

THEOLOGY OF THE

Celtic

Revival

FOUNDATIONS

T. M. MOORE

Theology of the Celtic Revival
Part II: Foundations
Patrick and Sechnall

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Waxed Tablet Publications

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T. M. Moore
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Introduction

The Celtic Revival was a movement of God's Spirit which, beginning in Ireland in the mid-5th century, spread from there to Scotland and the European continent, bringing renewal and awakening for the better part of three centuries.

The impetus for this great work came from the ministry of Patrick, who labored for many years in Ireland, beginning around 432 AD. Patrick was not a theologian, but an evangelist. He was not the first to bring the Gospel to Ireland, but it was under his ministry that the Celtic people of Ireland began responding to Christ in large numbers.

We know very little about Patrick's life, including his preparation for and the details of his ministry. What we can know will be unfolded in the sections that follow. Late in life, he was summoned by the clergy in Britain to return from Ireland and give an account of his work. He regarded the grounds for this recall as spurious, and so determined to continue his work in Ireland, penning his *Confession* as his defense for refusing to accede to the demands of his "superiors" (as he referred to them).

At some point during his ministry, Patrick wrote his *Letter against the Soldiers of Coroticus* to pronounce a verdict of excommunication upon those who had wrought violence against fellow believers. The degree of consistency between this *Letter* and Patrick's *Confession* helps to authenticate the two as coming from the same hand.

These two documents are all we have from Patrick's own hand, yet they provide important insights to the kind of person he was and the manner in which he carried out his calling from the Lord.

Patrick's contemporary, Sechnall, provides a complementary witness to Patrick's work. His poem, *Audite Omnes Amantes*, seems to have been intended to highlight the important components of Patrick's life and ministry, as if to lay a foundation for subsequent generations in carrying on the work Patrick began.

The works of these two men reveal the theological foundations of the Celtic Revival. Others before them in Ireland – Palladius and Ailbe, among them – had established a beachhead for the Kingdom of God

among the Irish people. Led by his visions of Christ and his calling, Patrick engaged the wind of God's Spirit to break out of that beachhead and bring the Irish people into the Kingdom of God. For his part, Sechnall provided a bridge to the second generation of Irish Christian leaders, who would solidified and consolidated the work of God's Spirit, providing a firm basis and foundation for Irish missionary activity in the 6th and 7th centuries.

The Celtic Revival is a significant but overlooked period of Christian history. The lessons it holds for the followers of Christ today are largely unknown, and therefore almost entirely unexploited. The purpose of the brief volumes in this series is threefold: To recover that lost legacy, to discover its primary components and driving forces, and to derive lessons and applications for seeking revival, renewal, and awakening in our day.

T. M. Moore

Patrick

Patrick: *Confession*

I, Patrick, a sinner, am a most uncultivated man, and the least of all the faithful, and I am greatly despised by many.

My father was the deacon Calpornius, son of the late Potitus, a priest of the town of Banna Venta Berniae. He had a small estate nearby, where I was taken captive.

I was then barely sixteen. I had neglected the true God, and when I was carried off into captivity in Ireland, along with a great number of people, it was well deserved. For we cut ourselves off from God and did not keep His commandments, and we disobeyed our bishops who were reminding us of our salvation. God revealed His being to us through His wrath: He scattered us among foreign peoples, even to the end of the earth, where, appropriately, I have my own small existence among strangers.¹

Patrick was taken captive from his home sometime early in the fifth century AD. His experience as a slave in Ireland changed his life, and changed the world.

Patrick wrote his *Confession* late in his life as a kind of *apologia* or even a deposition in lieu of his going back to Britain to answer to some spurious charges, which he therein refuted. Immediately, he strikes us as a humble, if not chastened, man. He confesses to be *a most uncultivated man*, which probably means that he had little in the way of formal schooling or training for ministry. Later attempts to ground Patrick's preparation for his mission within the bounds of the Roman Catholic Church have no basis in known fact, with the possible exception of a reference in his writings indicating that Patrick had some awareness of the practices of Christians in Gaul. He need not have had first-hand experience there, however, to have known this. Communities of Christians existed in Ireland prior to Patrick's arrival, and there is no reason to believe these believers were not in contact the Christianity elsewhere.

Patrick was raised in a Christian home, but he did not regard his faith seriously. He *neglected the true God* by not listening to his pastors and not walking in the commandments of the Lord. For Patrick there was no

¹ All excerpts from Patrick's *Confession* and the *Letter against the Soldiers of Coroticus* are from Liam de Paor, tr. and ed., *St. Patrick's World*.

separation between the life of salvation and obedience to God's Law. He considered that the lifestyle he and his mates pursued back them had *cut* them *off from God*. Patrick's Christianity, as we shall see, was fraught with moral implications, and he made sure that those who embraced the Jesus he proclaimed knew and embraced those implications, in line with the teaching of God's Word.

Did he regard himself as having been a Christian at this period? We do not know; subsequent events, however, proved the staying power of the Gospel, even when it was sown in the heart of one who had cut himself off from God.

At any rate, it was not the *love* of God but His *wrath* that finally got Patrick's attention and turned him from a rebel to a follower of Christ. Patrick believed that his enslavement *was well deserved*. We shall see that he firmly believed his salvation, and the subsequent blessing of God on his work, were not. His *small existence among strangers* was, as we shall see, a superb example of understatement and humility.

Patrick knew, loved, and served a God of wrath, Who used His wrath to refresh wayward souls in the paths of His love. He would be forever grateful for that wrath, because it drove him into the arms of God's love, and led him to discover his calling as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Grace Payback

Then the Lord made me aware of my unbelief, so that – however late – I might recollect my offences and turn with all my heart to the Lord my God. It was He Who took heed of my insignificance. Who pitied my youth and ignorance, Who watched over me before I knew Him and before I came to understand the difference between good and evil, and Who protected and comforted me as a father would his son. That is why I cannot remain silent (further, it would be inappropriate to do so) about the great favours and graces which the Lord deigned to grant me in the land of my captivity. For the way to make repayment for that revelation of God through capture and enslavement is to declare and make known His wonders to every race under heaven.

Patrick may have been a rustic, and unschooled. But he knew grace when he experienced it. And he knew what grace required on the part of those who receive it.

There can be no misunderstanding Patrick's view of salvation. It comes as an act of divine grace to undeserving sinners. Indeed, salvation is merely the culminating act of many years of gracious and caring oversight and provision on God's part. When God makes His saving grace known to us, the proper response is to acknowledge ("recollect") our sins and turn with all our hearts to Him. Only after God has made His grace known to us – "that revelation", as Patrick put it – can we see in retrospect just how completely good and loving He has been to us all our lives. Seeing Him thus, we realize, as Patrick did, that even His wrath, judgment, and discipline are acts of grace designed to disturb and reorient the souls of sinners.

What to do in response? Patrick understood: Make this Good News known as far and wide as possible!

Patrick made *repayment* for God's grace, not "payment." We do not earn salvation; it comes as a gift. But once we know the grace of God the only *appropriate* response is so to live and serve so that others may come to know the Lord of grace as well.

We catch the first glimpse of the vision that led Patrick throughout his ministry: "to declare and make known His wonders to every race under heaven." Patrick understood that the grace he had received was worthy of an effort without bounds or limits on his part. Would he reach every race under heaven? Of course not.

But that he *lived* as though that were, indeed, his mission, none can doubt.

God of Grace and Terror

It was He Who said through His prophet: "Call on Me in the day of your trouble and I will free you and you will glorify Me." And again He says: "It is an honourable thing to make known and proclaim the works of the Lord."

Although I am imperfect in many ways, nevertheless, I wish my brethren and kin to know what sort of person I am, so that they may understand my motives. I am not unaware of what my Lord has taught, since he has made it clear in the psalm: "You shall destroy the speaker of lies." And again He says: "The lying mouth kills the soul." And the Lord also says in the Gospel: "The idle word that people speak, they shall account for it on the day of judgment."

So, I realise I must be in the greatest dread – in fear and trembling – of incurring this sentence on that day when no one can hide himself or sneak away but we shall, all, every one of us, have to account even for our smallest sins at the tribunal of the Lord Christ.

We continue to see the implications of Patrick's theology of grace. We are still at what might be considered the introduction of Patrick's *Confession*, before he begins the formal account and defense of his work. It is clear he is captured both by the *grace* of God and the *fear* of the Lord. These two aspects of the Deity work in tandem to move us into the path of blessing and righteousness. God is gracious in that He invites sinners such as Patrick to appeal to Him in trouble – which Patrick did liberally, even desperately. He promises to hear them and set them free so that they might live for His glory. God is not obligated to make such an offer; He does so freely, out of the infinite depth of His grace.

Further, He calls His redeemed people to the *honourable* task of making known the Gospel in all the world. Patrick seems fairly astonished by this. He was one who scorned the Gospel and its teachings. Now it pleased God to invite Him to live and proclaim it to the world. What a wonder for such an *imperfect* soul! Patrick's motives for his ministry were in response to this grace and out of a sense of fear, since he knew well the pain of God's discipline. Remember, he had experienced the chastening of the Lord in his captivity in Ireland. He was well aware of what God could do against those who scorned or disobeyed Him. And he knew that a day of judgment is coming when every idle word or deed will be scrutinized by Christ, and judgment pronounced. He did not fear losing the salvation he had received by grace, but he did fear disappointing the One Who had saved and called him.

Thus Patrick loved the Lord Who forgave and commissioned him, but He also feared this One Who had called him to so high a commission. God is to be feared and loved for Who He is, what He has done, and what He can and will do in days to come.

A Letter of Christ

Therefore, while I have had it in mind for a long time to write, up to now I have hesitated. I was afraid of being exposed to criticism, because I have not the education of others, who have absorbed to the full both law and sacred scripture alike and who have never, from infancy onward, had to change to another language; but rather could

continually perfect the language they had. Whereas, with me, our words and our language have been translated into a foreign tongue, so that it is easy to ascertain – from the flavor of my writing – the manner of my education and of my training in expression. Because it is said, “The wise man will be distinguished by his language,” as will judgment and knowledge and true teaching. But excuses, however true, are pointless, especially if we take them in conjunction with my presumption in attempting only now, in my old age, to achieve more than I could in my youth. For my sins prevented me from continuing to build on my early education. But who believes me, even if I repeat what I have already said? As a youth, indeed not much more than a beardless boy, I was taken captive; before I knew what to aim at, what to avoid. So, because of this, today I am ashamed, and agitated with fear, at exposing my lack of education; because I lack the fluency to express myself concisely, as my spirit longs to do and as I try with heart and soul.

But, even if I had been given what was given to others, nevertheless, out of gratitude, I would not be silent. And if perhaps I seem to many people to be pushing myself forward, with my lack of knowledge and my lame language, yet it is indeed written, “The stammering tongues will quickly learn to speak peace.”

How much more ought we not to aim at that, since, as it is written, we ourselves are “the letter of Christ for salvation, even to the end of the earth,” and, even if the language does not flow but is blocked and turgid “it is written on your hearts not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.” And again the Spirit affirms that rustic backwardness, too, was created by the Most High.

We begin to see something more of the complaint against Patrick. Apparently, some were citing Patrick’s lack of formal training to bolster their argument for recalling him to Britain. Though, in his ministry, Patrick had realized many converts, so that a real awakening of the Irish people had begun, still some thought such work was only to be done by “real” priests – guys with seminary degrees.

Patrick admits he’s never been formerly trained. Clearly, he puts no confidence in his own abilities. Nevertheless, he declares that God has proven his call and has used him as an epistle of Christ to the Irish people, his “rustic backwardness” notwithstanding. He is not pushing himself forward in writing this *apologia*, as some might want to claim; rather, he is only explaining why he believes his call to be valid and why he feels no obligation to return to Britain to give an account of his ministry to people who would not support his work in the first place.

The work of ministry is a work of obedient faith. This is what Patrick sought from the beginning. And he challenged those who were summoning him to consider the evidence of his faithfulness. He was persuaded that the Spirit had affirmed his ministry, rustic though he was, and he believed his only accountability was to God and the people of Ireland.

Patrick saw himself as a letter of Christ to Ireland, and he did not believe he was obliged or free to leave his post in order to answer the spurious charges and claims of educated but jealous priests in Britain.

Patrick's sense of having been called by God to his ministry took precedence over any demands or opinions of others.

Responding to Grace

So, in the first place I am a rustic person and an exile, plainly ignorant, and I do not know how to provide for the future. But this I know for certain: that before I was abased, I was like a stone that had fallen into a deep mire. And He Who is mighty came and in His mercy picked me up and indeed lifted me high to place me on top of the wall.

Because of this I ought to shout aloud, giving some thanks to the Lord for His blessings, both here and in eternity, which are so great that the human mind cannot comprehend them.

So, therefore, be astonished, all you, both great and little, who fear God. And you, reverend professors, listen and pay close attention. Who was it that lifted me – stupid me – from the middle of those who seemed to be wise and skilled in the law and powerful rhetoric and in all matters? And Who was it that inspired me – me! – above others to be such a person (if only I were!) as could do good faithfully – in fear and reverence without complaint – to that people to whom Christ's love transported me and gave me; if I should prove worthy in short to be of service to them in humility and truth?

Consequently, I take this to be a measure of my faith in the Trinity that, without regard to danger, I make known God's gift and the eternal comfort He provides: that I spread God's name everywhere dutifully and without fear, so that after my death I may leave a legacy to so many thousands of people – my brothers and sons whom I have baptized in the Lord.

Patrick emphasizes the enormity of God's grace in reaching to him – a nobody – with the saving message of Christ and a commission to preach to the Irish people. Grace raised him from the mire and made him a foundation stone of faith among the Irish people. Patrick never made any claims for his own worthiness; indeed, we can see here the humility with which he viewed himself, both because of who he was and how God had chastened him. We remember that those who regarded themselves as Patrick's superiors in Britain were seeking to recall him, to hear from him an accounting of his ministry in the face of clearly spurious charges about pecuniary advantage. Patrick is writing this *Confession* in lieu of acceding to their request. He's too busy serving the Lord to be held accountable by those who tried to block his ministry in the first place.

He may be rustic and ignorant, but he is confident in the Lord's calling, and bold against those who would distract him from it.

Patrick shows how we are supposed to respond to the grace of God – with shouts of thanksgiving and works of obedience. It was a “measure of his faith” that he had fearlessly and faithfully obeyed the heavenly vision and been used of God for the sake of the Gospel and the Kingdom. Only God could do in and through a man like Patrick what had actually been accomplished. He had seen “thousands” come to faith, many trained and ordained for ministry, and the beginnings of an Irish Church taking root as a result of his labors. Everyone knew it was true, and Patrick was not about to leave the field to make a report to some cadre of “reverend professors” who were trying to reel him in and perhaps to take some credit for his work.

Here we see Patrick's distinct sense of independence from the Roman clergy in Britain. He was not accountable to them, but to God only. God had saved and called him. God had blessed and used him. He would give his accounting to God alone, and that through continued faithfulness in pursuing the work appointed to him. The Irish Church would continue its independent course for another 200 years.

Seeking the Lord

And I was not a worthy or a fit person for what the Lord granted me, his minor servant: that after such calamities and such great burdens, after captivity, after many years, He should bestow on me, in relation to that people, so much that I had never hoped for or thought of in my youth.

But after I had arrived in Ireland, I found myself pasturing flocks daily, and I prayed a number of times each day. More and more the love and fear of God came to me, and faith grew and my spirit was exercised, until I was praying up to a hundred times every day and in the night nearly as often. So that I would remain in the woods and on the mountain in snow, frost and rain, waking to pray before first light. And I felt no ill effect, nor was I in any way sluggish – because as I now realise, the Spirit was seething within me.

Patrick resumes the story of his captivity, which he had begun earlier. His work in Ireland involved tending flocks, and he appears to have been dutiful in his assigned task. It seems that he early on began to consider that his captivity was a judgment from the Lord for a wasted youth, and so he began to seek the Lord in prayer. He does not tell us specifically what he was praying for, but it certainly was not for some kind of ministry to the Irish people. He “never hoped for or thought” about doing anything for his captors. Most likely his prayers were for forgiveness, safety, and deliverance from the judgment which had befallen him.

Patrick must have found prayer a sweet discipline, for he persisted and increased in it, until he was veritably praying without ceasing. Note the effect of his prayer: Patrick increased in both the love and fear of God. His faith grew. His spirit “was exercised,” which I take to mean that his soul grew stronger in its various components – heart, mind, conscience – the more he gave himself to prayer. He delighted to seek the Lord in prayer, and he acknowledges that even this was a work of God in him. The Spirit of God, he admits, “was seething” within him.

He seems to have understood even then that the grace of God which saves and calls us also works for our sanctification by the Word and Spirit of God.

In the midst of judgment God worked on the heart of Patrick, turning him from indifference to zeal, from neglect to discipline, from the frivolity of youth to the patient earnestness that would serve him in his mission among the Irish. When God is preparing men for His service, He first sets them to seeking Him, which they do in prayer. They may not even be praying in line with God’s ultimate purpose for their lives, as Patrick was not. But God can use a seeking heart, as His Spirit seethes within and makes one open to the call of the Lord, however unlikely or extraordinary that call may be.

