

Summary of Structure of Reformed Druidism with Appendices

by Michael Scharding,
RDNA Archivist & Historian
December 2005 c.e.

To whom it may concern,

You requested the following material for evaluating the Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA) for its applicability as a religious organization for the purposes of designating a headstone for deceased military personnel. Namely, to wit, this essay addresses the third question;

3) A written description of

- * How the sponsoring organization's belief/faith system is comprehensive in nature and addresses fundamental and ultimate questions, and

- * its organizational practices (such as regular services, ceremonial functions, existence of clergy, efforts at propagation, observance of holidays, or other characteristics of a traditional belief system)

The Reformed Druids of North America is just one form, the oldest, of modern Druidism in America and Canada. Because the RDNA is the ancestor of more complicated forms like ADF, Keltria, Druidactios, MOCC and OMS forms of Druidry, the RDNA is naturally the simplest known format of organized Druidry. Our penchant for rejecting dogma, official writings and creeds has indeed greatly assisted us in our primary mission: addressing fundamental and ultimate questions of the Universe through the observation and comprehension of Nature. However, we have eschewed the codification of answers, so that each and every Druid may honestly evaluate these questions without fear of being "heretical" if they arrive at interesting conclusions. We facilitate the process of asking those questions rather than understanding the resulting solutions.

Regularity

The RDNA preferably has weekly services on Saturday afternoon, but due to sparse and scattered numbers in many groves (parishes), most Reformed Druids tend to meet eight times a year in person about six weeks apart (see page two for schedule) and instead meet on-line daily or weekly for discussions.

Liturgy

We have an approved general liturgy, known as the Common Order of Worship, which serves as the basic template of most services, and our priests elaborate upon it. The liturgy has places for procession, singing, poetry recitation, divination of divine favor by sacrifice of leaves or flowers, consecration of whiskey and/or water, communal partaking of waters, the reading of several meditations and sermons, and a blessing upon the congregation.

Ceremonial Functions

The Archdruid is the elected leader of a grove (parish), and is also an ordained priest of the RDNA. The Archdruid often leads the services and performs ordinations and blessings.

The Preceptor is an elected or appointed position to assist in the preparation of materials for services, taking care of business matters and public relations. The preceptor tends to lead responses to questions amongst the congregation at services.

The Server is an elected or appointed position to bear the cup and materials during the service, like an altar boy.

Existence of Clergy

There are currently about 134 priests in the RDNA, of whom about 24 are actively leading groves. Priests are usually trained by educating members of the grove in the ways and customs of the RDNA. After ordination of three successive Orders, these priests are also recognized at other groves, and it is a permanent title that can not be revoked, although dissident priests may be ignored.

The priests, collectively, are the legislative body of the RDNA, much like the bishops in the Roman Catholic church, chaired by the Archdruid of the original grove of Carleton College. Each grove is pseudo-autonomous in practical terms, and Reform-wide legislation by the Council of Priests has not been raised since 1982, leaving groves to determine matters locally.

Efforts of Propagation

Unlike the other forms of modern Druidism, the RDNA is averse to active proselytization. The normal situation is that people find our website or read about us in an article and ask to join, and they are usually accepted quite readily. We are more often concerned with enjoying the company and blessings we have than spending that energy on looking for more people.

Observation of Holidays

As indicated on the next page. The 8 great festivals of the years (two solstices, two equinoxes and four fire holidays) are filled with group meals, games, a service and lots of chatting. Often much time is spent on preparing decorations, practicing the music and selection of the stories to be read. If a bonfire is present, that will also occupy a great deal of joyful busy-work. Some groves may also honor the holidays of other religious traditions.

Other Characteristics of Traditional Belief System

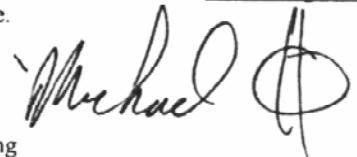
The RDNA has a tendency to select Irish or Welsh customs, but is not bound to do so. Each grove is free to decide which deities in particular it will celebrate or worship, if any are named specifically at all. We tend not to have permanent indoor locations, preferring outdoor services whenever possible, and meeting indoors only when the weather is abysmal. As such, there is no need for buildings and land property is rarely owned communally, preferring to use parks or borrowing a neighbor's land with their permission, picking the location more for the seasonal beauty than from convenience. We have amassed a collection of about 3250 encyclopedic pages of anthologized writings, much written in chapter-verse format, but they are not officially sanctioned or considered divinely inspired, just very interesting to us.

