

PART SEVEN

THE DRUID MISCELLANY

2003 Introduction

Do not confuse this section with "A Druid Missal-Any" magazine of the NRDNA.

Most of the contents from this dusty corner have been moved into the Green Books of Part Six, which is a separate publication, viewable on-line at the internet site into Green Book Vol 10. Originally, this Part 7 was going to be a good hefty 140 pages, and now its down to a handful, but I felt that this section was better suited to being "the waste bin" for things that absolutely didn't fit anywhere else".

As a result, two new Green Books developed and stole all the materials from this section of ARDA 2. One was a collection of materials related to Food & Trees and the other was Research Materials on Modern Druidism. Both of them also had considerable copyright concerns, so it was removed to the Green Books, which will not be commercially available. A few things from the cutting room floor were tossed in here at the last minute.

Yours in the Mother,
-Mike Scharding
March 20, 2003
Embassy of Japan

1996 Introduction

Most of the material in this section is of very little importance to most pre 1986 Carleton Druids (because of its heavy Celtic Pagan orientation), but I feel that it has great importance for understanding the later NRDNA, and it may be of use to modern Carleton Druids.

The books have been pretty much reprinted in order and verbatim from DC(E). This is better preserves the historical nature of these documents, to show the approach and "angle" that the DC(E) of 1976 was presenting, especially to the compilers of religious encyclopedists. Many issues of The Druid Chronicler magazine would essentially add to this section from 1976 to 1980. I removed the Book of Footnotes, broke it up and placed them under the appropriate texts rather than stuffing all of them in this obscure section of ARDA. I have added those sections and indicated so.

As with every section of this collection, none of this material is necessarily indicative of the opinion of any other Druid except that of the author(s). The material is not dogmatic or canonical, and can not be assumed to represent the Reform as a whole. Most of it is terribly out of date, and much **better** recent materials are available.

Day 1 of Foghamhar Year XXXIV of the Reform
(August 1st, 1996 c.e.)
Michael Scharding

The Drynemeton Press



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Figure 1 Could this be Druids in MN bundling together for warmth on Samhain, or an ancient world-record attempt for the largest go-go dancing group?

Pagan Musings

DC(E) Introduction:

This following was written in 1970 c.e. by Tony Kelly of the Selene Community in Wales. Tony, a most excellent poet and philosopher, was one of the founders of the Pagan Movement in the British Isles and, through his writings and concepts, one of those who initiated Pagan Way in this Country. (Pagan Movement in Britain in Britain and Pagan Way in the US both began as one with the same group of Pagan scholars, the same research into the ancient Goddess cults, and, in initial stages, the same rituals. The two later divided since all agreed that each country had its own particular needs and each required a unique approach in bringing back Paganism.)

What follows expresses well the feeling which lies behind the Paganism of today, and gives the hope that Pagans have for the future. Tony Kelly's inspired manifesto has become one of the great works of resurgent Paganism. As such, I feel that the Neopagan Druids will still find it inspiring for them. As for the non-Pagan Druids, it may increase their knowledge of diverse traditions and give them to appreciate the finer aspects and dreams of Paganism.

We're of the Old Religion, sired of Time, and born of our beloved Earth Mother. For too long the people have trodden a stony path that goes only onward beneath a sky that goes only upwards. The Horned God plays in a lonely glade for the people are scattered in this barren age and the winds carry his plaintive notes over deserted heaths and reedy moors and into the lonely grasses. Who now knows the ancient tongue of the Moon? And who speaks still with the Goddess? The magic of the land of Lirien and the old Pagan gods have withered in the dragon's breath; the old ways of magic have slipped into the well of the past, and only the rocks now remember what the moon told us long ago, and what we learned from the trees, and the voices of grasses and the scents of flowers.

We're Pagans and we worship the Pagan gods, and among the people there are Witches yet who speak with the moon and dance with the Horned One. But a Witch is a rare Pagan in these days, deep and inscrutable, recognizable only by her own kind, by the light in her eyes and the love in her breast, by the magic in her hands and the lilt of her tongue and by her knowledge of the real. But the Wiccan way is one way. There are many; there are Pagans the world over who worship the Earth Mother and the Sky Father, the Rain God and the Rainbow Goddess, the Dark One and the Hag on the mountain, the Moon Goddess and the Little People in the mists on the other side of the veil. A Pagan is one who worships the goddesses and gods of nature, whether by observation or by study, whether by love or admiration, or whether in their sacred rites with the Moon, or the great festivals of the Sun.

Many suns ago, as the pale dawn of reason crept across the Pagan sky, man grew out of believing in the gods. He has yet to grow out of disbelieving in them. He who splits the Goddess on an existence/nonexistence dichotomy will earn himself only paradoxes for the gods are not so divided and nor the magic lands of the Brother of Time. Does a mind exist. Ask Her and She will tell you yes, but seek Her out, and She'll elude you. She is in every place, and in no place, and you'll see Her works in all places but Herself in none. Existence was the second-born from the Mother's womb and contains neither the first-born, nor the un-born. Show us your mind and we'll show you the gods! No matter that you can't for we can't show you the gods. But come with us and the Goddess Herself will be our

love and the God will call the tune. But a brass penny for your reason! for logic is a closed ring, and the child doesn't validate the Mother, nor the dream the dreamer. And what matters the wars of opposites to she who has fallen in love with a whirlwind or to the lover of the arching rainbow.

But tell us of your Goddess as you love Her, and the gods that guide your works, and we'll listen with wonder, for to do less would be arrogant. But we'll do more, for the heart of man is aching for memories only half forgotten, and the Old Ones only half unseen. We'll write the old myths as they were always written and we'll read them on the rocks and in the caves and in the deep of the greenwood's shade, and we'll hear them in the rippling mountain streams in the rustling of the leaves, and we'll see them in the storm clouds, and in the evening mists. We've no wish to create a new religion, for our religion is as old as the hills and older, and we've no wish to bring differences together. Differences are like different flowers in a meadow, and we are all one in the Mother.

What need is there for a Pagan movement since our religion has no teachings and we hear it in the wind and feel it in the stones and the moon will dance with us as She will? There is a need. For long the Divider has been among our people and the tribes of man are no more. The sons of the Sky Father have all but conquered Nature, but they have poisoned Her breast and the Mother is sad for the butterflies are dying and the night draws on. A curse on the conquerors! But not of us, for they curse themselves for they are Nature too. They have stolen our magic and sold it to the mindbenders and the mindbenders tramp a maze that has no outlet, for they fear to go down in to the dark waters, and they fear the real for the One who guards the path.

Where are the Pagan shrines? And where do the people gather? Where is the magic made? And where are the Goddess and the Old One? Our shrines are in the fields and on the mountains, in the stars and in the wind, deep in the green wood and on the algal rocks where two streams meet. But the shrines are deserted, and if we gathered in the arms of the Moon for our ancient rites to be with our gods as we were of old, we would be stopped by the dead who now rule the Mother's land and claim rights of ownership on the Mother's breast, and make laws of division and frustration for us. We can no longer gather with our gods in a public place and the old rites of communion have been driven from the towns and cities ever deeper into the heath where barely a handful of heathens have remained to guard the old secrets and exact the old rites. There is magic in the heath far from the cold grey society, and there are islands of magic hidden in the entrails of the metropolis behind closed doors, but the people are few, and the barriers between us are formidable. The Old Religion has become a dark way, obscure, and hidden in the protective bosom of the night. Thin fingers turn the pages of a book of shadows while the Sunshine seeks in vain His worshippers in His leafy glades.

Here, then, is the basic reason for a Pagan Movement: we must create a Pagan society wherein everyone shall be free to worship the goddesses and gods of Nature, and the relationship between a worshipper and her gods shall be sacred and inviolable, provided only that in her love of her own gods, she doesn't curse the name of the gods of others.

It's not yet our business to press the law-makers with undivided endeavor to unmake the laws of repression and, with the Mother's love, it may never become our business for the stifling tides of dogmatism are at last already in ebb. Our first work, and our greatest wish, is to come together, to be with each other in our tribes for we haven't yet grown from the Mother's breast to the stature of the Gods. We're of the Earth, and sibs to all the children of wild Nature, born long ago in the warm mud of the ocean floor; we were together then, and we were together

in the rain forests long before that dark day when, beguiled by the pride of the Sky Father, and forgetful of the Mother's love, we killed her earlier-born children and impoverished the old genetic pool. The Red Child lives yet in America; the Black Child has not forsaken the gods; the old Australians are still with their nature gods; the Old Ones still live deep in the heart of Mother India, and the White Child has still a foot on the old Wiccan way, but Neanderthal is no more and her magic faded as the Lil and Archan burst their banks and the ocean flowed in to divide the Isle of Erin from the land of the White Goddess.

Man looks with one eye on a two-faced god when he reached for the heavens and scorned the Earth which alone is our life and our provider and the bosom to which we have ever returned since the dawn of Time. He who looks only to reason to plumb the unfathomable is a fool, for logic is an echo already implicit in the question, and it has no voice of its own; but he is no greater fool than he who scorns logic or derides its impotence from afar, but fears to engage in fair combat when he stands on his opponent's threshold. Don't turn your back on Reason, for his thrust is deadly; but confound him and he'll yield for his code of combat is honourable. So here is more of the work of the Pagan Movement. Our lore has become encrusted over the ages with occult trivia and the empty vapourings of the lost. The occult arts are in a state of extreme decadence; astrology is in a state of disrepute and fears to confront the statistician's sword; alien creeds oust our native arts and, being as little understood as our own forgotten arts, are just as futile for their unfamiliarity. Misunderstanding is rife. Disbelief is black on every horizon, and vampires abound on the blood of the credulous. Our work is to reject the trivial, the irrelevant and the erroneous, and to bring the lost children of the Earth Mother again into the court of the Sky Father where reason alone will avail. Belief is the deceit of the credulous; it has no place in the heart of a Pagan.

But while we are sad for those who are bemused by Reason, we are deadened by those who see no further than his syllogisms as he turns the eternal wheel of the Great Tautology. We were not fashioned in the mathematician's computation, and we were old when the first alchemist was a child. We have walked in the magic forest, bewitched in the Old Green Things; we have seen the cauldron and the one become many and the many in the one; we know the Silver Maid of the moonlight and the sounds of the cloven feet. We have heard the pipes on the twilight ferns, and we've seen the spells of the Enchantress, and Time be stilled. We've been into eternal darkness where the Night Mare rides and rode her to the edge of the abyss, and beyond, and we know the dark face of the Rising Sun. Spin a spell of words and make a magic knot; spin it on the magic loom and spin it with the gods. Say it in the old chant and say it to the Goddess, and in Her name. Say it to a dark well and breathe it on a stone. There are no signposts on the untrod way, but we'll make our rituals together and bring them as our gifts to the Goddess and Her God in the great rites.

Here, then, is our work in the Pagan Movement; to make magic where the gods would wish it, and to come together in our ancient festivals of birth and life, of death and of change in the old rhythm. We'll print the rituals that can be shared in the written word; we'll do all in our power to bring the people together, to teach those who would learn, and to learn from those who can teach. We will infiltrate groups, bring people to groups, and groups to other groups in our common devotion to the goddesses and gods of Nature. We will not storm the secrets of any coven, nor profane the tools, the magic, and still less, the gods of another.