Patrick came to see his calling and ministry as an astonishing gift of God, for which he was not in the least “a worthy or fit person.” What Patrick would learn was that God prepares the hearts and provides for the needs of those He calls to the work He has appointed for them. And He prepares them for that work by setting them to seeking Him in prayer, not so that they compromise their appointed tasks – Patrick was “in no way sluggish” about tending the sheep – but so that prayer and seeking the Lord become inextricably entwined with all their daily routines and responsibilities. One whose faith grows and whose soul becomes strengthened through seeking the Lord will be ready for whatever the Lord calls him to as the next step in his journey of faith.

The Essence of Faith

And it was there in fact that one night, in my sleep, I heard a voice saying to me: “It is good that you fast, who will go soon to your homeland.” And again, after a short space of time I heard the pronouncement: “Look! Your ship is ready.”

And it was not nearby, but was, as it happened, two hundred miles away. I had never been there, and I knew not a person there. And shortly afterwards I fled from that place, leaving the man with whom I had been for six years. I travelled with the aid of God’s power, Who guided me successfully on my way, and I had nothing to fear, until I arrived at that ship.

The primary work of grace is faith. Grace and faith work together for obedience. When God extends His grace to His chosen ones, they will respond in faith, leading to obedience. Patrick had lived a life of disobedience, but he saw it as an act of divine judgment and mercy that God had allowed him to be taken captive and sold into slavery in Ireland. Patrick’s deep sense of divine providence, doubtless instilled subconsciously by his earlier exposure to Christian teaching, helped him to see the hand of God in his enslavement. He responded to this gracious act of God by obedience, as he began to seek the Lord, even as he served his master in the Wood of Foclut.

For six years Patrick served as a slave. For six years he sought the Lord, through earnest prayers and fasting, and he grew stronger in his reliance upon Him. Faith in God required of Patrick for those six years that he diligently seek the Lord and faithfully attend to his daily duties. When

God's plan for him was ready to go to the next phase, He would let his servant know.

Which He did through a dream. It's not clear whether the two visitations Patrick mentions in this paragraph came on the same night or on separate occasions. The "short space of time" suggests that it was the same night. Perhaps he awoke from the first dream, startled by the word which indicated he would be going home soon. Upon falling back to sleep the voice came again, with more urgency. Patrick seems to have understood that he was to go right then.

His testimony at this point reminds us of the call of Abram (Gen. 12.1-3). Patrick did not know where he was going, nor how far away it might be (since he had no knowledge of Ireland other than the Wood of Foclut). He struck out toward the east, doubtless assuming that whatever ship God might have prepared for him would be on that coast, nearer to his home in the west of Britain. He probably travelled by night, since he was a runaway slave and undoubtedly risked re-capture should he be discovered. He could only trust in the Lord, Who, he explains, guided him on his way – we're not sure how – and aided him, doubtless by providing food, shelter, and protection from being discovered. Patrick's faith in divine providence, which had sustained and strengthened him for six years, now allowed him to trust God for each day's needs as he followed the Lord's call. The trust learned in seasons of discipline and adversity served him well for this first great challenge of his faith.

Patrick did not fear to obey the voice of God. True faith fears only the Lord. Amazed by the grace of God – all the daily, continuous, unmerited manifestations of His steadfast love and faithfulness – true faith at once recognizes the Lord's voice and begins immediately to move in the direction obedience requires. True faith does not need to know all the details at the outset – which ship? what harbor? precisely when? It simply needs to discern the *next step* and then, trusting God for each subsequent part of the journey, to continue until the Lord unfolds the next portion of His divine plan.

Patrick's faith became a template for generations of Irish monks, missionaries, and ordinary believers whose faith led them to a lived witness for Christ in every aspect of their lives.

Unbending Faith

On the day I arrived the ship had weighed anchor, I explained that I had the where-withal to sail with them. And that day, furthermore, I refused, for fear of God, to suck their nipples. Nevertheless, I hoped that some of them would come to faith in Jesus Christ (for they were heathen). This displeased the captain, who answered sharply, with anger: "Your wish to travel with us is quite futile."

And when I heard this, I left them in order to return to the shelter in which I had lodged, beginning to pray as I went. Before the prayer was finished, I heard one of them, who shouted loudly after me: "Come quickly; these men are calling you."

I returned to them immediately and they began to explain to me: "Come, we will accept you in good faith. Bind yourself in friendship to us in any way you wish." Because of this I was received among them and we set sail straight away.

He may have been a new believer, and not sure about a good many things. But Patrick was certain of this much: He would do nothing that was contrary to the fear of God and his desire to follow Christ.

This action of sucking the nipples of the heathen crew members was apparently a pagan way of demonstrating submission or camaraderie (note the sailors' comment at the end of this section). Patrick would not submit to a pagan practice which he considered to be not in keeping with the fear of God. Patrick's entire life from this point forward would be defined by fear of and love for the Lord. He would not yield to pagans, family members, or even ecclesiastical authorities when they seemed to be distracting or discouraging him from following the Lord.

Apparently, when Patrick declined to participate in their pagan rite of initiation, he then shared the Gospel and expressed the hope that some of the crew might become believers. This made the captain angry, and he turned Patrick away. Patrick's boldness here is certainly laudable, and it provides an indication of the kind of ministry he would have. The Gospel is true; paganism is not. Have nothing to do with heathen ways, and preach the Gospel boldly at every opportunity. Remember: This is a 22-year-old runaway slave with no formal schooling or training in theology or evangelism. Patrick's faith was simple, but sincere and powerful.

I have no doubt that the sailors understood that Patrick was some kind of runaway, perhaps a slave. Patrick's response to their turning him down

was to commit the matter to the Lord in prayer. But the sailors had a change of heart. Did God suddenly melt their hearts with sympathy and compassion? Probably not. More likely, He put in their minds the thought that, upon arriving at their destination they might sell this runaway slave into slavery again, and earn a little extra for themselves. Patrick was enslaved again, but it's not clear from his account whether it was by these sailors that he was sold or during the time of his ministry in Ireland (as we shall see).

It's interesting to see that Patrick's unbending faith actually bent circumstances in his own favor. He would not compromise with paganism, but by his boldness and trust in the Lord, Patrick caused paganism to compromise with the will of God. Here is a lesson every believer needs to understand and practice consistently.

The Help of God

And after three days we reached land. We travelled for twenty-eight days through a wilderness. They ran out of food, and hunger weakened them, and the next day the captain addressed me: "What's this, Christian? You say your God is great and all-powerful. Then why can't you pray for us? For we are in great danger of hunger. In fact, it's doubtful if we will see another human being." I said to them confidently: "Trust in the Lord my God and turn to Him with all your hearts – since nothing is impossible for Him – that He may send you today more than sufficient food for your journey – for He has an abundance everywhere."

And with God's help, so it came about. There – right before our eyes – a herd of pigs appeared. They killed many of them, and they spent two nights in that place eating their fill of pork and recovering their strength: for many of them had dropped out and had been left half-dead along the way. After this, they gave their greatest thanks to God, and I gained prestige in their eyes. From that point onward they had abundant food. They even found some wild honey and offered me part of it, one of them saying: "It is a sacrifice." Thank God, I tasted none of it.

We begin to get a glimpse of Patrick and his witness. Apparently, the runaway was something of a chatterbox about his faith. He was hoping, as we've seen, that "some of them would come to faith in Jesus Christ" and he knew that, if this was to happen, it would have to be through his witness. It does little good for us to pray for lost friends or family members if we're not also willing to speak a word of witness to them.

Patrick's witness could not have been very sophisticated, nor even very well grounded in Scripture. It seems he was able to recall some of what he had been taught as a child ("nothing is impossible for Him") and that, together with his experience of the Lord, must have comprised the substance of his witness.

Patrick understood that God is "great and all-powerful." He had experienced the down-side of divine sovereignty, and now he was riding a wave of its up-side. He had also learned through six years of slavery that God is able to meet the needs of His children, sometimes in surprising ways. Thus, challenged to produce on his witness, Patrick turned the challenge back to his traveling companions. *They* must trust in the Lord and "turn to Him" with all their hearts. We can imagine Patrick leading this desperate band in a prayer of deliverance, many of the men weeping for hunger as they hoped beyond hope that Patrick's God would provide. Patrick's first endeavor as a pastor/evangelist was about to bear surprising fruit.

It's not clear where this action took place. Apparently the ship "reached land" in a somewhat desolate place. Was it driven there by a storm? Did the navigator miscalculate? We don't know. But twenty-eight days of wandering ensued (indicating they did not know where they were), and they consumed all the food they had on board. Doubtless their prayers were those of desperate men who were quickly losing all hope; the reference to not seeing another human suggests they expected to die.

Then God sent a herd of pigs right into their midst. Patrick had promised that God "has an abundance everywhere" and the sudden appearance of these pigs must have persuaded at least some of the men, for after eating, and, it seems, retrieving some of the stragglers from their group, "they gave the greatest thanks to God." Further, Patrick reports that he "gained prestige in their eyes." While he was not seeking prestige, it's only natural that pagan sailors, experiencing such a miracle, should attribute their deliverance to Patrick as much as to his God. But Patrick was careful to keep the focus on the Lord, as when he turned down honey they had offered in sacrifice to their gods. Patrick's life and words provided a consistent and convincing witness to this band of lost mariners.

We can only imagine how this situation must have impacted Patrick. Was he surprised to see God's deliverance? Did this situation deepen his trust in the Lord, or heighten his fear of Him? Did it sow the seeds of some

future calling from the Lord? Undoubtedly, all the above. The details of this situation remained in Patrick's mind, so that he could recall them clearly, even as an old man. God used this situation to firm up Patrick's faith, shape his witness, and further prepare him for the great work that lay ahead.

Speaking in Dreams

That very night, when I was asleep, Satan tested me most severely: the memory of it will remain with me as long as I am in this body. It was as if a huge rock fell on top of me and I had no use of my limbs. But from what quarter came the inspiration to my ignorant spirit to call on Helias? In the midst of all this I saw the sun rise in the heavens, and when I shouted "Helias! Helias!" with all my strength – see, the brilliance of the sun came down on me and removed all the weighty pressure. I believe that the Lord Christ came to my help, and that it was the Spirit Who was crying out in me; and I pray that it will be so on the day of my troubles, as it says in the Gospel: "On that day" – the Lord testifies – "it is not you who speaks, but the Spirit of the Father Who speaks within you."

(And on another occasion many years later I was taken captive. And I spent the first night with my captors. However I heard a divine announcement to me: "You will be two months in their hands." This is what happened. On the sixteenth night the Lord freed me from them).

It makes sense that Patrick would believe God spoke to him through dreams. It was, after all, in a dream or vision that he had first heard the voice of the Lord telling him to flee for his freedom. The episode recorded above, following as it did on the heels of Patrick's remarkable witness to the starving crew members, seems to have served as a warning and a reminder for him. The warning was that Satan could easily overwhelm and keep him from being of any use to anyone. Was this a warning against pride? Or testing the Lord? Patrick didn't understand all the details of the dream. He cried out for Elijah as the Sun of Christ rose to his aid (the Latin for "sun" sounds very much like "Helias," so Patrick, who was not good at Latin, especially at that time, may have simply been confused). Patrick was reminded in this dream that Christ was his deliverance and would always be. The Lord Christ came to his help in the face of temptation and trial, and Patrick prayed that this would always be the case. (Later appearances of the sun on Celtic crosses, used as a symbol of Christ, may have been inspired by this reference from Patrick.)

He could not explain the words that came to his lips in the dream; he believed they must have come from the Spirit crying out within him. This led him to trust that the Lord would give him the words he would need whenever he was tried or tempted in his witness for Christ. If there is a moral to this dream it seems to be something like this: Don't let pride or testing the Lord make you prey to Satan's wiles; but don't hold back whenever you have an opportunity to witness for Christ: He will give you the help, even the words you need. This lesson seems to have had a formative effect on Patrick's subsequent history and ministry.

It is important to note that Patrick tried to sort out the meaning of this dream in the light of what he knew of Scripture at the time. God is continually upholding and sustaining us, and He is at all times declaring His glory through created things. We have every reason to believe this is as true while we are sleeping, when our subconscious brain takes over, as when we are awake. But we can only understand such insights as may come to us from God's *general* revelation, including dreams, by looking to His Word for the interpretive framework and guidelines to make sense of what we think we hear God saying through created things.

Patrick inserts a subsequent dream parenthetically at this point, perhaps just because it was on his mind and he may have felt that it somehow validated his interpretation of the Satan/Christ dream. Patrick believed the Lord is able to speak to His people in dreams and visions; however, he also believed that we can only make sense and derive meaning from such encounters by turning to the Word of God to guide our thinking.

Dreams and visions are a form of general revelation, which must always be kept subordinated to the revelation of God in Scripture.

Home, but Not

While we were on our journey He provided us with food, fire and dry conditions until, on the tenth day, we met people. As I have indicated above, we travelled for twenty-eight days through the wilderness, and on that night on which we met people, we had truly no food left.

Another time, after a few years, when I was in Britain, my family received me as a son, and asked me whether – after such tribulations as I had undergone – they could trust me now, as a son, never to leave them again. But while I was there, in a night vision, I saw a man coming, as it were, from Ireland. His name was Victorius, and he carried

many letters, and he gave me one of them. I read the heading: "The Voice of the Irish." As I began the letter, I imagined in that moment that I heard the voice of those very people who were near the wood of Foclut, which is beside the western sea – and they cried out, as with one voice: "We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us."

I was pierced with great emotion and could not read on, and so I woke. Thank God that after many years the Lord answered them according to their cry.

I have no reason to doubt Patrick's testimony about the dream which began to stir in him a call to return to Ireland. How else was God to get His "holy servant boy" to leave the safety of his home in Britain in order to take up residence among the very people from whom he had escaped so many years before?

Some issues of timing arise here. Patrick explains that they encountered people on the tenth night of their sojourn in the wilderness, wherever that may have been. The previous episode, when God provided the pigs, must have occurred after 18 days of journeying. For the next ten days they had ample provisions, but these ran out on the tenth day, when, by God's grace, they encountered people. Patrick seems to have learned from these timely incidents that God is able to meet the needs of His people, so there is no sense worrying about provision or protection when you are doing the Lord's work according to His will.

Patrick finally returned home "after a few years." We do not know what he was doing in those years, but they must not have been of much consequence for his calling and ministry, otherwise, he would surely have reported his experiences. Some scholars have speculated that he found his way to a monastery where he began to study for the priesthood. This seems highly unlikely to me. He was, after all, a high school dropout who knew very little Latin or theology. And if he had been so prepared, we would surely expect him to have included this experience here, and to appeal to it again later on in his *Confession* as testimony to the validity of his ministry. But he does neither of these.

This second vision built on the previous ones, especially the last, in which Patrick came to believe that the Spirit of God was crying within him. It is possible that he had not yet come to the conclusion that he reported earlier, in which he anticipated a day of "troubles" coming when he would need the Lord to be speaking through him. This second vision must have

brought that previous one back with compelling force and perhaps helped him to understand the earlier one a little better.

We can see Patrick's love for the Irish in his immediate response the visitation from Victorinus. He does not think first of all about himself. He regards this dream as God showing His grace toward the Irish, answering "after many years" what he took to be a persistent cry on their part. Had the Irish among whom he worked as a slave already begun to see evidence of God's grace in him? Had "holy servant boy" become a name by which Patrick was known among his captors? Had his ministry of bearing witness to Christ actually begun already, while he was still a slave in Ireland? I think this is likely, and also that some of the Irish had begun to inquire of him concerning his faith, though he doubtless would have struggled to make much sense to them.

Such experiences then may have come back to him following this dream; hence, the "great emotion" he felt in his soul, so strong as to wake him from his sleep. Was this a memory of some emotion he'd felt while still a slave, and struggling to give an answer to those who were inquiring of him concerning the hope that was within him?

God was preparing the way for Patrick's new home among the Irish, and he was able to discern this on the strength of his relationship with God alone. He had no counselors. His family and priests would oppose him. Patrick walked with God in an intimacy we can only wonder at, and the closeness of that walk made it possible for him to "hear" the promptings and discern the guidance of God's Spirit in the everyday circumstances of his life.

It was the closeness of that walk with the Lord which would ultimately lead Patrick to depart his earthly home in Britain for a new home among the Irish, where he would pursue his heavenly calling and home for the rest of his life.

Inward Calling

And another night He spoke (God knows – not I – whether within me or beside me) in words which I heard in terror, but without understanding them, except that at the end of the message He said: "He Who gave His life for you; it is He Who speaks within you." And so I woke, full of joy.

And again, I saw Him praying within me and I was as if I were inside my own body, and I heard Him above me – that is, over my inner person – and He was praying hard with groanings. And all the while I was dumbfounded and astonished, wondering Who it could be that was praying within me. But at the end of the prayer, He spoke, saying that He was the Spirit. And so I woke, and I recollected what the Apostle had said:

“The Spirit helps us in the deficiencies of our prayers, for we do not know what it is proper to pray for; but the Spirit Himself pleads on our behalf with unutterable groanings which cannot be expressed in words.”

And again: “The Lord, our advocate, prays on our behalf.”

God, we know, was provoking Patrick to leave the safety and security of his home in order to return to the Irish as a “holy servant boy.” I doubt Patrick would have understood fully what this vision intended. It seems He was inclined to follow it, but he may have required further confirmation of this “calling” before he would take action.

