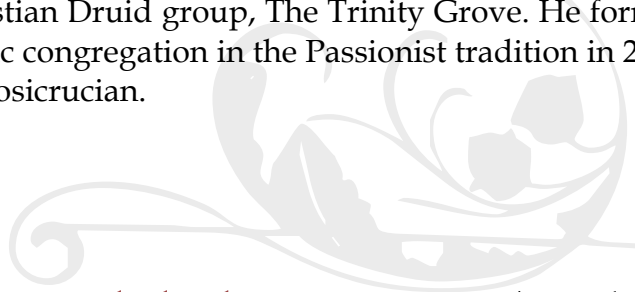


The DD Q&A: Reverend Bishop Alistair Bate



by the Druidic Dawn Community

Raised and educated in Ireland, Bishop Alistair has variously been an Anglican Benedictine Novice, an administrator in the HIV/AIDS charitable sector and a Shaker Brother in the United States for a while. After graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 2002 he had a short lay-ministry with the Unitarian Church before committing himself to the Independent Sacramental Movement. Ordained as a priest in 2005, he was instrumental in founding the Independent Liberal Catholic Fellowship and after his consecration to the episcopate he co founded the Liberal Catholic Apostolic Church with Bishops John Kersey and Andrew Linley and presently serves as a Bishop in that Church. Interested in Druidism since childhood, he joined the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids in 1999 and more recently founded his own Christian Druid group, The Trinity Grove. He formed the Companions of the Cross and Passion, a monastic congregation in the Passionist tradition in 2007 and is also a keen Freemason, Knight Templar and Rosicrucian.



DD: How did you first get involved with integrating esoteric/magical was incompatible with my Christianity. Today I understand all the strands of Western spirituality as component parts or strands in the wider Western Mystery Tradition.

Alistair: I think myself fortunate to be raised an Anglican in the south of Ireland. There are many worse religions to be and from a young age I appreciated the religious heritage I was born to. However as a young teenager I did have a spiritual awakening and was a fully paid up evangelical for a few years. As my father was a Spiritualist I also felt the influence of the esoteric and para-normal from an early age. My dad, for example, went to hear The Hon. Olivia Robertson on one occasion at the Theosophical Society in Dublin and my parents were quite indulgent when I bought my first Tarot pack at the age of twelve. Druidism was always there too, from visits to neolithic tombs in the local area, to books on the Druids in the school library. In fact there hardly seems a time when I was not aware of the druids or found them attractive in some way. Apart from my few years as a mis-guided evangelical I never felt that my interest in druids or the

Western Mystery Tradition.

DD: What do you see that these world views as having in common?

Alistair: Both the liturgical year of traditional Christianity – and by traditional I mean Catholic/Othodox/Anglican/Gnostic - and the Neo-Pagan “Wheel of the Year” both follow the journey of the sun and the seasons and both traditions are liturgical or ritualistic. Both traditions, at their best, practice ritual as poetry in motion, almost an art form as well as a means of devotion. Both traditional Christianity and Neo-Druidry facilitate the spiritual development of the individual by means of meditation and magickal/sacramental ritual and of course there is a common ethic in “do what you will and harm none”.

DD: Do you see a difference between Celtic Christianity and Christian Druidry?

Alistair: For me there is not much difference. I value both strands equally. Whilst Celtic Christianity, in the main, is focused on the lives of the Celtic Saints and those forms of devotion which have survived from the pre-reformation Celtic churches, Christian Druidism brings in another strand – the resurrected bardic system promulgated by Iolo Morganwg and the neo-Druidic orders of both cultural and fraternal Druidism. So one could say that Celtic Christianity is more Catholic, whilst Christian Druidism is more Protestant, at least culturally.

DD: What festivals do you celebrate on your path?

Alistair: Day to day, I celebrate the festivals of the Church's year and largely follow the Roman calendar, though I often pay particular attention to favourite Celtic saints. I also celebrate the cross quarter festivals, solstices and equinoxes, sometimes privately, often communally.

DD: How does your Esoteric and Theosophical interest become integrated?

Alistair: The great Dion Fortune used to talk about working with three magical rays; The Hermetic Ray of Knowledge, the Green Ray of Nature and the Devotional Ray and in a recent article on "Dion Fortune and the Plantary being" Wendy Berg writes on these rays, "we do have to combine all three, in equal measure, if our magic is going to fully explore, and encompass and express all that we may be...". This

says it better than I could ever hope to and when I read these few words recently I understood why I had been striving for so long to integrate Druidism, esoteric Christianity and my Masonic and Rosicrucian work. These three strands of the Western Mystery tradition belong together and feeding as they do different human needs, working all three has potential to lead the seeker to true wisdom as well as service to others.