We'll collect the myths of the ages, of the people and of the Pagans of other lands, and we'll study the books of the wise and we'll talk to the very young. And whatever the Pagan needs

in her study, or her worship, then it is our concern, and the Movement's business to do everything possible to help each other in our worship of the gods we love.

We are committed with the lone Pagan on the seashore, with he who worships in the fastness of a mountain range of she who sings the old chant in a lost valley far from the metalled road. We are committed with the wanderer, and equally with the prisoner, disinherited from the Mother's milk in the darkness of the industrial wens. We are committed too with the coven, with the circular dance in the light of the full moon, with the great festivals of the sun, and with the gatherings of the people. We are committed to build our temples in the towns and in the wilderness, to buy the lands and the streams fro the landowners and give them to the Goddess for Her children's use, and we'll replant the greenwood as it was of old for love of the dryad stillness, and for love of our children's children.

When the streams flow clear and the winds blow pure, and the sun nevermore rises unrecknowned nor the moon ride in the skies above; when the stones tell of the Horned God and the green wooded grows deep to call back Her own ones, then our work will be ended and the Pagan Movement will return to the beloved womb of our Old Religion, to the Nature goddesses and gods of Paganism.

(Selene Community, Con y Lloer, Ffarmers, Llanwrda, Sir Gaerfyrddin, Cymru, Wales)



Different Strokes

By Isaac Bonewits
Druid Chronicles (Evolved) 1975

[This section is terribly out of date, but it is shown to you in its historical originality. Do you notice a bias in the presentation? Scharding]

After studying the materials available from the various Branches of Reformed Druidism, it is possible that you may not find any of them to your personal spiritual taste. Therefore, we append a list of various other organizations you may find more to your liking. Feel free to write to them about their beliefs, activities and goals. Always include a stamped, self-addressed envelope (a large one) with ever request for information. Those organizations with a star (*) attached publish newsletters, magazines or other periodicals .Bonewits

Neopagan:

Coven du Bandia Grassail, Alliston, MA
Manhattan Pagan Way Grove, New York, NY 10022
Children of the Moon, Bladensburg, MD 20710
Ordo Templi Dianos, Lake Worth, FL 33460
Sabaeon Religious Order, Chicago, IL 60613
Chicago Mithraeum, Chicago, IL 60614
Temple of Isis, Chicago, IL 60656
Temple of Uranus, Chicago, IL 60637
Church of All Worlds, * St. Louis, MO 63130
Church of Seven Arrows, ULC Denver, CO 80210
Feraferia, * Altadena CA 91001
Temple, Tujunga, CA 91042
Church of the Eternal Source,* Burbank, CA 91505
Council of Earth Religions, San Diego, CA 92116
Temple of the Golden Calf, Berkeley, CA 94704

Wiccan:

Seax-Wicca, *Weirs Beach, NH 03246
Temple of Rebirth, Inc., Passaic NJ 07055
Theos & Phoenixm,* Commack, NY 11725
Moonstar/Starrcraft, Watertown, NY 13601
Association of Cymmry Wicca, * Atlanta Metro Branch, Smyrna, GA 30080
American Order of the Brotherhood of Wicca,St.Paul, MN 55165
Church and School of Wicca, * Salem, MO 65560
Wicca Contact Service, Dallas TX 75205
The Dianic Craft,* Dallas, TX 75221
Arianhu Church, Albuquerque, NM 87101
Susan B Anthony Coven, Venice CA 90291
Church of Wicca of Bakersfield, CA 93304
New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn,* Oakland CA 94661
The Covenant of the Goddess, C/o NROOGD
Nemeton, * Oakland, CA 94661
The Elf Queen's Daughters, Seattle, WA 98104

Other:

The Humanist Society:* check local phone book.
The Theosophical Society:* clpb
The Vedanta Society:*
The Universal Life Church, Inc.,* 601 3rd St, Modesto, CA 52951
The Buddhist Churches in America:* clpb
The Socialist Party:* clpb
The Society of Friends (Quakers):* clpb
The Swedenborgian Churches: * clpb

The Spiritualist Churches:* clpb

Note: The Majority of the addresses in the first two sections were taken from "The Pagan Yellow Pages," which were published over two years ago. Addresses may not be current. A letter of inquiry to the "Forum" of Green Egg (Box 2953, St. Louis, MO 63130) will usually produce a reply. Bonewits

Ecology:

Druids of every Branch of the Reform are deeply concerned with ecological matters. Therefore, we present a list of some of the more effective ecological and conservation organizations in the United States. Each of them deserves your support and (if you live close enough) your volunteer time.

Write to them, enclosing a large self-addressed, stamped envelope, to find out if there are local branches in your area and how you can help.

America the Beautiful Fund, 219 Shoreham Bldg., Washington, DC 20005

California Tomorrow, Monadnock Bldg., 681 Market St., San Francisco, CA 94105

Defenders of Wildlife, 2000 "N" St NW, #201, Wash DC 20036

Environmental Defense Fund, 162 Old Town Rd, East Setauket, NY 11733

Friends of the Earth, 529 Commercial St, San Francisco, CA 94111

National Audubon Society, box 5133 Church St Station, NY NY 10008

National Parks Association 1701 18th St NW, Wash DC 20009

National Wildlife Federation, 1412 16th St NW, Wash DC 20036

National Resources Defense Council, 15 West 44th St, NY, NY 10036

The Nature Conservancy, 1800 North Kent St, Arlington VA 22209

Point Reyes Bird Observatory, Box 321, Bolinas, CA 94924

Sierra Club, 220 Bush St, San Francisco, CA 94104

Wilderness Society, 1901 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Wash DC 20006

World Wildlife Fund, 901 17th St NW, Wash DC 20005

The Sociology of the RDNA

By Irony Sade
November 1998
(New to ARDA 2)

Introduction

In this paper I intend to demonstrate that the great sociological theories of Schleiermacher, Marx, Durkheim and others are applicable to the study of the Reformed Druids of North America. I believe that these theories can shed useful light on even a movement as peculiar as the RDNA and that the Druids themselves hold some valuable contributions for the general study of religion. I intend to demonstrate that while they do not call themselves a religion, and perhaps ought not to do so on philosophic grounds, the Reformed Druids share enough of the qualities of a religious movement to be usefully studied as such. I will discuss the sources and methodological problems involved in this kind of study, give an introduction to the Reformed Druids, and a brief sketching of their origins and belief. Next I will address the question of religious applicability, and finally delve into the examination of the sociological theories of Schleiermacher, Marx, and Durkheim as they relate to the Reformed Druids.

Disclaimer and Acknowledgments

It must always be remembered that in matters of religious belief each individual can express only his or her conception of what a religion is or teaches. This is especially true of Reformed Druidism. The Druidic path is an intensely individualistic one and each Druid can only speak for sure of what he or she has found. To a certain extent this also holds for describing the movement as a whole. The way in which I see Reformed Druidism is only one amongst the many views that can be taken of it. Anyone wanting to take a serious look at the subject should be careful to view it through more than one lens.

Which brings me to a certain methodological problem with this study. Most- if not all- of the scholarly work that has been done regarding the Reformed Druids of North America at Carleton has been done by one man- Michael Scharding. Archdruid of the Carleton Grove from the spring of 1993 to that of 1994 he cosponsored the most recent revival of the Druids at Carleton (1995-6) and remains an influential- albeit absent-friend at the time of this writing. Michael Scharding majored in History as an undergraduate and in 1994 undertook the wonderfully self-referential endeavor of researching the history of the Reformed Druids for his Senior Integrative Exercise. In 1996 he revised this paper into a rather longer one, A General History of Reformed Druidism in America, and published it along with nearly all the collected writings of Reformed Druids past in A Reformed Druid Anthology, of which he was also the associate editor. "As a result of this research," he writes, "I've probably collected and read more Reformed Druid material and talked with more Druids from the different factions than any other Reformed Druid (except possibly Isaac Bonewits.) This means that I'm either an 'expert' or I am now more irreparably confused in my Druidism than ever as a result."¹ It also means that no academic study of Reformed Druidism to date- to my knowledge- has escaped from his shadow.



Figure 2 Sturdy engineering endures.

¹ In his forward to A General History... A Reformed Druid Anthology, pp. 331. ARDA pp. 16

Daniel Hansen's *American Druidism* is a wonderful field guide to the various Druid groups of the Americas, and provides a fine history of the RDNA, but, as Mr. Scharding has commented, "it would not be a good book to compare my opinions against as I had a great deal to do with getting [it] published."

Margot Alder also talks about the RDNA in what many consider the definitive work on the Neo-Pagan movement, *Drawing Down the Moon*, but says very little that Scharding does not.

Isaac Bonewits also mentions the RDNA at Carleton in *Real Magic* but discusses them primarily in terms of one of their rituals, which he uses as an example to illustrate his theories on magic working. In short, beyond a few oral interviews performed by the College archivist and others and the preserved writings of past and present Druids there is little written work to study.

To date, Michael Scharding represents the most influential academic voice in the study of Reformed Druidism. Except by performing new, original research it is nearly impossible not to be influenced by his perspective on the movement. As mentioned above, any adequate study of religion ought to view it through more than one lens. Luckily most of the progenitors of the movement are still alive and much of its history has been recorded and stored so the possibility of original studies remains. I write this merely to make the reader aware of Scharding's influence. The study of Reformed Druidism is both indebted to and dominated by him, and, while I have drawn extensively on my own observations, interviews, research, and experience as Archdruid over the past three years, this paper is no exception. People who wish a clearer look at the movement are encouraged to explore it for themselves.

Finally let me make one technical note. Wherever I refer to 'Druids' in this paper I mean the Reformed Druids of North America at Carleton College, past and present. I do not intend to discuss the Paleo-Druids of the Old World, nor the Meso-Druids of Brittany revived in 1717, nor most of the other Neo-Druid groups in America except as they directly relate to our understanding of the RDNA. If you want an overview of them, read Hansen. With that caveat, let us begin.

Irony Sade
Prentice 206
November, 1998

Section I

An Introduction to Reformed Druidism

"Religions that combine humor, play, and seriousness are a rare species," Margot Adler wrote. "Once you embark on a journey of change in perception, even when you start this journey as 'play,' you can end up in waters far different from those you may have originally intended to enter."² Reformed Druidism represents the embodiment of this sentiment. Created partially as a joke, partially as a reaction against authority, it nonetheless blossomed and grew far beyond the hopes and desires of its founders, becoming both sillier than they had intended, and far more serious than they had ever imagined.

Reformed Druidism began at Carleton as a humorous response to the ruling that all students attend a set number of religious services each term. The early flavor of the movement was always one of serious tongue-in-cheek, a combination of the

intentionally profound with the pointlessly silly. The early Liturgy, for instance, was written in a playful pseudo-King James style both to provide a semblance of legitimacy and to tease the traditional profundity of holy writings. At the same time it contains some incredibly meaningful passages. Deborah Frangquist, one of the early formative members of the RDNA, recalls one of them nearly thirty years later.

