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## REMEMBER THE CHRISTIAN ORIGINS OF SAINT PATRICK'S DAY



May the road rise to meet you,  
May the wind be always at your back.  
May the sun shine warm upon your face,  
The rains fall soft upon your fields.

And until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.  
May God be with you and bless you:  
May you see your children's children.

May you be poor in misfortune,  
Rich in blessings.  
May you know nothing but happiness  
From this day forward.

May the road rise up to meet you  
May the wind be always at your back  
May the warm rays of sun fall upon your home  
And may the hand of a friend always be near.

May green be the grass you walk on,  
May blue be the skies above you,  
May pure be the joys that surround you,  
May true be the hearts that love you.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> The poem is at <http://islandireland.com/Pages/folk/sets/blees.html>. The image is at <http://www.traceyelliotreep.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/West-Coast-Ireland.jpg>.



Source: [http://spivey.wikispaces.com/file/view/Map\\_spread\\_of\\_Christianity\\_to\\_12th\\_century\\_medium.jpg/42170495/Map\\_spread\\_of\\_Christianity\\_to\\_12th\\_century\\_medium.jpg](http://spivey.wikispaces.com/file/view/Map_spread_of_Christianity_to_12th_century_medium.jpg/42170495/Map_spread_of_Christianity_to_12th_century_medium.jpg)

## Introduction

The Irish Blessing could have been formulated by the Christian Saint Patrick. As the above map presenting the Christianization of Europe indicates, Ireland was among the first geographical regions of Europe to receive the blessings of Christianity. The successful spreading of Christianity in Ireland is attributed to one person: Saint Patrick. Yet, there is sadness to this fact in that nowadays people use the name Saint Patrick without knowing anything about this Christian except that a day is named after him.

When Saint Patrick's Day is celebrated in Ireland, in the United States of America, or where ever on earth the Irish have settled, it brings to the mind's eye visions of green beer, drunken revelry, the shamrock, four-leafed clovers, pinching people who do not wear green, drinking songs, and all manner of faux-Irish imagery. Unfortunately, amidst all the holiday cheer and fun, the message, origin, and purpose of Saint Patrick's Day is lost on the masses. It is as if they do not believe that there ever was such a person, or that they do not care that such a person of historical importance ever existed. Saint Patrick's Day has been transformed into a secular holiday almost everywhere, and specifically into a drinking holiday. Its early Christian roots have been removed from the general celebration. Indeed, who cares about Christianity nowadays? We have

liberalism and the progressives who condemn conservatism and American traditions, indeed, American-Irish traditions and culture.

Lost are the great deeds of the historic Saint Patrick, which are confirmed in his own writings that survive to this day, and by the writings of Roman Catholic Church officials from his era, a most important one from the pen of the Irish Bishop Cumméne Fota or Cummian (flourished from c. 591 - 12 November 661 or 662), dated 632 or 633, who refers to Patrick as *our papa*, meaning pope or primate.<sup>2</sup> There are other important historical records such as the *Chronicle of Ireland* that records events between 432 and 911, not to forget the *annalistic chronical*, the chronology of historical happenings as presented by the ruling years of the Roman emperors, and the *formal chronological structure*.<sup>3</sup>

Saint Patrick's selfless acts and tireless devotion to the spreading of Christianity are not celebrated, nor even recalled, on his namesake holiday. Rather than hold the actions of this exemplary individual in reverence, people who claim to celebrate the Saint Patrick's holiday involve themselves in unrelated activities under the assumption that such activities are *Irish things to do*. When celebrating, or remembering Saint Patrick's Day, it is important to maintain the link to Christianity and not just use the day as an excuse to get drunk, put on a green outfit, and declare oneself Irish for one day.

### **Who Was Saint Patrick?**

A complicating factor in understanding the life and times of Saint Patrick, birthname Maewyn, who is also known by his Latin name *Patricius*, is the troublesome

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<sup>2</sup> Liam De Paor, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age*, Four Courts Press, Dublin: 1993, pp. 182-183.

