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# SPIRIT SET IN MOTION: A FIFTH-CENTURY LANDSCAPE OF ST. PATRICK'S MISSION TO IRELAND

Patrician scholar Pat Egan has lived a varied and colorful life. With two M.A.'s in Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama and Theology, respectively, and doctoral work in both areas at University College Dublin, the University of Chicago and Northwestern University, she was well-equipped to teach at junior high, high school, and college levels as well as at the English Language Institute in Dublin and the Dublin Language Institute at Blackrock College. She has written for newspapers, produced volumes of poetry, and has just published *A Book of Hours* with Conciliar Press. Church and community work, mothering "the best son in the world," and helping to establish an Orthodox Church in midcoast Maine fill her days. Pat's interview reflects her decades of work on the life and writings of St. Patrick; for most of us it will be a deeper look at an old and cherished friend.

RTE: Pat, could you tell us what first drew you to study St. Patrick?

PAT: I knew Patrick was my patron saint from the time I was a little girl of four or five and developed an affection for him for no better reason than that he had been given to me. He grew in my estimation after a St. Patrick's Day parade in New York which was proof positive that I had no ordinary run-of-

*Opposite: Patricia Colling Egan.*

the-mill saint, but a great one capable of inspiring all those mounted policeman, marching bands, bagpipers, girl and boy scouts, and soldiers of every description to proudly walk through New York City in his honor.

Somewhere in my childish mind I harbored a conviction that he, being close to God, knew me. But I needed to know him too. Once the snakes and imaginative legends were disposed of and I was able to read accounts of his life based on his own writings, I began to know and love him more, developing an attachment through prayer that made him one of the most influential persons in my life, although I am more aware of it now, in hindsight, than ever before.

My paternal grandfather came from Ireland via Paris where he had studied briefly for the priesthood. Through him my father had a dim understanding of our family background as hereditary *brehons* which explained why the professions of law and teaching tended to predominate among us. The *brehons* were part of the druidic class (along with poets and historians) in Ireland and, even after becoming Christian, functioned primarily as lawyers, judges and teachers, both in settling disputes among the people and as advisors to rulers. In the Middle Ages, *brehons* from our family were attached to most of the rulers around Ireland.

In addition, as the Anglo-Normans took increasing control over the country and its culture, members of our family conducted castle schools in parts of Connaught and Munster where Irish law, history and poetry were taught and where young boys copied manuscripts in the same way that they had been copied by monks in the Irish monasteries that were now gradually being replaced by the Continental orders.

Brehons figure in Patrick's *Confessio* as the authorities who allowed or prevented movement from place to place, and whom he had to bribe if he was to take the Gospel from one small kingdom or jurisdiction (*tuatha*) to another. St. Patrick, being the person responsible for converting my family to Christianity, had a familial-nationalistic hold on me as well as a profoundly religious one.

Although all of the following has a bearing on my study of Patrick, none of it is as important as the simple kinship I have always felt with him. Nothing really mattered to him but God—and everything mattered *in* God. He was a burning bush who experienced his life in this world with the keen perception of one who loves with God's own love. When he said or sang "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is in me bless His holy Name, "he was expressing his whole life.

RTE: As we begin talking about St. Patrick, I'd like to bring up a common problem that we have in venerating the early Irish and British saints. There is often not much contemporary material, so you end up depending on sources that seem so mixed with legend that there is difficulty in seeing the historical person.

PAT: That's the special value of St. Patrick because, if you think of saints in general (not just the Irish and British), there are relatively few, particularly among the earliest ones, who you can touch through their own writings. Patrick's letters enable you to encounter the man.

RTE: So, historians accept that this autobiography is truly his, an early fifth-century "Confession" roughly contemporary to Blessed Augustine's?

PAT: There's no doubt. Without going into mind-numbing detail, we have eight early manuscripts from locations in the British Isles and northern France containing his letters. The great Austrian paleographer and Latinist, Ludwig Bieler, meticulously studied these manuscripts and, from them, provided scholars with a Latin text of Patrick's writings from which to work. Along with the fifth-century *Confessio* we have his *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus*, (usually abbreviated as the Letter to Coroticus) which is also a very valuable source for facts about his life.

