

How St. Patrick and Irish Missionaries Helped Saved Western Civilization

Rudy Ray Seward

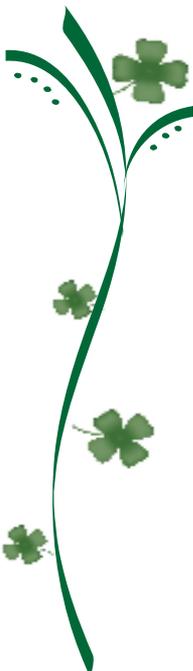
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Martyrs in Remote Ireland

- Humane literate evangelists on “remote” island reintroduced to medieval Europe eleven centuries of culture that fell largely along with the Roman Empire.
- These efforts, long forgotten outside Ireland, made important contributions to modern civilization.



By “the skin of our teeth”

- Sir Kenneth Clark acknowledged contribution of Irish missionaries in the 1966-69 BBC series about Western civilization.
- With help of Irish civilization survived the Dark Ages after the fall of Rome only by “the skin of our teeth”.
- Title of first chapter in *Civilisation: A Personal View* (1969, book on series)



II of Rome

- Between Alaric's sack of Rome in 410 AD/CE and death of last Western emperor in 476 AD/CE, Imperium destabilizes.
- Court abandons Rome for Ravenna and looting and devastation becomes widespread.
- The legions are withdrawn from Britain, opening it to Irish and Anglo-Saxon raids.
- The Irish, fine sailors, navigate their stealthy, skin-covered currach to isolated farms, for early morning slave raids.

Irish Raid on West Coast

- Around 400 AD/CE a great fleet in early morning raid captures ‘many thousands’ of young prisoners for slave markets.
- One prisoner left a written record: Maewyn Succat in Patricius’ *Confessio*.
- Sixteen-year-old Succat becomes property of Miliucc, who more a rustler than a king.
- Wrenched out of predictable life of Roman *civitas* into life of bitter isolation tending sheep.



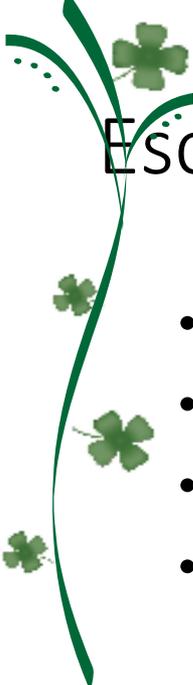
Spirited Debates about Succat

- Basics aspects of life and transformation into cleric and sainthood questioned.
- Most likely born in Roman Britain, probably Wales.
- Most likely born before beginning of 5th century but some contend later.
- His father was a Roman official and grandfather had been a Catholic priest.



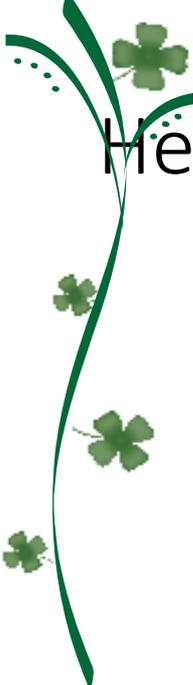
Life in Ireland

- Only slowly does Succat learn the local language and customs, and strangers happening by cause terror.
- Must have been well nourished before his capture to have survived.
- Despite having not believed in God and finding priests foolish, he turns to constant prayer.



Escaping Ireland

- Over six years, he grows from a careless boy to a holy visionary.
- A voice tells him “Your hungers are rewarded: you are going home.”
- He escapes and seeks out his homeland.
- He walks 200 miles to sea at Wexford, only to be turned away as a suspected runaway slave.



Helping Shipmates

- He returns to nearby hut and prayer but is called back and welcomed aboard.
- Boards ship and three days later reaches the continent where they trudge for two weeks only finding devastation.
- Captain ask Succat's help to pray for them and sailors bow their heads and shortly afterwards a herd of pigs trots down a nearby trail.



Voice of Irish Calls

- After a few more years Succat is once again in Britain, before long he feels called in another celestial visitation.
- "Voice of Irish" directs him to return to Ireland: "We beg you to come and walk among us once more" with a mission as a priest and convertor.
- He moves to Gaul to assume the life of a monk and to study for ordination.