<sup>3</sup> This structure includes the *Annals of Boyle*, *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, *Annals of Connacht*, *Annals of the Four Masters*, *Annals of Inisfallen*, *Annals of Lough Cé*, *Annales de Monte Fernandi*, aka *Annals of Multyfarnham*, *Annals of Roscrea*, *Chronicon Scotorum*, *Annals of Tigernach*, *Annals of Ulster*, *The Annals of Ireland by Friar John Clyn*, *Annals of Dudley Loftus*, *The Short Annals of Donegal*, *Leabhar Oiris*, *Annals of Nenagh*, *Mac Carthaigh's Book*, *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*, *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, *Dublin Annals of Inisfallen*, *The Annals of Ireland by Thady Dowling*, *Short Annals of Tirconaill*, *Short Annals of Leinster*, *Annales Hibernie ab anno Christi 1162 usque ad annum 1370*, aka *Pembridge's Annals*, *Annales Hiberniae*, also known as *Grace's Annals*, *Memoranda Gadelica*, *Annla Gearra as Proibhinse Ard Macha*, and *A Fragment of Irish Annals*.

chronology that emerges. The Roman Catholic Church's annals and the history scholars disagree on the timing of his life.<sup>4</sup>



St. Patrick depicted with shamrock in detail of stained glass window in St. Benin's Church, Kilbennan, County Galway, Ireland. Image on commons.wikimedia.org. by Andreas Franz Borchert.

Source:

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kilbennan St. Benin%27s Church Window St. Patrick Detail 2010\\_09\\_16.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Kilbennan St. Benin%27s Church Window St. Patrick Detail 2010\\_09\\_16.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kilbennan_St._Benin%27s_Church_Window_St._Patrick_Detail_2010_09_16.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Kilbennan_St._Benin%27s_Church_Window_St._Patrick_Detail_2010_09_16.jpg).

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<sup>4</sup> David Norman Dumville, *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493-1933*, Boydell Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk: 1993, p. 282.

Each of these chronologies has a variation of approximately thirty years, the earliest starting in 393 A. D. and the latest ending at 497 A.D.<sup>5</sup> Yet, due to Saint Patrick's own extant writings and the histories written about him a few centuries later, much can still be gleaned about his life to place him in a valid historical record.

Saint Patrick lived in the time of the declining Western Roman Empire. In fact, he was a Briton, not native to Ireland.<sup>6</sup> His identity is confirmed, more assuredly than some historical figures, because two works written in Latin and attributed to him still exist. Despite these two primary, original source documents, his writings are difficult to understand. There are two main reasons for this: his use of colloquial Latin and his tendency to avoid "lucid exposition of facts".<sup>7</sup>

From Saint Patrick's small books, which are more letters than books, a few details of his life can be established. They account for his actions against a few Christians who killed some of their fellow Christians and enslaved those who survived the attack. Saint Patrick excommunicates the perpetrators and secures the release of the enslaved.<sup>8</sup> Edward Arthur Thompson, the author of *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, claims that Saint Patrick then undertook the conversion of many other natives of Ireland and eventually became a bishop. According to Thompson, archeological evidence and the medieval writings on Saint Patrick are, however, absent of crucial details.

The core region of the Roman Catholic Church's power was on the European continent, and not in the Isles of Britannia, Thus, knowledge of Saint Patrick's Christianization efforts, and the efforts of others in Ireland, went unnoticed for centuries. During Saint Patrick's time, or shortly after his death, the Western Roman Empire collapsed. Some news of successful conversions in Ireland spread briefly in the fifth century, but true understanding of what Saint Patrick and others had accomplished in Ireland was not recorded for history until the late eighth century. Saint Patrick's writings did not reach the European mainland until the ninth century.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Arthur Thompson, *Who was Saint Patrick?*, Boydell Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk: 1985, p. xi.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. xv.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. xii

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. xiv.

Oddly enough, his Irish compatriots nearly forgot him, as well. The indications are that all facts beyond the writings of Saint Patrick himself were lost by the time a copy of his manuscripts were made sometime before 630 A.D. We can infer that due to the lack of storytelling about Saint Patrick in Ireland, at that historical point in time, and the lack of other relevant testimonies of his work, people in Ireland, indeed, the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church at that time, did not understand the significant role Saint Patrick played in the overall progress of Ireland from paganism to Christianity. Given this evidence, we can clearly deduce that forgetting Saint Patrick is not a new phenomenon in modern history.