The call to pastoral ministry has both an inward and an outward aspect. Inwardly, one senses the Lord directing him to take up the work of pastoral ministry. This comes in a variety of ways: One feels a strong desire to invest himself in the Word of God, in study, preaching, and teaching. He begins to form a vision in his mind of himself serving over a particular flock, and this vision grows stronger, clearer, and more compelling as he contemplates it. He is drawn to pray about such a possibility and, at the same time, he comes to experience various and contradictory affections – excitement and fear, joy and dread, hope and uncertainty. God works within the soul of a man He is calling to ministry in just such ways as this.

Patrick experienced this as Christ and the Spirit praying within him. He appears to have been in the throes of a struggle related to his calling. We should note the range of affections Patrick experienced during this season of God’s striving within him: confusion, terror, joy, astonishment. We can know we are in the presence of the Lord, and that He is working to get our attention, when we know such powerful affections as these.

This “inward” call seems to be what Patrick was experiencing. We recall that Patrick was not, at this time, a student of the Word or in any sense one who should have been considering a call to the ministry. God came to

him in dreams, but in ways that made it clear He was working within Patrick's soul, preparing him for some kind of service in Ireland.

Patrick's experience of prayer is significant here. Note the phrases he uses to describe the fusion of vision, contemplation, and prayer with respect to his communications with God: "within me", "inside my own body", "above me", "over my inner person." He seems to have been fairly pervaded, overwhelmed, and subsumed in vision and prayer. God was *weighing* on Patrick, and Patrick was learning what to expect, and what to seek, in terms of an ongoing relationship with God.

Note also that, upon waking, Patrick appears to have found validation of his vision in the Scriptures. God Who spoke to Him by night used the Word to lend legitimacy to those dreams and prayers. Throughout the *Confession*, while God used visions and dreams to prepare or guide Patrick in one way or another, Patrick's appeal is always to the Word of God. Scripture alone is sufficient to validate any vision, dream, or inward sense of struggling with God in prayer.

Patrick would not be able to look to his family or his pastors for the "outward" confirmation of his call to Ireland. They were opposed to him going. But the inward sense of God's preparing and calling him, coupled with his limited understanding of the Scriptures, was, for Patrick, undeniable. The outward confirmation of that call, which at this time was in the form of a dream only, would have to wait until he began his ministry in Ireland. The response of the people there would validate Patrick's decision and ministry, as he is at pains to argue in this, his *Confession*.

Vindication

And when I was attacked by certain of my seniors, who came and cast up my sins against my laborious episcopate; on that day I was powerfully tempted and might have fallen, now and in eternity. But the Lord showed His benign mercy to His disciple, who is an exile for His Name, and He came mightily to my support in this humiliation. Since it was not through my fault that I was brought into scandal and disgrace, I pray God that it will not be reckoned against them as sin.

They found a pretext from thirty years earlier, bringing against me words of a confession I made before I was a deacon. Because, in an anxious and melancholy state of mind, I had privately told my dearest friend about something I had done one day – indeed, in one hour – when I was a boy, before I had strength of character. I am not sure – God

alone knows – if I had yet reached the age of fifteen, and I was still, since my childhood, not a believer in the living God; rather I remained in death and unbelief until I was severely chastised and truly brought down to earth, every day, by hunger and nakedness.

Patrick breaks into his story of conversion and calling to recount a more recent episode, one which may have had a hand in prompting this *Confession* in the first place. His “seniors” in Britain had called him to give an accounting for some sin in his life, which he had confessed years before, prior to his becoming a deacon, to a dear friend.

We do not know what the sin was, but it occurred during Patrick’s childhood, and it made a lasting impression of shame. Thinking about becoming a deacon, he must have been weighed down by this sin, whether he had confessed and repented of it sufficiently. He entrusted his anxious concerns to a dear friend, who, later, and for whatever reason, passed along Patrick’s youthful failing to his overseers in Britain. Now they were using this as part of a pretense for trying to get him to come home and report.

Patrick appears to have been greatly alarmed that his superiors had come to know about this. He says he nearly “lost his faith” over the matter; however, rather than see this as some kind of latent Pelagianism in Patrick, we should read this comment as he intends, as a way of extolling the sustaining grace of the Lord. We can hear exasperation in that phrase, “cast up my sins against my laborious episcopate.” He had been working in Ireland for some time, and had known no little success, when this situation was thrown up at him. Had he not proved his calling? Had he not done enough to show that the grace of God was with him?

Patrick was humiliated for this youthful transgression to come out, and disgraced by the confrontation with his seniors. However, he does not hold it against them, and he seems to have had no ill feelings toward his friend, who betrayed him.

In Patrick’s mind the situation was over and done with. It was part of the process God had used – together with his enslavement – to bring him down and prepare him for the Gospel and his calling to Ireland. But it is to Patrick’s credit that he still seems to have felt pain and remorse for something committed so long ago. Patrick was secure in the grace and love of God. He clearly resented the intrusions of the bishops in Britain, but, knowing himself to be “a sinner”, he did not hesitate to include this

brief account at this point in his *Confession*, prior to telling of how he took up his calling. He wanted his readers to know about the situation before they learned about the many ways God used him, in spite of his sinfulness.

Patrick will offer a final musing on this situation in the paragraphs that follow. But he considers himself to have been vindicated by God, both in terms of the fruitful ministry he was able to realize, and in dealing with this confrontation and disappointment so late in the course of his episcopate.

God as His Witness

On the other hand, while it was not of my own choice that I arrived in Ireland at that time when I was almost a lost soul, it was a good thing for me, because I was reformed by the Lord and He prepared me to be today what was once remote from me; so that, whereas once I did not even consider my own salvation, now the salvation of others is my care and concern.

Therefore, on the day when I was rejected by the people mentioned above, that night I saw in a dream the dishonouring documents in front of me, while at the same time I heard the divine Voice saying to me: "It displeased Us to see Our chosen one in this state: stripped of honour." Nor did He say, "It displeased Me" – but rather "It displeased Us" (as if linking Himself with him – just as He had said: "Whoever touches you, it is as if he touched the apple of My eye.")

For that reason, I offer thanks that He gave me strength in all matters, not hindering that departure which I had decided upon, nor also those works which I learned to do from the Lord Christ; rather, I felt all the more His great power within me. And my faith was vindicated before God and men.

Therefore I tell you boldly that my conscience does not reproach me now or for the future. I have God as witness that I do not lie in what I tell you.

But I am all the more sorry for my close friend: how did we deserve to bear such evidence given? He to whom I had entrusted my very soul! And before that case (which I did not initiate, nor was I present in Britain for it), I learned from some of the brethren that it was he who would act on my behalf in my absence. (He is the very one who had told me, with his own mouth: "Look: you should be raised to the rank of bishop" – of which I was not worthy.) But how did he come, shortly afterwards, in public, in the

presence of people both good and bad, to bring me into disgrace over something which he had willingly and gladly forgiven – as had the Lord, Who is greater than all?

Patrick continues this rambling account of his departure for Ireland, interwoven with his explanation of a more recent event – the exposing of some youthful sin – that was troubling him at the time of his writing his *Confession*.

Patrick was a human being, and he had been hurt by this friend who, for whatever reason, thought that now, near the end of Patrick's ministry, was a propitious time to bring to light a transgression committed and forgiven many years before. Patrick was no superhero, as he would be the first to admit. He had failings and feelings like the rest of us, and he seems truly to have struggled to process this situation. This man had been his friend. He had spoken up for Patrick in earlier years, and supported his being appointed a bishop. So why had he come to think it necessary to humiliate his friend at just this moment?

Patrick could not answer that question, and he did not intend to dwell on it. He knew himself to be vindicated by God – by a vision he had received and by the work Christ had taught him and enabled him to do. God was his witness, even if he didn't have a friend in the world. And that was enough for Patrick.

It is important to note that Patrick says he arrived in Ireland barely saved, when he was practically “a lost soul.” This should put to rest speculations that Patrick prepared for his ministry at a Roman Catholic monastery in Europe prior to his coming to Ireland. His testimony seems clear, that what he learned about working for Christ he learned after having come to the land of his former enslavement. The revival of true Christianity which Patrick helped to launch began and spread for more than two centuries without the help of the Roman Church. Indeed, Roman Catholic clergy tried to thwart the work of Patrick, as they would that of Columbanus, when he came preaching the Gospel to Gaul at the turn of the 7th century. It would not be until the beginning of the 8th century, following the Synod of Whitby, that Roman Catholicism would begin to exert influence over the Celtic Christian movement.

“Enough of this” Patrick will write at the beginning of his next paragraph. He's ready to move on from personal slights to recount the work God had accomplished through him.

Thanksgiving

Enough of this. Nevertheless, I must not conceal the gift of God, which He so freely bestowed on me in the land where I was a captive. Because it was at that time that I strenuously sought Him and found Him. And He has saved me from all injustices – so I believe – because His Spirit is within me and works in me to the present day. Another bold statement; but God knows that if the voice that guided me were merely human, I should have kept silent for the love of Christ.

And so, tirelessly, I thank my God, who kept me faithful on the day I was tried, so that today I might offer to Him, the Lord Christ, the sacrifice of my living soul. He saved me in all dangers and perils, causing me to ask: “Who am I, Lord, or what am I called to, that in all Your Divinity You have shown Yourself to me, so that today I constantly lift up and magnify Your Name among the heathen, wherever I have been, not only in good times but in bad?”

So, whatever may come my way, good or bad, I equally tackle it, always giving thanks to God, Who granted me unlimited faith in Him, and Who helped me so that, ignorant as I am, I might in these final days dare to undertake this work, so holy and so wonderful. It is just as if I were a follower of those whom the Lord foretold, once, in former times, who were to be harbingers of His Gospel for a testimony to all races before the end of the world. And indeed, we have seen this done. See: we are witnesses: the Gospel has been preached to those places beyond which nobody lives.

Those in Britain who regarded themselves as in authority over Patrick were trying to recall him on specious grounds, perhaps related to some charge of pecuniary self-interest. To pad their case, they also floated before him a sin he had committed as a youth, which he confessed to a friend who had now made his transgression known. Those seeking to get him to come back to Britain to give an account of his ministry had let it be known they were aware of this long-ago transgression, as if they might threaten to “go public” with it if Patrick refused to submit to them.

He was unimpressed, even indignant, at the suggestion of malfeasance on his part, and deeply hurt by his friend’s breach of confidence. But he wasn’t coming home. He was too busy in what he regarded as a work “so holy and so wonderful” that he could not think of leaving it. He had devoted his life to the Lord, Who had shown him such grace. Now he was busy living out his gratitude to God in a tireless work of evangelizing the lost. He suggests that he had spread the Gospel throughout all of Ireland, and we have every reason to believe this was so. The “gift” he had

received during his captivity in Ireland – forgiveness, salvation, and a calling to serve the Lord – he was now intent on offering to every person in that land.

But Patrick took no credit for his labors or successes. He recognized it was the Spirit of God at work in him Who was leading and enabling him, and bringing about the glorious results he had seen. Patrick saw himself as carried along by the Spirit of God and the Word of Christ in the work he was doing. How could he walk away from this in order to go to Britain to stand in judgment for what he knew to be a groundless charge?

Patrick set forth as evidence in support of his decision to remain in Ireland the call of God, the indwelling Spirit of Christ, the Word of the Lord, his own self-deprecation and self-denying ways, and the abundant fruit God was bringing forth through his efforts. Whatever “evidence” his superiors might be able to marshal against him would not, he was certain, tip the balances against him.

And that being the case, Patrick determined to continue his “thanksgiving” ways in Ireland rather than to heed the instructions or decisions of any “merely human” voice that might try to guide him otherwise.

God’s Story, not Patrick’s

However, it would be tedious to tell in whole or in detail of my undertaking. I shall relate briefly how the most holy God frequently freed me from slavery, and from the twelve dangers which threatened my life, as well as from many snares which I cannot express in words. I do not wish to affront my readers, but God, Who knows all things before they happen, is my authority that He readily and frequently gave me His counsel, just because I am in His care, though I am poor and insignificant.

From where did this understanding come to me, who had knowledge neither of the number of my days nor of God? From where did I afterwards receive so great and so beneficent a gift – to know and to desire God, relinquishing homeland and family for Him?

They offered me many gifts, with tears and lamentation, and I offended them, as well as going against the wishes of certain of my seniors, but God guided me not to agree with them or consent to them. This was no thanks to me; rather it was God who triumphed within me and opposed them all, so that I might come to the Irish heathen to preach the Gospel and suffer the insults of unbelievers. But then! – to endure disgrace because of

my departure! And many prosecutions, even to the extent of imprisonment, and to sacrifice my patrimony for the sake of others! I am ready indeed to give my life, freely, in His Name, and I choose to spend it here even until death, if the Lord will allow me.

Patrick wanted to make it clear that the only reason he was in Ireland – and the reason he would not leave to return to Britain and give an account of his ministry – was that God had brought him and was keeping him there.

He does not fill his *Confession* with abundant details about his travels, preaching, winning souls, and the like. We know he did these things because he mentions them in passing, as we shall see, and later writers recall them, sometimes with great exaggeration. But his point is not that his ministry justifies his staying in Ireland. He can do no other. God saved him, after just discipline. God gave him the gift of knowing the Lord, and delight in pursuing that knowledge as far as he could. God delivered him from slavery. God called him to Ireland. And God gave all the increase of fruit and harvest from his ministry. He determined to remain in Ireland, doing what he'd been doing, until God's story for his life had turned its final page.

Patrick truly considered himself “poor and insignificant.” He regarded God and Jesus Christ as supremely worthy and deserving of all honor and glory. Those who were challenging his ministry were really challenging the work of God and thus seeking to cast aspersions on the glory of God. Patrick is not being snotty; he insists he doesn't want to “affront” his readers. But he wants everyone to be clear about what's at stake in his decision – once again – to defy his “seniors” and stay the course in Ireland. The God Who triumphed in Patrick by giving him the initial boldness to come to Ireland will triumph again and keep him there. Patrick prefers the insults of heathen to the accusations and slander of “Christians” in Britain.

Patrick's account may be his *Confession*, but it's God's story of the beginnings of revival amid the pagan peoples of fifth-century Ireland.

You Are What You Believe

Because I owe a great deal to God. He gave me this great boon: that through me many heathen should be reborn in God, and that afterwards they should be confirmed as Christians, so that everywhere clergy should be ordained for a population newly coming

to the faith, a population which the Lord redeemed from the ends of the earth, just as He had promised through his prophets: "The nations will come to you from the ends of the earth and will say: 'How empty are the idols which our forefathers erected and they are of no use'; and again: 'I have placed you as a light among the nations so that you may bring salvation even to the end of the earth.'"

And it is there that I choose to await His promise – in which, at least, He will never fail – as is stated in the Gospel: "They will come from the east and from the west and will recline at table" with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob: so we believe that believers will come from the whole world.

Patrick provides a classic example of the power of faith. Believing God had called him, he went to Ireland. Believing the Gospel is the power of God for salvation, he preached it fearlessly to lost pagans. Thousands believed. Believing more would come to Christ, Patrick persevered. And believing his work was not yet finished, he chose to remain in Ireland, seeking the promise of God, rather than to return to Britain to be judged by some spurious council.

Why did Patrick do this? He "owed" it to the Lord for saving Him. Not only that, but God honored his steps of faith by working through him so that "many heathen" should come to faith in Christ. These he prepared for baptism, confirming them as members of the Body of Christ when they were ready (following ancient practice). And from these he selected some for further training, that they might become priests and pastors to watch over the many who were entering the flocks of the Lord.

Patrick believed the Scriptures and he believed God's calling on his life. His life was shaped by his faith, not the other way around. You are what you believe, as Patrick demonstrates.

The phrase, "I choose to await His promise", is most telling. The Latin, *uolo expectare*, is rather more intensive than our translation, something more like, "I've made up my mind to wait with eager longing" for God to fulfill His promises of more coming to the faith. That "waiting" involved daily, earnest, focused striving after the promises of God, and we can see which promises Patrick was clinging to for his mission.

Do we believe that people will come to faith in Jesus Christ when we share the Gospel fearlessly with them? Well, when we do, then we too, like Patrick, will be able to prove the promises of God.

A Solemn Obligation

Therefore indeed it is true that there is an obligation to fish well and diligently, as the Lord commanded, saying: "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." And again, He tells us through the prophets: "Look, I send out many fishers and hunters" – says God, and so on. From which it follows most cogently that we are obliged to spread our nets so that we can catch a great shoal and multitude for God. And there should be clergy everywhere to baptise and preach to a population which is in need and longs for what it lacks, as the Lord says in the Gospel, where He admonishes and teaches, telling us: "Now therefore, go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and then – see – I will be with you all the days until the very end of the world."

Patrick read his Bible, believed what it taught, and obeyed God's Word in all things. Especially was this true concerning his mission to the Irish. God had reached out to him and showed him abundant mercy and grace. How could he not be available to God to do the same for others?

Both the Old and New Testaments look forward to a day of great "fishing" and "harvesting." Patrick did not fail to take these words personally and to heart, or to carry out the commands and seek the promises they contained.

