

IV.4.c.
MissionsMissions

Missions is at the very heart of church growth and progress and we are often surprised at how much missionary activity occurred in the various parts of the church before our day!

The most important mission worker in the earlier part of the Imperial Age was the Arian missionary Ulfilus (little wolf). 310-383. He was of Gothic background and was consecrated a bishop in 341. He was responsible for the conversion of at least three Gothic tribes and the translation of the Bible into ancient Gothic. His influence was felt far throughout the barbarian world and he was one of the most productive "convert returned to his own people" of any age. We do not know how much he really understood of the Arian question or its implications...it may have been that he was busy preaching and just didn't understand all the discussion. He had been a captured slave, gained an education and put it to work when freed.

The Nestorian missions, forced into the eastern part of Asia Minor after the excommunication of Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus, later expanded into India, Persia, and some parts of China. (A study of the early church mission to China is well told in Holdcroft: INTO ALL THE WORLD.)

But the most outstanding work of the age was done by Patrick in Ireland. Of this we need to make a few notes on both Patrick and the Irish Church.

Born about 389 and likely of British parentage, Patrick was taken as a slave to the Irish warlords. He escaped, reportedly fled to France although that is presently in doubt, but was converted, ordained a Bishop about 432 and determined to return to Ireland. He immediately made inroads on paganism and established a church. So much of his life is in doubt as to the details...that even things taught as certainty twenty years ago have been challenged by more recent findings and analysis.

A monastic center followed and it became the dominant voice in missionary work in the British Isles. Eventually its influence would reach to central Europe. It is worthy to note that Patrick did not think of his work as a subservient branch of the church of