Patricius' *Confessio*:

- Upon ordination he was given the title Patricius or Patrick.
- May have travelled to Ireland under the direct order of Pope Celestine.
- Becomes the first missionary bishop in Ireland and possibly in history to barbarians beyond reach of Roman Law.
- Not first priest sent to Ireland but only have documentary evidence for his experiences.

Founding Father Irish Christianity

- For thirty years, Patrick helps Irish "seize the everlasting kingdom."
- Ends slave trade plus decreases violence like murder and intertribal warfare.
- Establishes indigenous monasteries and convents throughout northern central, and eastern Ireland and appoints bishops .
- Religious scribes identified him as founder, ancient superhero, and able to perform miracles





ST. PATRICK

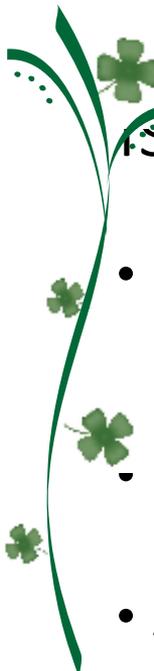
Christ is My King

Christ is My King



lore Peaceful Ireland

- By 461, when Patrick likely dies, Roman Empire is in deep chaos but Ireland is changing rapidly from chaos to peace.
- Thanks to Patrick's "earthiness and warmth," which serve to lessen hostility and suspicion.
- He also demonstrated the classic Irish virtues of steadfast loyalty, courage, and generosity (transformed into faith, hope, and charity).



Isolated in Ireland

- In fourth century Constantine blends Romanization and Christian church membership with the latter offering political advancement and social convenience.
- Isolated in Ireland, Patrick can only appeal to Irish dreams, fears, and aspirations.
- Artifacts and mythology reveal Ireland's pre-Christian world as inspiring nightmares, giving an adult "the willies."



Shifting Irish Beliefs

- Belief in shape-shifting indicated instability in the Irish world.
- Trickster gods lurked at every crossroad or behind every tree (Druid magic).
- Patrick offered the Irish a living alternative.
- To be brave despite expectation of violence and be a man of peace and at peace.
- His magic: All beings and events comes from the hand of a good God.



Ministry in Ireland

- Outside Ireland, Patrick is little known and his church is ignorant of developments in the continent church.
- Patrick sees universe as a "Great Sacrament", with the events of Christ's life, the ranks of saints, and the powers of nature all playing a part.



Celtic Cups: Transformation Story

- Irish imagination moved from “unstable pagan origins” to “baptized peace” of Christian message.
- **Gundestrup Cauldron** discovered in a swamp, where dumped BC/CE.
- Swarms with images of monsters and angry gods demanding both animal and human sacrifice.
- One side has “a gigantic cook-god who drops squirming humans into a vat.”



Alice of Ardagh

- Communion cup from around end of 7th century.
- In Christian communion, God does not demand the blood of human sacrifice.
- Instead the message is that God spilled His blood for all.
- Cup's most thrilling part intricate artwork etched on underside of base so that when cup raised to sky God alone could see it.





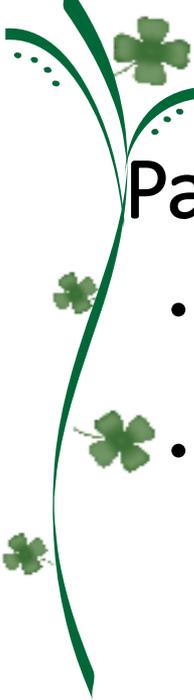
- Bowl and foot spun silver and outer side decorated with applied gold, silver, glass, amber, and enamel ornaments and underside contains a polished rock crystal at center.
- Names of eleven apostles and St. Paul are inscribed below the band of gold filigree and studs encircling the bowl.
- Incised animal decoration below two handle escutcheons, which are decorated with elaborate glass studs and filigree panels.

Celtic Christianity

- Patrick has a temper that flares when he sees injustice against the weak, but is also cheerful and good-humored.
- He does not take himself too seriously. In other words, he is an Irishman, more comfortable in Ireland than in his original home in Roman Britain.
- His gift to the Irish is a uniquely Celtic Christianity.

