1968

The Secularization of Irish Society before the Norman Invasion of 1171

John Patrick Kelly
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses

Part of the Medieval Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses/3178
THE SECULARIZATION OF IRISH SOCIETY
BEFORE THE NORMAN INVASION OF 1171

by

John Patrick Kelly

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment
of the
Degree of Master of Arts

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
1968
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There can be little doubt that a venture such as this thesis forces a student to rely more upon his own resources than he may have thought possible only a short time before. By the same token, it is impossible to operate alone in a project of this nature. At this point I would like to acknowledge the help of several persons without whom this writing would have been a great deal more difficult.

The first of these is my principal instructor and good friend, Dr. John R. Sommerfeldt. I doubt very much if I would have been able to complete an acceptable piece of work without Dr. Sommerfeldt's help and guidance in such matters as the technical aspects of writing and the organization of the actual contents of the thesis. Other professors who have provided encouragement and guidance include: Dr. Sherwood S. Cordier, Dr. Graham P. HawkS, Dr. Robert J. Hahn, Dr. Emmanuel Nodel, and Dr. George Demetrakopoules, all of the History Department of Western Michigan University.

Other persons outside of the immediate academic field of History have also been a great help. Foremost
were Col. Robert Brownlow and Lt. Col. Steven Barton, of the Department of Military Science at Western Michigan University. These two officers were instrumental in my obtaining extended leave from active duty with the army, thus allowing me to do the major work on this paper.

I could not close without grateful acknowledgement to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. F. C. Kelly, who put up with me throughout the period I was writing the thesis, and whose comments, suggestions, and corrections were of immense help. I also appreciate the fine work of my typist, Mrs. Barbi Mel of East Lansing, who besides being helpful, was patient throughout delays necessitated by long distance communications.

John Patrick Kelly
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</th>
<th>ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. BACKGROUND: PRE-PATRICIAN CHRISTIANITY AND THE MISSION OF ST. PATRICK</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. IRELAND'S CHRISTIAN-MONASTIC SOCIETY AT ITS HEIGHT A.D. 500-750</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE DESTRUCTION OF IRELAND'S CULTURE: THE VIKING INVASION</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CHRISTIANITY IN ECLIPSE: THE LAST YEARS OF NATIVE RULE, 1014-1171</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE SECULARIZATION OF IRISH SOCIETY
BEFORE THE NORMAN INVASION OF 1171

I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT
OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this thesis is to study the process of social evolution in Ireland from about A.D. 500 to A.D. 1171. Specifically this involves the question of whether or not Ireland maintained its distinctive Christian weltanschauung throughout this period. As is evident from the title of the thesis, it is my contention that this Christian outlook was not maintained, and the society of Early Christian Ireland was drastically altered in the course of the time period defined. It is this alteration that I have termed the process of Secularization.

For the purpose of this thesis I will define secularism as follows: a state of being within the society where those values and ideals usually identified with and advocated by the Christian Church are not those followed by the society as a whole. This is not exactly Webster's definition, but its meaning is close enough not to cause any serious discrepancy. Ireland as a secular state looked very much like Ireland as a pagan state, with the
exception that the secular Irish were at least nominal Christians. A society with a Christian population cannot be called pagan, so Ireland during this period must be considered to be a Christian society with a non-spiritual outlook.

The main body of the thesis is divided into four chapters. Each of these chapters describes one of the principal stages in the evolution of Irish society up to the arrival of the English king in 1171. The first section deals with the background of the Christian Irish society before that society had reached its height in its "golden age" after the death of St. Patrick. Included in this first chapter is a study of how Christianity reached Ireland, and to what degree the island could be called christianized before the arrival of St. Patrick about A.D. 432. This study continues with the mission of St. Patrick himself, and his influences on the subsequent history of his country.

The second chapter is a study of Ireland during the period when the Christian Church can be said to have been at its period of greatest influence. The time span included starts at about the beginning of the sixth century, and ends slightly before the beginning of the Viking
invasions at about A.D. 750. It was during this period that the Irish Church reached its pinnacle of influence and when it produced its most famous and respected figures. Also contained within this chapter is an examination of the everyday life of a monk in Ireland during this time, and a look at the physical evidence of his environment and his accomplishments. I have also undertaken the exploration of the historical origins of Irish monasticism, such as the place and time from which came the liturgy and traditions that made the Irish Church unique and important.

The third chapter comprises the examination of the critical phase of the process of secularization, the period of the Viking invasions, years from 795 to 1014. It is my contention that the process of secularization actually began before the Vikings ever set foot on Ireland, so for that reason, I have begun this chapter at about 750, when the Irish Church first found its influence slipping. However, the almost total destruction of the physical superstructure of the Church by the Vikings hastened this process. The Church was unable to cope with the invaders with its own methods, so the secular leaders of Ireland were forced to take up arms and drive off the invaders. After this had been accomplished, the organization of the
Church, allied to the central state, was unable to regain its former influence, and was severely divided.

The fourth chapter of the thesis deals with the Irish secular society of 1014-1171. This period was characterized largely by governmental anarchy, and almost total refusal to abide by the dictates of the Church on the part of the secular leaders of the land. This is sharply contrasted with the almost fanatical spiritualism and religious feeling that involved practically the entire population in one way or another during the "golden age" before the Viking invasions. The major source materials of this time reveal that this anarchy steadily worsened throughout the period under discussion, and ended only with the arrival of King Henry of England in 1171.

During this same period (1014-1171) Church leaders were well aware of their declining influence, and made a great many efforts to reverse the tendency. From the beginning of the twelfth century until the end of Irish ecclesiastical independence in 1171, there were numerous attempts by both secular and religious leaders to improve relations between their respective communities. The Church leaders began to actively participate in the mainstream of religious life on the continent with the introduction of papal
control of Ireland and the importation of continental monastic orders. It was with papal blessing, however, that the Anglo-Norman adventurers invaded and conquered the island, abruptly ending Irish independence to try and remake their own society.