Other Notes

I have included some of our earliest attempts to explain Reformed Druidism, by our revered Founding Fathers from 1964 to 1966; David Fisher and David Frangquist. I believe that this page merely reiterates what they have said, and brings it up to date. Those writings will show that our taste for ultimate questions was present from our foundation.

If you have any other questions, do not hesitate to ask for greater clarification. I will be moving overseas soon from the D.C. area, but you may continue to reach me at mikerdna@hotmail.com for many years to come.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Scharding

Arch-Druid of the Washington D.C. Grove of the RDNA
November 28, 2005 c.e.

What is Reformed Druidism?

Reformed Druids of North America
Flyer for Fall 1965 at Carleton

Origins

Reformed Druidism has its beginning at Carleton College in the spring of 1963 as a protest to the college's requirement that all students attend a certain number of religious services or meetings. One of the ways of fulfilling the requirement was by attending services of one's own religion. The Reformed Druids of North America proposed to test the degree of freedom permitted under this clause.

Druidism was ideal for this attack. It had a perfect combination of exotic ritual plus some relevance to the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition. If religious credit were granted, the religious requirement could be exposed as totally ineffective. If, on the other hand, credit were denied, the college could be charged with bigotry. The initial attitude of the college was, "If we ignore them, they'll go away." But the RDNA not only refused to go away, it grew, acquiring an advisor, and becoming a registered college organization.

In June, 1964, the religious requirement was repealed. Even though the Druids rejoiced at this triumph, they recognized that their job was not over. For many members the movement had come to represent a valuable part of their spiritual lives. So there was the importance of continuing the RDNA as a protest against all coerced religion.

Principles

Druidism boasts its lack of institutionalized dogma. Each Druid is required only to adopt these Basic Tenets:

(1) One of the many ways in which the object of Man's search for religious truth can be found is through Nature: the Earth-Mother.

(2) Nature, being one of the primary concerns in Man's life and struggle, and being one of the objects of creation, is important to Man's spiritual quests. (The phrase "objects of creation" does not necessarily imply a single Creator, but it does imply an important link between the spiritual and the material realms)

----- In Reformed Druidism, the material realm, Nature, is personified as the Earth-Mother. The abstract essence of the universe, in opposition to the material world, is referred to as Be'al, from a word which the ancient Celts applied to an abstract supreme being. The "object of Man's search" is called "awareness," and it is defined as "unity with Be'al".

Ritual

In accord with the Basic Tenets, all Reformed Druid worship must be directed toward Nature. For this reason, many customs and rituals of the Ancient Druids, who were essentially Nature-worshippers, are retained.

Druid worship must, in so far as possible, be held in the out-of-doors; an oak grove, or a hill or other prominence, is ideal. According to ancient Druid custom, the officiating Druids, and others who so wish, ought to be clad in long white robes; the robe of the Archdruid having a distinctive decoration or color. The waters-of-life are usually passed to all present as a symbol of the link man has with Nature. Incantation and other ancient Celtic ritual is also used; but in "Reformed" Druidism, human sacrifice is out.

In order to focus attention on Nature, various aspects of it retain the names of their corresponding Celtic gods and goddesses.

Dalon Ap Landu - the grove
Grannos - healing springs
Braciaca - malt
Belenos - the sun
Sirona (goddess) - rivers
Taranis - thunder & lightning
Llyr- the sea
Danu (goddess) - fertility

Festivals

Druid festivals correspond to the important dates of the old Druid year. Celebration always begins at sundown the previous evening, and includes bonfires and revelry appropriate to the season.

Samhain - Nov. 1: "Halloween" begins the period of Geimredh.

Midwinter - the winter solstice; day of the "Yule log"

Oimelc - Feb. 1; begins the period of Earrach.

Beltane- May 1; "May Day," begins period of Samradh.

Midsummer - the summer solstice

Lughnasadh (Brón Troghain) - Aug. 1; day for gatherings and feasts, begins the period of Foghamhar.

The phases of the moon also ought to be followed closely. A new venture should be begun only when the moon is waxing, an old one consummated only when it is waning. The night of the full moon is a time of rejoicing; while the night of the new moon is a solemn occasion, calling for vigils and meditation.

Organization

Each organization (known as a grove) has three officers: an Archdruid, who must be a third order priest or higher, to direct worship; a Preceptor, who must be at least a second order Druid, to handle business matters; and a Server, to assist the Archdruid.

To become a first order Druid, a person must partake of the waters-of-life, and affirm his acceptance of the Basic Tenets (listed under Principles above).

To become a second order Druid, one must pledge himself to the service of Druidism, as well as have an understanding of basic Druidism.

