

Of signs and navigators: the Jonah imperative

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory paper seeks to incorporate narrative and cross-cultural observations in a consideration of some complementary aspects of a) processes of alienation from community, and b) ways in which we personally authenticate the Christian story. It draws no formal conclusions, but encourages openness to various ways of appreciating "context" in relation to faith and spiritual development — and invites a response.

INTRODUCTION

I offer a ministry that comes out of my own experiences and I am attentive to those experiences to understand spirituality and theology. My perception is that our spirituality is about our whole life in relation to the God who is. Theology is the story we tell about our experiences of God. It is not the experience itself but the telling of the experience. Was it Heidegger who said "there is no content without a context"? In this exploratory paper, the reader will find that I jump themes dramatically as I introduce my story. My experiences of life and of God have not been tidy or orderly and I take the liberty here of attempting to speak authentically from my experiences in various contexts and so weave together a theology. The church is very frightened of allowing authentic voices the room to speak their own truth, with the result that the God stories typically carry a rhetoric of established goodness and recoil from the holy profanity of this world. "Jeezlum Crust" was my father's unconscious way of practicing God's presence in word and deed. The voice of his untold story helps to keep me honest.

THE JONAH IMPERATIVE

¹ *As it was, as it is, as it shall be evermore
O Thou Triune of grace!
With the ebb, with the flow
O Thou Triune of grace!
With the ebb, With the flow.*

CULTURES and communities ebb and flow but the Triune grace is an ever-presence. From ancient times, through all the ages into the present this rise and fall, high and low, ebb and flow are evident. In the flow time, a community sings and dances. The experience of community at such a time is liberating, creative and life-giving. The story the community celebrates is experienced as nourishing faith-food. Community breakdown is a sign of an ebb tide. During this low tide, the experience of people no longer resonates with their own rituals, celebrations and life-giving stories. An authentic context for the community's story is lost. People become alienated. At low ebb times, the story frequently becomes manipulative, controlling and fear-full. The power of the story becomes abusive. Life is dishonoured rather than celebrated.

Still, the power of interconnected life reaches out, desperate for nourishment. What if the experience of alienation is gift?² What if alienation, as T. Green suggests, is God's way of calling the people back to an authentic story that celebrates God's presence. All people need a story to live by — not any story, but one that is good enough to give hope today and to carry one over the river of death. Such a story feeds faith but nourishes only within a living context. Without that context, the faith-food cannot be swallowed and one becomes hungry, a rack of dry bones, broken, lost, forsaken and alienated. Without such a context, the whole community is lost at sea.

Throughout the ages, despite these ebb tides, there have always a few within the community who retained hope. When the tide returned these hungry ones, smelling good food, prepared of it what they needed. Then, fed, they gave to others.

¹ *Carmina Gadelica* II, 217.

² T. Green, *God's Way of Calling the People Back*.

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² T. Green, S.J., *Darkness in the Marketplace*.

The "Celtic Empire" described by P. Beresford Ellis³ was a culture that knew the ebb and flow. Within the Celtic cultural stream there are stories — such as those of *The Mabinogion* — that cite ample evidence of a once-strong, loving and honourable people. Say translators Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones: "no-one doubts that much of the subject matter of these stories is very old indeed, coeval maybe with the dawn of the Celtic world."⁴ But by the time of Paul, their tide had ebbed. The *Keltoi* as they were called by the Greeks, were victims of conquest, enslavement and acculturation; their intellectual and religious leaders, the druids, had been persecuted almost out of existence by the Romans. The causes, though, are not an issue here. They can arise from within a culture as compellingly from within a society as without. The point is that their own stories were no longer sustaining, their energies had dissipated, their values had weakened and become confused. They experienced alienation and had within their number those who were hungrily seeking nourishment. Paul's view of them was kinder than that of Romans like Caesar. He wrote to the Galatae: "You have never been unfair to me ... though my illness was a trial to you, you did not show any distaste or revulsion, instead you welcomed me as a messenger of God ... what has happened to the utter contentment you had then. For I can testify to you that you would have plucked your eyes out, were that possible, and given them to me."⁵