This process of secularization, difficult to trace even under the best of conditions, is even more difficult to follow when one considers the haphazard nature of the documentation of events of those times. Even in the most literate and stable of countries, (England, for instance) government documentation was quite irregular before the middle of the twelfth century. In a country where there was little concept of central government, such as Ireland, there was no government agency to record events. As a result, with a few exceptions, the history we have of Ireland from about A.D. 400 until the Anglo-Norman takeover was written by monks or other ecclesiastical individuals who had no actual connection with the events they wrote about.

The numerous works by ecclesiastical authors include almost every form of literature produced during the Middle Ages. These literary forms range from annals and monastic chronicles; through law tracts, penitentials, and monastic rules; to letters, sermons, plays, and satires;
and even included pre-Christian, pagan legends of heroes and great battles. Other forms of literature are less useful to a historian of this period. These are poetry and hagiography, or lives of saints. The usefulness of these sources lies not so much in their historical content (except for some historical poetry which has survived in various annals), but that they reflect the ideals and beliefs of the authors, which in turn reflect the ideals and beliefs of the times.

Among the most numerous and useful of all the sources, especially for my purposes, are the monastic chronicles, or annals. There are a surprising number of these, probably more than any other Medieval European nation, and certainly more than any other nation of comparable size and population. The best and most complete of the annals is the Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters.¹ This work is not actually a primary source in the strictest sense of the term. It was compiled in the seventeenth century by four monks (hence: the Four Masters) from virtually all existing or all annals known.

¹Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, ed. John O'Donovan (Dublin: Hodges & Smith, 1956).
at that time. Its all-inclusive nature makes it the most widely consulted authority for the history of Ireland from the legendary pre-Christian time to the sixteenth century. What makes the *Annals of the Four Masters* so unique and valuable is its non-local nature. Usually annals are a record of local events, but since this work was compiled from the local annals, we get a picture of all of Ireland, with very little local prejudice.

Among the other annals that have been published in the last two hundred years are *The Annals of Ulster* which is the most conspicuous source for the *Four Masters*, but deals primarily with the events of that northern quarter of Ireland (Ulster) for which it is named. Other annals are similarly named for their place of origin, whether it is a region, tribal home, or even a monastery. Numbered among these are the *Annals from the Book of Leinster*; the *Annals of Loch Ce*; *The Annals of Inisfallen*; the *Book*

---


3 *Annals from the Book of Leinster*, ed. Stokes (Rolls Series; London, 1887).


of Ui Maine;\(^6\) Annals of Clonmacnoise;\(^7\) plus others unobtainable outside of rare manuscripts rooms in Irish university libraries.

The various annals are the only source of direct history, but other literary works can yield information about the society and people. Law books provide a great deal of information about the values of the society, and can even provide information about the evolution of social ideals. The most important of the surviving law tracts is the Senchus Mor and Laws of Distress,\(^8\) which shows the shift from the ancient warrior culture "wergeld" concept to the old Christian "eye for an eye" or penance method of dealing with misdeeds. Another useful law tract is the Leabhar na g-Ceart, which deals with the rights granted to lesser kings by the high king, a sort of Magna Carta of


\(^7\)Annals of Clonmacnoise, ed. Denis Murphy (Dublin: R.S.A.I., 1896).

\(^8\)Senchus Mor and Laws of Distress (published as Ancient Laws of Ireland), (4 vols; Dublin: Stationary Office, 1865).

\(^9\)Leabhar na g-Ceart (Book of Rights), ed. O'Donovan (Dublin: Celtic Society, 1847).
Ireland. Collectively these law tracts are sometimes called Brehon Laws, after the Irish word for judge or law-giver. St. Patrick is also sometimes considered the chief Brehon of Ireland.

Although the above sources were written by churchmen and/or monks, they did not directly concern Church affairs. Much of the literature from Ireland between the death of St. Patrick and the arrival of the Vikings was about Church matters and Christianity in general. Similar in purpose but different in nature to the law tracts are documents used to legislate Church activity, such as monastic rules and penitentials. Of the former there are surviving perhaps eight or ten. Due to the loose organization of the Irish Church, each monastery probably had its own rule, and since the production of monks and monasteries was the chief industry in Ireland from A.D. 500 to 750, this would mean that a considerable number of rules may have been lost. Surviving penitentials are slightly more numerous, there being about eighteen or twenty of them presently in publication.  

---

10 See Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963).
about the Christian origin or orientation of the penitentials. They are primarily concerned with the correction of the morals of lay people. The monastic rules deal more directly with the monks. From a close examination of the contents of the penitentials we can discover what the problems of the society were, and what measures were considered to be adequate to counter tendencies toward certain crimes within the society.

Another source of information about the society is the letters and the sermons of the Church leaders and prominent personalities. There are not too many of these, the primary surviving source being those of Saint Columban (A.D. 540(?)-610). Again, these do not discuss the events of the time, but are useful in discovering the religious values held by the writers. Usually letters can be dated with some accuracy by examination of the people to whom and by whom the letter was written. By further examination of sequential letters, or by letters written many years apart, we can tell how values and beliefs have changed and evolved. Unfortunately there have not been enough letters or sermons passed on to modern historians for them to make any concrete evaluations from the material.
A saint was a very important and influential person in Ireland throughout Ireland's Christian era (from about A.D. 450). When the saint died, one of his followers or admirers usually wrote a largely mythical biography of him. Virtually every saint that lived in Ireland had his biographer, and due to the special interest placed in this subject by the people, most of them have been preserved. The tendency towards myth in these lives of the saints was not due to any attempt to deceive the reader, but was merely the custom of the times, utilized to increase the stature of a popular hero. This tendency toward myth also tends to nullify any historical value the Life might have and makes it possible to tell only that the saint lived, and a little about the system that made him a saint.

A large number of the Irish poems from the period A.D. 500-1100 were written by monks or hermits, but there was also a tradition of poetry among the secular rulers, and court poets were honored almost as highly as warriors. Irish poets, most likely connected with various secular courts, produced some of the most bloodthirsty poetical works known; they even outshine works such as the Iliad in this matter. Most of them do not date from the height of the Christian culture (seventh and eighth centuries),
which indicates that bloodthirstiness was probably not as
much a virtue then.