Celtic Christianity

- Unlike church fathers on the continent, Patrick does not work to eradicate pagan influences.
- To this day, the Irish feasts of May Day and Halloween survive.
- In parts of Ulster the harvest god Lug is feted; Brian Friel's play/movie *Dancing at Lughnasa*.
- Christianity was introduced in Ireland without bloodshed (red martyrdom).



Path to Saving Civilization

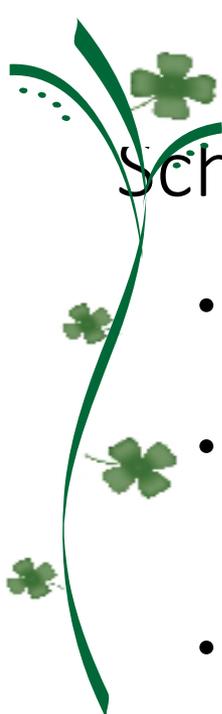
- Lack of red martyrdom disturbed the Irish, so they conceived green martyrdom that nurtured Irish scholarship.
- Green martyrs left behind comforts and pleasures of ordinary human society to live hermits' lives on mountaintops or lonely islands.

Path to Saving Civilization

- In no man's lands outside tribal jurisdiction studied Scripture and communed with God after example of anchorites in Egyptian desert.
- Ireland not like barren terrain of Egyptian desert; thus, green martyrdom gave way to more social life of monasticism.
- Many monasteries rapidly became first population centers, hubs of unprecedented prosperity, art, and learning.

Path to Saving Civilization

- Attracted participants from throughout Ireland, then England, Europe, and beyond.
- Especially students to expanding university cities, who were provided room and board without cost (for all rich or poor).
- Generosity extended to variety of idea accepted: brought into libraries everything they could get their hands on.
- Basis for unique role in Western culture.



Scholars seek refuge in West

- Wandering tribes that overran Europe as Rome declined brought great cultural and physical impoverishment.
- Bleak Atlantic shore where the sea battered away provided refuge for Christian refugees struggling in search of the most inaccessible fringes.
- Ireland endless stretches of bog and forest inland offered sanctuary as well.

What places they found!

- In 6th Century AD/CE boat-loads of scholars arrived at various location, looking for anywhere that offered security for like-minded men.
- For hundred of years Western Christianity survived by clinging on to places like Skellig Michael, a pinnacle of rock rising 700 feet out of the sea and 7.2 miles from the Irish coast.





Skellig Michael - cemetery and large oratory

Monastic Site contained

- Six clochán-type beehive cells, two oratories all of dry built corbel construction along with stone crosses, slabs, church, and hermitage.
- Collected and purified water in cisterns.
- Vegetable gardens, fish, plus meat and eggs of birds nesting on islands provided diet staples.
- Probably no more than twelve monks and an abbot lived here at any one time.

Other Monastic Sites

- Typically had an abbot's hut and smaller huts for each monk plus refectory and kitchen;
- A scriptorium and library;
- A smithy, a kiln, a mill, barns, and modest church
- Plus guest houses for those with unending stream of visitors.



Irish became Europe's Publisher

- Scribes were not drones but engaged text.
- Book spoke to book, writer to scribe, and scribe to reader, over generations.
- Tried to include a bit of everything, from every era, language, and style known to him.
- Nothing brought out Irish playfulness more than copying books.
- No Scriptoria at most early monasteries.



Irish became Europe's Publisher

- Irish codex new kind of book formed of bound leaves of parchment
- Christians adopted format for the Scriptures used in their liturgy because
 - codex is easier to handle than a scroll and
 - because one can write on both sides of a parchment but on only one side of a papyrus scroll.

Decorative Art

- Combined stately letters of the Greek and Roman alphabets with the spellbinding simplicity of Ogham to produce initial capital and headings that rivet one's eyes to the page and hold the reader in awe.
- Models of art found in megalithic tombs of the Boyne Valley.
- For example, Newgrange Kerbstones with indecipherable spirals, zigzags, and lozenges.



