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HEART - FOOD

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The person taking charge of worship on a Sunday morning has several problems on a Saturday night not the least of which is the prayers for the morning service or services.

Where are they to come from? from your own life, your own experience, your own certainties and your own doubts - or from another source?

From your head, or from your heart? If from your head, your head will direct you to the books of prayer for the Sundays of the year, and you will absorb the fact that this coming Sunday is Rogation Sunday, and part of the prayer of confession given for this particular Sunday, from a prayer adapted from Devotions following the Litany of the Saints in the Roman Missal (don't tell John Knox!) says -

*"O thou
whose property it is always to have mercy and to spare,
receive our humble petition:*



*that we, and all thy servants who are bound by the chains of sin,
may, by the compassion of thy goodness,
mercifully be absolved."*

This is language redolent of construction: or artifice. If from your heart, you will disdain the books and write a prayer which reflects where you are on your spiritual journey, although what it really reflects may well be the fact that you have just had a week which started badly and then fell away, a week of difficult meetings or severely trauchled people. And yet this writing of prayers is a discipline which saves us from the perils of extempore prayer ... the greatest peril of which is that you end up saying the same thing almost every week, only in slightly different words. When I was a teenager my own revered minister prayed the prayer of intercession every Sunday from his heart ... and every Sunday we were reminded, quite properly of course, that God is the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. (James 1: 17). The problem was that there was no variableness in the prayer, and we found that our attention was not really challenged.

The person leading worship has a choice of language to make - stately, magisterial, sober and measured? Or lively, colloquial, street-wise and conversational? - The symphony or the sound-bite? Both are flawed. The symphony prayer lifts you up and away, and leaves you hanging there, not anchored to earth: the sound-bite prayer sounds racy and relevant, but it dwells on the troubles of earth a little too fixatedly and it often fails to lift you at all: it just helps you to recognise how many problems there are. Their language is the language of speech.



To put it bluntly, the tone, the style, the note struck by a prayer will either stop at the Cross or journey to the empty tomb.

Where do the prayers come from? The foot of the Cross or the empty tomb? Do they dwell on our weakness, our fecklessness and folly? Or do they sing of the power of God to renew, to make Edens of hope to flourish again in the wasteland of human despair?

The Celtic prayers of which I'd like to speak are not the product of a school or the work of a committee or the outpourings of a power-group or the sparks thrown up by a passing trend. They can be both mystical and earthy. They are reverent and yet at ease with the thought of God. They soothe and they can startle.

Best of all: they are suggestive, they open windows - and then invite you, coax you into clean fresh air. They start off trains of thought. They do not say it all for you, so that your only response is to receive them as a consumer. They are recipes for trying out, testing, adapting; you can add to them if they seem to be lightweight, take away from them if they seem too heavy or too sweet. They nourish that part of me which is tired of argument and reason and careful explanation and - worst of all - didactic pomposity. We have had too much prose in our lives, especially for the last five weeks or so: politicians to the left of us, politicians to the right of us, and not an orator among them with passion and flair married to rich and varied imagery and silver-tongued dexterity. Ah well - Let's share some poetry now: some images from the Celtic treasure-trove.



The virtue of this exercise, this experiment, is that the Litany does not have a slant to it: no point of view to impose. This is simply narrative, but narrative made poetry. It is a story becoming more than a story. It presupposes, of course, a familiarity with the Bible sequence of events, describing Jesus' life. It is selective, naturally, for to do a complete summarisation of His life here would take many pages. So: these are high-lights, key moments, milestones. 75% of the Litany closes in on the last days of Jesus, so its natural habitat as an act of worship is during Holy Week. It moves forward with restless, breathless speed: the kiss - the betrayal of Judas: the chains - He is led away: the toy crown - the crown of thorns: the leaden sky: darkness at Calvary: Christ of surprises: Easter morning --- empty nets, full nets: St John 21, and the picnic by the lake - O Christ of pleading - the Lord who intercedes for us for ever: as we say these words, visualise what the short-hand of the minimal text is summoning up in your imagination: and let's note, too, the mood changes of the story.

