

# The Real Saint Patrick

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(Slightly modified from a series of articles in the [Standard Bearer](#). Though similar to the [audio speech on St. Patrick](#), it is not a transcript.)

[Patrick: The Myth](#)

[Patrick's Life](#)

[Patrick's Message \(Part 1\)](#)

[Patrick's Message \(Part 2\)](#)

[Patrick's Missionary Labours](#)

[The Significance of Patrick](#)

## (I) PATRICK: THE MYTH

Patrick is undoubtedly the world's most famous patron saint. Few know the patron saint of Spain or Poland outside of those nations but Patrick has attained international fame. Patrick is also the patron saint of fishermen—and almost every other occupation—along the River Loire in France. There are churches named after Patrick all over the world, including in Rome itself.

The popular conception of Patrick is of the mitred bishop who illustrated the Trinity using a shamrock, drove the snakes of Ireland into the sea and victoriously confronted Loeghaire (pronounced Leary), the High-King of Ireland, and the druids at Tara. He is seen as typically Irish and dearly loved by the Irish populace of his day.

Saint Patrick's Day is celebrated by many the world over and not just by the Irish and those in the Irish diaspora. The parade in New York—the largest demonstration of its kind in the world—sees over 100,000 march up Fifth Avenue. Green beer; shamrocks; green, white and orange flags; and public speeches are the order of the day. The world turns green and everybody discovers that they have at least some Irish connections.

Patrick, apparently, was a colourful character, a fun-loving guy. One author lends some support to this conclusion. Thomas Cahill puts it this way: Patrick "didn't take himself too seriously."<sup>1</sup>

Many aspects of the "popular Patrick" are promoted not only by the Irish diaspora and the Irish tourist board and the Irish government, but also by the Roman Church. According to Romish reckoning, Patrick was sent to Ireland by the pope. Clerical vestments are his garb and he carries a pastoral staff. He is accompanied by a guardian angel and works miracles. He is, in short, a "holy man." Thus when Pope John Paul II was in Ireland, he was allegedly walking "in the footsteps of Saint Patrick." It is strange that Patrick has not been canonised by the Roman Church.

On the last Sunday of July, Roman Catholics are still to be seen climbing Croagh Patrick in County Mayo, some in their bare feet. Allegedly, Patrick once spent the forty days of Lent on that mount, and the Roman Church promises the faithful access to his merits. The island on Lough Derg in County Donegal on which Patrick allegedly had visions of purgatory is another holy place that is frequented by pilgrims. In reality, however, the legend of Saint Patrick's purgatory began with the pilgrimage to Lough Derg of a soldier known as the Knight Owen in the middle of the twelfth century.

Not content with all this, the papal church even declares Patrick's daily ritual. The Roman Breviary for March 17 tells us:

Every day he worshipped God three hundred times with genuflections and during each canonical hour he made the sign of the cross one hundred times. He divided the night into three periods, devoting the first into the recitation of one hundred psalms, accompanied by two hundred genuflections; the second to the recitation of the last fifty psalms, but immersed in cold water, holding the heart, the eyes and the hands towards Heaven; the third he devoted to a short rest, lying on the bare stone.

But is this a faithful presentation of the Patrick who laboured in Ireland in the fifth century? Is this really the man who evangelised the Emerald Isle? And if it is, do we really want to know such a man, never mind make him the object of a special study? Ironically, the presentation of Patrick that embellishes his life with "pious legend" and papal fictions to make him appealing and interesting rather than making us admire him, makes any real appreciation of this remarkable man impossible. Thankfully, as John T. McNeill points out, "The popular image of Patrick partakes largely of the legend and *bears little relation to the historical person.*"<sup>2</sup>

Thankfully, we possess two writings of Patrick which, incidentally, constitute the oldest existing Irish literature. First, in his *Letter to Coroticus* Patrick rebukes Coroticus and his soldiers for attacking some of his Christian converts. Some were slaughtered but others were kidnapped to be sold into slavery. Second, Patrick wrote his *Confession* near the end of his life as a defence of his mission work in Ireland. Patrick's two writings have been translated into English several times and exist in many editions. They are well worth obtaining and make rewarding reading, taking us back to the work and world of a Christian missionary in fifth century Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

Papal writers sometimes betray a certain amount of disappointment with Patrick's *Confession* and his *Letter to Coroticus*. They appear to be dissatisfied with the simple account of his gratitude to God and labours on behalf of the gospel of Christ. "Where are his miraculous works?" they seem to be thinking. "Where does he speak of the practices of the Roman Church?" Something more is expected of a saint, and so the myths and exaggerations of the centuries succeeding Patrick are latched upon and promoted.

Admittedly, there are several historical difficulties. Patrick's writings are brief and they were not intended to provide later readers with his "Life and Times." They are occasionally ambiguous and can sometimes be interpreted in different senses. Our knowledge of the times during which he lived is still somewhat sketchy, and this provides further opportunity for an honest difference of opinion.

Patrick's first two biographers, Tirechan (pronounced Teera-hawn) and Muirchu (pronounced Murra-hoo), both wrote in the second half of the seventh century, at least two hundred years after his death. Later works betray an even greater desire to heighten Patrick's repute. It was one of these, the *Tripartite Life*, probably compiled near the end of the ninth century, which (sadly) became the most popular account of Patrick in Ireland until the twentieth century.

At the outset, we need to debunk some of the myths. First, Patrick was not Irish. He was born in Britain. Second, the tradition of Patrick's driving the snakes out of Ireland is palpably false. Third, the shamrock story was first mentioned about one thousand years after Patrick. Fourth, the confrontation at Tara, though taken for truth by many, is mythical. R. P. C. Hanson states, "There was no High-King of Ireland in his day," and "miters were not invented for at least 500 years after Patrick."<sup>4</sup> Fifth, the green beer, is not of an old vintage.

Sixth, the claim of Patrick's papal connections is denied even by some Roman Catholic scholars. Aidan Nichols, in a recent Vatican publication, states,

Patrick's own writings . . . make no such pretension to papal support. It seems that the conversion of those Celtic areas that lay outside the civil zone of Roman Britain was initiated by British Christians themselves.<sup>5</sup>

It is highly significant that when Patrick was challenged as to his credentials for working in Ireland, he does not appeal to Rome (*Conf* 23ff.). Had Patrick been a papal missionary, such an omission would be unthinkable.

If this helps us in understanding what Patrick was not, we are still some way in understanding what he was really like. According to one scholar, Patrick "is one of the few personalities of fifth-century Europe who has revealed himself with living warmth, in terms that men of any age who care for their fellows can understand." This quotation may serve to encourage us in our quest for the real Saint Patrick, the man behind the myth.

The Patrick portrayed in public celebrations and by the Roman Catholic Church is mythical and useless. In Patrick's *Confession* and *Letter to Coroticus* we meet a godly Christian missionary who both commands our admiration and deserves greater attention. Thus we shall consider his life, his message and his missionary labours, before concluding with an analysis of his significance.

