

Dear everyone, greetings once again.

As many of you are aware, I have both British and Irish heritage. The history of the British Isles is often a difficult history, but today I want to talk about perhaps one of the most famous Irishmen that ever lived, Saint Patrick. I want to talk about Saint Patrick because he is one of the first ever successful cross-cultural workers among a so-called "barbarian" people group, the Irish people.

There is very little record called of any organized outreach among so-called "barbarian" people groups within the territory of the Roman Empire from the middle of the second century A.D. onwards. Such people groups included the Celts, the Goths, the Vikings, the Vandals, and all those people groups who lived at the fringes of the Roman Empire. It would appear that in the Roman church, after the time of the apostles, there arose a belief that the so-called "barbarian" people groups were beyond the reach of the gospel, because to receive the gospel a people group had to show an existing level of civilization. Because so-called "barbarian" people groups had low levels of literacy, and were seemingly indifferent to principles of logic and rhetoric, outreach work within the Roman Empire tended to focus on those people groups who were already well assimilated within the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire had steadily pushed the Celtic people groups of northern Europe further north and further west into places like Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and the Basque region of northern Spain. The Romans regarded themselves as being "civilized" because they were literate, and had control of their emotions. In contrast, the so-called "barbarian" Celtic peoples were regarded as uncivilized because they were not literate and allowed for a very public display of their emotions.

And this is why Saint Patrick is so significant. Saint Patrick was raised in England in the late fourth and early fifth centuries in the northeastern region of England. He came from a family of Britons, one of the Celtic peoples then dwelling within the British Isles. When Patrick was 16 he was captured by a band of Celtic pirates from Ireland who forced him onto a ship sailed into Ireland and sold him into slavery. His new master was a tribal chief and Druid, and he put Patrick to work herding the capital of the family. While a slave in Ireland, Patrick underwent three profound changes:

- 1) Patrick became a devout believer in the God of heaven.
- 2) Patrick came to understand the Irish Celtic language and people in a profound way.
- 3) Patrick came to love the Irish Celtic people, even though he was held as a slave.

After six years of captivity, Patrick escaped by fleeing to the coast, on boarding the ship that took him back to England. While in England, Patrick engaged in many years of theological study and pastoral service. Then, one night, when Patrick was 48 years of age, Patrick had a dream which closely parallels the Macedonian call of the Apostle Paul. Patrick asked his church superiors if he could go on cross-cultural service to the Celts of Ireland, and his request was approved. In the year A.D. 432 Patrick arrived in islands accompanied by a small group of students and other cross-cultural workers.

The Roman model of cross-cultural work seems to have followed a three stage process:

- 1) presentation of the good news.
- 2) invites the people group to accept the good news.
- 3) welcome into fellowship.

Patrick's model was quite different. It appears that he took the following approach:

- 1) sharing in fellowship with the local people group. This involved living among the local people for an extended period of time.
- 2) engage in conversation and loving ministry within the local people group. This involved engaging in practical ministry, and helping people, regardless of the great religious, social, and linguistic barriers that were present.
- 3) welcome into fellowship when a decision has been made of commitment. At this stage, people were invited to make a decision, and many did, in the tens of thousands, because they first belonged.

What was the impact of Patrick's life of ministry in Ireland? The impact was dramatic he launched what can only be called a movement. Within Patrick's lifetime, approximately 40 of the 150 tribal groups within Ireland were converted. More than 700 congregations were planted, and over 1000 local workers were set aside for full-time ministry. Patrick spoke out against the practice of slavery, and within his lifetime, the Irish slave trade came to a halt. How did Patrick's superiors back in Britain view his ministry? Ironically, Patrick faced severe criticism for his cross-cultural outreach work. Patrick Rhodes a famous statement of defense of his life of ministry, and argued that whereas the Roman church in England assumed that the primary responsibility of leaders was to minister to existing congregations, Patrick was following in the footsteps of the Savior, whose primary area of ministry was among the lost.

After Patrick died, cross-cultural workers returned from Ireland to the British Isles, and established centers of influence in the islands of Scotland, most notably at Iona. Celtic and British cross-cultural workers spread across northern Europe among the so-called "barbarian" people groups, many of whom received the good news with joy. The hierarchy of the Roman church was not pleased with the Celtic approach to cross-cultural ministry. The Roman church insisted that all new believers had to worship in the Latin language and according to the rituals and rites of Rome. The Celtic church did not insist on this, but encouraged local communities of faith to develop an expression of faith and a life of faith that was consistent with the best within the Celtic culture. In the long term, the Roman church overcame the Celtic church, and eventually forced the submission of the Celtic churches to the Roman way of worship. And so by the sixth and seventh centuries, the upsurge in Celtic cross-cultural ministry came to an end.

Patrick's life and ministry calls us to ponder our own life and ministry. Do we love those who have hurt us the most? Are we willing to give the will to those who have hurt us the most? Have we taken the time to learn their language and culture at a deep level? Are we willing to enter into trusting and loving relationships prior to people entering the communion of faith within our local communities? Are we willing to serve purely out of love? Are we willing to spend the time to help new local members of the Body of faith to develop expressions of worship and expressions of faith that resonate within that culture and are not dictated by an overseas organization?

It is somewhat ironic that perhaps the most famous Irishman in history, Saint Patrick, was not in fact an Irishman, but was an Englishman. The fact that Saint Patrick is loved and respected in Ireland to this day as perhaps the most famous Irishman of all time is a testament to the depth of his love for, identification with, and advocacy of the "barbarian" Celtic peoples of Ireland.

My prayer is that each one of us, in our life of ministry, will joyfully demonstrate the same characteristics in our ministry as did Saint Patrick, the most famous Irishman of all time.

Have a blessed Sabbath day,

Conrad.