A CELTIC LITANY

O Christ of Mary
Christ of the Cradle
O Christ of the Temple
Christ of Jordan
O Christ of the Word
Christ of the Wilderness
O Christ of the lakeside
Christ of the wedding
O Christ of the mountain
Christ of the healing
O Christ of prayer
Christ of the five loaves



*O Christ of palms
Christ of the long whip
O Christ of the double coin
Christ of the brittle bread
O Christ of the cup
Christ of the garden
O Christ of the kiss
Christ of the chains
O Christ of the Courtyard
Christ of the palace
O Christ of the high balcony
Christ of the toy crown
O Christ of the stumbling
Christ of the torn robe
O Christ of the nails
Christ of the promises
O Christ of the vinegar
Christ of the last thirst
O Christ of desolation
Christ of the ripped veil
O Christ of the leaden sky
Christ of the loud cry
O Christ of silence
Christ of the pierced side
O Christ of the shroud
Christ of waiting
O Christ of rising
Christ of surprises
O Christ of the locked door
Christ of the empty nets
O Christ of full nets
Christ ascending
O Christ of pleading
Christ of our nights
O Christ of our days
Have mercy on us.*



Nearly a hundred years ago the *Carmina Gadelica* was published in Edinburgh.

Alexander Carmichael had devoted most of his life to the collection of Gaelic songs, chants and incantations; travelling incessantly, traversing the Outer Hebrides to engage people in conversation and to entice from them fragments of a culture which lived in memory, in tradition.

Carmichael wrote what was a spoken language of longing, beseeching, yearning. Some would have said, by so doing, he did some violence to its essential spirit.

Over 500 poems, some very short, some quite lengthy, represent the first 4 volumes of the *Carmina Gadelica*.

Who were his sources? Elderly people alive between 1860 to 1900. Let us say: people born around the end of the 1790's and the beginning of the 1800's. To help us focus on that, let's assume that the voices coaxed into song by Carmichael as he sat hunched over his notebooks, pen in hand, belonged to people whose first cries from the cradle had happened maybe in the declining years or the last days of Robert Burns.

Carmichael himself believed that the material he was allowed to garner dated back to the years between 1600 and 1650. Yet even this dating is vague and inconclusive: oral tradition - the handing down of stories and poems by word of mouth - regards a century as a blink of the eye.



Let's reflect, humbly, that the vanished voices which gave us the *Carmina Gadelica* were at a far remove from us: their owners were crofters and fishermen and fisherwomen, the possessors of secrets we would love to unlock: I mean secrets of survival: secrets of bodily survival and healing, medicines, salves, the use of herbs, the knowledge of properties present in roots and leaves and ingenious mixtures of these essences. They were readers of the sky, these people, readers of the sea: they had to be. A lack of observation, a lapse of visual surveillance of the elements, was punished without mercy.

You can write down a word, a phrase, a line, a verse - you cannot write down the tone of voice in which it was uttered. You cannot write down those invisible signals which a speaker sends you when they give tongue to what is in their heart and I mean by that, you cannot convey to a person reading them in cold print what the words in question meant to the one who said them out loud. The speaker's attitude to what he or she says - their relationship to what they say - is indefinable, mercurial, highly charged.

Two illustrations: when the disciples who have come to Emmaus in the company of the stranger realise that the One who has blessed the bread and given it to them is the Christ they say "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the scriptures?" They are testifying to a phenomenon - what they have heard on the road is the voice of one standing inside the words that speak of Him - so much so that the scriptures about Him are Him. They are His in a very special way. The disciples heard a tone of voice quite beyond their power to equal or replicate.



And another illustration, a much humbler one: when I was small I would listen to my Granny tell Bible Stories. Her fervour, her rapt involvement in these stories made my heart burn within me: her voice took on a rhythm and a warmth that told me how closely, how familiarly, these stories belonged to her another kind of ownership from the ownership whereby Christ claims from Himself what is written about Him, but ownership none the less.

To recap: the *Carmina Gadelica* is a harvest of Gaelic poems, blessings, even mantras, gleaned assiduously by Alexander Carmichael, published in the year 1900. Carmichael did a prodigious thing and performed an invaluable service. In the year 1961 G.R.D. MacLean published his version of the *Carmina*: 535 poems, translated from the Gaelic and rendered into rhyming verse to make the Gaelic retain something of its original flow and suppleness when rendered so into English. MacLean meant well, but the result is awkward, stilted, forced and sometime hopelessly fey. For example - MacLean's version of a poem called "The Three":

*"In the Father's name,
And in the Son's name,
In the Spirit's name,
Three the same, One in name.*

.....