RTE: Can you describe the *Confessio* and the Letter?

PAT: The *Confessio* isn't really autobiography in the strict sense. Patrick writes it as an *apologia pro vita sua*, a defence of his life: Aware of impending death, his purpose was simply to glorify God's actions and presence in his life and to clarify the misapprehensions regarding him and his work that might have undermined the Irish mission.

One reason he did not come to his own defense earlier was because he was aware that decades of speaking nothing but Irish might have had a deleterious effect on his Latin prose, allowing his ecclesiastical enemies to dismiss the effort if it did not come up to their literary standards:

This is why I have thought about writing for a long time but hesitated until now: I was afraid of being cut into pieces by the slander of man because I have not been educated like others who have absorbed to the full both law and Sacred Scripture alike and who, from childhood,

have never changed their language but rather perfected the one they had. For our words and manner of speaking have been translated into a foreign tongue. (*Conf. I*)

Yet we must beware of taking Patrick's protestations of rhetorical insufficiency too literally. Dr. David Howlett in *The Book of Letters of Saint Patrick the Bishop* (Dublin, 1994) demonstrates Patrick's use of chiasmic patterns in both letters and, although we may not always recognize them because they are from a pre-Vulgate translation, Patrick skillfully weaves quotations from every single book of the Bible into his letters.

I believe that Patrick, because he had missed his rhetorical education, had to catch up to his peers when he went to study for the diaconate and they may very well have taunted him initially. While they had been polishing their literary and oratorical skills, he was tending cattle as a slave in a foreign country and speaking another language. So, although well born, he had become an outsider when he began his clerical studies instead of a member of the comfortable upper-class clique who had spent their adolescent years together. Add to this the fact that he must have excelled in order to have been designated Patricius and elevated to the episcopacy. The "outsider" had now been distinguished more than most of his colleagues, provoking envy in at least one of them (whose slanders he is answering in the *Confessio*).

All of these considerations, as well as his having been betrayed and humiliated by his most trusted friend (something I will deal with at length in a forthcoming book), influence Patrick's state of mind as he addresses fellow clerics in the *Confessio*, many of whom strongly disapproved of the idea of bringing the faith to the pagan Irish from the beginning.

A close reading of the *Confessio* indicates that some had accused him of profiting financially from his missionary activities. Such an accusation is absurd because he was from a well-to-do noble Roman family with no need to embark on a hazardous mission in order to enrich himself. Patrick cries out:

Was I expecting, perhaps, even half a scruple from any of the thousands I baptized? Prove it to me and I will pay you back. Or if, when the Lord ordained clerics everywhere through my humble person and I performed the service for free, I asked any of them for even the price of my shoe, tell me to my face and I will pay you back more. Have I sacrificed for you [the Irish] so that they [his enemies] might ensnare me? (*Conf. IV*)

*Opposite: Page from 8th-century Book of Armagh, annals containing St. Patrick's Confessio.*

sonomy tuas electus

Ille hinc hinc  
et hinc

**B**onorum ratio carissimum deo  
dilecto inuitat carissimum  
deus omnia opto et beneficia  
caris et alium de omnibus  
operationibus facio propter in  
pelli qualiter et propter agere  
anima tua carissimum hinc ual  
de uentibus de hinc et hinc  
num pro hinc et hinc uita tua et  
tu inuitat ambulat maior  
hinc horum in habeo gratiam de  
ut hinc et hinc inuitat

Patrick also tells us in the *Letter to Coroticus* that he “sold his noble status.” The villa and its lands, owned by his grandfather and his father, would have passed to the next generation when Patrick’s father died. Like all others of his class, Patrick’s status was linked to his property. Since he was never going to return from Ireland once he embarked on his mission, he could neither oversee the property nor serve as part of the local *curia* governing his *civitas*. And, as he would need money for the mission, this is probably the reason why he sold his inheritance, spending it for the Irish mission while, at the same time, refusing to accept the many gifts offered him by his converts, precisely in order to shield both himself and his assistants against such accusations.