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Book of Kells: Christ holding Gospel

- Copy of the four Gospels distinguished by full pages of rich and vivid ornament from 800 AD/CE.
- Symbolizes power of learning, impact of Christianity, and spirit of artistic imagination.
- Page with Christ seated on a low-backed throne, flanked by peacocks, symbols of his resurrection due to the belief that their flesh did not decay.



Christ in Majesty



Book of Kells: Chi-Rho Page

- Dwells almost entirely on name of Christ via traditional abbreviation into the "Chi-Rho" symbol.
- Chi and Rho are two letters of the Greek alphabet, the first two letters of "Christ."
- Chi is written as an X. Rho is roughly a P.
- Chi is the dominant form.
- Rho stands in its shelter, with its loop turned into a spiral.



Ingenitio



Book of Kells: Chi-Rho Page

- Letters abundantly decorated.
- Their curves drawn out into flourishes, embellished with discs and spirals, filled with dense tracery and punctuated with occasional animals and angels.
- Such decoration clearly hates emptiness.
- Every space must be filled.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/great-works/anonymous-the-chi-rho-from-the-book-of-kells-c800-828951.html>

Body of Text: Irish Minuscule

- Insular script was a medieval script system invented in Ireland that spread to Anglo-Saxon England and continental Europe under the influence of Irish Christianity.
- Irish minuscule most commonly used as most readable and more fluid.
- Irish missionaries took the script to continental Europe, where they founded monasteries.



Scholar Scribe and his Cat

- I and Pangur Ban my cat,
'Tis a like task we are at:
Hunting mice is his delight,
Hunting words I sit all night.
- 'Tis a merry task to see
At our tasks how glad are we,
When at home we sit and find
Entertainment to our mind.



- 'Gainst the wall he sets his eye
Full and fierce and sharp and sly;
'Gainst the wall of knowledge I
All my little wisdom try.
- So in peace our task we ply,
Pangur Ban, my cat, and I;
In our arts we find our bliss,
I have mine and he has his.
- Practice every day has made
Pangur perfect in his trade;
I get wisdom day and night
Turning darkness into light.



Patrick's successors: Columba

- Missionary credited with spreading Christianity to Scotland (521–597 AD/CE).
- Born a prince with a title to kingship but chose to become a monk.
- Studied under some of Ireland's most prominent church figures and founded or was patron of 41 monasteries in Ireland.
- Considered Patrick's spiritual son and worthy successor



Columba

- Excommunicated and became an exile as held responsible for the Battle of Cuil Dremmed in which 3,001 men died (only 1 on his side) over rights to a book he copied without permission.
- As penance he set out to save the same number of people as died in the battle.



Columba

- Columba, with 12 relatives, founded in 563 AD/CE on Iona a new abbey as a base for spreading Christianity among the northern Pictish kingdoms who were pagan.
- Iona monastery off the western coast of Scotland became famous throughout Europe and was dominant religious and political institution in region for centuries.



umba

- Manuscripts produced were beautifully written with clear, round lettering.
- Among the richest and most complicated pieces of abstract decoration ever produced (one of last works Book of Kells).
- He provide important step to complete the cultural circle.
- Attracted lots of followers and students so began dreaming of opening new monasteries.



Columba

- Made 150 monks cutoff number for Iona.
- After that 12 plus one monks set off to establish another foundation in another setting.
- Irish monks would colonize barbarized Europe.
- Returning students brought back learning to Europe as well.



umba

- By century's end, sixty communities founded in his name, and filled with "literate druids".
- After Columba's death, "White Martyrs" dressed like druids set off in the white sky of morning in all directions in imitation of his "glorious and heroic exile."
- Some in boats without oars
- Mostly went east but some like Brendan the Navigator to west (North America?)



ndan the Navigator

- Traveled tirelessly to evangelize and establish monasteries.
- One epic journey encountered towering crystal pillars afloat, sheep the size of oxen, giants who pelted the ship with fireballs, and talking birds singing psalms.
- Finally, as boat drifted through fog, it landed at what was thought to be Paradise, a land lush with vegetation, fragrant flowers, and abounding in fruit and colorful stones.