Historical works that can be identified as purely
secular in their composition and content are few and far
between. Some of the annals and parts of the law tracts
no doubt qualify, as do numerous poetical works. Legends
and mythology had to be written down by someone, and con­
sidering the typical Christian attitude toward such matters,
it is not too far out to assume they were written down by
secular persons. There is no firm evidence of authorship
by either ecclesiastical or secular writers, and since
pre-Christian(?) myth is of doubtful historical value, to
say the least, it cannot concern us too much. The most
widely known and valuable work that can be verified as
secular in origin is the War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill,
an account of the Viking invasions. It is sloppy history
(totally undated), but was apparently written by an eye­
witness shortly after the battle of Clontarf (A.D. 1014),
which ends it, and probably used existing folk traditions
for the two centuries immediately preceding its existence.

---

11 War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill, ed. J. H.
Todd (Rolls Series; London, 1867).
Since it is the only account we have of the events of those times, it will have to serve.

Other literary works exist that tell us something about Ireland of this time, but they are mostly liturgical or otherwise strictly ecclesiastical, and will be covered at the appropriate place in the text. Outside of those, there are no more works where a historian can reconstruct a picture of the life in early Christian Ireland, yet from the evidence that does exist a fairly accurate view can be made. All things considered, Ireland was actually a very literate country for the standards of the early Middle Ages. There was no doubt much more written, but due to the almost incessant wars from the time of Viking invasions, it is actually surprising that as much has survived as did. Any historian, especially of a period this long ago, can always claim that the surviving literary evidence is insufficient, but what I have given in this brief resume is enough to give one a reasonably accurate picture of the events and the life of the inhabitants in Ireland from the death of St. Patrick (493) to the arrival of King Henry II of England (1171).
Most important for this study is a description of the arrival of Christianity in Ireland and of what personalities were important in the Christianization of the island before St. Patrick. Specifically, this includes the question of just how Christianity arrived in Ireland, and what portion of the population could be called Christians before St. Patrick began his mission in A.D. 432. The life and accomplishments of St. Patrick are also examined, with the aim of determining what his influence was on the subsequent ecclesiastical developments in Ireland.

When the first Christians arrived in Ireland, they found a culture that would not have been unfamiliar to the contemporary German or Slavic barbarians, nor even to the author of the *Iliad*. They found a warrior culture where the leaders of the society were those that proved themselves the most able and most courageous in battle. Classes were ill-defined, the only males not directly involved in the constant warfare were the priests of a religion with an unenviable reputation for human sacrifice, black magic,
and other deeds often connected with evil by Christians.¹

The economic and social values of this pagan Irish warrior culture were completely divorced from what was known in the Mediterranean lands controlled by Rome.² Ireland had never been part of the Roman Empire, and due largely to this fact, possessed a pastoral, rural economy much different than the urban culture of the Roman Empire.

We cannot know the precise moment, or the exact means, that Christianity first arrived in Ireland. Despite its physical isolation, Ireland had numerous commercial connections with its neighbors. Ireland was rich in mineral resources, especially gold and tin,³ which made it profitable for continental merchants to do business with the natives. One of the best-known Roman authors, Tacitus, tells us in his biography of Agricola: "We know most of its harbors and approaches, and that through the intercourse of commerce."⁴ There is adequate archaeological

¹For a summary of Irish religion see J. A. MacCulloch, Celtic Mythology, in vol. 3 of Grey, Mythology of All Races (Boston, 1918).


³Ibid., p. 120.

evidence of contact between Ireland and Rome during the first four centuries after Christ, although much of the material discovered probably found its way to Ireland through less peaceful means. St. Patrick himself was captured by an Irish raiding party and sold as a slave in Ireland late in the fourth century.

Christianity undoubtedly filtered into Ireland sometime during the first few centuries after the death of Christ by the means of trade relations, probably with Britain or Gaul before the Roman Empire lost the ability to control such commerce outside its borders. We have no way of knowing who the first Christians or their converts were, but there has been some tradition of bishops and saints before St. Patrick arrived on the island. The first mention of a person who may have been at least influenced by Christians is in the Annals of the Four Masters:

The Age of Christ, 266. Forty years was Cormac, son of Art, son of Conn, in the sovereignty of Ireland, when he died at Clerteach, the bone of a salmon sticking in his throat, on account of the siabradh (genii) which Mealgeun, the Druid,

---


\(^6\) De Paor, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
incited in him, after Cormac had turned against the Druids, on account of his adoration of God in preference to them.\footnote{O'Donovan, \textit{Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland} (Dublin: Hodges \& Smith, 1856), I, p. 115.}

Even though it is impossible to verify the historical accuracy of the statement, it does not seem improbable that Christianity could have reached an Irish king three centuries after the death of Christ.

There are traditionally five saints considered to be pre-Patrician. Actually they seem to have been roughly contemporary to Patrick, but conflicting evidence makes what little is known about them less than definite. One example: St. Ibar is listed as having died eight years after the death of St. Patrick, at the age of 304 years.\footnote{Ibid., p. 163.}

Such obvious exaggerations tend to make us doubt other parts of the story as well. The other five saints were Ciaran of Saighir, Abban, Ailbe, Declan, and Ibar. Their Medieval Lives are uninformative in the best hagiographical tradition, but some generalizations can be made from what little is known. All of them appeared to have received some Christian training in Ireland before going overseas.
to complete their educations. All of them did accomplish some valuable missionary work in their native land, but details are unknown. Where they worked and what they did is known only through relatively unreliable local traditions, but they all seem to have operated somewhere in the southern half of the island. The significance of these figures is their demonstration of the fact that there must have been a not insubstantial Christian population in Ireland before the time of St. Patrick.  