I did it for the hope of what endures. So I preserved myself carefully that they might ensnare neither me nor the servants of my household in any legal charge of infidelity. I did not give unbelievers the slightest opportunity to slander or speak ill. (*Conf. IV*)

I think Patrick realized at the end of his life that to continue his silence regarding these accusations, or other confusions about him, would be a mistake. Up to that point he had suffered “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,” false rumors circulated by enemies, as a matter of personal asceticism. But death would set a seal on all of it which, and without his intervention, these accusations could result in a lack of truth and clarity damaging to the Church and to the glory of the God he had sacrificed all to promote.

The *Letter to Coroticus*, written some time before the *Confessio*, was prompted by a raid on a group of newly baptized Christians by the soldiers of a nominal Christian leader from western Britain. The victims, still clad in their white baptismal gowns and with holy chrism gleaming on their foreheads, were robbed and killed, or kidnapped, depending on whether they were men or women.

In his anguished attempt to persuade the kidnappers to return those still alive with all the stolen goods, Patrick tells us about himself and his background and much more about his heart. He tries every avenue imaginable to gain his ends: persuasion, threats, humble sorrow, and prayer for those who shared, but had betrayed, both their common Roman citizenship and their faith.

“I am not suitable,” he says [being old, ill and far away] “to come to the relief of God or men. The irrationality of adversaries prevails over us as though we have been made foreigners. Perhaps they do not believe we



have received one baptism or that we have the same God for father. Do we, being Irish, seem unworthy to them, even though Scripture says ‘Do you not have the same God?’ ‘Why have each of you forsaken your neighbor?’ (*Corot. III*)

RTE: What are the earliest images we have of St. Patrick? What did the illustrators get right and what did they get wrong?

PAT: The earliest images aren’t very early. During Patrick’s lifetime, even in the culturally more advanced Eastern Roman Empire, the custom of memorializing saints was still young. Personal iconography was primarily limited to images of Christ and the apostles.

Additionally, at about the time of St. Patrick’s death in 461, the Frankish conquest of Gaul effectively separated the British Isles from the European mainland, insuring that Ireland and Britain would develop separately from it for the next few centuries.

Early religious art in Ireland rarely included the icon but concentrated on the illumination of Holy Scripture and liturgical books. Later, around the ninth century, the great stone high crosses depict scenes from the Old and New Testaments most helpful for the instruction of the faithful but we don’t find images of St. Patrick on them.

This is a round-about way of saying that we have no early images of Patrick. Many interested in the subject consider the engraving by Messingham from the *Spicilegium Sanctorum*, Paris, 1629 to be the earliest. I have an imprint of an even earlier one in my own possession. Published at Antwerp in 1611, it was the frontispiece to some copies of the first Catholic catechism published in the Irish language: *Teagasc Criosdaidhe* by Bonaventure Ó hEoghusa, O.F.M.

Not surprisingly, both of these images suffer from the tendency to anachronism afflicting most medieval and Renaissance images of antiquity. Artists, without evidence to the contrary, assumed that customs and costumes observable in their own time were also in effect long before it. That is why St. Patrick is almost universally portrayed wearing the episcopal mitre although it wasn’t invented until centuries after his death.

What do these images get wrong and what right? The 1629 image is very like most later depictions of the saint: misleading. They show him as an old man wearing anachronistic headgear and anachronistic vestments. The 1611 print is less inaccurate because it shows the saint as a beardless younger man

**Q**ui  
m  
qui  
dem

multi cona  
si sunt ondi  
nane nany  
at onam q  
nobis comple  
tu q sunt q  
sicut quadi de  
num nobis q  
ab initio ip  
sunt 7 ministri  
futurum 7 minor  
uissunt 7 mihi ad

27

28

scuto Apinapio omne dilecti



with short hair although he also is dressed more like a seventeenth-century bishop than one from the fifth.