To become a third order priest, one must dedicate himself to a life of Druidic inquiry, the beginning of which is an all-night, outdoor vigil.

Higher orders of the priesthood (up to the tenth) are reserved for outstanding insight and dedication over a period of time. They are similar to academic degrees in that they represent personal achievement, but carry no special authority. Each order of the priesthood is dedicated to one of the eight aspects of Nature mentioned under Ritual.

Purpose

On a superficial level, it might now seem that the purpose of Reformed Druidism is merely to delve into the strange customs and rituals of the ancient Celts, and to have some fun doing it, and also to serve as a new and different type of protest movement.

But, on deeper examination of the RDNA, it might be said to have two important purposes: (1) It offers a reasonable alternative for the person who cannot stomach organized religion, or who feels that it is somehow deficient; and it hopes that its exotic forms of worship will appeal to the rebel. (2) In communing with Nature, it seeks to promote a spirit of meditation and introspection, aimed ultimately at awareness of religious truth.

The Coming of Spring

(By David Frangquist, 1964)

1. It has been a mild winter. I hope that this foreshadows an early spring thaw, in Laird and Severance as well as the Arb.
2. After the ground has dried, and a small flock of seekers after religious truth makes its return to Monument Hill, I hope that they will find that the fog of religious discrimination has also cleared. Last fall, as well as the spring before it, was a difficult one.
3. The college has proclaimed that the religious requirement may be satisfied by participating in worship in one's own church. Yet, several churches have not been granted the privilege of credit.
4. Among them is the Reformed Druids of North America. The reason for this sort of discrimination has never been fully justified.
5. Charges have been made that the Reformed Druids have not been in existence long enough to be given credit. This is rather like saying that Christianity was not a religion until, say, the time of Constantine.
6. But the fact is that, although the Druids have been actively organized at Carleton only since last April, the movement springs from a tradition older than Christianity itself: ancient Celtic Druidism.
7. It has been said that the Carleton Druids are not serious about their religion; but an altar on Monument Hill, weighing over a ton of rock, carried there manually, is evidence of their seriousness.
8. Finally, Druidism is said to have no relevance to the college's so-called Judeo-Christian tradition. I would only point out that Christian missionaries pushing into Gaul and Germany from Rome, in order to more easily convert large segments of the local population, incorporated large amounts of Druidic practice into the tradition of the Christian church.
9. I would assume that when the college says tradition, it means to include more than simply the Old and New Testaments. It might also be noted that credit is even denied to students participating in discussion conducted by missionaries of the church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints.
10. I really should not have dealt with these charges, for to do so would seem to affirm the principle that there is some basis on which a religious group may be denied credit.
11. This is not the case. No clearly definable basis can be established. Any basis for judgment must be purely subjective, for religion is essentially a question of personal conviction.
12. This is the reason for the failure of the student negotiation committees. Committees may provide help in solving political problems, but not in religious problems. The committees have tried to deal in logical arguments; religion deals in faith.
13. Dr. Maitland has said that religion is concerned with "ultimate personal questions."
14. Reformed Druids could not agree more strongly. Perhaps the characteristic which distinguishes them, however, is the seeking of these ultimate questions through Nature.
15. John B. Sparks has demonstrated that all of the major religions of the modern world have developed directly or indirectly from Nature Worship.*
16. Druids, find themselves, concerned, then, with the questions of the origins of religion and the ultimate nature of religious experience. Their reward for this concern has been simply discrimination.

17. The Reformed Druids of North America do not plan any mass demonstrations of strength, nor do they wish to personally attack any member of the Administration for his handling of the problem. They seek only to make their case known.
18. Reformed Druids do not seek direct abolition of the religious requirement, nor do they desire to upset modern religious institutions.
19. They merely seek recognition and credit for their personal efforts in dealing with "ultimate personal questions."
20. I hope only that they will not be disappointed, but that as spring brings good weather to Monument Hill it will also bring good news of acceptance.

-David Frangquist

Broadcast of KARL AM radio, 1964

The Epistle of David the Chronicler

(by David Frangquist, 1964)

