

The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity can Reach the West. . . Again
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“The bishops of the British church, probably with strong encouragement of Pope Celestine, affirmed Patrick's vision. Patrick was ordained a bishop, and appointed to Ireland, as history's first missionary bishop. The tradition tells us that he arrived in Ireland, with a modest entourage of priests, seminarians, and others, in A.D. 432.” (15)

“Patrick's mission to Ireland was to be such an unprecedented undertaking that it is impossible to understate its magnitude and significance, why? Because the Irish Celtic peoples were 'barbarians'.” (15)

“Patrick's mission to Ireland was unprecedented and widely assumed to be impossible. The Irish context of that period, however, provided some strategic advantages for Patrick's mission. . . By i time, all of 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.” (19)

“Indeed, the fact that Patrick understood the people and their language, their issues, and their ways, serves as the most strategically significant single insight that was to drive the wider expansion of Celtic Christianity, and it stands as perhaps our greatest single learning from this movement. There is no shortcut to understanding the people.” (20)

“If God blessed the efforts of Patrick's band and the people responded in faith, they built a church. Indeed, the salient goal of the mission to each settlement was to plant a church, and Patrick often led in the decision regarding the chapel's location.” (22)

“An ancient document called the 'Annals of the Four Masters' reports that Patrick's mission [which lasted about 28 years] planted about 700 churches, and that Patrick ordained perhaps 1000 priests. Within his lifetime, 30 to 40 (or more) of Ireland's 150 tribes became substantially Christian.” (23)

“Irish Christianity spread even more in the generations following the death of Patrick than it had in Patrick's own lifetime.” (26)

“Irish Christianity was geographically beyond Rome's ability to shape and control, so a distinctively Celtic approach to 'doing church' and living the Christian life emerged. What would a visitor from Rome have noticed about Celtic Christianity that was 'different'? The visitor would have observed more of a movement than an institution, with small provisional buildings of wood and mud, a movement featuring laity in ministry more than clergy. This movement, compared to the Roman wing of the One Church was more imaginative and less cerebral, closer to nature and its creatures, and emphasized the 'immanence' and 'providence' of the Triune God more than his 'transcendence.’” (26)

“Patrick's successors adopted his principle of indigenous Christianity and extended it. They learned about 'monasteries' from Eastern Christianity, perhaps through visits to Gaul and the Eastern Church. . . then they radically adapted the idea of the monastery to Ireland. The resulting community was so different from many of the eastern monasteries that we need a distinct term such as 'monastic communities.’” (27)

“There were two ways (at least) in which these unusual communities produced an unusual approach to the living out of Christianity, compared to the Roman form. First, the monastic communities produced a less individualistic and more community-oriented approach to the Christian life. . . . Secondly, Celtic Christianity addressed a 'zone' of human concern that Western Christianity, and other world religions, have generally ignored. . . . Western society and the western churches especially since the Enlightenment, have tended to exclude from their view of reality a middle level that is nevertheless quite real to people in most societies (and increasingly real to postmodern people in the West.” What are the 'middle-level' issues of life? Here one finds the questions of the uncertainty of the near future, the crises of present life, and the unknowns of the past. . . . For many people. . . this middle realm is inhabited by 'mechanical' forces such as mana, spells, omens, evil eye, or luck. . . . The problem is that Western Christianity usually ignores this middle level that drives most people's lives most of the time, as do the other world religions.” (30-32)

“Celtic Christians has no need to seek out a shaman. Their Christian faith and community addressed life as a whole and may have addressed the middle level more specifically, comprehensively, and powerfully than any other Christian movement ever has.” (32)

“The Celtic Christian Movement proceeded to multiply mission-sending monastic communities, which continued to send teams into settlements to multiply churches and start people into the community-based life of full devotion to the Triune God.” (35)

“In broad outline, the emerging strategy of Aidan and his people looks familiar. First, they multiplied monastic communities. . . . Second, they sent apostolic teams from monastic communities to reach settlements within the region.” (37)

“Through several generations of sustained mission, Celtic Christianity. . . reevangelized Europe, helping bring Europe out of the Dark Ages. . . .” (39)