From this convincing evidence we can surmise that a historical figure attributable to Saint Patrick did indeed exist. The common facts are that there were missionaries in Ireland at the time of Saint Patrick, and that the territory was being ministered to by the Roman Catholic Church under the first Bishop of the Irish Christians, Palladius, who flourished in 408-431 and who precedes Saint Patrick, in spite of the fact that historians have synthesized the two persons in Irish traditions. This synthesis has led to the development of the theory of the two Saint Patricks.<sup>10</sup>

Despite his virtually unknown status for centuries after his death, Saint Patrick became the Patron Saint of Ireland over time. However, he was never officially canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. Numerous legends arose about Saint Patrick: from his chasing all the snakes out of Ireland to his fasting for an impossible number of days. Although the historicity is confirmed by his writings, all later folklore about him is filled with myths and legends that can easily be discounted. No snakes were harmed in the life of the true Saint Patrick, who has become a saint by cause and not by official recognition procedure of the Roman Catholic Church.

There are myriad dates concerning Saint Patrick's death. There is a record that in the year 457 *Patriac Sen* (Irish for *the elder Patrick*) died. It is also possible that this reference is to Bishop Palladius, who is referred to in the *Book of Armagh* as having been called Patrick.<sup>11</sup> In 461/2 there is an entry in the *Annals of Ulster*: "Here some

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. O'Rahilly, *The Two Patricks: A Lecture on the History of Christianity in Fifth-Century Ireland*, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin: 1942.

<sup>11</sup> Francis J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*. Batsford, London:1973, pp. 78-79.

record the repose of Patrick."<sup>12</sup> Again in the *Annals of Ulster* in the year 492/3 records the death of "Patrick, the arch-apostle (or archbishop and apostle) of the Scoti", on 17 March, at the age of 120.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, Saint Patrick must have been born in approximately the year 373.



The shamrock is a central image in the celebration of Saint Patrick's Day. According to legend, Saint Patrick used the three-leaved shamrock to explain the Holy Trinity – three beings in one, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. – to Irish pagans: Source: George McFinnigan. Permission is granted to copy, distribute and/or modify this document under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License, Version 1.2 or any later version published by the Free Software Foundation; with no Invariant Sections, no Front-Cover Texts, and no Back-Cover Texts.

On March 17<sup>th</sup> in the early years of the seventeenth century Saint Patrick's Day became an official holiday, and it is celebrated worldwide largely due to the Irish diaspora. Saint Patrick is reportedly buried alongside Saint Brigida (451-523) and Saint Columba (521-597) at Down Cathedral in Downpatrick, County Down, Ireland.

There is a common myth that Saint Patrick rid Ireland of its snakes.<sup>14</sup> Every tour group of the Emerald Isle will be informed of this *fact*. However the so-called *fact* of the natural history of Ireland as far as snakes are concerned is that Ireland never had

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<sup>12</sup> William Maunsell Hennessy (trans.) *Annals of Ulster; otherwise, Annals of Senat*, Vol. I. Alexander Thom & Co., Dublin: 1887, at <http://www.archive.org/stream/annalauladhanna01magu#page/4/mode/2up>, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2008/03/080313-snakes-ireland.html>. *Snakeless in Ireland: Blame Ice Age, Not Saint Patrick.*

snakes. The story is likely allegorical because the serpents are symbols of the Irish Druids. Therefore, Saint Patrick rid Ireland of its Druids.<sup>15</sup>

### The Writings of Saint Patrick

Two surviving texts, The *Confessio* (*The Confession*) and the *Epistola*, are attributed to Saint Patrick. In the *Confessio*, Saint Patrick announces himself as a sinner and explains his early life. Saint Patrick states he was taken captive at the age of sixteen and was transported to Ireland.<sup>16</sup> He then proceeds to give his testimony and explain how he understands God and takes Christ to be his savior. After accepting Christ, he remains humble and refers to his own writing as “drivel”.<sup>17</sup> Clearly, this aspect of the faith and humility of Saint Patrick is completely lost in the modern celebrations of his namesake holiday.

