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Contact: Deborah McCarty Smith or Pam Huber, huber@udayton.edu

**HISTORICAL ST. PATRICK NO LONGER A 'DIM BULB' —
SCHOLAR POINTS TO FIRST-RATE THEOLOGY, WRITINGS**

DAYTON, Ohio — Scholars have long dismissed the snakes-out-of-Ireland, shamrock-picking picture of St. Patrick of legend. But the historical St. Patrick, the 5th-century bishop who called for the abolition of the slave trade and demanded equality of treatment for the sexes, has never been embraced as one of the church's brightest bulbs. His critics claim St. Patrick lacked original opinion and theological thought and have portrayed him as barely literate.

Not so, says Raymond Herbenick, a University of Dayton philosophy professor, whose book *On the Erudition of the Historical St. Patrick* will be published this fall by the Edwin Mellen Press.

"The historical St. Patrick might well be reckoned not only as a first-rate Biblical theologian but as a wise monastic spiritual director versed in moral theology and pastoral theology," Herbenick says. He finds in Patrick's writings the influence of the Eastern Christian monastic ideal of becoming an Olympic athlete in Christ, a tradition Patrick apparently knew from Gaul.

"The real St. Patrick teaches us how to cope with losses as did Olympic athletes in Christ," says Herbenick, who traveled throughout Ireland and mainland Greece in 1997 as part of his research for the book. "In Patrick's own Latin words he wrote that he felt at times 'like a stone stuck deep in mud needing life' because of losses he experienced."

Herbenick points out that Patrick lost his family, friends, liberty and educational opportunities when abducted as a teen-ager across the Irish Sea by Irish raiders who enslaved him for six years. He nearly lost his life escaping his Irish captors across 200 miles of wilderness. He lost a close friend who divulged a secret that placed Patrick, then a successful

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missionary bishop, on trial by his church peers. He lost new Christian converts to Irish raiders and enslavers.

"To cope he learned to trust in God and 'spent to the limit to serve others' as he wrote in his *Confession*," says Herbenick, whose research builds on work by Celtic scholar D.R. Howlett. "He had the ability to cope with loss after loss after loss, to turn loss around and do something positive with it, and he did it in a foreign land."

In Patrick's *Confession*, Herbenick finds a "miraculous piece of literature, a reasoned worked of art by a Celtic genius," and he concludes the historical St. Patrick "could walk, talk and write with Aristotle, St. Matthew and St. Paul," among others.

He also finds in the life and writings of Patrick principles that "can lead to a lasting peace in the north and south of Ireland as both Belfast and Dublin recall their common ties to the Apostle to Ireland during their St. Patrick's Day celebrations."

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For media interviews, contact **Ray Herbenick** at (937) 229-2923 or via e-mail at herbenic@checkov.hm.udayton.edu.