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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

TWO SAINTS : ST. AUGUSTINE, ST. PATRICK.

A COMPARISON.

BY THE REV. F. R. MONTGOMERY HITCHCOCK, D.D.

IN many ways the *Confession* of St. Patrick, written about A.D. 450, is akin in spirit and devotion to the celebrated *Confessions* of St. Augustine of A.D. 397. Both quote many of the same scriptural passages; and many of Patrick's phrases and words like *inennarrabiliter* are to be found in Augustine's work. They both express the same utter and complete dependence upon God for everything they are, and have done, and are about to do that distinguishes these writers in an age when Pelagian views were widely spread. Orientius also, a Christian poet as well as a bishop of Auch in Aquitania in the early quarter of the fifth century, denounced Pelagius as a "British snake" (*Coluber Britannus*) and declared that the gifts of eloquence and reason are bestowed by Christ. Otherwise men would not have the power they have. "Quodque etiam possunt hoc quoque non poterunt." Nought is our own, He has it. He gave it. "Nil proprium est nobis, Ipse habet, Ipse dedit." This is the very *dictum* of Augustine scattered through his *Confessions*. "Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis." Give what Thou commandest and command what Thou wilt. Augustine even says: My faith, which is Thy gift, invokes thee (*Conf.*, I, 2). Patrick says: "I have no power (*nihil valeo*) unless He gave it to me" (*Conf.*, 57). Augustine says: "No one can be continent (pure) unless God gives it" (x, 31, 47). "Give me what I love," he cries, meaning the power of loving. "For I love and Thou hast given me that. Do not abandon Thine own gifts" (xi, 2). In his work *On Grace and Freewill*, c. vi, he says: "God crowns His gifts not thy merits." "All my good things (virtues) are Thy ordinances and gifts; all my bad things (vices) are mine own faults" (x, 3), meaning that the only things he really owned were his failings. "Whoever he be that reckoneth up to Thee his true merits (*vera merita*), what reckoneth he up but Thy gifts (*munera*)?" "O that men would but know themselves" and "he that glorieth would glory in the Lord" (ix, 13). Here Augustine appeals to the well-known classical adage—"NOSCE TEIPSUM." He believed if men would practise that habit of self-introspection with a view to self-knowledge they would agree with him, as surely they must. He was far from claiming any merit for himself. He said: "Thou hast wiped out all my bad deservings (*merita*), Thou hast gone before (*praevenisti*, prevented (Church Collect))¹ all my good deservings" (xiii, 1).

¹Gregorian Sacramentary (A.D. 600), "prevent our actions by breathing upon" (*ASPIRANDO*).

In another work he summed up the matter in these words—“ We live more safely if we ascribe everything (good) to God and not partly to Him, and partly to ourselves ” (*Tutiores igitur vivimus, si totum Deo damus* (*De Perseverantia*, c. vi).

Patrick, similarly, ascribes everything good in his life to God's gift and guidance. “ He called me, He predestinated me to preach the Gospel ” (*Ep.* 6), he says. Everything he did was a ‘*Donum Dei.*’ His work in Ireland, his missionary labours, his sacrifices, his preaching, his evangelistic and organising work for the Church, the writing of his Confession (*Conf.*, 62)—everything was to be attributed to God, Who gave him the opportunity, the good will to seize it and the power to use it to His glory. His success in Ireland was due to God's grace, not his. “ I am debtor to God Who bestowed such grace upon me ” “ I thank my God Who kept me faithful in the day of my temptation, so that I may offer to Him a sacrifice, a living host, my own soul ” (*Conf.*, 34)—the only sacrifice—and that a scriptural one (*Rom.* xii. 1)—he mentions. “ I fear,” he said, “ to lose the labour which I began,” and then correcting himself at once, adds, “ Yet not I, but Christ the Lord.” He does not say “ I ordained clergy,” as a modern bishop might, but “ the Lord ordained clergy through my mediocrity.” He claims that God chose and appointed him and that God was his *authority* (*auctor*). He cries like the Psalmist—“ I cast myself upon the hands of the omnipotent God Who ruleth everywhere.” “ I pray God,” he humbly says ; “ that He may grant me perseverance.” Referring to his work in Ireland he says : “ It was not my grace but God Who gave this care (laying it) on my heart ” (*Ep.* 11).

These are the very sentiments that we find in Augustine's *Confessions*. They are the very woof and warp of both works, and the longer we live and the more deeply we think, the more we are assured of their truth.

How inconsistent with such ideas is the Roman theory of works of supererogation—the word is in Augustine's *Confessions* but not the doctrine—“ Voluntary works done over and above God's commandment,” which Article XIV truly declares “ cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety.” And yet that doctrine is the foundation of the whole system of the indulgences of the Roman Church, which affects to possess a Treasury of Merits, in which are stored up the superabundant merits of Christ and the Saints which the Pope dispenses in the form of pardons and indulgences.