Brendan the Navigator

- After staying for 40 days, an angel told the men to return home.
- When Brendan came back to the Emerald Isle after the seven-year voyage, pilgrims who heard the sensational story flocked to his side in remote County Kerry until he died around 577 AD/CE
- Many claim Paradise was in fact North America.

<https://www.history.com/news/did-an-irish-monk-discover-america>



Brigid of Kildare (Church of the Oak)

- Formed Ireland's first religious community of women on the site of a Celtic shrine.
- "Double monastery," allowing both monks and nuns; she also accepted poets, artists, farmers, and craftsmen.
- Travelers and vagabonds, sick or well, Christian or not, flocked to Kildare knowing the inclusive Abbess would invite them to eat, drink, and stay as long as needed (Ireland's legendary hospitality).



St. Brigid

- Claims she conducted mass, heard confessions, ordained as bishop, and ordained clergy.
- While explaining Christ's death to a dying pagan, she wove a cross from the rushes strewn about his floor.
- Died 524 and was buried in Downpatrick, County Down, with the two other major saints of Ireland, Patrick and Columba.



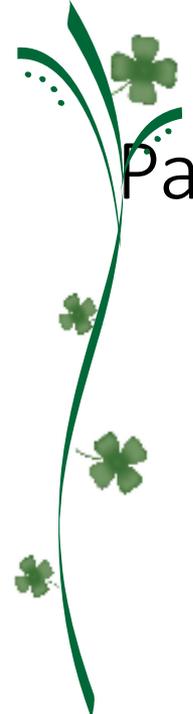


Roop Brigid

- Brigit and certain virgins went to take the veil from Bishop Mel.
- A fiery pillar rose from Brigit's head to the roof of the Church.
- Bishop Mel said to her: "Come, holy Brigit, that a veil may be placed on your head before the other virgins."
- Then, it happened, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the form of ordaining a bishop was read over Brigit.

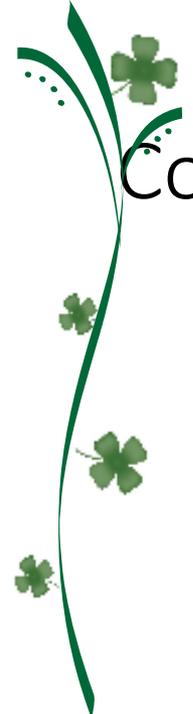
Celtic Christianity Distinctive

- Greater role and presence of women like Brigid.
- Personal conscience took precedence over public opinion or church authority.
- Private confession to *Anam Cara* (soul friend) not just to a priest.
- Arose due to little communication between Romans and Irish.



Patrick's successors: Columban

- Columban or Columba the Younger (543 – 615 AD/CE) in 590 with twelve companions, went from his home in Leinster to Gaul.
- Clashed with the local bishops and nobles who are annoyed by presence.
- Founded monastic communities at Luxeuil and Fontaine.
- Then exiled



Columban

- Then went to Switzerland and Italy, where founded most notably Bobbio Abbey.
- Over a span of twenty-five years, he and colleagues founded between sixty to one hundred monasteries, which returned classical learning to Europe.
- Many Irish monks became key bishops and writer of biblical commentaries in Europe



Irish Spiritual Invasion of England

- As Columba breathes his last on Iona, the king of Canterbury is baptized by a timid librarian, Augustine, sent to Britain by Pope Gregory I.
- Angles, Saxons, and Jutes have pushed the Celtic Britons westward into Cornwall and Wales and northward into Northumbria.
- Celtic Britons despise these pagans and have given no thought to evangelizing them.

Lindisfarne or Holy Island

- Having not suffered at Britons' hands, the Irish have no inhibitions and launch a "spiritual invasion" of England from Lindisfarne.
- Aidan, Columba's beloved disciple, who is on good terms with the British Celts, deserves to be called "Apostle of England," but Augustine installed by Rome.
- Slowly, Augustine's stricter version of the faith spreads, eventually encountering and clashing with Celtic Christianity.

