

A photograph of a forest with sunlight filtering through tall trees and ferns on the ground. The sun is low on the left, creating a bright lens flare and illuminating the scene with a warm, golden light. The trees are tall and thin, and the ground is covered in dense green ferns.

T. M. MOORE

The
Celtic
Revival

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The Celtic Revival: A Brief Introduction
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Introduction: What was the Celtic Revival?

Throughout the course of its nearly 2000 year history, the Christian movement has experienced periods of revival. At times these have been merely local in expression; at other times, however, winds of revival have swept through peoples, cultures, and nations across a broad geographic swath and lasting for many years.

These seasons of revival stand out starkly from the normal course of Christianity's progress, making dramatic impacts in many areas and contributing a lasting and variegated legacy to the history of the faith and, indeed, the world.

Such a period was the Celtic Revival (ca. 430-800 AD). While Christians today know very little about this period, the Celtic Revival stands as a most significant and remarkable episode in Church history. It is exaggerating only a little to say of this period, as Thomas Cahill has written, that the movement of God's Spirit which began among the pagan peoples of benighted Ireland "saved civilization" for much of the Western world.

This is the story of that unlikely, thrilling, and amazing period in the history of the Christian movement.

What was the Celtic Revival?

To be concise, the Celtic Revival was a movement of God's Spirit, among and through the Celtic peoples of Ireland and elsewhere, which impacted insular and continental Europe unto spiritual renewal, evangelical boldness, and social and cultural transformation. The Celtic Revival was a period of revival, renewal, and awakening which, while largely forgotten in our day, offers example, guidance, and hope for Christians who long for something more than their present experience of the faith.

The Celtic Revival could not have begun in a more unlikely place or way. It was launched by an unschooled British missionary, who had come to Ireland against the wishes of his family and church leaders, and without the support of the churches in Britain of his day, to do a work for which he had no preparation or experience, among a people who terrified even the Legions of Rome.

Yet, under what he regarded as the clear leading of God's Spirit, Patrick, the high school dropout and runaway slave, returned to the pagan Irish

world which had held him captive for six years, and brought to the illiterate, violent, and crude tribes of the Emerald Isle the Good News concerning a Kingdom not of this world. For nearly sixty years, Patrick labored among the “Scotti” of Ireland, leaving a legacy of believers, churches, leadership, and example that would fuel an ongoing revival of Gospel impact for centuries to come.

We will follow this almost unbelievable story, from its beginnings on a lonely Irish hillside through its development into a powerful, Europe-wide, movement of spiritual vitality, learning, missions, and cultural transformation. We will meet the men and women whose achievements were so many and so remarkable that those who celebrated them in their day and after simply could not find adequate words to express their admiration and awe. And we will discover the precious legacy which this period of Church history extends to us today.

1 Historical Overview

The Celtic Revival spanned a period of nearly 400 years, from its beginnings around 430 AD to the declining years, starting late in the 7th century, of incorporation into the fold of the Roman Church, infighting among monastic “families”, invasions of the Norsemen, and intermittent efforts at reform and renewal under the *céili déi* movement.

Our understanding of this period derives from scant but valuable literary resources available from throughout the period, together with a variety of cultural artifacts, mainly religious.

Christianity existed in Ireland prior to Patrick’s arrival. Late in the fourth century the Roman Pope Celestine sent a missionary, Palladius, to undertake a ministry among Christians in Ireland who had arrived there either by trade or as slaves. Little is known about Palladius’ work. However, small enclaves of believers had come into being by the early years of the fifth century, and it may have been among these that Patrick received what limited training he did and was ordained to the ministry. Among these enclaves was the monastery of Ailbe at Emly, on the east coast of Ireland.

Patrick recounts his highly successful work briefly in his *Confession*, an overview and defense of his ministry written toward the end of his career. This is supplemented by a letter of excommunication to a “Christian” warrior and his troops, the *Letter against the Soldiers of Coroticus*. From Patrick’s writings we learn the story of his conversion, call to Ireland, and subsequent work there, which laid the foundations for the Celtic Revival. During Patrick’s lifetime a disciple, Sechnall, further fleshed out some of the details of Patrick’s ministry in his lengthy poem celebrating the saint, *Audite Omnes Amantes*.

In the third generation of Irish Christians, in the middle of the 6th century, Finnian, Abbott of the monastery at Clonard, commissioned twelve leaders of the Irish Church to take the ministry of the Gospel throughout Ireland and beyond. This marks the beginning of the expansion of the Celtic Revival beyond Ireland to points east and west.

During the 7th century Christianity flourished throughout Ireland as a monastic movement. Great monastic centers came into existence in all the ancient territories of the formerly pagan tribes and families, the result of steady evangelization and patient works of service in and around the

ancient raths or tribal centers. Progress was not easy, and very often those who were leaders in the movement faced resistance, betrayal, and forms of persecution. Celtic Christianity came to be identified as a movement of martyrs, classified as white (those who joined a monastery), green (those who went as hermits to begin a new initiative in an unevangelized area), and red (those who suffered death for the faith).

The 7th century thus saw the rise of the *peregrini*, or wandering missionary/scholars, who took up the work of missions on behalf of the Gospel in foreign lands. Great leaders like Colum Cille, Brendan, and Columbanus pursued the work of evangelism and disciple-making, preaching and starting monasteries in Scotland, Gaul, Switzerland, Northern Italy, and elsewhere.

Celtic Christianity flourished as a movement of evangelism, spiritual vitality, community renewal, and cultural transformation from the middle of the 6th to the end of the 7th century. During the 8th and 9th centuries, following the incorporation of the Celtic churches into the Roman Catholic Church – the result of the Synod of Whitby in 664 – the spiritual vitality of the movement began to wane. The Revival had come full circle, from its pre-beginnings in the work of Palladius, Ailbe, and others, to the creation of Catholic parishes and monastic “families” (*paruchia*) of a decidedly Celtic temper throughout Ireland and beyond.

The Revival ran out of gas during the 9th century. Monastic families, jealous for the fame of their founders and openly competitive with one another, fell to bickering and “sheep-stealing” in place of evangelism and disciple-making. At the same time, seafaring Norsemen began to ravage the monasteries of Britain and Ireland, bringing terror, pillage, and murder to end the years of relative peace and prosperity which had characterized the Revival. Writing from Gaul, Alcuin saw their ravages as a judgment of God on the churches for leaving the ways of their forebears in the faith. Many longed for the old ways and former days, as we see in the *céili déi* (servants of God) movement and attempts to codify certain aspects of the Revival which some felt were being lost. Two great scholars, whose roots were in the Celtic Revival – Eriugena and Alcuin – represent the last lights of a glorious period that flickered for a century, then went out.

Before it ended, however, the Revival inaugurated by Patrick and carried throughout Europe by thousands of Irish *peregrini* would see untold thousands come to faith in Christ, moribund churches receive new life, pagan deities and practices confronted and forsaken, and beneficial

changes in law, literature, culture, and community life, reflecting the reality of the resurrection life and reign of Jesus Christ.

2 Major Figures in the Celtic Revival

The revival of Christian faith and religion which occurred between the 5th and 9th centuries was advanced and sustained by the efforts of countless, unnamed and unheralded men and women. Faithful monks and nuns; anonymous scribes, poets, and artists; trusting lay people from all walks of life; preachers, evangelists, healers, rulers, artisans, commoners, and burden-bearers of various sorts – all played crucial roles in heralding and establishing the faith of Christ in new areas and among lapsed believers from Ireland to Scotland and Wales and throughout the European continent.

Several individuals stand out, however, not only because of their contribution to the Celtic Revival, but because of what they represent concerning one phase or expression of that great period of Christian history. We have been introduced to these people – Patrick, early monastic leaders, Colum Cille, Brendan, Columbanus, and Gall. Here I simply want to review their contribution as a way of outlining or highlighting various aspects or facets of the Celtic Revival.

Patrick, for example, demonstrates both the simplicity of faith and the evangelistic fervor that launched and characterized this Gospel movement for nearly four centuries. Patrick was not a learned man when the call to serve as a missionary came to him. He had no advanced studies nor any specific preparation for a life in the ministry. But believing God had forgiven and redeemed him, and had returned him safely to his home from six years of slavery, he also believed God had called him to what others considered an impossible and foolhardy task.

The faith of Celtic Christians was like this. They did not allow what they undertook in the name of Jesus to be limited by their lack of experience or the perceptions of others. Like Colum, setting off on his own for Iona, Brendan, following the Lord's call on the Western Sea, or Columbanus, forsaking a life of scholarship to become a missionary to Europe at age 50, Celtic Christians *simply believed* what they read in the Scriptures and as they understood God's Word to apply to themselves. Patrick went to Ireland in simple faith. Once there, he sought whatever help he could receive to prepare for the work to which he had been called. Then he took up that work – evangelizing, baptizing, and training lost pagans – with unremitting fervor for the rest of his life.

In early Celtic Christian monastic leaders we see yet another trait that

marked this period, the ability to bring into being, sustain, and multiply spiritual communities of the faithful. Leaders of the monastic movement during the 6th century – people like Brigid, Colman Ela, Kevin, Ciarán, Finnian, and Comghall – embodied the lifestyle and skills that would see new communities beginning all over Ireland, Scotland, and Europe for two more centuries. Intense and consistent spiritual discipline, daily manual labor, commitment to holy living, love for and service within neighboring communities, and a passion for study and teaching – all these skills worked together in the monastic leaders of the 6th and 7th centuries to provide solid pegs and launch pads for the ongoing Revival.

Patrick's obedience and zeal for evangelism and the hard community-building work of early monastic leaders are also seen in Colum Cille (d. 595 AD). His zeal for the Scriptures, another of the characteristics common throughout the period of the Celtic Revival, is matched only by his skill in creating out of nothing what became the most famous of the Celtic Christian monastic communities.

Celtic Christians were people of the Book, and they cherished the Word and staked their lives on it. We see this in Colum's life in three ways.

First, as at least one account has it, it was love for the Word of God that ended up sending Colum out of Ireland to found the community on Iona off the west coast of Scotland. As a monk in the monastery of Finnian of Clonard, Colum so loved the Scriptures that, contrary to community rules, he made a personal copy of the gospels for his own use. Upon being discovered, his copy was confiscated and he was put under banishment as a form of discipline. He sailed to Iona and there began a community and training institute based on the Word of God in which hundreds of men were prepared as evangelists, missionaries, and scholars for Christ. Dallán Forgaill, an early biographer of Colum, wrote that the disciples he trained were like ladders laid against the walls of the City of God, upon which many found entrance to the grace of God. This devotion to Scripture in training others for the work of ministry is the second facet of Colum's – and Celtic Christians' – love for Scripture.

Finally, it is quite possible that Colum inspired the preparation of the Book of Kells, which, along with the Durrow and Lindisfarne Gospels, is one of the great works of spiritual and literary art of this period. A lavishly illustrated, beautifully-lettered copy of the four gospels, the Book of Kells demonstrates the great esteem Celtic Christians had for the Bible as well as their desire to honor and preserve it for the generations to come.

In Brendan and Columbanus we see that courageous, visionary aspect of Celtic Christianity which found so many people willing to forsake familiar circumstances and follow the call of Christ into dangerous fields of endeavor.

Brendan (fl. 560 AD) and Columbanus (d. 615 AD) both held secure positions in honored monasteries – Brendan at Clonfert and Columbanus at Bangor – when they decided to embark on the life of wandering missionaries in service to Christ however He might lead. Brendan's journeys over the Western Sea, while apparently based in historical reality, came to stand as a parable for the life of faith, a disciplined journey of faith fraught with trials and uncertainties, in the company of trusted soul friends, toward the vision of Christ and His glorious promises. Columbanus' ministry, while more certainly historical as to the specific details, was nonetheless also a spiritual adventure of follow the leading of Christ through trials and uncertainties to victories and glory in the Lord.

Such *peregrini pro Christi* carried the spiritual life-blood of the Celtic Revival throughout Europe, renewing for generations the calling to seek Christ and His Kingdom as the highest endeavor in life.

In Gall, a disciple of Columbanus, we glimpse the life of discipline and deference that characterized this period in so many ways. Gall was a student of Columbanus who through prayer, study, physical work, and the exercise of various spiritual gifts and skills, came to be a leader in the Celtic Revival in the generation following the death of Columbanus, early in the 8th century. He was a gifted preacher and a bold evangelist, with a spirit of daring faith, which he learned from his teacher. This was only possible after many years of learning, holding fast to the monastic rule of Columbanus, and following his teacher's instructions in daily discipline, the practice of penance, and the work of ministry.

