



The Tau Interfaith Franciscan Community.

Uniting all Faith Groups as ONE SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY through Love, Prayer and
Service

Tau News- March 2010.

**A BLESSED SAINT PATRICK'S DAY TO ALL OUR FRIENDS
ACROSS THE MILES**



Saint Patrick's emblem representing God of the Holy Trinity

On 17th March 2009 we celebrate an important event in the calendar when the world literally goes wild with being associated with that ancient land known as Ireland, a land of saints, scholars and sinners. Today, many will put on their finery to launch into a frenzy of Irishness, drowning their shamrocks in Guinness or some other intoxicating 'Holy liquid.'



There is reason why we who are members of the Tau community of Interfaith Franciscans celebrate the spiritual feast of this great and holy man is not partly due to the fact that he not only identified with the downtrodden of his day, but more importantly for the modern day lay monastic, St. Patrick is a key player in our safe return to embracing ancient values which empower the heart to honor their sacred contract and follow their dream. St. Patrick resurrected within the soul of his spiritual children a safe return to worshipping God through simplicity—a practical way of life which resonates very much with our Franciscan spirituality where we embrace the Natural world—the Franciscan soul. **For more about the historical St. Patrick, please read the enclosed attachment.**

The symbol of the Shamrock to the ancient Celts become their Bible! St. Patrick used simplicity to introduce his personal love of God to an oppressed people who were illiterate, impoverished as well being an enslaved people. Today, the shamrock worn on the lapels by many devotees, including the non Irish abroad, should carry a '**Health Warning**' for anyone seen wearing I in their lapels. Why? It could be said that they are putting out into the universe a profound spiritual statement to that simple Celtic belief, '**that God is Three Persons in One: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**' So, when we engage in the niceties of wishing each other a 'Happy Saint Patrick's Day, let us wear our shamrocks with a sense of real pride, commemorating not only the life of St. Patrick but let us thank God for the peoples who were inspired by his simple

Celtic spirituality and vision for a safe return to simplicity and a deep and abiding respect for the sacred in everything that God made.

There is another more important reason why we as interfaith lay monastic's within the Tau Community of Saint Francis have made a special effort this year to thank God for Saint Patrick. There is historical evidence which now suggests that when the young Patrick escaped his captors in Ireland, he travelled back to his home in England. This would confirm that he was not Irish but English. There is also a strong body of evidence based not on myth but on factual accounts that Saint Patrick landed on these very shores of the Morecambe Bay area to Heysham on the Lancashire coastline where he later established a Church which is dedicated to his name and where the ruins and graves are reminiscent of that period. Legend has it that Saint Patrick travelled with several Monks, including Saints Columcille and Kevin across the Bay to establish a monastic community with Saint Columba near to Kent's Bank, outside Grange over Sands, before travelling up to Iona in Scotland.

When we reflect on the 6th December 2002 when we said our farewells to friends back in Manchester, there was a sense of stepping out in complete faith with no guarantee whether we were right to leave Manchester or not. Looking back on the past 7 years, there has been an unseen power house driving us to continue the walk in faith with an inner knowing or call it a 'gut feeling' that all will be well and that we should continue to trust the heart more. Why we were led here is clearly God's plan for some event that He will reveal in the fullness of time. The spiritual birth of the Tau interfaith lay monastic community in an area where St. Patrick and his followers left a legacy for us to follow is beyond our comprehension. Knowing that the Tau Community of St. Francis shares the same sacred shores here in the South Lakes, or the ancient Celtic Kingdom of Rhegged, we embrace this resurgence of modern day lay monasticism with joy because the ancient Celtic Saints and monastic's are walking with us and sharing their sacred footprints with ours.

Though their monastic sites are now historical ruins which attract tourists, could there be another reason why many of us are so drawn to live and pray in these parts? I get the strong sense within my soul that our Celtic Saints and

brother monastics are guiding us to a new spiritual renaissance where the God of all beliefs has a plan for us to establish the Abbey of Saint Francis of Peace and Compassion where an interfaith lay monastic community will once more ring out the sacred bells inviting God's diverse religious family to come home. This home coming will be part of the eco sustainable vision which we the monastic's, oblates, friends and benefactors of the Tau Community of Saint Francis will enjoy heaven on earth.....

