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*Patrick Freeman earned his PhD in classical philology and Celtic languages and literatures from Harvard University in 1994. After completing his degree, Freeman was selected for a NEH fellowship at Boston University. In 1997, he began as an assistant professor in the Classics department at Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri. In 2005, Freeman accepted the Qualley Chair of Classical Languages at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. He was also honored to serve as a visiting scholar at the Harvard Divinity School during the 2004–2005 academic year. Freeman has published several books, including *Ireland and the Classical World* (University of Texas Press, 2001) and *Saint Patrick of Ireland* (Simon and Schuster, 2004). Freeman received an individual research grant from the American Academy of Religion during the 2009–2010 grant cycle. His research topic was entitled “The Letters of Saint Patrick and Early Patrician Literature.”*

The first things you notice about the National Library of Ireland are the gorgeous restrooms. They are spacious and luxurious by modern American standards with every surface covered in marble. Even the plumbing is elegant. But of course the thing that really strikes a visitor about the building is the gigantic reading room upstairs with its great domed ceiling and endless shelves of books on every aspect of Irish scholarship. The library was my home in Dublin while I conducted my research last December on the two Latin letters of Saint Patrick

Everyone has heard of Saint Patrick — the man who drove the snakes out of Ireland, defeated fierce druids in contests of magic, and used the shamrock to explain the Christian Trinity to the pagan Irish. But these are merely legends created centuries after his death. The true story is much more interesting than the myth.

The real Patrick was a young Roman nobleman living a life of luxury in Britain in the early fifth

century when he was suddenly kidnapped from his family's estate and sold into slavery in Ireland. For six years he endured brutal conditions as he watched over his master's sheep on a lonely mountain in a strange land. One day he escaped and risked his life to make a perilous journey across Ireland, finding passage back to Britain on a ship of reluctant merchants. His family welcomed back their long-lost son and assumed he would take up his life of privilege, but Patrick heard a different call. He returned to Ireland to bring a new way of life to a people who had once enslaved him. He constantly faced opposition, threats of violence, kidnapping, hunger, and even criticism from jealous church officials, while his Irish followers faced abuse, murder, and enslavement themselves by mercenary pirates. But through all these difficulties Patrick persevered in his Irish mission.

We know these facts of Patrick's life only through the chance survival of two letters, which he wrote in his old age — the *Confessio* and the *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*. The occasion of the letters were, respectively, a defense of his actions as a bishop to church authorities and a writ of excommunication against a band of British warriors. These short letters are two of the most remarkable documents written in ancient times, though they are largely unknown by scholars.

The unique qualities of Patrick's letters lie in several factors. First, they are the earliest written documents to have survived from Ireland. Second, Patrick lacked the education common to other bishops of the period, so that he writes in a colloquial Latin almost identical to the language of the native nobility in late Roman Britain. Patrick's letters are as close as we will ever come to a verbatim transcription of spoken Latin and are thus invaluable as linguistic sources. Third and most important, though Patrick had no intention of writing a history or autobiography, his two letters are remarkable historical sources for a period otherwise almost devoid of reliable documents. Patrick provides crucial information concerning the rise of Christianity in the late Roman Empire, the flourishing slave trade, ecclesiastical history in the British Isles, the status of women, and our earliest glimpse into the beginnings of Irish Christianity.

My goal is to present Patrick's *Confessio* and *Epistola* in a modern edition, which will incorporate up-to-date scholarship in a format consistent with that of other ancient Christian authors. My edition will contain a completely new text of both letters based on examination of all the original manuscripts; copious paleographical footnotes; a complete linguistic, religious, and historical commentary; a study of biblical quotations; a literal translation of the letters into English with a full index; and a complete bibliography of relevant scholarship.

Dublin was the perfect place to conduct my research on Patrick's letters. Even with the city paralyzed by an unexpected snowfall, it was a paradise for work on medieval Irish Christianity.

After a few hours at the National Library each day, I would walk across the courtyard to the National Museum for lunch and another look at the amazing artifacts from the churches and monasteries that covered the island over a thousand years ago. After I was done working for the day, there was still time for a quick visit to Trinity College and the exhibition on the incomparable *Book of Kells*, the triumph of insular manuscript decoration. But while all the other tourists jostled for a glimpse of this book in its case, I was content to spend my time looking at the smaller and less-decorated *Book of Armagh*, written soon after the 800 CE. Inside its covers is the earliest copy of Patrick's *Confessio*

. Just to stand next to this book and gaze at it through the glass was worth braving a blizzard at Chicago's O'Hare airport in order to make it to Ireland.

I would like to thank the American Academy of Religion for the research grant that enabled me to travel to Ireland to conduct my work. Many thanks also to the kind librarians at the National Library of Ireland in Dublin. The results of my research will be published in the Library of Early Christianity series by the Catholic University of America Press.