Gall may have learned too well, for when Columbanus decided to quit Switzerland and turn south toward Italy in their journeys, Gall declined to go. He intended to stay where he'd begun his public ministry and begin a community such as he had known under Columbanus in Gaul. Columbanus, unhappy with this decision, acquiesced, but insisted that, as an act of discipline and sign of his deference to his teacher, Gall should desist from offering the Lord's Supper until Columbanus had died. Gall, ever disciplined and deferential, agreed, and only after messengers came from Bobbio informing Gall of Columbanus' death did he offer the Supper to the monks in his charge.

Simple faith, fervent evangelism, love for the Scriptures, vision and boldness, discipline and deference – these were among the characteristics of those leaders of the 5th-8th centuries through whom the Celtic Revival advanced and flourished for nearly four centuries.

3 Revival

There has never been a period in the history of Christianity in which revival, in some form, was not occurring. Because “revival” describes a condition of spiritual surge and advance that can be applied to individuals, congregations, communities, and churches within larger geographical regions, it is virtually certain that the “embers”, if not an all-out conflagration of revival are always burning somewhere in the world. Historically, this understanding has always motivated Christians to a perpetual seeking of revival, for themselves daily, for their churches, and for the times in which they live.

Generally, however, when we think of the word, we have in mind those longer seasons and more far-reaching impacts that are the result of the movement of God’s Spirit in what, within the larger historical framework, can only be described as extraordinary ways. Besides the Celtic Revival (ca. 430-800 AD), great periods of revival can be seen to have occurred during the first three centuries of the Christian movement, from the late 15th to the middle of the 17th century, at various times during the middle of the 18th century (the “Great Awakening”), at the beginning of the 19th century (the “Second Great Awakening”), and episodically throughout the rest of the 19th and parts of the 20th century. No part of the world has failed to experience the warming, refining, and transforming fires of revival at some point.

During these seasons of revival Christians experience a renewed sense of their sin, and the need to repent of it; they gain a sudden new and more expansive vision of what the life of faith might entail; and they embark on good works of a personal, moral, social, and cultural nature which, in many ways, changed the historical landscape of their times and beyond. Their experience and efforts during such seasons typically incites others to join them in their beliefs and to take up the cause of Christ as well.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) described the characteristics of a period of revival in his book, *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*. Edwards had first-hand experience with genuine revival on many occasions, and he identified five convincing indicators that a work (“operation”) was that of the Spirit of God:

1. “When the operation is such as to raise their esteem of that Jesus who was born of the Virgin, and was crucified without the gates of Jerusalem; and seems more to confirm and establish their

minds in the truth of what the gospel declares to us of his being the Son of God, and the Saviour of men; is a sure sign that it is from the Spirit of God.”

2. “When the spirit that is at work operates against the interests of Satan’s kingdom, which lies in encouraging and establishing sin, and cherishing man’s worldly lusts; this is a sure sign that it is a true, and not a false spirit.”
3. “The spirit that operates in such a manner, as to cause in men a greater regard to the Holy Scriptures, and establishes them more in their truth and divinity, is certainly the Spirit of God.”
4. “...if by observing the manner of the operation of a spirit that is at work among a people, we see that it operates as a spirit of truth, leading persons to truth, convincing them of those things that are true, we may safely determine that it is a right and true spirit...”
5. “If the spirit that is at work among a people operates as a spirit of love to God and man, it is a sure sign that it is the Spirit of God.”

These five characteristics – focus on Jesus and His work, undoing the works of paganism and unbelief, increased love and regard for Scripture, guiding people out of uncertainty into truth, and increasing love for God and men – can be found, in various ways, to be present in all seasons of true revival. Christians hold revival to be not at all a work of men, but of the Spirit of God, according to the sovereign pleasure of God, in, for, and through those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world.

The Celtic Revival mirrors these characteristics and thus qualifies as one of the great periods of revival in all of Church history.

4 Ireland before the Gospel

The inhabitants of pre-Christian Ireland were a people defined primarily by their language and culture. Having migrated to Ireland from Europe many centuries prior to the Christian period, the Celtic peoples brought with them a rich social and cultural heritage. The armies of Rome, wary of the Irish because of their many costly encounters with the Celtic tribes of Europe, never invaded or occupied Ireland, although they established a strong presence in pre-Christian Britain, just across the Irish Sea.

Central to Celtic social and cultural life was their pantheistic religion, entrusted to and maintained by a caste of druids, who served as priests, historians, counselors, and promoters of Celtic culture and lore. Druids were not magicians, as they are sometimes popularly represented, or even primarily religious figures. Ellis observes, “The function of the druid was as minister of the religion, which had a complete doctrine of immortality and a moral system widespread among the Celtic peoples, but they were also philosophers, teachers and natural scientists, who were called upon to give legal and political and military judgements.”

Celtic religion included a pantheon of greater and lesser gods, ruling over different facets of life. In addition, the Celts revered and sometimes feared other spiritual beings of various sorts, some of which lived in or under the earth or in hills, waters, and woods. The gods were honored and placated by daily rituals, sacrifices (including, sometimes, human sacrifice), seasonal festivals, and works of art and poetry.

Celtic art was created for religious purposes, decoration, and cultural preservation. Celts were great story-tellers and used their folk tales to honor their forebears and preserve their moral code. The artwork of the pre-Christian period demonstrates a fascination with patterns, numbers, creatures, colors, shapes, and space. Recurrent themes – the number 3, certain godlike creatures, spirals and chains, and so forth – suggest widespread interaction among tribes and clans in the creation and maintenance of a common artistic and religious heritage. The Celtic tradition in the arts would prove especially useful in advancing the cause of the Gospel among the Irish people.

The social order of the Celtic peoples of Ireland was based on clan or family, centered on local chieftains or kings and their households and relatives, and organized around a series of “raths” or “ring forts.” An order or hierarchy of clans existed with kings being recognized as

possessing relative authority over one another. It may have been the practice of pre-Christian Celts to recognize a “high king” as supreme chieftain of the island, but this is not clear. A primitive but effect system of unwritten laws served to keep the social order intact and defined ideas of crime, justice, retribution, and the like. The people subsisted by a combination of local agriculture, cattle and sheep herding, harvesting the wildlife and bounty of the land, and the trades and occupations such an economy required.

Celtic people worked their land but they did not own it. Celtic society was communitarian; the benefits of the land were regarded as the possession of all the members of the clan, who also cared for and looked after one another in a variety of ways. Celtic society was structured, but movement up or down in the social order was possible, according to one’s merits and accomplishments within the community or in war.

The Celtic people did not dwell in cities but in tribal lands. Their habitations were mainly wood and thatch and, thus, have not survived except in oral or written accounts, although the remnants of their ring forts can be seen all over Ireland. Their most permanent structures tended to be religious in nature and served either as shrines or places of burial.

At some point prior to the Christian period the Celtic peoples of Ireland opened trade by sea with other parts of Europe. They also used their knowledge of the sea and skill as warriors to raid places like neighboring Britain for slaves, who would be sold in Ireland to work in various capacities. This was the means of Patrick’s introduction to the Irish people and their culture.

5 Celtic Peoples

“Celtic” describes a people associated with a particular culture and family of languages who flourished across southern Europe as they migrated west during the centuries prior to the Roman Empire and the birth of Christ.

The meaning of the word, “Celt”, is not entirely clear, although “outsider” or “hidden people” have been suggested by some. The Celts were mentioned by Herodotus and Aristotle, as well as Julius Caesar (who fought them in Gaul) and seem to be associated, as to place of origin, with northern Asia Minor, the region referred to in the New Testament as Galatia.

Allen explains, “All the Classical authorities are agreed as to the physical characteristics of the Celts with whom they were acquainted. The Celts are invariably described as being tall, muscular men, with a fair skin, blue eyes, and blond hair tending towards red.” By studying the discoveries of Celtic habitations and culture, historians and archaeologists have concluded that these people migrated westward from Asia Minor across southern Europe, intermarrying and intermingling with other peoples and cultures, yet keeping largely intact the distinctive aspects of their language, religion, and cultural heritage.

Deposits of Celtic culture and society have been discovered in various sites across southern Europe, giving the picture of a people strongly religious, fond of the world around them, adept at various arts, and keen on stories. They do not appear to have maintained a written language, preferring instead to commit their history and other important knowledge to memory. Julius Caesar remarked that the druids, the religious and philosophical caste of Celts, communicated with the outside world, they used Greek characters. Otherwise, they relied on unwritten language and memory.

From what we know of the Celts in Ireland, Celtic society appears to have been organized around clans, with a tribal chieftain or king overseeing his kin and maintaining order among them. Celtic religion was polytheistic. The god, Lug, the rule of light and art, was one of their most revered deities. A pantheon of gods, associated with various aspects of the creation and seasons, served with Lug, as well as a host of lesser spiritual beings, some of which lived in or under the earth and could be capricious or dangerous.

Celtic archaeological sites contain many artifacts suggestive of the everyday lives of the Celtic peoples. They practiced agriculture, herded cattle, went to war, and sought ways to make life easier and more efficient through the creation of household culture. Their artwork can be found on all aspects of their lives, from everyday household items to weapons, jewelry, badges, and religious vessels of various sorts. Celtic art featured repetition of patterns – interlocking keys, triskeles, swastikas, and so forth – and a fascination with the creatures of land and sea, as well as their deities.

Traces of Celtic language and culture remained throughout Europe along the path of their westward migration. Once they arrived in Ireland, Celts continued the linguistic, social, and cultural patterns and practices of their forebears. Thus the artifacts and sites discovered in Ireland show clear affinity and association with those in Europe, giving us a picture of a restless, prosperous (relatively speaking), and highly cultured people who flourished for two millennia from northern Asia Minor to the Emerald Isle.

6 Europe at the Beginning of the Celtic Revival

During the second generation of Christians following Patrick, toward the beginning of the seventh century, the Celtic Revival that had begun in Ireland and spread to Scotland began to spill over to the continent of Europe.

The leader of this “Irish invasion” was Columbanus, a teacher at the monastery in Bangor, Ireland. After many years of fruitful ministry, at the age of 50, he gathered a small company of like-minded monks and together they sailed to Gaul (modern France), following what they believed to be the leading of God.

The Christian faith was already well established in Gaul, since at least the last years of the second century. But by the time the Irish missionaries arrived to begin their work, the state of the Church and the faith had declined precipitously. We get a sense of this from Columbanus’ letter from Gaul to Pope Boniface:

Watch, for the sea is stormy and whipped up by fatal blasts, for it is not a solitary threatening wave such as, even across a silent ocean, is raised to overwhelming heights from the every-foaming eddies of a hollow rock, though it swells from afar, and drives the sails before it while Death walks the waves, but it is a tempest of the entire element, surging indeed and swollen upon every side, that threatens the shipwreck of the mystic vessel; thus do I, a fearful sailor, dare to cry, Watch, for water has not entered the vessel of the Church, and the vessel is in perilous straits (trans. Walker).

What Columbanus and his company encountered as they began their work in Gaul alarmed them greatly. The Church had settled into a state of corruption, complacency, and decline. We get the sense of how bad things were from Columbanus’ letters to Pope Gregory and to the bishops in Gaul.

Church leaders were corrupt, preferring money and women more than caring for the flock of God. They overlooked the sins of church leaders, and of the royal court. Positions of leadership in the church went to the highest bidder rather than those who were the most spiritually qualified. Meanwhile, bishops and pastors seldom preached or taught the Gospel and were delinquent in opposing those who lived in sin – especially the members of the royal court. The bishops had become arrogant, believing themselves to have all authority in matters ecclesiastical and refusing to cooperate with or accommodate the interests and mission of the Irish

peregrini (wandering missionaries). Indeed, the bishops called a synod, insisting that Columbanus attend, so they could “set him straight” about the way of things in “Christian” Gaul. Columbanus refused to attend and chided them for their arrogance.

The churches of Gaul were not growing because it was generally assumed that all the population were already Christians, no matter the kind of life they lived. Deceit, formalism, and spiritual indifference characterized church leaders and people alike. A deep spiritual hunger had settled on the souls of the people of Gaul, which burst to the surface as Columbanus and his troop began their work, and was visible in the overwhelming response to the pure Gospel preaching and disciplined lives of the Irish missionaries. Columbanus and his colleagues could barely accommodate all the young people who fled to their monasteries for teaching and training. As Jonas, Columbanus’ first biographer recounts the situation, “people streamed in from all directions in order to consecrate themselves to the practice of religion, so that the large number of monks scarcely had sufficient room. The children of the nobles from all directions strove to come thither; despising the spurned trappings of the world and the pomp of present wealth, they sought eternal rewards.”