O Lord, forgive these three sins, which are due to our human limitations:
Thou art everywhere, but we worship Thee here;
Thou art without form, but we worship Thee in these forms;
Thou hast no need of prayers and sacrifices, but we offer unto Thee these, our prayers and sacrifices.

"I still find that one of the most profound spiritual statements I have ever heard," she recalls. "It informs my understanding of what I as a believing Christian am doing in Christian liturgy, including the Eucharist. Every time I ended out on the Hill somewhere saying that prayer, I was moved anew by it, and I don't think I was alone in that."³ The Druids at Carleton today continue to exhibit this characteristic blend of the meaningful and the frivolous. Their celebration of Beltane- the first of May- in 1998 included both a pair of weddings as serious and beautiful as the nuptial pairs could ask and an extended bout of 'doughnut fishing,' a spontaneous game where people chased a doughnut suspended on the end of a string, trying to catch it in their mouths while being tickled.

It is, I believe, this persistence of humor and spontaneity, respect and seriousness that has kept Reformed Druidism alive at Carleton for the last thirty-five years and enabled it to spread as far as it has. Were it to lose either of these qualities the movement would be finished. It would become either the useless ghost of a religion or a sacrilegious joke. With them it becomes something both meaningful and liberating, a way of searching and of exploring life in the company of others and oneself that is not exactly one thing or another. Neither a religion by its own definition nor a philosophy by anyone else's, Reformed Druidism represents a unique and valuable creation of the human mind, and a fascinating confusion to the study of religion.

Section II

Origins of the Reformed Druids

The Reformed Druids of North America began, with no connection to either the Paleo or the modern European Druids, at Carleton College in April of 1963. At that time the college had a requirement for graduation stating that

"Attendance is required at the College Service of Worship or of the Sunday Evening Program or at any regularly organized service of public worship. Each term, every student must attend seven [of ten] of the services or religious meetings."⁴

³ This triad first appears in the Order of Common Worship as the invocation and again in nearly all the early liturgy. The Druids at Carleton have currently fallen out of the habit of actually using the old liturgy, but they still read through it for a good laugh and ponder it's many truths. See *A Reformed Druid Anthology*, Part Three, *Liturgy of the Druids*. Deborah Frangquist in an interview with Eric Hilleman, Carleton Archivist, October 31, 1993; pp. 450 of *A Reformed Druid Anthology*.

⁴ Carleton College Catalogue, March 1964, pp. 136. -ARDA-

² Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, pp. 299-300

Section III

Beliefs of the Reformed Druids

A number of students felt that it was unfair to require people to attend services and decided to test the policy. The protesters were led by the original 'Triumvirate', consisting of David Fisher, Howard Cherniack and Norman Nelson. They noted the escape clause of "or at any regularly organized service of public worship" and realized that they could create and organize such a service themselves and offer it up to the relevant deans as a fulfillment of the requirement. The college would have two choices, as they saw it: either to refuse to recognize them and be accused of religious discrimination, or to let them graduate at which point the movement would be declared a hoax and the requirement further ridiculed.⁵

Instead, in the summer of 1964, John Nason, the president of the college, sent out a memo revoking the requirement. It should be noted that Nason had already decided that the college's policy of in *Loco Parentis* was outdated and may have been planning to revoke the requirement all along. The role of the Druids in its elimination is debatable, but they cheerfully took the credit for its disappearance.

Two things about this origin are crucial to the understanding of Reformed Druidism. The first is that the founders never intended the movement to last. The second is that the Reformed Druids had no connection what so ever to any other Druid group at the time of their founding.⁶ "Indeed," writes Scharding, "this leads up to the greatest hindrance to the entire study of Reformed Druidism; the name 'Druid.' Many scholars will see the word 'Druidism' on a sheet of paper and suddenly a myriad of assumptions will strangle their minds."⁷

The Reformed Druid movement embodies none of the philosophy, worldview, cultural resonance or even religion of the Celts, Paleo, or Meso Druids. The name was picked because it was sufficiently venerable to be taken seriously and sufficiently misunderstood that the young RDNA could make up whatever they chose and not be called on inaccuracies.⁸ As the story goes, Howard Cheriack's parents did not like indicating that they were Jewish on government forms, and had taken to writing 'Druid' instead. The Triumvirate picked up the idea and ran with it, inventing beliefs as they went. The subsequent history of the movement is complex and fascinating but I do not intend to address it here. Scharding has covered it more thoroughly than I am ever likely to and traces its internal dividing and developments over a thirty-year span. I will attempt to avoid much of that discussion except where it is relevant to our purpose here.

Two things were of primary importance for the Reformed Druids in the beginning, and have remained fundamental to the movement ever since. The respect for nature, and the respect for each individual's rights. The founders wanted to create a system that would contain a meaningful core while eschewing all dogma and orthodoxy. In the words of one Druid, "Reformed Druidism is a statement that religion has a tendency to become organized religion and [sic] which then becomes organization devoid of religion."⁹ The founders were very conscious of this 'fossilization theory' and wished to provide no framework for organization that could be exploited later. As such, when the two tenets were devised and finalized in 1963, they were kept as simple and as inclusive as possible.

The object of the search for religious truth, which is a universal and never-ending search, may be found through the Earth-Mother; which is Nature; but this is one way, yea, one way among many.

And great is the importance, which is of a spiritual importance, of Nature, which is the Earth-Mother; for it is one of the objects of Creation, and with it people do live, yea, even as they do struggle through life they are come face to face with it.¹⁰

These are the only two tenets of the Reformed Druids of North America- and the only two statements with which all Druids are ever likely to agree. Everything else is up to the individual. In their original form the tenets are rather cumbersome. They are often paraphrased as 'Nature is good' and 'Nature is good.' A more serious way of putting it, currently practiced amongst the Druids at Carleton is to say that first: The spiritual search is an important, individual, and life long endeavor, and secondly, that one way of searching lies through the study, understanding, and awareness of nature. Each of these phrasings indicates something rather different if they are taken literally, yet it is at one truth that they point. The only commandment I have ever seen attached to Reformed Druidism is Think for thyself! The tenets, however you conceive of them, establish the framework in which to do this.

Druidism teaches that you have the right to believe what you know to be true, no matter what anyone else thinks of it. At the same time it holds that you cannot simply pick what you would like to be the case, nor design a cosmology irrespective of what the world teaches. To be a Druid is to deliberately and consciously seek out the truth of the world and decide for yourself what it is you will believe. Margot Adler sheds some useful light on the matter when she writes "The original founders seemed to hold the fundamental idea that one should

⁵ It should be remembered that these students- the original 'triumvirate' consisting of David Fisher, Howard Cherniack and Norman Nelson- were in no way irreligious. David is currently an Episcopalian priest. They merely felt that the requirement was unfair on principle and should be tested. They also hedged their bets and continued attending the 'legitimate' services throughout their protest.

⁶ This will be discussed more in section IV.

⁷ ARDA pp. 339. This seems to be a thing that each researcher is at pains to learn anew

⁸ "Mec"- Michael Scharding- wasted eight months of research before figuring this out. I knew he'd done so and I still fell for it. My desk is littered with fascinatingly irrelevant books on Druidism that have nothing to do with the RDNA.

⁹ Internal correspondence ARDA pp. 338

¹⁰ An interesting change in the modern phrasing of the first tenet is the omission of the idea that the spiritual search is universal. The reason for this is two fold. One motivation is a desire not to impose even that truth on others. Another is that it has become apparent that one can be a great Druid without holding that the spiritual search holds any immediate, personal, relevancy. David Coil, one of the greatest Druid apologists at Carleton today and the functional right hand of the Archdruid for the last year, holds the above view. He believes that upon death he will go back to being 'nineteen cents of chemicals,' end of story. He would rather live life that ponder its spiritual significance, and expresses one of the purest Druidic spirits on campus.

scrutinize religion from 'a state of rebellion,' neither embracing traditional faiths nor rejecting them."¹¹

Druids look everywhere for inspiration. World philosophies, religions, science fiction, children's books, strange dreams, the flight of swallows; all are considered equally valid insights to potential truths that must be at least examined, if never espoused. As Scharding writes, "It was important to Druidism that you believed your own views instead of slavishly following those of others, provided that you had carefully examined them and judged them sound."¹² This intellectual honesty is a necessary- if not sufficient- feature of the Druidic search. Without it the movement would descend into utter relativism.¹³

Another significant feature of Druidic 'belief' is that it is compatible with almost any other religious system. It serves to accentuate rather than replace a person's faith. Michael Scharding is a devout (maybe) Catholic as well as being a Druid. The group today contains at least one Atheist Druid, Jewish Druid, Quaker Druid, Seventh Day Adventist Druid, and innumerable Agnostic and Confused Druids. Indeed, the people who have taken Reformed Druidism to be their only religion have always been in the minority. The movement is hardly a thing that one can be converted to. The most common reaction to the personal acceptance of being a Druid is one of coming home. My own was, "Oh- now at last I have a name for what I've always done." The inclusiveness with which Druidism approaches all other religions is one of its strongest and most redeeming features.

Section IV

Is Reformed Druidism a Religion?

There is an unwritten rule that any whatever any Druid may say about him or herself, no one is to make categorical claims regarding the entire movement. Druidism can be and has been a religion for its individual members. It has never claimed itself to be a religion. Druidism is above all a system of inquiry into life, nature and meaning. Depending on how one takes that the movement could be viewed either way. The official Druidic statement has been that the RDNA does not affirm or deny the validity of any religion, including itself.

The founders of Reformed Druidism certainly never intended to start a religion. Indeed, the persistence of the

movement beyond the elimination of the Chapel requirement took many of the founders by surprise. David Fisher left the movement early on because he had begun to fear that he had helped to start something that was becoming dangerously close to a real religion. Its function as a protest was fulfilled, and yet the group remained. "For a great many Druids, the RDNA had introduced the possibility of taking personal responsibility for understanding and believing one's own faith."¹⁴

Druidism continued because people continued to find it meaningful and useful beyond its initial function as a creative protest. Still, did that make the RDNA a religion? The founders were careful not to call it such, though they wished it to appear as one for political purposes, and the movement has remained deliberately vague on this question ever since. Part of the reason for this vagueness is the fear of the 'fossilization theory.' If the RDNA had indeed found something meaningful in the realm of religion, it was felt that it had done so through its very simplicity. If defining themselves as a religion- or anything else- would engender the complexity and rigidity that people had joined the movement to avoid, they wanted no part of it.