The first apostle to Ireland who can be historically verified is Palladius. Unlike the men listed above, Palladius is a very well-documented figure. His appointment by Pope Celestine I is mentioned by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History* and by Prosper of Aquitaine in his *Chronicles*. Little is actually known about Palladius, except that he was educated at Auxerre and, like Patrick, enjoyed the confidence of St. Germanus. At the time of his appointment in 429 or 430, he was a deacon in Rome,

---


attached to the court of the pope. Despite his impressive background and evident qualifications, The Annals of the Four Masters record his mission as a failure:

The Age of Christ, 430. The second year of Laeghaire. In this year Pope Celestine the First sent Palladius to Ireland, to propagate the faith among the Irish, and he landed in the country of Leinster with a company of twelve men. Nathi, son of Garchu, refused to admit him; but, however, he baptized a few persons in Ireland, and three wooden churches were erected by him . . . . Palladius, on his returning back to Rome (as he did not receive respect in Ireland) contracted a disease in the country of the Cruithnigh, and died thereof.

Nothing more has ever been recorded about his mission or why it failed, if indeed it was a failure.

Saint Patrick was a figure of the utmost importance in the early history of the Celtic Church in Ireland. No other single person accomplished as much as he did toward the Christianization of the island. Although there is a controversy about whether or not there was one or two St. Patricks, even to the extent of suggesting Palladius may

---


12 O'Donovan, op. cit., p. 129.
the correct answer to this controversy actually makes little difference in a study of social evolution of this nature. Traditionally Irish historians have regarded St. Patrick as one man, and that traditional view, true or not in the academic sense, will be continued here.

Saint Patrick was not a native Irishman. He was born in a small village somewhere in the northern part of Britain. The more or less autobiographical work attributed to him, the Confessions, gives these details of his early life:

My father was Calpornius, a deacon, son of Potitus, a priest, of the village Banavem Taburniae; he had a country seat nearby, and there I was taken captive. I was then about sixteen years of age. I did not know the true God. I was taken into captivity to Ireland . . . .

Banavem Taburniae was probably somewhere in the northwestern part of Britain, relatively untouched by the Roman Empire. Patrick was taken captive on one of the frequent
Irish raiding parties that preyed on this remote province of the decaying Empire, and sold as a slave to a petty chieftain in northern Ireland. Six years later Patrick escaped and eventually ended up at the monastery of Auxerre under St. Germanus, determined to return to Ireland to convert to people he had recently left.

St. Patrick arrived in Ireland in 432, as is traditionally recorded, nearly two years after Palladius. Patrick's mission to the Irish occupied the next sixty years. His accomplishments during his lifetime are too many to recount here. There are so many local traditions, and St. Patrick was a man of such importance and stature, that it is impossible to tell what is true and what is fabrication. Ireland is not very big, and if he worked there for sixty years as claimed, Patrick could have covered all of it many times over. According to most of the Lives of Patrick we have, most of his time and effort was spent in the wilder western (Connaught) and northern (Ulster)


17 Bury, op. cit.

18 O'Donovan, op. cit., p. 131.
sections of Ireland. In all likelihood, the southern areas had greater exposure to Christianity before Patrick's arrival (see above, page 17).

There is one tradition that seems authentic: the founding of Armagh by St. Patrick as the primary ecclesiastical authority in Ireland. Virtually all of the sources mention this, so in the absence of any contrary evidence, it is as probable as anything among all the conflicting stories. It is recorded in the annals with these words:

(457) Ard-Macha was founded by St. Patrick, it having been granted to him by Daire, son of Finnchadh, son of Eoghan, son of Niallan. Twelve men were appointed by him for building the town. He ordered them, in the first place, to erect an archbishop's city there, and a church for monks, for nuns, and for the other orders in general, for he perceived that it would be the head and chief of the churches of Ireland in general.

After the death of St. Patrick, Armagh retained its position until challenged when fractionalism and local loyalties became prevalent during and after the Viking invasions.

The death of St. Patrick is somewhat controversial, especially the year. The tradition of 493 is still the


21 See Bieler, *loc. cit.*
strongest, so there seems to be no reason to disbelieve it.

The patriarchal image of Patrick is preserved with his obituary in the annals:

When the time of St. Patrick's death approached, he received the Body of Christ from the hands of the holy Bishop Tassach, in the 122nd year of his age, and resigned his spirit to heaven.22

In one of the most remarkable and revealing passages in the annals, two groups of Patrick's adherents prepared to fight over his body, until dissuaded by a miracle.23

 Tradition and legend have ascribed to St. Patrick accomplishments almost untold sanctity, heroism, and energy. The annalist who wrote the following words must have felt awed even writing about the man:

The Age of Christ, 493. The fifteenth year of Lughaidh. Patrick, son of Calphurn, Son of Potaide, archbishop, first primate, and chief apostle of Ireland, whom Pope Celestin the First had sent to preach the Gospel and disseminate religion and piety among the Irish, [was the person] who separated them from the worship of idols which they had for worshipping; who expelled demons and evil spirits from among them, and brought them from the darkness of sin and vice to the light of faith and good works; and who guided and conducted their souls from the gates of hell (to which they were going), to


23 Ibid., p. 159.
the gates of the kingdom of heaven. It was he that baptized and blessed the men, women, sons and daughters of Ireland, with their territories and tribes, both [fresh] waters and sea inlets. It was by him that many cells, monasteries, and churches were erected throughout Ireland; seven hundred churches was their number. It was by him that bishops, priests, and persons of every dignity were ordained; seven hundred bishops, and three thousand priests [was] their number. He worked so many miracles and wonders, that the human mind is incapable of remembering or recording the amount of good which he did upon earth.24

Even if one grants that St. Patrick lived 122 years, the ordination of seven hundred bishops hardly seems possible, especially on an island as small as Ireland. It seems obvious that a certain degree of local tradition has become incorporated into the account given here.