## (II) PATRICK'S LIFE

Leading twentieth century Patrician scholars reckon that he was born between c. 389 and c. 415 and that his death was between c. 460 and c. 493. They estimate Patrick lived between seventy and seventy-eight years. Many reckon that he was buried in or near Downpatrick, Co. Down. His mission in Ireland occurred between c. 430 at the earliest and c. 490 at the latest, and lasted at least thirty years. Augustine of Hippo's dates are 354-430 and the Roman empire fell in 476. If we think of Patrick labouring in Ireland from the death of Augustine to the fall of Rome and perhaps beyond, we shall not be far wrong. Thus he stands at or near the fall of the old world and the beginning of the dark ages. But it is doubtful how much he knew of Augustine or of Odoacer's conquest of Rome for he was on the very periphery of the then-known world.<sup>6</sup>

What of his family? Patrick was born into a family with ecclesiastical connections. His father, Calpornius, was a deacon and his paternal grandfather, Potitus, was a presbyter or elder (*Conf* 1). Hanson writes,

We should not be surprised that both Patrick's father and grandfather were clergy; clerical marriage was countenanced in one form or another well into the Middle Ages, indeed as late as the eleventh century, and in Patrick's day carried no particular stigma.<sup>7</sup>

Patrick's father was a member of the local town council responsible for raising taxes to finance local government under the administrative system of the Roman Empire. He also owned an estate. Thus he was a member of one of the higher stratas of Roman British society. In keeping with his relatively high station in life, Patrick speaks of "the men and women servants of my father's house" and refers to his own "worldly position" and "aristocratic status" (*Letter* 10).

Patrick did not live in one of the major population centres but in "the village of Bannavem Taberniae" (*Conf* 1). We are unsure of its location but it seems safest to conclude that it was on or near the west coast of Britain, either in Scotland, Wales or England. This would be the most accessible region to Irish pirates, for it was through one of their plunderous raids that the sixteen year-old Patrick, "almost a beardless boy," found himself a slave on Irish soil (*Conf* 1, 10).

Patrick, the young Briton, was sold as a slave by his captors and, like many other men used in the gathering and preservation of the church, was employed for a time as a shepherd (*Conf* 16). This must have been quite a change for Patrick. Hanson opines that Patrick was "perhaps spoiled" and "certainly waited on by servants." Now he was a servant not a master. He experienced many long nights "in the woods or on the mountain . . . in snow and frost and rain" (*Conf* 16). He was also a stranger in a strange land for Ireland was to him "an outlandish nation" (*Letter* 10).<sup>8</sup>

It is at this point that we gain an insight into Patrick's spiritual condition. Although he was brought up in a covenant home, he had not yet believed in the God of his fathers. Patrick speaks of the days before his Irish captivity: "I was not a believer in the living God, and had not been since my infancy, but I lay in death and disbelief . . . Then I used to take no thought even for my own [salvation]" (*Conf* 27-28). At the time of his kidnapping he confesses, "I did not then know the true God" (*Conf* 1). He was only converted to God when a slave in Ireland (*Conf* 2). As an old man looking back on his life, he understands that his Irish captivity was God's chastening him on account of his sins (*Conf* 1-3).

Patrick, however, was able to escape. Following the guidance of a dream, he journeyed some 200 miles (*Conf* 17) to a coastal town where he managed to board a ship. A few years later in Britain, Patrick received another dream.

I saw in a vision of the night a man coming apparently from Ireland whose name was Victoricus, with an unaccountable number of letters, and he gave me one of them and I read the heading of the letter which ran, "The Cry of the Irish [*Vox Hiberionacum*]," and while I was reading aloud the heading of the letter I was imagining that at that very moment I heard the voice of those who were by the wood of Voclut which is near the Western Sea, and this is what they cried with one voice, "Holy boy, we are asking you to come and walk among us again," and I was deeply struck to the heart and I was not able to read any further and at that I woke up (*Conf* 23).<sup>9</sup>

Patrick became a deacon (*Conf* 27) and then a missionary bishop in Ireland.

Roman Catholic scholars have been especially interested in arguing that Patrick received his theological training in Lerins in southern France. This would make it easier for them to unite him to the Roman pontiff. However, Christine Mohrmann in her 1961 lectures at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, pointed out, "There is nothing in [Patrick's] language which supports the tradition of a prolonged personal contact with Lerins or with any form of Continental monasticism." She notes that the key traits of Continental monastic writings, such as special monastic terms and very frequent reference to the Psalms and demonology, are missing from Patrick's writings.<sup>10</sup>

Patrick did, however, visit France (*Conf* 43; cf. 32); that much is clear. But he was a British bishop sent by the church of mainland Britain to Ireland. Hanson's conclusion bears repeating:

The internal evidence from Patrick's own writing compels us to realize that he was educated for the ministry in Britain, spent his ministry between ordination and the mission to Ireland in Britain, was in fact wholly the product of the British Church, and that later tradition, which sends him with such imaginative abandon to Lerins or to Auxerre or to Rome or to an island in the Tyrrhenian sea, must be discounted.<sup>11</sup>

His thirty years or more of labour in Ireland saw much fruit. Paganism was dealt a mighty blow. Human sacrifice was all but finished. "Within [Patrick's] lifetime or soon after his death," writes Thomas Cahill, "the Irish slave trade came to a halt, and other forms of violence, such as murder and intertribal warfare, decreased."<sup>12</sup> Paganism was not, however, completely vanquished. One merely has to think of the abiding place of fairies and leprechauns in Irish thought.

Patrick writes of "large numbers" and "so many thousands" of converts (Letter 2; *Conf* 14, 50), with not a few from amongst the ruling classes. Patrick even takes the time to tell us of the baptism of "one blessed Irish woman, an aristocrat of noble race very beautiful and of full age" (*Conf* 42).<sup>13</sup> At his death the church in Ireland had been well established in many parts of the island and was served by the many office-bearers he and others had ordained. Some form of monastic life had also taken root. The church of Jesus Christ in Ireland, in whose formation Patrick was instrumental, was to play a vital role in the evangelization of many parts of Europe in the dark ages after the fall of the Roman Empire.

### (III) PATRICK'S MESSAGE (Part 1)

But what was the message that Patrick preached to the Irish? Patrick leaves us in no doubt here, giving us a simple Rule of Faith near the beginning of his *Confession*:

There is no other God nor was there ever in the past nor will there be in the future except God the Father ingenerate, without beginning, from whom all beginning flows, who controls all things, *as our formula runs*: and his Son Jesus Christ whom we profess to have always existed with the Father, begotten spiritually before the origin of the world in an inexpressible way by the Father before all beginning, and through him were made things both visible and invisible; he was made man; when death had been overcome he was received into Heaven by the Father, and he gave to him all power above every name of things heavenly and earthly and subterranean and that every tongue should confess to him that Jesus Christ is Lord and God; and we believe in him and await his Advent which will happen soon, as judge of the living and the dead, and he will deal with everybody according to their deeds and he poured out upon us richly the Holy Spirit the gift and pledge of immortality, who makes those who believe and obey to be sons of God and coheirs with Christ and we confess and adore him, one God in the Trinity of sacred name (*Conf 4*).