One of the consequences of this refusal was the gradual splintering of the original RDNA into innumerable branches. Every so often someone would enter the movement who felt that it should be further defined. Each time this happened, after a brief struggle to change the whole RDNA, a new splinter group would form centered around the rebel and his or her followers. At present, so far as I can tell, there are nearly two dozen separate and related branches, all bearing the name 'Druid,' all spawned by definition or methodological disagreements. The first and most drastic of these schisms began in 1974 over the question of whether the RDNA should declare itself and its members exclusively pagan. This was exactly the sort of thing that many of the Druids- especially those for whom the Carleton grove had been influential- wanted to avoid. They loved the fact that one did not have to renounce any religious beliefs to become a Druid, and that the Druids brought together people of all different faiths to search together in a friendly, healthy manner. Others felt differently though, and a new group was formed.¹⁵

The old RDNA remained as it was, happily undefined and unsettled as to the religious question. Even in their second great interaction with authority, which seemed to hinge upon whether the RDNA represented an actual religion or not the Druids managed to escape without really settling the issue.¹⁶

From a research perspective the question remains. Is the Reformed Druid movement a religion? Is it a 'real religion,' whatever that means? Is it something to which one can legitimately apply the theories of Weber, Marx, and Schleiermacher as I intend shortly to do? It is apparent by now that I, at least, regard it as, if not a religion per se, at least something to which many of the great religious theories and debates are applicable. If I did not, all the time I have put into this project would be seen as wasted.¹⁷

¹¹ Drawing Down the Moon. pp. 301

¹² ARDA. pp. 341

¹³ One could argue that the Druids already embody such a relativism in that the closest thing we have to a statement of belief is really simply an insistence that you search truth out your self. If so, it is only the relativism of individual minds. Yet I do not believe that even this is the case. The intellectual honesty that Druidism fosters encourages clear sight and careful thinking, and it seems that even with a great many people searching in this manner, agreements and commonalities arise. It may be that when people look hard and carefully at the nature of reality they all find, on some fundamental level, the same things. It seems to me that even without an imposed order to the universe, relativism confounds itself against a deeper order that is already present. It is part of the answer to the problem of saying "This is the truth that I have found, which I will force on no one else- but it applies to everybody." A rigorous examination of this confusion will have to await the foredoomed attempt of working out a formal Druidic philosophy and metaphysic.

¹⁴ ARDA pp. 339.

¹⁵ See Scharding for a thorough discussion of this initial split, known within the movement as the 'Isaac wars.' Hansen also gives a solid cataloguing of the extant Druid groups in the United States today, their relationship to one another, and how each came to be.

¹⁶ This was the almost famous 'Smiley Case' which will be discussed further below.

¹⁷ Or as a furthering of the great and subtle joke that some have seen Druidism as being!

In what ways can the RDNA be considered a religion? Eliade defined the base of all religious experience as the personal experience of sacred reality or Other. Schleiermacher followed him in stating that it was the encounter between the finite and the infinite, which is the origin and object of all religion. To my mind, it is with exactly this encounter that Druidism deals. It is almost beyond question that on any functional level human beings are finite creatures. Through Druidism they engage freely in the spiritual search- the individual quest for understanding of the sacred. Certainly Druidism can and has dealt with all of the classical religious problems of ontology, metaphysics, soteriology, and eschatology, not to mention that of theodicy, the celebrated 'question of evil.' It has done so, however, on a purely individual level. Druidism never teaches that any particular thing is or is not the case- it simply teaches people to learn and decide for themselves.

All of the classic problems and issues of religion are discussed at Druidic meetings and debated at great length from a variety of views but in the end it is up to each individual to decide what to believe. What the RDNA does is to create a place where people of many different religions can come together to share their traditions and learning. Scharding credits this persistence to the delight in the possibility of taking personal responsibility for one's own faith. The movement had shown people experientially "the benefits of learning from people from other faiths in a non-hostile forum of interaction."¹⁸

The insight of the Druids, Scharding writes, "was that if the same story about, say, a bird making it's nest, can be interpreted by all religions as a useful analogy for their own religious beliefs, then people of all religions could benefit from getting together and hearing that same story.... As long as dogmatic theological statements remain out of the stories, the group can enjoy each other's company."¹⁹

It has often been denied that Reformed Druidism is a religion because it boasts no dogma or theology. 'How can that be a religion,' we often hear. 'It doesn't teach anything!' The short answer is that Druidism teaches people how to learn, not what is true. It will show you how to walk- not where to travel. In this it is exactly as much a religion as are the Zen Buddhist schools, or, for that matter, Taoism. The theories of the great sociologists of religion are usefully applicable to these systems. I believe that, even if it denies being a religion itself, they are no less applicable to Reformed Druidism.

There is one other problem that ought to be addressed. The question of what it would mean to declare the RDNA a religion. In a sense the question is academic because the movement intentionally never claims to be one. But from a certain perspective the question remains. If Reformed Druidism declared itself to be a fully fledged religion like any other, would it in effect be denying all religious validity? The argument runs vaguely as follows. Reformed Druidism affirms and denies no religious validity by its own admission. But the essence of religion seems to be a profound respect for the importance and validity of a personal encounter with the sacred. If the RDNA calls itself a religion just like the others, is it stating, in effect, that religious experience is not worth validating? The essence of religious tolerance is not unconditional acceptance of differences but rather an abiding

respect for the sacredness of the other's Other. Druidism appears not to contain this. To put it differently, if Druidism includes itself in the set of Religions, is it saying that a religion does not have to affirm or deny anything at all? Druidism does not appear to contain any sacred. By calling itself a religion is it saying that there is no sacred to religion?²⁰

I do not believe that this is the case. First of all, Druidism never declared itself, as such, to be a religion. If its members do so, that is their own affair, but almost invariably Druidism mutates and develops into something subtly different and much more complex as soon as it is adopted by a lucid individual rather than a group. Secondly, Druidism does hold an abiding respect for other experiences of the sacred. It simply holds their expressions, through theology, poetry, art, and philosophy as secondary portrayals of that primary experience. The experience of the sacred is holy and respected, whoever happened to have it. Their depiction of it is granted only as much validity as anyone else's. It is taken as one of many fingers pointing at the moon, not the moon itself. The validity of any and all experiences of the sacred stand. Religious expressions are viewed as mutable. Finally, Druidism itself would never- nor would any Druid that I know- state that there is no sacred in religion. It would merely insist that we each critically and honestly examine our own experiences, religious and otherwise, to seek out and understand the sacred within them.

Section V

Sociological Theory and the Reformed Druids

Of all the classical social theories, those of Friedrich Schleiermacher seem to most accurately describe Reformed Druidism.²¹ Schleiermacher divided the depictions of religion in his time into those reducing it to functions of the will, reason, and imagination. When viewed as such, the primary vehicle for religious expression became morality, philosophy and art, respectively. Schleiermacher believed that each of these conceptions left out something crucial about the nature of

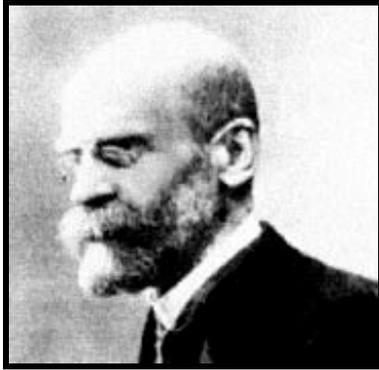
²⁰ I confess that I do not completely understand this argument and have not given it the best statement or defense possible. I would gratefully welcome any clearer formulations of it. It is almost regrettable that there has never been a serious philosophical study of the Reformed Druid movement. Druidism seems such a valuable tool of inquiry that one could see the attraction in developing a solid understanding and perhaps metaphysic of it. But it is not at all clear to me at this point how one would go about doing this, nor even that it should be done. It is not that I doubt Druidism could take the probing, but the defining that it would almost certainly entail seems against the spirit of the system. It may be that anything that was developed in such a manner would become yet another splinter group, another branch of the movement that would leave its original roots unchanged.

²¹ In discussing the sociology of the movement, I do not intend to focus here on social factors leading to or even influencing the Reformed Druids. Michael Scharding discusses some of these including Judeo Christian influences, the influence of Asian religions, of the 'Sixties,' of Carleton, and toys with the possibility of Fraternal influences in the creation of the RDNA. Instead I intend to look at the applicability of some of the classical sociological theories to Druidism, leaving the discussion of factors to those who know more about them.

¹⁸ ARDA pp. 339

¹⁹ ARDA pp. 341

religion and so posited a fourth category. The primary faculty of religion, he felt, was feeling. Religion, he posited, was the encounter of the finite to the infinite. Feeling was that by which we experience this encounter. As pure feelings are essentially incommunicable between sane humans, other means of expressing the encounter must be utilized. According to Schleiermacher, morality, philosophy, art, theology, rituals, laws, legends, and even history are all secondary means of trying to express this primary experience. As such, have no final or absolute validity in the domain of religion! Only feeling can convey the primary experience, and feeling is essentially impossible to communicate.

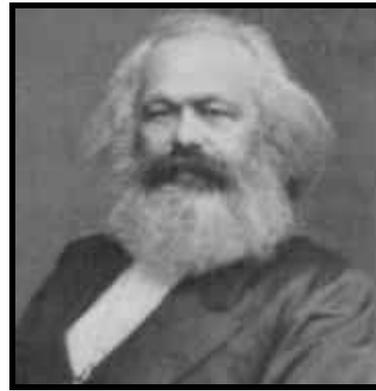


Schleiermacher's view of religion is a profound call for tolerance. If all theologies and dogmas, all morals and rituals are only secondary expressions of the sacred, then even religious beliefs that completely antagonize one's own can be tolerated. People can realize that it is only the details of expression that they are fighting about when there may be no real disagreement over the feeling of the sacred. This view is almost identical to that espoused by Reformed Druidism. They too regard all expressions of religious truth to be equally valid as secondary indicators of an inexpressible reality that is never the less to be sought by each individual. They too exhibit a unilateral tolerance for all systems of religious belief and practice.²²

Because no single expression of sacrality can be seen as being its primary experience people interested in approaching that sacred must engage in a constant process of interpretation of these secondary expressions. This hermeneutic circle of translation and interpretation is inherent to the Druidic search.

It is interesting that by both of these views religious experience and validity must remain forever a uniquely individual phenomena. Until it is possible to accurately communicate pure feeling, neither the Schleiermachers nor the Druids of the world will ever be able to convey to another what exactly their encounters with the Other- the infinite- were like. All forms of expression prove not only inadequate for the searcher's understanding of religion, but also for the sage's communication of religious understanding. The consequent of this, were everyone to operate within this model of religious understanding, is a plurality of completely unique experiences of the sacred, where each person honored the validity of other's experiences, and realized that no one's expressions of that feeling were any more adequate than their own.

²² Within reason. Someone whose religious practice involved destroying the natural world on principle, or who ritually murdered random folks would not be tolerated. But this would be on behavioral grounds rather than religious ones.



Carl Marx had rather different conception of religion. Unfortunately his understanding of the phenomena was rather stunted by his hatred of it. Marx's insights into the nature of economics and political theory are profound; it is a shame he could not apply the same clarity of thought to the study of religion. It has been argued that Marx's statements on religion are inconclusive and contradictory, making it rather hard to discern what he actually thought on the subject, but from his critiques of Feuerbach, and of Bauer in *On the Jewish Question* a synthesis of sorts can be made.