St. Patrick's influence on the Irish Church was deep and profound, but was eventually largely negated by circumstances he could not have foreseen. His appointment as bishop and apostle to Ireland gave him, according to standard Church procedure, the powers to do all that was necessary in the foundation and establishment of a Church like that already established on the continent and on Britain. This he attempted to do. It was his intention

24Ibid., p. 155.
to set up a Church organization exactly like that on the continent, in which the bishop, with his office in a city, presided over a territory which was divided into segments run by individual priests. Monasteries were usually responsible to the local bishop, who exercised authority over all ecclesiastical personnel in his territory. The bishop was nominally responsible to the Bishop of Rome, the pope, for all his actions and authority, but due to difficulties in communications, he actually was free of any authority but his own. In most cases, on the continent, the local secular leader controlled the actions of the bishop; often the religious leaders formed part of the secular government, and frequently composed the entire bureaucracy. Normally one bishop in a country would be responsible for the entire country, such as the Archbishop of Canterbury in England, but the title of archbishop was unknown in Ireland, and its task was left to the bishop of Armagh. This was what St. Patrick attempted to do in Ireland, and at first it seemed that he had succeeded.25

What St. Patrick apparently miscalculated was the nature of the Irish and the territorial uniqueness of Ireland as a political entity. Ireland was the first country to be converted to Christianity that had not first been part of the Roman Empire. In the other Christian countries, the organization of the Church very often followed the boundaries of the Roman administrative divisions, even to the extent of using the same cities of towns as administrative centers. In Ireland the only political division was based on tribal territory, and there were no cities or towns, or even villages, on the entire island. Patrick attempted to create his own urban centers, hence the order for the "archbishop's city" (see above, page 21). He also apparently tried to adapt the existing tribal system to the Church by giving each territory its own church, but this failed when each tribe or family had to have its own bishop as well.\(^{26}\)

In the end it was localism and tribal jealousy that doomed Patrick's attempt to set up a Church like that on the continent. If Ireland had not been so isolated,

and if the calamities of the fifth and sixth centuries (the barbarian invasions) had not reinforced that isolation, it is probable that the Irish Church would never have become as separated as it did from the mainstream of European developments. The unprecedented rise of monasticism (see Chapter III, this paper), and the twists given it by the Irish, deepened the rift between Rome and Ireland.

The Irish viewed St. Patrick as a great spiritual father from a time shortly after his death until the reforms of the twelfth century. But Patrick's formula was not closely followed. St. Patrick's concrete accomplishments are that he founded the Irish Church, but he did not choose which direction it went. He did encourage monasticism, but he did not intend for it to become the dominate outlook in the Church. His directions were ignored, or lost, but his spirit has dominated the Church until the present day.
The Monasteries

Source: De Paor, Liam & Marie, Early Christian Ireland, Fig. 6. Map showing principal Irish Monasteries (New York: Praegar, 1958), p. 51.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
IRELAND'S CHRISTIAN-MONASTIC SOCIETY AT ITS HEIGHT A.D. 500-750

Most countries have, at one time or another in their history, a period of higher than average national achievement. In Ireland this came between the years of A.D. 500 and 750. In this chapter I will consider the nature and accomplishments of the Irish Church during this period. This will include the origins of the Irish Church traditions, and what it was that made the Irish Church different than the Church on the continent. The study will continue with a look at the life of a monk, what constituted his occupation, education, and environment. The chapter will conclude with an evaluation of the effect of the monastic Church on the subsequent developments in Ireland.

The path by which monasticism entered the Irish Church was not as devious as that by which Christianity itself arrived. There are early traditions that associate the pre-Patrician saints with particular monasteries, for instance, St. Ciaran with the monastery of Saighir in Ossory.¹ St. Ninnian of Scotland (c. fourth century) established a

¹Mould, op. cit., pp. 76-79.
monastery, called Candida Casa, in Galloway, Scotland, in the year A.D. 397. Galloway is that part of Scotland that is closest to Ireland, so it is not too surprising that traditions in northern Ireland tell of several monastic foundations by Ninnian there in the early fifth century.² The foundation of Ninnian was, therefore, one of the first places to which the Irish turned after the death of Patrick and the need for religious instruction became apparent.

Much of the credit for the introduction of the monastic way of life into Ireland must go to the same man who is given the credit for the conversion of the island, St. Patrick. St. Patrick was educated at the finest monastic schools of his time, Auxerre and Lerins (see above, p. 20), and thus could hardly have avoided being influenced by them.³ Patrick's own words, in his Confession, and the words of most of the biographies written about him, tell of his place in the establishment of monastic traditions in Ireland. The following words are from his Confession:

... those who never had a knowlege of God, ... have now been made a people of the Lord, and are

²Phillips, op. cit., p. 69.
³C. Dawson, Religion and the Rise of Western Culture, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday), pp. 49-50.
called sons of God, that the sons and daughters of the kings of the Irish are seen to be monks and virgins of Christ.\textsuperscript{4}

These are from the \textit{Tripartite Life}:

He [Patrick] came again from Tara till he was in Uisnech. He founded a cloister there.\textsuperscript{5}

And Patrick founded a church in that place, and took him as abbot, . . .\textsuperscript{6}

Cell Tog, in the country of Corcu-themne, it is this that Bishop Cainnech, Patrick's monk, founded.\textsuperscript{7}

There are numerous other examples, including those in the annals (see above, p. 22).

When St. Patrick died, monasticism was well-known in Ireland, through his influence and through the influence of those who went before him. After the death of St. Patrick, the already well-established Welsh Church became influential in the continuation of the Irish foundations, even to the degree of introducing a relatively uniform liturgy.\textsuperscript{8} The Welsh liturgy and traditions came, through the agency of St. Iltud, straight from Lerins, a monastery

\textsuperscript{4}Barry, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 173-174.

\textsuperscript{5}Stokes, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 81.

\textsuperscript{6}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 111. \textsuperscript{7}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 123.

\textsuperscript{8}J. O'Sullivan, "Old Ireland and Her Monasticism," in McNally, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 99.
in southern France. With almost all the Christians in Ireland originating from Gallic monasteries, it is not at all surprising to learn that the form taken by Irish monasticism, at least in its liturgical aspects, was almost identical with that of Gaul.