On the 17th March, today, the monastic's of our community began a 7 day novena of intense prayer which we started back on the 10th March for the Spirit of God to inspire more able bodied volunteers to support the new Tau League of Friends get the project off the ground. If your heart guides you to donate your time and skills, please email me.

To assist the Tau Community project further and boost the coffers, I have just completed a whole series of E Books in Pdf format to sell at a 1/3rd of the asking price. You can order your copy today using Pay Pal. Please visit the Monastery's website and click on the Downloads Page.

If you have been on my previous Academy website, you will have come across many CDs offering a range of materials such as meditation, relaxation exercise and formal teaching. There are 16 CDs plus 24 meditation/relaxation exercise condensed into one beautiful E Book called, **COMING HOME.** Normally, to buy all CD downloads on the website would cost you about **£94.99**. As a Special Offer for Easter 2010, we are offering this wonderful collection for only **£20.00**. Please click on the following web link to access a synopsis of this book and all other E Books. In addition, we have also converted all of my published works from hard copies into PDF E Books. <http://www.monasteryofsaintfrancis.com/Downloads.html>

Happy Saint Patrick's Day to all our Members, Friends and Benefactors. Special thanks to Sr Deirdre in Croyden, Surrey who purchased a Euro Lottery ticket for the cause. Unfortunately, it didn't come up trumps but who's to say that someone else's lottery ticket will not provide the 700K? We shall continue to trust in our God of great abundance. So, watch this space for news!

Please remember two of our community who will be celebrating their special birthdays this month. They are: Brother Murray (Cuthbert) on Wednesday 24th and Brother Rob on 7th April.

We shall continue to remember you in the daily prayers of our members who in their life of availability and vulnerability as lay monastic's from their monasteries without walls.

About Saint Patrick



Saint Patrick's Flag: a red saltire on a field of white

Saint Patrick's Cross (or **Saint Patrick's Saltire**) is a red [saltire](#) (X-shaped cross) on a white field, when considered as a symbol of [Ireland](#) or of [Saint Patrick](#), the [patron saint](#) of Ireland. In [heraldic](#) language, it may be [blazoned](#) *Argent, a saltire gules*. **Saint Patrick's Flag** is a flag composed of Saint Patrick's Saltire.

The antiquity of the association with Ireland and Saint Patrick has been questioned.^[1] The cross was used in the regalia of the [Order of Saint Patrick](#), established in 1783 as the premier [chivalric order](#) of the [Kingdom of Ireland](#), and later in the arms and flags of a number of institutions. After the [1800 Act of Union](#) joined Ireland with the [Kingdom of Great Britain](#), the saltire was added to the British flag to form the [Union Flag](#) still used by the [United Kingdom](#). Saint Patrick's Cross is rejected by many Irish nationalists as a British invention.^[1] There is no universally accepted [flag for the island of Ireland](#).



Insignia of a Knight of St Patrick: Gold crowns on a green shamrock on a red Cross of Saint Patrick



Some 1,500 years ago a teenage boy from what is now Great Britain was kidnapped and enslaved by marauders from a neighboring country. Not since Paris absconded with Helen of Troy has a kidnapping so changed the course of history.

The invading marauders came from fifth-century Ireland. The teenager they captured eventually escaped, but returned voluntarily some years later. In the meantime, he had become convinced that he was handpicked by God to convert the entire country to Christianity.

Apparently, he was right.

In the process of converting the primitive people of Ireland, however, the former slave experienced a conversion, too. In the years that followed, he not only shared God with the people of Ireland, but also grew in his understanding of God through them.

And so it was that a young Briton named Patricius died an Irishman named Patrick. And neither Ireland nor Christianity was ever quite the same. This conviction of Thomas Cahill, Catholic author of the best-selling book *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, was made clear in an exclusive interview for *St. Anthony Messenger* last August.

Patrick in Myth and History

No, Patrick never chased the snakes out of Ireland. Nor do we really know whether he used the shamrock to teach converts about the Trinity. But what we do know about St. Patrick is far more interesting than many of the legends that grew up around him.