It might also be said that my kind of Druidry, although traditional, is also very rooted in the practice of shamanic techniques so I find that the Green Ray helps to keep me grounded and helps to maintain my relationship with middle earth and the under world whilst the other rays have a tendency towards mystical ascent.

DD: Do you have interests in any other religions or spiritualities?

Alistair: A little perhaps.

I guess I quite like certain aspects of Hinduism and Shinto and I can see the attraction in Sufism and Buddhism but they are not for me. Generally I would feel most at home with the various shamanic systems throughout the world.

DD: What do you think about the role of inter-tradition dialogue amongst the diverse Celtic spiritual paths and "flavours" of Druidry?

Alistair: I think it's about time it happened and there are some encouraging signs. My friend the Revd Mark Townsend, for example, has done wonders with his

recent book "Path of the Blue Raven" in bringing different Celtic and Druidic voices together. I am intolerant of bad scholarship and particularly dismissive of so called hereditary Druids but I am all for dialogue with well informed people of whatever tradition.

DD: Do you offer any services to the Celtic and Druid Community?

Alistair: Last year I offered a six day introductory training in Druidry over six months, one Sunday each month. Included in this were three Druidic initiations and two Celtic Reiki attunements. The course was not overtly Christian or Pagan and probably if anything was more a mix of fraternal/cultural Druidry with Celtic shamanism, ritual and magic. Anyhow it was affordable for students, reasonably well attended and great fun to lead, so I think I shall offer it again this year. I also offer open public Druidic rituals to celebrate the solstices and equinoxes and/or the cross quarter festivals and normally these take place in or around Edinburgh, sometimes outdoors but often at the Theosophical Society in the colder weather.

DD: How do you see Christian Druidry developing in the 21st Century?

Alistair: I would like to see friendships forged between fraternal, cultural, esoteric and neo-pagan Druids. Even over the last few years the boundaries have become a bit blurred, which is a good thing. Granted there are far more pagan druids now than any other sort – all of whom would be Christian to some degree,

but I can only think that dialogue would be mutually enriching. If I were living in England or Wales I would participate enthusiastically in such dialogue. Sadly however neither the Gorsedd of Bards of the Isle of Britain, the Ancient Druid Order nor the Ancient Order of Druids are represented north of the border. There are of course groups of Christian Druids popping up in other parts of the world, most notably in the USA, so I expect we will see more Christian Druid individuals but possibly less membership of the older (Christian) Druid Orders.

DD: What have been the major influences assisting you on your path?

Alistair: A lot of ism's really! Here's a short list: Anglicanism, Catholicism, Druidism, Monasticism, Spiritualism, Shamanism and Esotericism.

DD: What would be the top five books you would recommend for us to read?

Alistair: What a difficult question!

(1) "The Druids" by Prof. Ronald Hutton – an indispensable starting point for anyone who would seek to understand modern Druidry.

(2) "Magical Christianity: the power of symbols for spiritual renewal" by Coleston Brown – a very good introduction to esoteric Christianity.

(3) "Honest to Goddess: Russia, Sophia and the Celtic Soul" by Revd Geraint ap Iorwerth (so you think Christianity is "patriarchal". Think again!)

(4) "Where Three Streams Meet" by Fr Sean O'Duinn OSB – bring the three streams of the Neolithic, Druidic and Celtic Christian together in a scholarly work on Celtic Spirituality.

(5) "The Druid Magic Handbook: Ritual Magic rooted in the Living Earth" by John Michael Greer – I love what John has done to adapt the high magical style of working to the Druid context.

DD: What are your other interests besides the spiritual side of your life? What do you like to do to have fun or enjoy yourself?

Alistair: I love to cook, eat out and travel, particularly in France, but generally I am quite focused on spiritual things which I enjoy immensely.

DD: Do you have any closing words or advice you would like to leave with us?

Alistair: Who am I to give advice! The advice is there for all of us, in the book of nature and the inspired writings of many religious traditions. Pray and be open!

Additional information is available from:

Rev. Alistair Bate

<http://www.revalistairbate.com/index.php>

Trinity Druid Grove

http://www.geocities.com/b.bishopalistair/Christian_Druid_Order.html