Several things must be emphasised from this confession. First, Patrick was not a Unitarian; he was a full-blooded Trinitarian. His creed is structured according to the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Later he refers to the above creed as "the rule of faith of the Trinity" (*Conf 14*). Near the end of his *Confession*, Patrick writes, "We believe in and adore . . . Christ who reigns with God the Father Almighty and with the Holy Spirit before ages and now and for all ages of ages. Amen" (*Conf 60*; cf. *Conf 40*; *Letter 21*). It is this great God "who controls all things" (*Conf 4*) as Patrick was to learn time and time again (e.g., *Conf 17, 37*).

Second, and in keeping with this, Patrick was not an Arian. The great confession of every tongue on the great Judgment Day is "Jesus Christ is *Lord and God*" (*Conf 4*). Notably, however, the creed shows no awareness of the controversy concerning the Person and natures of Christ. It betrays no knowledge of the *Creed of Chalcedon* (451).

The Christocentric character of the Rule of Faith is reflected in Patrick's writing. Patrick sees Christ as the true sun (*Conf 20, 59-60*). He speaks of his whole life as nothing other than a "sacrifice . . . to Christ my Lord" (*Conf 34*), for Christ was the One who gave His life for him (*Conf 24*). Nowhere does Patrick mention the Virgin Mary. Patrick preached a message of "Christ alone" not "Christ and Mary."

Third, Patrick was a confessional Christian. Hanson observes that the Latin style of the creed in *Confession 4* is "markedly different from the rest of the *Confession*."<sup>14</sup> It was not his own production. Given that Patrick was a British Christian, and that his *Confession* was written for a British audience, and that he introduces his creed with the phrase "as our formula runs," it is highly likely that we have in *Confession 4* the Rule of Faith of the British Church in the fifth century. Patrick was not some theological lone-ranger. As a member of the British branch of the universal Church of Christ, he confessed his faith in the creed of his church. Like the *Belgic Confession*, the Rule of Faith is intensely personal: "we profess," "we believe . . . and await" and "we confess and adore" (*Conf 4*).

The arch-heretic Pelagius (c. 360-c. 420), like Patrick, was probably born in Britain. Moreover, they both lived around the same time, with Pelagius being the earlier figure. This has drawn forth comparisons. M. Forthomme Nicholson, in a contribution to a recent work on Celtic Christianity, has written that "Pelagius and Patrick share a similar concept of grace."<sup>15</sup> This is a very serious charge against Patrick.

Nicholson produces only two pieces of evidence for her assertion which even merit consideration.

First, she states, "Neither [Pelagius nor Patrick] believes in a confrontation between God's grace and human freedom." This is strange language and indicates that she does not properly understand the doctrines of grace. Augustine and all advocates of sovereign grace deny that grace "confronts" human freedom as if grace reduced man's freedom of choice to some shadowy power of acquiescence or made him a mere automaton. The *Canons of Dort* declare that the Lord

opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, he quickens; from being evil, disobedient and refractory, he renders it good, obedient and pliable (III/IV:11).

Nicholson's second argument is that, "There does not seem to be any clear concept of created grace in [Patrick's] *Confession*. All is gift, but there is no special gift that can be called 'grace' in the Augustinian sense." But ought we to expect Patrick to use words in their "Augustinian sense?" Especially is this not to be expected if Patrick, as appears most likely, never read Augustine. And if Patrick does not use words in an "Augustinian sense," does this mean that his view of grace is Pelagian?

Nicholson does not bother to quote even so much as one line from the *Confession* or from the *Letter* to the effect that Patrick was weak in his understanding of the grace of God. Nowhere in either of his writings does Patrick praise man's native powers or ascribe any goodness to man. Nowhere does he glory in man's free will or present salvation as the result of our not resisting God's grace. Nowhere does he speak of the possibility of sinless perfection or of the Fall of Adam as a bad example. Admittedly, he does speak highly of monasticism (e.g., *Conf* 42f.) but this does not make him Pelagian either. Practically all the church leaders of Patrick's day advocated the monastic life in one form or another, including Augustine, the champion of sovereign grace.

Patrick's *Confession* is a declaration of the mercy and faithfulness of God to him in Jesus Christ. Always and throughout his writings Patrick speaks of himself as only a lowly sinner who was pitied of the Lord. We see his humility in the immortal first line of his *Confession*: "I am Patrick, a sinner, most uncultivated and least of all the faithful and despised in the eyes of many" (*Conf* 1). He speaks of the sins of his youth and he presents them as being committed *against God*. He knew that "We shall all certainly render an account *even for the smallest sins* before the judgment seat of the Lord Christ" (*Conf* 8). In his waywardness, he had deserted the God of his fathers and disobeyed His commandments and neglected the church's message of salvation, but the Lord was gracious to him (*Conf* 1).

And it was [in Ireland] that the Lord opened the understanding of my unbelieving heart, so that I should recall my sins even though it was late and I should turn with all my heart to the Lord my God, and he took notice of my humble state and pitied my youth and my ignorance and protected me before I knew him and before I had sense or could distinguish between good and bad and strengthened me and comforted me as a father comforts his son (*Conf* 2).

Note that in Patrick's salvation the Lord is active. The Lord "opened" Patrick's heart. The Lord "noticed," "pitied," "protected," "strengthened" and "comforted" Patrick. It is true that Patrick tells us that he "recalled" his sins and "turned" with all his heart to the Lord but this was *the result* of the Lord's work upon his heart. "The Lord opened the understanding of my unbelieving heart, *so that* I should recall my sins . . . [and] turn with all my heart to the Lord my God," he writes (cf. Acts 16:14).

"So that is why I cannot keep silent," he begins his next sentence. He thanks the Lord for His "great acts of kindness" and His "great grace" and speaks of his desire to "praise and confess his wonderful works among every nation that is under the sky" (*Conf* 3). Many years later Patrick still marvels at the grace of the God who saved him:

Consequently I am strictly bound to cry out so as to make some repayment to the Lord for those benefits of his which were so great here and in eternity which the mind of man cannot calculate (*Conf* 12).

Such fulsome praise only issues from a heart that knows the great mercy of the Lord.

Perhaps the clearest—and the most earthy—presentation of the sovereignty of God in Patrick's salvation is found in his simile of the stone in deep mud.<sup>16</sup>

Before I was humiliated I was like a stone that lies in deep mud, and he who is mighty came and in his compassion raised me up and exalted me very high and placed me on the top of the wall (*Conf* 12).

