

THE CELTIC WAY OF EVANGELISM

By George Hunter

Preface

ix—Lost credibility (evangelical church) and rise of atheism.

x—How do we engage the epidemic numbers of secular, postmodern, etc.

x—What can we learn from ancient Celtic Christianity.

CHAPTER 1—THE GOSPEL TO THE IRISH

1—400AD Patrick growing up in England. He is captured, taken to Ireland, enslaved for 6 years as a herdsman.

3—He later served as a parish priest in England. He receives what seems like a “Macedonian Call” to go to the Celtic people of Ireland. In 432AD he arrives in Ireland with a team of “missionaries.”

4—Very tough assignment as Irish Celts were “barbarians.” He went to civilize and Christianize.

5—Background to BBB (as I like to call it)—

#1—Belong

#2—Believe

#3—Become

5—The first disciples were in these cases sent to the “barbarians.” (Rob, important to place in historical context.)

- Andrew—Scythia
- Thomas—Parthians and Syrians
- Matthew—his martyrdom ignited a Christian movement in a cannibal population name Anthropophagi.

5—Barbarians considered impossible to reach.

From the 2nd Century on, however, historians report no organized missions to the “barbarian” peoples, such as the Celts, the Goths, the Visigoths, the Vandals, the Franks, the Frisians, the Huns, and the Vikings, who lived at the fringes of the Roman Empire. “By now the Church assumed that reaching barbarians was IMPOSSIBLE; a population, by definition, had to be literate and rational enough to understand Christianity, and cultured and civil enough to become “real” Christians if they did understand it.

6—Each Celtic tribe (once the most dominant pop in Europe and greatest warriors) had its own gods, laws, customs, and languages or dialect.

6—Lion/Tiger illustration—a tiger will defeat a lion, but 5 lions will defeat 5 tigers because the lions fight as a team and the tigers do not. The 5 lions take on one tiger at a time. Each Celtic tribe was a formidable tiger in battle, but the Romans (with legendary strength and organization and coordination) were the lions in a lengthy series of battles against specific tribes to incrementally expand their empire.

7—Why did the Romans consider the Celtic people, especially the Irish Celts, barbarians?

1. The Roman tended to regard everyone who wasn’t culturally Roman as barbarian.
2. The Romans regarded literacy as a sure and certain sign of being civilized; the Irish Celts, with a rich oral tradition, did not read and write and were not interested in doing either one.
3. The Irish were known to be “emotional” people, volatile personalities who expressed the full range of human emotions, which could get out of control. The Romans believed that emotional control was essential to being civilized.
4. In warfare, “all the Celts...stripped before battle and rushed their enemy naked, carrying sword and shield but wearing only sandals and torc (a twisted, golden neck ornament)...while howling and, it seemed, possessed by demons.

5. Furthermore, the Celts were known to decapitate some conquered enemy warriors and to practice human sacrifice in some of their religious rituals.

7—For such reasons, the Romans stereotyped the Irish Celts as barbarians, and therefore probably unreachable. Nevertheless, by Patrick's time there was some interest, especially at the papal level, in the possibility of reaching barbarians, and that is probably why Patrick's Macedonian vision found Pope Celestine's support.

7—Patrick's mission to Ireland was unprecedented and was wildly assumed impossible.

7-8—Ireland was populated by 150 extended tribes (tuaths)—each tribe fiercely loyal to its tribal king. Ireland's total population numbered between 200,000 and 500,000 people. By Patrick's time, all the tribes spoke the same language that Patrick had learned while a slave, and they now shared more or less the same culture, so Patrick understood them. AMAZING!!!

Rob—consider Paul taken to Rome.

Rob—God's redemptive plan at work. Incredible, really.

9—Druids, Ireland's traditional religious leaders for centuries.

9—About 12 went with Patrick. Including priests, seminarians, laymen, and laywomen.

9-10—Patrick's evangelism efforts were highly relational—talk to king/leaders, engage people in convo, pray, counsel, mediate conflicts, bless their work, teach with parable/story/poetry/song/visual symbols/visual arts/drama/answer their questions, break bread together, etc.

Patrick died around AD460.

11—Patrick's 28 year mission to the Irish Celts was nothing short of amazing. Planted churches like Paul where he could and then moved to the next place. There may have been a very few Christians living in Ireland by AD432 (expatriate Christian slaves or traders and their families), but there was no indigenous Christian movement to the Irish before Patrick. Patrick and his people launched a movement.