The response of Church leaders in Gaul to the work of the Irish missionaries was to threaten, harass, and expel them. But the monasteries they began – at Anegray and Luxeuil – continued the work of evangelizing and disciple-making which would help to ensure that the Celtic Revival would continue, even though Columbanus and his company were forced to move on.

7 The Church in Britain in Patrick's Day: Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*

A common mistake people make in thinking about Patrick is that he was a great Irishman. Of course, he was not an Irishman at all. Patrick was from Britain. His association with Ireland was one of those works of divine providence which proves Paul's contention that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8.28).

Patrick was raised on the west coast of Roman Britain. Born sometime toward the end of the fourth century, he was the son of a Roman official with roots in the Roman Catholic Church. By Patrick's day Christianity had been a presence in Britain for at least a century. He was raised in the Church, as other children his age, and, like them, he paid little attention to his priests and teachers, finding the interests of Christianity not to be much in line with his preferred diversions and dreams.

We may perhaps understand better why Patrick was a merely nominal Christian at the time of his captivity when we reflect on the state of Christianity in Britain during the fifth century. The historian, Gildas, wrote *The Ruin of Britain* in 540 AD, to expose the hypocrisy, complacency, corruption, and spiritual lethargy of the British Church during his and the preceding century. To be brief, the Church in Britain of Gildas' and Patrick's day was in need of revival, renewal, and awakening.

As Gildas saw it, his "country's difficulties" were the result of "a general loss of good, a heaping up of bad." The Church of his beloved Britain was full of "ignorance and folly." Its general practice was "to deny fear to God, charity to good fellow-countrymen, honour to those placed in higher authority..." Every man, including church leaders, was ruled "by his own contrivances and lusts", which sounds strikingly like the situation that existed during the period of the Biblical book of Judges (cf. Jdgs. 21.25).

Gildas complained that "the flock of the Lord and his shepherds, who should have been an example to the whole people, lay about, most of them, in drunken stupor, as though sodden in wine. They were a prey to swelling hatreds, contentious quarrels, the greedy talons of envy, judgment that made no distinction between good and evil: it looked very much as

though, then as now, contempt was being poured on the princes, so that they were seduced by their follies and wandered in the trackless desert.”

Kings and rulers warred incessantly. The pastors were corrupt and lazy: “They are called shepherds, but they are wolves all ready to slaughter souls. They do not look to the good of their people, but to the filling of their own bellies. They have church buildings, but go to them for the sake of base profit. They teach people – but by giving them the worst of examples, vice and bad character.”

It is therefore perhaps little wonder that Patrick’s pastors tried to prevent him following his sense of call to the ministry in Ireland – especially since he was taking his inheritance with him to fund the mission. Or that, toward the end of his ministry, they sought to discredit his work and bring opprobrium on his name by trying to call him home from the field to face trumped-up and spurious charges.

Given the state of the Church in Britain in his day, Patrick firmly refused to submit. His work, he argued – as Columbanus would to the bishops and pastors in Gaul 150 years later – was too important to forsake just to satisfy their dubious, controlling interests.

8 Revival, Renewal, Awakening

Church historians employ a variety of terms to describe a sudden and sustained movement of God's Spirit resulting in significant manifestations and lasting results. Among those terms most frequently used are revival, renewal, and awakening.

Each of these terms has in common a reference to a work of God, specifically, of the Spirit of God, in acting upon Christians and the world in unusual and often surprising ways. Periods of revival – on scales large and small, local, regional, and universal – dot the landscape of Church history. In each of these periods the reviving work of God's Spirit is evident in individual and corporate ways. This was true of the period of the Celtic Revival as well.

The term *revival* can be thought of in individual or corporate terms. For our purposes, *revival* refers to the work of God's Spirit in the lives of individual believers. When believers are experiencing revival, they discover within themselves a heightened interest in the Word and will of God, a greater delight in the practice of spiritual disciplines, a brighter hope and outlook, and real transformation in aspects of their everyday lives – in particular, more love for God and others and greater boldness in their witness. Believers who experience revival testify of a heightened and sustained interest in the things of faith and a greater sense of urgency in living for Christ and bearing witness to Him. The ideal of the Christian faith, of course, is that believers would know such reviving influences every day of their lives, and not just in periodic episodes of spiritual flare-up.

Renewal has been used, most recently during the 1970s, to describe the experience of revival on the part of an entire congregation. When church members are experiencing revival, the effects of their worship, disciple-making, and working together are expressed in the life of their church and all its facets. Services of worship take on a new vibrancy and power. The order of the church – the work of pastoral oversight, discipline, and leadership – comes under the influence of a new vision, and realizes greater positive consistency. More of the members of the church submit to the disciple-making process: Bible studies and Sunday school classes experience growth, new programs for studying or applying Scripture are launched, all age groups demonstrate renewed interest in taking their faith more seriously. And the church's mission is revitalized, so that outreach

efforts of service, evangelism, and world missions gain new resources, participants, and energy.

When revived individuals and their renewed churches begin to express the work of God's Spirit in them to the surrounding community, *awakening* frequently occurs. During seasons of awakening, many people express a new interest in or commitment to the faith of Jesus Christ. Church memberships increase. Local culture and society are affected in ways which demonstrate the influence of Christian teaching and presence. New ventures of faith are launched to bring the light of Christian teaching and life into various arenas of society and culture – the arts, business, government, publishing, education, and so forth.

During the Celtic Revival, all these elements – revival, renewal, and awakening – were present and spread from Ireland through Scotland to the European continent in ways that left a unique stamp and legacy on the ecclesiastical, cultural, moral, and social landscape of the Western world.

9 The Gospel of the Kingdom

From time to time throughout the course of Church history, confusion has arisen concerning the nature of the Good News which Christians believe and proclaim. Typically, this confusion has come about because of some misunderstanding concerning the person or work of Jesus Christ.

Thus, during the period of the early Church, Jesus was sometimes presented as having been only a spirit, who only appeared to take on flesh; at other times, he was regarded as a man who became God because of His good conduct. Certainly the *message* about Jesus which was proclaimed and believed was radically affected by such views. Consistently, orthodox believers argued for a full presentation of Jesus as both the Son of God and a true human being – God incarnate, come to accomplish the redemption of a people for God and His glory.

If we begin our understanding of this Good News with Jesus and His own message, then what we find, consistently throughout the New Testament, is the announcement that, in Jesus Christ, the eternal God, in the Person of His Son, took on flesh and walked among men. He came to fulfill the righteousness God requires of men and to pay the price of their disobedience, so that both by His righteousness and suffering people might come to know the salvation of God. Jesus came to announce the “bringing near” of the Kingdom of the eternal God, long promised throughout the period of the Old Testament. Jesus’ death and resurrection validated His claims and teaching, showing that He was who He claimed – God in the flesh, the very Lord of life – and that His promise of a coming Kingdom could be trusted and believed. Following His ascension to the right hand of God, Jesus and the Father poured out the Holy Spirit upon humankind in a way He had never been present, thus bringing to human beings the power for establishing and advancing the rule of Jesus on earth, as it is in heaven.

The Good News of the Gospel, therefore, is that the Kingdom of God has come to earth, the gift and rule of the eternal King and Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. All who believe in Him enter into a new reality, a realm of true spiritual power by which they know God and Jesus Christ and take their place in the ongoing work of redemption and reconciliation which Jesus began during His time on earth. By believing in the Gospel, people find forgiveness of sins, a new delight in God and His Word, the inward and sanctifying work of the Spirit of God, and the

promise of safe passage through divine judgment into a realm of eternal glory and bliss – the new heavens and new earth.

The Gospel of the Kingdom thus announces a new King – One Who rules over all earthly, temporal, and spiritual powers or dominions – and a new agenda: advancing on earth His Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Those who believe this Good News are “born again,” born from above, by the power of God’s grace through the instrumentality of faith. Believers become “new creatures” who embark upon a lifelong journey of increasing in the newness of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom, looking forward to and preparing for the new heavens and new earth, where righteousness dwells.

The Gospel of the Kingdom demands full and complete obedience; at the same time, it offers exceeding great and precious promises of oneness with God, fullness of joy, and pleasures and purpose of the holiest and most edifying sort. All who truly believe this Good News take up a calling from God to enter His Kingdom and glory and to seek His righteousness in every area of their lives.

The Gospel which carried the Celtic Revival from Ireland to Scotland to the European continent was decidedly this full, joyous, life- and culture-transforming Good News of the Kingdom of God. When we see how the lives of men like Patrick, Colum Cille, and Columbanus were transformed, and how by their ministries so many people were affected and so much of culture and society was transformed; and when we consider their words and the words written about them, we can know for sure that the Gospel they preached and lived heralded the Good News of Jesus Christ and His eternal Kingdom, coming on earth as it is in heaven, to the ends of the earth and the end of time.

10 Evangelism and Missions in the Early Church

The Christian faith is a missionary faith. That is, those who embrace the Gospel and enter the Kingdom of God become heirs of Good News about hope, forgiveness, eternal life, love, peace, joy, and righteousness, a message which resonates with the heart of every human being. This is not news to keep to oneself.

From the beginning, those who came to know eternal life through Jesus Christ sought to make that Good News known to others, starting with their own families, neighbors, friends, and co-workers. But their efforts to evangelize the lost did not end in their own spheres of influence (2 Cor. 10.13-18). The book of Acts records the work of the first Christians who, we are told, “went everywhere” evangelizing the Good News of Jesus Christ (Acts 8.4). Within the first generation of Christians, special teams were deputized for the work of taking the Good News to other places, peoples, and cultures (cf. Acts 13.1-5). Before the age of the apostles came to an end, various “missionaries”, sponsored by the churches which had sprung up throughout the Roman world, were tasked with the work of going to new places, preaching the Gospel, teaching and training converts, organizing new churches, and putting those churches in order (cf.. Tit. 1.5) so that the work of the Gospel could continue for the generations to come.

The template established by the first Christians continued in the generations following the disciples, yet not without opposition. Wherever preachers of the Gospel appeared in the cities of the Roman Empire, opposition arose. Some of this was from entrenched religious groups. It was the practice of Roman authorities to allow virtually any religion to operate, as long as members paid proper obeisance to the Emperor as supreme authority throughout the Roman world. Christians were unwilling to acknowledge these claims by the Emperor, and it became quickly clear that, in proclaiming Jesus and His Kingdom, Christians were “practicing another King, saying Him to be Jesus” (Acts 17.1-9). This did not sit well, either with leaders of other religions or the civil authorities of Rome. Persecution began almost at once as the Christian movement began to expand beyond the confines of Judea. Bouts of persecution continued for three hundred years until Constantine issued the Edict of Milan early in the fourth century, granting Christianity official status within the Empire.

The work of missions typically involved a missionary arriving in a new community and seeking out places where people would gather for conversation, teaching, or swapping the latest news. Places of prayer (Acts 16.13), religious worship (Acts 14.1-4), marketplaces (Acts 17.16), and even formal schools or debating societies (Acts 17.22ff) were favorite venues for seeking conversation about the Gospel. Missionaries were supported in their endeavors by local congregations of believers throughout the Empire (cf. 3 Jn. 5-8) and, in many cases, by taking employment according to their particular skills within the communities they hoped to evangelize (cf. Acts 18:1-4). Those who responded positively to the preaching of the Gospel were organized into churches, which themselves were organized at two levels, by neighborhood (“house” churches) and by community (“city” churches).

Following this pattern, the Gospel quickly spread throughout the Roman world and beyond. By the time Constantine had secured the throne in 314, Christians could be found in every province, city, neighborhood, and occupation, with the exception of those places and works that Christians found to be morally out of bounds. As Tertullian, a Church father from early in the third century, explained in a letter to the Emperor, Christians were “everywhere” in his domain.

Evidence also exists indicating that certain Christian missionaries had begun to carry the Gospel to such places as Africa, Persia, Arabia, India, and China by the end of the fourth century. Late in the fourth century the Christian Emperor Theodosius declared Christianity to be not only legitimate, but the *only* legitimate religion throughout the Roman world. By then the Gospel had become established throughout Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, southern Russia and points east. The churches had begun to turn their energies to becoming properly organized to combat false teaching, solidify their gains city by city, expand their ministries locally, and instruct the faithful in orthodox teaching. The missionary effort of the church wound significantly down.