There are many signs of this alienation-driven seeking today, from New Age movements, drug cultures, corporate identity development, football frenzy, superstar adoration to quick-fix Jesus junkiedom. Is it possible that this hungry alienation is a gift: God's way of making pilgrims who search for the nourishment of truth, for faith-food? At times these seekers are empowered by a re-authenticated story that comes on the new tide but at other times they gorge themselves undiscerningly on poisonous or unhealthy food. The Galatians it seems did both. "You began your race well; who came to obstruct you and stop you obeying the truth?"⁶

It seems then that the seekers need Ways of Wisdom to guide them. "Everyman, I will go with thee and be thy guide, In thy most need to go by thy side."⁷

ONCE upon a time there were people of Galatia. Their tide had ebbed. Paul came to them, telling a great story of a man whose birth had been heralded by angels and supernatural signs. Paul's story told of how this man had been wise, even as a child. The child grew to be a healer, a teacher, a riddler, a miracle worker, a hero over death. He was known as a great King, a beloved son, a bringer of light. An acknowledged wise one, John the Baptist, who dressed in animal skins and spoke of a God who could raise up children from stones, had pointed this man out as one who would make a fire that would never go out. The story said that when the Baptist performed a water ritual on this man called Jesus, a dove came down upon Jesus. And a voice from heaven spoke saying: "this is my Son, the Beloved, my favour rests on him." The *Keltoi* received this story recognising Paul's experiences as he related them, to be Truthful.

Within the *Keltoi*/Celtic tradition, a great leader was of course heralded by supernatural signs and a miraculous birth. Such a leader's wisdom was frequently recognised as a child and they invariably grew to be heroes, healers, teachers, riddlers, story-tellers and miracle workers. The Jesus story echoes so much of the sign-lore which enabled Celts long before to recognise figures such as Lugh and Cúchulainn. The same lore would again attach, centuries later, to the stories of Arthur and permeate the stories of St Brigid and hagiographies of the early Celtic Saints. The *Keltoi* respected the authority and wisdom of the wise ones who prepared the way for new leaders. Stones and fire were deeply important to them and the worthy keeper of the fire would ensure that the fire never went out. These important leaders were regularly associated with birds that guided them on their way. So, hungry for new life-giving story, the Galatians, imperfectly perhaps, embraced the Christ story.

Four hundred years later this Christ story was being recorded and saved in Ireland by the Celts like St Brigid of Kildare.⁸ Mary Low writes: "Newly-Christianised people of Ireland gradually developed their own distinctive style and idiom, not out of any great desire to be different, but because they had

³Peter Beresford Ellis, *The Celtic Empire*.

⁴ Introduction to *The Mabinogion*

⁵ *Galatians* 4: 12-15

⁶ *Galatians* 5:7

⁷ Introduction to Jones & Jones. *The Mabinogion*.

⁸ Many sources including Alice Curtaigne, *St Brigid of Ireland* and Alan MacQuarrie, *The Saints of Scotland*.

no choice. They could not somehow step outside their own mental and cultural horizons in order to receive and understand Christianity. The same was true of the Jewish followers of Jesus. Irish culture was changed by Christianity certainly, but it would also be true to say that Christianity was changed by Irish culture. In order for it to take root at all, it had to be received and make sense in terms of what Irish people already held most dear, in other words, in terms of native values and belief-systems."⁹ Low's thesis is reiterated by Simone Weil: "to redeem the truths of the myths, they must be translated." Her conviction was that the archetypal poetries of people everywhere re-state the same truths in different metaphoric languages.¹⁰

THERE IS a way of wisdom that is unique to North America but in which you will hear echoes of many other ways of understanding. Writes Hyemeyohsts Storm: "The Sun Dance Way of the Plains Indian people is understood in the story of the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel is the very way of life of the people. It is an understanding of the universe. It is the Way given to the peace chiefs, the Teachers, and by them to others."¹¹

Journeying outwith my own community, and seeking an authentic story, I encountered this Medicine Wheel wisdom tradition. Within this Way of Wisdom, lies the understanding that we are all born on a place on the Wheel. Some are born in the North in wisdom; some in the East, in illumination; some in the West in introspection; others in the South in innocence. At the Centre is *Wakan Tanka*, the Great Spirit, God. Life is a "vision quest", always seeking to see the Centre from a new perspective. The vision quest is a way for us to discover ourselves, to learn how we perceive of ourselves, and to find our relationship with the world around us.