Chapter the Third

1. It is mine observation that religion is composed of two parts: the philosophy and the ritual. Should either be absent, there is no longer religion.
2. For without the philosophy the ritual is but playacting; and without the ritual the philosophy lacks the warmth and vitality, which is capable of perpetuating it beyond its originator.
3. For there is in all men a certain desire for the glory of ceremony.
4. Often it is indulged in for its own sake, as in the case of secret organizations and in the worship of the state (which is often confused with patriotism).
5. For ritual is capable of crowding all else out and becoming the end in itself. It is for this reason that we are constantly threatened by the Druid ritual shedding its philosophy and becoming mere playacting.
6. I am persuaded that our philosophy is valuable, for in Nature we have found a peace and a fulfillment that was otherwise lacking.
7. But we have also recognized that ritual is most often a hindrance; and to eliminate it is simply to encourage non-ritual to become the ritual. Rather as Druids we have endeavored to build a ritual which will be the destroyer of its own importance.
8. We have therefore adopted a ceremony, which is sufficiently foreign to our cultural tradition as to shock, whereas being sufficiently close to it to be taken seriously.
9. It is our fervent hope that in this way we will be able to impress upon men that ritual is only relative, and thus help them to rise above its limitations toward the greater truth beyond.
10. It is for this reason that we must be careful not to admit of any ceremony which would be too closely allied with our cultural traditions or which would tend to focus too much attention on the ritual itself.
11. We must not utilize any practice which is not derived directly from ancient Druid custom or from analogies from Nature.
12. And as leaders of our cause, we must always keep in mind our principal objectives.
13. For I would again affirm that insofar as we can continue to bring to others a greater appreciation of the wonders of the Earth-mother, I am persuaded that our effort is not in vain.
14. May the Peace of the Earth-mother be yours, and may the radiance of Belenos daily illumine your spirit.

The Book of Faith

(by David Fisher, 1964)

1. I, David, Arch Druid of the Grove at Carleton, write these words so that those who come after me may know and understand some of the feelings which moved me to found the Druid movement. The tone of these writings will differ from the rest of the Books, but I write as I do for clarity, and, in accordance with Druid practice, make no request that my words become a dogma.
2. In the beginning, Druidism was formed as a protest against a religious requirement at Carleton College, not in affirmation of anything, except to affirm a mutual protest against coerced religion. The History of the Druids will be found elsewhere in the various books of this canon.¹
3. The founders varied considerably in their degree of religious commitment. Some believed in no God, others in their own uncertainty, and others in the Christian religion. I am a believer in Christianity, and still hold myself as such.
4. Attacks have shifted in time from charges of insincerity to charges of emptiness and lack of real value. I write to reaffirm a new purpose, set forth elsewhere in the canon.
5. Druidism boasts no ethos. Since Druidism has never claimed to be the only true religion, dogmatism has always seemed incompatible with the organization. This does not mean that, as an individual Druid, I have no ethic, nor that any others who call themselves Druid are without beliefs as to what is right and wrong. As Druids, however, we can only affirm a mutual desire to ask ourselves questions about the meaning of life, and about the degree to which religious truth can be truth for us.
6. If I were to pass on any advice to my followers, it would be to never consider that they have found, as Druids, the ultimate answer to any of their questions. Druidism is a faith, if a faith, in questioning, not in answering. Awareness, to a Druid, is an individual thing, to be shared, perhaps, but never codified.
7. It has been asked, and with good reason: what is awareness. I can only answer that for me, awareness has meant a strengthening of my own faith, through communing with myself and with the world of Nature around me. I have come to a closer vision of the greater Reality that lies beyond this world, precisely because I have come to appreciate this world.
8. It has been asked, and again with good reason: if your purpose is to ask and to inquire, then why your use of ritual? Can not men seek for answers without the crutch of a ritual which has no real religious purpose? I can only answer that the Druid ritual has a value because it can be used by different men in different ways.
9. For one man, the sacrifice of life is the offering up of himself to a god or gods. To another, it is an offering up of his mind to a search for truth. As a priest, I repeat the great Answer to calm men's hearts and minds, not as a magical formula of absolution; but for some, the Answer is an absolution, washing away the distractions of a week of worry, and reaffirming confidence in the idea of a purpose in life.
10. For one man, the partaking of the Waters of Life is a mystical sacrament of communion with a god or gods. For another, it is an act of common fellowship with other seekers of the truth. As a priest, I do not seek to consecrate the Water to any use with my words, but rather think of my words as a common means for others, who watch and listen, to consecrate the Water within themselves.
11. Whether what has been founded at Carleton remains or passes away is now unclear. I will always have a concern for the Druids. My own feeling is that if the experience has helped any men to better see themselves, and to become aware of the problems of life in a new way, then it will have served its purpose.
12. I have called this book the Book of Faith. It is my faith in what I have done and in what I have seen grow. In accordance with a basic principle of Druidism, I do not presume to speak for anyone else except for myself. Yet I would add one word to the skeptical, to the vain, and to the self-satisfied.
13. Before you, O reader, pass a judgment on the Reformed Druids, look first into your own heart and be very sure that all is right and at peace. Then without false pride, ask those who call themselves Druids what they have learned from being Druids. Then, when you have weighed the amused against the serious, the scoffers against the men who call themselves aware, then only will you be able to judge.
14. In the name of the Earth Mother, the great personification of all that moves and walks and lives and is upon the Earth, and in the name of Be'al, the source of all truth without whom no Druid is aware, but whose nature remains to each man his own mystery, I ask upon you peace. May you, in your own way, find the truth, as I have found it.