By the time Patrick received his calling from the Lord to take the Gospel to the Irish, missions had ceased to play a significant role in the life of the Church, at least throughout Europe. With the decline of missions came also a kind of complacency about the life of faith which affected not only the work of evangelization, but all other aspects of Christian experience as well. The Celtic Revival, which Patrick inaugurated, would renew the work of Christian missions and, with that, the spiritual vitality of churches throughout Europe.

11 Christianity and Culture

In his majestic, seven-volume history of the Christian movement, 20th century Church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette not only traced the expansion of the faith up to his day, he also showed the effects of the faith on the world, and of the world on the faith. Each of the seven volumes of *The History of the Expansion of Christianity* ends with two chapters on the relationship between Christianity and the culture during the period covered in the volume. The first of these chapters addresses the impact of Christianity on the culture, while the next (and last of each volume) chapter is concerned to show the effects of the culture of the period on Christianity.

What Dr. Latourette reminds us of is that, in every generation, Christians have been inextricably involved with culture. Very often their cultural activities have made a lasting contribution to the history of culture, whether in the West or elsewhere. The much lamented “culture wars” of our generation are nothing new. In every age, Christians have had to interact with aspects of culture which they found to be inconsistent with their most cherished beliefs. Some of these they avoided, others they used without changing while they completely transformed others, and others still they innovated and passed on to subsequent generations.

By *culture* we mean the artifacts, institutions, and conventions by which people define, sustain, and enrich their lives. Human beings are inescapably cultural creatures. Like God, in Whose image we are created, we cannot help but make things, to make a better life for ourselves. We cannot escape or avoid culture; we can only make and use it. The cultural challenge to Christians is to engage all aspects of culture in ways that honor God and refract His purposes (1 Cor. 10.31).

By *artifacts* we refer to the items human beings make for everyday or other more specific uses – clothing, utensils, tools, machines, works of art and literature, toys, and so forth. People also establish various kinds of *institutions* – families, neighborhood associations, clubs, boards, governments, schools, museums, etc. – which bring people and artifacts together, within a framework of protocols and procedures, for larger purposes. The *conventions* we make and use – language, laws, customs, traditions, manners, and lore, for example – also set us apart from other creatures and even from other human beings, depending on where we live.

Celtic Christians inherited a rich legacy of cultural life from both their Celtic and their Christian forebears. During the Celtic Revival believers in Ireland and elsewhere brought together aspects of pagan Celtic culture with the Christian heritage of their spiritual forebears into some unique expressions of culture. In all three aspects of culture – artifacts, institutions, and conventions – we see the effects of Christian thinking on an inherited pagan legacy, and the beneficial effects of that legacy on the way Celtic Christians expressed their faith. We shall be considering examples of this cultural contribution in other installments.

12 Literary Sources for the Celtic Revival

The literary resources informing us about the Celtic Revival are few, compared to the wealth of written materials from other periods. Celtic Christians had neither the leisure, resources, nor inclination to generate the volumes of sermons, theological tomes, and Biblical commentaries that we find in other periods. They were not original theological thinkers and devoted most of their writing time, such as it was, to copying Scriptures and great Christian writers from the past. Compared to other periods of Church history, the resources from the Celtic period are scant, but significant.

The literary resources from this period fall into a few categories, including contemplative or devotional materials, sermons, hagiographies, poetry, and theological reflections. Let's take a brief look at each of these.

Devotional materials appear mainly toward the end of the period in the form of *litanies*. These are prayers comprised of long lists of terms addressing or celebrating the Deity or saints, concluding in a plea for mercy or help. The litanies appear to have been produced for personal use and may have been shared within or among the several monastic families which had come into being by the end of the period. Also in this category we might include the lengthy *calendars* of saints and martyrs – such as *Féilre Oengusso* – which were intended to provide a spiritual focus for each day of the year, as well as certain of the *poems* from this period, such as *Aipgitir Chrábaid*, a lengthy poem reflecting on life in the Spirit, which may have had a catechetical purpose.

Sermons by Columbanus (fl. early 7th century) and Eriugena (9th century) give us insight to the practices of Biblical interpretation that leaders employed in their ministries. These sermons are topical (Columbanus) and exegetical (Eriugena) and make large use of metaphor, in a poetic more than an allegorical manner. Each of these demonstrates a good familiarity with and use of Scripture, and has a strong devotional and practical bent. The intent is to encourage love for God and neighbor as the primary outcomes to be sought through the ministry of the Word.

The purpose of *hagiographical writing* was to celebrate the life and achievement of great saints. These accounts are, at best, quasi-historical, being embellished with exaggerated reports of wonders wrought, prophecies spoken and fulfilled, and spiritual encounters with the unseen world. Hagiographies are spiritual stories intended not as strict historical

accounts – though they are probably based in history – but as memorable tales meant to encourage emulation of the saint. The use of hyperbole – Kevin praying so long with his hands outstretched that a bird built a nest in his hand, laid her eggs, and fledged her chicks before he finished – built on the inherited Celtic tradition of story-telling and create memorable pictures embedding important truths (Kevin prayed long and with great concentration; so should we). Hagiographies appeared very early on, beginning with Sechnall’s plain and unembellished poem about Patrick, *Audite Omnes Amantes*, and feature throughout the period as a way to record, remember, celebrate, and instruct. They may also have been written for political purposes, such as, to tie the Celtic Revival more closely to the Church at Rome (it did not begin there) or to vaunt the importance of one monastic family over another.

Beginning with Sechnall, *poetry* features throughout this period. This provides more insight to the mind and heart of Celtic Christianity than any other literary form. Poetry was employed by great leaders like Colum Cille and Columbanus as well as by anonymous hermits and monks. The poems cover a wide range of topics, but common to nearly all of them is the sovereignty and goodness of God on behalf of His people. The poems follow mainly Latin meters and forms, and address everyday topics such as work, eating, and the creation, as well as larger worldview issues such as the vanity of life apart from God, the life and achievement of a particular saint (especially Patrick and Colum Cille), and the purposes of God in creation and history. A type of poem unique to this period is the “breastplate” poem, which calls on the blessing of God by seeking His aid for every aspect of life.

Works of *theological reflection* are few and include the eschatological vision of Adomnàn, reflections on divine miracles by Augustine Hibernicus, a *tour de force* of the creation by an anonymous 7th century scholar, and the theological works (of varying quality) by Eriugena.

I might mention a few other forms which are difficult to classify. A collection of *monks’ rules* and *penitentials* (handbooks for pastoral counseling and discipline) give us insights to life in the monastic communities of the period. *Letters* from Columbanus provide helpful historical glimpses into events on the ground in Europe. *Annals* link important figures, places, and events of the period. A handful of *law codes* shows us the influence of Celtic leaders in civil society. And Patrick’s *Confession* and *Letter against the Soldiers of Coroticus* open to us the earliest days of the Celtic Revival and the work of one saint as he laid a foundation for four centuries of Gospel advance.

13 Celtic Christian Culture

It was inevitable that, as Christianity began to flourish among the Celtic peoples of Ireland and elsewhere, dramatic cultural changes would come into effect.

The Celtic peoples of Europe sustained a rich cultural life, even though they appear to have been a pre-literate people. They loved stories and songs, created beautiful religious and everyday artifacts, and constructed impressive centers for worship and the burial of their dead. It only made sense that, as they began to confess faith in Christ, these peoples would continue their cultural endeavors, but with a decided change of direction.

The people who experienced and advanced the Celtic Revival (ca. 430-800 AD) left a variety of cultural artifacts, institutions, and conventions which help us in understanding the central place of Christian faith in their lives. Like their Celtic forebears, they created lovely personal and everyday items, especially tools and vessels for eating and grooming, many of them adorned with traditional Celtic symbols (triskeles, interlocking chains and keys, exaggerated animal figures, etc.). But often incorporated in these items are hints of something new – crosses – which signal us that a new narrative had begun to be consciously imposed on the old Celtic ways.

But it is in the larger cultural arenas that we truly see the impact of Christian faith on Celtic daily life. In the ruins of monasteries, surviving legal and penitential codes, materials in various literary genre, lavish illustrated manuscripts, and high carved crosses we see the creative and imaginative spirit of the Celts set free, enlarged, and greatly enhanced by their participation in the Kingdom of God.

We recall that the Celtic peoples were not literate, even though they sustained a rich and varied cultural life. Beginning with Patrick, Christian leaders took it upon themselves to instruct people in the ways of language and reading. In the second generation of the Revival this led to the creation of formal schools for training the young, such as the school Ita conducted and where Brendan was sent as a child. The effect of this was to open a spring for Celtic thinking and imagination which became encoded in writing. In the poems, liturgies, hagiographies, and so forth of this period we learn about the faith of the Celtic peoples of Ireland – their trust in God, love of His world, zeal for holiness and mission, and commitment to excellence.

The ruins of Celtic Christian monasteries around Ireland witness to the fact that, in the beginning of the Celtic Revival leaders combined the zeal for holiness of the desert fathers of the fourth century with the traditional community life of their Celtic forebears into a new and more powerful expression of the Kingdom of God. Monastic communities, comprised of clergy and laity, quickly became centers of cultural life and creativity. Copying manuscripts, teaching people to read and write, making and improving tools and implements, creating beautiful religious objects – such occupations became widespread in Ireland, wherever monastic communities thrived.

As these communities increased in size and influence, leaders were often looked to by local rulers for help in bringing a more stable social order to the surrounding region. Laws were developed, often following patterns practiced within the communities themselves and encoded in rules of discipline and guidelines for penance, so that people who formerly lived for and by the whim of local kings and tribal heads now began to know the protection and guidance of written law codes. One example of how much the faith of Christ affected Irish society during this period can be found in the so-called Law of Adomnàn, which established certain legal rights for women (7th century).

The rich tradition of pre-Christian Celtic art was preserved, redeemed, and recast into a distinctly Christian narrative in liturgical vessels (croziers, reliquaries, and patens), such illuminated manuscripts as the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels, and in the high carved crosses that still exist in many places reached by the Celtic Revival. These beautiful artifacts were created to celebrate the greatness of God and the Gospel, instruct believers in faith and piety, and adorn and honor monastic centers and the communities they served.

The Celtic Revival thus reminds us of the power of Christian faith to engage culture but also to transform it, identifying whatever is good and useful, preserving and extending it, and setting culture into a new context and narrative, that of the advancing Kingdom of God.

14 Patrick's Writings

Revival, as a season of renewal in faith and Christian life, has been a feature on the landscape of the Christian movement from the very beginning. Periods of revival tend to begin inauspiciously, in unlikely places and under the leadership of unlikely people.

We recall, for example, that the first disciples were neither learned scholars nor well-endowed evangelists. They were fishermen, tradesmen, and everyday people upon whom the Spirit of God moved suddenly and irresistibly to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Similarly, the Celtic Revival had its beginnings in an unlikely place through the exertions of an improbable leader. Celtic Ireland lay beyond the civilizing influence of the Roman Empire at what was then regarded as the ends of the earth. The people were warlike, impassioned, illiterate, and, though highly cultured in their own Celtic manner, largely uncivilized. They flourished, separated from the Roman world, and not infrequently, at its expense, sallying forth from their fortress island from time to time to rob, pillage, and kidnap from the remote outposts of Roman Britain.

It was on one such sortie, early in the 5th century, that a band of Irish raiders happened upon a group of school friends consorting by themselves in the countryside, and took them captive, to be sold as slaves in Ireland. One of these was Patricius, the son of a civil servant and grandson of a priest, from a village probably somewhere in what today is Wales. Only 16 years old at the time, Patrick was taken to the west of Ireland, to the Woods of Foclut, and sold as a slave. For six years he watched his master's herds through all manner of hardship and sorrow.

Over time, Patrick came to see his circumstances as a judgment from God. Though baptized, he had not taken his faith seriously. Instead, he and his friends had paid more attention to the ways of the flesh than of the Lord, and Patrick came to see his enslavement as a just punishment from God. This recognition set him to prayer, seeking the Lord for forgiveness and strength to bear up under his punishment.

Patrick tells us that he prayed as many as 100 times a day, pleading with God and calling upon Him, but without expecting any favor of the Lord,

so heavy did the burden of his sin lay upon him.