It is hard to conceive of imagery which more sharply conveys of the passivity of the sinner and the glorious saving power of the Almighty. It is also significant that this language came from Patrick's heart and experience. Elsewhere, his writing indicates his great dependence on Scriptural language, but here he tells us what his salvation was to him in his own words. "I was like a stone in deep mud," he tells us, "but the mighty God reached down and lifted me up."

Christine Mohrmann is nearer the mark than Nicholson in her assessment of Patrick: "The doctrines of grace are one of the few theological elements which are mentioned several times [in Patrick's writings], and there is a clear anti-Pelagian trend in his work."<sup>17</sup> However, this does not mean that Patrick consciously wrote against Pelagianism in either the Confession or the Letter. Nothing he says supports Pelagianism and everything that he says is contrary to it. This is as far as we can go with regard to a possible influence of the Pelagian controversy on Patrick.<sup>18</sup> We can, however, affirm that Patrick's understanding of grace is much more biblical and forceful than the majority of the pre-Augustine church fathers (if not them all). Patrick had grasped clearly that salvation is a "gift of God" (*Conf* 14) and this is the message that this simple missionary to the Irish preached.

#### (IV) PATRICK'S MESSAGE (Part 2)

We have seen that Patrick believed and preached the grace of the Triune God in Christ. Patrick's understanding of grace is demonstrated yet further in that he repeatedly refers to his call to preach the gospel in Ireland as a "gift" of God to him (e.g., *Conf* 16, 33, 62). God, not Patrick himself, called him to his mission (*Conf* 56), for he received his office from God's hand (*Letter* 1). Patrick humbly confesses that he was not worthy of the high calling of the bishopric (*Conf* 32). "I truly am a debtor to God," he affirms (*Conf* 38). With a sense of the greatness of God's blessings to him, he cries out, "Who am I, Lord?" (*Conf* 34; cf. 55-56; II Sam. 7:18). These are the words of a man who believed and preached the gospel of grace.

Perhaps most striking is the fact that Patrick realises that he was "called and *predestined* to proclaim the Gospel" (*Letter* 6). He knows that he, and all true ministers of Jesus Christ, were eternally appointed to their glorious task. It is no wonder that God should deliver him from all his perils. After all, God is the One "who knows everything even before it takes place" (*Conf* 35). When on one occasion during his ministry in Ireland he was "put in irons," it was not his Irish captors but the Lord who struck his chains (*Conf* 52).

Patrick speaks of his desire to return to his "country and kinsfolk" in Britain and to see the saints in Gaul, but knows that he dare not do so. He would be sinning against the Lord for he is "bound in the Spirit" to his Irish calling (*Conf* 43). His life, he tells us, is one of service to "Christ my God, on whose behalf I am fulfilling a mission" (*Letter* 5; cf. *Conf* 56). John T. McNeill rightly speaks of Patrick's "intense consciousness of divine authorization."<sup>19</sup>

His hard labours were the fruit of God's grace also (*Conf* 51, 53) and only in the Lord was he able to persevere (*Conf* 58). Similarly the results of Patrick's labours are in the Lord's hands. Patrick knows

that the Lord has His children whom He gathers from the ends of the earth (*Letter 9; Conf 39*). In one passage Patrick speaks of the believers in Ireland as "a people who had recently come to belief whom the Lord chose from the ends of the earth" (*Conf 38*). The natural understanding of this is that those whom God chooses before the foundation of the earth come to faith at the appointed time.

For Patrick, nothing is merited; it is all gift and all grace. One who knows the "great grace" of God in the forgiveness of his own sins (*Conf 3*) can preach salvation even to wicked idolaters like the Irish. God saved him, a rebellious child of the church, so why cannot He convert the pagans? Even Coroticus and his men, who, while professing the faith of Jesus Christ, killed and kidnapped many of Patrick's Irish converts, are exhorted to repentance so that they may "be made whole here and in eternity" (*Letter 21*).

Patrick, however, is not soft on sin. Nor is he a man to mince his words. He speaks of the soldiers of Coroticus as "fellow citizens of the devils" living "in death in an atmosphere of enmity" (*Letter 2*). "They shall inherit Hell equally with [Satan] in eternal punishment, because, of course, he who commits sin is a slave and is called a son of the devil" (*Letter 4*). Patrick urged that these recalcitrant robbers be excommunicated and forbidden fellowship by all Christians (*Letter 6-7*).

It would be a theological anachronism to claim that Patrick set forth the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Another millennium would pass before that dogma would be clearly set forth over against the full-blown heresy of justification by faith and works that was the death knell of the Roman Church. Hanson is correct, however, that Patrick had a "good practical grasp of what justification by faith means."<sup>20</sup>

Patrick's own conversion experience points us in the direction of his "good *practical* grasp" of justification, as does the comfort which he received in believing the promises of God:

I daily expect either assassination or trickery or reduction to slavery or some accident or other, but I fear none of these things *on account of the promises of heaven* because I have thrown myself into the hands of Almighty God who reigns everywhere as the prophet says, Cast your care upon the Lord and he will nourish you (*Conf 55*).

Patrick speaks often and boldly of his steadfast trust in God:

*I believe most confidently* that [should my body be torn limb from limb or devoured by birds] I have gained my soul along with my body, because, *without a shadow of doubt*, on that Day we shall arise in the radiance of the sun, that is in the glory of Christ Jesus our Redeemer, as children of the living God and coheirs with Christ and destined to be conformed to his image, because we shall reign from him and through him and in him (*Conf 59*).

Patrick had an eschatology of hope. He had no doubt about his eternal destiny. He would partake in the resurrection of the just and live and reign with Christ forever. Patrick had the certainty of eternal life because the Lord Jesus "died and was crucified" for the "slaves of God and the baptized maidservants of Christ" (*Letter 7*). Patrick "awaited" the final fulfilment of God's promise of the salvation of the nations when forever believers "will sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (*Conf 39; Matt. 8:11*). This steadfast and fearless gaze into eternity distinguishes Patrick from much of the medieval church, for wherever the doctrine of justification by faith and works enters, confidence in one's eternal salvation vanishes. After all, how can one ever be sure of acquittal at Christ's judgment bar if even the smallest part of our salvation depends on us?