This pagan — or earth-connected (viz. the Latin *pagus*, a "rural district") — Sun Dance teaching helped me to read the signs of my own North American story and gave me helpful insights into the pagan (earth-connected) roots and essence of the Gospel story. I found myself, as a woman, finding a new passion to authenticate the Christ within my own culture and context, understanding that I cannot know Christ outside of my own experience. My own experience is one of alienation.

The Shorter Oxford Dictionary gives various meanings for the verb alienate: "to turn away, transfer" ... it associates the word with ideas like "estranged, foreign in nature" ... and "the action of transferring ownership to another; diversion of anything to a different purpose, the loss or derangement of mental faculties and insanity".

There are many different kinds of alienation, But alienation is always relational. Alienation needs a starting place, a context from which alienation can occur. The alienation is, in a sense, steered or defined by the context that alienates. A culture defines its member communities. It has and provides a story. Within a community or society, a story can become fragmented, distorted or contaminated through outside pressures or internal abuses. The community can lose track of the wisdom within the story, even of the story itself. Individuals who most feel the pain, anger and frustrations of alienation may be those who most acutely witness or experience the consequences of their community's estrangement from its own self. I suggest that such individual alienation, where it does not lead to self-destructiveness, apathy or self-delusion, often energises a restless, longing, passion to seek authenticity, even to prophesy. This almost invariably requires a journey outwith the individual's impaired community and damaged context.

Journeying away, one begins to glimpse other ways of understanding, Simone Weil wrote that, should one turn aside from Christ to seek Truth one does not go far before falling into His arms, for Christ is Truth.¹²

I believe that all Truth has a common source. The Truth within other wisdoms is always heard as echoes resounding within the encircling rock of one's own cultural context — there is no other place, after all, but one's own consciousness where one can go to hear it — and one recognises its authority. It is an authentic voice and it encourages the individual to continue seeking.

⁹ M. Low, *Celtic Christianity and Nature*, p.4.

¹⁰ S. Weil, *Waiting for God*.

¹¹ Hyemeyohsts Storm, *Seven Arrows*, p. 1 ff.

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Is the seeker a navigator? Do journeyers know how to read the signs? Or has their alienation cut them off from that wisdom? They seem able to recognise the wisdom when they encounter it. But a navigator has gained the foundations of a particular wisdom before s/he journeys.

I JOURNEYED away to Aotearoa (New Zealand). *Tena kotou, tena kotou, tena kotou katoa.* (Greetings to you all.) The smells, the sounds and the tastes of the sea enveloped me. A *tangata whenua* (people of the land, the first people) voice challenged me: don't ask me what I do. That doesn't matter. Ask me *where* I come from. *Where* is my *marae* (community, place of refuge, centre of relationship), my *maunga* (mountain), *te awa* (river)? My people? I must tell my *whakapapa* (genealogy). *Tihei mauri ora!* (*tihei* = carry; *mauri ora* = life principle, source of the emotions, hidden principle of vitality — this is a very difficult expression to translate but asserts a commonality and urges a moving forward of the essentials, and is a phrase frequently heard in oratory on a *marae*).

This is where I come from. Let me tell you my story. My mountains are the Drumlins of Northumberland County, Ontario, Canada. My river is the Crowe. I am Hart and Helliwell, Irish and German-Irish meeting in a vast land of rock and water called Canada. The four seasons call out my story: September sumac, a birthday, the smell of wood smoke, a walk in the woods, hillsides of fall colours, fall fairs and taffy, Macs and Spys, sweaters and school, Thanksgiving, pumpkin pie, corn roasts, and dad ploughing.