In chapter two of his *Confessio*, Saint Patrick gives thanks to God by quoting a portion of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians (2:16), for giving him the strength to bring Christianity to the Irish and to convert “so many thousands”. He also thanks God for granting him favor in the land (Ireland) wherein he never expected any sort of warm reception.<sup>18</sup> This passage sheds light on the sort of person Saint Patrick was. At a minimum, it informs us as to his mindset and his concept of self. At a maximum, it tells us of his Christian magnanimity.

Later in chapter two of the *Confessio*, Saint Patrick describes his early life in Ireland. He used to feed cattle. He prayed and was imbued with holy strength that prevented him from feeling “harm” or “slothfulness” during his work in the cold and the rain, which he attributes to “the spirit” being within him.<sup>19</sup> Further in the chapter, Saint Patrick claims he heard a voice that complimented him on his fasting and told him that a ship would take him to his country. Saint Patrick then recalls traveling through a “desert,”

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<sup>15</sup> Chris Weigant, *Saint Patrick and the Snakes* at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-weigant/saint-patrick-and-the-sna\\_b\\_503252.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-weigant/saint-patrick-and-the-sna_b_503252.html).

<sup>16</sup> Charles Henry Hamilton Wright, *The Writings of Saint Patrick: The Apostle of Ireland*, Religious Tract Society, London: 1894, p. 46-47.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.



albeit a probably figurative one, and having scarce food and numerous troubles. He closes out the chapter with his struggle with Satan after many days of starvation and a renewed faith after he emerged victorious in his internal struggle.<sup>20</sup>

In chapter three, Saint Patrick recounts his second instance of being captured by the inhabitants of Ireland. Saint Patrick claims that the Lord delivered a message to him that he would be with the captors for two months, and at the end of the sixtieth day in captivity the prophesy came true and he was freed. After securing his freedom, whether by actual divine assistance or imagined, Saint Patrick finds himself back in the Britons with his family. He encounters an "intimate friend" and recalls his early struggles with his faith and the many messages he received from God.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the third chapter, his writings obscure what is real and what is intended to be allegorical.

At the opening of chapter four of the *Confessio*, Saint Patrick struggles with the question of whether or not he should leave his parents, this time of his own choice, to return to Ireland to preach. In the true fashion of a saint, Patrick declares his willingness to die in service to God's will, and he gives thanks for all of the many gifts that God bestowed upon him, despite all the many extraordinary difficulties that he had suffered through in the early years of his life.

In the second half of chapter four, Saint Patrick justifies his choice by reiterating the lessons set by the apostles in the Gospels, specifically Matthew and Mark. Saint Patrick closes out chapter four by recounting another experience of internal turmoil wherein he desires to return to Britain, or even to travel far south to the Gallic lands (France?). However, he steels himself and reminds himself that he is God's servant and must assist in the conversion and baptism of the land of Ireland.<sup>22</sup>

Within the final chapter of the *Confessio*, Saint Patrick shares more specific information about the conversion process in Ireland. He recounts colleagues questioning his dedication to converting the locals, and quotes them as asking "Why dost that fellow put himself in danger among enemies who know not God?".<sup>23</sup> As a challenge, Saint Patrick encourages his fellow colleagues to work toward greater things.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-60.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-65.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

He also describes how he traveled deep into lands previously untraveled by Roman citizens, and how he brought gifts to Irish kings and spoke with them. Throughout chapter five, Saint Patrick recounts his deeds and confirms that he is but a sinner writing his final confession.



Image of the first printed edition of Saint Patrick's Confession and Epistola.

Source: [http://www.confessio.ie/sites/confessio.ie/files/print\\_ware\\_200x300.jpg](http://www.confessio.ie/sites/confessio.ie/files/print_ware_200x300.jpg) and <http://www.confessio.ie/manuscripts/ware#1>.

