

Section I.1

Patrick, *Confession (Confessio)* (excerpts: sections 1, 9, 16–17, 23)

Date: ?first half of fifth century.

This work is preserved in eight MSS, one in Dublin and the rest in English and Continental libraries.

Author: Patrick, revered and celebrated as the apostle of Ireland, seems to have been born somewhere along the west coast of Britain, at some point in the first half of the fifth century, probably soon after the withdrawal of the Romans and while Germanic peoples were landing on more eastern parts of that coastline. His mother tongue would have been some form of Celtic language, but he may also have spoken a form of Latin, for bilingualism was not uncommon at the time. Since his grandfather and father were a priest and deacon respectively, Patrick is likely to have received his early education, including a grounding in Latin, from them, before he was kidnapped as a teenager by slave-traders and taken to the west of Ireland. After a few years he escaped, eventually finding his way home. He later felt called to return to Ireland to work for God, probably around 432. According to the opening of his *Letter to Coroticus*, he became a bishop there, though he still says of himself, *inter barbaras itaque gentes habito, proselitus et profuga ob amorem Dei* ('And so I am living among barbarous pagans, an incomer and fugitive for the love of God'). In *Confession* 46 Patrick indicates that he experienced hostile incomprehension from contemporaries at the idea of mission work among enemy people ignorant of God. This attitude may help to explain why the British, among whom Christianity had spread under Roman administration, seemed uninterested in persuading the Anglo-Saxon immigrants to adopt the Christian religion,¹ with the result that the conversion of the English in southern and eastern England occurred later than that of the Irish, not until after Augustine of Canterbury's mission to England in 597. There is some controversy regarding his relation to Palladius, mentioned by Prosper of Aquitaine as having been sent from Gaul *ad Scottos in Christum credentes* ('to the Irish who believe in Christ'; Bede, *HE* 1.13) already around 430, then moving from Ireland to northern Britain. Certainly it was not long after this period that the particular form of Latin culture that was to flourish in Ireland made its appearance.

¹ See Bede, *HE* 1.22 and 2.2.

Work: Patrick's *Confession* is a loosely autobiographical work, apparently directed at various groups of readers, written towards the end of his life. As with Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions*, written at the beginning of Patrick's century, 'confession' here can refer to a confession of faith, or to the acknowledgement of sin or to praise of God. The frequent quotations from Scripture, often seamlessly woven into the text, show Patrick's use of various versions of the Bible – the Old Latin (*Vetus Latina*) version, Jerome's early fifth-century version and a 'transitional' version, though the more standard readings may be due to later scribal 'correction'. Patrick's text is problematic, and there are many variant readings. In the excerpts below, Patrick tells us of his background and how he came to Ireland, his anxiety about writing this work, his escape from Ireland and the call to return there. As an account by someone who survived a slave raid, it may be compared with Jerome's *Life of Malchus*, in which the protagonist was captured by 'Saracens' in the Syrian desert, a century or so earlier than Patrick's experiences.

Linguistic points: This text is one of the most controversial ones from a linguistic point of view: is Patrick's writing derived from books or the spoken Latin he was familiar with? For a recent discussion of the sources and nature of Patrick's Latin, see *Adams (2016: texts 39 and 40).

Here, in the opening section of the work, Patrick combines the (literary) modesty topos with the more biblical humility topos. His sense of inferiority in literary matters and learning surfaces again in section 9, in connection with his struggles with Latin and his vernacular. Despite this, his Latin has clearly absorbed biblical style, being predominantly paratactic, with quotes from Scripture either introduced by *inquit* when they are direct quotations, or skilfully worked into the texture of his Latin. The balanced nature of some sentences recalls the parallelism particularly characteristic of the Old Testament. It appears that Patrick is familiar with a text of the *Vetus Latina*, rather than the Vulgate, and that it is this which often influences his choice of vocabulary and syntax. Here Patrick employs rhetorical figures such as asyndeton, with the same preposition repeated (*per nivem per gelu per pluviam*), and wordplay using close similarity of forms of different verbs (*fides augebatur et spiritus agebatur*). One might point to certain usages which may be particular features of later Latin, such as the increased use of diminutive forms or of the periphrastic form *notum habere* ('to know'). There is an apparent error in the use of *cum* with the accusative, but the ablative (*sex annis*) replacing the accusative for duration of time is not uncommon, in the sense 'within which period', 'throughout'. Note the use of reflexive and non-reflexive pronouns (whether *is* or *ille*) and adjectives. The word *Hiberione* seems to be a transliteration of the Old Irish word for Ireland: Patrick uses it both as an accusative and as an ablative.

TEXT I.1

[1] ego Patricius peccator rusticissimus et minimus omnium fidelium et contemptibilissimus apud plurimos, patrem habui Calpornium diaconum filium quendam Potiti presbyteri qui fuit vico Bannavem Taburniae; villulam enim prope habuit, ubi ego capturam dedi. annorum eram tunc fere sedecim. Deum enim verum ignorabam et Hiberione in captivitate adductus sum cum tot milia hominum, secundum merita nostra quia a Deo recessimus et praecepta eius non custodivimus et sacerdotibus nostris non obedientes fuimus qui <nos> nostram salutem admonebant, et Dominus induxit super nos iram animationis suae et dispersit nos in gentibus multis, etiam usque ad ultimum terrae ubi nunc parvitas mea esse videtur inter alienigenas. (...)

