

7-1-2013

## Book Review: The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Won the West Again by George G. Hunter, III

Allan Karr

*Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/gcrj>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Karr, A. (2013). Book Review: The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Won the West Again by George G. Hunter, III. *Great Commission Research Journal*, 5(1), 126-128. Retrieved from <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/gcrj/vol5/iss1/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Commission Research Journal by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

George G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Won the West . . . Again*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000, 2010, 154 pp.

Reviewed by Allan Karr, Associate Professor of Missiology and Church Planting, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary.

As an evangelical Christian from the Protestant tradition, it is embarrassing to admit that prior to reading *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, my knowledge of Patricius was exceptionally scarce. Apparently either my professors in the past or I had dismissed Saint Patrick as not worthy to be seriously studied since he was an early Catholic. Maybe at some point in my life my readings covering Saint Patrick had been assigned, but if so, I do not recall being exposed to him in the context of being an early Christian missionary. Interestingly enough, as I have assigned this book as a required text in my seminary classes, almost all of my students had the same reaction. They were mostly previously unaware of the history, heart for missions, and missiological strategy of Saint Patrick. Patrick was clearly more significant than just being the patron saint of Ireland responsible for a major drinking party day in America, where everyone is supposed to wear green.

The reader is drawn immediately into the content of the book with the historical account of Saint Patrick. It was fun and interesting to read the story about his early life, at least as much as is known. Patrick was a legendary figure in Ireland, and it appears one of the challenges of writing about his life is to sort through what is factual and what is hyperbolic. The known history of his life prior to Patrick's return to Ireland as a missionary is sketchy, but the phenomenal impact of his life in Ireland from A.D. 432 until his death around A.D. 460 was significant and has far reaching evangelical implications if we can make the transitional applications to missions that Hunter is prescribing in the twenty-first century.

From the missiological perspective, Hunter is contributing to the field of missions in at least two significant fronts. First, Hunter describes and documents the successful mission strategy of using an "apostolic band" as a "monastic community" as the focus of the evangelical lifestyle. Second, Hunter articulates that Patrick's strategy could be effective in the West again because the post-Christian culture makes the conditions ripe for a new chapter of effectiveness.

127

Hunter's assertion of the monastic community is not without controversial implications to some leaders as it challenges some deeply held convictions of ecclesiology. Even though most evangelicals come from Protestant roots, we still have some traditions that have almost become authoritative, in spite of our insistence that Scripture is our only authority. Most traditional churches in the West still follow what Hunter describes as a "Roman model" of church where the unconverted person receives a presentation of the gospel, at some point makes a decision for Christ, and then receives admission into the fellowship of the church. Many church leaders have very strong convictions about this tradition and have strong convictions that the order should not be changed. Hunter introduces to us that Patrick used a different model, the "Celtic model," to evangelize Ireland effectively. Hunter reports that Patrick immediately brought the unconverted Irish into the fellowship of the Christian community (where they even participated in the ministry and sacraments), answered questions that arose, waited for belief to be fostered, and then invited the lost to accept and acknowledge faith in Christ. Strict adherents to congregationalism would likely be threatened by the implications of this strategy, believing it to be dangerous to include the unconverted into the close fellowship and ministry of the church prior to their conversion. Hunter describes a process of evangelism that is fostered by community, relationship, and honest dialogue. Hunter documents this strategy with the sources available, and even

Karr: Book Review: *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Won t* though mostly Roman Catholic, they seem to support his assertions. This mission strategy has far-reaching implications in that it challenges the way that many evangelical churches in the West are doing evangelism in their communities. For many church leaders, to embrace Hunter's ideas requires a foundational shift in traditional ecclesiology. It appears that an entire generation of church leaders is eager to make the shift, and many have. They have even found biblical precedence in the life of Jesus and the early church of the New Testament.

128 The second major contribution of Hunter's *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* is that this "Celtic model" is not only successful for the contextual culture of fifth century Ireland, but also has great potential in the current culture of the West to give fresh energy to evangelizing the society again. Hunter effectively makes the case that twenty-first century people are "New Barbarians," and in that context they need to be introduced to the truth of the gospel in a postmodern "Celtic" strategic way. Hunter points out the power of relationships, community, authentic dialogue, and inclusion to introducing God's love and reaching the new barbarians of western culture for the kingdom of God. Hunter makes a strong case that even our evangelical churches have been using the Roman model. At the same time most indicators simultaneously reveal that Christianity in the West is declining and many church leaders are desperately seeking a solution, often by trying to do the Roman model of evangelism better. Hunter gives us another viable option—viable because it acknowledges solely the power of the gospel for transforming life and society.

In the last ten years, I have often had classes where this was a required text. I ask my students to turn in written reflections on what they have read, and the reaction to the ideas of this book has been virtually unanimous. Seminarians training for church leadership are persuaded by the revolutionary revelations Hunter has introduced to us from Saint Patrick's missionary strategies. The ideas resonate with a new generation of young church leaders and many older leaders as well. Interestingly enough, most of those leaders are completely devoted to Scripture as authoritative and are therefore open to allowing traditional ecclesiological models of the past to drift away to allow for a hopeful resurgence of Christianity in their current communities and parishes. *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* was groundbreaking when it was written and will be influential for generations of theologically conservative evangelical believers in the future.