

How the Irish Saved Civilization Study Guide

How the Irish Saved Civilization by Thomas Cahill

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| How the Irish Saved Civilization Study Guide..... | 1 |
| Contents..... | 2 |
| Plot Summary..... | 3 |
| Introduction..... | 5 |
| Chapter 1..... | 6 |
| Chapter 2..... | 8 |
| Chapter 3..... | 11 |
| Chapter 4..... | 13 |
| Chapter 5..... | 15 |
| Chapter 6..... | 17 |
| Chapter 7..... | 22 |
| Characters..... | 25 |
| Objects/Places..... | 26 |
| Themes..... | 30 |
| Style..... | 33 |
| Quotes..... | 35 |
| Topics for Discussion..... | 38 |



Plot Summary

How the Irish Saved Civilization by Thomas Cahill shows how humane evangelists prepare in remote, Stone Age Ireland the corps of literate "White Martyrs" that reintroduce to medieval Europe eleven centuries of culture that fall along with the Roman Imperium. Without this effort, now forgotten outside Ireland, modern civilization would be markedly different.

How the Irish Saved Civilization first sets the background for the accomplishment by characterizing the late Roman Empire in the year 406 CE, as Germanic barbarians confront Roman legions on the Rhine. The Romans cannot conceive their way of life ending, for the core has stood nearly eleven centuries and it stretches around the Mediterranean and into Gaul and Britain. The hordes want only farmlands to feed their expanding population. Besieged in North Africa, St. Augustine of Hippo is the first of many high minds to ask why it is happening; while in Bordeaux, the life of the poet Ausonius demonstrates how inattentive Rome's nobility has become to the threat. At risk are eleven centuries of literature and philosophy, stretching back to fifth-century BCE Greece. Augustine's life shows the brilliance of the heritage and the grump, sex-obsessed turn he is giving to Western civilization.

Meanwhile, Ireland is shown to be an unholy, shifting "world of darkness" beyond Rome's gasp. The Irish prose epic, *Tain Bo Cuailnge*, is filled with lusty, brutal stories from the dawn of the island's prehistory, which is little changed by the fifth century CE, and, in fact, shows amazing continuity with the modern Irish character. Ireland's first encounter with its first evangelist, St. Patrick, a Romanized Briton, comes as he is kidnapped and enslaved. Over six years he grows from a careless boy to a visionary holy man, called to flee home. Once again in Britain, Patrick feels called by the "Voice of Ireland". He moves to Gaul to study for ordination, and as a bishop, he becomes "virtually the first missionary bishop in history".

For thirty years, Patrick helps the Irish "seize the everlasting kingdom". He ends the slave trade, decreases murder and intertribal warfare, but makes little headway with sexual mores. Outside Ireland, Patrick is little known and his church is ignorant of developments in the continent church, where Augustine's views are becoming the norm. Patrick sees the 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. When Patrick dies in 461, the Roman Empire has fifteen years left and is in deep chaos, while Ireland is changing rapidly from chaos to peace, still cherishing the ancient virtues of courage, steadfast loyalty, and generosity.

Patrick's successor, St. Columcille, founds monasteries across Ireland before being exiled in 564 to Iona, offshore of Scotland. By century's end, sixty communities are founded in his name, and are filled with "literate druids". After Columcille's death, "White Martyrs" dressed like druids set off in all directions in imitation of his "glorious and heroic exile". Columbanus and twelve companions head to Gaul, where they "nettle" the local bishops; but over a span of twenty-five years, they found between sixty to one hundred

monasteries, which return classical learning to Europe. At the same time, Pope Gregory I sends an envoy, Augustine, to England as Archbishop of Canterbury, and slowly, Rome's stricter version of Christianity spreads, eventually clashing with Celtic Christianity. The Synod of Whitby (664) shows minds reduced to myth, magic, and images.

Charlemagne is crowned king of the Franks on Christmas Day 800 and Europe's first renaissance begins, made possible by the ubiquitous "wandering monks". Their homeland, meanwhile, is looted and the monasteries burned. By the time the Vikings are defeated in the early eleventh century, Ireland has irrevocably lost the cultural leadership of European civilization. Conditions worsen under English occupation, particularly with the publication of the Penal Laws and the "Great Hunger", which causes two-thirds of the population to starve or emigrate.

Introduction

Introduction Summary and Analysis

How the Irish Saved Civilization by Thomas Cahill shows how humane evangelists prepare in remote, Stone Age Ireland the corps of literate "White Martyrs" that reintroduce to medieval Europe eleven centuries of culture that fall along with the Roman Imperium. Without this effort, now forgotten outside Ireland, modern civilization would be markedly different.

"Irish" is seldom coupled with "civilization", but without Ireland, still a Stone Age culture in the fifth century, neither Renaissance nor Enlightenment would have occurred. While barbarians are looting Europe and burning books, the Irish are learning to read, write, and copy anything they can get their hands on, and then transmit back to Europe its great Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian heritage. Without this "Service of the Scribes", the world would be different today.

This story has gone, thus far, untold because historians inevitably write from their own cultural perspective. Thus far, Protestant Anglo-Saxons in England and America have controlled what is said about a Celtic, Catholic past and overlooked Ireland's contribution in a crucial period. From Disraeli down, educated Englishmen have considered the Irish "incapable of civilization". The historian Charles Kingsley writes unfeelingly of "white chimpanzees" dying of hunger in Victorian England, and Princeton historian Anthony Grafton recently confirms the nasty stereotypes against Catholics are alive in American universities. John Henry Newman's fable of the man and lion illustrates how who tells a story affects the outcome. This author vows to give hearing to all "without disparagement", but hints he sides with the lions (Irish).



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

From the Alps flow northeastward the Rhine and eastward the Danube. These separate barbarians from the mighty Roman Empire, a polity encircling the vast Mediterranean Sea. An old "Prophecy of the Twelve Eagles," winked at during drinking parties, warns that Rome has only twelve centuries of life, and all but seventy years are past when, on Dec. 31, 406, Roman legions and German hordes face one another across the frozen Rhine. In every aspect of deportment, grooming, dress, weaponry-even culinary style-the two sides are polar opposites.

A dozen years after this encounter, the dying old St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, explains in *The City of God*, how "vice-encumbered paganism", rather than the Roman gods' wrath at defections to Christianity, is to blame for barbarians hounding his city. Afterwards, Petrarch blames the empire's "inner faults" for its "fall", Machiavelli cynically blames the barbarians, and Edward Gibbons blames the Christian virtues that soften Rome. All that can be said for sure is that Rome falls gradually and it at first goes unnoticed. The Roman blindness comes from having the "upper hand" for eleven centuries, inheriting all the "gear and tackle and trim" of civilization. Legionnaires turn out "spiffy" across the river from the filthy, deformed, undisciplined, and chaotic barbarian hosts-according to the only surviving records: Roman. The atmosphere resembles the standoff between US border patrol and Latino illegal immigrants across a porous border. These barbarians are not armed invaders, just annoying migrants. Rome has incorporated earlier barbarian invaders in Gaul and expects to do so with Vandals, Alans, and Sueves. When the barbarians charge across without strategy but great courage, 20,000 *men* (not counting women and children) perish, but still the Romans cannot hold back the wave.

Rome's neighbors are motivated to immigrate because they are leaving the hunter-gatherer stage to take up farming. This triggers a population explosion and the hunt for new farmland-the same reason that brings Latin settlers to displace the residents of Rome centuries earlier. Why Rome is so lackadaisical in the fifth century is typified in a highborn poet, Ausonius of Bordeaux. Everything Ausonius writes is conventional, derivative, and attention getting, but contemporaries liken him to Virgil and Cicero. He converts to Christianity probably because everyone else does, but paganism by then is drained of life and marginalized. Ausonius teaches Latin for thirty years at the famed University of Bordeaux before coming to the Emperor Valentinian's court to tutor his son Gratian. When Gratian in 375 assumes the throne with brother Valentinian II, Ausonius is named chief of staff. Honors are poured on him and his family. In 379, he is named consul, a much-debased position since the end of the Republic in 31 BCE. It is now an ornamental office, like other "republican trappings". "*How things are done*" has eclipsed "*what is being done*".



Key to the *Pax Romana* is the emperor's control of the military and his ability to tax. Tax collectors (*curiles*) form a thoroughly hated "class of worms" in a job originally intended as the "first rung on the ladder of social betterment", but which becomes a "cruel trap". As the demand for revenue grows, emperors close off loopholes of escape. Responsible for remitting taxes whether they collect them or not, the *curiles* are an easy mark for local lords, who are happy to loan money, hoping for default so they can expand their estates. Rome is too "top-heavy and entrenched" bureaucratically for reform, and the upper classes too self-concerned. Starved for money, emperors cannot support the army adequately and mutinies occur. Gratian's murder ends Ausonius' career. Romans think the army bespeaks dictatorship and, increasingly, non-Romans and finally slaves are recruited. These factors should alert modern readers to dangers in contemporary society. The world's only superpower in the fifth century feels invincible until Alaric parks at the gates. Asked what he wants to go away, Alaric laughs, "everything of value that could be moved". In turn, he offers Romans their lives. A new world has begun.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Leisure is necessary for learning to thrive, and the chaos that the barbarians introduce destroys Europe's leisure class. Between Alaric's sack of Rome in 410 CE and the death of the last Western emperor in 476, the Imperium destabilizes. Large landowners grow independent. The court abandons Rome for Ravenna, and looting by Romans becomes widespread. The dispossessed turn to highway robbery and form an incipient Mafia. The kidnapping of children becomes the stuff of fairy tales. "Rapacious bullies" foreclose on properties whose deeds are lost. Spain, Gaul, and grain-rich North Africa are lost by the 430s. Goths and Huns plunder from the East through Italy. The legions are withdrawn from Britain, opening it to Anglo-Saxon raids. Great landlords redeem enslaved freemen and women, only to turn them into lifelong serfs. The Irish, fine sailors, navigate their stealthy, skin-covered coracles to isolated farms, and grab children. In 401 CE, a sixteen-year-old boy named Patricius is taken. Son of a *curialis* and grandson of a Catholic priest, this Romanized middle-class Briton is destined a classical education and career, but instead suffers as a hungry, naked shepherd-slave in "unholy Ireland".