When I was a little girl
I sat in the brown-grey dampness
of a November afternoon
— Remembrance Day —
Burning a pile of leaves
my seat was an upturned wheelbarrow
sheltering my back from the wind
I'd been given a box of matches
 beautifully shaped little sticks of wood
(I still love boxes of wooden matches)
I wonder now what mother was remembering
 that allowed me uninterrupted hours
 to persistently enflame that damp pile
Little rivers of grey ash
 would push back from the edge
But I only remember the
 4 o'clock darkness
and looking up, to see snowflakes
 in the wind.

Winter deep, winter long, winter sings a wondrous song
white as white on white, chunks of wood, the burning fire
Snow dazzled light on the singing choir
How do memories of such cold bring smiles
warm enough to melt my heart.

It was a cold, raw day and Old Tom was just
there ahead on the road.
I remember the huge dark brown coat he wore
Dad stopped — asked if he wanted a lift into town
He sat beside me in the back of our old Pontiac,
 sucking hungrily at the cigarette that dad
 had been smoking
His fingers were stained yellow
 he looked cold and thin and he smelled terribly.
Dad talked easily to him and when
 He got out at the Bank corner
dad gave him 2 cigarettes and opened his wallet.

Dad opened his wallet -
 for Old Tom
 to pay sister for my piano lesson

after Bernie cut his hair
 at Christmas time.
 He'd have to close one eye from the
 smoke of the cigarette in his mouth
 Both hands were needed for such an occasion.
 "Jeezlum Crust, it's cold."

Then the calves are born; the big flocks of geese fly in formation,
 a crow caws, the snow melts, the mud sticks and

We'd take
 a can of beans and a pound of bacon
 spring's first hot hope
 Sunday blessed then undressed
 to rough and tumble
 up trees and over hills
 down to Happy brook
 sun-thawed iciness welcoming
 paddling feet
 elaborate bridges and
 my brother's naked plunge
 Mother's gladness day
 baptised us with a deep
 joy that even now,
 deserts and droughts away
 bubbles up from a spring
 deep in that pre-Cambrian hillside.

Summer meant "no more pencils, no more books, no more teacher's dirty looks."

Holidays and Holy days.
 Sweet hayfields
 summered wheat-fields
 wild raspberries along rocky cedar rail fences
 garter snakes
 hot cud-chewing cows
 big flat green cowflops, crusted in the sun
 the water trough
 cows closed-lipped, close-eyed deep drinking
 the dogs hollow in the dry dirt
 under the maple trees
 the water lilies
 cow salt and green apples
 early morning gardening
 a kettle full of freshly pulled beets
 robins in the cherry tree
 cherries on the cherry tree
 cherry pies.

THROUGH all the seasons as they cycled, we went to church. The people were nice. The sermons were long. The women wore hats. Mom had big purses. There was a round window with a burning bush in it. We sang Hymns. Sometimes the men wore special suits and sat at the front by the big linen-draped table. It was a day to be very quiet and the adults ate little pieces of bread and drank from tiny glasses. Afterwards we went down to the basement for Sunday School. We memorised verses and heard the stories of Jesus.

Then when we were teenagers my sister and I got pregnant. We went to church when we could still hide it and then we went away.

I stayed away from the community and the church. My sister stayed away. My brothers stayed away. My parents moved away. My story had moved from a context of strong community to increasing alienation. I had become the alienated seeker, the journeyer. No longer able to be authentic within a

community that had lost touch with the essence of its own story (the Christian story that was birthed from a culturally incorrect pregnancy, inclusive, you without sin cast the first stone, essence.) When I left my community home I journeyed west to the Pacific, *Te Moana Nui a Kiwa* (Kiwa's Great Ocean), to *Aotearoa*, Land of the Long White Cloud (a name that itself may well be derived from the closing lines of some ancient chant that gave sailing directions).

Fifteen years later, I heard a voice over my shoulder. I knew it was God's voice. I laughed. I moved away. But God was persistent. Finally I acknowledged that God was calling this worldly, profane, wild woman to ordained ministry. *Te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa*, the Methodist Church in New Zealand tried and trained and tested me. I was ordained and received into full connection. Was my alienation gift that I might hear this voice of God?