Clement VI (*Bull. Unigenitus* 1350) describes this “ Treasury.” As one drop of the precious blood of Christ was sufficient to save an infinite number of souls, all the other drops could be applied to other purposes. “ Wherefore in order that the mercy of so great an outpouring should not be void or superfluous, He acquired a treasury for the Militant Church, wishing as a pious father to lay up a store for His sons. This treasure He committed to be dispensed through St. Peter, the key-bearer of heaven and his successors. To add to which heap of treasure the merits of the Blessed Virgin and of all the elect from the first to the last, are known to give their assistance,

so that no one need fear its consumption or even its diminution." But our Lord taught us that even when we have done all that is commanded us we are "unprofitable servants."

Such was the opinion of Augustine and the conviction of Patrick—the genuine Patrick who knew nothing of a Purgatory, nothing of works of supererogation, or of justification conveyed by the sacraments, *ex opere operato*, but who believed in the saving grace, the justifying power of the Love of Christ, Who "became poor for our sakes," and "was crucified and died for us," and "rose again having conquered death," and that "we shall rise in the glory of the Redeemer" and "in Him shall reign." How different was his mentality from that of those who believed and still believe that man can do something to merit or deserve justification! The Protestant Church is not antinomian; it believes in a living faith that must produce the fruit of good works, as a sound tree gives sweet fruit, but it does not consider that good works can expiate or atone for sins although done after justification. The Council of Trent decreed, on the contrary, that such good works merit the actual attainment of eternal life. See Sess. vi., Can. xxxii. "If any man says that the good works of a justified man are the gifts of God and not the good merits of the justified man—let him be anathema. Or if he says that the man who is justified by good works does not merit increase of grace, life eternal, and the attainment of eternal life—let him be anathema." St. Patrick—the Patrick of the *Confession*—lies under that anathema, like everyone who like Paul clings to "the Christ in me, the hope of glory"—for he declared that every good thing that he did was a gift of God.

Hitherto we have been considering one Patrick—the genuine Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland in the fifth century. There is another Patrick, quite a different person, who is venerated but not canonised by the Roman Church. Some people have been foolish enough to confuse our Patrick with his predecessor Palladius, who left the country after a short year in disgust, threw up his mission which he had received from the Pope, and died 'in the Britains.' As the Irish chronicler, Muirchu, shrewdly comments: "No one can receive what has not been given him from God! But more have confused the real Patrick with his Romanized understudy, the Patrick who works miracles of an ever-increasingly absurd kind, who visits Rome not once but often, and stays as long as thirty years on one occasion, and, while all Rome slept, surreptitiously annexed no less than 365 relics, including the bones of Paul and Peter, Laurence and Stephen, a sheet with Christ's blood and the hair of the Virgin! In Gibbon's day there were sixty-six biographies of Patrick, regarding which he used an opprobrious epithet. The miraculous element which is absent from the genuine works of the Saint, unless the greatness of God's mercy in converting the heathen Irish to Christ by means of Patrick be called a miracle, as, indeed, it was a crowning miracle. But that sort of a miracle is not what is meant, but thaumaturgy—the performance of marvellous deeds by the saints. It is this that gives the interest and the pep to medieval hagiography—the writer of

which, like the writer of the modern novel, catered for the taste of the public for whom he provided literary recreation such as it was. They perhaps could not appreciate anything better, like those who make the demand for sex literature in these days. We begin a record of marvellous deeds in Muirchu's memoir and Tirechan's compilation, both written about A.D. 680, which is carried on through one life after another, among them the medieval Lives collected by Colgan, e.g. the eleventh-century Tripartite Life edited by Stokes, and the Lives of Probus and Jocelyn of the twelfth. There is no regular system observed, as each new writer felt free to improve and enlarge previous works. As Professor Bury said (*St. Patrick*, p. 267), the Patrician legends were "worked up in the cells of ecclesiastics but the arguments of the stories, which they moulded, were created by popular imagination, and suggested by the motives of folklore." In the legendary Lives we find a most unpleasant person masquerading as Patrick, a creature armed with a potent curse, who drove his chariot over his sister and killed her, to whom the Lord appeared on Mount Hermon and presented to him the Staff of Jesus, and grants him three requests, that he (Patrick) is to be on His right hand in heaven, that he is to judge the Gael in the day of judgment and that he is to have as much gold as his nine companions can carry. The only miracle ascribed by Tirechan to Patrick that would appeal to moderns is the story that when he saw two brothers fighting in a field some way off, he put a spell upon them with a mighty shout, so that they remained rigidly in a ridiculous position with arms upraised until he had time to come up, release them from his spell, and make them embrace as friends. The most world-wide tradition, of course, is connected with the Shamrock (shamar og, small clover). This is said not to be older than the Reformation; but it is a remarkable fact that on the isle of Lerins, with which Tirechan connects Patrick, a species of shamrock called *medicago agrestis* is abundant and the ruined *chapelle de la Trinité* has a roof shaped like a clover leaf and a doorway consisting of three stones.¹