Before transitioning from examining the world of late antiquity to concentrating on these "fiercest of the fierce barbarians", one question must be answered: "What was lost when the Roman Empire fell?" The picture of Ausonius suggests not much, but against him, one must consider "the last great classical man-and very nearly the first medieval man". Like Patricius thirty years later, Augustine of Hippo is a Romanized son of a petty official. In Carthage, the capital of Roman Africa, the teen revels in sex, rejects safety, and hates himself for not being needy. His memoir, the *Confessions*, is revolutionary, revealing a concrete self-loathing worthy of Camus or Beckett in how he has sought "every pleasure". This is utterly different from first-person references in Homer, Sappho, the Psalms, or Marcus Aurelius. Augustine's introspection opens new genres: autobiography and "psychological fiction".

Augustine is born into an apparently stable world in 354 CE and masters Latin rhetoric and literature as few contemporaries do. Young Augustine weeps over the suicide of Dido, Queen of Carthage, in Virgil's *Aeneid*, when her lover Aeneas departs. The world's only successful national epic, the *Aeneid* is meant to evoke Roman patriotism vis-a-vis the Greek East, which has been absorbed culturally and politically. From the orator Cicero, Augustine learns language is a practical tool for winning and influencing. Later in life, as a bishop, Augustine uses these lessons to delight congregations with "verbal pyrotechnics" and convince followers of truth of his new worldview-Christianity.

First, however, Augustine experiments with Manicheism, a syncretistic religion that lets him indulge his lusts while feeling "above the herd". When his intellect demands more, he reads voraciously and takes his first job in Milan. There he organizes a pseudo-monastic community-more like an ashram-of young men intent on attaining Truth



through Plato and his Latin commentators. Socrates' great fifth century BCE student during the "Golden Age of Athens, Plato proclaims that all creatures in the natural world contain a "spark of divinity," but this is experienced in a "world of corruption and death." A lengthy passage from *Phaedrus* on the nature of the soul demonstrates why only the most elite study Plato. In the stillness of his ashram, Augustine responds to the great philosopher, seeing how out-of-joint the universe is from the "ambrosia of high heaven". He next discovers that the obscure Saul of Tarsus, writing under the name of Paul, has discussed the same problem of the fight between flesh and spirit. Paul convinces Augustine that Plato is wrong in equating knowledge with virtue and allowing humans to ascend to Truth by their own efforts. This realization causes Augustine to suffer a mental breakdown, which he describes in the *Confessions*. A child's voice chanting "Take, read," sends Augustine to a Bible, which he opens at random (superstitiously) to a passage urging him to put on Christ and make no provision for the lusts of the flesh. He accepts baptism.

Augustine's intellectual breadth shows what *might* have been lost, had the barbarian invasions been complete. Hebrew literature and at least some Greek scholarship, poetry, and wisdom would surely have survived in the East, but Latin literature would have "gone down the drain of history". As it is, the spirit of classical civilization as a living entity is irrevocably lost. Virgil, Cicero, and Plato miraculously survive in books, but no one in medieval Europe can appreciate them. In time, thanks to Irish copyists, scholars will rediscover the dead civilization.

In the meantime, Roman law survives. Largely a dead letter before the fall, circumvented whenever possible, law is remembered fondly as the source of peace in the midst of the new chaos. Civil governments have crumbled, but Christian bishops remain at their posts. The office of "overseer" is by Augustine's day rarely entered upon or exercised by consent of the flock, which has grown illiterate. Often the only people who can read and possess a few books, bishops keep close to new kings and princes, to restrain and civilize them.

Augustine sees little of the Vandals' destruction because he rarely deigns to go out among his flock. He is drafted to serve as Bishop of Hippo and continues to give his time to thinking about Plato and Paul. His formulations about Original Sin, Grace, and Trinity become normative in the West, where Augustine is the only "father" (theologian) of note, whereas in the Greek East many fathers struggle to articulate these arcane dogmas. When, in 410 CE, the "Eternal City" falls and the shrinking pagan population blames the Christians, Augustine pens his final masterpiece, *The City of God*. Three opponents arise against him. Pelagius, a British monk, opposes the necessity of divine grace; the North African easily defeats this Platonic error. Next, the North African Donatists insist that the sacraments administered by unworthy (lapsed) priests are invalid; so adamant is Augustine against this that he calls in the secular authorities to force the Donatists' submission to the Catholic view. This marks the first apology for secular persecution of religious error and eventually opens the way to the Inquisition. Finally, Julian of Eclanum, a married fellow bishop, challenges a distasteful implication of Original Sin: that unbaptized babies go to hell. Julian also informs Augustine he has sex with his wife whenever possible, driving the old man to rage. The ancient world

largely sides with Augustine in looking down on sexual passion, but Augustine resorts to *ad hominem* attacks, wishing like Cicero not to be right, but to win. Augustine's closed mind prefigures later Catholic developments like the confessional and celibate clergy. Augustine lives long enough to become an "evil cleric," merciful to those who fear him but contemptuous of opponents. Meanwhile, Ireland has never heard of him. This becomes a major theme in the chapters ahead.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

The Irish prose epic, *Tain Bo Cuailnge (The Cattle Raid of Cooley)*, preserves a view of a royal couple conversing playfully in bed two millennia ago in Rathcroghan, Ireland. Queen Medb and King Ailil debate which has brought more to the marriage. Unable to settle it, they jump out of bed and begin an inventory. Household items, jewelry, wardrobe, sheep, horses, pigs, and cattle come out even, but a great bull from Medb's herd defects to Ailil, refusing to be led by a woman. Medb orders her chief messenger to match it, and he finds one in Ulster province. Its owner agrees to lend it to the queen for a year in exchange for financial profit and Medb's "own friendly thighs," but when the intermediaries get drunk and fight, the deal falls through. Medb mounts an army against Daire, which encounters a single champion, the boy Cuchulainn. The characters scarcely think, but act with convincing panache. Medb is utterly different from Dido and could fit into a modern Irish drama. Even Homer is less frank sexually than the *Tain*. In early Irish literature men and women both "admire one another's physical endowments and invite one another to bed without formality". This is seen in the story of "Dierdre of the Sorrows" and another story in the *Tain* cycle, where Cuchulainn boasts of his ability to perform impossible tasks in order to "rest my weapon" in the "sweet country" he spies looking down Emer's dress.

The Irish belong to a larger ethnic grouping, the Celts, who enter history from across the Rhine ca. 600 BCE. Other Celtic branches conquer Gaul, the Iberian Peninsula, Greece and present-day Turkey, and finally Britain, ca. 400 BCE. Nine centuries later, the Anglo-Saxons push them into Cornwall and Wales, and fifty years after that the Celts reach Ireland. Irish and Scots Gaelic are the last surviving Celtic living languages and Ireland is the only Celtic nation-state in the world. The Irish "foundation myth" shows the sons of Mil reaching Ireland from Spain and wresting it from the "People of the Goddess Danu". Archeological evidence backs this. The aborigines are massively tall beings, "preternaturally skilled" in building and crafts, which in time devolve into "little people" - the leprechauns of later legend. Mil has a family poet, Amhairghin, showing the Irish from the start have been "intoxicated by the power of words". Christian monks later specify that Mil is a descendant of Noah and survivor of the Flood.

Ireland's prehistoric oral lore, including the *Tain*, cannot be precisely dated. Only in the sixth century CE is it written down. For centuries before this, Ireland is a "land outside of time," peopled by Iron Age warriors emerging from a nomad life into animal husbandry. An aristocracy controls society and slavery is practiced. It seems safe to assume their world is little different from continental Celts prior to contact with Rome, whose milieu is something like Homeric Greece, *Mahabharata* India, and Sumer.

Like all Celtic warriors, the Irish strip for battle, wearing only sandals and a neck ornament called the torc. An example is seen in a third century BCE Greek statue, *Dying Gaul*. The Romans are shocked by these "insane warriors", who howl as though



demon-possessed and are incredibly strong and brave. The *Tain* illustrates the Celtic "warp-spasm" through Cuchulainn. The teen turns monstrous and hideous, his arms and legs reversing their structures, his neck expanding, his face turning into a bowl with one eye being sucked inside and the other lolling on his cheek; his lungs and liver protrude from his gaping jaws, "fiery flakes" surround his head, his heart pounds like a lion surrounded by bears, his hair twists and spikes like a thorn bush, and a "hero-halo" forms around his head. As he rides his chariot, rattling his shields, black blood shoots out of his skull and smokes. In three passes, he mows down 130 kings plus innumerable rabble, which he lays out six deep in a vast circle. Cuchulainn, his helper, and horse are unscratched and unstained. Cuchulainn resembles the modern comic book hero, down to his fighting gear—a prehistoric Batmobile. The Celts' inability to calculate dead and wounded, meanwhile, suggests the Book of Genesis, where numbers merely suggest enormity.