So be it.

David Fisher

April 12th, 1964.

Outline of the Foundation of Fundamentals

(By David Frangquist, 1966)

BEING: a brief catalogue of the major quasi-metaphysical-theological conclusions which may be abstracted from and by the application of the Reformed Druid point of view to questions of ultimate relevance (in outline form).

THE THREE PILLARS (or treasures, or paths, or baskets, or roots, or branches, or wondrous illuminations)

I. The Relentless Rebellion (threefold)

A. The categorical If

No Intellectually honest mind can long remain so termed unless it is willing to submit all things to rigorous examination, even the most sacred provinces. Blind faith is no faith; it is blindness.

B. The Principle of Non-Confirmation

Applying rigorous scrutiny to the world's religions, we find, especially in western form, universal claims to exclusiveness; yet none submits any more proof of its claim than an appeal to faith. Logically, therefore, all are equal.

C. The Principle of Non-Conformation

In the face of the insoluble problem of selecting the "one true faith" most people conform to one of two patterns:

1. **The True Believer** embraces the faith of his fathers wholeheartedly and unquestioningly, fearing to face the logical possibility (probability?) that he is wrong.
 2. **The Non-Believer** rejects all faiths out of hand, fearing that he might prove himself a fool by choosing the wrong one.
- Reformed Druids reject the necessity of conforming to either of these patterns based on fear. True spiritual growth exists only in the *Relentless Rebellion* against petrified norms.

II. The Paths of Paradox (also threefold)

A. The Ceremonial Syndrome

Man is incurably finite. He cannot conceive of spiritual activity except in terms of ritualistic hocus-pocus. But ritual must be carefully selected or it will independently acquire magical properties of its own. Ritual properly constitutes a springboard for the spirit only. Oak worship is ideal for this purpose (see also III).

B. The Primacy of Ambiguity

True spiritual growth consisting of personal effort and rebellion, Reformed Druidism must remain devoid of orthodoxy. All writings must be ambiguous and non-final (present dissertation included).

C. The Principle of Non-Confirmation (rears its ugly head again)

You'll get no pat answers here. There being no logical basis for the acceptance or denial of any faith, Reformed Druidism confirms nothing (including Reformed Druidism). You're welcome to, but you're on your own.

III. The Last Refuge (whadaya know?...threefold!)

A. The Noble Fivefold Formulation

1. The Nature of Life

Life is defined as the unity of the spiritual (Be'al) and the material (the Earth-Mother). Without the material the spiritual has no form; without the spiritual the material is dead.

2. And Man?

Man, as a living animal, ideally consists of both material and spiritual.

3. And Man?

Man is unique. This is because he has self-awareness. He passes from self-awareness through self-centeredness to self-importance, thence to self-isolation, resulting in self-misery.

4. Unity for All and All for Unity

Man's self-importance cuts him off from the life-giving benefits of unity with the spirit and Nature (the material). Druids sometimes call unity *Awareness*. It is the object of religion to restore unity; most concentrate on the direct attainment of spiritual unity, ignoring (or rejecting) the material.

5. Back to Nature

Druids (at least some of them) believe that a good approach is to first restore material unity. Having broken down part of the barrier around the self, the rest should then be easier. Hence, Druid Nature worship: the ideality of going to worship oaks.

B. The Basic Tenets

The Basic Tenets of Reformed Druidism, which form the basis (believe it or not) for the preceding discussion, are found in the Constitution of the Reformed Druids, and in another form in the Book of the Law in *The Druid Chronicles (Reformed)*. They are the quintessences of Druidism, such that a person need accept nothing else and still become a Reformed Druid. They are here presented in their most concentrated form:

1. Nature is good!

And the second is like unto the first:

2. Nature is good!

C. The Last Refuge

- It is simple to grind out these systems. It is the expected thing to do. Perhaps it is useful. It is meaningless!
- It is simple to sit on the Hill of the Three Oaks and look at the pretty blue sky. That, too, can be meaningless!
- It is not so simple to stand alone under the pretty blue sky and watch all your preconceived systems come tumbling down.
- But when they come tumbling down, there is a refuge: in Nature. There one may find a clearing of the head, a freedom from stagnant forms, a beginning. (The End)