

SAINT PATRICK AND THE EARLY CELTIC CHURCH

By Brian Hoeck – www.truthontheweb.org

Many have heard stories of the “Patron Saint” of Ireland: Patrick. But of these stories that abound, and the beliefs that are held concerning him, much is quite erroneous. Many think that Patrick (born ca. 360 CE) was Irish – he was not, but rather he was of Scottish /British origin.

“The place of his birth was Bonnaven, which lay between the Scottish towns Dumbarton and Glasgow, and was then reckoned to the province of Britain. This village, in memory of Patricius, received the name of Kil-Patrick or Kirk-Patrick. His father, a deacon in the village church, gave him a careful education” (Dr. August Neander, General History of the Christian Religion and Church, Vol. II, p. 122. Boston: 1855).

“Patrick himself writes in his Confession: ‘I, Patrick, ... had Calpornius for my father, a deacon, a son of the late Potitus, the presbyter, who dwelt in the village of Banavan.... I was captured. I was almost sixteen years of age ... and taken to Ireland in captivity with many thousand men.’” (William Cathcart, D. D., The Ancient British and Irish Churches, p. 127).

“Patrick, a son of a Christian family in southern Scotland, was carried off to Ireland by pirates about 376 A.D. Here, in slavery, he gave his heart to God and, after six years of servitude, escaped, returning to his home in Scotland. But he could not forget the spiritual need of these poor heathen, and after ten years he returned to Ireland as a missionary of the Celtic church” (*ibid.*, p. 70).

Many also believe Patrick to be of the Roman Catholic system, yet in Patrick’s own Confession which we read part of above, he claims that his father was a deacon and his grandfather a presbyter. While the Roman Catholic Church holds the doctrine of “sacerdotal celibacy,” wherein members of its ministry are to remain unmarried and thus virgins, the ministry of the Celtic Churches held no such doctrine. This is one of many doctrinal distinctions between the two faith systems. The claims that Patrick was a Roman Catholic are mere fabrications as we shall see clearly.

“There is here a hiatus of unknown length in his life; a chasm, however, which his mediaeval biographers have filled up according to the liveliness of their fancy, or the supposed credulity of their readers. They wrote of his studying with St. Germain, and of his attending a monastery near the Mediterrenean, and finally of his going to Rome and receiving ordination from the pope. All these are mere inventions, and were not put forth till more than five hundred years after St. Patrick’s death, and all of them are presented without a shadow of proof.... In the establishment of his Church, St. Patrick in no instance ever appealed to any foreign Church [i.e., Rome, or anywhere else], pope or bishop. In his Epistle to Coroticus (sect. 1), he simply announces himself as bishop: ‘I, Patrick, an unlearned man, to wit, a bishop constituted in Ireland: what I am I have received from God’ ... These well authenticated statements of St. Patrick concerning himself are wholly at variance with those of Probus and Joscelyn, who, for the first time, put forth their fabrications full five hundred years after his death. In regard to his studying with St. Germain at Tours, and of his going to Rome for ordination, all these stories

were invented in the 10th or 12th century. Joscelyn, who wrote the fullest life of the saint, about A.D. 1130, has, in one sense, really the praise or dispraise of bringing the Irish Church into that of Rome. The abbe, not being embarrassed with facts, dates, or contemporary history, wrote easily and readily, and presented a life of the Irish saint that exactly suited his times, in the beginning of the 12th century. He represented St. Patrick and the early Church of Ireland in the 5th century as exact models of his own in the 12th. This life of the saint was readily received and adopted as the only true one by the Roman Catholic Church, and it has ever been the 'storehouse' from which his numerous and papal biographers have drawn their materials. After the publication, and the general reception of this book, there was no hesitation in the full acknowledgment of all the Irish Christians, and of St. Patrick among them. Archbishop Usher, on the Religion of the Early Irish, asks (iv, 320):

'Who among them [the early Irish] was ever canonized before St. Malachias, or Malachy, was?' (A.D. 1150). St. Patrick himself seems never to have been sainted till all Ireland was sainted or canonized" (McClintock and Strong, Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, Vol. VII, pp. 774,775; article: Patrick, St.).