- They baptized “many thousands” of people, probably tens of thousands.
- Tirechan refers, usually by name, to at least 55 churches that Patrick's team planted.
- An ancient document entitled “Annals of the Four Masters” reports that Patrick's mission planted about 700 churches, and that Patrick ordained perhaps 1,000 priests.
- Within his lifetime, 30-40 (or more) of Ireland's 150 tribes became substantially Christian.

12—Criticism from British Church. Amazing considering the incredible work done. Underscores the reality that criticism will always be. Dogs bark at moving trains. Keep moving. Keep making disciples.

12—Patrick criticized for not spending time with “church people” but with pagans, sinners, and barbarians. Jesus faced the same criticism from the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Jesus--blind, deaf, mentally disabled, possessed, prostitutes, Samaritans, tax collectors, zealots.)

13—Compelling fact—Outreach to the lost vs focusing on the reached. Jesus day—St. Patrick—Us. We would be so blessed to be accused of focusing on the lost. God help us be “guilty” of rescuing those far from God with the message of God's love.

13—Patrick spoke of his mission in these terms—“reborn in God,” “redeemed from the ends of the earth,” “as a light among the nations,” “fish well,” “spread our nets so that we can catch a great multitude for God,” “go into all the world,” “to preach the gospel to all creation,” “teach all nations,” “in these last days,” “will pour out His spirit on all flesh,” “become children of the living God,” “this is why we came to Ireland.” Patrick had a missions mindset.

13—Patrick succeeded the work of the early apostles in the missions of reaching pre-Christian populations. To this he devoted his life.

CHAPTER 2—A NEW KIND OF COMMUNITY, A NEW KIND OF LIFE

14—Christianity spread even more after Patrick's death than during his lifetime. Rob, he lit a match and fueled the flames. He got the ball rolling. So many churches grew up, out of the reach of Rome

(geographically speaking). Celtic Christianity was more of a movement than an institution. More organic. Grass roots movement on the grow for Christ.

21-22—Good section on prayers. “Contemplative prayer.” “Carmina Gadelica”—daily rituals and taught them how to pray. Several prayers listed here. Taught them Christian faith and practice through these prayers.

CHAPTER 3—TO THE PICTS, THE ANGLO SAXONS, AND OTHER BARBARIANS

25—563AD, new apostolic leader Columba, led teams beyond Ireland. By 600’s, many “Anglo Saxons” invaded the land and drove many of the Britons to Brittany or to Wales. Populations were changing.

Interesting cross-cultural missions work—

- Patrick and his people were Romanized Britons from England who went Irish Celts.
- Columba and his people were all Irish and went to Celtic Picts in Scotland.
- Aidan and his people were Irish and wen to Germanic Anglo-Saxons in Engalnd

27—Augustine of Canterbury (diff Augustine), was called the Apostle of England 597AD.

28—Roman Empire was crumbling. Fell to military invasion in AD410. Series of events ushered in the “Dark Ages”—in which barbarian hordes largely destroyed the arts, architecture, and libraries of Roman civilization. Missions work in this historical context is interesting to contemplate.

32—The Church in Rome tried to enforce its will on others.

34—Lyle Schaller quote on the declining church in America. Doing well until 1920 and that’s when the European model and denominations began to unravel.

CHAPTER 4—THE CELTIC CHRISTINA COMMYINTY IN FOMRATION AND MISSION

36—The Celtic way of being and doing church (before the Roman way eclipsed the Celtic way).

- 1)First—Importance of team (not Lone Ranger).
- 2)Second—Depth, compassion, power of mission.
- 3)Third—Imaginative praying—visual quality, psalm-like
- 4)Fourth—Hospitality in ministry to seekers, visitors, refugees, and other groups.
- 5)Fifth—Role of seeker in conversion.

39—Most famous Celtic prayer—“St Patrick Breastplate”—with key section below:

Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ to the right of me, Christ to the left of me; Christ in my lying, Christ in my sitting, Christ in my rising...

41—Important:

<u>Roman Model</u>	<u>Celtic Model</u>
<u>1.</u> Presentation	1. Fellowship
<u>2.</u> Decision	2. Ministry and Conversation
<u>3.</u> Fellowship	3. Belief, invitation to commit

43—Celtic model, more caught than taught. For many, Faith is $\frac{3}{4}$ caught and $\frac{1}{4}$ taught.

44—Belonging comes before believing.

45—Since belonging comes before believing...than we need to help people belong so that they can believe.