Synod of Whitby (664)

- The Synod of Whitby (664 A.D.) was a Northumbrian synod where King Oswiu ruled that his kingdom would calculate Easter and observe the monastic tonsure according to the customs of Rome, rather than the customs practiced by Irish monks at Iona and its satellite institutions.
- The synod was summoned at Hilda's double monastery, later called Whitby Abbey.

Monastic Tonsure

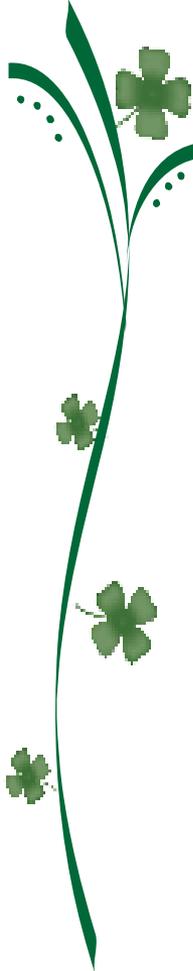
- All monks of the period kept a distinct tonsure to distinguish their social identity as men of the cloth.
- Prevailing "Roman" custom was to shave a circle at the top of the head, leaving a halo of hair, eventually associated with imagery of Christ's Crown of Thorns.
- Celtic tonsure emphasizes distinctiveness (connected its use to Celtic dating of Easter).
- Romans thought proof of barbarian status.

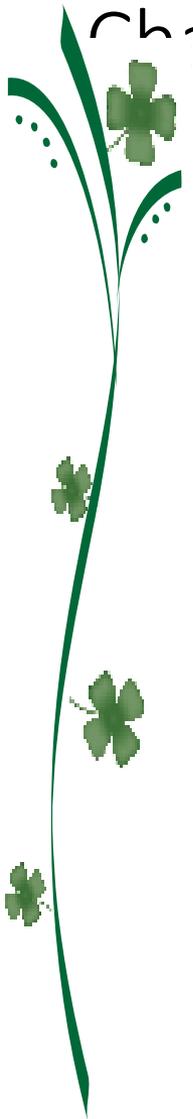
Dang, I just made a mistake.
Where's the Illuminate-Out?



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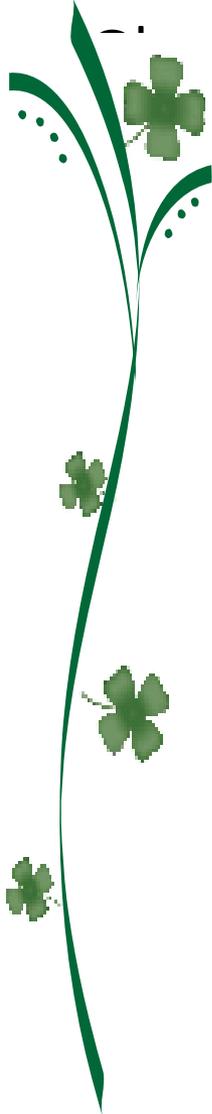
Illiteracy Norm in Western Europe

- 
- Practically no lay person, from kings and emperors downwards, could read or write, only most higher clergy.
 - Charlemagne (742–814 AD/CE), first great man of action to emerge from the darkness since the collapse of the Roman world.
 - Led Europe's first renaissance, made possible by the ubiquitous "wandering monks."



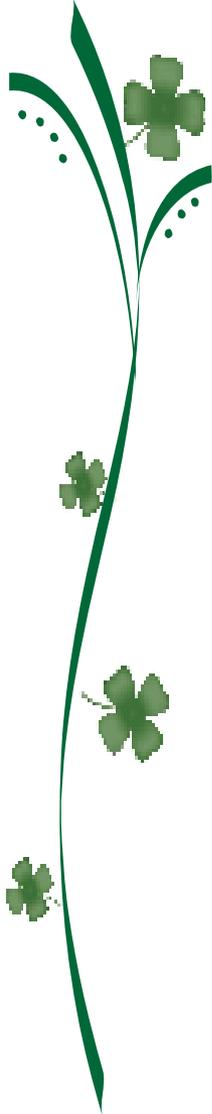
Charlemagne

- With the help of an outstanding teacher and librarian named Alcuin of York, he collected books and had them copied.
- Few antique manuscripts by the Latin authors still existed.
- Our whole knowledge of ancient literature is due to the collecting and copying that began with Irish and continued on continent under Charlemagne.