*God, my holiness,
Christ my holiness,
Sprit holiness,
Three to bless, holiness*



*Help of hope the Three,
Help of love the Three,
Help of sight the Three,
And my knee stumbling free,
From my knee stumbling free."*

All is well till the last two lines: then, the need to compress (to say nothing of the need to find a rhyme) leaves us wondering if the writer is talking of one arthritic limb which causes him trouble, or whether he is referring to a part of his body which has all the room in the world to go staggering along while the rest of him remains rigid. I exaggerate: but the point has to be made that G.R.D. MacLean, in trying to give us the ***Carmina***, sometimes has to try too hard. That said, we owe him unstinting praise for making the effort to introduce the ***Carmina*** to a wider public.

Now, in this decade, we have access to yet another version of the ***Carmina Gadelica*** - Carmichael's own work, edited by John McInnes, and available for less than twelve pounds: published by Floris Books. This edition contains Carmichael's own introduction to the original edition, the 1900 edition. In this introduction, Carmichael tells us: describing his roaming Commission to the Outer Hebrides -

"during all the years that I lived and travelled among them, night and day, I never met with incivility, never with vulgarity, never with aught but courtesy. I never entered a house without the inmates offering me food or apologising for their want of it "

Ah - did you catch that? -

"I never entered a house without the inmate offering me food or apologising for their want of it."



Carmichael goes on to give a pen-picture of the lifestyle of these people who sometimes had food and sometimes didn't -

*"The people work in unison in the field during the day,
and discuss together in the house at night.
This meeting is called 'ceilidh' "*

Ah! That has a ring of truth about it. Contrast Carmichael's word with the words of G.R.D. MacLean - remembering that 61 years separate the writers. MacLean says -

*"(They were) a people who were of necessity individualists,
and where church was nature."*

61 years after Carmichael, MacLean has begun to weave an aura of myth into stark reality - and this process of romanticisation is of course the seductive trap into which we, 97 years after 1900, can also be drawn and beguiled. How easy it would be to visualise a scenario of the West of Scotland and the Western Isles in which sturdy, clean-limbed, agile Highlanders populate a kind of twilight world of rustic simplicities, living off nature's bounty, untrammelled by noise, pollution, stress-levels and worries about Ecoli. Their waking thoughts suffused by gentle piety, their horizons tinged on every side by the purple heather and the gently rolling sea and for a backdrop, majestic or crepuscular, the blue remembered hills clad soothingly with acre upon acre of the green, green grass of home or the immortal rocks upreared to the sky.



Tosh! Not only cotton-wool but pink cotton-wool. A day after the "Westhaven," a trawler out of Arbroath, went down with the loss of its crew, Christopher Rush the writer from the West Neuk of Fife wrote, in the "Scotsman" -

*"In my grandfather's earlier days,
during the season of the East Anglian fishing,
the village was emptied of men,
and only women and dafties awaited their return -
which was never accomplished without loss of life.*

*A death-ship always seemed to spread a certain aura on the sea
even without the benefit of theatrical black sails . . . "*

and Rush goes on to describe how the fishermen he remembers . . .

*"came home with a few pounds or shillings,
navigated with their eyes,
smelt herring in the air, followed the shoals by instinct.
And they did this on beef puddings
and rhubarb duffs, Gregory's Powders
and Carlton's Dutch Drops,
and with red flannel bandages from their women's petticoats
soaked in paraffin,
to take away the pains of the jellyfish
and the saltwater boils."*

Small wonder, then, that the poems/prayers of the **Carmina** often feature appeals to God to keep the seafarer, to guard the wayfarer.

*"God be with me to protect,
The Spirit there to strengthen
.....
No time, no year, no hope, no fear
No age, no space, no work, no place*



No depth nor any height without Him"

or again -

*"With God be my walking this day
With Christ be my walking this day,
With Spirit my walking this day"*

In particular, since we have been listening to Christopher Rush explain the heavy price that a fishing Community pays for its way of life, the prayers for safety at sea are pointed and fervent -

*"Be the ship blest,
By God the Father blest.
Be the ship blest
And by God the Son blest.
Be the ship blest.
By God the Spirit blest"*

And urgent, simple, unadorned as that prayer may be, the following prayer leaps out of time-bound considerations to marry together the image of a star to navigate by with the image of a Jesus who conveys us through the travail of our earthly life to the safe haven of the life to be -

*"May the Son of the Virgin,
The Son of Mary Himself,
Be a kindly lantern
Over your head,
A guiding and shining one
For the wide rough ocean of eternity."*