And the fact that we know anything about him at all is as great a miracle as any that later traditions ascribe to him. For Patrick is literally the only individual we know from fifth-century Ireland or England. Not only do no other written records from Britain or Ireland exist from that century, but there are simply no written records at all from Ireland prior to Patrick's.

Surprisingly enough, however, scholarly debate about the authenticity of what Patrick left us is almost nonexistent. The chronology of his life is very confused. Indeed, we can't even identify for sure when he was born, ordained a bishop or died! Experts agree, however, that the two examples of his writing that we have are clearly written by the same man, the man we know as Patrick.

These two brief documents, Patrick's *Confession* and his "Letter to Coroticus," are the basis for all we know of the historical Patrick. The *Confession*, because its purpose was to recount his own call to convert the Irish and to justify his mission to an apparently unsympathetic audience in Britain, is not a traditional biography.

And the "Letter to Coroticus," apparently an Irish warlord whom Patrick was forced to excommunicate, is a wonderful illustration of Patrick's prowess as a preacher but doesn't tell us much by way of traditional biography either.

The uncontested, if somewhat unspecific, biographical facts about Patrick are as follows:

Patrick was born Patricius somewhere in Roman Britain to a relatively wealthy family. He was not religious as a youth and, in fact, claims to have practically renounced the faith of his family.

While in his teens, Patrick was kidnapped in a raid and transported to Ireland, where he was enslaved to a local warlord and worked as a shepherd until he escaped six years later.

He returned home and eventually undertook studies for the priesthood with the intention of returning to Ireland as a missionary to his former captors. It is not clear when he actually made it back to Ireland, or for how long he ministered there, but it was definitely for a number of years.

By the time he wrote the *Confession* and the "Letter to Coroticus," Patrick was recognized by both Irish natives and the Church hierarchy as the bishop of Ireland. By this time, also, he had clearly made a permanent commitment to Ireland and intended to die there. Scholars have no reason to doubt that he did.

Stranger in a Strange Land

Though Patrick's writings tell us little in terms of names and dates, they do reveal much about Patrick the man. But traditional biographies of Patrick, suggests Thomas Cahill, author and former religion editor for Doubleday, don't really do him justice.

"I think they missed a lot of what Patrick was about because they approached him as a kind of plaster-of-paris saint. Two things," he says, "really shine through his *Confession*: his humility and his strength. That strength is what has been missing in the earlier biographies and portraits of Patrick."

In fact, Cahill says, "The Patrick who came back to Ireland with the gospel was a real tough guy. He couldn't have been anything else—only a very tough man could have hoped to survive those people. I don't mean to say he wasn't a saint—he was a great saint—but he was a very rough, vigorous man."

And he was his own man, writes Noel Dermot O'Donoghue, O.D.C., in his 1987 biography *Aristocracy of Soul: Patrick of Ireland*. When Patrick receives the vision that he believes calls him to evangelize the Irish, he doesn't hesitate, despite the fact that in 400 years no one had taken the gospel beyond the boundaries of Roman civilization. "He goes his own way following his own dreams and divine 'responses,'" says O'Donoghue, even though by doing so he is challenging the structure and ordinances of the Church he serves.

It doesn't take a scholar to recognize how he was able to do this. Patrick was so certain that he had been specifically called by God to do exactly what he did—return to the land of his captivity and convert the barbarians to Christianity—that his *Confession* leaves even the modern reader little room for doubt. In this certainty, Patrick finds his strength—strength sufficient, in fact, to overcome every obstacle he will encounter in the remaining years of his life.

The first obstacle was his education. The six years Patrick was enslaved in Ireland put him permanently behind his peers in terms of his classical education. His Latin would always be poor. Later in life when he used Latin less frequently, it was practically unintelligible at times.

Despite the fact that Patrick would be self-conscious about his literary limitations to the end of his days, he was not uneducated. One suspects, however, that he was primarily self-educated. His use of biblical quotations, Cahill says, "is far more accurate and appropriate than many of the Fathers of the Church."

And although almost any other qualification pales by comparison to Patrick's zeal for his mission, he must have set off equipped with an intellect both subtle and supple. For he not only decided, unilaterally, to do what no man in 400 years of Christian history had done before him—to carry the gospel message to the ends of the earth—but he also found a way to do it.