There are three basic lessons that can be learned from the *Confessio* of Saint Patrick. The first is humility. While Saint Patrick does recount his extensive deeds in successfully contacting the Irish tribes and their kings and converting many of them, he does not do so with a boastful tone. He couches all of his descriptions with Biblical quotes and credits all of his deeds and success to God.

A second lesson to be learned from the *Confessio* of Saint Patrick is to avoid bemoaning being stuck in a poor situation. Unlike many captured youths of his age, Saint Patrick does not whine and gnash his metaphoric teeth over his capture and

subsequent enslavement. Instead, he finds strength in his faith and eventually secures his freedom, albeit he gives no specific information on how he secured said freedom.

A third lesson to be gleaned from the *Confessio* of Saint Patrick is that all earthly things are possible through God. Countless times within the short work, he gives all credit to God and looks to God for both guidance and strength in troubled times. At no point does Saint Patrick take credit for his own deeds, nor does he claim that he could have accomplished them without divine guidance. He claims in his *Confessio* that he feels the Spirit throughout his complete life, doubly so in the most difficult times, and he even claims to hear a voice that he attributes to God himself. With few exceptions, these aspects of Saint Patrick are not often recognized during celebrations of his holiday, yet his confession and his account of the conversion of Ireland is just one aspect of the Saint.

Saint Patrick's second book, the *Epistola*, or the *Epistle to Corticus*, is aimed at the soldiers responsible for the capture and deaths of Christians. He reports that new converts to Christianity, shortly after their anointing ceremony, were killed by locals. Saint Patrick demands that the soldiers responsible do repentance for their crimes against the Irish Christians otherwise they will remain "alien" to him personally and also suffer eternal damnation. He also reminds the soldiers that they are personally responsible of the commandments they have broken, which implies that those responsible were Christian's themselves or would know of the commandments of which Saint Patrick missionized, and he chastises them for running afoul of God's decrees. He closes out the short epistle by reminding the soldiers that they too were converted to Christianity and cannot be counted among the flock until they repent for their actions and free their Christian slaves from bondage.<sup>24</sup> Between the two short texts attributable to Saint Patrick, it is clear why his status as a saint has stood the test of time. He had all the necessary hallmarks of sainthood. The person<sup>25</sup>

1. is an exemplary model.
2. is an extraordinary teacher.
3. is a wonder worker or source of benevolent power.
4. is an intercessor.
5. leads/led a life refusing material attachments or comforts.
6. is a possessor of a special and revelatory relation to that which is holy.

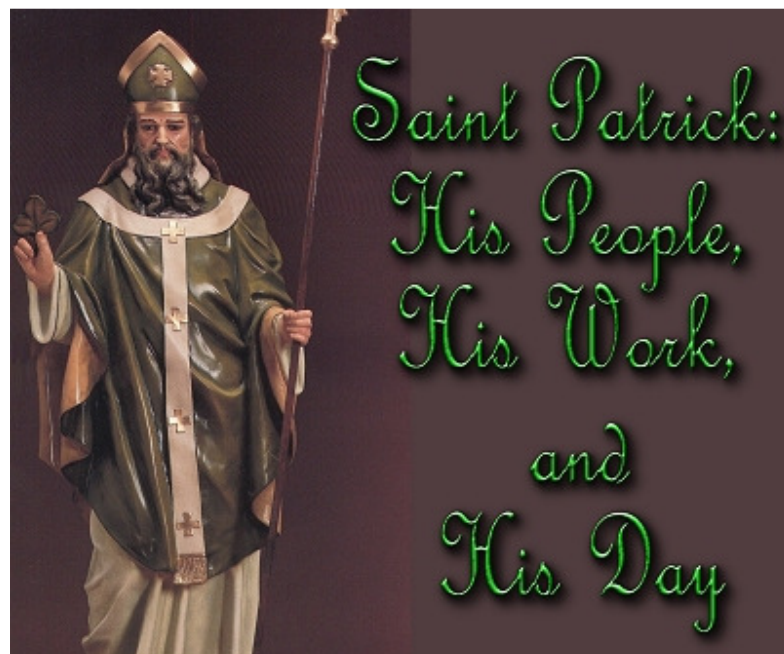
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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pp. 74-80.