Then, one evening, after 6 years of waiting, Patrick received a vision. Or, at least, he heard a voice telling him to rise and flee, promising that his deliverance was nigh. When the vision was repeated, Patrick fled, heading east across Ireland, traveling only by night, seeking what he believed would be a ship to carry him home.

After many days he arrived at the east coast of Ireland, and was taken on board a ship preparing to leave for Britain, where he was likely to have been sold again as a slave. We do not know precisely where Patrick's ship actually landed, but it was in a wasteland where there was little to eat. By the grace of God and at Patrick's promise, God sustained and provided for the group as they made their way across to their destination.

In due course Patrick managed to return home, where his family, overjoyed at his return after 6 years, made him promise he would never leave home again. This was a promise Patrick was ready to make.

But it was not one he would keep. A high-school dropout, hardened in the flesh by slavery and many trials, but softened toward God in his soul, Patrick was ready for God's calling. That came in a vision, perhaps in 430 AD, as Patrick saw a man from Ireland coming toward him, bearing many letters. The gist of them all was the same, imploring Patrick, the "holy servant boy," to come and walk among them again.

Persuaded that God was calling him to return to Ireland and serve the Lord there, Patrick announced his plans to his family. They opposed his going, and enlisted the local priests on their side. But Patrick would not be deterred. Taking his inheritance as his only support, he made his way to Ireland, probably sought out one of the few and small Christian communities there, and prepared himself for the work he believed God had called him to do.

He became a deacon and then a priest, and then he began the work of evangelizing, teaching, healing, and instructing the pagan Irish. The hand of God was upon him, and multiplied thousands came to faith in Christ as Patrick wandered among them, proclaiming and embodying the Good News. In time he came to be acknowledged as the Bishop of the Irish, although not by any official designation of Roman Church authorities. Indeed, Patrick remained at odds with the Roman clergy in Britain

throughout the period of his ministry among the Irish, culminating in their attempt to remove him from the field near the end of his ministry. This action on their part occasioned the writing of his *Confession*, in which he refused their summons, defended his innocence (they were charging him with self-interest in ministry), and reported on the Lord's work through his ministry.

Patrick's manner was direct: Preach the Gospel, call the people to repent of their pagan ways, and show them how to follow Jesus in love for God and their neighbors. Patrick instructed the people in the ways of faith and taught many to read and write. He purchased men out of slavery, organized believers into communities, trained and ordained men to the priesthood and women to lives of devoted service to God. He took no gifts of money from anyone but earned his way in the work of ministry at every step.

Over many years of faithful ministry Patrick was used by God to launch the Christian movement from its small base camps to an island-wide presence, thus laying the foundation for the great period of revival that would follow. Patrick's vision, courage, compassion, uncompromising holiness, and unflinching faithfulness made him the right person to begin the great work of converting the Irish and, through them, in the words of Thomas Cahill, saving civilization for the next millennium.

Patrick was not a theologian, and he did not have the leisure for reflective writing. He seems to have been continuously on the move, evangelizing, strengthening disciples here and there, parlaying with local kings for the release of slaves and the right to teach the faith, falling in and out of favor with these rulers, and training others to take up his work after him. It probably never occurred to Patrick either to keep a written record of his endeavors or to reflect in writing on matters of theological importance. He was just too busy doing the work for which he had come to Ireland.

Two works from Patrick's own hand have survived. The first, his *Confession*, is a brief composed toward the end of his life explaining why he refused to return to Britain and appear before the clergy there to give an account of his ministry. The ultimate audience for his *Confession* is the clergy of Britain, but Patrick addressed his *Confession* to the people of Ireland, among whom rumors about him were being circulated, so that they would be able to verify the claims he made. Patrick considered that the motives of his overseers for pulling him off the field were not sufficiently compelling to cause him to leave his work behind. There was

talk in Britain, it seems, that Patrick was only “in it for the money,” so to speak, an innuendo he dismissed by reminding his overseers that he used his own money to fund his ministry and that he never accepted even a gift from any of those he served.

Patrick’s refusal to appear established an important aspect of the Celtic Christian movement – its independence from Rome. The authorities in Britain were Roman clergy; Patrick, in effect, made himself their equal (Sechnall would refer to him as a “pontiff”) by continuing his work in Ireland, without severing his communion with the Church in Britain, but without being lorded over by it, either. The *Confession’s* lack of any reference to Patrick’s preparation for ministry – whether, as some later hagiographers wrote, in Gaul, or in Ireland, among the Roman enclaves there – can be understood as an expression of his sense that his authority had come from God and was confirmed by his work. He had not been sent to Ireland by the Roman clergy in Britain, and he considered that he was not responsible to submit to those whose motives in overseeing him were not in line with the Gospel. We will see this same attitude in Columbanus a century-and-a-half hence.

In his *Confession*, we meet a man of intense determination, profound humility and piety, unbounded courage, and heartfelt gratitude to God. Patrick apologizes for his ineptness as a writer – he never finished his schooling and didn’t pay much attention to his instructors while he was a student. He had no skills as a writer, regarded himself as a rustic, and yet penned a powerful, Biblically-based apology for his ministry and his decision to continue on the field rather than return under spurious conditions.

Patrick’s *Confession* recounts his youth and captivity, the Lord’s leading in setting him free, his call to Ireland, and many of the details of his work and its effects. A second writing from Patrick’s hand gives us a further look at the man and his ministry. At some point in Patrick’s ministry a band of ostensibly Christian soldiers, in the service of a local king named Coroticus, attacked a group of new believers, murdering some and carrying others away as slaves. After disrupting their baptism with such violence, they headed back across Ireland to their home in Scotland.

Word came to Patrick about this calamity, and he sent emissaries to the soldiers, seeking the release of their captives. They were laughed to scorn. This being reported to Patrick, he penned the *Letter against the Soldiers of Coroticus*, which is proclamation of excommunication on these so-called Christians and their general, and a warning to believers not so support or

greet them as they made their way along the road back to their home. This *Letter* must have been read or posted in villages along the route of retreat, for Patrick seemed to expect that readers would report the contents of the letter to the soldiers so that they could have opportunity to repent of their wickedness. We do not know whether they did.

The *Letter* is firm but pastoral, an act of church discipline designed to reclaim errant sinners and restore peace to the Irish Church. As in his *Confession*, Patrick laces his admonition with Scripture. He warns the soldiers to repent, and he instructs his readers to carry out the requirements of excommunication with respect to those he refers to as more minions of Satan than disciples of Christ. Patrick assumes his authority to make such a pronouncement and such demands, and he fully expects readers to do their Christian duty toward these unrepentant sinners.

In his writings Patrick expresses a theology of grace, gratitude, grit, and growth. He overflows with wonder, love, and gratitude to God; recounts his successes matter-of-factly and without boasting and asserts his authority; and insists that nothing must be allowed to get in the way of the continuing progress of the Gospel. In all these ways and more, Patrick's two little contributions to the literature of the Celtic Revival served as a foundation and cornerstone for the Celtic Christian movement for nearly four centuries.

15 Sechnall, *Audite Omnes Amantes*

*Hearken, all you lovers of God, to the holy merits
of a man blessed in Christ, the bishop Patrick:
how through his good deeds he is like the angels,
and on account of his perfect life is mad equal to the apostles.*

*He keeps Christ's blessed commandments in all things,
his bright deeds shine forth among men;
and they follow his holy miraculous example,
so that they [too] magnify God the Father in heaven.*

(Translation: John Carey, *King of Mysteries*)

So begins the first hymn written in Ireland, appropriately celebrating the work of God as manifested in the man Patrick and his ministry.

Audite Omnes Amantes (“Listen, All You Lovers [of God]”) was written in the late fifth century by Sechnall, known in his Latin name as Secundus. Sechnall was a disciple of Patrick and, tradition has it, his successor as bishop in Armagh. The hymn is composed in twenty-three stanzas of four lines each, each stanza beginning with the next letter in the Latin alphabet and each line consisting of fifteen syllables in the original Latin. This rigid structure would have made the hymn easier to learn and remember. Sechnall’s hymn became so popular that copies were made and circulated widely, so many, in fact, that an introduction was prepared sometime after the hymn’s composition advising readers how to recognize the “genuine article” by its firm poetic structure.

The hymn is written in the present tense, either for effect (the “historical present”) or because Patrick may still have been alive and ministering when the first draft was composed. Whereas Patrick, in his own work, is self-effacing and reticent with respect to the particulars of his ministry, Sechnall lavishes us with details about his character and work.

It is fitting that Sechnall begins his hymn by extolling the character of his subject. Patrick is an example for all to follow, and, since a pastor’s personal example is one of the three tools available to him for the work of ministry (with prayer and the Word), this is a logical place to begin. The song is addressed to those who love God, so that they may be induced to praise and love Him more because of Patrick.

I find it interesting that Sechnall compares Patrick's "good deeds" to those of the angels, as if the experience of angels doing good among them was not unfamiliar among Irish Christians. Did Patrick instruct his followers more carefully and consistently than we do today about the world of unseen things? The reference to his "perfect life" – like the lives of the apostles – both elevates Patrick's authority and confirms the authority of the apostolic writings in the New Testament, and, by implication, the whole of Scripture.

Patrick, Sechnall seems to be saying, is a man of Scripture, a true follower of the apostles and of Jesus Christ.

Patrick's "bright deeds shine forth among men", the fruit of his obedience to the commandments of Christ. In Patrick people find a beacon to follow, as Patrick followed Paul and the apostles, who followed our Lord Jesus in the path of God's commandments (1 Cor. 11.1; 1 Jn. 2.1-6). Patrick, Sechnall reports, is a tireless evangelist and a demanding teacher. Those who follow Patrick do not put him on a pedestal, even though he is a "pontiff" to them; rather, like Patrick, they too "magnify God the Father in heaven." The goal of all Christian instruction being love (1 Tim. 1.5), Patrick seems to have taught his followers quite well.

The Celtic Revival began not by means of coercion or contrivance, but because a man of wonderful, admirable life lighted the way to God by his example and words. What would become a legacy of bright deeds and powerful, converting words was already beginning to take deep root in Patrick's own day, and Sechnall's poem made sure that people who had benefited from the work of Patrick knew to look beyond him to the God He served in their expressions of gratitude and obedience.

16 Early Christian Monasticism

The first several generations of the Celtic Revival emerged within and from various monastic centers which became established throughout Ireland as the primary initial context for the Christian movement. As the Revival expanded to Scotland, the Low Countries, Gaul, Switzerland, and beyond, this monastic model provided the organizing framework for ongoing development. Eventually a parish (church-based) model would grow within and alongside the monastic structure of the Celtic Revival, but for the duration of this period the monasteries of Ireland and beyond never ceased to be centers of Celtic Christian life and mission.

Celtic Christians took their cue on this way of structuring their movement from historical and cultural sources. Historically, Celtic Christian leaders were aware of and greatly impressed by the early work of such Christian hermits (“solitaries”) as Anthony and Paul. Toward the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth, these men and others, sensing a growing complacency in the Church, desiring a place of solitude to seek the Lord, and eager to avoid the persecution which flared up from time to time throughout the Roman Empire, fled to deserts and other remote places in Egypt, across the Levant, and in Europe, establishing themselves as individual contemplatives, counselors, and teachers, or as communities of solitaries living and working together.

Increasingly, throughout the fourth century, the monastic movement came more to be characterized by communities of “monks” than by individual hermits. Martin in Tours (316-397 AD) and Benedict in Nursia (480-543 AD) provided the historical models for Celtic Christians as they organized their followers and established communities of the faithful throughout Ireland and beyond.

Christian monasteries, for men and women, and, on occasion, for both, were overseen by an abbot, or in the case of women, an abbess, who gave direction to the community and enforced the Rule. Monasteries drew for their membership from surrounding communities as well as distant lands, as men or women were led to seek the solitary life of service under the oversight of a particular abbot or abbess. Each monastery had its own “rule” or manual of discipline, the purpose of which was to outline the proper use of the community’s time for worship, work, and personal needs. Monastic rules were designed to bring spiritual structure to all aspects of life in the community, and, when adhered to in the spirit with

which they were given, they provided common vision and discipline and a sense of cohesion and identity for all members.

The monks who lived within a monastic community divided their time between worship and devotions, manual labor on behalf of the entire community, mutual discipleship and encouragement, study, personal needs, and ministry in the wider community. Ministries could take a variety of forms, including, evangelism, teaching, training in literacy and practical skills, consulting with rulers and community leaders, healing, and so forth. By the beginning of the fifth century monasteries had become a prominent feature on the landscape of the Christian world, and some of the Church's most important leaders – such as Jerome and Augustine – conducted their ministries from within monastic walls.