It's hard to grasp just what an accomplishment that was, says Cahill. When Patrick decided to "willingly go back to the barbarians with the gospel," Cahill explains, "he had to figure out how to bring the values of the gospel he loved to such people. These were people who still practiced human sacrifice, who warred with each other constantly and who were renowned as the great slave traders of the day.

"That was not a simple thing. This was before courses were given to missionaries in what is now called inculturation—how to plant the gospel in such a culture," Cahill says. "No one had ever even thought about how to do it; Patrick had to work his way through it himself.

"I know that Paul is referred to as the first missionary," Cahill says, "but Paul never got out of the Greco-Roman world, nor did any of the apostles. And here we are, five centuries after Jesus, who had urged his disciples to preach to all nations. They just didn't do that. And the reason they didn't is because they did not consider the barbarians to be human."

Patron Saint of the Excluded

Patrick's enslavement as an adolescent had to have been a critical factor in the development of his unique attitude toward the Irish. Even in captivity, he must have come to know them as human, hence, deserving of the gospel. This set the stage for his call to convert them.

As a result of his enslavement, Cahill, whose particular interest is the "hinges of history," says, "Patrick grew into a man that he truly would not otherwise have become. So you would have to say that Patrick's kidnapping was a great grace, not just for the people of Ireland, but for all of Western history."

Had he never been kidnapped, it seems quite likely that it would have been decades, probably centuries, before Ireland was converted. It certainly would not have been in a position to "save civilization," as Cahill so dramatically puts it in his book, when the Roman Empire crumbled and literacy was lost—lost, that is, by all but the Irish monasteries planted by Patrick and his successors.

Not surprisingly, his own experience in captivity left Patrick with a virulent hatred of the institution of slavery, and he would later become the first human being in the history of the world to speak out unequivocally against it.

"The papacy did not condemn slavery as immoral until the end of the 19th century," Cahill says, "but here is Patrick in the fifth century seeing it for what it is. I think that shows enormous insight and courage and a tremendous 'fellow feeling'—the ability to suffer with other people, and to understand what other people's suffering is like."

In fact, although he is renowned as the patron saint of the country and the people he evangelized, a better advocate than Patrick cannot be found for anyone disadvantaged or living on the fringes of society.

"He really is one of the great saints of the downtrodden and excluded—people that no one else wants anything to do with," Cahill says.

Women find a great advocate in Patrick. Unlike his contemporary, St. Augustine, to whom actual women seemed more like personifications of the temptations of the flesh than persons, Patrick's *Confession* speaks of women as individuals. Cahill points out, for example, Patrick's account of "a blessed woman, Irish by birth, noble, extraordinarily beautiful—a true adult—whom I baptized."

Elsewhere, he lauds the strength and courage of Irish women: "But it is the women kept in slavery who suffer the most—and who keep their spirits up despite the menacing and terrorizing they must endure. The Lord gives grace to his many handmaids; and though they are forbidden to do so, they follow him with backbone." He is actually the first male Christian since Jesus, Cahill says, to speak well of women.

"The Fathers of the Church had the most horrible things to say—it's frightening to read what people like Augustine or John Chrysostom had to say about women. As remarkable as anything about Patrick is that in his writings there is never anything remotely like that."

In fact, there are clear instances of him saying warm and appreciative things about women. O'Donoghue adds, "It is clear that the man who wrote the *Confession* and "Coroticus" is deeply and sensitively open to women and womanhood....But he does not take refuge in either 'the pretentious asceticism, nor yet in that neurotic fear of and

contempt for the feminine' that has entered so deeply into the attitudes and structures of the Christian Church....In this respect he is a complete man."

Patrick the Mystic

Modern Catholics might have a hard time reconciling the portrait of the rugged individualist that Cahill describes with the current notion of a mystic. Yet O'Donoghue says that in the *Confession*, "the main lines of Patrick's spiritual development show through, and they are unmistakably the lines of a mystical journey." In fact, his biography of Patrick is the first in a series of works edited by Michael Glazier called "The Way of the Christian Mystics."

So what makes Patrick a mystic?