Medb is the most perceptively drawn character in the *Tain*. Tall, fair, soft-featured, yellow-haired, dressed in a purple cloak with gold on the back, she arms herself with a lance and iron sword. This "massive figure" dominates the story as no woman in any other epic does, including Helen, Dido, Clytemnestra, Antigone, and Medea. Disparaging things might be said about following the "rump of a misguiding woman", but Medb overshadows everyone else. Three women teach Cuchulainn to fight, three goddesses of war put in his place the god of war, and Derdriu, when recaptured by Noisiu makes good on her promise never to smile again by slamming her head into stone—a suicide nothing like Dido's. Eighteen centuries after Noisiu's lament over Derdriu, the widow of an Irish Catholic killed by the English for owning a horse worth more than ?5, demonstrates continuity of imagery and feeling throughout Irish literature. Dark Eileen O'Connell, aunt of Daniel O'Connell, the "Irish Catholic Martin Luther King", and the Penal Laws are returned to later.

O'Connell's tombstone has three most-Irish adjectives: "generous, handsome, brave". These summarize the Iron Age moral code of *Gilgamesh*, the *Iliad*, and the *Tain* and to some extent surviving today. The opening debate between Medb and Ailil includes claims to these virtues. Unnamed is the virtue of loyalty or faithfulness, which the Irish have never followed in heterosexual relationships, but have been fundamental to same-sex friendships (*Gilgamesh* and Enkidu, Achilles and Patroclus, and Cuchulainn and Ferdia). The ancient Irish understand life is fleeting; so holding onto people or things is pointless. Instead, they pursue "heroic gestures", intense poetry, and music-drinking all the time. They are capable of detachment when death comes. Their outlook makes for great stories and songs but "little personal peace or social harmony". They are difficult people to work for, as young Patricius learns after his kidnapping.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

Miliucc, more a rustler than a king, wrenches sixteen-year-old Patricius out of the predictable life of the Roman *civitas* into a life of bitter isolation tending sheep. Only slowly does he learn the local language and customs, and strangers happening by cause terror. Patricius must have been well nourished before his capture to have survived. Having not believed in God and finding priests foolish, Patricius in Ireland turns to constant prayer. Over six years, he grows from a careless boy to a visionary holy man. When a voice tells him he is going home, Patricius walks 200 miles to the sea at Wexford, only to be turned away as a suspected runaway slave. He returns to prayer and is welcomed aboard. Patricius begs off the sailors' offer to suck their nipples, an Irish apology, but boards ship and three days later reaches Europe. The continent is devastated by German hordes, and the Irishmen are near collapse from hunger within two weeks. When the captain taunts Patricius to have his Christian God feed them, he says confidently that they will be filled if they pray. A herd of pigs stampedes towards them.

Several years later, Patricius is welcomed home to Britain, but he feels called by the "Voice of Ireland". Patricius, whose first tongue is probably Welsh, speaks Latin at home but receives no more than elementary schooling in that language before being plunged into Irish. Answering the Voice, he moves to Gaul to study for ordination. Ill prepared, he finds the work torturous. The night before his ordination to the diaconate, Patricius confides to a friend a sin committed at fifteen and receives forgiveness. It will come back to haunt him later in life. Ordained priest and finally bishop, Patrick becomes "virtually the first missionary bishop in history". The apostles had intended to preach to all nations, and Peter and Thomas are believed to have gotten as far as Rome and India, respectively. Paul, an apostle "appointed by vision", travels more than anyone. Between him and Patrick, remarkably, there are no missionaries. Roman Christians accept without question the prejudice against rural folk, that the *pagani*: "pagans" -are unreliable, threatening bumpkins. Travel into the hinterlands makes Augustine shudder, and it is popularly believed that outside the boundaries of the Imperium monsters dwell. In a step as bold as Columbus, Patrick leaves the "Ecumene," ready to be "murdered, betrayed, enslaved-whatever" for the sake of the Gospel. The promise of heaven and hand of God guide him. Patrick is "one of humanity's natural noblemen", and the people to whom he goes appreciate his "core of decency".

Patrick loves not with "generalized 'Christian' benevolence" alone, but each individual as he or she needs in ways Augustine certainly could not fathom. He worries about not only their spiritual welfare, but their physical welfare as well. As a former slave, he finds their plight horrifying. His preaching transforms Ireland, establishing his primatial see at Ard Macha (modern Armagh), and other bishoprics in the northern, central, and eastern regions, close by the chieftain-kings on whom they keep an eye. The Irish slave trade ends, murder, and intertribal warfare decrease, but sexual mores are little reformed-



even in the monasteries and convents. Relations with brother bishops in Britain are less successful. When King Coroticus raids Northern Ireland and kidnaps thousands of Patrick's converts, Patrick first tries to ransom them and then openly appeals to British Christians, hoping their bishops will intervene. Beseeching them to pressure Coroticus into making amends before God and freeing those for whom Christ is crucified and dies, Patrick calls this an "unspeakable" crime. British Christians do not accept Irish Christians even as human beings, since they are not Roman. Patrick knows this snobbery, of course, but identifies with the Irish, which make the British only suspect some ulterior motive. To counter vicious whispering about the youthful sin he once confessed, Patrick pens his *Confession*. Since sex is low on the list of preoccupations until the Augustinian views prevail and grand theft by a well-off teen is unlikely, it seems young Patricius has murdered a slave or servant. This would in the times have had no civil consequences.

Patrick is the first person in history to speak out against slavery unequivocally, and no one matches his voice until the seventeenth century. Outside Ireland, however, Patrick is little known. He and Augustine are ignorant of one another in an era when communications and book publishing take years. Still, Patrick demonstrates he understands the duality of the cities of God and man as well as Augustine, when he lashes out at Coroticus' woeful reign. Patrick's "emotional grasp" of Christianity may be deeper than Augustine's, for Patrick prays, makes peace with God, and looks into the hearts of others, while Augustine looks only within himself and articulates a dark theory of sin for all mankind. Augustine sees the dark side, but Patrick the light, believing even slave traders, murderers, and barbarians can be remade.

Patrick is able to penetrate the Irish psyche and make the Irish imagination more humane and noble without tampering with the people's Irishness. He understands the "New Life" not just as the sacrament of baptism but also as filling all of God's good creation. The druids (pagan Irish priests) feel threatened because Patrick embraces the whole world as they do. Legends about ridding Ireland of snakes and using the shamrock to explain the Trinity are apocryphal, but Patrick does confront a king about Christians' right to light bonfires to commemorate Christ's resurrection. The great Irish prayer known both as "Saint Patrick's Breastplate" and as "The Deer's Cry" cannot be ascribed to Patrick, since the language is seventh-eighth-century, but it is filled with his spirit. The universe is a "Great Sacrament" in this earliest exemplar of European vernacular poetry that inspires a new genre. The speaker, probably a Christian druid, awakens praising God as three and one, strengthened by the events of Christ's life, strengthened by the ranks of saints, the powers of nature, and God's various protections. He summons the powers against all forms of evil, holding Christ with, before, behind, in, beneath, above, and to his right and left. The initial invocation of Trinity and Creator is repeated in closing.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

In the thirty years Patrick spends helping the Irish "seize the everlasting kingdom", he attracts the kind of "off-center personalities" Jesus-but few others in church history-attracts. By 461, when Patrick likely dies, the Roman Empire has fifteen years left and is in deep chaos. Ireland, by contrast, is changing rapidly from chaos to peace, thanks not only to Patrick's "earthiness and warmth", which serve to lessen hostility and suspicion, but also to his demonstrating the classic Irish virtues of courage, steadfast loyalty, and generosity. Not since the fourth century, when Constantine blends Romanization and church membership, have preachers lacked worldly benefits to offer his converts, and bland, detached Christians like Ausonius are the result. 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 "the willies". The Irish gods are not shapely Apollos and Aphrodites, but eaters of human meat so monstrous that warriors must drink themselves unconscious in order to sleep. The war goddesses Nemain and Badb appear in dreams revealing what they will do the next day and 100 warriors die of fright. With understatement, the *Tain* declares it a "bad night". Heroes may claim to be indifferent to death but subconsciously they quake in fear. Patrick shows them one can be ready to die daily and yet live in peace. He sleeps soundly and soberly and peace exudes from him like perfume.

Almost all Irish tales include "shape-shifting" that goes beyond the warp-spasm. Gods, druids, poets, and anyone in touch with the magic-world are assumed to be able to take on any shape they wish. The dark side of this belief is that there are no predictable patterns in the world. People have no fixed identity. Everything is "essentially inessential". The world is full of hidden traps and taboos are too extensive for them all to be respected. The heroes of ancient Irish literature all fall prey to some taboo (*geis* in Irish; plural: *gessa*, signifying "observance"). Stone Age Greek myths know such traps-Achilles' heel and Oedipus' patricide/incest-but "trickster-gods" do not hide behind every tree as in Ireland. Patrick accepts the world is full of magic and invokes the elements to his aid as the hand of a well-meaning God. Christians may suffer in the short-term, but the universe ultimately conspires to their good. Patrick has suffered enough to be convincing. Patrick has bedrock confidence in the Creator-God living among humans, having taken flesh in Jesus. He now "flames out in all his creation", removing from the magic world all fear. Christ has trodden all paths, so Christians have only to listen quietly-as Patrick had as a slave boy.

Such a view could not arise in a Greco-Roman environment, one pessimistic and suspicious that the body and the world are unholy and meaningless. Augustine's synthesis of paganism and Christianity is less original than Patrick's. Augustine's theory of sin prevails to "haunt the Middle Ages", but Patrick's celebration of life in the "Breastplate" gives rise to the art and poetry of the West, influences liturgy, fills Gothic



architecture with "smiling angels" and "laughable demons," and inspires Francis of Assisi, Dante, and Chaucer. Irish poetry down to the present day continues the tradition (e.g., George Herbert, Thomas Traherne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Joseph Plunkett, and Seamus Heaney). Had Augustine read "Breastplate", he would doubtless have sensed heresy, and even his *Confession* and *Letter* would unnerve him. Patrick is "as silent about sex as are the Gospels". He may simply not have been as obsessed with it as the continental Catholics, and he never succeeds in changing the Irish "improvisational" approach to marriage (including trial marriages, multiple partners, and homosexual relations among warriors). As late as the twelfth century, the kings of Clan Conaill include public copulation with a white mare as part of inauguration festivities. The best Patrick can hope for is the Irish accepting the body as holy.