Patrick regarded the work of evangelizing the lost as a solemn obligation "to fish well and diligently." The goal of his evangelizing was to win souls, "a great shoal and multitude for God." To this end he needed to "spread [his] net" by wandering across the Irish countryside bearing witness, baptizing, making disciples, and training believers as much as he could. This included training clergy, which Patrick appears to have undertaken merely as a part of his ongoing ministry. Patrick was no theologian, but he knew the Word and did the work. However he trained those aspiring pastors, it took.

Patrick received his calling as a solemn obligation, and he nurtured and pursued an expansive vision appropriately. The next generation of Irish church leaders took up Patrick's burden, vision, and work, and extended it far beyond Ireland to Scotland and Europe.

Patrick's Mission Field and Ours

And again He says: "Going therefore out into the whole world, preach the Gospel to all of creation: whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; they who do not believe will be condemned."

And again: "The Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all peoples; and then the end will come."

And the Lord also foretells through the prophet, saying: "And in the last days," says the Lord, "I will pour out My Spirit over all flesh and your sons and daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams, and indeed in those days I will pour out My Spirit over my male servants and my female servants and they will prophesy."

And in Hosea, He says: "A people that is not Mine I will call My people, and a people that has not obtained mercy I will call a people that has obtained mercy. And it will be in that place where it was said: 'You are not My people': there they will be called 'children of the living God.'"

So this is why it come about in Ireland that people who had no acquaintance with God, but who, up to now, always had cults or idols and abominations, are recently – by this dispensation – made a people of the Lord and are known as children of God. Sons of the Scotti and daughters of chiefs are openly monks and virgins of Christ.

In going to Ireland, Patrick did not rely solely on the visions God sent him, in particular, that of the Irish man carrying letters pleading with him to return to Ireland and serve there. We do not know when or how Patrick's knowledge of Scripture began to mature. However, since it seems he was at home in Britain for some time after returning from Ireland, we can imagine that he set himself the task of improving his relationship with the Lord. We recall how he was chastened during his time in slavery, and spent many long evenings in prayer and meditation, doubtless recalling as much as he could of the Word he had heard as a youth. It seems likely that, upon being delivered back to his home, that Patrick would have begun to read and study the Word of God rather more diligently.

During these times he must often have come across passages such as those cited in this excerpt. He clearly understood that God was intending to do a work of salvation among the heathen, but it wasn't until his vision

that he understood his own role in helping to realize those commands and prophecies.

Patrick went to Ireland because God called him to take his unique place in a great work of evangelization and salvation that God was doing all over the world in his day. Patrick took his place in the divine “dispensation” among the “Scotti” people of Ireland (how the Irish were called in Patrick’s day) as that part of the world to which God had called him – his Personal Mission Field.

Patrick went to Ireland to get in on the Lord’s work and to fulfill his own responsibility within the mandates, prophecies, and promises of God concerning the salvation of the lost. Patrick understood the Scripture and what it taught about God’s great work. More important, he understood the Scripture and what it meant and implied for him.

Those same mandates and prophecies that moved and empowered Patrick remain before us today. Patrick understood the will of God, and he submitted to it gladly. We have the same commands and promises.

Would that we had the same heart as that which beat within the soul of Patrick.

Preaching for Commitment

And indeed, there was a certain blessed noblewoman, of Scottic origin, mature and beautiful, whom I baptized. A few days later she had reason to come to us; she told us privately that she had received a message from an angel of God who commanded her to become a virgin of Christ and so draw nearer to him. Thanks be to God, just six days after that she embraced in the most excellent and eager way that which all the virgins of God follow. They do not do it with their fathers’ consent; on the contrary they endure harassment and false accusations from their parents. And nonetheless their numbers increase (and we do not know the number of those of our own race who were born there), as well as those of widows and women living in chastity. But it is those who are held in slavery who have most to endure, even to the extent of suffering continual fears and threats. But the Lord has given grace to many of His handmaids, so that they can bravely imitate Him in spite of all prohibitions.

In this passage Patrick illustrates the kind of response to his preaching which he regularly received. It’s not just that he went up and down the island proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom. God honored that

preaching and raised up committed followers of Jesus Christ, like the lady described in this passage.

The Latin does not include the phrase “from an angel.” Obviously, this woman felt a strong prompting or leading from the Lord to take up the lifestyle of a virgin – a nun (although we bear in mind that the Celtic Church at this period was not formally linked to Roman Catholicism). Did this come to her in a time of prayer and meditation, perhaps even as a vision, as Patrick himself had experienced? She could only have learned such discipline as part of her preparation for baptism, during which time she would have confirmed her faith to herself, her community, and her teacher.

The life of a virgin was a lifelong commitment involving, if the life of Brigid can serve as an example, prayer, preaching, and service to the poor and needy. Here was a woman of nobility, a beautiful woman whose life prospects from a worldly perspective probably could not have been better. But she desired the things of Christ, to draw near to Him and to serve Him by bringing His love to others, more than the pleasures of marriage and the court.

How did she learn to desire the things of Christ more than those of the world? Obviously, something in the way Patrick proclaimed the Gospel and prepared people for baptism gave them a powerful and compelling vision of the Lord and His Kingdom, so that many – as Patrick notes – were willing to forsake everything for the cause of Christ and the Gospel.

There was risk in this, because frequently such young ladies made this commitment and took up the rule of discipline associated with it without seeking their parents’ permission. Patrick reports that persecution often followed, which these women were willing to endure for the sake of the cross. Even girls held captive in slavery were committing themselves to follow Christ and be His virgin handmaids. Here we see that Patrick’s teaching of the Gospel made following Christ not merely a matter of the convent but of faith, obedience, and service in everyday life, regardless of one’s station.

Patrick’s preaching was clear, visionary, and compelling, leading people to forsake everything and to endure hardship for the sake of the Kingdom. We need more such preaching in our day.

Committed for Life

That is why, even if I wished to leave them so that I could visit Britain (and with all my heart I was ready and anxious for my homeland and my parents – not only that, but to go on to Gaul to visit the brethren and be in the presence of my Lord's saints – God knows how much I longed for it), I am bound by the Spirit, Whose testimony is that if I do this He will afterwards find me guilty. And I am afraid of wrecking the task I have begun – not just I but the Lord Christ, Who commanded me to come and live among them for the rest of my life. May it be the Lord's will to guard me against all evil. So that I may not sin against Him.

Four observations in particular stand out from this section of Patrick's *Confession*.

First, Patrick understood that his calling to go among the Irish for the purposes of the Gospel was lifelong and unintermittible. The Lord Jesus commanded him to this task, and the Spirit both enabled him to it and warned him against foregoing it for any reason.

We know that Patrick's original call to Ireland was by a vision or dream. However, as we have seen, that only confirmed to Patrick what he must have been reading throughout the Scriptures concerning the Great Commission and the Lord's intention of sending workers into the fields to the farthest ends of the earth. The vision was but the culmination of what must have been stirring in Patrick's soul for some time, and he read it as the Lord Jesus calling him to his ministry. Once that decision was made and Patrick headed to Ireland, the Spirit confirmed his calling and ministry, as we have seen, in many ways thus far in his *Confession*.

So he feared lest, should he go to Britain as requested, he might interrupt the Lord's work or, worse, even cause it to come to an end, should he leave his fruitful calling in the field for what he regarded as a frivolous assembly back home.

The second observation relates to Patrick's mention of Gaul. He would, of course, have enjoyed being with his parents again. The reference to Gaul and the "saints" there, and Patrick's longing to go among them (although note the absence of *again*) is perhaps what leads many Patrick biographers to believe that he had spent time in Gaul among those saints before returning home the first time, or perhaps before going off to Ireland. There is nothing in Patrick's *Confession* or in the poem, "Audite

Omnes Amantes,” by Sechnall, a contemporary of Patrick, to suggest such a hiatus. Patrick’s testimony and his frequent apologies for his meager learning and inadequate literary skills suggest he was not trained in a Roman Catholic monastic center but, as it were, “on the job.”

In the third place, I want to reflect a bit more on Patrick’s sense of being “bound by the Spirit.” Patrick knew himself to be indwelt by the Spirit and a vessel of the Spirit for the work of the Gospel. He was a servant in the Spirit’s hands, so to speak, to do the work the Spirit is wont to do. This included bearing personal fruit, exercising spiritual gifts, bearing witness, preaching and teaching, serving and caring, making disciples, and building the Body of Christ. Patrick knew these to be the works of the Spirit. How could he, “bound by the Spirit,” dare to think of doing anything other than this?

The “testimony of the Spirit” for Patrick, it seems – looking at the over 125 references or allusions to Scripture in his *Confession* – was the ongoing witness of the Word of God, coupled with the inward and confirming voice of the Spirit, as evident in various kinds of fruit. Patrick “listened” for the Spirit’s leading daily, and he feared lest he should be found guilty of departing from the path the Spirit was marking out for him.

Finally from this section, most of us would not consider a little time off for “R & R” – a visit with one’s parents, a brief vacation in the homeland, perhaps a nice tour among the saints in Gaul – as an “evil.” But Patrick did. He regarded anything that would distract him from the Lord’s calling and the Spirit’s work as evil. Evil to Patrick was not just the “evil” we experience about so often in this country, where innocent victims are slaughtered by troubled or insane shooters, corruption and scandals erupt in various sectors, and cultural expressions continues to wear the garments of the slough. For Patrick, evil was anything that diverts one from the path of the Spirit and the work of Christ. And he earnestly prayed that the Lord would keep him from all such evil so that he would not sin.

The way to bring “evil” to an end is to follow Patrick’s advice and nip all evil in the bud, as it seeks to emerge in our hearts, leading us astray from Christ and His Spirit. Certainly Celtic society in Patrick’s day included *evils* of many sorts. But it was the daily struggling against evil and sin on the part of growing numbers of believers which ultimately saw the decline of evil and the rise of Christian civilization in that pagan land.

Keeping Faith

I hope, however, that I did what I should have done; but I have no trust in this self of mine so long as I am in the body. For he is powerful who endeavours every day to turn me from the faith and from the pure teachings of the religion which I hold even to the end of my life for the Lord Christ. But through the flesh the Enemy is always dragging me towards death, that is, towards what is enticing but unlawful; and I know, in part, why I have not led a perfect life like other believers. But I admit it to my Lord, and am not ashamed before Him, because I do not lie. Indeed, since I learned to know Him in my youth, the love and fear of God have grown in me, and up to now, with the Lord's help, I have kept the faith.

The life of faith is one of continuously seeking the Lord in order to remain on the path He has chosen for His people. We run our race daily; we fight the good fight every waking moment. If we do not, we become vulnerable to the temptations which daily beset us, that we might *fall through* them into sin, rather than *grow through* them to greater maturity in the Lord.

As Patrick knew, the devil is wily; he seeks only our destruction, and he can appear as an angel of light – or even a British bishop! But Patrick was used to dealing with the devil's daily attempts to turn him from faith and true religion. He held fast to the teachings of Christ at all times, by which we must understand both the doctrines of faith and the specific instructions those doctrines required for Patrick's walk with the Lord. For Patrick, there was no discontinuity between what he believed and how he lived.

The path of the devil leads away from the Law of God and the call of Christ into the way of spiritual death. Patrick was grateful to have lived a sinful past. Having been accustomed to following the devil before his conversion, Patrick was now able to recognize his wiles and to resist him in the faith. He is not proud of this; indeed, as we have seen, his former life was a source of great shame and sorrow to him. But he was able to understand why the Lord had allowed him to stray for a season.

How Patrick must have delighted to write that line about not having “led a perfect life like other believers”! This strikes me as a clear jab at those who were seeking to recall him and who had gone fishing for some pretense to require an accounting from him. Patrick is not ashamed of his past, and he won't let anyone haul him back under the guilt from which

the Lord has delivered him. Since coming to know the Lord, fear and love of God had grown steadily in him. He was not about to allow jealous clerics to undo that. He had kept faith in the Lord from the day of his conversion, and he would continue to do so now, though the devil himself may summon him to Britain!

Persuaded to Do Better

Let who will laugh and scoff. I will not be silent, nor will I conceal the signs and wonders which the Lord has shown me many years before they happened – He Who knows all happenings since before the beginning of time.

That is why I should give thanks to God without ceasing – because He has often been lenient with my foolishness and my carelessness. And because on more than one occasion He has not been wrathful with me, who was given to Him as a helper but did not quickly accept the task which was made clear to me nor do as the Spirit prompted. And the Lord took pity on me countless times, because He saw that I was ready, but that I did not know how to organize myself for these matters. For there were many who hindered this mission. They even talked among themselves behind my back, saying, “Who is this fellow going into danger among enemies who do not know God?”

This was not from malice, but because they didn’t like the look of it – I bear witness to that myself – and you may take it that it was because of my naïveté. And I was not aware of the grace which was within me. Now I know that I should have understood this earlier.

Now, then: I have given a simple explanation to those of my brothers and fellow servants who believed in me because of what I preached – and continue to preach – for the strengthening and confirming of your faith. If only you too could be persuaded to do better! This will be my renown; for “it is the son’s wisdom that gives honour to the father.”

From this section it seems Patrick delayed somewhat in making his way to Ireland in obedience to the Lord’s vision. God was calling him, but apparently it took Patrick a while to get moving, and that for three reasons.

First, those with whom he shared his vision and burden seem to have discouraged such an idea. They could not imagine him, an unlearned and untrained lay person, taking up so dangerous a calling among the wild pagan peoples of Ireland. Their question, “Who is this fellow going into danger among enemies who do not know God?”, tells us much about the

state of Church leadership in Britain in the middle of the 5th century, a condition loudly decried by Gildas in *The Ruin of Britain* a few years after the turn of the 6th century. Patrick knew that Christ had come among his enemies for the purpose of bringing the Kingdom and salvation. Why should he not do likewise?

Second, and perhaps because of this discouragement, Patrick himself appears to have had some difficulty realizing that he had the grace of God to take up this calling. He was naïve in all such matters and did not perceive that God's grace could fit one such as he was for something he'd never done, nor even imagined, before. But the nagging prompts of the Spirit kept the vision alive until Patrick was finally determined to go.

Finally, once he did determine to go, he was hindered by his lack of practical skill in getting organized. How does one prepare for something he has never undertaken before, especially when no one who might help him seemed the least inclined to do so?

But he praised the Lord for bearing with him through this dithering, and for continuing to prompt him by the Spirit to follow the vision he had received. The "signs and wonders" he was shown beforehand may refer to his vision of ministering among the Irish – an impossible task, it would seem, but one which God allowed him to fulfill. God bore with him, took pity on him, and continued gently to prompt and persuade him in the direction of his appointed mission.

Patrick took up his calling – in spite of opposition, ignorance, and self-doubt – and God confirmed his obedient faith with a fruitful ministry. What Patrick learned through this process he proclaimed to those entrusted to his care: Hear the Lord! Obey the Lord! Believe great things from the Lord! Go beyond yourself and your experiences and limitations, for the Lord's grace is sufficient to enable you to fulfill whatever He calls you to do!"

Thus Patrick urged his hearers to believe the Gospel and "to do better" than they or he had ever dared to ask or think. We need not stumble at Patrick's desire to be remembered. The legacy he sought, after all, was that of faithful disciples who were going beyond him in every respect.

Looking out from heaven in the centuries that followed, Patrick must have been pleased.

Whatever He Could

You know, and so does God, how I have been among you since my youth in truth of faith and in sincerity of heart. I have kept, and will keep, faith even with the heathen among whom I live. God knows I have deceived none of them, nor even thought of doing so, lest I stir up an attack on God and His church, and on all of us, and lest the Name of the Lord be blasphemed through me. For it is written, "Woe to the person through whom the Name of the Lord is blasphemed."

For, although I lack skill in anything, yet I have tried to do whatever I could to safeguard myself in my dealings, even with the Christian brethren and virgins of Christ and with religious women, who would spontaneously offer me gifts of throw some of their personal ornaments on the altar. These I repeatedly gave back to them, and they were offended with me, not knowing why I did so. But I did it from the hope of eternity, because of which I aimed at being careful of my integrity in all dealings, so that the unbelievers should not catch me out in any detail, and so that I would not in the smallest matter give a pretext to them to disparage or denigrate the ministry of my service.

I am a firm believer in the idea that, within one's calling, anything worth doing is worth doing poorly, if poorly is the best you can do. I think Patrick would agree.

Patrick understood that the success of the Gospel depends on the way believers live it as much as on how effective they are in proclaiming the Kingdom. He kept a close watch on his conduct at all times, since he did not want to give anyone an occasion for stumbling, for blaspheming, or for discrediting or attacking his ministry. He sounds like Paul protesting his clean conscience before Jews and Gentiles alike, and this should not surprise us. Patrick's life and ministry were grounded in the Word of God, which he took to heart and lived faithfully in all his ways.

Life in Ireland must have been rather tenuous at times. Patrick suggests that the infant Church there was vulnerable to attacks, and, as we see from his *Letter against the Soldiers of Coroticus*, these could often be violent and deadly. He had to be very careful in his conduct and demeanor not to provoke pagan powers to lash out at those who were becoming followers of Christ. For the most part, he seems to have succeeded in this effort.