There, too, is a characteristic motif of the prayers in the *Carmina* - the quick and easy leap from the things of time to the timeless -



*"From the new light of today
Be Thou bringing me
To the guiding light of eternity."*

But it was not only voyages and trips to the shoals of herring that awoke the Highland believer's awareness that he must take nothing for granted: sleep and darkness were seen to be unknown territory too, uncharted seas where God was summoned to hold and defend - with a truly child-like directness. The Sleep Sanctification prayer from Benbecula may shock us, sophisticated people as we imagine we are, with its utter disdain for all pious grovelling: this is the language of sublime simplicity -

*"With God I will lie me down,
God Himself will lie down with me.*

*God and Christ and the Holy Ghost
And the cross of the nine white angels,
As Three and as One my host to shield me,
From the brow of my forehead
To the tips of my toes."*

A sublime simplicity and an unaffected directness also reside in the prayer called "The Trinity at Night"

*"With God will I lie down this night
With Christ will I lie down this night,
With Spirit I lie down this night"*

. . . . and as soon as I begin talking about "sublime simplicity" and "unaffected directness" I hear alarm bells going off in my head. A note of condescension has entered this discourse: I have begun to be a reviewer offering tit bits to an



audience, and the essential point is beginning to be lost, namely: that the prayers and poems which Carmichael plucked from oblivion were never meant to be evaluated: they were said, sung, changed for decade after decade with never a thought to their becoming public property. If these prayers are free of posturing, free of grandiloquence, free of any conscious striving for effect, it is because they spring from a privacy which in fact Carmichael breached when he wrote them down. Gaelic prayers are confidential in every sense of that word: hundreds of them are about a personal relationship with God about which the speaker makes no claims: for which the speaker makes no apologies: and in which the speaker seeks no audience. This must mean, I think, that when we encounter Celtic spirituality as expressed in the *Carmina Gadelica* we do so as eavesdroppers, and the prayers or the poems have the quality of an overheard conversation. Now this must give us pause, or at least, force us to examine ourselves to see if we are quite at home with the possibility that we are trespassing.

The Italians have a phrase *Traddutore traditore* - the translator is a traitor. But there are two translations going on when we read G aelic prayers in English: one is the linguistic exercise, the words themselves. The other is the historical and geographical displacement whereby we transplant a flower that flourishes on the Western sea-board and we try to bed it down in a totally different kind of soil and a different atmosphere. This is an activity we partake in every time we read the Bible in church: a timeless Word is spoken but it is rooted in another culture, another time, another place - and we do well to remember that we can take on board the Bible's language and thought-forms far too glibly.



Two examples: one trivial, maybe, one more telling. In Isaiah 40 we have a vivid picture of God the shepherd -

*"He will feed his flock like a shepherd,
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young."*

That is all accessible to us, we think. When we picture a shepherd carrying a lamb in his bosom, we visualise a rugged hill-man clutching to his manly chest a wee white lamb - although I defy any man here to tell me that it is a manly chest he conjures up in his mind's eye when he hears the word "bosom." Be that as it may: the word "bosom" in its Biblical sense is a pouch created by a gold of material being pulled up through the belt of the tunic and hanging at the shepherd's side.

Very briefly, the Lord's Prayer encourages us to ask God for our daily bread. "Give us this day our daily bread." What does that mean to a worshipper in 1997, whose local national supermarket boasts a product list, for bread, of hundreds of items? The Corporate product list for Tesco as at 4 p.m. last Saturday, detailing what they call their branch replenishment systems, for bread products runs to a staggering 236 different entries.

"Give us today our daily bread" becomes a prayer we have to re-discover in the light of such plenty, such choice, such bewildering versatility. More: we have to rediscover how to mean it. When we read Gaelic prayers for protections for the healing of diseases either in animals or in people, we are being invited to step out



of our sophistication and re-learn what life is like on the knife-edge. We think we have tamed the darkness and domesticated the universe: banished the grim spectre of danger: put in fight of looking shadow of poverty and the malevolent, mocking phantom of disease. The Highland believer did not have such luxuries. He did not expect, as we do, to grow old or to be at ease in Zion.

His prayers were the song of his heart, but a heart dumbfounded by the sheer otherness of God, the brute force of creation, the untamed sea, the resisting land. He cried for help, this soul made naked and defenceless often, and he cried out sweetly in words which his mother had sung to him as he clung to her knee. In a real sense, the Highlander knew that praise and appeal were both alike his mother-tongue. He cried out in poetry, not in speeches: in pictorial images, not in propositions: in melodies paced to his breathing, not in statements with all the leaden dullness of a Civil Service memo.