A fifth-century Roman bishop was discouraged from wearing distinctive clothing and would have worn his hair cropped and been tonsured or shaven like any other upper class Roman. His everyday wear was a belted *tunica* reaching to the knees over a linen under-tunic with fitted sleeves. Leggings or long socks were worn under cross-gartered trousers which fit into soft knee boots, sandals or shoes. For cold or inclement weather there were cloaks called the *lacerna* and the *paenula*.

For more formal occasions like the Divine Liturgy or meetings with Irish nobility Patrick would have worn a long white toga with a decorative band along the bottom over the under-tunic. And, as mentioned before, there would have been no mitre.

Historical inaccuracies in images of St. Patrick have inspired me to research the subject extensively and to commission England's Aidan Hart to paint a more truthful icon of him using the fruits of that research, which we hope will be ready by the end of this year.

RTE: What do we know about his background?

PAT: Much of what we know can be gleaned from a careful study of his names or those of his family. We know Patrick by the only name he uses in his letters: Patricius. But that could not have been his given name. Patricius was an honorific, an *agnomen*, which, in the fifth century, was bestowed by a pope or emperor on someone of extraordinary accomplishment and added to his legal name. The fact that Patrick uses this *agnomen* indicates that he had been recognized as great in his time by his superiors. There are other names that early *Lives* claim for him which are also instructive.

Patrick himself tells us the name of his father, Calpurnius, and also the name of his grandfather, Potitus. Roman citizens didn't have the freedom to take just any name. Calpurnius is a *gens* name or *nomen*, which means it is the fundamental family clan name and it proves that he was a Roman Roman, not a Gallo- or Brito-Roman. If you were a Gallic or Brythonic Celt and were granted Roman citizenship, your new Roman *nomen* would usually be that of the reigning emperor or, perhaps, of a distinguished military patron. Calpurnius was an ancient Roman Republican family name which couldn't

*Opposite: Page from 8th-century Book of Armagh, Gospel of St. Luke.*

just be assumed; it had to be inherited.

The name Patrick gives us for his paternal grandfather is “Potitus”. His audience would have understood that his grandfather’s *gens* name was also Calpurnius and that “Potitus” was a *cognomen* (a more particular family name indicating to which branch of the *nomen gentile* one belongs) for a matrilinear branch of the Valerius gens: the Valeriani.

Early lives indicate that “Succetus” was the name Patrick was called by as a boy. It would have been a *cognomen* but is not found among Roman *cognomina* but rather seems to have Celtic roots, leading one to conjecture that it indicated the provincial branch of the Calpurnii to which Patrick’s family belonged. Another name, “Magonus” (which the earliest sources say means “great” or “famous”) was an *agnomen*, an honorific bestowed probably at ordination. This *agnomen* would have been dropped when the more illustrious *agnomen*, “Patricius”, was bestowed later in his life.

Born around 387-388, Patrick’s given name would have been Calpurnius Succetus plus a *praenomen*, a personal name, which was rarely, if ever, used in the late fourth century and mostly abbreviated to the initial letter. There were a limited number of these and only certain ones were used in any given family. Common *praenomina* for the Calpurnii are Lucius, Titus, Marcus, Gaius. If, and we can only guess at this, his *praenomen* were, say, Lucius, Patrick’s full legal name at the time of his writings would have been L. Calpurnius Succetus Patricius though he was known and addressed simply by his *agnomen*, Patricius.

RTE: With these family connections do you think he was educated in Rome?

PAT: No, we have no evidence that he ever went further than Gaul. Some writers have assumed he went to Rome because Palladius, his predecessor, served as a deacon there and was sent by the pope to Ireland.<sup>1</sup> Palladius was from a distinguished Roman family long settled in Gaul. (Like many gifted courtiers from similar families he went into the equivalent of the foreign service, which meant either the imperial or the papal courts.)