Patrick was also careful about his conduct toward the brethren in Christ. He took care whenever he had any dealings with women, and he received

no gifts from anyone. He was wise enough to know that there would always be someone ready to impugn his motives if it turned out he was receiving gifts from those he served. This, in fact, was precisely the charge being laid against him by people in Britain. However, as he here insists to his Irish constituency, they knew there was nothing to such a spurious charge.

We note the indirect way that Patrick likens the behavior of those who are summoning him to Britain to pagans. Unbelievers would always be looking for some way to undermine or interrupt a successful and growing ministry like Patrick's. What excuse did the bishops in Britain have?

Freely Received, Freely Given

Perhaps when I baptized so many thousands of people I was hoping for as much as a ha'penny from any of them? Tell me and I will return it to them. Or when the Lord, through my very ordinary person, ordained clergy everywhere and I assigned his ministry to each of them free of charge – if I asked them for so much as the price of my shoe, speak out against me and I will return it to you.

On the contrary, I spent money on your behalf, so that they would receive me. And I journeyed among you, and everywhere, for your sake, often in danger, even to the outermost parts beyond which there is nothing, places where no one had ever arrived to baptise or to ordain clergy or to confirm the people. By the Lord's grace, I achieved all these results, conscientiously and gladly for your salvation.

Patrick is addressing his remarks at this point to those in Ireland who have been the beneficiaries of his ministry. His detractors in Britain were trying to get him to come home and answer false charges that he had pursued his ministry in Ireland for purely financial reasons. We can hear the outrage in Patrick's voice as he invites those he has served for so long to bring forth any evidence that he ever sought any financial return from anyone. Patrick reminds them that he had in fact spent his own money to be able to preach the Gospel to the Irish, by which he means he paid local rulers for the right to come and teach within their territory. This, too, his Irish constituents would have known to be the truth.

Patrick is forced to boasting here, and we sense it is not his natural inclination. Many thousands were won to Christ, baptized, and confirmed by Patrick, without his requesting their financial support. Men were called, trained, and ordained to pastoral ministry "everywhere", even though he

had no credentials or experience to train them. Nor did he charge them for this labor of love. Patrick succeeded in training men by the strength of his life and example. The next generation after Patrick would continue his work, and the generation they trained opened the flood gates of Irish missions to Scotland and the Continent. Whatever Patrick did in training these men, he may have done it poorly, as some might think, but he did it well.

And, as he is always quick to remind us, all his achievements were because of the grace of God. The Lord used this “very ordinary person” to train clergy; by “the Lord’s grace” he achieved all the quite amazing results he outlines here, and which all his Irish readers would have known to be so. And the Lord met his every financial need, apparently without his having to mount an ongoing fund-raising effort to support himself.

The Lord had freely chosen, saved, and called Patrick, and sent him freely to Ireland to do the work of the Gospel. Freely he had received, and freely did he give his life and means for the cause of the Kingdom in that wild, pagan land.

A Question of Value

At times I gave presents to chiefs, apart from the stipend I paid their sons who travelled with me. Nevertheless, once, they seized me with my companions, and on that occasion they were most eager to kill me. But the time had not come. They stole everything they found in our possession, and they put me in chains. On the fourteenth day the Lord freed me from their power, and our belongings were returned to us, through the intervention of God and of firm friends whom we had had the foresight to acquire. However, you have seen for yourselves how much I have paid to the administrators of justice in all the districts I was in the habit of visiting regularly. I reckon to have contributed to them no less than the price of fifteen men, so that you could continue to enjoy me, and I you, in God. I have no regret, nor have I done with it: I still spend, and will spend more. The Lord has power to grant to me that I may continue in the future to spend my very self for the sake of your souls.

Patrick valued the work of the Gospel and the souls of God’s people more than material possessions. These fees he reports to have paid strike me as being more on the order of tolls or licenses than of bribes. One doesn’t normally boast about having bribed some public official. But the way of things in those days required that, if Patrick wanted to move freely about the lands of some local patriarch or chief, he had to show good

faith, that is, that he intended only good for the people to whom he wished to preach. A fee or toll to the ruler would have helped to indicate his good intentions. It's not clear where Patrick acquired the money to do this, but just because, as he reports, he did not seek gifts of money from those he served does not mean people did not rally to his aid from time to time.

But this did not mean that Patrick was loved by all. As he reports, he was taken advantage of and plotted against, at least once, and doubtless more than that. Patrick testifies to God's use of "secondary means" (*Westminster Confession of Faith*) in delivering him. Friends he had previously made, perhaps within the very district and among the followers of the very chief who plundered and enslaved him, came to stand for his deliverance and restoration. Patrick saw the hand of God in this, so that the work could continue. "The Lord has power" to rule in the affairs of men, providing all the needs of His people and directing the affairs of rulers and nations in such a way as to allow His work to continue going forward.

Patrick's priorities were clear and uncompromised. He was a servant of God to the Irish people, precisely in obedience to the vision that had brought him there in the first place. Men in Britain could raise questions about his motives all they wanted, but those he served knew the truth. Rather than acquire wealth for himself, Patrick spent himself tirelessly and selflessly for the souls of the Irish.

Thrown into the Hands of God

Look: I call God into my soul as a witness, that I am not lying. Nor would I wish to write to you to ingratiate myself or to gain anything from you, nor because I look for respect from any of you. If my integrity is not clear to you, it is enough for me that I am sure of it in my heart. Moreover, He Who made His promise to the faithful, He never lies.

But I see that already, in the present, I am lifted up beyond measure by the Lord, and I was not worthy of that, nor of the way He has provided for me; since I know for certain that I am better fitted for poverty and misfortune than for wealth and luxury. But the Lord Christ too was poor for our sake. I am indigent and unfortunate, and even if I wanted wealth, I do not have it. But that is not how I estimate myself; because I expect daily to be killed, betrayed, or brought back into slavery, or something of the kind. But, because of the promise of heaven, I fear none of these things. For I have thrown myself

into the hands of Almighty God, who reigns everywhere; as the prophet says, "Cast your cares upon God and He will sustain you."

Anyone who knew Patrick – and the authorities in Britain did not – could have testified that he was not making a profit on his work of ministry among the Irish. Patrick appears to have been continually on the move among the peoples of Ireland. He had no occasion to accumulate wealth, and there would not have been any way for him to enjoy it had he acquired it. He used the resources that came his way to further the work of his ministry, not to surround himself with things, pleasures, and luxury. Anyone who knew him could testify to that.

Anyone who didn't know him should simply leave him alone to do the Lord's work.

And even if the church leaders in Britain did not believe him, and continued to embrace the calumny charged to his name, he wasn't going to sweat about it. He knew his motives and condition, and his conscience, as Paul might have said, was good and clean before God and men.

Danger seems to have stalked Patrick's work much of the time. He had no wealth which local rulers might have coveted. What he did have in the way of money or valuables, he used to purchase entry among the local peoples, that he might preach the Gospel and disciple new converts. It would have been in the best material interests of local rulers to protect Patrick, since he was a steady revenue stream to their coffers. Still, Patrick would have had to deal with jealousy on the part of some rulers as well as local priests and druids. He had been taken captive more than once, as previously reported, and he knew it could happen again at any moment.

But he had thrown himself into the hands of Almighty God. What a wonderful image! Having thrown himself there, Patrick believed that God would provide for him and allow him to finish his work and the course chosen for him by the Lord.

This is the faith of one who truly knows the Lord and knows that he is pursuing the Lord's calling.

God's Ambassador

See: I commend my soul to my most trustworthy God, Whose ambassador I am, in spite of my obscurity. He accepts no person, but He chose me for this task, to be one of the least of His servants.

Because of this I will repay Him for all He has bestowed on me. But what shall I say, what shall I promise my Lord, since I have no power over anything unless He gives it to me? But let Him look into my innermost being: I greatly desire and am prepared for Him to grant me that I might drink from His chalice, as He has permitted to others who loved Him.

Therefore, let God never permit me to lose the people that He has won in the ends of the earth. I pray God to give me perseverance and to deign to allow me to give faithful testimony of Him until my death, for the sake of my God.

Patrick wanted his readers to be absolutely clear: He regarded himself as a person of no consequence except that which God assigned to him in the work he was given to do. God is trustworthy, Patrick was not. God is glorious, Patrick was rustic and unlearned. God is the Giver of all good things, Patrick was but His instrument for manifesting grace to God's people. God is all power, Patrick had power only to do what God had called and given Him to do. God is the Keeper of those whom Patrick was used to save. God is the Preserver of Patrick and all those who truly love and obey Him.

Patrick was not refusing to come to Britain and give an account of his ministry because he thought he was above such an indignity. Far be it. He believed that to do so would have been to consider himself above God and more important than he really was. He could not come to Britain, as if he were someone those bishops should be all worked up about anyway, because he belonged to God, Who chose Him for a work which was not yet finished.

He was God's ambassador to the Irish people, and only God could recall him. God had not done so yet, nor would He, and therefore Patrick would continue about the work appointed to him, and which he, from the depths of his heart, was committed to fulfill. Thus he expected to drink the full draught of the chalice of God's salvation, when God – not jealous British bishops – finally called him home.

One's sense of *calling* to the work of ministry – or any work in the Kingdom of God – is as important as one's *vision* of the work to be done. As God's ambassador, Patrick had both – a clear and compelling vision, and a from-the-heart calling to serve God in Ireland. With these two matters locked down, all the rest – training, acquisition of skills, resources, accountability, and so forth – would come in their proper time. And, in Patrick's case, did.

Living toward the Glory

And, if I have ever succeeded in following any good for the sake of God, Whom I love, I pray Him that, with others of His converts and captives in His Name, I may shed my blood, even though I might go without burial, or my miserable corpse might be torn limb from limb by dogs or wild beasts, or the birds of the air might devour it. I know for certain that if this should happen to me I should gain my soul along with my body, because, without any doubt, on that day we will rise again in the brightness of the sun, that is in the glory of Jesus Christ our Redeemer, as children of the living God and as co-beirs of Christ, and we will be moulded to His image, and we will then reign from Him and through Him and in Him.

In one of his many “Resolutions” Jonathan Edwards determined to think often of his death, and to envision all the pains and rigors of dying, so that he would be prepared for it and would not flinch when the worst might come to pass. James Fennimore Cooper has his main character, Deerslayer, undergo a trial of torture at the hand of his enemies, during which, because he set his mind to die a horrible death, he, a believer, was completely calm and totally collected, to the astonishment and admiration of his tormenters.

Patrick lived toward the day of glory, and he wanted to make certain that he would not fall back from attaining that objective by the prospects of a cruel death. He not only imagined dying a martyr, he actually prayed that it might happen! By preparing himself mentally for the worst possible death, he was able to see through that death to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he could live the rest of his mortal life courageously, confidently, and without fear of flinching, come what may. He was a true convert to the Lord; but more than that, he was totally captive to Him, and truly longed to be taken into captivity forever (Eph. 4.8).

How does a person learn to live this way? First, by loving the Lord. Patrick both feared God and loved Him, but the fear strengthened the

love, and the love motivated everything he did. He embraced the promises of God, especially the promise of *partaking* of Him (2 Pet. 1.4), and he lived every day in obedience to his calling and with a view to laying hold on the promises of God more fully. He was absolutely confident in the resurrection, and thus convinced that both his soul and body would be reunited in the glory of Christ. He saw this with the eye of the heart (Eph. 1.15-23), and he kept focused on that vision throughout all his days.

Patrick again refers to Jesus as the sun, an image that subsequent generations of Celtic Christians embraced, and which appears on many carved crosses of the 9th century and after, where Christ is fixed at the center of the cosmos, the risen Sun of glory ruling over all things.

And notice Patrick's confidence that he would share in that rule. The prepositions are significant: "from" Christ, "through" Christ, and "in" Christ (Latin, *ex*, *per*, and *in*). All power and authority and rule are in Jesus Christ, but He engages us *in* and *with* that power for the furthering of His Kingdom, both now and in eternal glory, *through* His power at work in us. The more we dwell *in* Christ and fix our minds *on* Christ, the more we will know power *from* Christ to extend His Kingdom in and through our lives. In the day of glory, we will be completely transformed to refract the glory of the image of Jesus Christ through our own unique personhood. From Patrick we can learn how to live toward that glory here and now.

The Gift of God

For the sun is that which we see rising daily at His command, but it will never reign, nor will its splendour last forever. And all those who worship it will be subject to grievous punishment. We, however, worship the true sun, Christ, who will never perish. Nor will those who do His bidding, but they will continue forever just as Christ will continue forever, He Who reigns with God the Father Almighty and with the Holy Spirit before time and now and in eternity. Amen.

See: again and again, I would reiterate what I wish to express in my declaration. I testify, in truth and in joy of heart, before God and His angels, that I never had any reason beyond the Gospel and its promises, ever to return to that people from whom I had formerly escaped.

But I implore those God-fearing believers who agree to read or accept this document which the unlettered Patrick composed in Ireland, that none of them will attribute to an ignorant person like me any little thing I may have done, or any guidance I may have

given according to God's will. Consider, and let it be truly believed, that it may have been rather the gift of God. And that is what I have to say before I die.

Patrick brings his *Confession* to a close, insisting, as he has throughout, on three things: 1) He is a rustic, unlearned person, by implication, not clever enough to have devised the scheme with which he was being charged. 2) He only ever came back to Ireland for the sake of the Gospel, and not for any personal or pecuniary advantage. 3) Whatever he may have accomplished – and it was significant – the glory and credit are to be ascribed to God only, Who gave him the gift of his calling and ministry when he was yet alienated from Him.

Patrick was convinced that he had done nothing but the bidding of Jesus Christ in all his endeavors. He has served the Sun of Righteousness, Who rose with healing in His wings to redeem and restore a wandering youth. And he could not have done that bidding were it not for the help of the Triune God. Patrick's motivations were pure; his theology was Trinitarian and orthodox; his manner of life was humble and self-sacrificing; and all his accomplishments were only the grace of God at work in and through him. He pleads with those who read his *Confession* to take him at his word.

They would have to, because he had no intention of leaving the calling and gift of God to return to Britain to answer what he and everyone knew to be spurious charges on the part of jealous and overweening superiors.

With Patrick's mission, the dawn of the Celtic Revival rose onto the pages of history. Patrick was used by God to launch a new day, not only in the history of Ireland but in the history of the Christian movement. We have rarely seen the likes of Patrick since the Lord brought his life and ministry to a close.

But it is altogether possible that God may raise up more men and women like Him, a flame of devotion, discipline, and daring, to take the Gospel of the Kingdom into the darkness of our unbelieving age.

Patrick: *Letter against the Soldiers of Coroticus*

I, Patrick, a sinner and unlettered, declare myself to be a bishop publicly established in Ireland.

I am firmly of the opinion that whatever I am, I have received from God. I live among barbarian foreigners, a stranger and exile for the love of God – as He is my witness. And I would not have chosen to speak as harshly and as sternly as I must; but the zeal of God compels me, and Christ's truth urges me, for love of my neighbors and children on whose behalf I gave up my parents and my homeland, and my very life until death. If I am worthy, I will live for my God to teach the heathen, even if many look down on me.

With my own hand I have written and set out these words to be sent, transmitted and delivered to the soldiers of Coroticus – whom I will not call fellow-citizens of mine or of the holy Romans, but rather – because of their evil deeds – fellow-citizens of the demons. After the manner of the Enemy, they live in death, allies of the Scotti and of the apostate Picts. I denounce them as bloodthirsty men embued in the blood of the innocent Christians whom I have brought to life in countless numbers for God and whom I have confirmed in Christ.

Here is the second of the extant writings of Patrick. It amounts to a bull of excommunication against the soldiers of one Coroticus, for their violent crimes against Christian catechumens. We note Patrick's characteristic humility and deference to the will and call of God. He is unlettered, but a bishop; a person of no-account, except that God has called and used him mightily; an exile, yet at home among the people he loves and serves.

We shall learn more about the occasion of this letter as we proceed. For now, Patrick makes it clear from the beginning that this is a most serious missive, full of stern language and what some may regard as harsh statements and judgments. But Patrick's love for God and his neighbors will allow him to speak in no other way. Like Jesus, throwing the money-changers out of the temple, Patrick is determined to "clean house" of certain vile offenders.

The letter is addressed to the offenders, but, as we shall see, it was intended to be read to people who may have lived along the route of return of the soldiers of Coroticus. These men claimed to be citizens of the Kingdom of God, but their works proved otherwise. We note the

careful distinction Patrick makes between these men being neither “fellow-citizens of mine or of the holy Romans.” In other words, these men could not regard themselves as members either of the Church in Ireland or the Roman Catholic Church. Patrick, of course, was not unaware of the Roman Church; however, he saw his own mission as somehow distinct from and parallel to that communion. This distinction would continue on the part of Irish Christian leaders until the end of the seventh century.

We see Patrick’s shepherding heart: The people on whom suffering has been inflicted were *his* flock, the fruit of *his* labors, the disciples in *his* congregation. No wonder he was so inflamed at the violence to which they had been subjected.

Double Sorrow

On the day after the catechumens, wearing their white robes, had been anointed (the oil shone on their brows as they were cut down and slaughtered by the swords of those I have mentioned), I sent a holy priest whom I had taught from childhood, together with some clerics, with a letter requesting that they return some of the loot and the baptized captives to us. They laughed aloud at them.