Celtic Christians found the monastic, rather than the parish, model an appealing place to begin the work of the Kingdom of God in Ireland because it lent itself so well to the existing social structure. Because the Celtic peoples of Ireland lived in semi-permanent communities organized by family and tribal structures, the monastery was regarded as a natural spiritual counterpart to the rath/ring fort social framework of the time. From Patrick's writings, it does not appear that he operated out of a specific base of ministry, such as a monastery, although Armagh in northern Ireland has traditionally been recognized as owing its prominence to association with Patrick. By the second generation of the Celtic Revival, beginning in the sixth century, monasteries had already begun to feature in the establishment and expansion of the Christian movement. Women such as Brigid and Ita and men like Erc and Finnian established communities which became the seedbeds of the subsequent expansion of Christianity throughout Ireland and beyond.

17 Spiritual Forts

*The ancient fortresses of the pagans
to which title had been gained by long habitation,
are empty and without worship,
like the place where Lúgaid dwelt.*

- Oengus mac Oengobann, *Feilire Oengusso* (Irish, 9th century)

The revival of Christian faith which began with Patrick and spread, within two generations, to win virtually the whole of Ireland to Christ was, in its initial phases, a movement based in monasteries.

Churches would come, but only later. Pre-Christian Celtic Ireland did not have any cities – or much real civilization, for that matter. The peoples of Ireland affiliated with a local king who lived in the midst of his people in a ring fort, or, a rath. Rathes were enclosures within earthen or stone walls which served as the nerve center of an outlying community of loyal tribe members.

In his calendar of martyrs, Oengus notes that one after another of the “ancient fortresses of the pagans” fell to the preaching of the Gospel: Raith Chruachan became the monastery of Clonmacnoise. The fortress of Ailenn yielded to Brigid’s witness. Emain became the monastic community of Glendalough.

Celtic Christians modeled their monasteries after the ring forts of the pagans whom they won to Christ – stone walls enclosed the religious center of the community, whence monks went out daily to serve the needs of the people they had won or were winning to Christ. From within the monastic center the rule of the monastery – its constitution of spiritual life and practice – exerted a formative influence on all who were served by the monks.

The monasteries were thus spiritual forts, Kingdom outposts from which the power of the Gospel went forth to bring lost pagans to life, hope, civilization, and communities of holiness and love. In the second and third generations of the Celtic Revival, young people from Ireland and Europe, where the Revival spread, flocked to the monasteries seeking to learn the ways of the Kingdom and to find a place of service for themselves.

Each monastery consisted of a chapel, cells where the monks lived, a refectory or dining hall, a scriptorium for copying books, and a cemetery. Toward the end of the period round towers were added to many of the

monasteries as a means of protection against invading Norsemen. Monasteries were enclosed within a low stone wall which added nothing for protection but only served to demarcate the space within which the rule of the monastery was most consistently enforced.

At the end of Psalm 48 the City of the Lord, the citadel within which God dwells, is presented as the very embodiment of God Himself – the epicenter of all that is joyful, true, beautiful, powerful, righteous, and wise.

Celtic monasteries sought to become such outposts, and they largely succeeded, at least, for a time. From within these spiritual citadels God made Himself known by words and deeds to the people in the surrounding countryside. The result, as Oengus reports, was that, “Though it was far-flung and splendid,/paganism has been destroyed:/the kingdom of God the Father/has filled heaven, earth, and sea.”

Monasteries were centers for the practice of an intense spiritual life, which was communicated by the monks to the people they served in the surrounding community. They became places of scholarship and instruction, where others were prepared for service to the Church or mission to the lost. Monasteries were the source of the great works of Celtic art and culture which the Celtic Revival produced. They were instructional, missional, cultural, and civilizing institutions which established the platform on which the Celtic Revival was constructed and from which it grew.

Toward the end of the period of the Celtic Revivals the monasteries conducted a vicious and sometimes violent competition for pride of place among Irish Christians. Efforts to reform the monasteries were not successful, and, by the time the Revival had run its course, the monastic movement had been replaced by the parish system and episcopal hierarchy of the Roman Church as the dominant expression of the faith in Ireland.

18 Celtic Christian Mission

Beginning in the third generation of the Celtic Revival, toward the middle of the sixth century, monasteries in Ireland began commissioning members to evangelize in areas where the Gospel had not yet penetrated. Patrick set the pace and provided the example for such activity, since much of his ministry involved wandering about Ireland looking for opportunities to preach and do good works. The monastic centers which began to dot the landscape of Ireland early in the sixth century were active in doing the work of evangelism among their near neighbors. Various hagiographers describe the work of people like Brigid, Colman Ela, and others as they reached out with the Good News to the Celtic peoples of Ireland.

But beginning in the middle of the sixth century the work of evangelism began to be carried out more deliberately in efforts to reach peoples beyond Ireland. The age of the *peregrini* began with Finnian of Clonard, who, the record indicates, charged twelve men – the “Twelve Apostles of Ireland” – to take the Gospel to parts throughout Ireland and beyond where the Word of Christ had not been heard before. These men became the prototypes of the *peregrini*, wandering evangelists whose mission was to sow the Word of God in places it had not come before or where it had ceased bearing fruit.

Monks who went on *peregrinatio* – wandering under the direction of the Holy Spirit – prepared to respond to whatever situations or opportunities might arise. The early *peregrini* do not seem to have had any concrete plans other than to leave their monastery and follow the Lord’s leading each day. As they were going (cf. Matt. 28:18-20) they responded to whatever situation arose before them, looking for ways to preach the Gospel to whomever they encountered.

In one story of Brendan, we find the saint, as he walked with his mentor, Erc, in a version of local *peregrinatio*, encountering a man who was being pursued by a band of brigands. Brendan instructs him to take shelter in the shadow cast by a standing stone. Standing stones were religious monuments, often quite tall and bulky, which served as sites for religious rituals and rallying places for pagan worshipers to connect with the unseen world. As the man’s pursuers approached, they mistook the standing stone for the man they sought and, with their swords, chipped off the head of the stone, thus desecrating a holy place. In terror at what they’d done they looked around for some safety or deliverance, at which

time Brendan stood forth and preached the Gospel. All were converted, and the man who was fleeing them was made safe.

In another account Columbanus and his troop, including Gall, were departing Gaul for a new location and had to pass through what is today part of Switzerland. They came upon a group of pagans gathered around their local idol, worshipping beside a lake. Gall seized the opportunity and preached an eloquent, sweet, and most appealing sermon about the salvation of the Lord. Then, instead of giving an “alter call”, he took up their idol and threw it into the lake. As you might imagine, the reviews were mixed, and the Irish *peregrini* had to depart the scene.

Thousands of wandering missionaries took to the pathways and highways of Ireland, Scotland, and the Continent during the sixth and seventh centuries. Some cast themselves adrift in leather canoes upon the wild sea, looking for God to lead them to where they could serve Him best. Others became hermits, following the example of Anthony and Paul (not the Apostle) from the period of the early Church, serving as best they could any who passed by their cell. Still others attracted followers, settled in a particular place, established a community, and, in due course, commissioned *peregrini* of their own. The names of Colum Cille, Brendan, and Columbanus stand out in the record as only the greatest of the Irish missionaries. They were by no means the only ones. John T. McNeill writes (*The Celtic Churches*), “For more than half a millennium a stream of educated and dedicated men poured from the monasteries of Ireland to ‘go on pilgrimage for Christ’ wherever they might feel themselves divinely led...They were not conscripted or appointed by their superiors. In typical circumstances they were men of more than youthful years who found themselves aware of a divine call to be up and away. They would obtain the consent of their abbots and start out eagerly, often taking with them companions they had enlisted...They were not directed by committees or expected to make periodic reports to a home base...They began the new career without specific plans other than the intention to teach a foreign people. They found their way over rough seas and perilous roads and among strange tribes until they came to a spot that seemed by some circumstance divinely indicated as their place of labor.” And there they labored diligently for the cause of the Gospel and the Kingdom. McNeill continues, “That one small island should have contributed so rich a legacy to a populous continent remains one of the most arresting facts of European history.”

Indeed.

19 Columbanus: Greatest of the *Peregrini*

From the middle of the sixth century to the end of the Celtic Revival (ca. 900 AD), thousands of missionary/monks streamed from monasteries in Ireland, Scotland, Gaul, and elsewhere, taking the Gospel of the Kingdom and the distinctives of the Celtic Revival throughout Europe. These *peregrini* for Christ left their mark on the spiritual, moral, and cultural landscape of the nations among whom they ministered, bringing revival, renewal, and awakening wherever they went.

Of these wandering missionary monks, the greatest was Columbanus (543-615 AD). We learn about Columbanus from the brief biography prepared shortly after his death by the monk Jonas, a member of the Columban community of Bobbio in northern Italy, as well as from his own writings.

Columbanus grew up in Ireland, the son of a single mother. He was a handsome young man and serious about his faith. As a youth, he feared he might fall to the wiles of young women and so, after consulting with a wise woman in his village, fled to a monastic school to begin preparing for a life in the ministry. He ultimately ended up in the great monastery at Bangor under the tutelage and oversight of Comghall. There he became a scholar and teacher of monks, serving until his fiftieth year.

At age 50 he sensed a calling from the Lord to go on *peregrinatio pro Christo*. Gathering a group of twelve companions, he set out for Gaul, where, with the permission of the rulers, he founded his first monastery at Annegray. Columbanus and his monks worked hard, preached earnestly, evangelized relentlessly, and refused to allow themselves to fall under the sway of the royal court. Rather, Columbanus' sincere piety and uncompromised teaching soon found him falling out of favor with the royals, and he and his troop were scheduled for deportation. A fluke in the ship's ability to set sail, however, was interpreted by Columbanus as a sign from God to stay, so they did, founding a second monastery at the site of some old Roman ruins at Luxeuil.

It was not long before young men began finding their way to Luxeuil to be instructed by Columbanus and his monks. By now Columbanus had begun to interact with the local clergy, whom he regarded as lazy and incompetent, and who considered him impudent and unruly. He wrote letters to the popes in Rome – including Gregory the Great – calling on them to discipline their charges in Gaul. Columbanus did not regard

himself or his monks to be accountable either to the existing ecclesiastical hierarchy in Gaul or the Bishop of Rome. They insisted on maintaining the celebration of Easter according to Irish, not Roman, custom, and Columbanus politely refused to attend a synod in Gaul which was being convened by the clergy there to try to bring him into line.

In time, Columbanus was again forced to leave Gaul, departing for northern Italy by way of what is today Switzerland. Along the way he founded the monastery of St. Gall, leaving this one of his companions (Gall) to oversee the work begun there as he himself continued on toward northern Italy. Once there he founded the monastic community of Bobbio where, for the remainder of his life, he held forth for orthodoxy in a time in which various heresies were widespread among the clergy and rulers of his area.

Columbanus left a small body of writings to help us gain insight to his thinking and character – letters, sermons, poems, and rules of discipline. In these he comes across as a man steeped in Scripture and devoted to obeying it, learned in classic literature and literary forms, deeply spiritual and pious, earnest about the work of disciple-making and the calling to ministry, friendly and human toward those he loved and stubborn toward those who disagreed with him. He represents perhaps the high water mark of the Celtic Revival, for after him and the impetus of his ministry, the Church in Rome began to take steps to bring the Irish churches and monasteries under their authority and oversight, an effort that would culminate in the Synod of Whitby in 664.

20 The Synod of Whitby

A “synod” is a gathering of church leaders from a particular geographic region, for the purpose of considering matters relevant to all the churches within that jurisdiction. Synods played a role in the Christian movement from at least the second century. Pastors and bishops gathered in synods to rule on false teachings, ordain new ministers, review cases of church discipline, and so forth.

So the convening of a synod at Whitby, in 664, on the west coast of Britain, to consider the relationship between the Celtic churches, with their independent Irish origins, and the rest of the Western Church, subject to the Bishop of Rome, was nothing unusual or extraordinary. For almost a century the Roman Church, having become aware of the Celtic churches through interactions with men like Columbanus, had sought to bring those churches and that movement under its jurisdiction. The Venerable Bede (ca. 672-235 AD), a British monk in the monastery at Jarrow, outlines the process by which the Celtic churches relinquished their independent status and united with the Roman Catholic Church in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

The process seems to have begun in earnest with Pope Gregory the Great (540-604 AD). Having been made aware of the existence of the Celtic churches, and of their presumed independence from Rome, perhaps through the letters sent to him by Columbanus, Gregory sent a missionary to Britain to re-organize the Church on that island and to seek to incorporate the Irish into the Roman fold. Christianity had been a feature of the British landscape since early in the third century. We recall that Patrick was raised in the Roman Catholic Church in Britain, although, according to his own testimony, he did not receive any aid from the Church in undertaking his mission to Ireland.

