



---

## “E-Team E-Zine”

A “Leader’s Toolbox” of Encouragement and  
Equipping for Evangelism That Extends the  
Kingdom

---

### “The Celtic Way of Evangelism”

*How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again*

*George Hunter’s Outstanding Book on Evangelism History and Strategy*

*January 29, 2003*

“Back to the Future” was a pretty good series of movies. George Hunter’s book made me think of another descriptive phrase that can help us in our current ministry environment—“Forward into the Past.” It almost appears to be an oxymoron...to help us engage our immediate future, sometimes the best thing we can do is learn from our distant past. Hunter’s book makes a compelling case for a seeming oxymoron to really be a strategic opportunity.

Hunter begins his journey by a short history of Saint Patrick and his ministry to the Irish people in the early 400’s AD. From the conversion and call of one man, Christianity dramatically impacted an entire culture. The story is fascinating and compelling.

The ministry of Patrick was far from Rome, where “headquarters” was located “...beyond the reach of Rome to shape and control...” (p. 26) Consequently, a different form of “doing church” was established, one that was immensely productive and controversial. Hunter describes the differences between Rome and the indigenous ministry in Ireland as “more of a movement than an institution...laity in ministry more than clergy...more imaginative than cerebral, closer to creation...emphasized the ‘immanence’...of the Triune God more than His ‘transcendence.’” (p. 26)

Hunter contrasts the two models of ministry in a simple, clear way with this chart:

*Roman Model*

Presentation  
Decision  
Fellowship

*Celtic Model*

Fellowship  
Ministry and Conversations  
Belief, Invitation to Commitment

In other words, the Roman model was “*believe, then belong*” while the Celtic model was “*belong, then believe.*” The implications of those simple differences were huge.

If a ministry mindset worked in 5<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, what relevance could it have to 21<sup>st</sup> century North Americans? Hunter would answer, “Much!” In fact, his premise is that our best change to engage our culture for Christ would be to utilize the mindset and methods of Patrick. He talks about communication strategies, left vs. right brain distinctions, use of the visual arts, music, redemptive dialog and a number of other issues that are raised by the “Celtic way.” All those issues make us stop and think seriously about how we do (or don’t do) ministry in our traditional evangelical North American context.

We could sum up Hunter’s hypothesis by saying that the Roman way of doing ministry (or as he calls it IFE--Imported From Europe) fit a modern culture well, while the Celtic way (or more indigenous MIA—Made in America) approaches to ministry works much better in a postmodern culture. Hunter shows the difference between IFE and MIA organizations take in their approach to ministry and organization (p. 45):

*IFE (Imported from Europe)*

Liturgical language rooted in European past  
Music composed before 1960 (or 1760)  
Formal, “proper” worship  
Hierarchical, program oriented  
Trust the system  
Church is “real estate”  
Low expectations of people  
Past focused, resist change

*MIA (Made in America)*

Language is current American English  
Music composed after 1960 (or 1980)  
Informal, “personal” worship  
Flatter, people oriented  
Trust the people  
Church is “the people”  
High expectations of people  
Future focused, affirm new things

Hunter points us toward some current ministry methods that are more “Celtic,” including the Alpha Course. His book is a beautiful blend of “reading history” to help us develop relevant ministry. After all, “history” is really “His Story,” and connecting people’s stories to God’s Story is the ultimate goal of all we do in ministry.

Next edition: “*Men God Gave Moses*”...a Biblical example of the ‘Seven Spheres of Support.’



*As always, please feel free to pass along editions of these “E-Team E-zines” to others. If you’d like to have people added to this mailing list, contact me. If you have insights, feedback or questions, I’m glad to hear them. God’s best to you!*