Charlemagne

- Learned to read, but could never write.
- Self-educated hard way.
- So he strongly valued education and importance of educated laity.
- Tried to achieve through series of decrees.
- Crowned king of the Franks on Christmas Day 800.

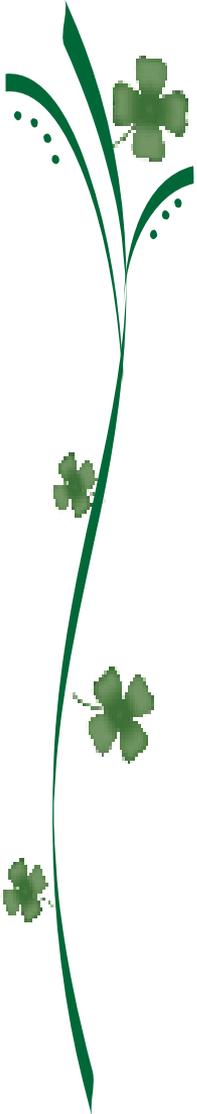


rlemagne

- With lots of help from Irish monks through him the Atlantic world re-established contact with the ancient culture of the Mediterranean world.
- Almost any classical text that survived until the eighth century has survived till today.
- Great disorders after his death, but no more “skin of our teeth.”
- Civilizations had come through.

Fury of Norsemen 800 – 1050 AD

- Meanwhile, Irish homeland looted and monasteries burned by Vikings.
- These marauding pirates, new barbarism, arrived by sea.
- Invaders were almost illiterate, rapacious, and murderous.
- Set out from a base and with unbelievable courage and ingenuity they got as far as Persia.





Impact of Vikings and English

- By time Vikings defeated in early eleventh century, Ireland has irrevocably lost cultural leadership of European civilization.
- Followed by English occupation: Colonializing Elizabethans redistributed land to Protestant families; Penal Laws in 18th Century, nearly destroyed identity; and "Great Hunger" in 19th caused two-thirds of population to starve or emigrate, nearly finished of the Irish; until Easter Rising.

Kenneth Clark in *Civilisation*

- Claims lack of confidence, more than anything else, kills a civilization.
- We can destroy ourselves by cynicism and disillusion, just as effectively as by bombs.
- Clark includes section of W. B. Yeats' prophetic poem *The Second Coming* (1919).
- Written in the aftermath of the First World War and the beginning of the Irish War of Independence that followed the Easter Rising.

W. B. Yeats' *The Second Coming*

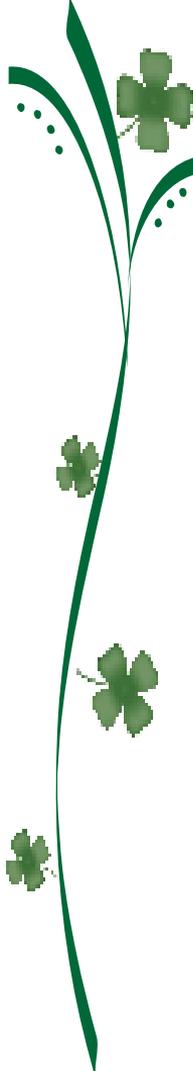
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Kenneth Clark on Yeats' Poem

- That was certainly true between the two world wars, and it nearly destroyed us.
- Is it true today?
- The trouble is that there is still no centre.
- One may be optimistic, but one can't exactly be joyful at the prospect before us.

From Chapter 13, *Civilization: A Personal View*, 1969)

End of World: Is There Any Hope?



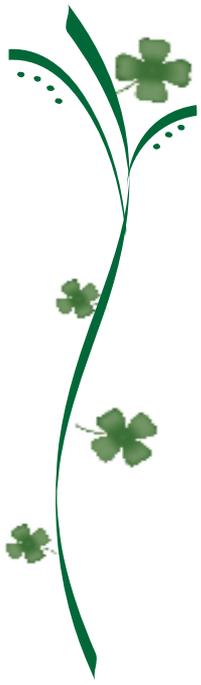
- Cahill concludes:

“Rome’s demise instructs us in what inevitably happens when impoverished and rapidly expanding populations, whose ways and values are only dimly understood, press up against a rich and ordered society.” (p. 217)

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- Perhaps history always divided between Romans (rich and powerful who always want more) versus catholics (universalists who instinctively believe humanity makes up one family and all humans are equal).