Listen to these cries, taken at random, in which he revelled in language which leaps from the throat to give God back His mystery and His majesty -

*O God of the heaving sea
Christ the King of all might
The Maker of sea and hill
The glorious Holy Three
The God of life
The King of all the world
The Star-Son
Chief of Chiefs
King of the elements*



King of Kings
Jesus the Christ of the line of King David
Jesus the Lamb of the Garden
The glorious King of life
The all-sufficing Lord Christ of love
The perfect Spirit of guidance

Holy Father of glory
Kind Father of power

King of the moon and the sun
Thou loved and fragrant king of the stars
Holy Father of truth
Kindly Father of mercy
God of virtues
Christ is the Priest of rising again
Christ is the Priest of love
Christ the Priest of the bread
Christ the Priest of the shed blood
Christ the Priest of the wine

These images are often repeated, sometimes simplified, sometimes extended: they become a refrain, and sometimes they take on some talismanic quality. Billy Connelly talked once about comedy being a device to keep the witch at bay. There is little doubt that some prayers, ready to hand, lying in readiness on the tongue became also devices to ward off by evil repetition, evil from outside in the shape of disaster or injury and also devices to quell the roars and whispers of our inner demons. Let us not, for any sake, take a superior view of this. We have innumerable ploys to set about the stilling of our psychic pain. It would be tempting to suggest that "Eastenders," "Brookside" and "Coronation Street" are the little families we flee to to reassure ourselves that our own family ups and downs are not too unbearable. The Celtic believer delighted in the family: in the



togetherness, visible of invisible of the Clan to which he belonged, and then, more practically, in the family whose proximity to each other was heightened (and sometimes darkened) by the living conditions of the times. But there is another sense in which family impinged on the Highlander: firstly and glowingly, his awareness of the Trinity, the community of love which binds the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. But then - added to God the Holy Three is the family of heaven, whose members are saints and angels, frequently addressed by name and comfortably, easily accepted as mentors, guardians, benign influences and watchful allies. In one remarkable poem, Mary is extolled and exalted -

*"My heart is content
To kneel at thy footstool,
My heart is content
In thy favour and hearing*

*To come into thy presence
Beauteous one of smiles,
To come into thy presence
Beauteous one of women
To come into thy presence
Queen-maiden of mankind
To come into thy presence
Queen-maiden of the world.*

*To come into thy presence
O flower-garland of branches.
To come into thy presence
Bright garland of the heavens"*

And the poem goes on, unrestrained and uninhibited, to give Mary the names

*"O Mother of the Lamb of Grace
O Mother of the Paschal Lamb*



*O vessel of peace,
O fountain of healing,
O well-spring of grace,
Thou jewel of the clouds
Thou jewel of the stars
O Mother of black sorrow
The star of the ocean
The star of the earth
The star of night,
The sun of day
The star of angels
The star of paradise"*

In this and other poems, there is an almost exact correspondence of thought and expression with much of the Akathistos Hymn in praise of Mary which is sung on the Saturday of the fifth week of Lent: 12 stanzas of 12 lines each! It should not surprise us at all that the Russian Orthodox believer and the Celt at prayer should seem to have some common ground: the colours that glow from the icon, reds and blues, purples and gold, glow equally from the prayers of the Highlander, though we err, and err disastrously. if we confuse the icon with a pretty picture, a picture to be admired: and we err, too, if we think of the prayers in the *Carmina Gadelica* as forming any fixed, static liturgical prescription. Let's remember that all the people of the Outer Hebrides did not know they possessed such a treasury of religious lore till Carmichael swept the floor of the West for the lost coins of a previous necklace, and having found them, bound them together.

