In Australia, where God is often portrayed as distant from our interests and concerns, I have appreciated learning from Celtic approaches to spirituality. Celtic spirituality suggests the idea of “thin places” where the boundaries are blurred between the visible world and spiritual world. I reckon we have a lot to learn from the Celtic tradition and its lovely everyday and earthy prayers, its community based approach to mission and evangelism, its generous hospitality, and its practice of pilgrimage and adventuring with God.

My favourite guides for Celtic spirituality, and especially as it relates to our life and faith in Australia, are Ray Simpson and Brent Lyons-Lee. Ray Simpson is the founding Guardian of the Community of Aidan and Hilda (www.aidanandhilda.org) and has published widely on Celtic spirituality and monasticism (http://www.raysimpson.org/store/type/book). Brent Lyons-Lee is Mission Catalyst for Community Engagement and Advocacy with the Baptist Union of Victoria and has been a grassroots urban mission worker with Urban Seed in the inner-city of Melbourne and Norlane in Geelong. He has partnered in helping pioneer The Community of Aidan and Hilda in Australia (www.aidanandhilda.org.au). This is their second book together, following and expanding on Emerging Downunder: Creating New Monastic Villages of God (ATF Press, 2008).

Celtic Spirituality in the Australian Landscape introduces the history and foundational elements of Celtic spirituality, how the Community of Aidan and Hilda seek to practice them in contemporary life, and how it relates particularly to a post-Christendom context anywhere in the Western world but also especially to Australia. There are resources here for any Christian, but also for those who identify as “spiritual but not religious”. I especially appreciate its advocacy for a “way of Life” including the practice of “soul friendship”, the importance of learning from Aboriginal spirituality, and the need to face and embrace our shadow sides. This is not a shallow feel-good spirituality product, but nourishing fuel for a long and deep journey! The book is worth it alone for the “ten waymarks” as guideposts for a sustainable spiritual journey.

 Appropriately, there is discussion of the relevance of Celtic spirituality not just for individuals but for church communities and networks. It challenges the church to leave behind and let “Rest in Peace” such dangerous ideas as hierarchy, patriarchy, fragmentation, love of power, denial of the problems we face, and the church’s unpreparedness to face stains in its history. In all the conversations around Fresh Expressions of Church, new monasticism and emerging church, there is a lot of wisdom to be gleaned from Celtic models. The book also offers Celtic prayers and resources for a spiritual journey. We cannot import faith from another context and transplant it without critique or adaption, but any of us can learn from people and traditions beyond our own walls, and Celtic spirituality is a generous and life-giving source of inspiration.

Ray Simpson and Brent Lyons-Lee offer us a pure gift from their own experience and what they are observing, as sources of renewal for the church. I’ll be inviting church friends and teams I serve with to feast through its pages and discuss its relevance to how we share life and mission together.