

Extracts from *Ludwig Bieler's translation of The Confession of St. Patrick*



Patrick, a sinner:

I am Patrick, a sinner, most unlearned, the least of all the faithful, and utterly despised by many. My father was Calpornius, a deacon, son of Potitus, a priest, of the village Bannavem Taburniæ (in Britain); he had a country seat nearby, and there I was taken captive.

Did not know God:

I was then about sixteen years of age. I did not know the true God. I was taken into captivity to Ireland with many thousands of people---and deservedly so, because we turned away from God, and did not keep His commandments, and did not obey our priests, who used to remind us of our salvation. And the Lord brought over us the wrath of his anger and scattered us among many nations....

His Conversion:

There the Lord opened the sense of my unbelief that I might at last remember my sins and be converted with all my heart to the Lord my God, who had regard for my abjection... and watched over me before I knew Him, and before I was able to distinguish between good and evil.....Hence I cannot be silent....about the great benefits and the great grace which the Lord has deigned to bestow upon me in the land of my captivity....

His Concept of God:

Because there is no other God, nor ever was, nor will be, than God the Father unbegotten, without beginning, from whom is all beginning, the Lord of the universe....and His son Jesus Christ, whom we declare to have always been with the Father, spiritually and ineffably begotten by the Father before the beginning

of the world... by Him are made all things visible and invisible. He was made man, and, having defeated death, was received into heaven by the Father; and He hath given Him all power ...in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess to Him that Jesus Christ is Lord and God...He has poured forth upon us abundantly the Holy Spirit, the gift and guarantee of eternal life, who makes those, who believe and obey, sons of God and joint heirs with Christ

Why evangelise:

For He Himself has said through the Prophet: Call upon me in the day of thy trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shall glorify me..... Although I am imperfect in many things, I nevertheless wish that my brethren and kinsmen should know what sort of person I am, so that they may understand my heart's desire.... We are, so Scripture says, a letter of Christ for salvation unto the utmost part of the earth, and, though not an eloquent one, yet this letter is genuinely and strongly written in your hearts, not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God! ...Whence I, once rustic, exiled, unlearned...this at least I know most certainly that ... I was like a stone lying in the deep mire; and He that is mighty came and in His mercy lifted me up, and raised me aloft, and placed me on the top of the wall.I must spread everywhere the name of God so that after my decease I may leave a bequest to my brethren and sons whom I have baptised in the Lord---so many thousands of people

The power of Prayer:

...After I came to Ireland---every day I had to tend sheep, and many times a day I prayed---the love of God and His fear came to me more and more, and my faith was strengthened. My spirit was moved so that in a single day I would say as many as a 100 prayers, and almost as many in the night, and this even when I was staying in the woods and on the mountains; and I used to get up for prayer before daylight, through snow, through frost, through rain, and I felt no harm... because the spirit within me was then fervent.

Learning to hear God's voice:

One night I heard in my sleep a voice saying to me: 'It is well that you fast, soon you will go to your own country.' And again, after a short while, I heard a voice saying to me: 'See, your ship is ready.' And it was not near, but at a distance of perhaps two hundred miles...and then I took to flight, and I left the man with whom I had stayed for six years. And I went in the strength of God ...and I feared nothing until I came to that ship.

God answers prayer – transport:

And the day that I arrived the ship was set afloat, and I said that I was able to pay for my passage with them. But the captain was not pleased, and with indignation he answered harshly: 'It is of no use for you to ask us to go along with us.' And when I heard this, I left them in order to return to the hut where I was staying. And as I went, I began to pray; and before I had ended my prayer, I heard one of them shouting behind me, 'Come, hurry, we shall take you on in good faith...'