Shortly after his arrival in Britain, the missionary Augustine (not to be confused with the great Augustine of North Africa and the early 5th century) summoned leaders from the Irish churches to meet with him in Britain. Though he had met them before, and they had welcomed him to his new calling in Britain, now Augustine was hoping to gain their submission to Rome. The Irish church leaders, evidently aware of the purpose of the meeting, consulted a wise elder for advice concerning how they might know whether they could trust the Roman bishop. The elder counseled them to arrive at the meeting only after Augustine had been seated. If he rose to greet them, he was an honorable man, and they could

trust him. If he did not rise, they should listen to him cordially, but make no commitments.

As it turned out in that meeting early in the 7th century, Augustine did not rise. To the Irish, steeped in Scripture and devoted to the Law of God, this conveyed either that Augustine did not know the Law of God, or that he knew it but felt no need to submit to it in the presence of the Irish pastors (cf. Lev. 19.32). The Irish pastors thus returned to their churches without making any commitment to the Roman authorities.

The Synod at Whitby convened in 664 to address the issue more pointedly, and to bring the matter to a conclusion. The Irish pastors and elders argued for the heritage of Colum Cille as their lineage of faith, while the representatives of Rome insisted that Peter had the supremacy over all the Church, including all the Irish churches. The decision in favor of Rome was adjudicated, not by the clergy in attendance, but by King Oswy of Britain, who seemed to have feared offending Peter, keeper of the gates of heaven.

The decision to incorporate the Irish churches into the Roman Church did not take immediate effect. It took many years, and the work of Irish pastors such as Cuthbert (623-687 AD), abbot of the Scottish monastery at Lindisfarne, to persuade the long-independent Irish to relinquish their view of the timing of Easter, their particular manner of taking the tonsure, and other differences, and to submit to the authority of the Bishop of Rome. The incorporation of the Celtic churches into Rome coincides with the winding down of the Celtic Revival, although it is not necessarily the case that the one is the cause of the other.

21 Looking Back (1): Cormac's *Glossary*

By the beginning of the 9th century the Celtic Revival had run out of steam. Monastic centers had ceased pursuing the hard work of scholarship and missions and now were trying to shore up their gains against one another, even at times resorting to violence. Savage raiders from the North had begun regularly to invade and sack the monasteries and communities of Ireland, Scotland, and elsewhere. The Roman Catholic parish system, initiated gradually following the Synod of Whitby, had begun to be the primary organizational force for the believing communities, supplanting the role of monasteries and bringing with it the kind of uniformity and tendency toward complacency that Celtic missionaries had encountered in places like Gaul and Italy during the 7th century.

But the memory of the “glory days” of the Revival lingered in the hearts and minds of at least some, and, lamenting what had been lost, they undertook to preserve, and, if possible, restore some of the greatness which had been the Irish Church during the 6th-8th centuries.

A movement seeking return to the old ways of their Celtic Christian forebears sprang up in various places in Ireland, auguring for a renewal of the vision and disciplines that motivated the revival in the beginning. More a spirit of the times than an organized effort, the *céili de* – the “culdees” or “servants of God” – movement achieved only limited success in rekindling the conscience of Celtic Christianity.

The revival spirit of the *céili de* movement showed up mainly in certain monasteries, and among a few well-meaning individuals; but the sentiment for revival reached to many sectors of Irish Christian society and took a variety of expressions.

One curious effort at preserving at least the memory of the old days appears from the hand of a man named Cormac mac Cuilennáin, who, according to Kennedy, was both a bishop and local king, and died in 908. To him are attributed a variety of lesser literary works; however, that for which we remember him is the *Glossary* of old Irish terms which he seems to have compiled over a period of some years.

This odd book is interesting for what it suggests about the changes underway in Irish society and within the churches of the land. The *Glossary* lists hundreds of Gaelic terms, in alphabetical order, which had

either disappeared from the vernacular or were only rarely in use in Cormac's day. It's not clear whether Cormac hoped to restore these terms to their proper place in society, or if he was simply making observations about changes in the native tongue. But the words that were dropping out of the vernacular clearly indicate that the old ways that featured large during the period of the Celtic Revival were either being set aside or had been replaced by terms and ideas more in line with the Roman agenda.

For example, Cormac recorded the falling into disuse of the term, *buas*, meaning something like "poetic art." We recall that in pre-Christian society the poets of the Celtic lands were their historians, philosophers, conservators of tradition and culture, and religious leaders. This carried over into the period of the Celtic Revival, when poetry continued to play an important role in teaching, learning, and celebrating the work of God. Cormac also notes that the word for poet, *filid*, was also no longer in use.

Certain ecclesiastical terms, central to Christian life during the Celtic Revival, had also been dropped or replaced, among them the words meaning "elder", "confession", "singing together", "prayer of supplication", "thanksgiving", "glory", and at least two words for "general prayer." This is not to say that the roles or functions associated with these terms no longer existed in Cormac's day, only that the native Irish form and meaning of them was either being abandoned or replaced by Roman usage.

Cormac's observations may also suggest that the Celtic Christian insistence on learning and especially a learned clergy was no longer as important as formerly. The words for "learner", "learning", "library", a "monastic cell" – the small rooms where monks lived and studied (interestingly, in Gaelic, *cubachail*, "narrow place," such as a "cubicle"), and "pupil" were no longer in use in Cormac's day. The great learning characteristic of the Celtic monasteries had been shifted to the churches in Europe; no longer did men such as Colum Cille, Comghall, or Columbanus grace the ecclesiastical landscape of Ireland.

Most of the hundreds of words Cormac lists in his *Glossary* are terms from everyday life – everyday activities, animals and artifacts, institutions and practices, and so forth. The people of Ireland were becoming accustomed to the Latin of Christendom, and, while they did not entirely abandon their native tongue, they became, it seems, careless about easily accommodating to an imposed culture and order of society and life, setting aside the ways and forms of their forebears and becoming absorbed into a standardization and status quo which despised ethnic and

cultural uniqueness and demanded conformity on all matters of faith and life.

22 Looking Back (2): *Litanies*

The “afterglow” of the Celtic Revival lasted nearly as long as the revival itself. That for many centuries following the Synod of Whitby, Irish Christians looked back to the period of the Revival for guidance in their own spiritual struggles, testifies to the formative power of this period. While the Irish Church in the centuries following 667, increasingly under the authority of the Roman Pontiff, would never again witness the vibrancy, courage, creativity, and fruitfulness which characterized it in the years between Patrick and Whitby, still, much remained of the deeply spiritual aspect of those years to guide and encourage believers into the later middle ages and beyond.

One evidence of this lingering influence can be seen in the collection of *Litanies* assembled by Charles Plummer and first published in 1925. A litany is a personal devotional exercise, in the form of an extended prayer, which focuses on one or another aspect of the life of faith. Plummer’s anthology includes litanies intended for use in confession, in celebrating the greatness of Christ and seeking His mercy, in honoring the Virgin Mary and remembering great saints of old, in praising the triune God, and in seeking the blessings of creation. Plummer insists that these litanies, written it appears, between the 13th and 15th century, were intended strictly for personal use, to guide a worshiper in expressing some aspect of his devotion to God, and in seeking the Lord’s help for daily struggles.

Litanies directed to Christ and God begin with a lengthy section of invocation, in which the names and titles of God or Christ are called upon, before a brief section of confession or a plea for mercy is addressed. The purpose of this seems to be to aid the celebrant in acknowledging the great distance that separates him from God, so that he will cast himself entirely on the grace of the Lord.

The two litanies *Of Irish Saints* appear to have two purposes, each of which is related to seeking the blessing of God. First, post-Revival Celtic Christians believed there was some merit in remembering and reciting the names and deeds of the saints who preceded them in the Irish Church. Oengus mac Oengobann, in the introduction to his saints’ calendar (10th century), explains that the purpose of assigning a saint to each day of the year is to give the faithful an opportunity to enter into the blessing of God by reciting the glories of those who have gone before in the Church in Ireland. The two litanies in Plummer’s anthology were undoubtedly

written for a similar purpose. In addition, the second litany indicates that reciting it over various maladies of the flesh may contribute to healing.

The litany *Of the Virgin Mary*, while it claims to have been composed by Colum Cille, the great 6th century *peregrini*, incorporates the veneration and intercession of Mary in ways that were not practiced in the Celtic Church of Colum's day. This seems to be something of an attempt to extend the influence and authority of Rome back further than the historical record would otherwise support, albeit undoubtedly with good intentions.

Throughout these litanies, we are provided glimpses into the memory of the Celtic Revival itself – its key figures, themes, and achievements. The use of the Irish and Latin languages together recalls Cormac's burden. The poetic form of the litanies recalls a primary literary medium of the Revival. The litanies are decidedly Christo-centric and designed to bring the celebrant into the grace of the risen Lord. The theme of coming judgment and eternal glory appears frequently, reminiscent of the earlier longing for the "Promised Land of the Saints." The litany *Of Creation* invokes different aspects of the creation as a kind of "breast plate" against various dangers, thus recalling the "breast plate" poems of the 7th-8th centuries.

These litanies show us that a concern for true spirituality was still glowing, if only in scattered embers, for centuries after the fire of the Celtic Revival had subsided. Individual monks and priests composed and used these litanies to discipline their souls to love God, despise the world, and carry out the will of God in their daily lives. The *Litany of the Saviour* captures as well as any of them the purpose and longing of these private devotional exercises: *Give to this wretched convicted sinner the grace of compunction of heart, and earnest repentance, that I may weep bitterly for every outrage, every contempt, and every provocation, that I have offered to the King of heaven and earth, and every harm that I have offered to myself up to this day, in word, in deed, in thought...Impart to me Thy fear and Thy love around my heart, and in my thought, that I may despise every carnal pleasure, and all vain glory of the present life...That I may desire earnestly to meditate on Thee...That I may merit an above of rest among the believing widows in the unity of the heavenly church in the presence of the Trinity in secula seculorum. Amen.*

23 Lingering Lights: Eriugena

John T. McNeill tells a wonderful story about John Scotus Eriugena (810-877 AD), one of the two bright lights of scholarship which were birthed from the afterglow of the Celtic Revival. His anecdote captures some of the wit and brashness that characterized much of the Celtic Revival:

Charles [the Bald, Emperor], to tease [Eriugena], asks what is the difference (*Quid distat*) between a Scot and a sot (*sottum*, a fool?). Facing the king across the board, Eriugena rejoins: "*Mensa tantum*" ("Only the table").

Eriugena's early years are uncertain, but he appears as one of the great intellectual lights of his generation. His name, Eriugena, testifies to his Irish (Erin) origins. He served in the court of Charles the Bald, having taught in various educational venues in Britain. What we know of his contribution in Gaul boils down to a handful of highly intellectual treatises, of mixed value, and one wonderful homily on John 1.1-14.

Eriugena's most complex work is *Periphyseon*, "Concerning the Nature of Things." This lengthy philosophical treatise attempts to classify and explain all categories of being, from God to the most insignificant mundane things. It is the fruit of his pondering and investigating, by existing methods, the scope and nature of all reality, seen and unseen, created and uncreated. Whereas the 6th century saw an anonymous Irish scholar summarizing the world of things in *Liber de Ordine Creaturarum*, what Eriugena attempts is more ambitious and extensive and, consequently, more abstruse. His goal is to understand how everything in creation – and non-creation (that is, God) – relates to the believer's greatest hope for happiness, "which we consider to be nothing else but the pure unmediated contemplation of the Divine Essence itself". Such happiness, Eriugena argues, is obtainable only by the grace of God, Who grants it to whom He will. His view of the eternal disposition of all things is nothing short of breathless: "...after the end of this world every nature, whether corporeal or incorporeal, will seem to be only God, while preserving the integrity of its nature, so that even God, while Himself is incomprehensible, is after a certain mode comprehended in the creature, while the creature itself by an ineffable miracle is changed into God."