These same writers have assumed a pre-eminence for both Rome and the pope which was not true for the fifth century. During most of Patrick’s life Ravenna, not Rome, was the main seat of the Western Roman emperors

<sup>1</sup> Palladius would not have been sent as a missionary but, as was customary, to believing Christians who requested a bishop, almost certainly Gallo-Romans settled in Ireland. I believe there needs to be a distinction made between what Palladius was sent to do and what Patrick volunteered to do, as well as between the places to which they went.

with Trier (now in Germany) and Arles (now in France) being seats for the Gallic Prefecture. Popes continued to live in Rome but the city had not been a powerful imperial center since the end of the third century and, for much of the fifth, was mostly in ruins due to the Visigoths' overrunning it in 410 and other depredations until the city fell entirely to the barbarians in 476.

The papacy had not yet become the centralized power later historians would recognize but that didn't prevent the latter from anachronistically reading the later situation back into the fifth century and making an assumption that it was usual for the pope to dispatch missionary bishops or for those bishops to visit Rome before embarking on their missions.

Palladius is almost certainly to be identified with the deacon of that name who lived in Rome, perhaps as secretary or assistant to Pope Celestine I, from 418 to 429. He urged the pope to send St. Germanus of Auxerre to Britain in 429 to combat Pelagianism, and perhaps even accompanied him on that mission. Prosper of Aquitaine tells us in his *Chronicle* that Pope Celestine I ordained Palladius bishop in 431 and sent him "to the *Scotti* believing in Christ." Palladius' being in Rome and well known to the pope seems to be the reason it was the pope and not a local bishop who ordained and commissioned him.

Several *Lives* of St. Patrick name St. Germanus of Auxerre as Patrick's tutor and the person who consecrated him bishop. People assume that he was at first priest, but that's unlikely. Patrick never mentions being a priest and, in his time, the ordinary route to episcopacy in the West was the diaconate. The *Apostolic Constitutions* state that deacons were ordained to serve bishops while priests were most often local pastoral clerics. Palladius was also elevated to the episcopacy without becoming a priest first.

Patrick tells us that his family owned an estate outside *Bonnavem Taberniae*, the town his grandfather served as priest and where his father was both deacon and Decurion. Probably it was King Neill of the Nine Hostages with a flotilla of his armed followers who kidnapped Patrick to County Antrim, where I believe he was sent to tend cattle (not sheep!) on Slieve Mish, a mountain near Ballymena, in Ulster in the northeast. This is the most ancient tradition and accords with everything in Patrick's writings.

It was on Slieve Mish that Patrick encountered God. Although his grandfather and father were Christian clerics, apparently in Patrick's time the family faith was nominal. He explains that his kidnapping, and that of many others, was because they had abandoned their faith in God. Not until he was tending cattle in the rain, snows and wind of northeast Ireland did what he had been

taught by his bishops come back to him. There he began to pray in earnest until his whole life *became* prayer.

More and more, the love and fear of God increased in me. Faith was being generated and the Spirit set in motion so that in a single day I was praying up to a hundred times and nearly as much at night. Even while I remained in the woods and on the mountain in snow, frost and rain I was roused up to prayer before dawn. Neither did I feel ill nor was there any sloth in me, although only now do I see that it was because the Spirit was burning in me then. (*Conf. II*)

After several years of slavery and progressing in prayer, he heard a voice urging him to escape and then, on a second occasion, the voice told him that the boat that would carry him to his homeland was waiting for him 200 miles away.

I think Patrick's ministry was largely limited to northeastern Ireland, the territory of the northern Ui Neill and the Ulaidh (the modern counties of Down, Armagh, Antrim, Tyrone and Derry), and perhaps to Meath, the territory of the southern Ui Neill. The Ui-Neill were a tribe or dynasty of the Connachta whose rise to dominance was facilitated by their discovery that the quickest way to obtain goods they couldn't make at home was steal them from settlements abandoned by Roman military in Britain and northern Gaul. So they became pirates who also captured slaves to assist them with manual labor.

