

Book blesses with Celtic insights

Every Earthly Blessing, by Esther deWaal; Servant Publications (Ann Arbor, 1991); 148 pages; \$7.99.

By Sister Margaret Brennan, SSJ
Guest contributor

Recently I heard a Native American speaker encourage her listeners to return to their spiritual roots, to rediscover their own ethnic pulse, to appreciate the traditions of their own ancestors, to touch the springs of their own spirituality.

It was in this spirit that I picked up Esther deWaal's little book, *Every Earthly Blessing*. I'm glad I did.

An historian and author of several books on Celtic spirituality, deWaal draws the reader into the world of Celtic Christians and shows how their unique vision was shaped by natural temperament, the harsh beauty and isolation of the land itself, the influence of monasticism and by their own belief that all things are somehow connected. Anyone who thinks that

creation spirituality is new or radical will find this book enlightening.

Celtic Christians were deeply incarnational in their vision of the world and, for ordinary folk, every moment, every daily activity — kindling the morning fire, milking the cow, harrowing the field, weaving the cloth — was cause for contact with God and for blessing. To them God was, not a distant spirit, but a friend present with them as they worked, walked and slept. Their prayer was not a formality

but a state of mind among busy people. The author includes many of these delightful traditional prayers in her book. They are earthy and profound, full of ordinary images, blessings for the cycles of life and celebrations of simple pleasures.

Because they were, geographically, on "the edge of the world," far from Mediterranean or other European centers, Celtic Christians had a chance to shape their own Christianity apart from other cultural influences. Even the monasteries, which became their anchors of faith, were closer to Eastern than to Western spirituality.

From the pagan Druids they had learned a love of the land, the sacredness of all creation, the ideas of the feminine face of God; from the monks they learned the value of asceticism and solitude in setting the spirit free, the conflicts between the powers of light and darkness in the world, and the meaning of the coming of Jesus.

"This Christianity was forged," writes deWaal, "with a fire and a vigor that spoke as much to the heart as to the head. Out of this crucible came a Christianity full of both tenderness

and passion, with a dedication to beauty and yet a commitment to asceticism ... a triumphant hymning of creation and yet an unswerving devotion to the cross."

This book is well documented and scholarly in its content, but very readable and even inspiring in its form. The author uses modern poetry, ancient prayers and blessings, vivid portraits of people, stories and history to bring to life a people whose world view and religious practice were closer to those of indigenous American peoples or African tribes than to European tradition.

Every Earthly Blessing is a beautiful book with clear implications for our times. In our synod discussions we have heard a strong desire for spiritual renewal, for an antidote to the materialism and violence in our society. We have become more and more attuned to our need to be good caretakers of the earth. Perhaps we just need fresh eyes, and a look back to our roots.

Sister Brennan serves as co-director of St. Martin's Place, a food program at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church in Rochester.



Robert Downey Jr. stars in the title role of *Chaplin*, a film which chronicles the life story of Charlie Chaplin, the man who turned an industry into an art form.

Movies fall short of mark

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule reviews of movies recently reviewed by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

Leap of Faith

During a three-day revival in a backwater Kansas town, a bogus faith healer (Steve Martin) and his mercenary manager (Debra Winger) each experience minor transformations when he witnesses a possible real miracle and she is moved by the decency of the local sheriff (Liam Neeson).

Director Richard Pearce's serio-comedy of religious hucksterism, titled *Leap of Faith* (Paramount), has few laughs and little meaning, made all the more unsatisfactory by a vague, feel-good ending.

Comic depiction of religious sentiment exploited for profit and an implied sexual encounter.

The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Chaplin

A respectful, plodding biography, *Chaplin* (TriStar) shows screen great Charles Chaplin (1889-1977) from his impoverished youth in London to his meteoric rise in World War I Hollywood. The movie details his decades of popular success and critical acclaim as well as his exile as a political undesirable after World War II, and his triumphal return to Hollywood for a special Academy Award a few years before his death.

Directed by Richard Attenborough, the episodic chronicle captures the changing historical context but not, for all Robert Downey Jr.'s evocative performance in the title role, the essence of the man or his genius for visual comedy.

Muted sexual references, incidental nudity and occasional rough language.

The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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