

## Patrick's Hymn – “Be Thou My Vision”



*I am the sinner Patrick. I am the most unsophisticated [clownish] of people, the least of Christians, and for many people I am the most contemptible...*

*I was taken into captivity in Ireland - at that time I was ignorant of the true God - along with many thousand others.*

*This was our punishment for departing from God, abandoning his commandments, and ignoring our priests who kept on warning us about our salvation...*

St Patrick, *Confessio*, translated from Latin

***“The other...standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner”  
Luke 18:10, 13***

### Introduction – County Meath Vibes?

Of the four hymns in this series *Be Thou My Vision* is *primus inter pares*, first among equals<sup>1</sup> for this writer, who encountered it, along with the other hymns, during the time with the Navigators in Sydney in about 1968. It happens that this writer's cousin traced the O'Reilly family back to County Westmeath in south Ireland. She thought it possible that the family came from the ruling house of Breffny in County Meath. That was always part of the family folklore. Vibes from County Meath may then be partly why Patrick's Hymn is special for this writer, because Patrick, it is said, had associations with County Meath and defiant ones at that. As shown, Patrick wasn't Irish but came from the British mainland, possibly from what is now Kilpatrick, near Dumbarton in the Firth of Clyde, Scotland, where his father was a church deacon<sup>2</sup>. Patrick was born in about 387 A.D.

### Patrick – A Man of Defiance

The hymn *Be Thou My Vision* is from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, 300 years after Patrick but it is associated with him as a man of defiance. The Cyberhymnal site<sup>3</sup> says that Slane, the tune of the hymn, is of Irish folk origin and that “*Slane Hill is about ten miles from Tara in County Meath. It was on Slane Hill around 433 AD that St. Patrick defied a royal edict by lighting candles on Easter Eve. High King Logaire of Tara had decreed that no one could light a fire before Logaire began the pagan spring festival by lighting a fire on Tara Hill. Logaire was so impressed by Patrick's devotion that, despite his defiance (or perhaps because of it [that would be Irish!]), he let him continue his missionary work. The rest is history.*” Patrick's history-making defiance of false worship, even at the highest level, has a lesson for the Christian, according to Proverbs 16:7.

***“When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.”***

## Patrick – A Man of Confession

Patrick was defiant against heathenism but definite about his sin. His written Confession shows that and Hebrews 2:3 describes his priests' warning: **"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;"** Rev Ivan Foster of Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church relates what befell Patrick, *"At the age of sixteen Patrick was taken captive by Irish raiders and sold as a slave in Ireland...Wherever he was born there is one thing we can be sure of and that is he was born again in Ireland. It was here that the wayward youth repented and sought the God of his fathers and received Christ by simple faith."* Patrick received mercy, in answer to Luke 18:10, 13.

In sum, the Lord had to dislocate Patrick, to deal with him. That may be another reason why Patrick's Hymn is special to this writer, though his experience was much easier than Patrick's! Patrick says in his Confession: *"And there the Lord opened my mind to an awareness of my unbelief, in order that, even so late, I might remember my transgressions and turn with all my heart to the Lord my God, who had regard for my insignificance and pitied my youth and ignorance. And he watched over me before I knew him, and before I learned sense or even distinguished between good and evil, and he protected me, and consoled me as a father would his son. Therefore, indeed, I cannot keep silent, nor would it be proper, so many favours and graces has the Lord deigned to bestow on me in the land of my captivity."* As David says in Psalm 107:2, which should be memorised, **"Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy."** Patrick did so. He escaped to Britain after 6 years in Ireland but prompted by God's calling, he returned to Ireland and there he ministered the Gospel for over 50 years.

## Patrick – A Man of Mission

Ivan Foster says that *"[The historian] Nennius, who, it is believed, lived in the ninth century, affirms that Patrick established 365 churches and "consecrated the same number of bishops.""* Patrick himself states *"According, therefore, to the measure of one's faith in the Trinity, one should proceed without holding back from danger...to spread God's name everywhere with confidence and without fear, in order to leave behind, after my death, foundations for my brethren and sons whom I baptized in the Lord in so many thousands."* Patrick's witness to the Trinity points to his Bible, the pure *non-Catholic\** Old Latin Bible<sup>4</sup> of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century that bore testimony to the triad of heavenly witnesses **"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one"** 1 John 5:7. Patrick's Bible had that verse. Yours should too. \*It should be noted in passing that Patrick never mentions Rome or the pope in his writings.

## Patrick – A Man of Prayer

Patrick's Hymn is really Patrick's prayer. It should be ours:

*Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.  
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,  
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.*

Patrick, like David, could trust in Acts 2:25.  
**"For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:"**

## Patrick – Among Men of Vision

This series of hymns has revealed several men of vision; Martin, mighty in **"the time of reformation"** Hebrews 9:10, John **"valiant for the truth"** Jeremiah 9:3, 5 martyrs who wear **"the crown of life"** Revelation 2:10 and Patrick, who **"foresaw the Lord always"** Acts 2:25. Each **"served his own generation by the will of God"** Acts 13:36. That should be our pledge. May it be so.

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## References

<sup>1</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primus\\_inter\\_pares](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primus_inter_pares)

<sup>2</sup> *Patrick The Apostle of Ireland* by Rev Ivan Foster. See also [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/saints/patrick\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/saints/patrick_1.shtml)

<sup>3</sup> [www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/b/e/t/bethoumv.htm](http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/b/e/t/bethoumv.htm)

<sup>4</sup> [kiv.benabraham.com/html/our\\_authorized\\_bible\\_vindicated.html](http://kiv.benabraham.com/html/our_authorized_bible_vindicated.html) Chapters 2, *Which Bible?* pp 198-203, 213