First, as recounted in the *Confession*, most of the major events in Patrick's life are preceded by a dream or vision. The visions were usually simple—almost self-explanatory—but they were also very vivid and carried enormous emotional impact with Patrick.

The first vision, which he received after six years of servitude in Ireland, came by way of a mysterious voice, heard in his sleep. "Your hungers are rewarded: You are going home," the voice said. "Look, your ship is ready." Indeed, some 200 miles away, there it was. (Patrick was nothing if not tenacious.)

The second vision—the one that came to him after he'd returned home and that called him back to Ireland—was equally straightforward. Victoricus, a man Patrick knew in Ireland, appeared to him in this dream, holding countless letters, one of which he handed to Patrick. The letter was entitled "The Voice of the Irish." Upon reading just the title, he heard a multitude of voices crying out to him: "Holy boy, we beg you to come and walk among us once more." He was so moved by this that he was unable to read further and woke up.

But the dream recurred again and again. Eventually Patrick tells his dismayed family of his plans to return to evangelize Ireland and soon begins his preparations for the priesthood. What is interesting about this dream calling Patrick to his lifelong mission to the Irish is that it comes not as a directive from God, but as a plea from the Irish.

It is also significant, O'Donoghue says, that "the voices in the dream do not ask for preaching or baptism but only that Patrick as one specially endowed should come back and share their lives, come and walk once more with them." In other words, at least according to his recollections decades later, Patrick wasn't commanded to bring civilization or salvation to the heathens. He was invited to live among them as Christ's witness.

When he finally returns to Ireland, he proceeds to treat the barbarians with the respect implicit in his dream. From the outset, Patrick feels humbled and honored that God has selected him to convert the Irish. Apparently he never doubted that he would be able to do so.

Patrick even came to see his own kidnapping as a grace, Cahill says. From the time Patrick sets off on his 200-mile journey to his "waiting ship," he is convinced "once and for all that he is surrounded by Providence and that he is really in the hands of God. And that is what gets him through the rest of his life. That is what enables him to do the incredible thing that he does by returning to the barbarians." And that closeness to God in no way diminishes as the years progress.

"Patrick was a mystic who felt the presence of God in every turn of the road," Cahill says. "God was palpable to him, and his relationship to him was very, very close." In fact, he says, it was very much like the relationship in the Bible that Jesus has with God the Father. "It is very familiar and comfortable, and that is how Patrick saw God at work in the world."

Patrick's Lasting Legacy

When Patrick looked back at the end of his life on his service to Ireland, Cahill says, he must have been pleased with his accomplishments.

By the time of his death, or shortly thereafter, "the Irish stopped slave trading and they never took it up again." Human sacrifice had become unthinkable. And although the Irish never stopped warring on one another, "war became much more confined and limited by what we might call the 'rules of warfare.'"

"I think that though he probably died knowing that he had succeeded [in his mission]," Cahill adds, "he also died hoping that success would be permanent and not temporary."

In fact, Patrick's success couldn't have been more permanent. Not only had he accomplished what he'd set out to do—convert the nation to Christ—but in the process he'd retrieved from obscurity the primary objective set by Christ for his apostles: the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

The inadvertent results of his conversion of Ireland, however, were equally astonishing and long-lasting.

First, as Cahill makes the strong case in *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, it is Patrick's conversion of Ireland that makes possible the preservation of Western thought through the early Dark Ages by the Irish monasteries founded by Patrick's successors. When the lights went out all over Europe, a candle still burned in Ireland. That candle was lit by Patrick.

Second, by converting the Irish pagans to Christianity without making any attempt to romanize them as well, he founded a new kind of Church, one that was both Catholic and primitive.

Third, with Patrick's introduction of Christianity to Ireland, Cahill says, the faith was introduced for the first time into a culture free of the sociopolitical baggage of Greco-Roman civilization. Prior to Patrick's gift of the faith to Ireland, to be Christian was to be Roman, or at least to be a product of Roman civilization.

The conversion of Ireland, however, sees the faith thrive in an entirely different environment—in a culture that celebrates rather than abnegates the natural, a culture in which, according to Cahill, there is a "sense of the world as holy, as the Book of God—as a healing mystery, fraught with divine messages."