More vital an issue is Patrick's confrontation with human sacrifice. All Stone Age people sacrifice people (e.g., Agamemnon's offering of Iphigenia to Artemis), but the practice survives nowhere in the Romanized world. The "Binding of Isaac" in Genesis appears to be the point at which Jews turn from the practice. Animal sacrifices, however, continue both in Rome and Jerusalem. At Patrick's coming, the Irish are sacrificing prisoners of war as well as newborns to appropriate gods. They proudly display the heads of enemies in their temples, on their palisades, and hanging from their belts. They use them as footballs and drinking bowls and incorporate them in their art. Tri-faced gods are a popular motif. The faces of Irish idols make clear only blood could propitiate them, but archeology suggests this kind of *King Kong* motif is but a caricature. Perfectly preserved prehistoric corpses found in Danish bogs in the 1950s and an English bog in 1984 (Tolland Man, Grauballe Man, Borremose Man, and Lindow Man) suggest willing Isaac-like victims among the Celts. Archeologists Anne Ross and Don Robins suggest Lindow Man is a druid prince who offers himself as a sacrifice to the gods to defeat the Romans in their attempts to wipe out their religion. They believe his name is Lovernius, "Fox Man". Red-haired and full-bearded, his last meal is not the desperate diet of the Danish victims, but blackened hearthcake, an item still consumed by some Scottish youth on May 1, the ancient feast of Beltaine, following rituals that obviously once included sacrifice. Lovernius has undergone three lethal operations and his body shows him a lamb of the gods "who takes away the sins of all". Patrick tells the Irish this is no longer needed, for Christ has died once for all. Seeing this meets their deepest needs, the Irish end sacrifices. The "God of the Three Faces" has acted not in hate but love. God wants the sacrifice of lives not deaths.

Two artifacts illustrate the Irish movement from pagan chaos to Christian peace. The "Gundestrup Cauldron" is a votary offering dating from the centuries before Christ. Newly forged, it is intentionally broken and thrown into a Danish swamp, to be enjoyed only by the god who receives the offering. It shows gods, warriors, and sacrifices, both human and animal, but also Cernunnos, lord of the animals, a benevolent "prehistoric Saint Francis". The second artifact is the seventh/eighth-century "Ardagh Chalice" found in a Limerick field. Contemporary with the final redaction of the "Breastplate", it is intended for the sacrifice of the Eucharist, and its rich workmanship is meant to inspire the communicant who approach. The intricate underside, seen only by God, is meant to please him-providing continuity with the Cauldron.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

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 de-Romanized Christianity. He gets the Irish to put away slavery and the instruments of sacrifice, but allows them to remain Irish. 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 one town in Kerry, three days in August are devoted to a bacchanalia to Cernunnos, while in parts of Ulster the harvest god Lug is feted. Irish marriage customs are very un-Roman. As late as the twelfth century, they are annually renewable on Feb. 1, the feast of Imbolc. In the nineteenth century, nude horseracing takes place on Clare's beaches at high tide. Patrick eliminates the more evil gods and leaves alone those that become gargoyles. The Irish come to believe "the one thing the devil cannot bear is laughter". Edward Campion, a Jesuit martyred at Tyburn in 1851, leaves a description of the Irish that rings true today, and Sigmund Freud proclaims them the only people who cannot be helped by psychoanalysis. The Irish never change.

One characteristic Campion mentions that might seem out of place is that the Irish are "lovers of learning, capable of any studie [sic] whereunto they bend themselves". Ireland is the only place that Christianity is introduced without bloodshed. With no "red" martyrs to venerate, the Irish in the fifth/sixth century introduce "Green Martyrdom", akin to the anchorites of the Egyptian desert. People seek holiness in isolated hermitages through "heroic fasts and penances". St. Manchan of Offaly traces the evolution of Green Martyrdom in a poem. A would-be martyr sets himself up in a forest that is still accessible by those who desire baptism. He becomes a guru whom others seek out. When the number exceeds twelve, he splits them off as another community. An abbot heads each community. Buildings beyond the original common dwelling are needed to accommodate a full-fledged monastic existence. "Self-deprecatory, monastic mirth" in "The Hermit's Song" corresponds with the humor found in earlier Irish literature.

Green Martyrdom quickly gives way to monasticism, but because Ireland lacks cities as in the Roman Empire, the monasteries become hubs for populations rather than visa versa. They give rise to prosperity, art, and learning. Tribal warfare is not eliminated; indeed, some monasteries battle one another. There are "solitary ecstasies"-madmen-remembered in tales, like Kevin of Glendalough, who lives in a hole in a cliffside and torments himself in various ways. Eventually, however, Kevin agrees to live on the shore of Upper Lake so disciples can learn from him, and a community forms. The monks build a tiny church and huts of drystone, shaped ingeniously like beehives, but soon the site is too small for the throng. The monks build what in time becomes a university city to which students from Ireland, then England, and finally everywhere in Europe gather. Heroic hospitality means no one is turned away, and the Venerable Bede describes a



place where the monks provide commoners and royals alike "food day by day without cost, and books for their studies, and teaching, free of charge," without requiring they become monks. The scholars have none of St. Jerome's scruples about reading Cicero and with little care for orthodoxy or uniformity of monastic practice they bring into the library and read everything they can find. Aldhelm of Malmesbury worries about the "ancient fables" the Irish are tempting themselves with.

The Irish see no value in censorship and find the old tales of Greece and Rome "fresh and fascinating". They take a dimmer view of their own pagan literature but do preserve it, from childhood memories or hearing bards' performances. Sometimes they add pious disclaimers about what they have faithfully copied. While they respect the three sacred languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Latin), they love their own tongue and are the first people in Europe to speak a vernacular openly. Frequently the monks intersperse beloved Irish lyrics into dense Greek works, perhaps to keep themselves awake. Most of the copyists are engrossed in the texts and record their feelings; one mourns Hector's death at Troy. One of the most famous and telling imbedded compositions is Liensterman's poem musing on how he and his cat, Pangur Ban, both seek entertainment and bliss. The copyists strive to understand the words they are penning, adding to them, even improving them. In today's jargon, their works are "open, interfacing, and intertextual", rich literary smorgasbords filled with everything they can get their hands on.

Like the Jews earlier, the Irish see literacy as a religious act and courageously turn the growing darkness into light and hope. They also see it as something with which to play. They put aside the cumbersome "Ogham" writing system in favor of Latin, Greek, and some Hebrew lettering, create Irish grammars, and write down their oral tradition. They also make up secret languages to facilitate secret communications, in anticipation of *Finnegans Wake* and J. R. R. Tolkien. They are playful copying books. Ireland knows no scriptoria. Individual monks in beehive cells or outdoors balance a borrowed book on one knee and fresh sheepskin pages on the other to create "the most spectacular, magical books the world had ever seen". They combine the stately Greek and Latin alphabets with "talismanic" Ogham to produce initial letters that appear the work of angels. For the texts, they use either half-uncial or miniscule scripts; the latter becomes the standard script in Europe during the Middle Ages.

To decorate their books, the monks turn to the "spirals, zigzags, and lozenges" first used on a grand scale in the Neolithic "tumuli" of the Boyne Valley, ca. 3000 BCE, and refined by metalworkers, who rejoice in the subtle riffs that metal, unlike stone, allows. By Patrick's day, such artisans enjoy the social status of seers. An example is a bronze box cover from the Somerset Hoard in Galway, worked with an off-center endless spiral. The Christian monks take the form to its most "riotous" and extravagant form in monumental crosses, liturgical vessels, and above all, the codices.

By Patrick's day, the *codex* has displaced the scroll in publishing. Dried sheepskins are folded double, cut, and gathered into "quires", which in turn are stitched together into larger volumes, and sometimes finished with protective covers. *Vellum* or calfskin is reserved for the finest works. The fifth century knows the "cheap paperback" in the



unbound works on sheepskin. The most famous Irish codex is the Book of Kells, preserved in Trinity College, Dublin, but dozens more survive far distant from Ireland, thanks to the work of Columcille (Columba), prince of Clan Conaill, born in 521 CE, less than ninety years after Patrick's arrival as a bishop.

Named Crimthann ("Fox") before he chooses monasticism over kingship, Columcille ("Dove of the Church") is educated first as a bard and then as a Christian under Bishop Finian of Clonard. After visiting the tomb of St. Martin of Tours, Columcille begins founding monasteries all over Ireland; forty-one by the time he reaches forty-one. Columcille loves books and particularly illuminated ones like Finian's psalter, which he secretly copies. Finian catches him and through King Diarmait forces him to relinquish both original and copy. Years later, after Diarmait kills one of Columcille's followers, the monk leads his kinsmen into battle against the king and kills 3,000, losing only one of his soldiers. Columcille claims the psalter as a spoil of victory and becomes known as "Cathach" ("Warrior").