It seems that Marx held that the ideas of religion emerged from social powerlessness. Religion served, in his mind, as a superstructure to maintain and perpetuate the economic base, which gave rise to it. It did this by maintaining the social class structure and placating the lower classes with promises of something better to come- so long as they held their peace for the time being. At the same time it seems that Marx held that religion emerged from alienation in the realm of civil society- the same force that produced divergent political and economic systems. Alienation leads to the objectification of an expression of one's self- or one's culture- which then is imagined as being independent of the thing it is an expression of. This is idolatry on Marx's view- the worship of something you yourself have created.²³

It seems, though, that none of these ideas shed any particular light on Reformed Druidism. Druidism did not arise out of social powerlessness, does not maintain any class structure, and has no economic bearing what-so-ever. It also posits no higher being, objectified or otherwise, that could be viewed as a created and forgotten idol of civil alienation. Instead it seems that the RDNA emerged and has been sustained primarily through curiosity. Furthermore, Druidism does not seek- or serve- to maintain any authority, including its own, other than that of intellectual honesty, which is operative on a solely personal level. Druidism does take a certain delight is frustrating the authority of others, especially that which is seen as arbitrary, restrictive or simply absurd. In this sense it could be seen as a reaction to authoritarian structures, but not at all in the way that Marx envisioned. The RDNA has had only two major interactions with authority, and while one of them was the purpose of the movement's initiation, the struggle against an authority has never since proved a motivating factor in the movement's continuation.²⁴

²³ In this understanding of Marx I am deeply indebted to professor Nader Saiedi of Carleton College.

²⁴ The first was the successful attempt to get the mandatory chapel requirement revoked. The second was the 'Smiley Affair' beginning in 1967 when the RDNA successfully stalled the US



Another sociologist whose theories mesh oddly with the RDNA is Emile Durkheim. Durkheim held fundamentally that religion is not irrational- not at all a function of superstition and error as others have often maintained. All religious experience is the experience of the power of society in his view. The immediate fascination of this view is that no society can ever exist without religion. He also believed that to understand religion we must go back to its base: totemism. On at the same time he held that as a society changes, its god must too. In totemism the individual identifies and becomes one with the totem, which in turn unifies and expresses the nature of his or her social group. As societies advance this identification becomes intellectualized and disguised. By the time a society reaches a reasonably advanced stage its conception of the totem has evolved into a fairly abstract, usually singular god. Along the way this conception of the sacred has been purged of all definable qualities. To adequately represent and unify a very simple social group was easy- they could all be seen to manifest attributes of the bear, for instance. As people specialize and society develops, one definable vision of 'god' can no longer depict them all equally. By abstracting more and more- and by removing all human characteristics- a societies god becomes more philosophic, beyond all description and understanding, all in the attempt to represent as many different objectified people as possible. The eventual and evident end of this so far as religion goes, is that a society will either have to simplify itself drastically to preserve its conception of god, or the individual itself will become seen as sacred- bypassing the objective representation of the individual as a totem, god, or anything else.

Druidism seems to be an exemplification of this second course. The very conception of god has been objectified away to nothing, and we are left with the individuals again, knowing that the sacred is important, but realizing anew that it is basically unknown. Each individual must seek out their own understanding of the sacred and, in doing so, it appears that each individual actually becomes in some sense sacred. While Reformed Druidism itself certainly did not begin as totemism and evolve to something else, it is entirely possible that the society from which it arose did. It may be that the emergence of the RDNA is the exact fulfillment and continuation of Durkheim's theory on religious evolution. It emerged at a time when society had diversified to the extent where not even a completely abstract and indescribable god without any qualities could represent every member of that society- for people are not themselves abstract. A specific conception of a personal deity could represent individuals better than an abstraction.

In this case the theory does shed useful light upon the RDNA. The movement is seen as the natural result of societal change and the forerunner of a greater degree of individual awareness and responsibility for religion soon to come. Indeed, as one looks at the kinds of religious movements that have been emerging since the 1960's when Druidism began one can see

that many of them embody just this individualization of the sacred- though none of them do so as simply and carefully as do the Reformed Druids. I need merely instance the vast neo-pagan movement, the Church of All worlds, and other similar organizations where any non-socially murderous religious belief is tolerated, and where the church will ordain anyone as a legal minister for the asking.

On the other hand, Durkheim insists that all religious experience is the experience of the power of society. The Druidic path is one that can be followed without reference to society at all. It is useful to talk to others, to read the writings of sages past, or to ponder the teachings of other religions, but the essence of Druidism is clear and careful thinking about the world- a skill that could be practiced by the last man on earth. In addition, most, if not all, of the religious experiences reported by Reformed Druids have taken place in utter solitude. It is in their aloneness with nature that many of the Druids find themselves closest to the sacred. One could argue that if the individual itself has become sacred it is only natural that he or she would feel closest to the sacred when alone with themselves, but this argument smacks strongly of sophistry. It is also possible that the religious experience a person feels when alone is simply the transcendental power of society that they have absorbed and carried with them manifesting itself like a voice in the wilderness. Given the feeling and noetic content of many of these experiences I must seriously doubt that this is the case. I have yet to see a clear and convincing argument in its favor, but mention it because I cannot refute it completely.

Finally, Durkheim's description and justification of the social contract meshes nicely with Reformed Druidic thought. For him it is the inherent sacrality of each individual that makes it important for us not to break our promises to each other. For the Druids, an inviolate respect for the rights of each individual is inherent to the movement. Life is inherently sacred, many of them hold. No one has the right to violate that.

Section VI Conclusion

I hope that I have at least demonstrated that the Reformed Druids of North America, while not being a religion in the strictest sense, comprise a movement to which the sociological theories of Schleiermacher, Marx, Durkheim and others are applicable. I believe that much can be learned about the movement by seriously applying the theories of these and other writers, and by examining and developing the philosophic background of the RDNA. I hope that others will continue this search, and if they ever find from within the movement that they are acting against its spirit, that they will listen to the dictates of their hearts before forging ahead or dropping their studies.

What I am not sure that I have demonstrated is that the Reformed Druids actually embody a definable and distinct set of people that could be studied as a religious group. I think that what binds them together is the spirit of their search, the shared history of the movement, and their individual acceptance of the simple tenets. If that is not enough, to convince the reader, I ask you to consider how the worlds Christians can be considered part of one movement, embracing as they do both the Catholic church and the Quaker meeting halls.

Finally, let me say that for the most part, the confusion as to who is and isn't a Druid shows up on paper more than it does in life. This seems to be because, despite the changes, there has never really been any doubt as to who the Druids amongst people were. As Isaac Bonewits writes,

Military out of Drafting one of their priests. See the Carleton Archives, Internal correspondence, and pp. 345-6 of ARDA.

"The role of the Druid has always been clear-scholar, and artist, poet, and priest, philosopher and magician- the one who seeks, preserves and expends the highest wisdom her or his people are capable of handling safely, and who uses the knowledge and inspiration for the benefit of their community." (ARDA pp. 323)

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Mike Scharding and the History of the Reformed Druids

By Stephen Crimmins, 2003

It is often said that the Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA)¹ at Carleton undergo a substantial change at least once every four years. Both the general membership as well as, and perhaps more importantly, Arch Druids are involved with the Druids for at most 4 years before leaving the Carleton Grove. With each new Arch Druid new ideas are infused into the Grove.² However, it is clear that this only begins to explain change among the Druids. It can hardly handle variations in degrees of change nor can it be expected to predict what direction a change will occur in. In order to elucidate the causes of change I will look specifically at the case of Michael Scharding, Arch Druid of the Carleton Grove from 1993-4.



Figure 3 Ehren, Merri & Stephen, c. 2001.



Figure 4 Stephen Crimmins gallantly trying to eat a dangling donut while being tickled, 2001.

¹The RDNA has become a nationwide organization with a number of groups, or groves, in various locations. It should be distinguished from the group of Carleton students which is a member grove of the RDNA, and which will generally be referred to as the Carleton Druids or the Carleton Grove. All Arch Druids mentioned are Arch Druids of the Carleton Grove.

²This is something that I have heard a number of times as a druid and more over as one of the current Arch Druids at Carleton. Some of the material that I bring in to this paper will be from my own experiences or conversations as a druid. Moreover though, the topic that this paper discusses, though in this case limited to the case of Michael Scharding, is a more general issue among the Carleton Druids and so one that in some ways affects me. I will try to avoid biases but I cannot promise complete removal from the subject, nor would it be completely helpful. To date what scholarly work as exists that focuses on the RDNA is the work of Carleton Druids [there are some works, such as Margot Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon* that mention the RDNA in a larger context. A listing and notes on the applicability of such works is available in Appendix E of Part 8 of Michael Scharding, Isaac Bonewits, Robert Larson, Richard Shelton and Mark Heiman eds., *A Reformed Druid Anthology* Northfield, MN: Drynemetum Press, 1996, 384-387. (Here in, ARDA) and of course updated in the current collection (ARDA II) in Part Eight. The field could certainly use scholars who have not been Reformed Druids but for now those with some interest will continue to do the best we can.

I should also note that I have for the past few years known Michael Scharding and from time to time have discussed Druidism with him though I had not read his essay on Reformed Druidism, *A General History of Reformed Druidism* until working on this paper nor have I had the chance to discuss the material in that with him. I have, however, asked him to look over the current paper for any insights he may have into his own psyche, as unlikely as those may be.

Scharding's Arch Druidship was one especially full of a series of changes. The changes Scharding's implemented, as will be seen, were in large part derived from a study of the history of the Druids that was more basically fueled by a general interest in history. Particularly, in the middle of his Arch Druidship, Scharding centered his senior thesis around the RDNA. Subsequently Scharding has published *A Reformed Druid Anthology (ARDA)*, a collection of essays, letters, and various writings produced by the RDNA and the second edition of the *ARDA* known as *ARDA II*. Regarding the last two works, Scharding has noted repetitively that he collected the *ARDA* in part for future scholarly use, but that he also intended it for use by practicing Druids. In Scharding's opinion it has become "an anchor of tradition for the most recent Carleton Druids, who...rarely want to root in the Druid Archives in the basement of their campus Library."³ (The last part is a comment that I both must resent and find to be true) Scharding, on the other hand, did search out the Druid Archives and use what he found to shape his own Druidism. What I wish to examine is what need pushed Scharding to work as extensively as he did and to what degree that work influenced him as AD.

In the early eighties the activities of the Carleton Druids came to a halt after 20 fairly continuous years. In the mid eighties, a number of people interested in Neo-Pagan and Native American religions attended Carleton and restarted the Reformed Druids using what little they could gather about the RDNA and borrowing extensively from other religions. Approximately four years later Scharding came to Carleton, shortly after these 'renaissance' Druids had graduated. Scharding joined the Carleton Druids and, as will be discussed, took a heavy interest in the history of the RDNA.⁴

Scharding's pursuit of Reformed Druid history has had a number of effects on him. In an oral history interview, Scharding noted that he found that "the older Druids... had a much more lackadaisical attitude toward ritual"⁵ where as the Druidism that Scharding had first wandered upon placed a fairly heavy emphasis on ritual. Finding this out freed Scharding to perform rituals more in a style that he saw the old Druids as having used and less in the style he was first introduced to. He used Druidism to explore "a philosophical bent about what the

whole purpose of religion was"⁶ as well as to question the importance of ritual as he found that the older Druids done. He seems to have found a lot about the older Druids that fit with what he had already come to consider in his own Druidism. I might conjecture that, in part, he was looking for and finding similarities, if unconsciously.