The direction taken by the Irish Church with regard to monasticism, can be explained as a case of physical isolation and arrested development. During the fifth and sixth centuries, the fading power of the Roman Empire finally gave way and was replaced by more warlike and less organized German barbarians, but Ireland was not directly effected by the invaders. Physical isolation and a certain prowess in war had proven to be the factors of salvation, but were to demonstrate drawbacks as well. Military ability eventually was submerged by Christianity, but the physical isolation was constantly reinforced by events on the continent. It was not until the seventh century that Rome was able to resume its missionary activities. The isolation cut off any new influences that might have come from Rome, and tended to reinforce those that were already

9 Ibid.
10 Dawson, op. cit., p. 49.
there. In spite of St. Patrick's attempt to introduce the episcopal system, the personalities involved in the conversion of Ireland leaned heavily toward monasticism, with the final result that it was a strong monastic tradition that became dominant in the Irish Church.

If any single class or profession could be considered the most important or influential during the height of Ireland's monastic civilization, it would be that of the monk. The life of a monk within the society was not one of ease, however. There is little doubt that Irish monastic life was among the most ascetic known in Church history. This asceticism manifested itself in many ways and was one of the best documented phenomena of the Irish Christian society. A substantial number of monk's rules and penitentials have survived, enough to permit a fairly accurate reconstruction of what was expected of a monk.

The most complete and most valuable monk's rule to survive is the one by St. Columban. Although St. Columban (c. A.D. 540-610) lived and worked with the Merovingian rulers of Gaul for most of his life, his early education at the monastery of St. Comgall at Bangor makes his works representative of the Irish Church as a whole. Columban's Rule for Monks (Regula Monachorum) is one of the few
documents we have that tells us what was most valued by
the society, and what sort of life was led by a monk in
that society.

The ten chapters of Columban's Rule for Monks seem
almost too short to be of any use as a set of laws for a
monastic life. Their brevity makes it more probable that
they were intended to be more of a general guideline, leav­
ing more to the discretion of the local abbot than would be
true in a Benedictine monastery. The titles of the chap­
ters (as well as the chapters themselves) tend to bear out
this probability by their more general attitude, that is by
not giving specific directions or provisions for enforce­
ment. The titles of the chapters are: I. Of Obedience;
II. Of Silence; III. Of Food and Drink; IV. Of Overcoming
Greed; V. Of Overcoming Vanity; VI. Of Chastity; VII. Of
the Choir Office; VIII. Of Discretion; IX. Of Mortifica­
tion; and X. Of the Monk's Perfection.

The first chapter sets the basis for monastic au­

At the first word of a senior, all on hearing
should rise and obey, since their obedience is
shown to God, as our Lord Jesus Christ says:
He who hears you hears Me. Therefore, if
anyone hearing the word does not rise at once, he is to be judged disobedient.\textsuperscript{11}

The establishment of absolute control by the abbot is the obvious purpose of this first chapter. It continues with a definition of the limits of obedience:

But to what measure is obedience laid down? Up to death it is assuredly enjoined, since Christ obeyed the Father up to death for us. And this He suggests to us saying through the Apostle: Let this mind be in you, which was also in Jesus Christ, . . .\textsuperscript{12}

The importance of establishing the abbot's authority first is obvious, for without it nothing else would be possible. St. Columban's authority for such strict control is based clearly on the words and deeds of Christ.

The second chapter, "Of Silence," is a continuation of the authoritarian principal, using the words of Christ to establish the abbot's jurisdiction: "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."\textsuperscript{13} St. Columban ended this chapter with a mild admonition and a plea to avoid the sin of pride:

These and such like words must never pass the lips of the monk, whose tongue must ever be governed by prudence and right reason, lest by his

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 125. \textsuperscript{13}Matthew 12:37.
talkativeness he be betrayed into detraction and contradictions born of pride.\textsuperscript{14}

In many of the other chapters, pride, and its avoidance, is the underlying theme of the chapter.

In the third chapter of Columban's rule, "Of Food and Drink," the matter of pride is once again the apparent end of the dietary suggestions made by the Saint:

It is reasonable to promote spiritual progress by bringing the flesh into subjugation by abstinence, but if abstinence is practiced to excess, it ceases to be a virtue and becomes a vice.\textsuperscript{15}

The dietary rules of the third chapter do not seem as harsh as one might expect from a monastery with a reputation for severe asceticism:

The food of the monks shall be course, consisting of cabbage, vegetables, flour mixed with water, and a biscuit, and taken toward evening. Surfeiting must be guarded against in eating, and drunkenness in drinking, so that what is partaken may sustain, not injure the body . . . .\textsuperscript{16}

It is evident that St. Columban wanted his monks to be strong enough to work in the fields of the monastery. He probably also recognized that in the cold and harsh climate of northern Europe a person, even a monk, needed a substantial amount of food to live.

\textsuperscript{14}Walker, op. cit., p. 127.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.
The fourth chapter, "Of Poverty and Overcoming Greed," describes what many consider the most important and traditional of the monastic vows. Once again it is pride, in this case the pride of ownership, that is reason for personal poverty:

Those who have left all things to follow Christ the Lord with the cross of daily fear have treasure in heaven. Therefore, as they are to possess much in heaven, they ought to be content with little, nay, the barest necessaries on earth, remembering that in monks covetousness is a leprosy . . . .17

Columban then gives his formula for monastic success:

Utter nakedness, therefore, and contempt of earthly goods is the first perfection of the monk . . . .18

Personal poverty and contempt of worldly possessions seemed to be the one matter upon which St. Columban was least willing to compromise.

The next two chapters, "Of Vanity," and "Of Chastity" need little explanation beyond their titles. The fifth chapter, dealing with vanity, is another example of the importance of pride as one of the major sins. The sixth chapter, about the seriousness of chastity, appears to have a greater significance within the society as a
whole than the brevity of this chapter in St. Columban's rule would lead a casual reader to suspect. In most of the penitentials known from St. Columban's time (sixth and seventh centuries), the problem of sexual morality occupies a plurality of the text. The penitentials give degrees of penance not only for more conventional forms of sexual indulgences, but cover perversions as well. From the extensive attention paid to the problem, it seems evident that this was the rule most commonly broken, the one aspect of Christian morality the Irish found most difficult to live up to.