For taking up arms, Columcille is, per custom, excommunicated and exiled. He and twelve companions sail over the horizon to Iona, offshore of present-day Scotland. Without cities, Ireland has no need for continental-style bishoprics and the rulers of great monastic centers upstage bishops in importance. "Literate druids" create centers of knowledge-and wealth-unprecedented in Ireland. Women can reign over these like Medb in Connacht. Had the papacy known about what is going on in Ireland, it would have been put off by a double (male and female) monastery headed by a former druid princess converted by Patrick, Brigid of Kildare. After her conversion, Brigid begins giving away her father's possessions to beggars. He takes her, screaming, to sell to the King of Leinster. While they discuss her, Brigid gives her father's sword to a leper. Hearing her excuse and declaration she would steal all royal wealth and give it to "Christ's brothers and sisters," the king declines Brigid's services and she runs away to become an abbess. Her monastery serves choice food to God's poor children. Women in Ireland are not equally empowered with men, but play an important role in the church. Rome would be distressed to learn Irish abbesses heal the sick, hear confessions, probably ordain clergy, and may even celebrate Mass. *The Old Life of Brigid* claims she is consecrated bishop "by mistake", a claim dropped in Cogitosus' seventh century biography. Cogitocus does show her preaching and functioning as bishop in everything but title.

Unlike in the Roman tradition, Irish monastic rulebooks respect differences and Irish abbots suggest rather than enforce. The office is often passed from father to son. Penance is entirely private and repeatable as needed. Individual conscience takes precedence over public opinion or ecclesiastical authority. Sin is handled between a person and God, with a trusted *anmchara* ("soul-friend") present to bear witness to sincerity. No one can pry out what is said under the seal of confession-and doing so is virtually the only "unforgivable" sin to Irishmen. This is a practice taken over from druid days. Unfortunately, private confession is incorporated by the Catholic Church at large, but without the sense of sympathy, acceptance of diversity, and underplaying of sexual mores. Cogitosus tells of Brigid making the fetus of a pregnant nun magically disappear; while the nun is absent from the convent, the Virgin Mary keeps her place warm and no



one realizes the difference. Cogitosus, with greater historical accuracy, relates the founding of Kildare in the mid-seventh century. Its church, the largest in Ireland, accommodates masses of pilgrims who celebrate St. Brigid's "falling asleep" on Feb. 1 -the druid feast of Imolc, dedicated to the fertility goddess also named Brigid.

Rome is unaware of Irish developments because by the time Columcille goes to Iona in 564 CE, the barbarian hordes have driven all but a few Romans out of Western Europe. The great cities are laid waste, communications are broken, and illiterate Goths rule other illiterate Goths, pagans, and some Arians. The Irish do not mean to deviate from Rome but have no models of orthodoxy. Mostly monastic refugees bring ideas from the continent. Gaunt ascetics from Armenia, Syria, and Egypt introduce artistic innovations, such as the red-dot initials that become hallmarks of Irish art. With the establishment of St. Benedict of Nursia's rule, monastic discipline comes to be uniformly-and brutally-administered by autocratic abbots. Irish variants are in time obliterated. The Irish view the pope as a distant "high king of the church". Pilgrims go to Rome to find books to bring back and copy. The continental libraries are forgotten and by the end of the fifth century, the profession of copyist has largely disappeared. In the sixth century, Pope Gregory the Great re-establishes a poor library in Rome, which illiterate mobs sack during a famine. Only on a peaceful island, cut off from commerce with Europe by the pagan Saxons in southern England, does literacy flourish. Only once Irish monks are freed to wander Italy and Gaul does the book trade come alive, and Ireland becomes "Europe's publisher".

Columcille, by becoming the first of the "White Martyrs"-those who painfully sail away from Ireland, never to return-makes this happen. Ireland has hosted thousands of foreign students, who take home Irish learning. Irish monks first colonize Scotland, quickly constructing the simple Iona monastery. Soon, it must be expanded to accommodate visitors from across Britain, many of whom never leave. Columcille's reputation spreads among Scots and Picts, and when Iona reaches 150 monks, he sends "twelve and one" to found a new community. By the end of the sixth century, there are sixty communities founded in Columcille's name in Scotland, filled by well more than the 3,000 souls he sets as a quota to save. Patrick is not mentioned in Columcille's *Life*, the monasteries at that time are battling Armagh for primacy. Clearly, however, Columcille bears Patrick's spirit, touch, and zeal, and is at ease with nature (including an encounter with the Loch Ness Monster). Columcille returns to Ireland once, to plead at Drumceatt that the kingdom of Dalriada be exempt from tribute to the high king at Tara. The accomplished poet also defeats an attempt to suppress the satirical order of bards.

Towards the end of his life, Columcille has premonitions about his own death. He bids farewell individually to the monks working the fields and then sits down to copy a manuscript. He stops in the middle of Psalm 34. When the monks gather for the midnight office, they find him in ecstasy before the altar. Columcille blesses them and dies. High born, a natural leader, prescient, forceful, shrewd, and sympathetic; this is how British historian Kathleen Hughes assesses Columcille. He terrifies, comforts, and delights. The warrior-monk is determined to make the Scots and Picts literate. After his death, his spiritual heir, Aidan of Lindisfarne, carries this campaign to the pagan Angles



of Northumbria. Other monks set off in all directions in imitation of Columcille's "glorious and heroic exile". Brendan the Navigator visits Iceland, Greenland, and North America. Some drift without oars, completely in the hands of God. Many spread out across Europe to return ancient civilization to its ancient home.

One such traveler is Columbanus, born in Leinster ca. 540 CE, and serving as a monk at Bangor for twenty-five years. Ca. 590, he and twelve companions head to Gaul, where they found in Sueve territory three monasteries, Annegray, Fontaines, and Luxeuil, destined for importance. Each attracts "local talent" as Columbanus "nettles" the local bishops who are too lax to visit their flocks. In 603, these bishops summon Columbanus to a synod in Chalon-sur-Saône. Columbanus responds by a deferential but provocative letter taking them to task for their own laxity and for interfering with his mission. The bishops ask Brunhilda, Visigoth princess of Burgundy, to deport him, but the ship they are put on in Nantes sinks and they escape. Columbanus heads to Italy to convert the Lombards. Leaving his ailing German expert, Gall, in Arbon on Lake Constance, he takes an active role, in his seventies, in building the first Italo-Irish monastery at Bobbio. Brunhilda is overthrown and Clothaire of Neustria tries to lure Columbanus back, but he remains in Bobbio, where he dies. He writes as an Irishman to popes Gregory I and Boniface IV, intimately with digs in the ribs. In return, he gets "cold pontifical silence".

His "swaggering behavior" make some historians suspect Columbanus is "off his rocker", but his achievements show otherwise: letters, sermons, poems, and a jolly boat song. They betray knowledge of diverse classical writers. He also leaves behind sixty to one hundred monasteries, founded in a span of twenty-five years, which return classical learning to Europe. The monk with whom Columbanus falls out in the Alps, St. Gall, is the central figure in the founding of a Swiss church, working among the Alemans. Reconciled with Columbanus, he succeeds him as abbot, turns down lucrative positions elsewhere and sticks with the Alemans. By his death in 645, they have all been converted.

Much of the physical culture of these Irish exiles is lost, but the Bible and the literatures of Greece, Rome, and Ireland are known only because they pass them along. The European vernacular literatures would not have developed without the Irish example. Furthermore, the "habits of mind" that encourage thought would not have been in place when Islam expands into Europe, leaving no one to confront them except "scattered tries of animists, ready for a new identity". Whether this would have been better or worse, Cahill leaves to the reader. This is not the case because White Martyrs, dressed like druids, fan out across Europe as far east as Kiev. Notables include St. Fursa the Visionary, Caidoc and Fricor, Virgil the Geometer, Donatus, and St. Cathal (or Cahill). Among the women exiles is St. Chrodoara, whose sarcophagus discovered in 1977 in Belgium shows a woman carrying a bishop's crosier. In 870 CE, Heiric of Auxerre claims "almost all of Ireland" are migrating to Europe "with a herd of philosophers". Many carry books tied from the waists-as Irish heroes had slung their enemies heads. They restore everywhere they go the love of learning, the skills to make books, and a renewed literacy. That is how they save civilization.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

As Columcille breathes his last on Iona, the king of Canterbury is baptized by a timid librarian, Augustine, sent to Britain by Pope Gregory I, marking the first instance of a papal mission to pagans. Angles, Saxons, and Jutes have pushed the Celtic Britons, Christians in Patrick's day, westward, finally into Cornwall and Wales, and northward into Northumbria. Britons hate these pagans and have given no thought to evangelizing them. Having suffered nothing at the Britons' hands, the Irish have no inhibitions and launch a "spiritual invasion" of England from Lindisfarne. Aidan, Columcille's beloved disciple, who is on good terms with the British Celts, deserves more than Augustine to be called "Apostle of England", but Augustine is installed by Rome. Slowly, his stricter version of the faith spreads north and westward, eventually encountering-and clashing with-Celtic Christianity. The Synod of Whitby (664) considers two superficial matters: the correct date of Easter and the form of the Irish monastic tonsure. Learning for the first time that the calendar is an issue, the Irish give in, reluctantly, allowing their father, Columcille, to take second place to Peter, prince of the apostles, buried in Rome.

Christian Saxons always look to the Irish as elders in Christ and borrow from their generosity. Saxon monasteries are often founded by Irish monks and learn the scribal arts from them. The Lindisfarne Gospels, as exquisite as the Book of Kells, comes from the hand of an Englishman, Eadfrith, Aidan's successor as abbot. The workmanship, however, is thoroughly Irish. The Saxons also learn from the Irish to revere their past, and Beowulf is shown with Celtic virtues: loyalty, courage, and generosity. His fighting with monsters is turned into an allegory of Christ fighting Satan. Celtic and Saxon myths become "secular Old Testaments". Neither people is any more capable than Pope Gregory the Great of understanding the Greek texts they copy. Augustine of Hippo is unknown. They understand the world through myth and magic, primarily through images. Even the Roman party at Whitby uses images of Peter's bones versus Columcille's bones, because intellectual argument is beyond them. Peter's metaphorical keys to the kingdom become very real politically. There is no list of charges, such as the great councils of the church, to draw up, although the Irish practice many things to which the Romans could object. The monastery in which they meet, Whitby, houses men and women and is ruled by the Abbess Hilda. The Romans content themselves with the two most *visible* matters.