Interestingly, the Irish believers slain by Coroticus' men (*Letter 2-3, 15*) are described by Patrick as being in "Paradise" (*Letter 17*) and in "the kingdom of heaven" (*Letter 18*). On the other hand, the wicked have "their part in the lake of everlasting fire" (*Letter 18*). Patrick's writings leave no place for purgatory and James Bulloch points out that "No reference to purgatory is found in . . . any . . . Irish



writing prior to the tenth century."<sup>21</sup>

Underlying all of Patrick's faith and hope is his unshakeable trust in the Word of God. He can go as a missionary to a hostile land because he is armed with the Word. He can face fierce opposition "on account of the promises of heaven" (*Conf* 55). He can rebuke the powerful Coroticus and his bloodthirsty soldiers because he knows that the message he brings is not his but the Lord's. As he says near the end of his *Letter*,

That which I have set out in Latin is not my words but the words of God and of apostles and prophets, who of course have never lied. He who believes shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be damned. *God has spoken* (*Letter* 20).

That last sentence, "God has spoken," has a deathly ring of finality about it. Here is Patrick's authority: the Triune God speaking in Holy Scripture.

According to Edward T. Stimson's analysis,

[Patrick] quotes the Bible 54 times in his *Letter to Coroticus* and 135 times in the *Confession*, often unconsciously, quoting from 23 out of the 27 books of the New Testament, 12 books of the Old Testament, and 3 of the Apocrypha. He quoted most from the Psalms, Romans, Acts, Corinthians and Matthew, in that order.<sup>22</sup>

Sometimes Patrick quotes Bible text after Bible text as if he would bury his readers in Scripture (e.g., *Conf* 38, 40; *Letter* 2, 18). At other times his use of the Bible is less overt and more subconscious. Christine Mohrmann puts it well:

In every sentence, in every thought which he formulates, there are traces of Biblical language. And not only his language but also his way of thinking is determined by the Bible. But there is also in his writings a constant flow of Biblical words and phrases, which seem to belong to his normal vocabulary.

She speaks of "a sort of omnipresence of Holy Scripture" in Patrick's writings, for Patrick was a man saturated with the Bible.<sup>23</sup>

His sober exegesis also deserves recognition. Hanson states that Patrick's "biblical interpretation is remarkably sound and sensible," and notes that after reading the "far-fetched allegorizing" of many of the church fathers, both of the East and of the West, "one turns with relief to the straightforward and simple use which Patrick makes of the Bible."<sup>24</sup>

Patrick was a man of one book and the Bible that he read and from which he quoted was the Old Latin translation, not the later Vulgate of Jerome. We find no quotations or references to the church fathers in Patrick. This is probably due, at least in part, to the fact that he only received a limited education as a boy. His studies were incomplete when he was kidnapped by marauding Irishmen and he was never able to make up for this.

Thus when he writes, in the first line of his *Confession*, "I am Patrick, a sinner, *most uncultivated and least of all the faithful* and despised in the eyes of many" (*Conf* 1), he is not feigning humility, as some contemporary scholars would have it. What he said was true. His learning was meagre, his Latin grammar was very poor, and he knew it. Often in his *Confession* he bewails his "lack of education" (*Conf* 46; cf. 2, 9-12, 49, 62), and the same note is found in his *Letter* (e.g., *Letter* 1, 20).

Though scholars struggle in places to decipher Patrick's Latin, Patrick's lack of learning enhances the value of his work in one important respect. His lack of knowledge of rhetoric renders him incapable of writing for effect. Thus we gain a clearer and surer light into the inner thoughts of this man of God.

We should note, however, that although Patrick does not cite the church fathers, he does quote the

Apocrypha. Hanson identifies eleven quotations from Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Tobit, Song of the Three Holy Children and I Maccabees.<sup>25</sup> Nor does Patrick merely quote them as books "which the church may read and take instruction from" as our *Belgic Confession* puts it (chapter VI). In *Confession* 11, he quotes from Ecclesiasticus 7 with the words "in another place the Spirit testifies." In this, however, Patrick was no further astray than the church of his day. Only with the struggle regarding Scripture versus church tradition at the time of the Reformation did the Church make a final, clear proclamation on the canon and sufficiency of Scripture.

Perhaps more objectionable are his seven or eight references to his dreams. Two of these dreams occurred at significant junctures in Patrick's life: the message he received as a slave to depart from Ireland by ship (*Conf* 17) and his call as a missionary to Ireland by Victoricus (*Conf* 23), both mentioned earlier. The former, no doubt, merely presents to his mind the desire of his heart to escape from the land of his captivity. The latter is best explained, not as a supernatural revelation, but merely as the product of his burden to reach the Irish with the gospel of Christ. This was on his mind and he ended up dreaming about it one night. The other dreams are more trivial and can be understood along the same lines.

Most striking is the fact that Patrick introduces two of his dreams with the words "I saw in a vision of the night," evidently taken from Daniel 7:13 (*Conf* 23, 29). From this it would appear that Patrick, in his devout faith in the Scriptures, did not understand that revelatory dreams from God terminated with the apostolic witness in the first century. In this error, as in his view of the Apocrypha, Patrick was merely a man of his times.

## (V) PATRICK'S MISSIONARY LABOURS

We have considered the biblical message of the gospel that Patrick knew in his heart and which he brought to the people of Ireland. We have also seen that Patrick was called by the British church to labour in Ireland and that he had unshakeable confidence in his divine calling. However, he was not sent to preach in wholly virgin territory. That there were some believers in Ireland before Patrick's visit is evident from the writings of a contemporary, Prosper of Aquitaine, and Patrick himself tells us that there were believers in Ireland before his mission (cf. *Conf* 51).

But how did Patrick go about his work? Philip Hughes gives a fine summary of Patrick's labours:

The saint spent himself in an endless apostolate, preaching, baptizing, ordaining, consecrating other bishops, everywhere establishing monasteries and a curious kind of ecclesiastical settlement, part monastery, part seminary, part center of administration, which, in this country where cities were unknown, serve as the bishop's see.<sup>26</sup>

Diligent labour, Patrick explains, was the means of his success. After the kidnapping and murder of some of his converts, he speaks of "the flock of the Lord which was increasing in Ireland nicely as a result of hard work" (*Letter* 12). Patrick spent himself for the souls of his Irish converts (*Conf* 53), taking trouble and labour for the salvation of others (*Conf* 28). Thus he had a good conscience, serving God "in faithfulness to the truth and in sincerity of heart" (*Conf* 48).

But he does not accredit this to his own power. Right from his earliest days as a Christian, Patrick learned to supplicate the throne of grace. Even as a shepherd-slave he would "rise before dawn" and pray fervently in the power of the Spirit (*Conf* 16). The great missionary to Ireland confesses, "By God's gift I achieved everything industriously and willingly for your salvation" (*Conf* 51).