On this account I do not know whom I should lament more, those who were killed or captured, or those whom Satan has so thoroughly ensnared. For they will be consigned along with him to the eternal pains of hell, since he who commits sin is a slave and will be known as a son of Satan.

Patrick was angry, and his letter reflects it. New Christians, men and women who had entrusted themselves to the care of the Church, and to Patrick’s own care, had been cut down while they were still wearing their baptismal robes and the oil of baptism (evidently applied with water) was dripping from their heads. Those who were not killed were carried off into captivity by Picts, soldiers under the command of one Coroticus, who were now on their way back to Scotland.

Upon hearing the news, Patrick was stunned and heartsick, both for those who had been martyred and for those who had murdered them. Apparently the soldiers of Coroticus had some kind of Christian confession, which is doubtless how they could have so easily ingratiated themselves, as foreigners, with this congregation of the Lord’s people. It grieved Patrick that his flock had been savaged; but it grieved him as well to know

that these “confessors” had put themselves in danger of hell.

It is instructive for us to see that Patrick did not shy away from talking about ultimate condemnation for those who had so egregiously betrayed their profession of faith. He knew what power lay back of all this, and it wasn't just Coroticus or whoever was in charge of this vile deed. Satan had motivated this, having taken captive the hearts of these soldiers.

Patrick made an attempt to get the captives released, but the soldiers of Coroticus laughed out loud at his emissaries, thus confirming that they were beyond repentance and closed to reason, persuasion, or pity. They may have been soldiers of Coroticus, but they were slaves to the devil.

But, as we shall see, Patrick would continue to hold out hope that his letter of excommunication might yet lead at least some of this horde to repent.

He is a true shepherd who, like Patrick, grieves with sorrow for the saved and the lost alike, and who wields the two-edged sword of edification and judgment (Ps. 149.5-9).

Excommunicated

Therefore, let every God-fearing person know that they – the murderer of kin, the fratricide, the ravening wolves who devour God's people like a meal of bread – are strangers to me and to my God, Whose ambassador I am. As it is said, “The wicked have destroyed Your Law, O Lord” – that law which at the end of time He has graciously planted most successfully in Ireland, so that it has been firmly founded there with God's favour.

I do not exceed my jurisdiction. I am one of those whom He called and predestined to preach the Gospel even to the end of the earth, in spite of no small persecution, although the Enemy shows his resentment through the petty tyrant Coroticus who fears neither God nor God's bishops whom He chose and to whom He gave that highest divine power, that those whom they bind on earth are also bound in heaven.

Therefore I most solemnly enjoin those of you who are holy and humble of heart to take heed that it is not permitted to show any honour to the likes of them, nor to eat or drink with them; nor ought their alms be accepted until they have done the most severe penance with shedding of tears to satisfy God, and until they free the servants and handmaids of Christ on whose behalf He died and was crucified. The Most High

rejects the gifts of the wicked. He who offers sacrifice from the goods of the poor is like him who sacrifices the son in the sight of the father.

We do not have a very high view of church discipline these days, even though the Lord Jesus taught it and the Apostles practiced it faithfully. Somehow we have come to regard this exercise of judging with righteous judgment (Jn. 7.24) to be something we ought not take seriously.

But Patrick took it seriously. And he expected every believer within his ecclesiastical jurisdiction to take it seriously as well.

Church discipline proceeds by stages. Doubtless some among those who were attacked by the soldiers of Coroticus protested their actions and called them to repent. That's the first level of discipline: church members approach those guilty of sin and call them to repent. The next level is to take the offenders before the authorities of the church. Patrick received the report of this incident, and he made an effort to call the soldiers of Coroticus to return their captives and stolen property, and to repent of their sins. His emissaries were laughed to scorn. The only step of discipline left to him was to excommunicate from his fellowship and that of the Body of Christ those so-called Christians who had committed this terrible sin.

The offenders were to understand that, having been excommunicated from the Body of Christ, they were also cut off from fellowship with God.

Note the obligations of excommunication: Those upon whom discipline falls are to seek repentance with tears, and to restore justice to the community, so that they might be renewed in fellowship with God and His Church. Those who read Patrick's letter and heard this act of discipline were to participate in it responsibly. They must have no fellowship with the excommunicated, nor receive any gifts or alms from them. They must show by their actions in relation to those excommunicated that they were, indeed, cut off from Christ's Body and from Christ.

Patrick understood his authority as a bishop. He had been entrusted with the oversight of the flocks of God in Ireland, but the only power he could wield was spiritual. But Patrick knew how truly effective that power could be. He had seen the Gospel transform the pagan peoples of Ireland. He had endured persecution, trusting in the power of God's presence and

grace. And he believed the enemy of the saints could be thwarted by the proper exercise of the spiritual authority entrusted to him.

There is power in doing God's work God's way. Patrick understood this. He did not send a posse after the soldiers of Coroticus. He did not send an arbitration team. He sent the Word of God and the authority of the Body of Christ.

We do not know how this situation turned out, but, for the better part of the Celtic Revival, church leaders continued to rely on the authority of God's Word rather than of princes or swords or simony for carrying out the work appointed to them. Patrick had set the example, and two centuries of faithful leaders followed it well.

Patrick's Authority

It is said that: "The wealth he has accumulated unjustly will be vomited from his belly; the angel of death drags him away; he will be scourged by the rage of dragons; the adder's tongue will kill him; and an inextinguishable fire will consume him."

And further: "Woe to them who fill themselves with what is not theirs;" or: "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?"

It would be tedious to analyse in subtle detail and to pick out texts on such greed from the whole of the Law. Avarice is a mortal sin.

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods." "Thou shalt not kill." A murderer cannot be with Christ.

"He who hates his brother will be known as a murderer;" – or: "He who does not love his brother remains in death."

Some might suggest that Patrick is acting in a rather heavy-handed way by excommunicating the soldiers of Coroticus with such strong words. Does not love require more patience and tolerance? But Patrick was only expressing within the scope of his episcopal power what the Scriptures teach about those who transgress the Law of God and do violence against their neighbors. His job, as overseer of the Irish believers, was to act according to the Word of God.

Patrick wanted those who read his letter to understand that he was taking

this action of excommunication on the authority of the Word of God, and not just on the basis of some personal pique. Those who would not comply with the ban of excommunication would find themselves at odds, not just with Patrick, but with the very Word of God.

We note also Patrick's readiness to wield the Sword of God's Law in this situation. Unlike many pastors and church leaders in our day, Patrick understood the Law of God to be in continuing effect unto righteousness for the followers of Christ. He lived and taught it and, as we see here, appealed to it for his decisions and leadership in the Irish Church.

Patrick understood that the Kingdom of God makes progress on earth through a kind of spiritual violence, in which, as we wield the weapons of our warfare, the treachery of the evil one is exposed, attacked, and negated by the living and powerful Word of God and the faith of His saints.

O, that such confidence might be found among church leaders in our own day!

Savage Wolves

How much greater a criminal is he who stains his hands with the blood of those children of God whom He won recently at the ends of the earth through my unworthy preaching. Was it without God's intervention or in a purely human way that I came to Ireland? Who was it that drove me? It is by the Spirit that I am prevented from seeing any of my family again. Is it from me that the mercy comes which I show to that same people which once enslaved me and pillaged the male and female slaves of my father's household? According to the world's reckoning I was a gentleman, the son of a decurion. I have sold my patrimony, without shame or regret, for the benefit of others. In short, I serve Christ on behalf of a foreign people for the ineffable glory of life everlasting which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And – if my own people will not give me recognition – “a prophet is without honour in his own country.”

Perhaps we are not of the one fold, and do not have the one God. As He says: “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”

It makes no sense: one destroys, the other builds. I do not ask for what is mine. It is not my kindness, but that God has placed in my heart an urge to be one of His hunters

or fishers, whom He once foretold would come in the last days.

It is begrudged to me. What should I do, Lord? I am treated with great contempt. Look: Your sheep are mangled around me and are carried off, and by these robbers I have spoken of, on the orders of the hostile Coroticus. Far from the love of God is he who betrays Christians into the hands of Scotti and Picts. Savage wolves devour the Lord's flock, just when, by great care, it has reached its best growth in Ireland – and I cannot number the sons of the Scotti and daughters of chiefs who were monks and virgins of Christ. Therefore do not accept this injury to be just; it is unacceptable all the way to hell.

Patrick has acted courageously and justly against vicious men. There was no doubt some danger in this, but that did not trouble Patrick one bit.

It may, however, have troubled some of those who, upon reading this letter of excommunication, would have understood that they were expected to shun the soldiers of Coroticus as they were returning along their way to their native land. Surely these men who acted with such violence against innocent Christians would not restrain themselves against those who refused to make provision for them?

This section of Patrick's letter appears to make their infraction a personal slight. Coroticus and his band have not only offended God, they have offended God's faithful servant, Patrick. There is a reason for this. Soon Coroticus and his men will be out of Ireland. But Patrick will still be there – the servant of the Lord, the man whom all knew and acknowledged as God's chosen vessel for the evangelizing of Ireland, who by his faithful labors had brought many to a saving knowledge of Christ.

The soldiers of Coroticus came to Ireland to take and kill, charged with their mission by a hostile and uncaring, ruthless enemy of the flocks of God. Patrick had come to Ireland, sent by God and His Spirit, sacrificing his comfortable life in Britain, to serve and give life to those who were dead in sin, and God had abundantly shown His pleasure in Patrick's work.

So it should have been obvious whose side God was on; if the people reading this epistle refused to carry out the decree of excommunication, and to take their part in making that decision effective, they would be found on the side of the savage wolves who had ravaged the flocks of God, and against Patrick and the God Who had brought him to Ireland.

They would be “criminals” like the soldiers of Coroticus if they did not act with as much courage and resolve in carrying out the ban of excommunication as Patrick had in issuing it.

Those who were of the true fold of the Lord, Patrick knew, would not be found siding with those who scattered the Lord’s sheep, but with him who had gathered them for Jesus Christ. Patrick’s “people” in Britain did not give him recognition; indeed, they tried to thwart and throttle his ministry to Ireland. Coroticus and his soldiers did not recognize Patrick’s authority.

Where would the Christian people of Ireland come down in this matter? As tenders of the flock, or savage wolves against the purposes of God? As those who built up the body of Christ, or as those who destroyed it?

Faith requires courage when savage wolves are at large in the land.

No Friends of Sin

Who among the holy would not be horrified at the thought of making merry or enjoying festivity in the company of the likes of them? They have filled their houses with what has been robbed from dead Christians; they live by plunder. The wretched creatures do not realize what they do, offering deadly poison as food to their children and their friends, just as Eve did not understand that she too was offering death to her husband.

So it is with all who commit evil: they bring on themselves the perpetual punishment of death.

Patrick is not merely expressing indignation here. He knows that the power of excommunication – which he hopes will bring the soldiers of Coroticus to their senses – depends on the people of God fulfilling their part in refusing to have any converse with those who are under the ban. Rather than fellowship with this bloody band, as they make their way back to their native country, the people of God must completely isolate them. Any fellowship they might share with them would be a fellowship of evil, and believers are not to be friendly with sin, but to hate it (Ps. 97.10).

But we detect a note of grace, perhaps even hope, in Patrick’s words: The soldiers of Coroticus were only following orders, doing what soldiers in a foreign land do. They did not understand the gravity of their crimes and they do not realize the dire consequences of divine judgment that will

flow from them. Patrick doesn't want to *punish* the soldiers of Coroticus; he wants to *enlighten* them, and, for this to happen, the people of God along the route of their return needed to help them see the magnitude of their sin by refusing to support or share with them in any way. If the soldiers of Coroticus needed an explanation for their lack of hospitality, the people could show them this letter from their bishop.

Grace sometimes works in strange ways. By being “ungracious” to the soldiers of Coroticus, the people reading Patrick's letter may possibly be the means by which grace will break through to some of them, bringing understanding of the horrors they have committed and, perhaps, repentance unto life.

Tell 'em Like It Is

This is the custom of the Christian Roman Gauls: they send worthy holy men to the Franks and other heathens with as many thousand solidi as are needed for the redemption of baptized captives. You [Coroticus], on the other hand, kill them and sell them to a foreign people that does not know God; you betray the members of Christ as if in a brothel. What kind of hope do you have in God, or, for that matter, does anyone who goes along with you or who speaks to you in terms of respect? God will judge. It is indeed written: “Not only those who do evil, but even those who consent are to be damned.”

Here again it's not hard to see that Patrick is writing to two audiences, Coroticus and his soldiers, and the people who will receive this letter and are in the path of the soldiers' retreat. The message is clear: true Christians act like Christians; they do not betray their brethren or in any way consort with those who do.

Patrick's reference to the “Christian Roman Gauls” is telling, I think. First, it lets us know that Patrick's awareness of the Kingdom was not limited to his work in Ireland. By some means he managed to stay apprised of what the Lord was doing in other lands as well. By referring to the believers there in this way he indicates his understanding that they were part of the Roman Catholic Church and under the oversight and authority of the Bishop of Rome. He does not describe himself in this way; rather, Patrick's overseers are in Britain, yet he does not feel particularly bound to submit to their requests that he return to Britain and give an account of his ministry, since they opposed his going in the first place, and seemed to be recalling him out of jealousy rather than true shepherds'

hearts. Patrick was a bishop like them, an equal, and he considered that he was in a better position than those in Britain to decide what was best for the progress of the Kingdom in Ireland. When Columbanus arrived in Gaul, a century and a half after Patrick, he, too, regarded the Roman Church as a different communion from the one in which he served, and refused to submit to the authority of the Frankish bishops. He even wrote letters to their bishop in Rome, the pope, complaining about their poor performance as shepherds of the flocks in their charge.

It was Christian practice in the fifth century, and Patrick participated in this, to purchase people out of slavery from pagan tribes and rulers. Especially, Christians sought to redeem their brethren in the Lord, but they also worked for the liberation of others as well. This was done within the framework of existing laws, such as they were, and without violent rebellion or political scheming. They raised the funds necessary to purchase slaves from their owners, then set them free.

These days it is not considered good taste to suggest to people who profess faith in Christ that their actions indicate they actually have no faith at all. But Patrick did not hesitate. The stakes are too high. People who betray the Church and the cause of Christ cannot possibly expect any benefit from Him. And those who aid and abet their sinful ways show that they have no real love for Christ, either. Patrick expected those who professed faith in the Lord to act like true followers of the Lord. He knew that a day is coming when we will all have to give an account of our works, and he didn't want any of those in his care to come up short. So he wrote difficult words like these, which, we can be sure, reflect the general theme and tenor of all his preaching and teaching. Those who profess faith in Jesus must follow in the path of good works which He trod. Otherwise, what evidence (Heb. 11.1) will they present to the Lord to indicate that their faith is real, and not just a dead and meaningless confession?

To Die is Gain

I do not know what more I should say or tell of those dead children of God who were direly struck down by the sword. It is indeed written: "Weep with those who weep." And again: "If one sorrows, let all be sorrowful."

Therefore the church weeps and laments for those of its sons and daughters whom the sword has not yet slain but who have been carried away and transported to distant

lands where open, shameless, grave sin abounds. There free citizens have been sold, and Christians have been reduced to servitude which is all the worse since they are enslaved to the vilest worthless, apostate Picts.

For that reason I shall cry out in grief and sadness, "O most beautiful and loving brethren and children whom I begot in Christ (and whom I cannot number) – what can I do for you? I am inadequate to help either God or humans. The wickedness of the wicked has overcome us. We have been transformed into strangers. Perhaps they do not believe that we have been given the same baptism, or that we have the same God. For them it is shameful that we are Irish." But the saying is: "Have you not the one God? Why have you, one and all, abandoned your neighbor?"

For that reason I grieve for you; I grieve, my most loved ones. But then again, I rejoice within myself. I have not laboured in vain, and my exile has not been for nothing. For it is an unspeakably horrible crime that has taken place; but thank God, it was as baptized believers that you left this world for paradise. I have a vision of you: you have begun your journey to where there will be no night nor sorrow nor death any more; freed of your bonds, you will gambol like young calves and you will trample on the wicked, and they will be like ashes under your feet. And you will reign with the apostles and the prophets and the martyrs. You will gain an eternal kingdom as He Himself has promised. He said: "The will come from the east and the west and they will sleep with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven." "Outside are dogs and purveyors of evil and murderers;" – and: "The lying perjurers will be allotted the lake of fire." It is not without reason that the apostle says, "When the just man will barely be saved, where will the sinner and the unholy breaker of the law find himself?"

We glimpse here the powerful eschatological vision which motivated Patrick throughout his entire ministry. God has prepared a glorious day for those who believe the Good News of the Kingdom of heaven, and He is even now receiving His faithful ones into His presence with joy. But for sinners and all the wicked, only judgment looms.

Here below we lament the loss of loved ones, especially those taken so violently as was the case with these Irish martyrs. Many of those kidnapped by the soldiers of Coroticus might have wished to be among the slain. Awaiting them in the land of the Picts was slavery and additional torment and persecution. Patrick prayed with tears for both groups, those who had been lost, and those whose freedom had been taken from them.