For a century and a half, 450-700 CE, there are no known communications between Rome and Britain, much less Rome and Ireland. On these marginal islands, no one knows what is in or out in Rome and other centers of Christianity. The Irish believe in diversity and thrive. By the second half of the seventh century, Irish and allied English missionaries are at work in Germanic lands. Wilfrid, leader of the victors at Whitby, and Boniface establish monasteries and sees across Frisia, Saxony, Thuringia, Bavaria, and Denmark. They must seek books from Ireland, for the art of copying is dead in Italy and



Gaul. The Irish supply them and by the mid-eighth century, Fulda is employing forty full-time scribes.

The pope crowns Charlemagne king of the Franks on Christmas Day 800 and Europe's first renaissance begins. Charlemagne is illiterate until late in life and never learns to write, but he loves "the wandering monks", who are everywhere. Dungal, an Irish recluse at Saint Denis, instructs Charlemagne about a solar eclipse, as do Dicuil on geography, and Sedulius Scotus on statecraft. The greatest Irishman in Charlemagne's court is John Scotus Eriugena. Born ca. 810, he comes to France in his thirties to teach Charlemagne's successor, Charles the Bald, in the Palatine School. John Scotus, a layman, is the first medieval philosopher, first Christian philosopher since Augustine, first European philosopher since Boethius' execution (524), and "the first man in three hundred years who was able to think". His *De Divisione Naturae* returns readers to the world of Plato, but in a more elaborate, balanced, and internally consistent system. He loves the word "nature", a favorite of all Celts but abhorrent to Platonists and Roman Christians. John Scotus allows no distinction between natural and supernatural, showing a debt to Patrick. Many readers see pantheism. John Scotus opposes reason to reality and downplays authorities, including the fathers of the church. He takes St. Paul's statement that in the end "God will be all in all" to suggest even the devils will be saved. In 1225, Pople Honorius III orders all copies of *De Divisione Naturae* burned. In John Scotus' day, barbarians rather than churchmen burn books.

As John Scotus leaves Ireland, the Vikings arrive as terrorists, looting and burning the monasteries, grown rich in precious art objects. The monks cannot defend themselves. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 793 describes the horror, monastery by monastery. Many treasures are hastily buried or moved inland to keep them from the Vikings. The Book of the Kells is taken from Lindisfarne to the town whose name it bears. Modern farmers still come upon ancient items, like the Ardagh Chalice. Some noble families reduced in stature by the English occupation (see below) sell off items like the Cathach of Columcille, which they have preserved for centuries. The Irish see nothing positive in the Vikings; but in fact, they establish Ireland's first true cities. When the Vikings are defeated in the early eleventh century, Irish life goes back to normal, but Ireland cannot recover cultural leadership of European civilization.

Next invaded by the Normans in the twelfth century, Ireland readily assimilates them. In the sixteenth century, the Elizabethans cut down forests to get rid of guerillas and contemplate genocide. In the next century, the Calvinist Cromwellians come even closer to doing so. In the eighteenth century, Penal Laws are instituted to deprive Catholics of their civil rights. In the nineteenth century, the "Great Hunger" finishes off the Irish. As London watches idly, one million Irish starve to death from 1845 to 1851, and 1.5 million emigrate. By 1914, four million have left-two-thirds of Ireland's 1845 population. Ireland becomes the first Third World country as it becomes England's first colony. Only in the twentieth century does the Irish population regain a semblance of self-respect first crushed by the Penal Laws. Art O'Leary, seen in Chapter 3 dying over a horse, is the last nobleman to try to remain in Ireland. The exiles are known as "Wild Geese", while the impoverished peasants left behind sing of "Kilcash", the aristocratic ghosts. Even at



the low-point, the Irish retain their love of books. In 1843, a German traveler spies a gnarled Kerry farmer reading an Irish codex that has survived.

People of the First World, the "Romans of the twentieth century", dare not turn their backs on the signs of coming catastrophe, which the wonders of technology partly mask. No human group has ever figured out how to design its future. History divides into "Romans," the rich and powerful who run things their way and horde because they believe there is not enough to go around; and "catholics" (lower-case), who are universalists, accepting all are equal before the God who provides for all. Malraux says the twenty-first century "will be spiritual or it will not be." It could well be scattered by the wind, as Patrick says. If mankind is to be saved, it will be by saints, not Romans.



Characters

St. Patrick (Patricius)

St. Augustine of Hippo

Augustine of Canterbury

Ausonius

Columbanus

St. Columcille (Columba)

John Scotus Eriugena

Lovernius

The Apostle Paul

Plato

Virgil



Objects/Places

The Ardagh Chalice

An artifact from seventh/eighth-century Ireland, the "Ardagh Chalice" is a communion cup found in a Limerick field. Contemporary with the final redaction of the "Saint Patrick's Breastplate", its rich workmanship is meant to inspire the communicant as he or she approaches. The intricate of the chalice underside, however, seen only by God is meant to please God. This provides continuity to a second Celtic artifact, the Gundestrup Cauldron. This votary offering dating from the centuries before Christ is intended only for the god who receives it as a votary offering. Newly forged, it is intentionally broken and thrown into a Danish swamp. It shows gods, warriors, and sacrifices, both human and animal, but also Cernunnos, lord of the animals, a benevolent "prehistoric Saint Francis".

The Book of Kells

The most famous Irish codex, the Book of Kells, is now preserved in Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland. It is originally copied and decorated in the monastery at Iona, but removed to Kells, a city in Meath, Ireland, when the Vikings threaten to sack the ancient monastery.

Celts

A large ethnic group, the Celts enter history from across the Rhine in ca. 600 BCE. Branches of the Celts conquer Gaul, the Iberian Peninsula, Greece and present-day Turkey, and finally Britain, ca. 400 BCE. Nine centuries later, they are pushed into Cornwall and Wales, and fifty years after that, they reach Ireland. All Celtic warriors strip for battle and howl as though demon-possessed. They amaze the Romans by their incredibly strength and bravery. Some enter a frightful "warp-spasm", at least in literature like the *Tain Bo Cuailnge*. Beyond the "warp-spasm", Celts take for granted their gods, druids, poets, and others in touch with the spirit world are "shape-shifters". Amhairghin, for instance, becomes an estuary, a wave, the sea, an ox, a hawk, etc. The dark side of this is the realization there are no reliable patterns in the world. Individuals have no fixed identity. The world is full of hidden traps and violated taboos bring disaster. Perfectly preserved prehistoric corpses from Danish and English bogs (Tolland Man, Grauballe Man, and Borremose Man, and Lindow Man) suggest the victims in Celtic human sacrifice are willing "lambs". Today, Irish and Scots Gaelic are the last Celtic living languages to survive, and Ireland is the only Celtic nation-state in the world.



Druids

The priests of pagan Ireland, the druids claim the ability to control the elements. They find St. Patrick threatening because he treats the whole world as the world of a Creator-God from whom humble prayer brings forth food even in a barren desert. The great seventh/eighth-century Irish prayer known both as "Saint Patrick's Breastplate" and as "The Deer's Cry" reflects a Christian druid who thoroughly mixes faith and magic, evoking not the ranks of saints and God's various protections, but also the various powers of nature to protect him from all forms of evil.

Iona

An island off the shore of modern day Scotland, Iona is the first monastic community founded by St. Columcille in 564 CE, when he is per custom excommunicated for taking up arms and exiled with a dozen companions. "Literate druids" gather around the monks and make Iona a center of knowledge and wealth unprecedented in Ireland. Rome is unaware of how Irish monasticism is developing because the barbarian hordes have driven all but a few Romans out of Western Europe. When the population of Iona reaches 150, Columcille sends "twelve and one" to found a new community. By the end of the sixth century, there are sixty communities founded in Columcille's name in Scotland, filled by well more than the 3,000 souls he sets as a quota to save. The tradition of Iona is then carried throughout Europe, restoring literacy to the benighted continent. When the Vikings threaten Iona, its most famous treasure, the Book of Kells, is spirited off to Kells in Ireland's interior for safety.

Lindisfarne

The monastery founded by St. Aidan, spiritual heir of St. Columcille, to preach among the pagan Angles of Northumbria, Lindisfarne is best known for the beautiful illuminated Gospel manuscript, copied by Aidan's successor, the Englishman, Eadfrith. As exquisite as the Book of Kells, the Lindisfarne Gospels is thoroughly Irish in spirit and execution.

Pax Romana

The "Roman Peace" in which Christianity first develops is founded above all on the excellent road system, which facilitates transportation and communication around the Mediterranean basin. Christianity at first attracts women and slaves, offering them a feeling of humanity that life denies them. In the fourth century, the Emperor Constantine establishes Christianity and laxity inevitably sets in; it no longer requires heroics to believe. The Roman legions stand guard over the Imperium's porous borders, fending off the German tribes that seek seasonal work. There is a myth, "The Twelve Eagles", that holds Rome has one century per eagle to live. On time, as it were, as the twelfth century passes, fierce barbarian hordes overwhelm the Imperium from the north and east. Law and communications break down, taxes do not suffice to keep the army loyal,



and treasures of secular and sacred literature are destroyed. The economic conditions needed for literacy and culture are destroyed. As people yearn for the *pax romana*, the church steps in and becomes increasingly bureaucratic and remote. Only in forgotten Ireland are conditions right for the light to remain lit, and the Irish, having copied the great European literary legacy, returns to reintroduce it.