"There is strong evidence that Patrick had no Roman commission in Ireland ... As Patrick's churches in Ireland, like their brethren in Britain, repudiated the supremacy of the popes, all knowledge of the conversion of Ireland through his ministry must be suppressed [by Rome].... There is not a written word from one of them [i.e., popes] rejoicing over Patrick's additions to their church, showing clearly that he was not a Roman missionary.... Prosper does not notice Patrick.... He says nothing of the greatest success ever given to a missionary of Christ, apparently because he [Patrick] was not a Romanist.... Bede never speaks of St. Patrick in his celebrated 'Ecclesiastical History.' ... So completely buried was Patrick and his work by popes and other Roman Catholics, that in their epistles and larger publications, his name does not once occur in one of them until A. D. 634" (William Cathcart, D. D., The Ancient British and Irish Churches, pp. 83-85).

Due to the world of Patrick's day knowing the truth about him and the Celtic Church, Rome made no mention of, or claim to, Patrick until at least 200 years after his time. Bede did however make record in 431 A.D. of an attempt of a Roman Catholic missionary to bring the Celtic assemblies under the rule and doctrine of Rome:

"Palladius was sent by Celestinus, the Roman pontiff, to the Scots [Irish] that believed in Christ" (Bede, Ecclesiastical History, p. 22). But "he left because he did not receive respect in Ireland" (William Cathcart, D. D., The Ancient British and Irish Churches, p. 72).

Such disrespect would be unheard of if the Celtic assemblies had indeed been adherents of Rome's "gospel." Rome was looking to claim what the true Gospel already had when it entered the "Britians" (Britian, Ireland, Scotland) during the first century:

"That the light of Christianity dawned upon these islands in the course of the first century, is a matter of historical certainty" (Richard Hart, B. A., Ecclesiastical Records, p. vii; Cambridge: 1846).

"The Christianity which first reached France and England (i.e., Gaul and Britian) was of the

school of the apostle John, who ruled the churches in Asia Minor, and therefore of a Greek, not Latin [i.e., Roman], type.” (Gordon, World Healers, p. 78)

“A large number of this Keltic community (Lyons, A.D.177) – colonists from Asia Minor – who escaped, migrated to Ireland (Erin) and laid the foundations of the pre-Patrick church.” (Thomas Yeates, East Indian Church History, p. 226)

Tertullian, ca 200 A.D., wrote “by this time, the varied races of the Gutulians, and manifold confines of the Moors, all the limits of the Spains, and the diverse nations of the Gauls, and the haunts of the Britons (inaccessible to the Romans, but subjugated to Christ)... In all which places the name of Christ who is already come reigns.” (Tertullian, Answer to the Jews, chap. vii.)

Tertullian had included the Britons among the many nations which believed in Christ, and he speaks of these places as being “inaccessible to the Romans, but subjugated to Christ.” In other words, the Church there was not founded by, nor subject to, Rome.

“He (Patrick) never mentions either Rome or the pope or hints that he was in any way connected with the ecclesiastical capital of Italy. He recognizes no other authority but that of the word of God.... When Palladius arrived in the country, it was not to be expected that he would receive a very hearty welcome from the Irish apostle. If he was sent by [pope] Celestine to the native Christians to be their primate or archbishop, no wonder that stout-hearted Patrick refused to bow his neck to any such yoke of bondage” (Dr. Killen, Ecclesiastical History of Ireland, vol.1, pp. 12-15).

“Patrick rejected the union of church and state. More than one hundred years had passed since the first world council at Nicaea had united the church with the empire. Patrick rejected this model. He followed the lesson taught in John's Gospel when Christ refused to be made a king. Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’ (John 18:36). Not only the Irish apostle but his famous successors, Columba in Scotland, and Columbanus on the Continent, ignored the supremacy of the papal pontiff. They never would have agreed to making the pope a king” (Truth Triumphant, pp. 85,86).

“Two centuries elapsed after Patrick's death before any writer attempted to connect Patrick's work with a papal commission. No pope ever mentioned him, neither is there anything in the ecclesiastical records of Rome concerning him.... Patrick preached the Bible. He appealed to it as the sole authority for founding the Irish Church. He gave credit to no other worldly authority; he recited no creed. Several official creeds of the church at Rome had by that time been ratified and commanded, but Patrick mentions none. In his Confession he makes a brief statement of his beliefs, but he does not refer to any church council or creed as authority. The training centers he founded, which later grew into colleges and large universities, were all Bible schools. Famous students of these schools – Columba, who brought Scotland to Christ, Aidan, who won pagan England to the gospel, and Columbanus with his successors, who brought Christianity to Germany, France, Switzerland, and Italy – took the Bible as their only authority, and founded renowned Bible training centers for the Christian believers.... Patrick, like his example, Jesus, put the words of Scripture above the teachings of men. He differed from the Papacy, which puts church tradition above the Bible. In his writings he nowhere appeals to the

church at Rome for the authorization of his mission. Whenever he speaks in defense of his mission, he refers to God alone, and declares that he received his call direct from heaven” (Truth Triumphant, pp. 82-84).