There is a beautiful stream that flows from Kaukau in Wellington, New Zealand. It flows right through the community where I found myself as a Methodist minister. I always drew water from that stream to use in the baptismal font. Our sacred rituals are different when we draw living water from *te awa* (our own *sruthain*/stream). Such ritual, only because of its authenticity, is the stuff of story-making within a community. Come, Holy Spirit, renew us.

*Stream from the hills
water that's pure
Stream from the hills
truth that is sure
God of the hills
cleanse me and beckon me on.*

*(Sruthain na gcnoc
Fior uisce fuar
Sruthain na gcnoc
Ferinne Buan
O Dhe na Sruth,
Zlan me, is smeid me, sa tsiul)*

ABOUT one third of the earth's surface is covered by the waters of Kiwa's Great Ocean. In the times of the Prophets and Jesus, Polynesian navigators were exploring the eastern Pacific in magnificent outrigger and double-hulled canoes. It is only very recently that a blinkered Western mind-set has begun to realise with any clarity the outstanding attributes of those navigators and the extraordinary complexity of their accomplishments.¹³ A distinction most Western minds find difficult to fully appreciate is that the Polynesian navigator was far less the possessor of a particular set of skills pertaining to navigation than he was a person whose whole being was a navigator.

Western navigation is based on calculation and logical process. Western thinking — unlike that of many cultures — is highly mathematical. If time, distance and the elevation of stars and the sun are accurately measured, then one simply calculates one's position on a chart, or looks it up in the right set of tables. Western ideas of navigation equate to being able to locate oneself in time and space on a chart and use that information to set courses. (This thought process, incidentally, not only helped to generate a lot of superfluous names for geographic features in the Pacific, features which already had been given perfectly adequate names by the people who lived there, but also small errors of measurement led to the double reporting of islands, so they were duplicated on charts until well into the present century: "Nineteenth-century nautical charts and atlases contained some 200 islands that are now known not to exist..." observes H. Stommel.)¹⁴

In a fundamentally different way, Polynesian navigation is based entirely on experience. As originally taught, a child chosen for his aptitude at a young age would be imbued with the wisdom and insights of a navigator by being immersed in the experiences of it, including the feel of the sea, the circling of the stars, the dampness, temperature and scent of a wind, the habits of birds and fish, the subtle colouring of a cloud and the mingled wave forms of ocean swells from different quarters. Experience from every available source was integrated in ways that were non-mathematical and subjective, ways that were themselves developed through experience. Western mariners were impressed with the Polynesians' ability, after weeks at sea on changing courses — on a European whaling ship, for example — to point unerringly towards their homeland and other islands known to them. They retained a sense of where they were in relation to the world they knew. They read the signs.

There was a life and death difference between the reading of signs and the superstition of ascribing powers to signs that experience had not thoroughly tested. The navigators read the signs and knew where they were. Their context was an oceanic one and all they knew was learned within that context. If they became hopelessly lost, they could fall back on a tradition that, at such times, a

¹³ D. Lewis, *We the Navigators*.

¹⁴ H. Stommel, *Lost Islands*.

dolphin or bird would appear to guide them.¹⁵ If their system had at last failed them, this tradition of last resort left them with hope. That hope, incidentally, led them to act in the way that gave them the best possible chance of survival: sailing on until other cues could re-establish themselves.

Long distance voyaging was already in decline when Europeans arrived in force in the eastern Pacific. By then, the Polynesians had run out of ocean, having established new cultures on every inhabitable island in the eastern Pacific. And then colonial administrations outlawed voyaging and the ocean-going canoes. Traditional navigation techniques were forgotten and, indeed, the whole Polynesian way of life was disrupted. Some clung to the shadows of old ways which became superstitions and literalisms. It took other sailors, a very few foreigners like David Lewis and Hipour of Puluwat, to help Polynesian people rediscover the wealth that lay in the sea of their own traditions. Today, there are some Polynesian sailors who are again building the canoes and, again, they are finding their way — bold souls who may one day be recognised as the true heroes of a Polynesian renaissance. The reason has less to do with their feats of seamanship, impressive though they are, than it does with their appreciation of the fact that their cultures are oceanic through and through; they are a canoe people, a voyaging people. As of old, the hero is defined by the context.