RTE: How old would he have been when he returned to Ireland?

PAT: We always get an ancient Patrick in icons, but when he went to Ireland he would probably have been in his mid-forties. He was a vigorous man; you can tell this from the way he writes and the way he worked. He wasn't really sent; he was called by voices in a dream to go back to the very people who had kidnapped him. Palladius, on the other hand, had been sent to minister to the Christians in Ireland and I believe there were already some communities of Christians around the southern Irish coast.

One reason why Palladius' mission to the Irish was not successful was that he had led the life of an upper-class Roman engaged in public service in culturally sophisticated centers; he was totally unprepared for the rusticity of fifth-century Ireland, nor did he know the language. Ireland was outside

*Opposite: St. Patrick's Bell. National Museum of Ireland, Dublin.*



the Roman Empire and the Church of that period ministered to those within the empire, primarily in cities. The Christians in Ireland to whom Palladius was sent were probably originally from Gaul, perhaps having fled to Ireland to escape land confiscation during persecutions or barbarian invasions. So these would have been expatriate Roman citizens who needed a bishop and thus the pope sent one of their own Gallic clergy.

RTE: What impact did Patrick's ministry have on Ireland?

PAT: His impact is not easy to quantify. I say this because we don't have the necessary historical sources from that period so we have to make inferences from Patrick's writings and from later history. Patrick's way of talking about his ministry indicates that, after being captured and held as a slave, he knew very well how the ruling elite in Ireland operated.

Patrick makes a clear distinction between the *Scotti* and the *Hiberionaci*. The former were the Celtic rulers of Ireland in the fifth century and the latter is a generic term for all the Irish people. Patrick concentrates on converting the *Scotti* druidic class (*brehons*, historians and poets) and ruling warrior families, aware that it would be impossible to reach the rest of the Irish otherwise.

So, he preached to sons and daughters of the kings. Some of these became, if not monastics in the later sense of the word, at least adherents of religious life as consecrated virgins. I think that, in addition to establishing churches, his impact was felt through those dedicated individuals and through the clerics he ordained, because the following age is an age of monasticism. Monasticism was only beginning to develop at that time in the West, moving from the Egyptian desert through Gaul to other places in northwestern Europe.

Fifth-century Ireland was not literate in our sense of the word until after Patrick and his adjutant bishops introduced the "religion of the Book". The Irish quickly learned Latin and the combination of Christian faith with ancient Irish culture produced a florescence of Christian poetry that, in its turn, influenced the development of western literature.

The seeds he planted took root among the native Irish and the love of learning they exhibited led to Irish monasteries' becoming centers of learning which, during the "Dark Ages" preserved western culture for the rest of Europe. And monks, educated in those monasteries, like torches, brought that learning to enlighten and Christianize a Europe whose own light had grown dim under the barbarians.



RTE: How did his writings influence later Christians?

PAT: At first, Patrick's writings were unknown to the general public so that it was his life and example, his instruction, foundations, and the power of his personality exerting influence on his followers and theirs. His writings haven't really influenced too many until now because they weren't made public until the 19th century. It was only in the 20th century that a definitive Latin text became available for scholars' use and the process of wrestling to translate it could begin.

This is why I have undertaken a new translation of Patrick's letters. In addition to some facility with Latin, a translator needs a knowledge of ancient Irish history, theology, history of post-Roman Britain and Gaul and, I believe, a living faith, as well as the English language in order to enable Patrick to truly speak to us.

How his writings *may* influence later Christians is another question. Once more people come to really know Patrick through his writings, they will be impressed with his utter single-mindedness. After his conversion on Slieve Mish to a life of prayer, he never looks back. Everything in his subsequent life is dedicated to the God he had come to know and love through prayer. Nothing else matters.