Roman Catholic Church

Overall, *How the Irish Saved Civilization* takes a dim view of the institution of the Roman Catholic Church in comparison with SS. Patrick and Columcille's Irish version. Roman theology is too dependent on the thought of one sex-obsessed man, St. Augustine of Hippo. Its early leaders fail to execute the great command to preach the Gospel to all nations. After the Edict of Milan makes Christianity the official religion of the Imperium, the laity grow lax. As literacy drops with the coming of barbarian hordes, bishops are no longer elected by their flock and no longer consult with them. Bishops appoint other bishops. Rome demands obedience and conformity. This comes in conflict with the Irish, evangelized by SS. Patrick and Columcille with open minds and hearts, develop expressions of the faith that would shock Rome, were Rome aware of them. Contact is restored in the late sixth century when Pope Gregory I assigns a timid librarian, Augustine, Archbishop of Canterbury and, slowly, Rome's stricter version of the faith spreads-and clashes with-Celtic Christianity. The Synod of Whitby (664) considers two superficial matters: the correct date of Easter and the form of the Irish monastic tonsure. Learning for the first time the calendar is an issue, the Irish give in, reluctantly. Most Irish adopt the Roman practices, and in the late seventeenth century are deprived of their civil rights when London enacts the infamous Penal Laws.

Tain Bo Cuailnge

A masterpiece of Ireland's prehistoric oral lore, the *Tain* cannot be precisely dated, but the action pictures an Iron Age lifestyle in a "land outside of time". It seems safe to assume their world is little different from continental Celts prior to contact with Rome, whose milieu is something like Homeric Greece, *Mahabharata* India, and Sumer. Only in the sixth century CE is it written down. The chief characters are Queen Medb, King Ailil, and the teenaged Ulster champion, Cuchulainn, who illustrates the Celtic "warp-spasm".

Vikings

Between 793 and 1014, the Vikings terrorize Ireland, looting and burning monasteries, which have grown rich in precious art objects. The monks cannot defend themselves. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 793 describes the horror, monastery by monastery. Many treasures are hastily buried or moved inland to keep them from the Vikings, including the Book of the Kells and the Ardagh Chalice. The Irish see nothing positive in the Vikings, but in fact, they establish Ireland's first true cities. When the Vikings are

defeated in the early eleventh century, Irish life goes back to normal, but Ireland cannot recover cultural leadership of European civilization.



Themes

Sex

Guided by Plato's view that the physical world is inferior to the spiritual, Greco-Roman society generally looks down on manifestations of sexual passion, but not with the intensity of St. Augustine of Hippo. Before his conversion to Christianity, Augustine indulges every passion conceivable and adheres for a while to a syncretistic Eastern religion, Manicheism, which allows him to do as he likes and still feel somehow superior to the masses. The systematic study of Plato begins to touch his conscience, and the reading of St. Paul, who describes the flesh fighting the spirit, convinces him to "put on Christ" and "make no provision for the lusts of the flesh". The guilt-wracked former sex addict turns his considerable classical education to theology, having no one to counter his extreme views. For Western Christianity, any sexual encounter becomes at least a venial sin. So rigid and impersonal is Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin that God must consign to hell babies that die unbaptized.

A vestige of the Western coyness about sex is seen in adolescent St. Patrick, but no knowledge of the Augustinian system is apparent, nor any of Augustine's deep-seated aversion. This is beneficial when Patrick goes to Ireland as a missionary bishop. The fifth-century Irish, still living like their Stone Age forebears, show open interest in one another's bodies and are not shy climbing into bed together. Marriages are renewable annually, like insurance policies today, and homosexuality is accepted among active-duty warriors. Patrick's preaching turns the Irish from slave trading, human sacrifice, and inter-tribal warfare, but never makes many inroads into their sexual practices. Even the monasteries and convents are not notable for their celibacy. As late as the twelfth century, the kings of Clan Conaill retain as part of their inauguration by public copulation with a white mare, and modern Irish literature no less than the ancient traditions treats fidelity as a rarely practiced virtue.

Learning

The upper class in the Greco-Roman world values education for eleven centuries, with Homer and Virgil teaching grammar and rhetoric, and Demosthenes and Cicero the more difficult and boring subject, dialectics. Cicero turns language into a practical tool for persuading the audience to do as the speaker wishes. Greek has fallen out of use in the West by the fifth century CE, and Latin, judging by the poetry of Ausonius of Bordeaux, has become derivative: he and his contemporaries delight in allusions to great writers of the past as they merely flow with the times. Members of the upper class—a minority of the population—study the humanities, but only a tiny minority of them delve into philosophy, whose pinnacle is Plato, the shining light of fifth-century BCE Athens' "Golden Age".



Before becoming Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, Augustine learns to love Virgil and has thoroughly mastered Cicero. When he turns from a voluptuous youth to St. Paul's call for making "no provision for the lusts of the flesh"-a correction of Plato-Augustine applies his learning to preaching the new faith. He formulates doctrines of Original Sin, Grace, and Trinity that become normative in Western Christianity, where he is the only "father" (theologian) of note. When, in 410 CE, the "Eternal City" falls and the shrinking pagan population blames the Christians, Augustine pens his final masterpiece, *The City of God*. Battling Julian of Eclanum, a married fellow bishop, who challenges the distasteful implication of Original Sin-that unbaptized babies go to hell-and informs him he has sex with his wife whenever possible, Augustine does not argue from authorities that generally back him on sexual passion, but resorts to the kind of *ad hominem* attacks Cicero would use, not just to be right, but to be victorious. As barbarians spread across continental Europe, destroying books and the leisure required for literacy to flourish, isolated Ireland emerges from barbarian darkness, thanks to St. Patrick and his followers. In monasteries that sprout up across Ireland and Scotland, scholars copy every manuscript they can get their hands on. Many refugees from the continent and Middle East join them. Columbanus and fellow "White Martyrs" fan out across Europe, restoring the lost learning in monastic centers.

Virtues

Author Thomas Cahill fills *How the Irish Saved Civilization* with keen appreciation of virtues of generosity, beauty, and bravery. Common to all Iron Age cultures, these precepts are found in the Middle Eastern *Gilgamesh*, the Greek *Iliad*, and suffuse the Irish epic, the *Tain Bo Cuailnge*. The opening debate between Queen Medb and King Ailil includes claims to these virtues. Unnamed is another virtue, loyalty or faithfulness, which the Irish seem never to have followed in heterosexual relationships, but are fundamental to same-sex friendships in the Iron Age (Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Achilles and Patroclus, and Cuchulainn and Ferdia). The ancient Irish understand life is fleeting so holding onto people or things is pointless. Instead, they pursue "heroic gestures", intense poetry, and music-drinking all the time. They are capable of detachment when death comes. Their outlook makes for great stories and songs but "little personal peace or social harmony".

Using the Romanized Ausonius of Bordeaux and Augustine of Hippo as contrasts, Cahill demonstrates how Patrick, Columcille, Columbanus, and the "White Martyrs" embody the ancient heroic virtues. While clergy on the continent are fighting pagan practices, Patrick sees pagan generosity, beauty, and bravery as compatible with, if not perfectly equivalent with the Christians' faith, hope, and charity. Having studied no Plato, Patrick is free to see the universe as a "Great Sacrament". Thus he can compete with the druids on even ground for the people's allegiance. He lacks the worldly benefits Romans offer their converts, so he must appeal to Irish dreams, fears, and aspirations. By the time Patrick dies in 461, he has brought Ireland from chaos to peace, as the Roman Empire plunges into profound chaos. His successor, St. Columcille, founds monasteries across Ireland before being exiled in 564, to Iona, offshore of Scotland. By century's end, sixty communities founded in his name, filled with "literate druids". After



Columcille's death, "White Martyrs" dressed like druids set off in all directions in imitation of his "glorious and heroic exile". Columbanus and twelve companions head to Gaul, dare to "nettle" the local bishops, and over a span of twenty-five years found sixty to one hundred monasteries, which return classical learning to Europe through the beautiful manuscripts they copy.

Historian Edward Gibbons blames the Christian virtues for softening Rome and thus hastening its downfall. This follows St. Augustine's blaming pagan immorality, which angers the Christian God, who abandons the Imperium. In isolated Ireland, meanwhile, Christianized druids hold fast to the qualities that in the eighteenth century appear in the adjectives, "generous, handsome, brave", which adorn the tombstone of Art O'Connell, an Irish Catholic slain by the English for daring to own a horse worth more than ?5.



Style

Perspective

How the Irish Saved Civilization is a volume in author Thomas Cahill's "Hinges of History" series, intended to look at crucial periods in history from the perspective of key participants. Ireland saving civilization is a natural starting-point for the Bronx born and raised Irish-American scholar, Jesuit-trained in literature and philosophy at Fordham University. The story, he remarks, is virtually unknown outside of Ireland; but without it, the modern world would be utterly different. Cahill tells the story with evident relish and flamboyant style, tying in modern-day cultural equivalents to render it relevant to non-scholars. Never does he assume the reader will recognize a name, place, or event. He wants the reader to understand and appreciate the points he makes, so he makes them memorable, reiterating major themes to make them sink in, but adding new bits of information to prevent boredom. He writes with the pride and tongue-in-cheek wit of an Irishman, but in no way offends others (except, perhaps Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Arians in brief swipes). The book's impact is profound. A reader might well take up some of the titles in the narrative-style bibliography and learn more about some facet of the Irish past, or one may simply appreciate that the "island of saints and scholars" is responsible for much more than the cultural stereotype carries. That one might very well *not* be reading a book today without the medieval Irish is a sobering thought.