<sup>25</sup> John A. Coleman, Society of Jesus, *Conclusion: after sainthood*, in John Stratton Hawley, ed. *Saints and Virtues* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987. pp 214-217.

He was pious, benevolent, and he dedicated his life's work in service to the Lord. Furthermore, he spread Christianity into one of the harshest lands of Europe. He met with heavy resistance, as evidenced by his capture and by the pushback resistance he received from the various tribes of Ireland. Despite the hardships of his early life, he remained in the clergy and in arguably the most difficult geographical location of the then Roman Catholic Church in which to preach. Where others might have given up and headed back to the less wild and more Christianized Britannia, Saint Patrick stayed in Ireland and began missionizing. The details of his life after the writing of the work are unclear, but what is clear from his writing in the *Epistola*, is that while shaken, he intended fully to continue doing as he had done before. Saint Patrick decried the actions of the soldiers who killed and enslaved their fellow Irish Christians, but the horrendous event did not deter him in the slightest. Saint Patrick knew that his mission to serve God by Christianizing Ireland would be a lifelong struggle.

In addition to the writings there are other pieces of evidence of the importance of Saint Patrick. For example, there are the crosses connected with Saint Patrick. The cross pattée has become a symbol of him as a result of his being the founding bishop of the Irish Church. Images of Saint Patrick's mitre and garments often show this cross pattée.



Saint Patrick's mitre and garment cloak showing the cross pattée.

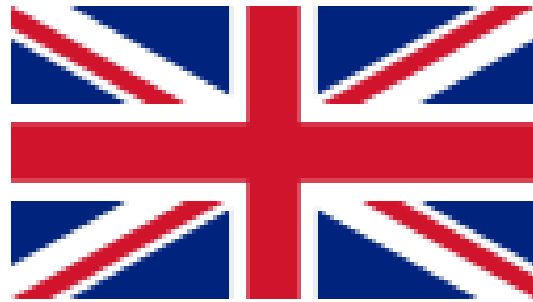
Source: [http://www.familychristmasonline.com/other\\_holidays/st\\_patricks\\_day/st\\_patrick\\_title.jpg](http://www.familychristmasonline.com/other_holidays/st_patricks_day/st_patrick_title.jpg).

Saint Patrick's Saltire is a red cross on a white field and appears in the insignia of the Order of Saint Patrick, founded in 1783. After the signing of the Acts of Union in 1800, the cross saltire was combined with the Saint George's Cross of England and the Saint Andrew's Cross of Scotland, thus forming the Union Flag of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.



Saint Patrick's Cross Saltire

Source: [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/20/St\\_Patrick%27s\\_saltire.svg/250px-St\\_Patrick%27s\\_saltire.svg.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/20/St_Patrick%27s_saltire.svg/250px-St_Patrick%27s_saltire.svg.png).



Union Flag of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Source: [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/a/ae/Flag\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom.svg/125px-Flag\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom.svg.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/a/ae/Flag_of_the_United_Kingdom.svg/125px-Flag_of_the_United_Kingdom.svg.png).

A third item attesting to the importance of Saint Patrick is Saint Patrick's Bell, which was first mentioned in the *Book of Cuanu* in 552, as referenced in the *Annals of Ulster*. The bell (now encased as a shrine) is one of the relics that Saint Columba (Colum Cille 521-597) removed from Saint Patrick's tomb sixty years after Saint Patrick's death.



Saint Patrick's Bell Shrine, now in the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

Source: [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e8/Shrine\\_of\\_St\\_Patrick%27s\\_Bell.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e8/Shrine_of_St_Patrick%27s_Bell.png).

