

Celtic Christianity, Evangelism and Orcutt Christian Church

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Several years ago I read a book that changed my thinking about evangelism. What should be our thinking about this touchy subject?

If it's not about ramming Scripture down people's throat, or using scare tactics - frightening people into certain kinds of conduct – then what is evangelism? Put simply, evangelism is that Christian relationship that grows and nurtures discipleship, rather than demanding discipleship.

The book is *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West . . . Again* by George Hunter III.

In his book, George Hunter describes the difference between what he describes as the evangelism approach in Roman and Celtic Christianity. Celtic Christianity is the tradition of mission and ministry that was first developed by St. Patrick in Ireland and then journeyed into Scotland. Roman Christianity is the tradition of mission and ministry that was practiced by missionaries from Rome that sought to Christianize the people of England.

Bluntly stated, the Roman model for reaching people (who are civilized enough) is: (1) Present the Christian message; (2) Invite them to decide to believe in Christ and become Christians: and (3) If they decide positively, welcome them into the church and its fellowship.

The Roman model seems very logical to us because most of us have been taught that model. We explain the gospel, they accept Christ, we welcome them into the church! Presentation, Decision, Assimilation.

In contrast, this is the Celtic model for outreach:

- (1) you first establish community with people, or bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith.
- (2) within the embrace of community, you engage in conversation, ministry, prayer and worship.
- (3) As people discover their gifts and faith, you invite them to commit to discipleship.

The two models can be simply charted as such:

Roman Model

Presentation

Decision

Fellowship

Celtic Model

Fellowship

Ministry and Conversation

Belief, Invitation to

Commitment

The Celtic model reflects the adage that for most people, Christianity is more caught than taught! Belonging comes before believing. Evangelism is about helping people to belong so that they can believe.

The Celtic Christianity ministry of inclusion and nurture before the discipleship decision seems very much like the evangelism that we are looking for. Perhaps, because the Roman tradition became the dominant model of evangelism, perhaps you have often felt that we weren't doing evangelism unless we were doing it Roman style.

It is encouraging to know that there is a historic alternative approach to evangelism that we can embrace and learn.

The book has many fascinating insights about Celtic Christianity that are engaging; including discussions on it's imaginative, yet down-to-earth spirituality, it's identification with the people and their culture, the hospitality and nurture of the Celtic Christian communities, it's team approach to evangelism, and it's passion to serve beyond itself to others not yet in the community of faith.

I particularly would hope that we would be inspired by the Celtic passion to share the love of Christ simply for the sake of the

Gospel, not as a tool of empire building, but as an outreach mission of sharing with others the life that we have found in Jesus.

If you would like to learn more about Celtic Christianity and evangelism, do read Hunter's book.

The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West....Again, George Hunter III, Abingdon Press , Nashville, TN, 2000