These days, when foreign governments persecute Christians with impunity, when our own government refuses to intervene on behalf of

suffering Christians, if only in the name of human rights, it behooves us as believers to remember with tears those who are being martyred and those whose freedoms are curtailed on pain of imprisonment or worse. If believers in this country were to weep and pray and publish their complaints as loudly, pointedly, and courageously as Patrick, we might see some change in world policies with respect to our brothers and sisters in other lands.

But despite this tragedy, Patrick could rejoice. He knew where those martyred believers were and had a sense of what they were doing there. Interesting to note that he mentions their going to heaven is but the beginning of their journey to the full Kingdom. Heaven is not the end of our journey, but merely an interim place of rejoicing and further preparation for the new heavens and new earth yet to come. As wonderful, glorious, and filled with joy as heaven will, God has even more in store for us who believe and hold fast our confession to the end.

To live is Christ, as Patrick knew and proclaimed; but to die as one who has lived for Christ is gain.

A Coming Day

Where then will Coroticus and his most criminal crew – rebels against Christ – where will they see themselves, they who have distributed young Christian girls as prizes, for the sake of a wretched worldly kingdom which will pass away anyway in an instant? Like mere mist or smoke which is dispersed by the wind, deceitful sinners will perish in the face of the Lord; the just on the other hand will feast in perfect harmony with Christ; they will judge the nations and rule over wicked kings for ever and ever. Amen.

Patrick was not at all convinced that Coroticus and his wicked crew would be brought to justice in this life. He had pronounced excommunication on them, warning all believers in the path of their retreat not to have any dealings with them, except to read this bold letter in their presence whenever possible. Patrick regarded them as “rebels against Christ”, apparently because they professed faith in Him. Yet the example of their lives – plundering, murdering, man-stealing – bore witness to the reality of their hearts. They were more devoted to the ways of the world – power, sensuality, violence – than the ways of the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Coroticus and his men should “see themselves” not as Christians bound for eternal glory, but as sinners who, having never truly come to repentance or submission to the one true

King, should expect condemnation in the day of wrath.

Patrick understood the importance of the unseen world, here in particular, of the world to come. He pointed his readers beyond the trials and sorrows of this temporal realm to the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells. While here they are deprived and oppressed, there they will feast and rule over all things. Here the wicked may seem to gain ground; there they will be blown away into eternal oblivion. All must one day stand before the face of King Jesus, to give an account of the works they have done in the flesh. Toward that day, true Christians may look with hope and yearning. Unbelievers and those whose lives do not match their profession must be reminded that a day of judgment is coming. They must either amend their ways now, while they can, or suffer the eternal wrath of the King of Glory.

The Good News of the Kingdom is more clearly seen against the backdrop of the failing kingdoms of this world and coming King Who will judge all men according to their works.

If, If, If...

I bear witness before God and His angels that, for all my lack of learning, it will be as I have indicated. The words that I have expounded in Latin are not mine, but those of God and the apostles and prophets, who certainly have never lied. "Whoever will believe will be saved; whoever will not believe will be condemned." God has spoken.

Most earnestly, I ask whichever servant of God may be willing, to be the bearer of this letter, so that no one may for any reason withdraw or hide it, but rather so that it may be read aloud in public, and in the presence of Coroticus himself. Because, if some time God should inspire them to come back to their sense of Him and – however late – if they should repent of such unholiness as they have committed – murder of the Lord's brethren! – and if they should release the baptized prisoners whom they had captured; so may they merit life from God, and may they be restored to wholeness now and forever! Peace in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

It is fitting that Patrick's stern letter of warning and excommunication should end with an offer of hope and a benediction of peace. Patrick was a man who knew adversity. He had faced unlikely odds in the past, and God had done great things through him. How likely was it that Coroticus and his soldiers would repent? Only as likely as the grace of God, which everywhere abounds to lost sinners, and which Patrick experienced

throughout the course of his ministry. Patrick was as urgent to restore these vicious sinners as he was to excommunicate them, following the example of Paul with the man in Corinth (1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2.1-7).

Note the care as well with which Patrick links his actions to the Word of God. He has done nothing but what the prophets and apostles would approve. Patrick was a man of the Word of God. In this letter and his *Confession* we may identify over 125 quotations, references, or allusions to passages of Scripture, from both the Old and New Testaments. Patrick understood that the power and authority for his ministry were from God, according to His Word, and not at all from himself, much less from the clergy in Britain who were seeking to recall him from the field. He was confident in God's call and firmly rooted in God's Word.

So end the works of Patrick, slight though they be. In them we discover a man of humility, courage, conviction, grace, and evangelical firmness, who knew himself to be called of God to the work of evangelizing the Irish, and who would not be thwarted in following that call, whether by family, ecclesiastical superiors, pagan rulers, or violent heretics. It is no wonder that subsequent generations of Irish Christians looked back to this remarkable man with such admiration, or that, in seeking to communicate his greatness to their own generation, they enlarged the scope of his work beyond what he himself reported. In understanding Patrick and his ministry, we must begin with his own words, and we must be guided by those words as we consider what has been added of legend or lore by subsequent generations. Patrick's own words must guide our understanding of him, and of what we can learn from him for seeking the Kingdom and glory of God in our generation.

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 made 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.*

So begins the first Christian 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 may have been 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. As an ancient introduction puts it concerning the strict syllabic structure, “if anyone finds more in it, or less, it is an error.” If nothing else, this introduction suggests that Sechnall’s hymn was so popular that copies of it were being made for study, recitation, and singing very early after its composition.

An envoy (end-piece) serves as a kind of exclamation point to the whole poem and a means of encouraging readers to take up the praises of God for Patrick and his ministry. This may or may not have been composed by Sechnall, since its form is rather different from the rest of the poem.

Poetry features large part in the literature of the Celtic period. The Irish people before Christianity were illiterate, and poetry and song played a significant role in community life. The Irish druids used poetry and song to inspire people with stories of heroes and gods, to inculcate the values of Irish life, and to maintain continuity with the past into future generations. Irish Christians like Sechnall quickly understood the need to take existing cultural forms captive for the new narrative of the Gospel. By using song and poetry, they were simply entering their cultural space and

bringing a new narrative for a new life and future for the Irish people. In the literature from the Celtic Christian period we have verse from Sechnall, Colum Cille, Dallán Forgaill, Columbanus, Colmán mac Beógnai, and other anonymous poets, celebrating some aspect of the life of faith, enriching cultural life, and providing elements of a Celtic Christian legacy for the future. Poems were used to orient candidates to life in a monastic community, encourage saints in their labors, provide basic doctrinal instruction, praise the Lord for some aspect of the life of faith, and many other purposes.

Sechnall's 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. John Carey reports that one tradition says Sechnall presented the poem to Patrick before he revealed that he himself was the subject of the work. 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. "Audite Omnes Amantes" is the first of the hagiographical ("lives of saints") literature to arise from the period of the Celtic Revival. As such it lacks the strangeness and dubiousness of many of the later works, since it focuses strictly on the actual character and work of Patrick and eschews extraordinary or miraculous embellishments. Patrick's person and work, Sechnall seems to have believed, speak for themselves.

It is fitting that he 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 all who love God, so that they may be induced to praise and love Him more because of Patrick.

I find it interesting that Sechnall should compare 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 will 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). The result is that those who follow Patrick do not put him on a pedestal; 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.

John Carey's translation is excellent, even though it doesn't reproduce the strict metrical form of the original verse (doing so and ending up with as good a translation as John Carey's is next to impossible). Nevertheless, as in all translations, some of the original intent may be obscured. For example, in the second line, Sechnall refers to Patrick as "uiri in Christo, beati Patricii episcopi" – literally, "a man in Christ, blessed Patrick, bishop." Sechnall thus outlined Patrick's journey from being a mere *man*, to coming to *know Christ*, to being *blessed* in Him in many ways, and finally becoming *bishop* of the Irish. In the first line of the second stanza Patrick is described as "custodit" – custodian of – the commandments of Christ. The idea of "custodian" is stronger than "keeps", as John Carey has it. Custodians are caretakers who treasure and care for their trust as true stewards of God. They do not merely "keep" the commandments because of some sense of obligation or duty. Men are said to "follow" Patrick's example, but the Latin, "mirificum" implies following or "mirroring" with wonder and admiration.

The Celtic Revival began not because 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.

The Man God Chooses

*Constant in the fear of God, and immovable in faith,
upon whom, as upon Peter, the church is built:
whose apostleship has come from God,
against whom the gates of hell do not prevail.*

Sechnall was a contemporary of Patrick and his hymn, the first composed in Ireland, intends to call all those who love God (“omnes amantes”) to hear (“audite”) and celebrate the grace of God through the bishop of the Irish.

Sechnall continues his introduction to Patrick by a further word about the character of the man, from which he begins to transition into Patrick’s calling and work. Patrick was a man “constant in the fear of God.” This echoes Patrick’s own words concerning his calling to the work of ministry among the Irish. Grateful for the salvation of God and fearful of not being obedient to Him, Patrick departed for Ireland to do whatever the Lord would have him do. He continued in the fear and love of God throughout the course of his ministry – in which he spread the fear of God to many others.

He was also a man “immovable in faith”; he would have to have been. He believed God could use even an unschooled rustic such as himself to win the people of Ireland for the Kingdom of God, and he never wavered from that hope. Because of his faith he is like Peter, who also expressed the kind of faith on which the Lord builds His Church in every age (Matt. 16.16-18). Note the direct line to Peter and Paul in this stanza. He is like Peter in that he had faith in Jesus, and he is like Paul in that his apostleship came directly from the Lord, and not through the mediation of men (cf. Gal. 1.15-17; Col. 1.1; etc.). Here we might have expected Sechnall to try to establish Patrick’s authority from the Roman bishop, if, indeed such an appointment had been the case (as later hagiographers allege). But Patrick was not commissioned to the Irish by the bishop of Rome, like his predecessor in Ireland, Palladius, had been. Indeed, his own (British) church authorities opposed his going to Ireland, so he used his inheritance to get there and begin his ministry. He was elevated to the bishopric by his colleagues in Ireland, and as a result of his fearless and faithful work among the Irish people.

Patrick had the fear of God – based on the Word of God and visions granted him at various times – together with the faith of Peter and a calling like Paul’s. How could he *not* take up the work God had been preparing him for in Ireland?

The Irish Church thus has its roots apart from Roman Catholicism in a strictly indigenous and orthodox form of Christianity that derives from the Lord and His Word and links to the apostles, but not to Rome. This

helps to explain why, a century or so after Sechnall, Columbanus, an Irish missionary in Gaul, could write so boldly to the Pope in Rome, complaining about the local priests and bishops and asserting his own views on various matters, but without any sense of being under the jurisdiction of the Roman pontiff. The evidence of God's blessing on Patrick was that the counsels, schemes, machinations, and contrivances of the devil and hell ("the gates of hell") could not prevail to keep Patrick from fulfilling his calling from the Lord.

Sechnall begins his work telling us something about the man God chooses for so important and difficult a work as Patrick undertook. He must be a man of faith and obedience, with a close relationship to the Lord and a worshipful way of life, a man who radiates the glory and goodness of the Lord in every way. Patrick was such a man, and, for generations, these requirements would also be inculcated, nurtured, required, and celebrated in those who followed in Patrick's legacy into the work of ministry in the Irish Church.

In our day ordaining pastors is primarily a matter of determining whether they know the Bible and understand sound doctrine. Personal testimony and a sense of calling to the ministry are also considered, but not with the same intensity or depth. The character of their lives and the nature of their relationship to God are not examined with nearly the kind of "fine tooth combing" as is given their doctrinal views and Biblical understanding.

But, as Sechnall seems at pains to emphasize, God works through men of great character to do great works for His Kingdom. When we begin to train men as truly spiritual followers of Christ, and not just good thinkers and preachers, we'll start seeing more of the kind of results Patrick did from his labors.

The Mission of Patrick

*The Lord chose him so that he might teach the barbarian
nations, so that he might fish with nets of doctrine;
so that he might draw believers out of the world to grace,
and they might follow the Lord to a heavenly seat.*

*He sells the precious talents of the Gospel of Christ
and demands them back, with interest, from the pagans of Ireland.*

*As his payment for the toil of this laborious voyage
he will share with Christ the joy of the kingdom of heaven.*

Having outlined Patrick's character, Sechnall now moves to a summary of his mission. The ultimate objective of Patrick's mission in Ireland was to bring many to Christ, so that they might share in His glory ("a heavenly seat"). The focus of Patrick's ministry was thus on Christ and His determination to call out a people for God from among the pagan peoples of the world. The means whereby Patrick accomplished this are all based in the Word of God, as Sechnall explained.

Patrick was sent to "teach the barbarian/nations..." Patrick led with the Word of God; he would "fish" for those the Lord was calling to Himself with "nets of doctrine." This recalls Patrick's own words, from his *Confession*, in which he understood himself to have been called to "fish well and diligently" with the Word of the Lord. Patrick did not try to "dumb down" the Word of God. He did not appeal to the pagans on the basis of reason, experience, or "natural law." He put sound doctrine before the illiterate pagans of Ireland, evidently trusting that the Word of God could do its best work to the extent that it was most faithfully proclaimed.

But note the use of "draw" by Sechnall to describe Patrick's evangelizing efforts. He did not "snag" the lost or otherwise "pressure" them to believe. His approach was to "draw" those to Christ who were hearing him, a word suggesting patient and laborious effort. Patrick kept the grace of the Gospel in the foreground and undoubtedly held out the vision of Christ in glory to attract those who heard him, encouraging them to come to Christ on His "heavenly seat." Patrick preached Christ not only as a gracious Savior, but as ruling Lord.

Patrick's call to his hearers included a clear sense of what this would require of them. Patrick offered the Gospel freely, but he demanded much – "with interest" – of those who believed. Following Christ to His heavenly seat requires commitment, Patrick explained – being drawn out of a pagan lifestyle into the way of life embodied and taught by Patrick himself.

Patrick accepted no payment for his ministry from those he served. He is adamant about this matter in his *Confession*, and Sechnall alludes to it here as well. His only "payment" for the hard work he undertook in leading the

Irish people to Christ was the joy he looked forward to with Christ in His Kingdom. While we do not know all the details of how Patrick's ministry was funded, we know, from his own testimony, that he spent his own money, at least initially, to do the work to which God had called him.

Patrick was a man of the Word in his life and his ministry. God honored his holy example and faithful teaching to bring many of the Irish to faith and to begin a revival that lasted nearly four centuries.

For the Kingdom

*A faithful minister of God, and a splendid messenger,
he gave to the good the example and form of an apostle,
preaching to the people of God with both words and deeds
so that he might with a good act inspire the one whom his words did not move.*

*He has glory with Christ and honour in the world,
being revered by all as an angel of God
whom God has sent, like Paul, as an apostle to the pagans,
that he might show men the way to God's kingdom.*

*Humble in spirit and body out of fear of God,
upon whom the Lord rests because of his good works,
bearing in his righteous flesh the stigmata of Christ
and carrying his Cross, in which alone he glories.*

Sechnall intended to connect Patrick and his work with that of the apostles, specifically, Paul. This is as it should be. Only if our work springs from the same root, traces the same trajectory, follows the same outline, and is confirmed by the same works and results as the apostles can we have assurance that ours is a true calling from the Lord.

He refers to Patrick as a "minister," a "messenger," and as having the "form of an apostle." Like the apostles Patrick understood that his ministry must be both in Word and life (cf. Acts 6.5; 1 Pet. 5.1-3). Sechnall then more pointedly identifies Patrick and his mission with Paul, who was also sent to the pagans, and who, like Patrick, preached the Kingdom and bore the marks of Christ in his body (Gal. 6.17). We should not read that last idea as referring to the so-called "stigmata," claims for which only began to appear in Church history in the late Middle Ages. The word, "stigma," here in the accusative plural, refers only to

identifying marks or traits which are normally looked upon with disdain. Patrick's body was marked with the evidence of labors devoted to the Lord, including poverty, as well as the physical suffering which sometimes results. As Paul suffered in his body, bearing the cross appointed to him by Christ, so Patrick suffered as well. Each suffered because of good works and a powerful example to support their preaching. The "marks" of his ministry were faithfulness in life and work, together with the fruit of harvest and suffering such labors normally entail.

Like Paul he was regarded as an "angel," not literally, but as a messenger from heaven, blessed with a solemn and powerful charge (cf. Gal. 4.14). The same term is used in Revelation 2 and 3 to refer to the pastors of the seven churches in Asia Minor. It indicates a high and holy calling which must be faithfully pursued if the blessing of God is to come to His flocks.

Also like the apostles, Patrick both preached the Gospel of the Kingdom and lived the Kingdom life, so that his manner of being in the world supported and bore witness to the truth of what he preached. Many were convinced of the Gospel Patrick preached because of his humility, poverty, generosity, and integrity. Thus he brought the glory of Christ into the world and received honor from all who saw and knew him. The goal of Patrick's ministry was to "show men the way to God's kingdom." He was not merely saving souls or dispensing blessings. He was calling, leading, and equipping people for life in an entirely new realm of existence.

The fear of God led Patrick to faithfulness and humility, and the blessing of the Lord rested on him as a result. In Patrick, Sechnall insists, the work, ministry, and lifestyle of the apostles – but more important, of the Kingdom of God – were established in Ireland. From these a legacy of revival would issue and spread to Britain and the European continent over the next two centuries.