Thomas Dinely (16??-1695), an Englishman who travelled in Ireland in 1681, wrote that "the Irish of all stations and condicōns wore crosses in their hatts, some of pins, some of green ribbon."<sup>26</sup> About thirty years later Jonathan Swift (1667.1745) wrote of Saint Patrick's Day in 1713 that "the Mall was so full of crosses that I thought all the world was Irish."<sup>27</sup>

Saint Patrick's legacy is clear. What remains a mystery is how the celebration of Saint Patrick's Day in modern times is neither religious, in most places, nor does it involve anything remotely related to the historic doings of Saint Patrick, or any sort of remembrance of the best attributes of Christianity as exemplified by Saint Patrick. To understand the evolution, or devolution, of Saint Patrick's Day, a short history of the celebration itself must be explored.

### **The History of Saint Patrick's Day**

In *The Wearing of the Green: A history of St. Patrick's Day*, Mike Cronin and Daryl Adair refer to holidays that celebrate saints as "invented traditions,"<sup>28</sup> which seems to imply that both the classification of sainthood and the holidays surrounding celebrations of saints are created after the fact and do not naturally occur. While at first that notion might offend, it seems apt since most holidays naturally form around the day of significance out of which they arrive. For example, the Battle of Puebla that took place near the Mexican city of Puebla where the Mexican Army defeated the occupying French Intervention Force in Mexico (1861-1867), occurred on the fifth of May, 1862, so *Cinco De Mayo* is a non-invented holiday. In contrast, March 17<sup>th</sup> held no importance in Saint Patrick's life according to official documents. Albeit that day is the alleged day of his death according to tradition, so that particular date for that holiday did not occur naturally. A further example as to why Saint Patrick's Day is possibly an "invented tradition" is that the holiday was not first celebrated until nearly thirteen centuries after Saint Patrick's approximate date of death.

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<sup>26</sup> Consult Nathaniel Colgan, *The Shamrock in Literature: a critical chronology* in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland: 1896, No. 26, p. 349.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Swift, *Letter 61* at <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/swift/jonathan/s97s/letter61.html>. The Mall is a road in the city of Westminster, London. It traverses from Buckingham Palace at its western end to Admiralty Arch and on to Trafalgar Square at its eastern end.

<sup>28</sup> Mike Cronin and Daryl Adair, *The Wearing of the Green: A history of St. Patrick's Day*, Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, London: 2001, p. xxi.

Another interesting fact is that Saint Patrick's Day is more widely celebrated elsewhere, specifically in the United States, than in Ireland. That may be partly due to the unsure history of the day of celebration in Ireland. March 17<sup>th</sup> was included in the Irish legal calendar as a saint's day as early as 1607,<sup>29</sup> but it took much longer for it to form into an official holiday focused around Saint Patrick. By the time the holiday began being celebrated in foreign countries, no doubt carried to new English-speaking lands by Irish indentured servants and immigrants, it had already achieved status as a holiday in the United Kingdom and Ireland. By the mid-seventeenth century Saint Patrick appeared on coins with a shamrock, the flower now being synonymous with the holiday. The Irish diaspora tends to celebrate Saint Patrick's Day more than those in their native country. In Ireland Saint Patrick's Day is a point of contention between the oft-embattled Anglican and Roman Catholic factions. A historical reason for the celebration of Saint Patrick's Day in America is the Irish immigrants' role in the American War of Independence (1775-1783), wherein they made a name for themselves on the battlefield in the fight for independence from the British crown. The holiday grew in size and import as more Irish immigrants flocked from their restrictively English-controlled homeland to the freer United States and other English speaking countries.

## **Conclusion**

At present, all Americans, regardless of their nationality or religious affiliation, are welcomed to participate in Saint Patrick's Day in the United States. This should not be interpreted as a negative feature. Inclusiveness is most often a positive feature of any given organization. Yet, in the modern celebration of Saint Patrick's Day, there is a void of both the historical and religious significance of Saint Patrick.

Taking for granted that the texts attributed to Saint Patrick are genuine and honestly reported, which they seem to be, then Saint Patrick was not just any important figure in Irish religious history, but definitely one of the most important figures. Simply put, Saint Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland and spread it further than any of his predecessors. He did so by allowing God to work through him and by keeping to the lessons of Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the earlier prophets.

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.units.miamioh.edu/ath175/student/albertkd/>.