Pope Gregory had sent delegates to the Christians Celts: “Acknowledge the authority of the Bishop of Rome.’ These are the first words of the Papacy to the ancient Christians of Britain. They meekly replied: ‘The only submission we can render him is that which we owe to every Christian”” (Merle D’ Aubigne, History of the Reformation, Book XVII, chap. 2). ““But as for further obedience, we know of none that he, whom you term the Pope, or Bishop of Bishops, can claim or demand’ (Early British History, G. H. Whalley, Esq., M. P., p. 17 London: 1860; see also Variation of Popery, Rev. Samuel Edger, D. D., pp. 180-183. New York: 1849).

“The monks sent to England [in 596 A.D.] by Pope Gregory the Great soon came to see that the Celtic Church differed from theirs in many respects ... Augustine himself [a Benedictine abbot] ... held several conferences with the Christian Celts in order to accomplish the difficult task of their subjugation [submission] to Roman authority... The Celts permitted their priests to marry, the Romans forbade it. The Celts used a different mode of baptism [i.e., true baptism: immersion] from that of the Romans... The Celts held their own councils and enacted their own laws, independent of Rome. The Celts used a Latin Bible [i.e., the Itala] unlike the [Roman Catholic’s Latin] Vulgate, and kept Saturday as a day of rest” (A.C. Flick, The Rise of Medieval Church, pp. 236-327).

“It seems to have been customary in the Celtic churches of early times, in Ireland as well as Scotland, to keep Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, as a day of rest from labor. They obeyed the fourth commandment literally upon the seventh day of the week” (James C. Moffatt, D. D., The Church in Scotland, Philadelphia: 1882, p. 140).

“In this latter instance they seemed to have followed a custom of which we find traces in the early monastic church of Ireland by which they held Saturday to be the Sabbath on which they rested from all their labours” (W.T. Skene, Adamnan Life of St. Columba, 1874, p. 96).

As noted above, the Christianity which first reached France and Britian was of the school of the apostle John, who ruled the churches in Asia Minor. Colonists from Asia Minor laid the foundations of the pre-Patrick church. They brought with them the doctrine which they received of John, Paul, Philip, and the other apostles of the Lord, which included not only the observance of the seventh day Sabbath, but also the commemoration of Christ’s death upon the 14th of Abib – Passover!

“It is probable that the primitive Christians kept the Pasch on the 14th of Nisan as determined by the Jewish authorities, and regarded it as the anniversary of the crucifixion.... The churches of the Roman province of Asia... followed the older custom, keeping the Pasch on the 14th of Nisan, whatever the day of the week” (James F. Kenney, The Sources for the Early History of Ireland, Vol.1, pp. 211, 212; Columbia University Press, New York, 1929).

“...they ignorantly refuse to observe our Easter [Pascha] on which Christ was sacrificed, arguing that it should be observed with the Hebrew Passover on the fourteenth of the moon”

(Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, II, 19 wherein Bede quoted “Pope” John’s words concerning the Celtic brethren).

Other doctrines that Patrick, Columba, and the Celtic assemblies held included the observation of the other Festivals of the Eternal (Lev.23), the belief in the mortality of man and the hope of the resurrection (vs. immortality of the soul and going to heaven, hell, and/or purgatory); the distinction between clean and unclean animals; “improvised” prayers (from the heart, rather than merely from the lip with repetitions); that Christ Jesus is our only Mediator – as opposed to various “saints,” Mary, angels, etc.; and that redemption and atonement come through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ alone – separate from works and heeding commandments /doctrines of men (see *The Celtic Church in Britian* by Leslie Hardinge, as well as *Truth Triumphant* by B.G. Wilkinson, for documentation).

“The Roman Catholics have proudly and exclusively claimed St. Patrick, and most Protestants have ignorantly or indifferently allowed their claim ... But he was no Romanist. His life and evangelical Church of the 5th century ought to be better known” (McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. VII, p. 776; article: Patrick, St.).

We hope you have been edified in knowing the truth about the real saint Patrick who kept the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

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