Celtic Christianity?
There is a sense in which Celtic Christianity is a contradiction in terms. The Christianity born in the fifth and sixth centuries in what is now England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland was a complex array of practices and beliefs conceived through the meeting of pagan rituals and the Roman rite. In this sense, "Celtic" means indigenous and aboriginal, while "Christian" means Roman and institutional. Thus, the term Celtic is difficult to get a handle on—it resisted definition from the beginning. Nor should it surprise us that some Celtic sensibilities are set in opposition to doctrinal orthodoxy. When Roman theologians argued against the Irish practice of burying unbaptized children close to the church walls, rather than on unconsecrated ground, one local leader reassured them that the rainwater running off the eves of the church would take care of that! The Celtic cross is a reminder of this kind of openness to the grace of God's creation. Sometimes referred to as a sun cross, the cross incorporates both circle and cross, integrating sun and Son, cosmos and church.

Celtic Liturgy?
While historians cannot point to the existence of a Celtic liturgy per se, four features are often cited to describe the spirituality of the Celtic traditions: 1) physicality: both ascetical discipline and everyday domestic life are viewed as the realm of our relationship with the Divine; 2) nature: God's creation is viewed as good and affirmed as the prime source of wisdom, insight, and revelation; 3) imagination: human creativity in art and music is valued as evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit; 4) community: in social and political structures, interpersonal relationships and the Trinitarian structures of prayer, there is an affirmation of Divine mystery in the interrelationship and interdependence in all of life. Consider these examples from Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*, a nineteenth century collection from the Scottish oral tradition:

*for kindling a fire*
I will kindle my fire this morning
in the presence of the holy angels of heaven...
God, kindle Thou in my heart within
a flame of love to my neighbour,
to my foe, to my friend,
to my kindred all,
to the brave, to the knave,
to the thrall.

*in praise of Jesus*
Jesu! Jesu! Jesu!
Meet it is to praise you!
There is no plant in the ground
but is full of your virtue....
There is no bird on the wing,
there is no star in the sky,
there is nothing beneath the sun,
but proclaims your goodness.

Celtic as Contextual
John Bell of the Iona Community seldom speaks of Celtic worship. He describes their worship as "Scottish, incarnational, and biblical." The challenge is to build upon the poetic, musical, artistic, and spiritual riches of the Celtic traditions and contextualize them for our time. Like the ancient spiritual discipline of pilgrimage, this is more a process than a product. For signposts on this journey: see the work of Kathy Galloway or J. Philip Newell; and visit www.iona.org.uk and www.united-church.ca/worship/liturgy/ celtic.shtm.

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