Word and Deed

*Tirelessly he feeds the faithful with heavenly feasts,
lest those who are seen with Christ should fail upon the way:
he gives them the words of the Gospel like loaves,
multiplied in his hands like manna.*

He keeps his flesh chaste for love of the Lord,

*flesh which he has prepared as a temple for the Holy Spirit
(by whom it is constantly moved to pure deeds),
and which he offers to the Lord as a pleasing living sacrifice.*

*He is the light of the world, the great burning light of the Gospel,
raised aloft on a candlestick, illuminating the whole age;
the fortified city of a king, set atop a mountain,
in which there is great abundance of the Lord's possessions.*

*For he will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven,
who fulfills in good deeds what he teaches in holy words;
who by his good example goes forth as a model to the faithful,
and guards faith in God in his pure heart.*

Sechnall emphasizes the soundness and constancy both of Patrick's teaching and his life. Ministers of the Gospel have three tools to bring to their task – prayer, the Word, and their personal lives. Sechnall will describe Patrick's prayer life a bit later. For now, he is giving us a glimpse into the saint's "curriculum" and the kind of person he was as he ministered among the pagans in Ireland.

As to his teaching, a twofold focus appears. While (as we've seen) Patrick taught from the apostles of the New Testament and the Law (and Prophets) of the Old, his focus was on the Gospel and the Kingdom. He fed even the saints with the Gospel. We can never experience the fullness of the Good News that we have in Jesus. There is always more about Jesus and more of His great salvation for us to know. It is the duty of ministers to keep urging the salvation of the Lord on those who believe, to feed them with "heavenly feasts" and "loaves" of Gospel nutrition. We get the sense that Patrick preached and taught the Gospel often and personally as each had need. He held out the Gospel to the world of His day, using all the gifts God had concentrated in him to make the Good News of Jesus known.

The second emphasis was on the Kingdom, but this is simply an elaboration of the Gospel. Either our Gospel is the Gospel of the Kingdom, or it's not the Gospel Jesus proclaimed and the apostles taught. Patrick taught as one who was "greatest in the kingdom of heaven," which means he lived and taught the Law of God (Matt. 5.17-19). Patrick taught and preached Jesus as Savior and Lord, and he called all who believed to follow in the path Jesus walked (1 Jn. 2.1-6). And Patrick's life backed up

his teaching so that people who heard him had no doubt concerning whether his words were reliable and true.

Patrick consecrated himself as a temple of the Spirit of God, and he diligently strove to live in a manner worthy of such a calling, as he himself reports in his *Confession*. His life was a living sacrifice to the Lord each day, “a model to the faithful”, who by “pure deeds” and “good deeds” showed the followers of Christ how the Good News of the Kingdom makes all things news.

Patrick thus served the purposes of the Kingdom of God in his life and ministry, preaching and working for righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit in every aspect of his ministry.

Fearless

*Boldly he announces the Lord's name to the pagans,
giving them the eternal grace of the bath of salvation,
praying daily to God on account of their sins,
offering sacrifices for their sake, as befitting to God.*

*He rejects all the world's glory for the sake of divine law,
considering it all mere scraps at its table;
nor is he disturbed by the hurtling lightning of this world,
but rejoices in hardships since he suffers for Christ's sake.*

These two quatrains contain a wealth of information about Patrick’s work of evangelism. Note that Patrick was fearless in proclaiming the Gospel. He did so “boldly,” not flinching at the threats against him and pains (“lightning of this world”) inflicted on him – including slavery, again – by those who opposed him. Patrick knew why he’d come to Ireland, and he would not be deterred. Nothing the world could do to hinder or harm him could keep Patrick from carrying out his calling and ministry.

Evangelism begins in prayer. Patrick prayed for his pagan neighbors, that they might see, and presumably repent, of their sins. Be sure that his preaching included the “divine law,” for by the Law, as Paul reminds us, comes the knowledge of sin (Rom. 7.7). He eschewed all earthly methods, means, or rewards (“the world’s glory”) and stuck with the Law and the Gospel as his message and method. These days we prefer to “market” the Gospel or to “friend” people into the Kingdom. Patrick would have

regarded these as the “world’s glory” – the world’s way of doing business. He considered these as “scraps” before the banquet of grace and truth encoded in the Law. The Law blasted bare the souls of unbelievers; the Gospel poured the Balm of Gilead on the stricken soul, preparing it for the “bath of salvation” in baptism.

Patrick bore his sufferings and deprivations without complaint, for he knew he was simply following in the footsteps of Christ. This, plus – as we’ve seen – his blameless character gave credibility to his message. We note that Patrick had a message to proclaim. The Gospel must be preached; people must *bear* the Good News and not just see it in our lives. The Gospel as Patrick preached it amounted to nothing more or less than the Name of Jesus – Who He is, what He did, what He’s doing now, and that He is coming back again. Patrick offered Jesus to pagans as a “sacrifice,” which an ancient gloss tells us is the meaning of the last line in the first quatrain. Patrick did not offer the “sacrifice” of the mass, but the blood and forgiveness of Jesus, to be received, embraced, and obeyed, as the key to entry into the household of faith. Baptism – the “bath” of salvation – was only available to those who professed faith and proved their profession by lives of repentance in line with the Law of God. Salvation is *by* the “eternal grace of God.” But it is *unto* eternal obedience to Him, beginning with His Law.

With this kind of ministry as its foundation and cornerstone, it’s little wonder the Celtic Revival made such an impact for nearly four centuries.

True Shepherd

*A good and faithful shepherd of the Gospel's flock
whom God has chosen to guard the people of God
and to nourish his folk with divine teachings –
for whom, following Christ's example, he has offered up his life.*

*The Saviour has, for his merits, exalted him as pontiff,
that he may instruct the clerics in celestial warfare,
giving them heavenly food and clothing
filled full of divine and holy speeches.*

*The King's messenger, inviting believers to the wedding,
himself adorned with a wedding garment,
he draws the heavenly wine in heavenly vessels,*

and serves God's people with drink from a spiritual goblet.

As fearless as Patrick was toward the pagans of Ireland, he was tender, caring, and nurturing to the Lord's sheep. Through Patrick's many believed in Christ, and communities of believers came into being in many parts of Ireland. Patrick understood the need of sound teaching and spiritual nourishment for the Lord's sheep, and that this must come both by formal instruction and by his own consistent example. He was able "to guard" (Latin, *custodire*) the flocks of God by offering his own life for their care – training pastors, and teaching, evangelizing, and leading God's people in worship.

Patrick "offered up his life" in the service of those who responded to the Gospel. He was the "pontiff" of all Irish believers throughout the course of his life (a choice of words on Sechnall's part intended to assert Irish Christian independence of Rome?). Sechnall confirms Patrick's claim to have trained and ordained other pastors for the flocks of God. The mention of "heavenly food and clothing" suggests that Patrick worked hard to equip the pastors of God's flock with spiritual vision, sound instruction, and blameless lives.

The "wine" referred in the last stanza above perhaps means all the salvation of God, following Psalm 116.12, 13. Patrick wanted the people in his charge to know as much as possible of the full and abundant life Jesus longed to give them. So he taught them and established them under sound shepherds and brought them to the Lord's feast where, together, they hoisted the cup of salvation and drank increasingly of its intoxicating and transforming goodness.

Patrick was a "good and faithful shepherd" indeed, and his example established a pattern that lasted for several generations as the Celtic Revival unfolded in the sixth and seventh centuries.

The Vision of Christ

*He has found a holy treasury in the holy book,
he has prophetically seen the Saviour's Godhead in the flesh.
He has bought that treasure with his holy and perfect merits:
he is called "Israel", for his soul sees God.*

He is the Lord's faithful witness in the catholic law,

*whose words are seasoned with the oracles of God,
that the bodies of men may not rot, eaten by worms,
but may be salted with heavenly savour for the Sacrifice.*

*True and illustrious husbandman of the field of the Gospel,
whose seeds are seen to be the Gospels of Christ
which, with his godly mouth, he sows in the ears of the wise,
ploughing their hearts and minds with the Holy Spirit.*

Sechnall considered that the key to Patrick's piety and prowess to be his vision of the exalted Christ and his dependence on the Word and Spirit of God.

In his own flesh Patrick had "seen" the Savior, as he reports in his *Confession*. He is called "Israel" because, like Jacob, he had "seen" God in visions and obeyed His call (cf. Gen. 28). Patrick received powerful visions from Christ on several occasions. In the absence of any sound or even consistent teaching of God's Word, the Lord seems to have used these visions to overcome all fear or doubt in Patrick and to impel him to take on the mission appointed for him. Even in Sechnall's day, Patrick continued to "see" Jesus in his soul. This vision of Christ, clear and consistent, drove Patrick to Christ's Word, where he was equipped for the work God had called him to do.

Patrick's preaching was Law and Gospel. In his mind these were not opposed to one another but complementary. He was faithful as a servant in the Law of God ("catholic" here does not mean "Roman Catholic" but "universal"). He supported his teaching of the Law with the rest of the "oracles of God" – perhaps a reference to the Old Testament (cf. Rom. 3.2). The mention of Patrick's use of the Scriptures – the "holy book" – as a "treasury" perhaps refers to Matthew 13.52 and is meant to suggest that Patrick taught and preached from all the Scriptures.

Certainly the gospels featured large in Patrick's teaching, for here the life, teaching, claims, and example of our Lord Jesus are most plainly in view.

Patrick worked his mission field faithfully, sowing the Gospel throughout, teaching from the example of a godly way of life, seeking out "the wise" for further instruction, and in all things working with the Spirit of God to bring fruit from among the Irish people. Sechnall understood that Patrick's piety and prowess were only because of Christ, His Word, and

His Spirit. Patrick was merely a human vessel. But he was a faithful vessel through whom God wrought on the hearts and minds of many people.

Representative of Christ

*Christ has chosen him as his representative on earth,
who frees captives from a twofold servitude:
very many men has he redeemed from slavery,
countless are they whom he has loosed from the Devil's dominion.*

*He sings hymns and the Apocalypse, and the psalms of God,
which he expounds to build up God's people.
Belief in the Trinity of sacred name is a law to him,
and he teaches one Substance with three Persons.*

*Girt with the belt of the Lord, by day and night
he prays to the Lord God without ceasing.
He will receive the reward of his vast labour
when he will reign as a saint with the apostles over Israel.*

Sechnall did not intend to be exhaustive in describing Patrick's ministry. We've already learned much about Patrick's life and the nature of his teaching. Patrick set a powerful example of moral and spiritual wholeness, and he faithfully taught the Word of God, both for evangelizing the lost and discipling the saved. But his ministry included aspects of justice and worship as a representative of Christ to the world.

As Jesus announced that He had come to set the captives free (Lk. 4.18-21), so Patrick did as well. He reports in his *Confession* that he purchased men from slavery, using the resources available to him in his ministry. Sechnall confirms that claim here, saying that "very many" were the slaves Patrick managed to liberate. He relates this work of justice to Patrick's ministry of leading lost men to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Justice and witness, it seems, were never far apart from one another in Patrick's work. In each case captives were being set free, just as Jesus had done during His ministry. Patrick truly represented His Savior, not just in life and teaching, but in works of justice and compassion.

Patrick also was a man who knew joy, and who showed that joy in worship, by singing and teaching the songs he sang to others. Patrick understood the importance of singing "to build up God's people." But

the songs of faith must be taught to the people, and not just sung. They must understand the words and have some sense of how the music works, if they are to gain the edification such singing can provide.

Patrick was fully orthodox, as Sechnall signals by indicating his holding to the Trinitarian formula hammered out by Church councils at Nicea (325), Ephesus (381), and Chalcedon (451). Patrick may have been isolated from the Church in Rome by geography, but not by profession. He was as orthodox as the best of the Church Fathers.

And Patrick was a man of prayer. One gloss on this last stanza quotes Augustine who says that praying without ceasing is accomplished when a man observes set times of prayer during the day. The Church had practiced set times prayer – the “hours of prayer” (Acts 3.1) – from the days of the apostles, and Sechnall may well be indicating that Patrick held to this practice in his day. He was never so busy with ministry that he did not maintain close fellowship with the Lord in prayer. Patrick clothed himself with and lived the “belt of truth” (Eph. 6.14), and this included serious devotion to a life of ongoing prayer as part of his “vast labour” for the Lord.

In Sechnall’s estimation, Patrick was a saint to be reckoned with the best of them. This seems a fitting way to conclude his lengthy poem about Patrick and his ministry. I see no reason to disagree.

The Legacy of Patrick

*A prayer:
The just will be remembered forever,
he will have no fear of bad repute.
We will utter Patrick’s praises forever,
that together with him God may protect us.*

Sechnall’s poem celebrating Patrick and his ministry ends with this brief “prayer.” But it doesn’t look much like a prayer, does it? In Latin, “prayer” is absolutely the *last* definition assigned to *oratio*, the word John Carey translates, “A prayer.”

It begins with a confident assertion: “The just will be remembered forever...” This was the purpose for Sechnall’s composing this poem in the first place, to recount in brief the character and achievement of

Patrick, and to keep his work alive in the memory of readers in every age. He wanted to make sure that the generation which succeeded Patrick would have the legacy of his life and work to draw from in carrying on the Kingdom work he began.

This is followed by what sounds like a benediction: “he will have no fear of bad repute.” Was this included as a personal word to Patrick, still alive at the time of the poem’s composition? A word of assurance and comfort to one who, in his later years, was being slandered and harassed by jealous religious leaders in Britain?

The next line sounds like an affirmation: “We will utter Patrick’s praises forever...” Here Sechnall encourages readers to spread the word about Patrick. His poem could be easily memorized, sung, and shared.

Then, finally, a kind of fervent wish, “...that together with him God may protect us,” that is, that the protection and blessing God poured out on Patrick might attend to all who take up the challenge and follow the example of his life. This is as close to a prayer as this *coda* or *envoi* gets in John Carey’s translation, and even then, God is not addressed, but spoken of in the third person.

Exactly what is this concluding part?

I think it is a prayer, one that involves, first, a supplication, then a declaration and petition to the Lord. By translating the Latin *erit* and *timebit*, both subjunctive forms, in a *jussive* sense, expressing a wish or desire, we end up with something like this in the first couplet:

*May the just be remembered forever,
may he have no fear of bad repute.*

Since Sechnall entitles this section, “A prayer”, we can assume he is expressing the desire of these two verbs to God. He pleads with God to preserve the story and honor of Patrick, and he invites readers to join with him in this prayer.

In that same prayerful mood, therefore, Sechnall takes up his own challenge: *He and his contemporaries* will do their part in keeping the true story of Patrick alive. They will secure his legacy. Thus, by their testimony, God will protect the praise and honor due His Name because of the life








and work of Patrick. And Sechnall expresses the desire that God will remember and protect him and those who read him as well.

This desire for a legacy is laudable: “I will cause Your Name to be remembered in all generations” (Ps. 45.17 ESV). “Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD...” (Ps. 102.18 ESV). Sechnall focused his account on the grace and mercy of God and Patrick’s faithfulness in proclaiming and extolling Him. Why would he *not* want that to continue? What Patrick had accomplished in his day, as he obeyed the grace and leading of the Lord, blessed many people, including Sechnall. It only makes sense that he would want others to benefit as well, generation after generation forever.

Reading this poem can do many things: inspire, delight, inform, instruct, exhort, admonish, and encourage among them. It provides a unique combination of historical and creational theology to nurture and strengthen us in our faith. As a work of historical theology, it recounts in brief the character and achievement of one man, Patrick, who launched the first phase of the Celtic Revival (ca. 430-800 AD). As a work of creational theology, it employs a very strict poetic form to create a song which, in the original, could be easily remembered and frequently sung in order strengthen faith in the Lord.

We may join Sechnall in praising God for the amazing work of grace He accomplished through Patrick. And we may learn from Sechnall how we, too, should prepare ourselves to be used of God as vessels of His grace and truth to our own unbelieving age.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- 1) How do you see that the theology of Patrick and Sechnall lines up with that of the Fathers of the Church, as expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds?

- 2) Describe the balance in Patrick's work between good works and the proclamation of the Gospel. Give examples of each.
 
- 3) Patrick protests that he was "rustic" and unlearned. He seems to have had no formal training for the work he undertook. Yet God used his work mightily. How should his example encourage believers today?

- 4) Poetry and song were important aspects of pre-Christian Celtic life in Ireland. Why did it make sense for Sechnall to employ these in seeking to instruct people in the work of Patrick?

- 5) Which of the images or metaphors in Sechnall's poem speak most pointedly to you about Patrick and his work? Why?

- 6) What shall we make of Patrick's visions? How did the Lord use these in his life? Did it make sense for the Lord to communicate with Patrick in this way? Does his having done so mean that we should expect the same? Why or why not?

- 7) How would you describe the use of Scripture by Patrick and Sechnall? Give some examples to illustrate your points.
- 8) How can you see that Sechnall wanted to create a line of continuity from Scripture and the Apostles to Patrick and his work? Why would this have been important?

- 9) What do you regard as the most important aspects of the character of Patrick, as you see him in these documents? Why?

- 10) What are the most important lessons for Christians today from this foundational period of the Celtic Revival? How might we expect to benefit in our day from more faithfully applying these lessons?

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