Tone

How the Irish Saved Civilization is as objective a work of history as can be produced concerning the "island of saints and scholars". Any short work (some 200 pages of text) is by definition subjective in what is included. Author Thomas Cahill admits several times in his narrative-style bibliography, which closes the book, that no two scholars of St. Patrick agree on any detail of his life and work, and that he has had to "go largely of supposition and insight". Whenever the reader might disagree with a statement he makes, Cahill seems to anticipate it and invite informed dissent. He admits part of the story "could drive a careful scholar to drink". The bibliography, however, makes clear Cahill is a careful, honest, and sober scholar, sharing with readers precisely how he has used various works and how they have affected his thought. This is far superior to the usual extensive alphabetic listings meant largely to impress. Cahill shows a bias against Roman (Imperial and Catholic) formalism in government and religion and Augustinian sexual repression, and suggests the Irish paradigm, had it been allowed to survive and influence the rest of Europe more, might have served civilization well. Cahill evidently admires the Celtic virtues of generosity, beauty, and bravery and shows how all the characters in his rich narrative relate to these. He writes with the light wit he ascribes to the greatest of Irish writers from prehistoric times down to today. All of these qualities combine to win the reader to Cahill's side. Even a Briton would have to feel a twinge of guilt for the heavy hand of colonial control, lightly mentioned at the end of the book.



Readers are likely to study more about Ireland or at least consider the country and its people, many living abroad, as other than the cultural stereotype. Cahill has made the depths and breadth of the Irish personality clear and accessible in passages that stick in the memory.

Structure

How the Irish Saved Civilization consists of an Introduction ("How Real Is History?") that the reader definitely should not skip over, seven numbered and titled chapters; a brief but useful "Pronunciation Guide to Key Irish Words"; a narrative-style, chapter-by-chapter commentary on the "Bibliographic Sources" used; a "Chronology," acknowledgements, and a serviceable subject index. All of the ancillary materials are useful, although the guide to Irish words might have been expanded. The generally chronological arrangement from the fifth century CE onward is natural and well executed. The Roman Empire must fall to the barbarians for the Irish monks' bookish efforts to be needed by a benighted continent. In discussing St. Patrick and his successors, it is natural to examine Stone Age Ireland to see why and how their mission succeeds.

Chapter 1 ("The End of the World: How Rome Fell - And Why") characterizes the late Roman Empire with the barbarian hordes waiting to overrun it, focusing on St. Augustine's high-minded views on why it is happening and the poet Ausonius' career as the "nitty-gritty" of why it does. Chapter 2 ("What Was Lost: The Complexities of the Classical Tradition") examines more closely the great legacy that would be lost were it not for the Irish copyists; grumpy, sex-obsessed, but influential St. Augustine is the focus. Chapter 3 ("A Shifting World of Darkness: Unholy Ireland") prepares the reader to appreciate what St. Patrick experiences during his enslavement; Ireland is an isolated, Stone Age culture with a rich oral tradition that shows amazing continuity with the modern Irish character. Chapter 4 ("Good News from Far Off: The First Missionary") returns to St. Patrick, follows his life in brief, and examines why he succeeds in Christianizing the Irish. Chapter 5 ("A Solid World of Light: Holy Ireland") looks more closely at how St. Patrick wins over the Irish soul, in particular how he wipes out slave trading and human sacrifice.

Chapter 6 (What Was Found? How the Irish Saved Civilization") is the high-point of the story, concentrating on the work of the "White Martyrs" preaching across Europe, converting pagan peoples, and restoring literacy to a brain-dead continent. Chapter 7 ("The End of the World: Is there Any Hope?") looks at the pitiable fate of Ireland under subsequent invaders and suggests the modern world may fall much like Rome if Romans rather than saints control its fate.



Quotes

"That Rome should ever fall was unthinkable to Romans: its foundations were unassailable, sturdily sunk in a storied past and steadily built on for eleven centuries and more. There was, of course, the prophecy. Someone, usually someone in his cups, could always be counted on to bring up that old saw: the Prophecy of the Twelve Eagles, each eagle representing a century, leaving us with - stubby fingers counting out the decades in a puddle of wine - only seventy years remaining!" Chapter 1, p. 12

"How could a grown man have spent so much time so foolishly? Well, it's what everyone else was doing. This is a static world. Civilized life, like the cultivation of Ausonius's magnificent Bordeaux vineyards, lies in doing well what has been done before. Doing the expected is the highest value - and the second highest is like it: receiving the appropriate admiration of one's peers for doing it. "Though Ausonius is a Christian convert, as his 'Oratio' shows, his Christianity is a cloak to be donned and removed, as needed. It was, no doubt, what everyone else was doing." Chapter 1, p. 21

"But Augustine wanted Truth, not cheap success: such a pressure-cooker psyche can settle for nothing less. He soon abandoned the simple, emotional Catholicism of his mother and adopted something more exclusive and *recherchy*: the religion of Mani, a Persian syncretist who had taken this and that from here and there and come up with something that can only strike us as a California cult - a little Christian symbolism, a large dose of Zoroastrian dualism, and some of the quiet refinements of Buddhism. It was called Manicheism. For a while it let Augustine off the hook." Chapter 2, p. 9

"Fixity escaped these people, as in the end it escapes us all. They understood, as few have understood before or since, how fleeting life is and how pointless to try to hold on to things or people. They pursued the wondrous deed, the heroic gesture: fighting, fucking, drinking, art - poetry for intense emotion, the music that accompanied the heroic drinking with which each day ended, bewitching ornament for one's person and possessions." Chapter 3, pp. 96-97

"And right away I returned to them and they began to say to me: "Come on board, we'll take you on trust." They even offered their nipples to be sucked, the ancient Irish version of 'kiss and make up.' Patricius, too much the Roman for such *outry* goings-on, held back - he says 'for fear of God,' but better minds than Patricius's have succumbed to a confusion of Roman custom and Christian faith. The sailors shrugged: 'You can make friends with us however you like.' Patricius jumped on board, and they sailed at once." Chapter 4, pp. 103-104

"Despite Patrick's great success in changing the warrior mores of the Irish tribes, their sexual mores altered little. Even the monasteries he established were not especially notable for their rigid devotion to the rule of chastity; and as late as the end of the twelfth century, Geraldus Cambrensis reports that the kings of Clan Conaill continue to be inaugurated in the high style of their ancestors - by public copulation with a white mare." Chapter 5, p. 135



"Patrick's gift to the Irish was his Christianity - the first de-Romanized Christianity in human history, a Christianity without the sociopolitical baggage of the Greco-Roman world, a Christianity that completely inculturated itself into the Irish scene. Through the Edict of Milan, which had legalized the new religion in 313 and made it the new emperor's pet, Christianity had been received into Rome, not Rome into Christianity!" Chapter 6, p. 148

"These were happy human beings, occasionally waspish, but normally filled with delight at the tasks their fate had set for them. They did not see themselves as drones. Rather, they engaged the text they were working on, tried to comprehend it after their fashion, and, if possible, add to it, even improve on it. In this dazzling new culture, a book was not an isolated document on a dusty shelf; book truly spoke to book, and writer to scribe, and scribe to reader, from one generation to the next. These books were, as we would say in today's jargon, open, interfacing, and intertextual - glorious literary smorgasbords in which the scribe often tried to include a bit of everything, from every era, language, and style known to him. No one would see their like again till James Joyce would write *Ulysses*." Chapter 6, p. 163

"The steely zealotry and peculiar practices of such men had already merited the suspicion of orthodox bishops on the continent, who much preferred the rule of Saint Martin of Gaul, whose foundations were all alike and readily subservient to the desires of the local bishop. Soon they would find even greater virtue in the rule of Benedict of Nursia, whose foundation at Monte Casino would become in time the motherhouse of western monasticism, a monasticism of disciplined uniformity, enforced - through floggings, if necessary - by an autocratic abbot. Blessed by successive popes, the Rule of Saint Benedict would in the end obliterate all memory of the pluriform Irish." Chapter 6, pp. 180-181

"The Hebrew Bible would have been saved without them, transmitted to our time by scattered communities of Jews. The Greek Bible, the Greek commentaries, and much of the literature of ancient Greece we well enough preserved to Byzantium, and might be still available to us somewhere - if we had the interest to seek them out. But Latin literature would almost surely have been lost without the Irish, and illiterate Europe would hardly have developed its great national literatures without the example of the Irish, the first vernacular to be written down." Chapter 6, p. 193

"Even as John Scotus was crossing to the continent from Ireland, Ireland was under siege. The Viking terrorists had discovered its peaceful monasteries, now rich in precious objects. The monks built round towers without ground-floor entrances and hauled their plate up rope ladders, which they then pulled up after themselves. But such towers were no match for the Vikings, nor were the monks, by this time growing sleek and tame." Chapter 7, p. 210

"The Normans became, in the famous phrase, '*Hibernis Hiberniores*,' 'more Irish than the Irish themselves.' Subsequent invaders were not so appreciative. In the sixteenth century, the colonizing Elizabethans cut down the Irish forests (to get at the impenitent dispossessed, who harried them guerrilla-style) and contemplated genocide, after the



gentle recommendation of the poet Spenser. In the seventeenth century, the Calvinist Cromwellians came close to implementing this poetic recommendation. In the eighteenth century, the spirit-crushing Penal Laws denied Catholics the rights of citizens. But it took the famines of the nineteenth century - the Great Hunger - to finish the Irish off." Chapter 7, p. 213



Topics for Discussion

What virtues do the Irish most admire, and how does St. Patrick appeal to them while evangelizing them?

Why are episcopal sees so unimportant in Ireland and how does this affect church polity there?

How are SS. Patrick and Augustine of Hippo alike and how do they differ?

What does the Synod of Whitby accomplish and what does it say about the tenor of its times?

How do Red, Green, and White Martyrdom compare and contrast?

How does St. Patrick talk the Irish out of human sacrifice?

What might life be like had the Irish not saved civilization?