Saint Patrick was never officially canonized, which is common for many of the earlier saints, but he remained in the minds of believers long after his death. To date, he is one of the more recognizable saints. Yet, sadly he earns this via the drunken celebrations every March 17<sup>th</sup> and not from his accomplishments and teachings.

In the process of celebrating Saint Patrick's Day on March 17, it would be an injustice to Saint Patrick's life of service to God, for people to parade down the streets, drinking and singing songs, without a single thought to the sacrifices and efforts of this great man. Saint Patrick left a legacy of tireless servitude to a higher cause and a capacity for forgiveness that is not often seen on this earth. Each participant in a Saint Patrick's Day celebration should spend a few quiet moments reflecting on the Saint's life and his message of God's grace and capacity for forgiveness. This may not happen in the United States of America or in other Western countries where the Irish have settled. However, in Ireland there should be a vivid remembrance of what Saint Patrick accomplished with the Christianization of Ireland.

The Irish must not lose their faith, their values, and their principles. If they suffer such loss, the Irish will become easily influenced, easily misled, and easily fooled. This truth is valid for all ethical, moral cultures.

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#### The Death of Saint Patrick (according to an Irish tale)

Saint Patrick lay dying. He sent a messenger to the local tax collector and the local lawyer who represented the realm. The messenger told them that Saint Patrick wanted them at his bedside.

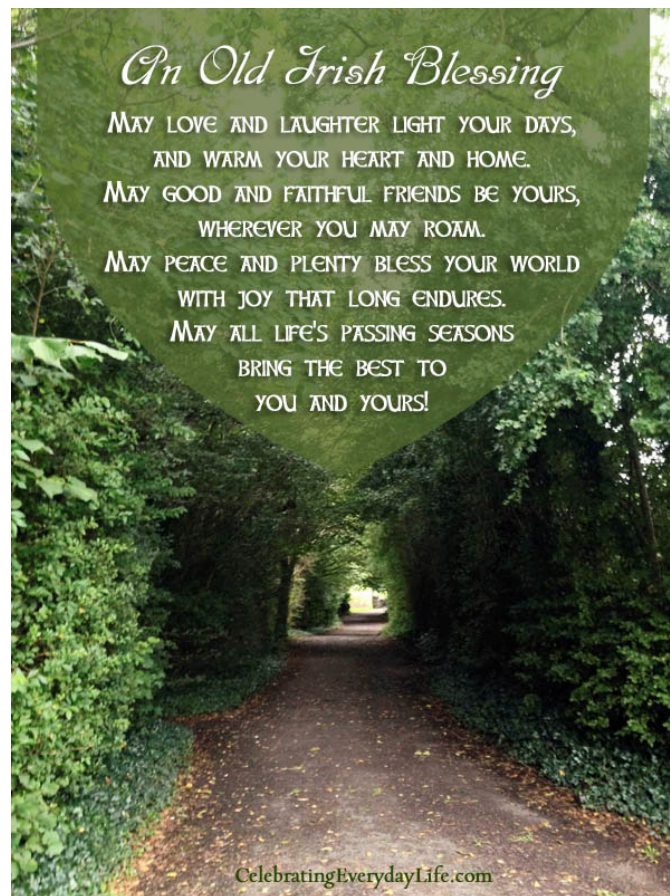
When they arrived they were taken to Saint Patrick's bedroom. Upon their entering the room, Saint Patrick extended both hands and motioned them to sit on each side of his bed. Saint Patrick grasped their hands, sighed contentedly, smiled, and stared at the ceiling as if he were viewing heaven. All three persons were silent for many minutes.

Both the realm's tax collector and the realm's lawyer were very much touched and flattered that Saint Patrick would ask them to be with him during his final moments. They were also puzzled because Saint Patrick had never given any indication that he particularly liked either of them.



Finally, the realm's lawyer asked, "Saint Patrick, why did you ask the two of us to come here?"

Saint Patrick mustered all of his strength and then said in a weak, dying voice, "Jesus died between two thieves, and that's how I'd like to go."



Source: <http://celebratingeverydaylife.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/IrishBlessingQuote.jpg>.

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Patriotic, Steadfast, and True  
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