



Mixology and Theology

Michael Coffey

Week Seven: Rob Roy and Celtic Theology

Mixology: Rob Roy

Unlike many cocktails, the Rob Roy appears to have a very definite origin story. In 1894 the operetta *Rob Roy* premiered on Broadway. The Waldorf Astoria hotel bartender created the cocktail and named it in honor of the premiere. Since the Rob Roy is basically a Manhattan made with Scotch whiskey instead of rye or bourbon, you could trace its origins back to the 1870's and the uncertain origins of that drink.

Since the only difference between the Rob Roy and the Manhattan is the type of whiskey, it seems appropriate to choose a Scotch with some distinctive Scotch qualities like smoke and peat. Most bartenders use a blended Scotch for Rob Roys.

Rob Roy

2 oz	Scotch whiskey	1 oz	sweet vermouth
2 dashes	Angostura bitters	1	Luxardo cherry, garnish

Fill a coupe cocktail glass with ice to chill. Add whiskey, vermouth, and bitters to a shaker half-filled with ice. Shake until very cold, about 30 seconds. Discard ice from glass. Strain cocktail into glass. Garnish with cherry.

Rob Roy Mocktail

4 oz	Dr. Pepper	2 oz	club soda
2 dashes	Angostura bitters	1 drop	liquid smoke

Luxardo cherry for garnish

In a tall glass, add Dr. Pepper, club soda, bitters, and liquid smoke. Stir just to mix. Add ice and cherry for garnish.

Theology: Celtic Theology

Introduction

It turns out, this is not a simple topic to explore. The last 150 years include many attempts to reconstruct some understanding of “Celtic Christianity,” a “Celtic Church,” and “Celtic spirituality.” Many historians view the notion of a distinct Celtic church with suspicion. It is claimed by many historians that these romantic notions of one early expression of Christianity reflect more about the needs of those in who find them appealing than they do about the actual historical reality. In recent decades, the proliferation of books and teachings on Celtic spirituality and theology has coincided with both the New Age movement and a growing dissatisfaction with institutional expressions of the church. So, let’s look at the history of Celtic Christianity, some distinctive differences within it, and the modern interpretations of it.

History

What do we mean by Celtic? We should first clarify what we mean by the word Celtic. Celtic languages were an ancient language family that developed across central Europe and migrated west. But when people refer to areas of Europe that are Celtic they often mean Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany, Cornwall, and a few small islands. As the Germanic tribes and languages spread west, these areas were the ones that remained Celtic.

As the Roman Empire spread westward, Rome controlled these Celtic regions to some degree, but because of their distance, they experienced less control and influence than other parts of Europe. Ireland was never conquered by Rome, so its cultural and religious life remained distinct from other Celtic regions where Rome had control.

Since early Christianity often spread through the Roman conquest of other lands, Christianity reached the Celtic regions early on. It is assumed that Christianity was in Ireland before St. Patrick arrived from Britain in 432.

Celtic Church

Some writers have assumed there was a Celtic church that existed separate from the Roman church. Others believe this is a false distinction, and there is little evidence of an entirely separate church body in opposition to the church of Rome. It is clear, however, that the Celtic church existed at great distance from Rome, often isolated from changes and developments happening in the rest of Europe. For this reason, some prefer to call the church of this region and period “insular Christianity.” There were some distinctive beliefs and practices among the Christians of the Celtic regions.

1. The date of Easter was calculated differently in Celtic churches than it was in the rest of the Western church. This lasted until the early 8th century.
2. Monastic life was central to the growth and spread of Christianity in Ireland, which influenced the spread of Christianity in Scotland. Irish monasteries practices a different tonsure (head shaving) from

other Christian monasteries. While many Christian monks shaved the top of their heads, leaving a ring of hair around the head, Irish monks shaved from ear to ear.

3. Ireland developed a distinctive practice of penance (confession of sin and forgiveness). While much of Christianity practices a public rite of penance, the Irish developed a private practice of confession, seen as a more pastoral and caring form of addressing individual's struggles.
4. The practice of "exile for Christ" developed in Ireland, where a person would choose to leave their homeland either temporarily or permanently, and wander, trusting God was leading them. These developed into missionary efforts in foreign lands for many.

In addition to Patrick, other early important saints for Ireland include Bridget, who started monasteries for women and for men, and Columba, who is credited with spreading Christianity from Ireland into Scotland.

Celtic Christian Revivalism began as early as the 8th and 9th centuries as later Christians wanted to recover an earlier golden age of Christianity. Hagiography of Celtic saints were written during this period. By the time of the English reformation, Protestants appealed to the Celtic Church as an earlier, pre-Roman version of Christianity to support their own claims to forming a church outside of Roman authority. The Romantic movement of the 19th century similarly looked for a Celtic Church to support its notions of a more nature-centered faith.

By the time of the 20th century, the revival movement centered on the island of Iona began. Iona is a small island off the western coast of Scotland, home to the Iona Abby. In 1938 George MacLeod founded the Iona Community, an ecumenical Christian community of men and women from different walks of life and different traditions in the Christian church committed to seeking new ways of living the Gospel of Jesus in today's world. This community is a leading force in the present Celtic Christian revival. <https://iona.org.uk/>

Popular Notions of Celtic Spirituality

1. Sacredness in creation: God is known in and through creation, not apart from it. This is seen as creation-affirming and body affirming. Christian sacraments using material things to experience the divine, are important in this theology. The well-known prayer of Saint Patrick might give a sense of this affirmation of Christ in and among us: *Christ, shield me this day: Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of every person who thinks of me, Christ in the eye that sees me, Christ in the ear that hears me.*
2. Thin places are geographical places where the presence of God is closely felt.
3. Soul friend: A person in your life who can mentor you in faith, spirituality, and growth, someone with whom you can share your struggles, doubts, and failures without fear of judgment.

4. Community as an essential way to experience God
5. The Holy Spirit is likened to a “wild goose” surprising and disrupting our lives.

What I’m Pondering on This Topic

It seems to me discussing Celtic Christianity is filled with historical nuance and plenty of interpretation and filling in the blanks. Because early Celtic churches were insular, they maintained some sense of otherness for the rest of Christianity. That leaves something of a blank slate on which to project both your dissatisfaction with current society and religion, and your longings and hopes for what you want life and spirituality to be.

Since our modern age is one leaving many feeling empty, or with a sense of mistrust of religious traditions and institutions, Celtic Christianity has given some a way to explore what they long for: something ancient, meaningful, uncorrupted, spiritual, approachable, creation-affirming, communal.

What are you longing for that traditional and institutional forms of religion are not satisfying? That might be what Celtic spirituality is actually about.