MATTHEW's Gospel is written after the invasion of foreigners. Jerusalem has fallen. One could say the Jewish culture was at a low ebb. The Pharisees were alienated Jews. They were members of a lay renewal movement seeking to reinterpret the Law. The gift of their own alienation led them to a new awareness of intimacy with God. They were seekers who recognised that the story of the Law no longer nourished people but had become a manipulative power base disconnecting people from their own story.¹⁶ They asked Jesus for a sign. They wanted some sort of new miracle to convince them of Jesus' authority and authenticity. Jesus replied: "It is an evil and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign! The only sign it will be given is the sign of the prophet Jonah."¹⁷

There is an injunction here to "look into the context of your own tradition." And, on Judgement Day, Jesus warns, it will be the Ninevites, the Queen of Sheba, the foreigners who listened and repented and looked for wisdom, they are the ones who will judge and condemn. The foreigners will see that you have lost touch with your own traditions, your own faith stories, your own context; it is they who plainly see the treasure we look past, around or under.

Jesus was reminding these people that faith depends on knowing the signs and what they mean — just as Pacific navigation does not depend on a cloud or a bird, or a wave, but on knowing the signs and what they mean; and not on interpreting single signs in isolation, but a whole constellation of signs that are given their coherence in a context of experience informed by wisdom.

The navigators of old, through their daring voyages beyond the horizon to discover new islands, were able to enter the stories of their children's children's children: the stories of the future, the defining myth of the culture that, as the discoverers of new homelands, they were uniquely positioned to found. The genetic transmission of themselves through biological procreation was transcended by the greater feat of becoming their people's story — a metamorphosis from mortal to immortal, from hero to demi-god. The stories were preserved, very carefully, in their new settings. The material, political and economic expressions of Polynesian culture adapted vigorously to the varied exigencies of new local conditions. But the stories were handed on intact.

Conserved story, by indicating what the possibilities are and modelling heroic attitudes and behaviour, can in fact be seen to have empowered radical adaptation but, arising as they did from the story-source, even the adaptations remained distinctively Polynesian, and constantly reconnected with that cultural base. Those very stories could be seen as the nourishment re-empowering Maori today after what has been a low ebb.

THE MAORI meeting house (*whare nui*) is an architectural representation of the ancestral story, making manifest in its forms the bones, flesh and blood of its builders' ancestors. One enters the meeting house and enters the tribal rib-cage in ways that becomes increasingly apparent; *marae*

¹⁵ Stephen Thomas. *The Last Navigator*, p.30, and D. Lewis. *We the Navigators*, p. 215.

¹⁶ Rev. Dr Lynne Wall, personal communication.

¹⁷ *Matthew 12:38-39 (New Jerusalem Bible)*.

protocol is to establish relationships first, with the landscape, the past and the community. Only then comes the business. The context is first put clearly in place, and that within the context of the *whare nui* and the presence of the ancestors who have themselves metamorphosed into story, and story into architecture. All is informed by the greater context of landscape; the landscape seems almost to draw breath, so deeply does it inter-suffuse with awarenesses of the living and the dead. *Tihei mauri ora!*

THE CONSERVED Christian story should be capable of empowering radical adaptation and reconnection and still be distinctively Christian.

Pointing to 'the sign of Jonah' could be seen as an attempt to put Jewish faith into context again: the context of ancestors, language, nature and cultural wisdom. But how does a follower of Jesus today see the sign and know its meaning? Who are the Ninevites and the Queens of Sheba today who come seeking wisdom within our Christian culture? Will we be condemned by them or will we become navigators, imbibing the ancient wisdom that empowers us to nourish others with the good news of hope.

I interpret Jesus' pointing to the sign of Jonah as an encouragement to enter into the wisdom of the whole story. Some argue that the Psalm of thanksgiving in the second chapter of *Jonah* is not an original part of the story, or that its inclusion or omission makes no difference to the point of the narrative.¹⁸ The Psalm however follows all the conventions of Hebrew poetry. There are patterns, repetitions, and cycles within it.¹⁹ I suggest that the poetic form is not just an optional extra but an integral part of the ancient wisdom that the Gospel writers have Jesus pointing to. This is the crux of the experience. This is the ribcage of the whale.