More accessible and rewarding – and much more in the spirit of Celtic Christianity than proto-scholasticism – is Eriugena's homily on John 1.1-14, translated by Christopher Bamford in his volume, *The Voice of the Eagle*.

Here Eriugena wants us to see Christ in all His beauty and majesty. His interpretation of John's prologue is grammatical, historical, and allegorical, but he does not stray from the plain meaning of the text. He celebrates the work of the Apostle John "who leads the faithful among souls to knowledge of what in Christ is eternal."

Eriugena comments on John's equating the Son and Word of God with the Father. The Father is the "beginning, the principle, from whom all things are..." But "the beginning, the principle, through whom all things exist is the Son. The Father speaks his Word – the Father brings forth his Wisdom – and all things are made." Christ made all things, even time, and He rules over them sovereignly by continuing to "speak" to all created things: "All things were – subsist – in him as causes before they are in themselves as effects." We can learn a great deal about this sovereign Lord by contemplating the creation which He made and upholds: "Learn to know the maker from those things that are made in him and by him." "Contemplate with your inner eye how in a master the many laws of an art or science are one; how they live in the spirit that disposes them." Just so the creation shows the greatness and majesty of Christ, its Creator.

Christ is the Light of the world: "The light shines in darkness. All humanity, by virtue of original sin, was in darkness – not darkness of the outer eyes that sense the forms and colors of sensible things, but the darkness of the inner eyes that discern the kinds and beauties of intelligible things; not the darkness of a gloomy atmosphere, but the darkness of the ignorance of truth..." Thus, when we come to Christ and live for Him, "It is not you who shine, but the Spirit of your Father shines in you."

We learn about Christ through the study of Scripture, Eriugena insists, informed as well by reflecting with our minds on the creation around us. The purpose of the Christian life is to strive for the contemplation of Christ, for in His beauty and majesty we find our reason for being, our joy, and our life.

Reading Eriugena is not an easy task, and, as I have suggested, he is not always to be received without serious criticism of his Biblical and doctrinal understanding. But in seeking Christ, contemplating Him, and directing our thoughts toward the hope of glory, Eriugena reveals much of that spiritual fervor and focus that sustained the Celtic Revival for those several centuries.

24 Lingering Lights: Alcuin

By Cormac's day, a century after the Celtic Revival had ceased, everything about religion and life in Ireland and Britain had become concerned more with the things of this world than the things of God. The Celtic Revival was over. The decline Cormac observed had begun a century earlier, as the last vestiges of the independent Celtic Church were being fully absorbed into the Roman fold.

During the 8th century, as if to express divine displeasure for the state of things, Norseman in swift boats launched a protracted series of raids, ravaging the monasteries of Ireland, Scotland, and Britain, murdering and pillaging and leaving in their wake a physical wasteland to match the spiritual desert which, as many saw it, the Celtic lands had become.

Around the turn of the 9th century, Alcuin of York (740-804), writing from the continent, expressed the view that the ravages of the Norsemen upon the churches and monasteries of Britain and Ireland were evidence that God was judging His people because they had left off their old ways. He wrote to Cuthbert, Abbott of the monastery on Lindisfarne (and, incidentally, a "cheerleader" for the Romanizing of the Celtic churches):

...the calamity of your tribulation saddens me greatly every day, though I am absent; when the pagans desecrated the sanctuaries of God, and poured out the blood of saints around the altar, laid waste the house of our hope, trampled on the bodies of saints in the temple of God, like dung in the street. What can we say except lament in our soul with you before Christ's altar, and say: 'Spare, O Lord, spare thy people, and give not thine inheritance to the Gentiles, lest the pagan say, "Where is the God of the Christians?"'...Either this is the beginning of a greater tribulation or else the sins of the inhabitants have called it upon them. Truly it has not happened by chance, but it is a sign that it was well merited by someone...' (John Marsden, *The Fury of the Norsemen*, p. 33).

Alcuin was the predecessor of and trailblazer for Eriugena, and served in the court of Charlemagne from 782 on (though he finished his course as Abbott of the monastery of Martin of Tours). He is primarily remembered for his contribution to medieval education, but he was the brightest intellectual and spiritual light of his day, a true product of the best of Celtic Christian spirituality, scholarship, and organizational genius.

An heir of the scholarly tradition of Bede, Alcuin laid the foundation and provided much of the intellectual and practical leadership for what is referred to as the Carolingian Renaissance, a season of spiritual and cultural flourishing throughout the domain of Charles the Great. The great Celtic missionaries of the 7th and 8th centuries cleared the way and laid the foundations for the work Alcuin would do in reforming churches, creating schools, training scholars, standardizing script, and filling the libraries of Europe with some of the finest theological, philosophical, and practical works since the days of Augustine and Boethius.

Alcuin wrote books of philosophy, theology, educational theory and practice. He presided over the court academy of Charlemagne and set the standard for learning for the entire Carolingian Renaissance. He helped to establish the Caroline minuscule script as the standard script – a combination of capital and small letters – for medieval writing. He organized the schools of Gaul, trained the liturgists of the churches, and extended Charlemagne’s reforms across Europe through disciples like Rabanus Maurus.

Alcuin was, as C. J. B. Gaskoin put it, “a born teacher”: “patient enthusiastic, indefatigable, careful not to overload the mind of the learner by giving him too much to learn, striving literally to educate, to call out in each the latent intellectual power, as – to use his own simile – a man strikes out of the flint the fire which has all along only been hidden in it” (*Alcuin: His Life and Work*, p. 197). His influence in the work of education extended throughout Europe and lasted for more than a century and a half: “the schools and cathedrals and monasteries, the natural successors and heirs of Alcuin, were the centres of student life and of the teaching tradition. Without the existence of such centres, established as they had been for generations, it is doubtful whether universities would have arisen” (Andrew Fleming West, *Alcuin and the Rise of the Christian Schools*, p. 178).

Alcuin embodied the great spiritual, intellectual, and cultural potential of the Celtic Revival. His was not able to exercise influence within the domains of the traditional Celtic churches. However, he brought into a fully Romanized Europe that Celtic love of learning, Scripture, spiritual discipline, disciple-making, and cultural renewal which brought life and beauty to churches, courts, cities, and people for centuries after his death. If there is a coda to the Celtic Revival, Alcuin, and Eriugena as his intellectual successor, are that final punctuation mark.

25 The Celtic Revival: A Partial Bibliography

Material to feed the renewed interest in Celtic Christianity is of many different kinds. Most important, of course, are the source documents, many of which have been translated into English, but also provide side-by-side Latin or Gaelic manuscripts (for language buffs). The ones I use most frequently include Thomas Owen Clancy and Gilbert Márkus, *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); G. S. M. Walder, ed., *Sancti Columbani Opera* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advance Studies, 1957); Dana Carleton Munro, ed. *The Life of St. Columban by the Monk Jonas* (Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1993, reprint of 1895 edition); Oliver Davies, tr., *Celtic Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999); Charles Plummer, ed. *Irish Litanies* (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 1992, reprint of a 1925 edition); Uinseann Ó Maidín, *The Celtic Monk: Rules and Writings from Early Irish Monks* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1996); John Carey, ed. *King of Mysteries: Early Irish Religious Writings* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998).

Most accessible to lay readers are the popular histories, such as Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (New York: Doubleday, 1995); Peter Berresford Ellis, *Celtic Inheritance* (New York: Dorset Press, 1992); Jean Markale, *The Celts* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1993), T. M. Moore, *Celtic Flame: The Burden of Patrick* (XLibris, 2000) and *The Legacy of Patrick* (Knoxville: Waxed Tablet Publications, 2006).

In addition to these reprints are available of such standbys in the field as, J. Romilly Allen, *Celtic Art* (London: Senate, 1904, 1997); Nora Chadwick, *The Celts* (London: Penguin Books, 1971, 1991); and Charles Plummer, ed. and tr., *Lives of Irish Saints*, Vol. I and II (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1922, 1997).

My interest in this period was first fed by several popular anthologies, including, Christopher Bamford and William Parker Marsh, *Celtic Christianity: Ecology and Holiness* (Great Barrington, MA: The Lindisfarne Press, 1987); Anthony Duncan, *The Elements of Celtic Christianity* (Rockport, MA: Element, Inc., 1992); Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, ed. and tr., *A Celtic Miscellany* (London: Penguin Books, 1971); and Robert Van de Meyer, ed., *Celtic Fire* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

Also available is a wide range of other popular literature, including manuals of spirituality such as Oliver Davies and Fiona Bowie, *Celtic Christian Spirituality* (New York: Continuum, 1995) and Shirley Toulson, *The Celtic Year* (Shaftesbury: Element Books Limited, 1993); first-person accounts, such as, James Charles Roy, *Islands of Storm* (Chester Springs, PA: Dufour Editions Incorporated, 1991) and Peter Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), and such period novels as Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Sun Dancing* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1997).

There is also a growing body of scholarly literature – more than I can list here – on various aspects of this period, including, Lisa M. Bittel, *Isle of the Saints* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Catherine E. Karkov, Robert T. Farrell, and Michael Ryan, eds., *The Insular Tradition* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1997); Mary Low, *Celtic Christianity and Nature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); James P. Mackey, *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* (Edinburg: T. and T. Clark, 1989); John Marsden, *The Fury of the Northmen* (London: Kylie Cathie Limited, 1996); Liam De Paor, *St. Patrick's World* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993, which includes primary source materials translated into English); Philip Sheldrake, *Living Between Worlds: Place and Journey in Celtic Spirituality* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1995); and E. A. Thompson, *Who Was St. Patrick?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985).

Of course, numerous works specifically devoted to Celtic art, and Celtic Christian art in particular, are also available. These include, Janet Backhouse, *The Lindisfarne Gospels* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1993); Derek Bryce, *The Symbolism of the Celtic Cross* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1995); Miranda Green, *Celtic Art: Symbols and Imagery* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1996); Peter Harbison, *The Golden Age of Irish Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999); Lloyd and Jennifer Laing, *Art of the Celts* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1992); Bernard Meehan, *The Book of Kells* (Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1994); Ruth and Vincent Megaw, *Celtic Art: From Its Beginnings to the Book of Kells* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1991); Barry Raftery, ed., *Celtic Art* (Unesco and Flammarion, 1996); Jakob Streit, *Sun and Cross* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1984). A series of books explaining various aspects of Celtic Christian art for contemporary artists is available from Thames and Hudson Publishers, New York.

There is even a growing number of recordings of Celtic spiritual music,

including, *Bards and Ballads: Ancient Celtic Music* (London: Topic Records, Ltd., 1995); *The Brendan Voyage* (Dublin: Tara Record Co., 1980); Eden's Bridge, *Celtic Psalms* (Brentwood, TN: StraightWay Music, 1997); Eden's Bridge, *Celtic Worship* (Brentwood, TN: StraightWay Music, 1997); *Celtic Spirit* (Milwaukee: Narada Media, 1996); Aine Minogue, *The Mysts of Time* (East Greenwich, RI: North Star Music, 1996); Noirin Ni Riain, *Soundings* (Boulder: Sounds True, 1993); Noirin Ni Riain, *Vox de Nube* (Boulder: Sounds True, 1992).

Finally, we encourage you to consider three books by T. M. Moore. *Celtic Flame: The Burden of Patrick* (Exlibris, 2000) combines the two extant documents from Patrick's own hand, together with "Patrick's Breastplate," a seventh-century poem attributed to Patrick, into an epic poem in heroic couplets, complete with documentation and discussion questions. Available through most booksellers. *The Legacy of Patrick* (Waxed Tablet, 2006) provides a concise overview of the Celtic period, as well as an introduction to The Fellowship of Ailbe. Available through the website, www.ailbe.org. Finally, T. M.'s book, *Culture Matters* (Brazos, 2007) includes an extensive chapter on Celtic Christian art, which includes an interview with Phil Keaggy. Available through the website or most booksellers.

Questions for Discussion

1. What can we learn from the Celtic Revival to guide us in seeking revival, renewal, and awakening in our day?
2. Which aspects of the Celtic Revival resonate most strongly with you? Why?
3. The Celtic Revival lasted for nearly four centuries. What to you were the most significant factors contributing to the success of this movement of God's Spirit?
4. What obstacles did people like Patrick, Colum, and Columbanus have to overcome in being used of God for revival, renewal, and awakening?
5. What obstacles do we face in our day in seeing a fresh and powerful movement of God's Spirit break out in our midst?
6. How do you think The Fellowship of Ailbe can help churches to realize more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God?
7. What's the most important idea or lesson for you from the period of the Celtic Revival?