That Patrick saw his mission in terms of preaching is clear. He speaks both in his *Confession* and in his *Letter* of "hunting" sinners and "fishing" for them with the gospel net (*Conf* 40; *Letter* 11). "The children of God whom [the Lord] has recently gathered at the ends of the earth," Patrick says, have been saved "through my exhortation poor though I am!" (*Letter* 9). He confesses that God enabled him "to come and preach the gospel to Irish tribes" (*Conf* 37). Mohrmann reckons that Patrick must

have been a "very eloquent preacher," since "the language and style" of his writings are "very dynamic."<sup>27</sup>

But what did Patrick see as the basis for preaching? In *Confession* 40, he lists the classical biblical texts for missionary work, including Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15-16. The promises of the gathering of the catholic Church were dear to him. In both the *Confession* and the *Letter* he quotes Matthew 8:11: "They will come from the east and from the west and will sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven" (*Conf* 39; *Letter* 18). Patrick describes the Irish as a people

whom the Lord chose from the ends of the earth as long ago he had promised through his prophets: to you the nations will come from the ends of the earth and will say: *just as our fathers took to themselves false idols and there is no usefulness in them, and in another place, I have set you as a light to the Gentiles so that you may be for salvation even to the end of the earth* (*Conf* 38).

One striking point about Patrick's missionary work is that he understood it eschatologically. He speaks often of the "last days" (e.g., *Conf* 34; *Letter* 11) and the Rule of Faith says that "we . . . await [Christ's] Advent which will happen soon" (*Conf* 4). Patrick quotes the classic text linking the spread of the gospel and the end of the world: "This gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony for all nations and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14; *Conf* 40). For Patrick the mission to Ireland was not merely one of many missions to hitherto unreached nations. He did not know of Iceland and the Americas to the west, so he thought of Ireland as being at "the end of the earth" (*Conf* 1). Patrick saw himself as one of those whom

the Lord had long ago foretold would declare his gospel as a testimony to all nations before the end of the world, and we see as a consequence that it has been fulfilled just so: you can see that we are witnesses that the gospel *has been preached as far as the point where there is no beyond* (*Conf* 34).

Hanson accurately presents Patrick's thought: "When the gospel will have been preached to every nation (and the Irish are the last on the list), then the world will end."<sup>28</sup>

Like all true missionaries of all ages, Patrick was motivated to obey the call to go to other lands to preach the gospel out of love to God and love to the people to whom he ministered. He tells us that the love of Christ "carried" him to Ireland (*Conf* 13). He testifies, "I live among barbarian tribes as *an exile for the love of God*; God himself is witness that this is true . . . . *I exist to teach tribes for my God*" (*Letter* 1).

Patrick thought of his converts as part of the universal church of Jesus Christ. They are the "flock of the Lord" (*Letter* 12) and "children of God" (*Letter* 15) for whom Christ died (*Letter* 7). Patrick speaks of them as "most beautiful and most beloved brothers whom I have begotten in Christ" (*Letter* 16; cf. *Letter* 2; *Conf* 38). William Henry Scott notes that in Patrick's writings "not the slightest innuendo betrays any sense of patronizing superiority or paternalism."<sup>29</sup>

When Coroticus butchered and kidnapped many Irish Christians, Patrick quotes I Corinthians 12:26: "If one member grieves all members should grieve with it" (*Letter* 16). Thus he is filled with "sorrow and grief" (*Letter* 16). At this point he identifies fully with the Irish Church: "They think it derogatory that we are Irish" (*Letter* 16). Of course, Patrick was not Irish by birth but British, but his heart so burned for his brothers in the Lord that he adopted their nationality. This was quite a statement to make in a letter addressed to Britons who despised the Irish as non-Roman barbarians.

Patrick's love for the Irish people did not result in his watering down the gospel. We see him declining to partake in Irish idolatry and immorality right from the time of his escape from slavery in Ireland (*Conf* 18). His hatred for their paganism comes out in *Confession* 41: "Those in Ireland . . . up to now

always only worshipped idols and filthy things." Irish pagans who worship the sun, Patrick affirms, "will come to a bad end in wretched punishment" (*Conf* 60).

Persecution resulted but, by the grace of God, this too failed to make Patrick compromise the gospel.

God . . . prevailed in me . . . to enable me to come and preach the gospel to Irish tribes and endure insults from unbelievers, to bear the reproach of my pilgrimage and many persecutions, even as far as being thrown into irons (*Conf* 37).

Patrick speaks of his "twelve perils" (*Conf* 35) and several imprisonments (*Conf* 15, 21, 35, 37, 52). Three times he expresses the hope that God might grant him the crown of martyrdom (*Conf* 37, 55, 59). It was always a distinct possibility. In one place Patrick refers to himself as he "whom this world hates" (*Conf* 13). He tells us, "I daily expect either assassination or trickery or reduction to slavery or some accident or other, but I fear none of these things on account of the promises of heaven" (*Conf* 55).

In many ways Patrick showed faithfulness in his gospel labours. He was not afraid to travel to the more remote and barbarous parts of Ireland with the Word of God (*Conf* 51). He took great pains to be straightforward in his dealings with the Irish tribes. Patrick was not, as much of the (later) medieval church, tainted with simony (*Conf* 55). To avoid even the appearance of covetousness he refused many voluntary gifts (*Conf* 48-50). Patrick's motivation for this is striking:

But I [did it] because of the hope of the permanence [of my mission] to safeguard myself carefully in every way, for this purpose that they should not catch me or the ministry of my service out in any charge of unfaithfulness and that I should not give an opportunity for denigration or disparagement even in the smallest matters (*Conf* 49).

. . . for the sake of God and his church . . . in case the name of the Lord should be blasphemed through me (*Conf* 48).

Patrick's reference to the desired "permanence" of his mission is also important (*Conf* 49). "The Lord Christ," he tells us "commanded me that I should come to be with them *for the rest of my life*" (*Conf* 43). Patrick was not a fly-by-night evangelist with no long term goals. Instead, he wanted to stay in Ireland all his days that the church might be solidly established and so continue to prosper after his death. Patrick's goal was an indigenous church served by Irish office-bearers.

I must . . . promulgate the name of God everywhere fearlessly and faithfully, *so as to leave after my death a legacy to my brothers and my children* whom I have baptized in the Lord, so many thousands of people (*Conf* 14).

Just before this Patrick had spoken of the necessity of his teaching "from the rule of faith of the Trinity" and making known "the gift of God and eternal comfort" (*Conf* 14). Clearly the legacy he wished to leave to the succeeding generations of the Irish Church was creedal Trinitarian orthodoxy, the comforting gospel of the grace of God (*Conf* 51). This alone would stand the test of time.

Patrick's lament was that he could not serve his Lord perfectly (cf. *Conf* 13). He knew his academic limitations. He also knew the struggle with the old man, which he refers to as "this body of death" and "the hostile flesh" (*Conf* 44), and with Satan and the wicked world (*Conf* 13, 20, 44, 55). But through it all his only hope was in the faithfulness of his God (*Conf* 35, 54-56). Patrick's closing words in his *Confession*, disclaiming all credit for his mission and attributing it all to the pleasure of the Lord, are especially poignant.