In this tradition, Cahill explains, "there is a trust in the objects of sensory perception, which are seen as signposts from God. But there is also a sensuous reveling in the splendors of the created world, which would have made Roman Christians exceedingly uncomfortable."

As a result, Cahill says, "The early Irish Christianity planted in Ireland by Patrick is much more joyful and celebratory [than its Roman predecessor] in the way it approaches the natural world. It is really not a theology of sin but of the goodness of creation, and it really is intensely incarnational."

And since it was the Irish monks who served as the bridge between classical Christianity and the Middle Ages, medieval Christianity tends to reflect the celebratory nature of Irish spirituality rather than the gloom and sin-centeredness of its classical predecessor.

Finally, Patrick gave the Irish himself—knowingly, willingly, joyfully, proudly. He did this despite the fact that, even at the end of his life, "after 30 years of missionary activity," Cahill says, "he knows he's still living in a very scary place. You don't change people—people who offer human sacrifice and who war on one another constantly—you don't change them overnight."

But change them he eventually did. And the example of his life—his courage, his intelligence, his compassion and his incredible, indomitable faith—made the lives of all Catholics, even those living 1,500 years later, just a little easier.

To millions of modern-day Catholics, an Ireland without Patrick is unthinkable. But so, too, Cahill says, is the prospect of modern life without saints like him. The saints are for the ages, and ours no less than any other.

"Life would be almost unbearable without such people," he says. "I think it *would be* unbearable. The saints are for everyone—believer, unbeliever, Christian, non-

Christian—it doesn't really matter. They are the people who say by their lives that human life is valuable—that my life is valuable—and that there is a reason for living. Without them, history would just be one horror after another."

Patrick at the Judgment

There is no question that Patrick taught us by his example that all life is, indeed, precious. Yet it's hard to imagine that there isn't a soft spot in his heart reserved just for the Irish.

In fact, there is an old legend that promises that on the last day, though Christ will judge all the other nations, it will be St. Patrick sitting in judgment on the Irish.

When asked whether that spelled good news or bad news for the Irish, Cahill doesn't hesitate.

"That's *great* news for the Irish," he says with a laugh.

Introduction

Saint Patrick

Saint Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland. St Patrick's Day is **March 17**.

St Patrick is traditionally associated with the Shamrock plant, which he used to explain the concept of the Trinity.

St Patrick's value doesn't really come from the historical details but from the inspiration of a man who returned to the country where he had been a child slave, in order to bring the message of Christ.

Facts in brief

- St Patrick really existed
- Taken to Ireland as a slave at age 16
- Escaped after 6 years
- Became a Christian priest, and later a Bishop
- Returned to Ireland as a missionary
- Played a major part in converting the Irish to Christianity
- Some of his writings survive, the *Confessio* and the *Letter to Coroticus*

Doubtful extra facts in brief

- Born in 387 AD in Scotland, in Kilpatrick
 - alternative sources suggest he was born at Banwen in Wales
- His original name was Maewyn Succat; he became Patrick when he became a bishop
- Studied in France at the monastery of St Martin's in Tours
- Went to Ireland in 432 AD
- Died either in 461 AD, or 493 AD (unlikely)
- Taught by Saint Germaine

Top

Patrick's life

Patrick's early life

Patrick's family lived on a small estate near the village of Bannavem Taburniae. (This name cannot be placed on any current map of England or Wales.)

Although his father was a deacon, Patrick was not a believer:

I did not, indeed, know the true God

Saint Patrick, Confessio, translated from Latin



Enslaved by pirates

In his teens, Patrick was captured by a gang of Irish pirates and taken as a slave to Ireland. Patrick came to believe that this was a punishment for his lack of faith.

He was put to work for six years herding sheep and pigs on Slemish mountain in County Antrim. While he was a shepherd, Patrick spent much of his time praying.

I used to stay out in the forests and on the mountain and I would wake up before daylight to pray in the snow, in icy coldness, in rain, and I used to feel neither ill nor any slothfulness, because, as I now see, the Spirit was burning in me at that time.

Saint Patrick, Confessio, translated from Latin

Escapes after six years

In an escape bid (while he was a captive in Ireland), Patrick stowed away on a boat bound for Britain, and it landed not far from where his parents lived.