We observe with pain the gradual transformation of a very human-hearted man into a self-seeking despot, as we glance through these later *Lives* of Patrick. Muirchu's account sets the fairy snowball a-rolling. Dom Louis Gongand of Louvain condemns these legends, while Roman Catholic bishops accept them like children. In Muirchu the man Victoricus who, in the *Confession*, visited Patrick in a dream asking for help like the man of Macedonia who appeared to Paul asking for help, becomes an Angel Victor, who visits him every Saturday and ascends visibly to heaven, on one occasion leaving the print of his foot upon a mountain (c. xi).

This new Patrick overcame the Druids with his magical powers, turned a fruitful land into a salt marsh, and changed Coroticus into a fox! The work, in fine, abounds in that miraculous element which is absent from the genuine writings of the Saint.

We notice too in Muirchu the first instance of the veneration of

¹ For an account of the monastery of Lerins, and its founder Honoratus, see my *St. Patrick and his Gallic Friends*, S.P.C.K. (c. iv.).

relics or bones, those of a Saxon lady, Moneisen, baptised by Patrick (c. 27) ; and the first mention of " merit " of Patrick (ii. 8). When he died there arose a fierce contest between the O'Neills and the Ulidians over the relics of the Saint, although the angel had said, " no relics of thy body are to be taken from the ground " (ii. 12), but " by the merit of Patrick (merito Patricii) and the mercy of God the waves of the lough arose so high that the combatants could not get at one another.

In the memoir of Tirechan, compiled about A.D. 680 (he gives a valuable note of time referring to the recent plague *mortalitates novissimae* 664-8) there is no mention of a papal mission of Patrick. A sentence, however, in the *Book of Armagh*, inserted before this memoir by the tenth-century editor, is to the effect that one Sachellus went with Patrick to study thirty years in Rome and that Patrick ordained Sachellus there and carried away some of the relics of Peter and Paul and Stephen which are in Armagh. The whole story is absurd, on the face of it, and was evidently made up in the interests of Armagh. It runs directly counter to Patrick's own statement in his *Confessions* that he never left Ireland even to go to the Britains where his people were, much less to Gaul where his brethren were, the furthest limit of his travels. In the *Liber Angeli* (book of the Angel) of about A.D. 800 or later, inserted in the *Book of Armagh*, we have a colloquy of Patrick and an Angel in the course of which the latter permits the extension of the boundaries of the See of Armagh and appoints to Patrick and Armagh all the nations of the Irish as his " paruchia " or diocese. Patrick thanks the angel for this donation and declares himself bound to provide for the " religious " of the monasteries. The second part establishes the rights and jurisdiction of Armagh as the principal See, because of its possession of the sacred relics of the apostles, and the sacred blood of Christ in a mantle, declares that Armagh is supreme in authority over all churches in the land and that if any case arises too hard for the Irish judges, it is to be referred to the chair of the Archbishop of the Irish, that is Patrick, and " that if it cannot be settled by him and his wise men, it is to be referred to the Apostles and the chair of the Apostle Peter which has the authority of the city of Rome."

It is plain that this document was deliberately framed to establish the primacy of Armagh upon an alleged divine ordinance. As Bury said, it is " a clumsy invention, a fiction." But it shows the spirit that was working in those days in Ireland, when every superstitious device, every miraculous element was dragged in to bolster up the claims of Armagh to rule Ireland and the claims of Rome to rule Armagh. The document itself, short as it is, is full of inconsistencies such as a friendship between Patrick and Columba, who was not born until sixty years after Patrick's death, and late ecclesiastical terms which would have been anachronisms in Patrick's day such as " diocesis," " anchoritae," " abbas," " monasterium," " religiosi."

The Irish Canons which claim to be the decrees of a Synod of Bishops, that is of Patrick, Auxilius, and Iserninus, are likewise not

to be taken seriously. Canon 6 ordering that any cleric whose hair is not tonsured in the Roman fashion, should be excommunicated, shows the tendency. The Irish Church claimed to have its own form of tonsure and its own Easter, whereas the Romanising party, at first evidently but a small faction, strove to bring them into line. The 13th Canon forbids a bishop, who has left his own diocese, to perform episcopal functions in the domain of another, forgetful of the fact that it is condemning Patrick who is stated to have ordained Sachellus in Rome. See the note prefixed to Tirechan. These Canons, drawn up some centuries after Patrick, were assigned to him in order to secure his authority for their regulations. Haddan and Stubbs are followed by Wasserschleben in assigning these Canons to the eighth century.