The continuity between fifth-century theology and the present cannot fail to impress a modern reader as will Patrick's total immersion in Sacred Scripture or the way he identifies with the apostles and their commission to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. During his life, he was transformed by the Holy Spirit and aware of being so, but he was also the most human of saints. He was a man who loved his family, his native land, his Roman citizenship, his friends and teachers on the continent, yet when he went to Ireland he made a vow that he would never leave it because he loved God more than his ties to family and *patria*. I believe that vow is another of his legacies. You can observe its influence later in Columba and Columbanus and all the other Irish missionaries who left Ireland on their white martyrdom, bringing their faith to Iona and the Continent by turning their back on the country they loved.

RTE: What is St. Patrick's importance for us now?

PAT: I feel that he can be a tremendous icon for unity, because he is from the time before the Great Schism and is a saint revered by both East and

West. Some saints are obscured by legend or the limitations of their hagiographers, but Patrick shares his own thoughts, speaking to us with his own voice. One of the things that struck me when reading an account of his life as a teenager, was that he, at my own age, had lost everything—country, family, social position, wealth, language, freedom—his entire worldly identity. He was alone in a country that spoke a language he didn't initially understand. There was no one to talk to unless he chose to speak with God.

RTE: Many people around the world feel drawn to the early Christian Irish, British, and Welsh. Russian young people, for example, are often very interested in these early cultures. Do you have any insight as to why?

PAT: If you read the early Celtic nature poetry provoked by Christianity, it's stunning. Faith took the love of nature inherent in ancient Irish sensibility to a new level with a corresponding sophistication of expression. I think the Russians have a similar kinship to nature.

RTE: I have been told that there was also Greek influence on Ireland.

PAT: Many questions have arisen as to the source of the amazingly skilful gold work from before the time of Christ and I suspect some Greek or Thracian nobles of having come with artisans to settle in Ireland. There is also evidence of Greek linguistic influence on Old Irish.

The Irish custom of storing books in leather satchels hung on pegs in the round towers indicates influences from Greece or Abyssinia where they treated books similarly, and design motifs in the great illuminated manuscripts, on stone crosses and on leatherwork also betray significant borrowings from the East. Several of the earliest Christian grave slabs have Greek crosses on them but Greek and other eastern influences on Ireland is an area of study whose surface has barely been scratched.

RTE: Pat, to end, how do you see the Holy Spirit working in St. Patrick's life?

PAT: Primarily through his personal *theosis*. In Patrick's writings we encounter a transformed person whose only interest is in aligning his will with God's, whose love of God and gratitude to Him are constantly spilling over into the narrative. The conversion of Ireland is primarily the result of the work of the Holy Spirit through this human being who became remarkable precisely because of the extent to which the Spirit triumphed over the merely

human. Patrick responds to the Holy Spirit when he escapes from Ireland as well as when he goes back. It's the Holy Spirit who inspires Patrick to make a vow never to leave Ireland after he goes as bishop.

Even when he must deal with Coroticus and the friend who betrayed him, he does so, not with anger so much as with sorrow for the sinners. He was immensely attractive to the Irish and it was his holiness radiating through his genuine love of them that touched their hearts. Despite consciousness of his Roman origins and awareness of the more primitive nature of Irish society he completely identifies with the Irish when pleading with Coroticus and his soldiers saying “*we* are Irish”.

RTE: As an Orthodox Christian, how do you relate to St. Patrick?

PAT: Just as I did before I became Orthodox. He is someone I love and admire more than almost any other human being. What I love in the Theotokos is what I love in him: the total response to awareness of the God who IS love, the desire to do and be whatever God requires of them. He lived completely in his time yet he transcends it because he embodies what is most essential in a person. You cannot be aware of him without being aware of God.

St. Patrick is a door to the fifth century and a foundational building block for our understanding of the northern Europe in which he lived. “Getting him right” by properly translating what he wrote and understanding its implications, is essential for the history of that time. As a descendant of the great medieval *brehon* family, the Mac Aodhagains, I hope to repay Patrick for expenditures extorted by their predecessors by enabling him to travel far more widely than they did into the hearts and minds of contemporary pagans. ✦