“You would think that the Roman wing of the Church would have been grateful for the expansion achieved by the mission of the Celtic wing, and begrudgingly, it was; but the Roman wing's leaders repeatedly criticized the Celtic wing for not doing church the 'Roman way!' The driving issue, of course, was control.” (40-41)

“Five themes suggest what we might learn about 'missionary ecclesiology' from the ancient Celtic Christian movement. (47)

- “First, in significant contrast to contemporary Christianity's well-known evangelism

approaches of 'Lone Ranger' one-to-one evangelism, or confrontational evangelism, or the public preaching crusade, (and in stark contrast to contemporary Christianity's more dominant approach of not reaching out at all!), we have already seen how the Celtic Christians usually evangelized as a team-by relating to the people of a settlement; identifying with the people; engaging, in friendship, conversation, ministry, and witness – with the goal of raising up a church in measurable time.” (47)

- “The second theme focuses on how the monastic community prepared people to live with depth, compassion, and power in mission. Celtic Christianity seems to have prepared people through a fivefold structure of experiences.” (48)
 - Voluntary periods of solitary isolation
 - Time with an *anamchara* (Soul friend)
 - If the monastic community was at all large, you spent time in a small group of ten or fewer people – led by someone chosen primarily for their devotion.
 - You participated in common life, meals, work, learning, biblical recitation, prayers, and worship
 - You observed and gained experience in ministry and witness to pre-Christian people.
- “A third theme, weaving through the second, focuses on the role of *imaginative prayer* in all settings – in solitude, with the soul friend, in the small group, in the corporate life, and in ministry with seekers – of life within the monastic community.” (48)
- “The fourth theme is the role of the monastic community's Hospitality in ministry with seekers, visitors, refugees, and other 'guests.’” (52)
- “The fifth and final theme follows from the fourth and focuses more explicitly on the role of the seeker's experience of the Christianity community in the process of conversion. . . .” (53)
 - The Celtic model for reaching people:
 - You *first* establish community with people, or bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith.
 - Within the fellowship, you engage in conversation, ministry, prayer, and worship
 - In time, as they discover that they now believe, you invite them commit.

“...much of the communicative power of the Celtic Christian movement was attributed to the *ethos* of its communicators, who affirmed and engaged the *pathos* of the Celtic audience. Turning now to the *logos* of the message, we see that Patrick, Columba, Aidan, and the others could reason quite effectively with people, their genius (compared to the Romans) was in the *imaginative* communication of Christianity's message.” (70)

“Celtic Christian advocates especially engaged barbarian imaginations through *storytelling* and *poetry*.” ... and music... and visual arts (73-74)

“The doctrine of the Trinity became the foundational paradigm for Celtic Christianity. The doctrine informed the people's piety as well as the theologian's theories.” (82)

“Patrick proclaimed the good news of a different kind of God [from the one of a 'basely religious' sacrificial tradition]. 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.” (83)

“The Celtic Christian attitude toward nature could teach us several things today. First, their affirmation of nature stands as an outstanding example of a Christian mission moving into a culture and affirming, and building upon what it can. Second, they model the fact that a missionary encounter with another culture can often help us to perceive, and recover, something precious in the Christian body of truth. Third, because they understood nature so intimately that they saw both the wonder and the threat, they would dissuade us from the naïve New Age romanticism about nature often surfacing today. Fourth, they would say that our lives can be deeply enriched by living in covenant with creation as well as creator.” (88)

“Celtic Christianity was a fairly 'religion friendly' movement. It is important to note that the Celtic Christianity's 'religion friendly' policy would not have been very controversial in the early Middle Ages; indeed, the Roman wing's mission practice often followed a similar policy.” (93)

“Three additional suggestions should establish the relevance of the Celtic Christian story to much of what Western Christianity faces in the twenty-first century. First, a host of New Barbarians substantially populate the Western world once again; indeed, they are all around us. . . . Second, these populations are increasingly similar to the populations that the movements of Patrick, Columba, and Aidan reached as the New Barbarians become increasingly postmodern. . . . Third, most churches assume (though this is seldom verbalized) that the postmodern New Barbarians are unreachable, because they are not 'civilized' enough to become 'real' Christians.” (96-97)