Whether or not there Scharding was picking out similarities with what he desired Druidism to be, the studies certainly affected his Druidism. On the contrary, the similarities in philosophical stances that he noticed allowed him to make use of such similarities in the activities that he organized. Scharding noted in his interview that "Basically, when I finished my studies I introduced a greater amount of silliness, play, and meditation to my services, which I began to hold in the earlier style, on a more frequent basis."⁷ Like the older Druids he began to have weekly services with meditations, something that hadn't been seen among the Carleton Druids since some time before 1984. It wasn't something that every Druid could agree upon, but the permission of history meant that since it had worked in the past Scharding could legitimately reintroduce it.⁸

However, it should be understood that the Carleton Druids under Scharding did not come to be completely removed from the renaissance Druids. Some of the rituals survived, such as the Native American inspired sweat lodge. Indeed, Scharding became quite interested in holding sweat lodges monthly, when possible.⁹ But even the sweat lodge was not in the form used by the renaissance Druids. When Brandon Shields, a renaissance Druid, visited in 1993 he taught Scharding and others "some of the old habits of the sweat lodge."¹⁰

Scharding is also clear that his research had a definite yet intangible effect on his Druidism. In his interview he discusses an incident where a Christian interrupted a Druid service. One of the less immediate responses was to "kick off a huge surge of interest in my research" which Scharding described as "sort of a search for validity"¹¹ since he, himself, was still unsure of how he could reconcile the Druids with other parts of his spiritual life. In finding validity, he noted the importance of understanding what had come before; a part of his experience with the Celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the RDNA "to connect with the past of Druidism, to tell all the other Druids that yes, we've been here a very long time, and other people have done the same things that you have done in your search for religious truth;" this was a feeling that his research had helped him with.¹² Moreover, it seems that the reassurance of the past meant something for the future of Scharding's Druidism. He felt a reassurance that since others before him had shown that "one can reconcile one's beliefs with Druidism on a stable basis throughout one's life" his Druidism could continue, whatever the other twists and turns in his life.¹³

³Michael Scharding, Isaac Bonewits, Robert Larson, Richard Shelton and Mark Heiman ed., *A Reformed Druid Anthology* 2nd ed., Northfield, MN: Drynemetum Press, 2003-4, Part Eight, chapter seven. (Here in, *ARDA II*) Part Eight, "A General History of Reformed Druidism" is an updated version of Scharding's comps on the Reformed Druids. Unfortunately, while the initial paper and so the initial part of the "General History" are still scholarly, much of the later material seem to be more examples of Scharding's Druid related memories. They are, unfortunately, without end notes though in some cases it seems possible that they draw from various sources about the druids more than his memories. It is unfortunate that he appended the sections that he did in the manner that he did. It might have been better, if he did not want to expand the "General History" with scholarly sections that he might have included the later sections elsewhere. However, I must still say that Scharding is the person who knows the most of the whole course of the history of Reformed Druids.

⁴*ARDA* 2, Part Eight, "A General History of Reformed Druidism."

⁵Michael Scharding, personal interview with Eric Hilleman, 30 August 1996, Side A. As a conceptual division Scharding tends to divide the eras of druidism at Carleton, before his, into the old Druids and the renaissance Druids, at least outside of his scholarly work. The renaissance druids are those druids who restarted the RDNA at Carleton in 1986 after it founded in 1984. Traces of it were receding by the time Scharding arrived. 'Older Druids' is a much broader term of everyone from 1963 to 1984. Since I am studying Scharding in this paper I will use his terms, with caution.

⁶Ibid., Side A.

⁷Ibid., Side A.

⁸Ibid., Side A.

⁹Ibid., Side A.

¹⁰Michael Scharding, *Five Year Druid Diary*, unpublished, 1 August 1993. The *Five Year Druid Diary* represents a selection of entries of Scharding's diary that he felt pertinent to Druidism as well as for future scholars. It also has comments and reflections from 1994 when he compiled the *Diary* in order to donate it the International Druid Archives.

As far as 'old habits' are concerned, the Carleton Druids, with such a quick turn over rate tend to assume that certain aspects are traditional that haven't been around for more than a few years.

¹¹Scharding, 30 August 1996. Side A.

¹²Ibid., Side A.

¹³Ibid., Side A.

But why was Scharding the one that produced “A General History of Reformed Druidism,” not to mention the *ARDA* and the expanded *ARDA II*, the last of which contains 2400 packed pages? Was it merely, as he notes, that others were content with Druidism as it was but he “was a historian by training and stubbornly wished to know what my predecessors had done.”¹⁴ Of course his interest in history in general had something to do with his choice to study the Druids through their history, but there were other reasons as well. Clearly, Scharding was not the first AD trained at Carleton College as a historian¹⁵ and many more undoubtedly had an interest in history. To be fair, there were earlier attempts to provide some sense of history. The third Arch Druid, David Frangquist, wrote a number of works, including *The Druids Chronicle (Reformed) (DC(R))*, a history, in mock biblical style, of the foundation of the RDNA. About ten years later, Richard Shelton began to collect an Apocrypha to the DC(R), consisting largely of letters of past Druids.¹⁶ Additionally, a Blue Book of the Archives was kept and added to by successive Arch Druids, though it was lost from time to time.¹⁷ Certainly, though, none of these publications and collections ever thought of rivaling the extent of the *ARDA* though they may well have been created to allow an understanding of the RDNA similar to the one that Scharding was attempting to achieve in his research.

It is worth wondering why Scharding did as much research as he did, far more than any previous Druid. I have already mentioned that Scharding did not possess a direct link to the older Druids. There was a gap which Scharding could not hope to overcome through talking with the Druids who were his immediate predecessors in the way that pre-renaissance Druids might have done. And while he may have had access to a certain number of their written works, Scharding later noted that he believed that “Far more tradition of the group exists outside of the printed matter.”¹⁸ Hence, the loss of a direct line meant the loss of a great deal of knowledge which the printed matter could only hint at. Moreover, much of the printed material that existed was not initially available to him. Scharding would have had access to the RDNA section of the Carleton archives, though at that time it was considerably smaller than at present. There was most certainly a copy of Isaac Bonewits’ *Druid Chronicles (Evolved) (DC(E))*,¹⁹ though notably missing was the Blue Book of the Archives which “was lost around 1985...found again” but not passed around, “it got lost again...and found again about ‘88, and got refound in 1994.” However, that collection was never accessible to all of the members of the Carleton Grove.²⁰

Hence, not only was direct person to person contact unavailable until late in Scharding’s time with Druidism, but paper records were also unavailable.

Yet, it would appear that Scharding had the tradition of the renaissance Druids to work from. The renaissance Druids themselves had made some attempts to reestablish the traditions of the Carleton Druids, in part through the influence of the *Druid Chronicles (Evolved)*²¹ as well as a limited amount of contact with Richard Shelton who corresponded with the renaissance druids and celebrated a ritual with them in 1988. However, as Shelton himself notes in an interview, the major impetus from renaissance Druidism was Native American and Wiccan religions.²² However much of an influence these new areas had relative to traditional RDNA Druidism is not important. What is important is that the renaissance Druids appear to have had a strong tradition that Scharding might have latched on to, rather than needing to study older Druidism for the sake of the remaking his own Druidism.

Scharding himself notes that in many ways his view of religion and his particular spiritual needs did not fit well with renaissance Druidism. While being interviewed he pointed out that much of what the druids were doing when he first showed up “wasn’t incredibly satisfying,” and that he “just hung out with them because they were the closest thing to what I was looking for.”²³ He gives a number of examples of what made those Druids less than satisfying, including a general sense that the Druids had made up their minds about what a religion was and that they did not have a favorable opinion of monotheists.²⁴ This was a problem for Scharding who was still grappling with various issues about his own religious path; in becoming a Druid he was careful to make sure that it “would not violate his confirmation” with the Catholic Church.²⁵

This is not to deny that there was any meaning present when Scharding first became a Druid. During a standard second order ordination, at the time, one was asked “‘Do you think that the Earth-Mother is good?’ If the recipient said ‘Yes!’, the druid sigil was drawn on their forehead” However, in Scharding’s case, he was asked “Do you dig that the Earth-Mother is Groovy?”²⁶ Despite the unorthodoxy of this ritual, and despite later noting that this was “during my more serious phase of Druidism,”²⁷ it meant a lot to Scharding.²⁸ I note this because Scharding’s seriousness was part of what made some of the rituals disagreeable to him. Likewise, when he first became interested in Druids he did so expecting to find something Celtic in the rituals.²⁹ But, rather than finding anything actually Celtic in either the renaissance Druids or the old Druids, he came to a conclusion illustrated by the following excerpt of a conversation with Richard Shelton.

"I have achieved Enlightenment!"
 "oh?" he [Shelton] said
 "Yes! the RDNA has nothing to do with [original] Druidism! It's actually Zen Buddhism!"

¹⁴*ARDA 2*, Part Eight, Introduction.

¹⁵ David Fisher was the first. David Frangquist the second.

¹⁶Shelton’s apocrypha took twenty years to be published and for the most part access to it is through its inclusion in the *ARDA* side by side with other apocryphal materials. To be fair, Shelton’s apocrypha may have been intended more to counter the apocrypha presented by Isaac Bonewits rather than for a completely historical reasons. Cf. *ARDA P.* 39.

¹⁷Scharding 27 August 1996, Side A.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, Side B.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Side B. Scharding spent a great deal of time and work in expanding the archives, bringing it from a section of the Carleton archives into what he calls the International Druid Archives. It is not clear how much was present though there is some evidence. Scharding himself claims to have enlarged it at least ten fold. Certainly much of the material was added through his efforts, either through visiting alumni or in response to a myriad of letters that Scharding sent out asking for material. Scharding’s efforts are largely recorded in the Carleton Archives in a series dedicated to some of the less druidic of his activities.

²⁰*Ibid.*, Side B.

²¹*ARDA II*, Part 8, Chapter 8.

²²Richard Shelton. Interview with Eric Hilleman, May 8, 1993.

²³Scharding, 27 August 1996. Side A.

²⁴*Ibid.* Side A.

²⁵*Ibid.* Side A.

²⁶*Five Year Druid Diary*, Reflections on November 1990. The Sigil is the name for a widespread symbol of the Reformed Druids, a circle with two vertical lines through it. The origin is unknown, though probably an invention of David Fisher, the primary founder of the RDNA.

²⁷Scharding, 27 August 1996. Side A.

²⁸*Five Year Druid Diary*, Reflections on November 1990

²⁹Scharding, 27 August, 1996. Side A.

