, still worship with us in the mystery of the one family in heaven and on earth....*

*If it be thy holy will, tell them how much we love them, and how we miss them, and how we long for the day when we shall meet with them again....*

*Strengthen us to go on in loving service of all thy children. Thus shall we have communion with thee, and, in thee, with our beloved ones. Thus shall we come to know within ourselves that there is no death and that only a veil divides, thin as gossamer. P.92*