God answers prayer – food:

After 3 days we reached land, and for 28 days we travelled through deserted country. They lacked food, and hunger overcame them; and ...the captain said 'Tell me, Christian: you say that your God is great and all-powerful; why, then, do you not pray for us? As you can see, we are suffering from hunger.' I said ... full of confidence: 'Be truly converted with all your heart to the Lord my God, because nothing is impossible for Him, that this day He may send you food....for He has abundance everywhere!.. With the help of God, it came to pass: suddenly a herd of pigs appeared on the road before our eyes, and they killed many of them.... and fully recovered their strength... From that day they had plenty of food. They also found wild honey...

Hearing God's voice in prison:

And once again, after many years, I fell into captivity. On that first night I stayed with them, I heard a divine message saying to me: 'Two months will you be with them.' And so it came to pass: on the sixtieth night thereafter the Lord delivered me out of their hands.....

Britain: a prophetic vision:

And again after a few years I was in Britain with my people who received me as their son...There I saw in the night the vision of a man, whose name was Victorius, coming as it were from Ireland, with countless letters. And he gave me one of them, and I read the opening words of the letter, which were, 'The voice of the Irish'; and as I read the beginning of the letter I thought that at the same moment I heard their voice...and thus did they cry out as with one mouth: 'We ask thee, boy, come and walk among us once more.' And I was quite broken in heart, and could read no further, and so I woke up.

Betrayed by his dearest friend:

I was attacked by a number of my seniors who came forth and brought up my sins against my laborious episcopateAs cause for proceeding against me they found---after thirty years!---a confession I had made before I was a deacon. In the anxiety of my troubled mind I confided to my dearest friend what I had done in my boyhood one day, nay, in one hour, because I was not yet strong. I know not, God knows---whether I was then fifteen years old: and I did not believe in the living God,...But the more am I sorry for my dearest friend that we had to hear what he said. To him I had confided my very soul!

Learning to always give thanks:

Hence, then, I give unwearied thanks to God, who kept me faithful in the day of my temptation, so that today I can confidently offer Him my soul as a living sacrifice---to Christ my Lord, who saved me out of all my troubles. Thus I can say: 'Who am I, O Lord, and to what hast Thou called me, Thou who didst assist me with such divine power that to-day I constantly exalt and magnify Thy name among the heathens ... and not only in good days but also in tribulations?' So indeed I must accept with equanimity whatever befalls me, be it good or evil, and always give thanks to God, who taught me to trust in Him always without hesitation...

Numerous plots and dangers:

Now, it would be tedious to give a detailed account of all my labours or even a part of them. Let me tell you briefly how the merciful God often freed me from slavery and from twelve dangers in which my life was at stake---not to mention numerous plots, which I cannot express in words...

Many people born again:

For I am very much God's debtor, who gave me such grace that many people were reborn in God through me and afterwards confirmed, and that clerics were ordained for them ... for a people just coming to the faith

Fish well and diligently:

For that reason, therefore, we ought to fish well and diligently, as the Lord .. teaches, saying: Come ye after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men..... Hence it was most necessary to spread our nets so that a great multitude and throng might be caught for God, and that there be clerics everywhere to baptize and exhort a people in need and want, as the Lord in the Gospel states, exhorts and teaches, saying: Go therefore now, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit... And again He says: Go ye therefore into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned. And again: This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all nations, and then shall come the end.

From idols to true God:

Hence, how did it come to pass in Ireland that those who never had a knowledge of God, but until now always worshipped idols and things impure, have now been made a people of the Lord, and are called sons of God, that the sons and daughters of the kings of the Irish are seen to be monks and virgins of Christ?

A slow learner:

Hence 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. And the Lord had mercy on me thousands and thousands of times because He saw that I was ready, but that I did not know what to do in the circumstances. For many tried to prevent this my mission; they would even talk to each other behind my back and say: `Why does this fellow throw himself into danger among enemies who have no knowledge of God?' It was not malice, but it did not appeal to them...