But I beg those who believe in God and fear him whoever shall condescend to peruse or to receive this writing which Patrick, a very badly educated sinner, has written in Ireland, *that nobody shall ever say that it was I, the ignoramus, if I have achieved or shown any small success according to God's pleasure, but you are to think and it must*

*be sincerely believed, that it was the gift of God. And this is my confession before I die (Conf 62).*

## (VI) THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PATRICK

We have seen that Patrick was clearly not the happy-go-lucky guy of popular perception. Nor did he evangelize Ireland in the service of the Roman Church and bring it under the sway of the Roman pontiff as, for example, Boniface did for Germany three centuries later.

Nor was he an abolitionist. Thomas Cahill writes, "The greatness of Patrick is beyond dispute: the first human being in the history of the world to speak out unequivocally against slavery."<sup>30</sup> But Patrick's *Letter* to Coroticus and his men does not condemn slavery *per se* but the kidnapping and murder of "the slaves of God and baptized handmaidens of Christ" (*Letter* 7). Patrick's *Letter* and *Confession* are very different from, say, the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.

It would be more accurate to refer to Patrick as "Evangelical" than "Protestant." The distinctive Reformed doctrines were not developed in his day and it is absurd to expect them to be taught in the *Confession* or the *Letter*. Truth develops over against the lie. When the time was right the Reformation gospel was stated sharply over against Roman sacerdotalism. But that would await another thousand years.

Patrick held to orthodox Trinitarian and Christological theology. He had a strong faith in God's promises and a compelling eschatology of hope. His devotion to the Word of God is seen on every page of his writings. His knowledge of salvation in Christ was the basis for his missionary zeal to the Irish. Jesus Christ "overcame" death and received "all power above every name" (*Conf* 4), therefore the church must go into all the world and teach and baptize (*Conf* 40).

The greatness of his work and its difficulties, the glory of the gospel he preached, and his own limited education were used of the Spirit to work in him a profound humility. He was no proud prelate of the same ilk as Augustine of Canterbury, wrongly credited by some for first bringing Christianity to Britain. The honesty and purity of Patrick's soul shine through his works. He was a simple follower of Christ labouring on behalf of His God. He is an example to us all.

Patrick does not hold a place in the history of dogma. He was not a profound thinker, never mind a speculative theologian. He did not have the intellectual skills, nor the time, nor the library, for serious dogmatic reflection. Nor did Patrick translate the Bible into the vernacular for the Irish as did Wycliffe and his followers for the English. Instead Patrick sought to diffuse a knowledge of Latin in Ireland so the church could understand the Old Latin translation.

But Patrick did have what was needed for his missionary task: an unwavering faith and fervent love for the truth. As a missionary, several things stand out regarding Patrick. First, he was an itinerant bishop, one of the few we know of in the post-apostolic church. Even the Arian missionary to the Goths, Ulfilas (c. 311-c. 381), was largely stationed in one place. Second, his identification with those for whom he laboured would be commended by any modern school of missions. Third, his desire for a truly indigenous church reflecting the bent of the Irish is highly commendable. Fourth, a Reformed man appreciates Patrick's creedal emphasis and concern for the future of the church.

Will Durant points out that when Patrick died "it could be said of him, as of no other, that one man had converted a nation."<sup>31</sup> Another peculiarity of Ireland is that it received the Christian faith without the shedding of the blood of martyrs, Patrick and his anonymous helpers evidently dying a natural death.

Patrick's writings show a faith very different from that of the Council of Trent and Vatican I and II. Patrick knows nothing of transubstantiation, the worship of the host or the mass as a propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead; nor of mariolatry, Mary's immaculate conception or her bodily

assumption into heaven or her mediation; nor of papal dominion, infallibility or of religious inquisition. The seven sacraments, auricular confession, the rosary, indulgences, worship of idols, prayers to saints, prayers for the dead, purgatory and clerical celibacy are not part of Patrick's faith.

Ireland, which is now one of the most devoutly Romanist nations of the world, was only reduced to the Roman yoke in the twelfth century. For more than eleven hundred years after the resurrection of Christ, Ireland was independent of the papal see. Then in 1155, Adrian IV, the only English pope, granted Ireland to the Norman King of England, Henry II.<sup>32</sup> Sixteen years later Ireland was subdued by the English. The church that was built by Christ through the labours of Patrick and others was now claimed to be founded on Peter the rock. At the time of the Reformation, Ireland had been Roman Catholic for less than three hundred and fifty years. Non-Roman Catholic Christianity, on the other hand, was to be found in Ireland for at least eight hundred years before the Norman invasion.

The ancient Irish Church's freedom from both the old Roman Empire and the Roman Church led William Henry Scott to write,

Nowhere does church history provide an example of an accomplished indigenous church of this kind equal to that of the Celtic Church which developed in Ireland in the fifth century.<sup>33</sup>

But the significance of Patrick can be seen not only in his role in establishing the Irish Church but in that church's vital role in the progress of Christianity in the early part of the Middle Ages. With the collapse of the Roman Empire and the incursion of the barbarian tribes, European civilization decayed rapidly. Libraries were destroyed and educational standards plummeted. The church was in great peril. However, as Kenneth Scott Latourette remarks

Thanks to Patrick and to his imperfectly remembered associates and contemporaries, in the declining days of the Empire in the West, Christianity was securely planted in Ireland, well beyond the farthest limits reached by the legions . . . . From Ireland, too, within a very few generations, Christian monks were to pour into Britain and the Continent, there to revive a faith which had decayed through the turmoil of the years and to carry it to pagan peoples.<sup>34</sup>

Mark Noll, in his book *Turning Points*, identifies twelve key events in the history of the Church. In his introduction he mentions a dozen or so others which almost made it on his list. One of these is "the mission of Patrick to Ireland in the early fifth century."<sup>35</sup>

The missionary passion of the post-Patrician Irish Church was a continuation of Patrick's zeal. William H. Marnell points out,

It was the St. Patrick of actuality, the slave of Christ and his follower in exile but not the wonder-worker of tradition old or new, who established the tradition in which the Irish monks who brought Christianity back to Europe in the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries lived, worked and suffered.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, Hughes Oliphant Old writes of the Irish Church,

Not content to achieve their own salvation, their monasticism was an evangelistic monasticism. They knew that the Bible taught that they had to share the gospel as well as receive it. And to that sacred task they gave their lives, with all the passion that comes so naturally to the Celtic soul.<sup>37</sup>

The Irish Church followed Patrick not only in their missionary fervor but also in their love of learning. Patrick, it is true, was no scholar, but in his writings it is clear that he attached a high value to knowledge. He lamented the loss of the education he would have gained in his youth but for his kidnapping (*Conf* 10) and yearned for "the same talent as the others had" (*Conf* 11). His children in

the Irish church over the next few centuries took the opportunity they had to gain a good education and they led the way in European scholarship.