CHAPTER 5—HOW CELTIC CHRISTIANITY COMMUNICATED THE GOSPEL

47—Ethos of communicator, logos of message, pathos of audeicne.

- Ethos—character, ethics
- Pathos—emotion of audience
- Logos—appeal to logic, facts, figures

50—Credibility

- 1)Do we believe what we say we believe?

- 2) Do we live by it?
- 3) Does it make a difference in our lives?
- 4) Does it make a difference in the world?

CHAPTER 6—THE MISSIONARY PERSPECTIVE OF CELTIC CHRISTIANITY

71—Druids—secretive religion. Vs. Celtic Christians who were an open book. No secrets. Open to all.

71—Great quote—Celtic Christians were devoted, sold-out, committed citizens of Heaven.

72—Interesting statement—The Christian faith never exists except as “translated” into a culture.

78-79—Very interesting—Patrick ministered to Irish engulfed in human sacrifice. Their gods desired human sacrifice and their gods were also capricious, cruel, uncompassionate, and more. Patrick proclaimed the good news of a different kind of God. Christianity’s God is not hostile, capricious, or self-seeking; he is for us, he loves people (and his other creatures), and he wills their deliverance from sin and terror into new life.

82—Love for God and His Creation.

85-87—Celts vs. Augustine—The Roman Church, especially under the sway of St. Augustine, believed in a deeply corrupted human nature. Celts were more optimistic—Ps 8—man just a little lower than the angels. Impacted their approach to evangelism.

CHAPTER 7—THE RELEVANCE OF FIRST-MILLENNIUM CELTIC CHRISTIANITY FOR THIRD-MILLENNIUM WESTERN CHRISTIANITY

91—The need to bridge barriers—such as language, culture, ethnicity, literacy, and much more. We must find ways to reach out cross culturally here at home. (We talk about global—crossing cultures, languages, and oceans. We need to do this at home—cross cultures, ethnicities, languages, and political divides.)

Missional. Build bridges, not barriers.

92—Barbarians—The Roman Churches stance seems ludicrous today. But I submit to you that so many today are in essence doing the same thing. If you don’t talk like me, believe like me, have the same politics as me, etc, etc, ... than you are a barbarian and unreachable and do not matter (to God? And me). Wow! To the Church in Rome, people who were not “culturally” Roman were unfit for Christianization.

92—Listen Church—In most churches today, the expectation pre-Christian people to be like church people culturally.

92—Overall, in Roman-like churches exclusionary attitudes and practices are more epidemic in churches today than almost anyone recognizes. Rob—who is welcome at our church? Your church? Long list here of those excluded.

94—Folk religion vs. orthodox Christianity. Authentic Christianity needed. Live within 3 circles. Faith reductionism—today vs. martyrs. Nominal syncretistic faith.

95—10 Perspectives of Celtic Faith—

- 1) Personal responsibility for growth. (God’s Word more than TV)
- 2) Pre and Post Guttenberg. Many memorized the Bible, internalized it. Not casual attention but serious.
- 3) 3X/day devotions
- 4) Pray without ceasing.
- 5) Pray with eyes open—fixating on that which inspires of God.
- 6) Harness imagination.
- 7) Soul friend
- 8) Small group
- 9) Forgetting self
- 10) Be like Christ (Thomas a Kempis—Imitation of Christ. CS Lewis, “Little Christs”)

98-99—Celtic Spiritual Formation--3 More—Set apart from the top 10.

1) Less individual and more community. Belong before you believe.

2) Monastic training—theological knowledge, ministry skills, conversational skills, leadership, and more. Wow!!!

3) Spiritual formation aim—not to bless self but to bless others. ****

100—CS Lewis quote—“The church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, even the Bible itself are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose.”

CHAPTER 8—THE CELTIC FUTURE OF THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT IN THE WEST

101—“Establishment Christianity” expects pastors to focus on church people vs. unchurched.

102—Three applications for today:

1) Secular society (post Christian) (nones). New Barbarians. Unchurched. Unfamiliar with Christian values.

2) Post modern.

3) Ignore people looking for life.

104—Key Strategic Insights

1) Credibility

2) Clearance

3) Contact

4) Community

5) Communication

6) Conversation

7) Contextualization

8) Continuity

9) Consistency

10) Conviction

115—Jonah

130—Receptive “new barbarians”

NOTES

1. Patrick=390 Birth, 406 Kidnapping, 412 Escape, 460 Death, 432 approx when to Ireland.