Patrick decided to follow his vocation to become a priest, and after a dream he was inspired to return to Ireland.



I seemed to hear the voice of those who were beside the forest of Foclut which is near the western sea, and they were crying as if with one voice: 'We beg you, holy youth, that you shall come and shall walk again among us.'

Saint Patrick, Confessio, translated from Latin

Patrick spent several years studying before he felt ready to take up the life of a missionary.

Patrick's return to Ireland as a missionary

Patrick eventually returned to Ireland, as the country's second bishop, and brought the message of Christ to many people who had never heard it.

As a missionary Patrick baptised many thousands of people.

It was not an easy task. Patrick tells how his life was at risk, and how he was sometimes imprisoned by the local pagan chiefs. We know that Patrick sometimes made things easier by giving gifts to the chiefs.

Poignantly, Patrick also writes of his longing to leave Ireland.

How I would have loved to go to my country and my parents, and also to Gaul in order to visit the brethren and to see the face of the saints of my Lord! God knows it! that I much desired it; but I am bound by the Spirit

Saint Patrick, Confessio, translated from Latin



But he knew his duty, and remained in Ireland.

Patrick had problems not only with himself, and the local pagans, but suffered from some backbiting by fellow clergy who accused him of seeking to win personal status.

The claim nearly broke his heart, but anyone who reads his *Confessio* will soon realise that Patrick was the last person to think that he deserved any glory for himself.

I ought unceasingly to give thanks to God who often pardoned my folly and my carelessness, and on more than one occasion spared His great wrath on me, who was chosen to be His helper and who was slow to do as was shown me and as the Spirit suggested.

Saint Patrick, Confessio, translated from Latin

Top

Patrick's writings

Patrick's world

Patrick clearly perceived Ireland and Britain to be far apart, but he also perceived Britain and Gaul to be very close.

Seeing the world like that is as much a matter of theology as geography.

Jerusalem was believed to be the centre of the world and around Jerusalem were countries which were occupied by the Romans. On one particular far-flung corner was the island of Ireland - the last bastion of paganism (as Patrick saw it).

Patrick's education

Patrick not only knew the language of his British parents but studied and understood Latin. Just how much Latin would have been used in Ireland (so far away from Rome) by that time is uncertain, but in his own writing there is evidence that he was well read in both secular writing and the Scriptures.

And in addition to the language of his British parents, and the Latin he learned as a priest, Patrick would have had to speak Irish to communicate God's message to the people.



Patrick's mission

Patrick believed that when "every nation" had heard the gospel, Christ would then return, and it seems he believed that he was the person to bring this message of Christianity to the land that represented this "final hurdle" of God's plan.

Patrick's writings

In Ireland, probably towards the end of his life, Bishop Patrick wrote about his life and work in the *Confessio*.

He begins:

I am the sinner Patrick. I am the most unsophisticated of people, the least of Christians, and for many people I am the most contemptible...

I was taken into captivity in Ireland - at that time I was ignorant of the true God - along with many thousand others.

This was our punishment for departing from God, abandoning his commandments, and ignoring our priests who kept on warning us about our salvation...

St Patrick, Confessio, translated from Latin

[Top](#)

Myths about Patrick

Was Saint Patrick Irish?



No he wasn't; he was British. When he was a child, raiders from Ireland came and took him from Britain.

In Ireland, he was sold as a slave, and spent about six years tending sheep and pigs around Slemish (a mountain formed from the plug of an extinct volcano just outside Ballymena in what is now Co Antrim).

As a stowaway, he returned to his parents, but felt called by God to return to preach to the people of Ireland.

Did St Patrick bring Christianity to Ireland?

Probably not. There's good evidence that there were believers in Ireland before Patrick arrived.

Pope Celestine had sent Palladius to that part of the world years before.

Anyway, it would be unlikely that a country with such strong trading links with the Roman Empire would have remained untouched by Christianity.



Did St Patrick drive the snakes out of Ireland?

No he didn't, because it's unlikely there ever were any snakes in Ireland.

The snake may be a reference to serpent, a symbol of evil, and the driving out a reference to Patrick's mission to rid Ireland of pagan influence.