There are gaps, of course, in the topics dealt with in the *Carmina* - a lack of Easter material, an absence of Pentecost prayers, a dearth of references to parts of the Christian Year: again, one can only reflect that the Highlander was not



working in concert with his fellows to produce a system, a definitive body of work. Nor was Carmichael, I suspect, working to a remit of his own: or should that be, an agenda of his own. Carmichael was not proceeding to a plan which made him specialise now here, now there, in an attempt to be comprehensive. Carmichael was a blank page offered to a widely scattered community for them to fill up with whatever store of personal devotions they were prepared to share. He took what he was given: and sometimes he happened upon pure gold -

*"Though I had no bed
I lacked not for sleep
For Christ's arm was my pillow
His eye supreme was my protection.*

*Though I was forlorn
Hunger came not near me,
For Christ's Body was my food
The Blood of Christ, it was my drink.*

*Though the stones were diamonds,
Though they were dollars of gold,
Though the whole ocean were wine,
Offered to me of right;*

*Though the earth were of cinnamon
And the lakes were of honey
Dearer were a vision of Christ
In peace, in love, in pity."*

In closing, I must answer some questions which must occur to all of us. Why does the Celtic way of prayer appeal to us? For me, the simple answer is: the Celtic way of prayer reaches parts of me that other prayers don't ... and it



refreshes me. Jeanette Winterson, in her book, *Boating for Beginners*, makes this startling and unorthodox claim for the Bible -

*"It's very potent, that Punch and Judy show look ...
almost every quasi-revolt has gone back to it,
because when the heart revolts it wants outrageous things
that cannot possibly be factual.
Robes and incense,
and larger-than-life,
and miracles and heroes.
It's all there, it's heart-food ..."*

There it is, in a nutshell - heart-food. I've had it with prayers that treat me as a mass of mistakes and treat God as a stern but indulgent driving-test official. There is no self-forgetfulness in the remorseless analysis of how wrong, rebellious, useful, selfish, misguided, arrogant, proud, stupid, careless, forgetful, devious and silly the human race can be. That is actually a kind of narcissism, to dwell on the desperate state of humanity. "Love keeps no score of wrongs," says Paul. To me that means that God is desperately bad at arithmetic. Why do we need confessions that try to rectify the Almighty's willingness to wipe the slate clean, and give us a fresh start? Reciting your sins can be just as much of an ego-trip as boasting you have no significant sins to report on.

Can we use the riches of the *Carmina Gadelica* in public worship? The answer is - yes, but with hard labour, with tentative confidence, with courageous risk. We



have compiled a Communion Service in St John's using the *Carmina* - it's called "This is our morning bread." Something like 15 to 20 entries, from all over the *Carmina Gadelica* were plundered to yield up a phrase here, an image, a line, a couple of words, and the end-result is still an experiment, still a basis only for the better work that will maybe one day appear out of our fumbled, quavering beginning. But this is the great power of the *Carmina* - its power to be suggestive.

*"Grant us to sing
in the lovely gates
of your Kingdom"*

says the *Carmina* - and the impulse to contrast that, to complement it, is given, seized upon and rendered thus - this is our contribution -

*"in Him,
through Him,
with Him,
who taught us to sing,
here,
in the lowly gates -
Our Father"*

In days gone by we had a sermon on Christmas Eve. Now, we put out the lights, we read by candle-glow, two readers, one at each end of the nave,

*"The day of light
Has come upon us,
Christ is born
Of the Virgin.*

*The Holy Son of God
To shield us.*



*Behold the kindler of stars
On the crests of the clouds
and the choirs of heaven
praising Him.*

*Son of the Mary of graces,
Mary the loveliest,
Joy would it be for me
To be in the fields
Of Your riches."*

Heart-food.

And finally - again on Christmas Eve, in St John's, the scene is set. A church plunged into darkness. The choir wait at the West door, candles lit, preparing to walk down the centre aisle singing "Once in Royal David's City." We have had a half-hour of a ceilidh, singing carols. Now the Watch-night worship is beginning. In the vestibule, three police officers in uniform have left their patrol-cars to eavesdrop on the magic, the ancient mystery. They stand there, gazing in like children again, caught between duty and wonder. One of the ministers gives the Bidding for Christmas Eve, straight out of the *Carmina* -

*"This night is the long night.
It will snow and it will drift.
White snow there will be till day.
White moon there will be till morn.*

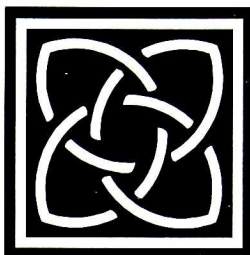
*This night is the Eve
Of the great Nativity.*



*This night is born
Mary Virgin's Son.
This night is born Jesus,
Son of the King of Glory."*

Heart-food.

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Editor's Note: It was **Carmina Gadelica** which was the inspiration of the Celtic Services, Prayers and Blessings in **Common Order**.

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