We then laughed along time.³⁰

While Scharding found that old Druidism was no more Celtic than renaissance Druidism he still found reason to latch on to the former. While useful, it would be difficult to chart when these changes occurred and how such timing affected his research interests. For now, though, I will say that there must be more of a point to Scharding's research since many of his dislikes of renaissance Druidism could have also been applied to old Druidism and much of what he accepted of old Druidism were points that he had previously found unsatisfying in renaissance Druidism.

I believe that Scharding's relationship with renaissance Druidism was actually rather similar to the lack of a relationship that he initially had with older Druidism. Yes, Renaissance Druidism was going on shortly before him, and he had a number of people to serve as links with it, but at the same time, the linkage was not complete. At the time that Scharding had arrived most of the original renaissance Druids had graduated or left Carleton.³¹ What Scharding was first introduced to was only a fragment of renaissance Druidism, one that some of the Scharding's immediate predecessors tried to hold on to, but one which Scharding did not have sufficient access to make use of. Scharding has noted that when he arrived at Carleton The Druids were in a "slump" and so "it took me about six months before I found them."³² Even after he attended his first ritual communication was often disorganized to the point where "I didn't hear about some of [the rituals] until it was too late" to attend them.³³ Farm House, which had been the center of Druidism during the renaissance, was lost to Druids and the loss was significant to many, including Scharding, who noted that "a new focus was required for the Druids."³⁴

In addition to uncoordinated events, the leadership itself was rather fragmented. Scharding puts some stress on John Burrige as somebody who had been able to keep many of the Druids together. In his reflections upon his diary he noted that one ritual "was the last ritual where so many [people] were attending, probably because it was the last time John Burrige was at a major Druid ritual."³⁵ Scharding is even more blatant in an interview where he stated that "the group had faltered, back in '91-'92, because of John Burrige departing."³⁶ Perhaps even worse for the group was animosity among some of the members and the "loads of gossip circulating and people not going to rituals because 'you know who' was there."³⁷

What all this often meant was that the number of rituals was limited and some rituals that were planned did not occur. As I have mentioned, the sweat lodge was an important ritual for Scharding. However, the first sweat lodge Scharding planned to attend "was cancelled when Jon Nauert accidentally bumped Andrea Davis in the mouth with his elbow (their relationship wasn't too good then) and things degenerated." Because of those and similar issues Scharding didn't actually participate in a sweat lodge until 1992.³⁸

There were also certain features of renaissance Druidism that were no longer tenable. During the renaissance years and following

There were strong minds who made sure that rituals happened, and that was all there was. There wasn't any kind of totalitarian 'I'm in charge, we're going to make sure this thing happens' and such, it was more like someone showed up and said 'I'm going to lead a ritual on this day. Any of you guys want to come up?' and we'd all show up.

But as time passed fewer and fewer people wanted to take charge one person, "Andrea Davis, from the period of '89 - '92, ended up being pretty much the only person who ever decided to do anything,"³⁹ the old system of leadership was dying. Simply noting the date that Scharding chooses, 1992, it is clear that after Davis left there was a vacuum of leadership from then until 1993 when Scharding officially became Arch Druid, though undoubtedly he took some charge of the group before then.

Connected to the idea of leadership was the idea of a third order druid. After 1984 until 1993 when Scharding was ordained a third order druid, no one at Carleton was so ordained because, in part, there was no one to perform the ordination.⁴⁰ The nature of the third order, though, has changed significantly over time. In 1992, when Scharding decided to become the Arch Druid he "didn't really think there was much difference" between a third order and Arch Druid.⁴¹ However, before Scharding could join the third order and take over the Druids he had to find out more about the third order and find someone to ordain him.

What I argue then is not that the lack of connection with the renaissance Druids, in addition to the old Druids were the *only* cause for Scharding's research into the old Druids, but it was an important influence.⁴² I admit that part of the reason that Scharding used his research for his Druidism was because he was dissatisfied with the form of Druidism that he had inherited. But I might also suggest that part of his dissatisfaction comes from the lack of a stable connection to be had with renaissance Druidism and the faltering state of Druidism in his own day.

The results that I have found, of course, only apply to Scharding himself, though I am curious if other Druids, in similar situations, may have reacted in similar ways.⁴³ Related to that, I would ask, in some cases, particularly that of the renaissance Druids, why examining Druid history was not used to the benefit of the group. I might suggest that the renaissance Druids were not interested in history, and were already familiar with Neopaganism and Native American Religion before becoming Druids.⁴⁴ Of course, the ultimate question would be how this question, and where it fits into other questions of influence, might be used to examine the origins of the Druid rituals created in 1963 by David Fisher.

³⁰*Five Year Druid Diary*, 26 February 1994.

³¹Scharding, 27 August, 1996. Side A. He sets the years of the renaissance proper as 1986-1989. Scharding arrived at Carleton in the fall of 1989, right after those renaissance Druids would have left, and he did not become aware of the Druids until 1990.

³²Ibid. Side A.

³³Ibid., Side A.

³⁴*Five Year Druid Diary*. Reflections, 10/3/91

³⁵Ibid., Reflections, 11/21/91

³⁶Michael Scharding, 27 August 1996, Side B.

³⁷*Five Year Druid Diary*. Reflections, Mid April 1990. Scharding never goes into specifics about the rift.

³⁸*Five Year Druid Diary*, 26 February 1994.

³⁹Scharding, 27 August, 1996. Side A. He sets the years of the renaissance proper as 1986-1989. Scharding arrived at Carleton in the fall of 1989, right after those renaissance Druids would have left, and he did not become aware of the Druids until 1990.

⁴⁰Ibid. Side A.

⁴¹Ibid., Side A. This is rather like the original organization where Druids only joined the third order to become Arch Druid.

⁴²*Five Year Druid Diary*. Reflections, 10/3/91

⁴³Ibid., Reflections, 11/21/91

⁴⁴Michael Scharding, 27 August 1996, Side B.



David Fisher *the* Founder?

By Stephen Crimmins, 2004.

I recently had the privilege of transcribing an interview of the man who is generally known as the primary founder of Reformed Druidism, David Fisher. I was given the ability thanks to Michael (Mec) Scharding, who conducted the interview, as well as to Eric Hilleman for lending me transcribing equipment. The first thing that came into my mind was: how did Scharding manage to get an interview with Fisher who, I had thought, was too embarrassed of Druidism to give an interview. The key, Scharding insisted, was following up on his original call, nothing more. My image of David Fisher has been changing for some time since I was introduced to the contents of the International Druid Archives last year. Listening to the interview has changed my opinion further. This article is an attempt to distill some of what I have learned about our heretofore legendary founder, as well as to share some of the gems of the interview. For those who want to read the complete transcript, it will be published in the oral history section of ARDA II.¹ If you can't wait that long, you can probably pester myself or Scharding.

Margot Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon* paints a picture of Fisher similar to the one that I had until recently. According to it "In 1964 the [religion requirement] regulation was abolished but, much to the surprise—and it is said, horror—of the original founders, the RDNA continued to hold services and spread its organization far beyond the college campus. One of the founders, David Fisher, who wrote many of the original rituals, is now an Episcopal priest and teacher of theology at a Christian college in the South, having apparently washed his hands of the RDNA."² I know, moreover, that this opinion is

fairly wide spread among those people I've talked to but I have recently come to realize that this is not exactly true.

It is, of course, widely known that there were actually three founders: Norman Nelson, Howard Cherniack, as well as David Fisher. However, for some reason, Fisher has gotten most of the credit. For instance, Joan Carruth's "Epistle to the Myopians" asks "May the Earth-Mother keep David the Fisher in Her sight and bless him, for this is all his fault."³ But, since he was accompanied by two other founders why is he held above the others? Certainly, while Cherniack forgot about Druidism, Nelson has continued to be active to the present day.

The idea of Fisher as primary founder has precedents from the earliest days. He was the first person credited in the *Druid Chronicles (Reformed)* as preaching the word of Reformed Druidry,⁴ most likely because he was the first Arch Druid.⁵ However, Fisher is also often credited with bringing in the majority of the customs of the Druids. In so far as Fisher was the Arch Druid he may have had a special burden to come up with liturgical material. According to the *Druid Chronicles* and other sources Fisher claimed that he had been made a Druid in high school. However, Fisher has refuted this, saying that he "never claimed any special consecration by a Druid in England."⁶ If that is true Fisher was never under the burden of creating material by himself as a "pre-existing" ritual.

Regardless, it seems clear that much of the creation of the Reformed Druids was shared. As he notes in the interview, "we sort of dreamed a piece up here and a piece up there, improvising as we went along the way people, I suppose, sometimes do."⁷ This is not to say, either, that Fisher was not the creator of much of the material. For instance he suggested that he "must've dreamed" the sigil up, though he doesn't remember much about his inspiration for it except that the idea of "closing the circle" was important.⁸ The meditations were also his addition to the services.⁹ On the other hand many other parts of the Druids were the creation of some of the other founders and early members. Fisher credits the higher orders to a suggestion by Nelson and notes that the tenets are the only lasting contribution of Cherniack.¹⁰ Fisher credits the liturgy as

³ Joan Carruth, "The Epistle to the Myopians," in *A Reformed Druid Anthology*, ed. M. Scharding (Northfield: MN, 1996), line 0, page 60.

⁴ Frangquist, David, *Druid Chronicles (Reformed)*. Fisher is first mentioned in E.C. 1:3. His name is mentioned again in 1:6. Howard Cherniack appears first in E.C. 2:7. Nelson is first mentioned in L.C. 1:10 but then without a last name.

⁵ E.C. 1:6 indicates that Fisher was of the third order.

⁶ "David Fisher to Reformed Druids of Carleton Grove," 13 April 1970, Reformed Druid Collection, Carleton College Archives, Laurence J. Gould Library, Northfield, MN. There is still some dispute about this in my mind. Despite Fisher's denial the claim appears in Nelson's annotation to the *Druid Chronicles* and more recently in interviews with Nelson and Larson. Of course, if this claim was made, the circumstances around it would also be of interest. I am inclined to believe that if the claim was made it was after Nelson, Cherniack, and Fisher came up with the idea of the RDNA as a protest though it is possible that he claimed to Nelson and Cherniack.

⁷ David Fisher, telephone interview with Michael Scharding, 23 August 2004.

⁸ David Fisher, telephone interview

⁹ David Fisher, telephone interview

¹⁰ "David Fisher to Reformed Druids of Carleton Grove."

Cherniack was also the author of the original constitution. There may be a number of reasons why Fisher chose to overlook that.

¹ *A Reformed Druid Anthology, Second Edition*, vol. 1 ed. M. Scharding (Northfield, MN: Drynemetum Press), expected late 2004.

² Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon* (New York: Penguin Compass, 1997), 321

something that “I and Norman Nelson wrought in 1963 on Saturdays,”¹¹ though he does not indicate whether the work was equal or not. Indeed the balance of the initial work will probably be left an open to question for the future because, as Fisher points out, “I didn’t take notes at the time because, obviously, I didn’t think I was founding something for thirty, forty years.”¹²

However, in the period after the founding, Fisher, of the three founders, did have more of a tendency to be a guiding force. Among his early letters are responses to early council proposals, not only accepting some and rejecting others, but also requesting changes in parts,¹³ as well sending his own proposals to the council.¹⁴ This occurred despite feeling that Druidism did not meet a need for him and, moreover, that he was being drawn by his increasing Christianity away from Druidism. However, a partial answer could be found in a later letter in which Fisher explained his desire for the proposals as trying to combat over complicated organization that his own actions had inspired.¹⁵ Hence he felt responsible, as a founder, to at least guide what he had started.¹⁶ However, in that type of action it is easy to see Fisher in a parental role that is missing from the later actions of either of the other two founders. This guidance indicates both that Fisher saw himself more as a founder and probably has led others to feel that he had a special role among the founders.