The seventh chapter of Columban's rule, titled: "Of the Choir Office," is one of the most important, inasmuch as it tells us what the liturgy of the Celtic Church was like. It is verified by the major surviving liturgical texts, most of them from Ireland itself. The Antiphonary of Bangor could have been written by a person using St. Columban's rule as a draft, or St. Columban could have written what he had learned as a youth in the monastery of

---

St. Columban was apparently trying to clear up some confusion that existed in his time:

But concerning the synaxis, that is, the office of psalms and prayers in canonical manner, some distinctions must be drawn, since its observance has been variously bequeathed to our remembrance by different authorities.  

His text continues with a detailed guide of how and when the Divine Office should be sung.

The eighth and ninth chapters both deal further with pride and humility. The eighth is titled "Of Discretion," and the ninth "Of Mortification"; both titles could be misleading. The eighth chapter deals almost exclusively with humility, but sounds more as if it should be part of a sermon rather than in a monastic rule:

Therefore the evils are to be equally avoided, pride, ill will, lying, seduction, unrighteousness, wicked transgressions of morality, gluttony, fornication, avarice, wrath, dejection, inconsistency, vainglory, boasting, slander; the goods of the virtues are also to be followed, lowliness, kindness, purity, obedience, temperance, chastity, liberality, patience, cheerfulness, constancy, zeal, persistance, watchfulness, silence, which through and enduring courage and sobering moderation, as in some weighing balance of discretion, are to be weighed in the performance of our customary work, according to the


21 Walker, op. cit., p. 129.
capacity of our endeavour, if everywhere we seek sufficiency.\textsuperscript{22}

The ninth chapter, on the other hand, deals with only one kind of humility:

The chief part of the monk's rule is mortification, since indeed they are enjoined in the scripture, "Do nothing without counsel." Thus if nothing is to be done without counsel, everything must be asked for by counsel . . . . Then, since this is so, monks must everywhere beware of a proud independence, and learn true lowliness as they obey without murmuring and hesitation, that according to the Lord's word they must feel the yolk of Christ pleasant and his burden sweet.\textsuperscript{23}

It will be noted that this chapter (nine) is much like the first, in that it gives further ground for the authority of the abbot.

The tenth and last chapter is the shortest, and seems to be a recapitulation of the whole rule:

Let the monk live in a community under the discipline of one father and in company with many, so that from one he may learn lowliness, from another patience. For one may teach him silence and another meekness. Let him not do as he wished, let him eat when he is bidden, keep as much as he has received, complete the tale of his work, be subject to whom he does not like. Let him come weary to his bed and sleep walking, and let him be forced to rise while sleep is not yet finished. Let him keep silence when he has suffered wrong, let him fear the superior of his community as a lord, love him as a father, believe that whatever he commands is healthful for

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid. \textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 139.
himself, and let him not pass judgement on the opinion of an elder, to whose duty it belongs to obey and fulfill what is bidden, as Moses says, "Hear, O Israel," and the rest. END-OF THE RULE.24

As this chapter amply demonstrates, the whole rule contains few specific directives, but merely provides a general outline that leaves a great deal to the discretion of the local abbot.

Another document reputedly from the hand of St. Columban, called the Communal Rule (Regula Coenobialis), takes up what the other rule leaves out, the application of the directives. This rule seems to be more a penitential. It is called a rule probably for the reason that it deals almost entirely with the practical problems likely to be encountered in the everyday running of a monastery. Its chapters are nothing more than a list of wrongdoings and the penance required for their correction. It differs from a penitential by the fact that it covers only clerics (monks), to the exclusion of all other elements of society, whereas a penitential usually deals with all classes, lay and ecclesiastic.

24Ibid., pp. 141-142.
The rule itself contains fifteen different chapters, and is somewhat longer than the Rule for Monks. The best way to acquire knowledge of the nature of the rule is through the reading of some samples of the material covered:

It has been ordained, my dearest brethren, by the holy fathers that we make confession before meat or before entering our beds or whenever it is opportune since confession and penance free from death.25

Thus him who has not kept grace at table and has not responded "Amen," it is ordained to correct with six blows. Likewise him who has spoken while eating, not because of the wants of another brother, it is ordained to correct with six.26

If he has not blessed the lamp, that is, when it is lighted by a younger brother and is not presented to a senior for his blessing, with six blows. If he has called anything his own, with six blows.27

Him who through a cough has not chanted well at the beginning of a psalm, it is ordained to correct with six blows. Likewise him who has bitten the cup of salvation with his teeth, with six blows.28

He who forgets to make the oblation right until they go to Mass, with a hundred blows.29

If anyone says to his brother, enticing him who dwells in the best spot, "It is better for you to live with us, or in some community," with three impositions.30

25 Ibid., p. 145. 26 Ibid., p. 147.
27 Ibid. 28 Ibid.
29 Ibid. 30 Ibid., p. 153.
He who advises a relative when learning some skill or anything enjoined by the seniors, that he should rather learn reading, with three impositions. 31

He who utter an idle word, to be condemned to silence for the two following hours, or to twelve blows. 32

If any brother has been disobedient, let him spend two days on one loaf and water. If he says, "I will not do it," three days on one loaf and water. If any murmurs, two days on one loaf and water. 33

If any holds converse with a lay person unbidden, twenty-four psalms. 34

If any eats before the ninth hour on the fourth and sixth day, unless he be sick, two days on bread and water. If any has told a lie unwittingly, fifty lashes; if he speaks wittingly and presumptuously, two days on bread and water. 35

Whoever has lost the sacrifice and does not know where it is, let him do penance for a year. He who has shown neglect to the sacrifice, so that it is dried up and eaten by worms, with the result that it is reduced to nothing, let him do penance for half a year. 36

The picture that emerges from reading these rules is that of rigid discipline and harsh asceticism, where severe punishment is exacted for the slightest infraction, and where the

\[31\text{Ibid.} \quad 32\text{Ibid., p. 155.}\]
\[33\text{Ibid., p. 159.} \quad 34\text{Ibid., p. 161.}\]
\[35\text{Ibid.} \quad 36\text{Ibid., p. 163.}\]
word of the superior was next only to the word of God in importance.