Isa. 42:25

Jer. 9:16/Acts 1:8

[9] quapropter olim cogitavi scribere, sed et usque nunc haesitavi; timui enim ne incederem in linguam hominum² quia non didici sicut et ceteri, qui optime itaque iura et sacras litteras utraque pari modo combiberunt et sermones illorum ex infantia numquam mutarunt sed magis ad perfectum semper addiderunt. nam sermo et loquela nostra translata est in linguam alienam, sicut facile potest probari ex saliva scripturae meae qualiter sum ego in sermonibus instructus et eruditus, quia, inquit, sapiens per linguam dinoscetur et sensus et scientia et doctrina veritatis. (...)

Sir. 4:29

[16] sed postquam Hiberione deveneram – cotidie itaque pecora pascebam et frequens in die orabam – magis ac magis accedebat amor Dei et timor ipsius et fides augebatur et spiritus agebatur, ut in die una usque ad centum orationes et in nocte prope similiter, ut etiam in silvis et monte manebam, et ante lucem excitabar ad orationem per nivem per gelu per pluviam et nihil mali sentiebam neque ulla pigritia erat in me – sicut modo video quia tunc spiritus in me ferebat – [17] et ibi scilicet quadam nocte in somno audivi vocem dicentem mihi: ‘bene ieiunas cito iturus ad patriam tuam,’ et iterum post paululum tempus audivi responsum dicentem mihi, ‘ecce navis tua parata est,’ et non erat prope sed forte habebat ducenta milia passus et ibi numquam fueram nec ibi notum quemquam de hominibus habebam. et deinde postmodum conversus sum in fugam et intermisi hominem cum quo fueram sex annis, et veni in virtute Dei qui viam meam ad bonum dirigebat et nihil metuebam donec perveni ad navem illam. (...)

[23] et iterum post paucos annos in Britanniis eram cum parentibus meis qui me ut filium susceperunt et ex fide rogaverunt me ut vel modo ego post tantas tribulationes quas ego pertuli nusquam ab illis discederem, et ibi scilicet vidi in visu noctis³ virum venientem quasi de Hiberione, cui nomen Victoric(i)us, cum epistolis innumerabilibus, et dedit mihi unam ex his et legi principium epistolae

Dan. 7:13

2 This phrase, meaning ‘to incur criticism’, occurs later, in John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* and in John of Whethamstede: it has a biblical ring and may derive from Sir. 28:23, 27.

3 This is Patrick’s fourth dream of seven he relates in this work.

continentem 'vox Hiberionacum' et cum recitabam principium epistolae putabam ipso momento audire vocem ipsorum qui erant iuxta silvam Vocluti quae est prope mare occidentale et sic exclamaverunt quasi ex uno ore, 'rogamus te, sancte puer, ut venias et adhuc ambulas inter nos.'⁴ et valde compunctus sum corde et amplius non potui legere et sic expertus sum, Deo gratias, quia post plurimos annos praestitit illis Dominus secundum clamorem illorum.

Translation: Patrick, *Confession*

[1] *I, Patrick, a sinner, completely without refinement and the least of all the faithful and totally despicable in the eyes of many, had a father, Calpurnius, a deacon and son of a certain Potitus, a priest in the town of Bannaventa Berniae; for he had a small estate nearby where I was taken captive. I was then about sixteen years old. I took no notice of the true God, and I was brought to Ireland in captivity, along with so many thousands of men, as we deserved because we had withdrawn from God and did not keep his commandments and we were not obedient to our priests who urged our salvation, and the Lord inflicted on us the anger of his spirit and scattered us among many peoples, even to the ends of the earth, where now my humble self is seen to be among people of a foreign race. (...)*

[9] *For this reason I long ago thought of writing, but up till now I have hesitated to do so; for I was afraid of falling onto men's tongues because I had not studied like others who have completely absorbed both the laws and holy writings equally and who have never, since their infancy, changed their (own) language but have instead always improved their own to perfection. For our words and speech have been translated into a foreign language, as the standard of my training and learning in eloquence can easily be demonstrated from the savour of my writings because, as it is said, 'the wise man is recognised by his tongue, as also his judgement, and knowledge and the teaching of truth'. (...)*

[16] *But after I had reached Ireland (I used to graze the flocks every day and prayed several times a day), the love and fear of God increased more and more and my faith grew and my spirit was exercised so that on a single day I was praying up to a hundred times and at night nearly as often. I was also living in the woods and on the mountain and would get up before dawn to pray, in snow, in ice, in rain, and I suffered no ill effects and had no lack of energy. I now see that this was because at that time the spirit was burning within me, [17] and it was there, in fact, that one night I heard in my sleep a voice saying to me, 'It is good that you are fasting, because you are soon going home', and again, a little later, I heard a reply saying to me, 'Look, your ship is ready', and it was not close by but about two hundred miles*

4 Here Patrick switches from the subjunctive of *venias* after *ut* to the indicative of *ambulas*, perhaps carried away by the similar *-as* ending of the two forms; such a switch is not uncommon in his writing; cf. *Adams (2016: 451).

away, and I had never been there and I did not know a single person there. And then afterwards I ran away and left behind the man with whom I had been for six years, and I travelled in the company of the strength of God who was guiding me in the right direction, and I feared nothing until I reached that ship. (...)

[23] And so after a few years I was once again in Britain with my relatives, who welcomed me as their son and asked me in good faith never to leave them now after all the tribulations I had suffered. It was in fact there that I saw in a vision at night a man apparently coming from Ireland, whose name was Victoric(i)us, with innumerable letters, and he gave me one of them and I read the heading of the letter, which contained the words 'the voice of the Irish'. When I read out the letter heading I thought that at that moment I heard the voice of those who lived beside the wood of Foclut, which is near the western sea, and they shouted out, as with one voice, 'We beg you, holy child, to come and continue to walk among us.' I felt great remorse in my heart and I was unable to read further and in this way I realised – thanks be to God! – that after many years the Lord had granted them what they were crying out for.

Primary Sources and Related Texts

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