The *Hibernensis* is another collection of Canons relating to the Irish Church, probably compiled on the Continent. Impartial authorities like Wasserschleben, Haddan and Stubbs, etc., assign them to the beginning of the eighth century. It assigns to Patrick the Canon—"if any questions arise in this island let them be referred to the Apostolic See."

Wasserschleben dates these Canons from a time when the Irish Church after an arduous and lengthy struggle had been forced into union with Rome. Had this Canon about referring questions to the Roman See been in existence in A.D. 664 when the Council of Whitby was held, Wilfrid could have laid the question that disturbed the northern church at rest by bringing it forward. Dr. J. E. Kenny, who has studied the question, says: "In any case it seems certain that the book was composed early in the eighth century by members of the Roman section of the Irish clergy."

Students of Church history are familiar with the forgeries of the ninth century known as the False Decretals (see *Encyc. Britann.*)—a literary fraud which succeeded. Among these were letters composed in the ninth century and foisted upon the earlier popes with a view to aggrandise the papacy and to establish its primacy and the right of the Apostolic See to hear appeals. The power of the papacy was enlarged by these letters and when the centuriators of Magdeburg lodged their protest in the sixteenth century—there had been considerable uneasiness about them for some time before—it was too late to be of any use.

In Tirechan's memoir which was written, though not so audaciously, in the interests of Armagh, a candidate for Baptism is asked this question—"Do you believe in the unity of the Church?" (not the Roman Church). This recalls the great work of Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church*, in which he was very far from recognizing any primacy of the Roman bishop whom he so often bitterly opposed. Tirechan, who writes in the interest of the *paruchia Patricii*, declaring that the whole island belonged by divine donation to the *paruchia* of which Armagh was the head, referred to the relics of Peter and Paul and others, part of which, he says, Patrick gave a northern bishop who lived near the Bush River. Later writers tell how Patrick obtained these relics "by a theft which was no sacrilege,"

and that Patrick having stolen them in this manner "left the whole of that collection in Armagh, according to the will of God and of the Angel and of the men of Ireland." So the Tripartite Life of the eleventh century. But according to the earlier record of Tirechan he had already bestowed a part of them upon another bishop. Fancy the madness of the idea, Patrick stealing the bones that Rome held in such high honour, and not only that, but being allowed to steal them, and the Irish people being allowed to retain them when they fell under the sway of the Roman See!! No one but children could conceive such *ineptiae*. Patrick never mentioned "relics." No one can prove that he was interested in them. Anyway, his bones have been, like Shakespeare's, left in their last resting-place.

The wonders and signs which Christ showed Patrick (*Conf.*, 45) were not wonders in the physical world, miraculous feats of making the dead talk and converse and live again, but the power of God in keeping him safe and secure from all the perils that threatened him always. As St. Paul gives a list of his conflicts and trials in 2 Corinthians xi. 23-33, Patrick enumerates his in *Confession*, 35. "The most loving God set me often free from captivity and from twelve dangers which threatened my life." Like St. Paul he also suffered from hunger and nakedness (*Conf.*, 27). As in St. Paul's life God's power was made perfect in weakness, so in Patrick's. God helped him to overcome the temptations of his strong enemy, the devil, who never ceased to try to seduce him from his great and holy purpose to lead a chaste life, devoted to the work of saving the souls of the Irish for the Master he loved, Who had died for him, and who was ever present with him to guide, help and love him, and give him patience and perseverance to the end. Such are the genuine, the real wonders of St. Patrick's *Confession*, the wonder of a life absolutely devoted, absolutely humble, absolutely spiritual, absolutely human—a wonder that anyone who follows in the steps of this single-minded and great-hearted disciple may experience. St. Augustine has a striking passage (*Conf.*, viii, 3) in which he describes the joy of his own conversion as a sort of reaction to the joy of the great loving Father who rejoices in the return of the younger son. That joy is the undercurrent of feeling that runs through the *Confession* of Patrick. "What can I do for Him Who has done so much for me?" "This," he says, "is my return, my 'retributio,' to exalt the knowledge of God and to confess His marvellous works before every nation under heaven" (4, 57). This is the only return I can make, he cries, to "*the God I love*, and for whose love I yearn to die" (59). Who has reached a higher than that cry of a heart breaking with joy of loving and sorrow of yearning, the cry of one Saint answering another? Augustine had written in his self-revealing pages: "What return shall I make to the Lord. I shall love Thee, O Lord, I shall give thanks to Thee and confess to Thy name" (ii. 7), using the words of a kindred spirit of a distant age (Ps. cxv. 12). So one Saint goes on answering another all down the ages, until all their voices are gathered into one mighty wave of praise rolling triumphantly towards the shore of the city of God.