Fisher’s interview indicates another ‘founder’ who was more important as a source of meaning in rituals: David Frangquist. According to Fisher, Frangquist “essentially took what had been a protest against religion requirement and an occasional exercise in pantheistic speculation and turned it into, if not a religion, something like a religion.”¹⁷ Moreover, Frangquist was the first leader of the group for whom the Druids “served a [spiritual] need.”¹⁸ We know that Frangquist’s search for material was apparently more extensive than Fisher’s.¹⁹ While it would be difficult to say how much he added it is possible to mention a few notable contributions. Frangquist published the *Druid Chronicles (Reformed)*. While at least some of the material was the writings of other druids,²⁰ the more serious material in the books of *Customs and Meditations* is

certainly Frangquist’s.²¹ He is also responsible for the collection of the *Green Book of Meditations* which was intended to be a guide for later Arch Druids.²² While Fisher can be seen as creating the Druids, Frangquist created a groundwork for its continuation and is probably most responsible that it is still around. Frangquist has also continued to be a leader in the Druids. When the Carleton Grove faltered in the 1980’s Frangquist came to stir up interest. Of course, all of this is not to say that Frangquist is *the* founder of Druidism instead of Fisher. Fisher indicates that Frangquist “refounded” the Reformed Druids; that is to say that while Fisher along with Nelson and Cherniack started the Druids and gave it much of its outward form, Frangquist was the prime mover in imbuing the movement with meaning.²³ Both individuals were important in the creation of what Druidism is, but in different ways.

It is also claimed that, having started something that blossomed into something he hadn’t expected, Fisher “washed his hands” of Reformed Druidism. What is true is that, after a point, Fisher stopped providing the guidance that he initially offered and has stopped initiating contact with Druids; the latest letter from Fisher to a Druid in the International Druid Archives is dated 1 August 1974 and before that a letter dated to 13 April 1970.²⁴ In his interview Fisher says that he has replied to letters sent to him more recently, though none of the replies have made their way to the Archives. However, his letters have stopped being instructions and aid for a wide audience of Druids

Fisher has expressed concern for the Druids; he particularly expressed worry about people who approach the Druids as something that it is not.²⁵ Perhaps, he has even wished from time to time that he never started the Druids so that people could not be hurt by it. But having such concerns does not mean that he feels that, on the whole, the Druids are not worthwhile. Indeed, at the end of the interview he wished that the Druids would continue to be around as an aid to those for whom it was suitable.

But if Fisher has not washed his hands of Druidism, why do many people believe he did? Before answering that I will examine why Fisher’s early guidance and more active role have faded. This is given a fairly clear answer in the interview. Fisher admits that “I’ve not maintained an active tie with Druidism because sometimes the leadership has seemed very strange to me.”²⁶ Though Fisher may have felt responsible to some degree early on as the nature of the Reform has changed his desire to

¹¹ “David Fisher to Rev. J. Gordon Melton,” 13 July 1973, Reformed Druid Collection, Carleton College Archives, Laurence J. Gould Library, Northfield, MN.

¹² David Fisher, telephone interview

¹³ “David Fisher to Arch Druid of Carleton College,” after 29 March 1966, Reformed Druid Collection, Carleton College Archives, Laurence J. Gould Library, Northfield, MN.

¹⁴ “David Fisher to Arch Druid of Carleton College submitting proposals,” 1966?, Reformed Druid Collection, Carleton College Archives, Laurence J. Gould Library, Northfield, MN.

¹⁵ “David Fisher to Arch Druid of Carleton College clarifying proposals,” 1966?, Reformed Druid Collection, Carleton College Archives, Laurence J. Gould Library, Northfield, MN.

¹⁶ “I see my duty as remaining, and advising,” “David Fisher to Arch Druid of Carleton College clarifying proposals,” and “I felt somewhat responsible, having started the ball rolling down the hill, to offer what helpful observations I could,” David Fisher, telephone interview.

¹⁷ David Fisher, telephone interview.

¹⁸ David Fisher, telephone interview.

¹⁹ David Fisher, telephone interview.

²⁰ “David Fisher to Reformed Druids of Carleton Grove.” The Druid named here is Jan Johnson who, however, left Carleton after the Druid’s first term in existence and is an unlikely candidate to have written this. However, it is clear that some selected material came from elsewhere.

²¹ “David Fisher to Rev. J. Gordon Melton.”

²² David Frangquist, “Introduction to The Green Book Volume One,” in *A Reformed Druid Anthology, Second Edition*, Vol. 2 ed. M. Scharding (Northfield, MN: Drynemetum Press, 2003), 1.

²³ David Fisher, telephone interview.

²⁴ The later of which is a response to the proposals put forward by Isaac Bonewits. It is of a different nature than the previous, going more to explain the nature of the founding and of his beliefs as a Christian vis-à-vis Neopaganism rather than providing guidance, as he had, towards the Carleton Grove.

²⁵ Fisher was most particularly worried about Druids who stayed with the group and did not find a more complete religion. Perhaps his concern is valid that in some groups there is not enough material for complete spiritual well being. As Fisher created it and Frangquist altered it at least, Fisher doesn’t feel that there is enough material. Though he didn’t consider the option during the interview, I would expect that the groups with more long term membership, especially the Groves in California, offer a more filling religion.

²⁶ David Fisher, telephone interview.

guide those led by a different spirit of the Reform has dissipated.²⁷

There are, however, good reasons why Fisher has been seen as a recluse. For my own belief I would point to the research of Scharding who only managed to speak to Fisher after ten years and multiple attempts. A certain feeling came from him to me and, I would think, to others that Fisher didn't want to talk. Admittedly Scharding may have had been helped along in his belief. After telling Robert Larson that he had been unable to contact Fisher during an interview Larson's response is 'that figures,' followed by an explanation of why Larson wasn't surprised.²⁸ That may have been enough to turn a string of unsuccessful attempts to contact Fisher into a belief that Fisher couldn't be contacted.

However, the quotation from Margot Adler is of an earlier date and probably arises from the period when Neopagans began to use the vehicle of Reformed Druidism. Certainly Fisher became much more silent as his creation turned towards this new religious category and his Christianity may have convinced others that he was more opposed to the new path of Reformed Druidism than he actually was. In specific, I would point to Isaac Bonewits as the origin for the belief, especially since he was the primary source for the Reformed Druid material in *Drawing Down The Moon*. In an early version of Bonewits' article "What and Why is Reformed Druidism in the 1970's,"²⁹ Bonewits wrote that "And so, to the horror or of the original founder, the RDNA continued to exist and grow." In fact, Bonewits, at the suggestion of Richard Shelton,³⁰ removed this line, though he added another which insinuated something similar.³¹

Some of Bonewits opinions on the founder and on other topics were distorted because he had a particular vision of what the Reformed Druids should be. Most notably Bonewits had a vision of Reformed Druidism not as becoming a neopagan vehicle but as already being one,³² a point which was denied by many of the founders.³³ With this in mind it is easy to see how

Bonewits would see Fisher as being repulsed by his creation if only a limited part of it was considered. Bonewits also had a view of the Reformed Druids needing to become a much more active organization. In his First Epistle he depicts the Founders as having abandoned Druidism, except to protest against changes.³⁴ From the available letters we have seen that this was not the limit of Fisher or the other Founder's activities, as they tended to guide and support, at least, the Carleton Grove. They, however, lacked an interest in participating in a Grove and, moreover, in creating new Groves, an activity Bonewits saw as essential for the survival of the Reformed Druids. Regardless of the exact reasons, Bonewits believed that Fisher was disgusted with Druidism and was instrumental in spreading this view.

I hope that I have been able to convince people of two things. The first is that while Fisher is most famous as the founder of Druidism there were others who might take more credit especially in the creation of the meaning and continuation of Druidism. Secondly, that Fisher has not repented of his creation. He still takes an interest in the Druids even if he doesn't actively seek them out. His actions and inactions in the past may have led to other views, but those may now be cleared away. I, at least, have come to a new respect for Fisher and for the importance of other founders as well as for who Fisher is today. I would like to end with a few quotes from the interview which I felt to be interesting.

- (On how the Druids were started) One night Norman Nelson, Howard Cherniack, and myself were having one drink too many and were trying to figure out what we could do to deal with this (religious) requirement.
- (An analogy for Reformed Druidism) Well, I suppose, given people's need for alternative spiritualities, the Druids are like a template on a word processor that can be filled in with a number of contents.
- (On some of the sources of Reformed Druidism) I must admit we were all readers of science fiction or science fantasy
- (On the Druid Chronicles (Reformed)) I thought it was pretty fun.

²⁷ He admits in the interview that some letters from people who took Druidism seriously were embarrassing to him and he felt no need to guide people on that path, perhaps because he had no experience with it.

²⁸ Robert Larson, telephone interview with Michael Scharding, 20 April, 1994. In in *A Reformed Druid Anthology*, ed. M. Scharding (Northfield, MN: Drynemetum Press, 1996), 475. Other interviews have similar sentiments, such as Scharding's interview with Norman Nelson.

²⁹ "What and Why is Reformed Druidism in the 1970's?," Isaac Bonewits, Pamphlet produced in 1974? A latter version appears in the *The Druid Chronicles (Evolved)*.

³⁰ "Richard Shelton to Isaac Bonewits," 1 May 1976, Reformed Druid Collection, Carleton College Archives, Laurence J. Gould Library, Northfield, MN.

³¹ "many of the older members of the RDNA disapprove of Neopagan Druidism, considering it a dangerous step backwards." "What and Why is Reformed Druidism in the 1970's?," page 2, in *The Druid Chronicles (Evolved)*, ed. I. Bonewits (Berkley, CA: Berkley Drunemeton Press, 1976).

³² Bonewits' Sixth Epistle which will be in ARDA II mentions that the omission of non-pagan material that he received through Larson lead him to this conclusion.

³³ A letter from Fisher to Bonewits dated 1 August 1974 probably contributed to Bonewits' feelings. In the letter Fisher says that he no longer considers himself a "Reformed Druid Priest" or a "Patriarch," (though he never mentions anything about not being a "Reformed Druid." The letter also includes

Fisher's feelings about Neopaganism. It would have been easy for Bonewits to overlook that the letter did not deny the rest of Reformed Druidism since it denied the part Bonewits felt most important and most real.

³⁴ "The First Epistle of Isaac," 1:14-15, in *The Druid Chronicles (Evolved)*, ed. I. Bonewits (Berkley, CA: Berkley Drunemeton Press, 1976).

So Endeth
Part Seven
Of ARDA 2