Many precious manuscripts found their way to Ireland as did many young men of the continent who sought a first-rate education at one of the famed Irish monastic schools. The Irish church laboured hard in copying these precious texts and was renowned for its calligraphy. The *Book of Kells*, written very soon after the turn of the ninth century and on display at Trinity College, Dublin, rates as one of the world's most famous manuscripts. Irish learning and the books they preserved flowed back to the continent with the missionary monks as did the purer form of Latin which the Irish maintained. Roland Bainton writes that while continental Latin was

corrupted by the emergent vernaculars there was no such danger in Ireland where the native speech was Gaelic. Here, Latin continued separate and undefiled, to be brought back to the Continent, after subsequent invasions, by Irish monks.<sup>38</sup>

The Irish also led the way in the study of Greek. John T. McNeill writes, "Nora Chadwick [an expert on the Irish Church] can speak of a knowledge of Greek under the Frank[ish Empire] as 'an Irish monopoly.'"<sup>39</sup>

Another area in which the ancient Irish Church followed Patrick was in her godliness. After all, Ireland was known not merely as "the Island of Scholars" but "the Island of *Saints* and Scholars." Near the end of the seventh century, Aldfred, king of the Northumbrian Saxons, who was educated in an Irish monastery, penned the following lines concerning the piety of the Irish Church:

I found in each great church moreo'er,  
Whether on island or on shore,  
Piety, learning, fond affection;  
Holy welcome and kind protection.  
I found the good lay monks and brothers  
Ever beseeching help for others,  
And in their keeping the holy word  
Pure as it came from Jesus the Lord.

In the next several centuries after Patrick the Irish Church proved faithful to his legacy. She used her learning and piety in the promulgation of the gospel to Scotland, England, Iceland, France, the Lowlands, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Austria and other lands farther east. The islands of Iona and Lindisfarne had famous Irish monastic settlements. Through the great missionary work of Columba, Columbanus, Gall, Killian, Virgil of Salzburg and hordes of other Irish monks the white horse of the gospel rode forth from the Emerald Isle.

There is much truth to the words of Thomas J. Johnston about the Irish monks:

In old chronicles and in manuscripts written by Irish hands, ample witness of their work remains; but all that Christendom in Western Europe [owes] to them is by no means fully known or realized today.<sup>40</sup>

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (USA: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1995), p. 147.

<sup>2</sup>John T. McNeill, *The Celtic Churches: A History A.D. 200 to 1200* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 55; italics mine.

<sup>3</sup>Patrick's *Confession* and his *Letter* to Coroticus hereafter will be abbreviated *Conf* and *Letter*, respectively. The translation from the original Latin which is used in this article is that of R. P. C. Hanson (*The Life and Writings of the Historical Saint Patrick* [New York: The Seabury Press, 1983]).

<sup>4</sup>Hanson, *Op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Aidan Nichols, "The Roman Primacy in the Ancient Irish and Anglo-Celtic Church," in Michele Maccarrone (ed.), *Il Primato del vescovo di Roma nel primo millennio* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), p. 475.

<sup>6</sup>Patrick's *Confession* though having a very similar title to Augustine's *Confessions*, gives no evidence of inspiration from the African church father. Cahill writes, "Patrick himself probably never heard of Augustine . . . and if he did hear of him he undoubtedly never read him" (*Op. cit.*, p. 114).

<sup>7</sup>Hanson, *Op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>8</sup>Hanson, *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup>It would appear that the Wood of Voclut was the region where Patrick laboured as a shepherd. Its location depends on whether the Western Sea is to be understood as west with respect to Ireland (the Atlantic Ocean) or west with respect to Britain (the Irish Sea).

<sup>10</sup>Christine Mohrmann, *The Latin of Saint Patrick* (Dublin: Dublin University Press, 1961), pp. 45-46.

<sup>11</sup>Hanson, *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup>Cahill, *Op. cit.*, p. 110.

<sup>13</sup>This reference to the attractive appearance of a female baptismal candidate is not the sort of thing one finds often in the writings of the Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.

<sup>14</sup>Hanson, *Op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>15</sup>M. Forthomme Nicholson, "Celtic Theology: Pelagius," in James P. Mackey (ed.), *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), p. 404.

<sup>16</sup>Mud, of course, requires rain. Apparently the Irish climate has not changed much over the last 1,500 years.

<sup>17</sup>Mohrmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Hanson: "Efforts to support the argument that Patrick was influenced either by Pelagianism or anti-Pelagianism do not seem to me to have been successful" (*Op. cit.*, p. 43).

<sup>19</sup>McNeill, *Op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>20</sup>Hanson, *Op. cit.*, p. 39; italics mine.

<sup>21</sup>James Bulloch, *The Life of the Celtic Church* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1963), p. 126.

<sup>22</sup>Edward T. Stimson, *Renewal in Christ As the Celtic Church Led "The Way"* (New York: Vantage Press, 1979), p. 159.

<sup>23</sup>Mohrmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.



<sup>24</sup>Hanson, *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>25</sup>Hanson, *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>26</sup>Philip Hughes, *A Popular History of the Catholic Church* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1954), p. 68. The debate as to where his center of labor was (Armagh, Tara or elsewhere) does not concern us here.

<sup>27</sup>Mohrmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 48. Remember that Patrick would have spoken to the Irish in Gaelic, whereas he wrote his *Confession* and *Letter* in Latin for a British audience.

<sup>28</sup>Hanson, *Op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>29</sup>William Henry Scott, "St. Patrick's Missionary Methods," *The International Review of Missions*, 50, 146 (April, 1961).

<sup>30</sup>Cahill, *Op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>31</sup>Will Durant, *The Age of Faith: A History of Medieval Civilization—Christian, Islamic and Judaic—from Constantine to Dante: AD. 325-1300* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950), p. 84.

<sup>32</sup>Some Roman Catholic scholars have sought to deny Adrian IV's papal bull but it is clearly genuine (cf. Appendix II in Henry C. Sheldon, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1 [USA: Hendriksen, repr. 1988], pp. 544-546). It is highly ironic that Ireland was "given" to England by the pope.

<sup>33</sup>Scott, *Op. cit.*, 137.

<sup>34</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vol. 1 (USA: Harper & Row, repr. 1965), pp. 222-223.

<sup>35</sup>Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), p. 13.

<sup>36</sup>William H. Marnell, *Light from the West: The Irish Mission and the Emergence of Modern Europe* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), p. 25.

<sup>37</sup>Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 111.

<sup>38</sup>Roland Bainton, *Christendom: A Short History of Christianity and its Impact on Western Civilization* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 144.

<sup>39</sup>McNeill, *Op. cit.*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>40</sup>Thomas J. Johnston, John L. Robinson and Robert Wyse Jackson, *A History of the Church of Ireland* (Ireland: A.P.C.K., no date), p. 92.