“If our civilization is to be saved – forget about our civilization, which, as Patrick would say, may pass ‘in a moment like a cloud or smoke that is scattered by the wind’ – if we are to be saved, it will not be by Romans but by saints.” (p. 218)

QUESTIONS ON ST. PATRICK AND Missionaries

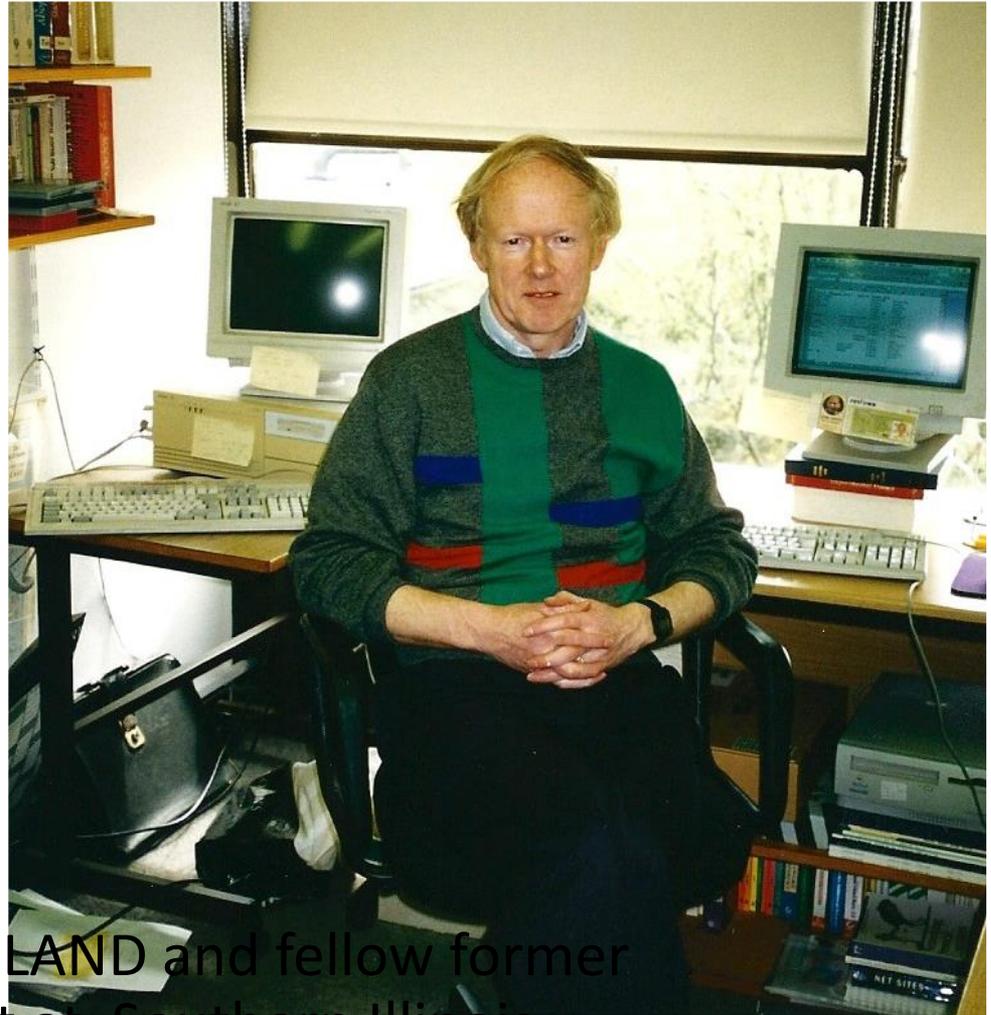


National Univer.





Donal Igoe



Colleague in IRELAND and fellow former
doctoral student at Southern Illinois
University