The rest of the story contains timeless patterns in language and action. God calls — we run away; God persists, using people and dramatic signs in nature. Finally we respond but, in responding, come face to face with challenges we'd rather ignore (our own prejudices, our own fears, our own pride, our own being).²⁰ These challenges, often intellectual contradictions that can be creative and need not necessarily be resolved, are the Ways of Wisdom that can guide and inform the journeyer. There is an abrupt but perfect ending as the tide turns. O Thou Triune of Grace.

The sign of Jonah points to cultural revival: to a newly resurrected story offering nourishment to those who are alienated.

Attempting to learn ways of becoming a navigator, I found myself like Jonah swallowed into the belly of the whale, carried to the place of resurrection that I needed to be and spewed out. This is the Thomas Merton experience: "The life of every Christian is signed with the sign of Jonah, because we all live by the power of Christ's resurrection ... travelling toward my destination in the belly of a paradox."²¹

The paradox of alienation is that being estranged from community can lead one more deeply into the essence of community. The essence of community is wisely understood within Celtic wisdom as three-ness. Again, we hear the echoes of understanding. Remember, the Keltoi embraced the Christ story whose very intricate and interacting spirituality (e.g. *John* 17:17-21) resonates with all the endless complexity of the Celtic knot-design patterns. The Galatians, though alienated within their own context, would still have a cultural memory and love of the knot-design patterns. They would have recognised a spirituality that does not let us reduce our understanding of the Eternal One, nor does it permit an isolated individualism.

My experience informs me that God is God, Jesus is Jesus, the Spirit is the Spirit, the Three are One. Jürgen Moltmann's discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity in *God in Creation* is very helpful: "We must not view the trinitarian perichoresis as a rigid pattern. We should see it as at once the most intense excitement and the absolute rest of the love which is the wellspring of everything that lives, the keynote of all resonances, and the source of the rhythmically dancing and vibrating worlds." Also,

¹⁸ *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 967

protocol is to establish relationships first, with the landscape, the past and the community. Only then comes the business. The context is first put clearly in place, and that within the context of the *whare nui* and the presence of the ancestors who have themselves metamorphosed into story, and story into architecture. All is informed by the greater context of landscape; the landscape seems almost to draw breath, so deeply does it inter-suffuse with awarenesses of the living and the dead. *Tihei mauri ora!*

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¹⁸ *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 967.

¹⁹ c.f. Jonathan Magonet, *A Rabbi Reads the Psalms*.

²⁰ *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 965.

²¹ T. Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*.

"we are bound to understand it (triune God) as an intricate relationship of community — many-layered, many-faceted and at many levels."²²

The 17th-century Welsh writer Morgan Llwyd writes: "The Trinity abides with us exactly the same as the ore in the earth, or a man in his house, or a child in the womb, or a fire in a stove, or the sea in a well, or as the soul is in the eye, so is the Trinity in the godly."²³

Incarnation and resurrection, immanence and transcendence — all dance within the Trinity and are important signs of intertwining truth. But they can so easily become hollow rhetoric unless there is a willingness to experience them personally as currents of living Truth in the patterns and wisdom streams all around us.

I am a woman passionately seeking to know the essence of the Christ and so authenticate the Christ story within my own experience community and context. So often when women have tried to do this, they have been heard as critics and detractors, rather than as the authenticators so evidently needed, or as journeyers learning to be navigators. The alienation continues.

As I learn to be a navigator across these overly charted (if under-experienced) seas, I find myself paradoxically swallowed up by a whale of wisdom that has fed in all the oceans of the world. Within that great whale I'm carried to the place I need to be, spewed out and then challenged to learn to read the signs, and so to find authentic that Love that will not let me go. I read the sign of Jonah as an urgent challenge for each of us to authenticate within our own story, culture, community and tradition the essence of the Christ.

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²² J. Moltman, *God in Creation*.

²³ Quoted by Esther de Waal in *The Celtic Vision*.