Freely you have received, freely give:

When I baptized so many thousands of people, did I perhaps expect from any of them as much as half a scruple? Tell me, and I will restore it to you. Or when the Lord ordained clerics everywhere through my unworthy person and I conferred the ministry upon them free, if I asked any of them as much as the price of my shoes, speak against me and I will return it to you....Daily I expect murder, fraud, or captivity, or whatever it may be; but I fear none of these things because of the promises of heaven. I have cast myself into the hands of God Almighty.... as the prophet says: Cast thy thought upon God, and He shall sustain thee.

Faithful witness to the end:

So, now I commend my soul to my faithful God, for whom I am an ambassador in all my wretchedness; but God....chose me for this office---to be, although among His least, one of His ministers.... But what can I say or what can I promise to my Lord, as I can do nothing that He has not given me?... I pray to God to give me perseverance and to deign that I be a faithful witness to Him to the end of my life for my God.

Total Commitment:

If ever I have done any good for my God whom I love, I beg Him to grant me that I may shed my blood with those exiles and captives for His name....I am firmly convinced that if this should happen to me, I would have gained my soul together with my body, because on that day without doubt we shall rise in the brightness of the sun, that is, in the glory of Christ Jesus our Redeemer, as sons of the living God and joint heirs with Christ, to be made conformable to His image; for of Him, and by Him, and in Him we shall reign.

Rewards of Faith:

For this sun ...rises daily for us because He commands so, but it will never reign, nor will its splendour last; what is more, those wretches who adore it will be miserably punished. Not so we, who believe in, and worship, the true sun---Christ, who will never perish, nor will he who doeth His will; but he will abide for ever as Christ abides for ever, who reigns with God the Father Almighty and the Holy Spirit before time, and now, and in all eternity. Amen.

Pure Motives for preaching:

Behold, again and again would I set forth the words of my confession. I testify in truth and in joy of heart before God and His holy angels that I never had any reason except the Gospel and its promises why I should ever return to the people from whom once before I barely escaped.

My Confession: a gift of God:

I pray those who believe and fear God, whosoever deigns to look at or receive this writing which Patrick, a sinner, unlearned, has composed in Ireland, that no one should ever say that it was my ignorance if I did or showed forth anything however small according to God's good pleasure; but let this be your conclusion and let it so be thought, that---as is the perfect truth---it was the gift of God. This is my confession before I die.

Note:

- ❖ Patrick's Confession contains approx. 200 references to scripture.
- ❖ It contains [The Rule of Faith of the Trinity](#), a creed of the Celtic Church
- ❖ Patrick was a British Celt, enslaved in Ireland as a teen, later a missionary to Ireland
- ❖ The date of his birth/death is unknown, but traditionally it is 17th March.
- ❖ The only documents about Patrick are his *Confession* and his letter to Coroticus.

The Shield of St. Patrick *(Paraphrased by Cecil Frances Alexander)*

I bind unto myself today the strong name of the Trinity, by invocation of the same, the Three in One, the One in Three. I bind this day to me forever by power of faith Christ's incarnation, his baptism in the Jordan river, his death on the cross for my salvation; his bursting from the spiced tomb, his riding up the heavenly way, his coming at the day of doom I bind unto myself today.

I bind unto myself today the power of God to hold and lead, his eye to watch, his might to stay, his ear to harken to my need, the wisdom of my God to teach, his hand to guide, his shield to ward, the Word of God to give me speech, his heavenly host to be my guard.

Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me; Christ to comfort and restore me; Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself the name, the strong name of the Trinity, by invocation of the same, the Three in One, and One in Three, of whom all nature hath creation, eternal Father, Spirit, Word; praise to the God of my salvation, salvation is of Christ the Lord!

Note: The Shield of St. Patrick is attributed to Patrick, but may not be written by him. It is found in many variations. Some leave out the middle section, some have only the middle section, and some are more or less like what you see here. This version is an example that contains all the verses that are normally associated with the shield, which is also sometimes called the breastplate of St. Patrick.