The rigid asceticism was not the only feature that made the life of a monk difficult. The physical existence of a monk was hard even by monastic standards. The normal conception of monastic life, where the monks all live together in a barracks-type room, and all work and eat together in an elaborate stone building, would not apply to the monastic life of Ireland. Irish monasteries were more like a group of conveniently located hermit's cells than anything else. Usually there would be ten to twenty, perhaps more, cells, each housing from one to six monks. The cells were usually made of a wood and mud combination that was characteristic of almost every other structure on Ireland. The individual cells were small, usually about ten feet in diameter, and their design was such so as to afford the barest minimum of protection from the elements. On a few occasions the cells were made of stone, but these were built only on remote islands that had little or no vegetation, such as Inismurray, six miles into the Atlantic, or some of the more remote Hebrides.

The wattle-mud cells were not the only feature of Irish monasteries, although they were the most numerous.
Fortifications as such were unknown in Ireland at that time, but monasteries were usually surrounded with a wall of the stockade type. In all likelihood this was to keep out wild animals and keep in stock rather than any design for protection from human enemies. The only other structure was a communal hall, where the monks would meet to celebrate Mass and participate in various Church festivals. As the monasteries became centers of the society, other more specialized buildings were added, probably starting with a library. Almost never were these specialized buildings under one roof, for it was characteristic of the Irish Church until the introduction of the continental orders in the twelfth century to retain the decentralized organization of the buildings.

The economy of the monastic society of Ireland between A.D. 500 and 750 also seemed primitive when compared to contemporary society on the continent. The diet of the monk was explained in the rule (see above, p. 35), but was probably supplemented by meat of cattle and/or pigs. Ireland was still primarily a pastoral country, with cattle

---

DIAGRAM OF AN EARLY IRISH MONASTERY
C. 700 A.D.

Source: De Paor, L. & M., Early Christian Ireland, Fig. 8. Plan of the monastery of Sceilg Mhichil. New York: Praegar, 1958, p. 53.
used as a medium of exchange. Naturally, the Church adapted this part of Irish life along with many others when the island was first converted. Grain crops were not as important as vegetables, which were the staples of the monk's life, but bread and associated grain foods were known and consumed (see above, p. 41). Wine was highly prized by the Celts, but could not easily be produced in Ireland, the only native substitute was a beer-like drink made of grains. Milk was probably also drunk, but the primary evidence for this assumption is the proximity of large numbers of cattle. Ireland lacked agricultural techniques for large scale food production, so the diet was probably limited even more than it was on the continent. 38

A monk's life in Ireland at this time was not easy, characterized as it was by harsh discipline and meager fare. The Irish monks had rewards other than those offered by easy living, those that were offered by intellectual pursuits. The backbreaking field labor that was typical of monasteries on the continent was almost unknown in Ireland.

The monasteries lived off donations and less arduous forms of agriculture, such as stock tending and vegetable farming. The ample time for meditation led the monks to desire knowledge, first of the Scriptures and then classical subjects. Within a relatively short time (by the end of the sixth century) Ireland had become one of the greatest cultural centers in western Europe. One century later (end of the seventh century) Ireland was probably the greatest European cultural center outside of the city of Constantinople itself. The brilliance of Ireland as a cultural center lasted through the eighth century, and into the ninth, but it was eventually destroyed by the same catastrophe, the Viking invasions, that was responsible for the destruction of the Irish monastic society as a whole.  

Classical learning in Ireland during the height of its monastic civilization was not limited to the Latin Fathers. There were Irish scholars who possessed knowledge of Hebrew as well as Greek, and were familiar with many of the great works written in those languages. The greatest educational concentration was, of course, on the Latin authors of the Roman period, and especially the patristic

---

Examination of literary works written by Irish scholars of this period show that they were familiar with pagan Roman poets and authors, and utilized the Roman forms in their own works, even when writing in Irish.

Writing in the native language was a major characteristic of the Irish, even though most of it has not survived. Ireland, being the first non-Roman area to be Christianized, did not use Latin as the native language. As a result many of the people who wrote preferred to use their native tongue rather than the unknown language. Even in pre-Christian times, Ireland had a strong native literary tradition, even if most of it was oral. The peaceful introduction of Christianity, along with the Roman alphabet and language, without the accompanying destruction of foreign conquest, reinforced the native tradition of learning, and helped it contribute to the strong position of scholarship within the Church. Under ecclesiastical sponsorship, Irish emerges as the first literary vernacular language of modern Europe.

---

40 Ibid., p. 218.
Although most of the works of the Irish scholars have been lost or destroyed, enough have survived to give us an idea of what was written about, and the motivations of the men who did the writing. Outside of purely ecclesiastical works, such as saint's lives, and the other historical works discussed in the first chapter, there is quite a bit of less serious poetry in our possession. These include works praising God, nature, or various spirits, and many that were composed as humorous or satirical works. The following are excerpts from Irish poems of this period I feel are representative of much of the material that is presently available.

The first example is from the Altus Prosator of St. Columba, founder and abbot of Iona in Scotland, and it demonstrates the piety and education of one of the leaders of the Irish monastic society in its earlier stages (sixth century).

The high Creator, Ancient of Day,
and Unbegotten
was without origin of beginning and without end;
He is and shall be to infinite ages of ages
with Whom Christ the only begotten
and the Holy Spirit,
coeternal in the everlasting glory
of the God head.
We set forth not three gods, but we say
there is One GOD,
saving our faith in three most glorious Persons.
The Dragon, great, most foul, terrible, and old, which was the slimy serpent, more subtle than all the beasts and fiercer living things of earth, drew with him the third part of the stars into the abyss of the infernal regions and of divers prisons, apostate from the True Light, headlong cast by the parasite.

The tottering and despotic and momentary glory of the kings of this present world is set aside by the will of GOD! Lo! the giants are recorded to groan beneath the waters with great torment, to be burned with fire and punishment; and, choked with the swelling whirlpools of Cocytus, overwhelmed with Scillas, they are dashed to pieces with waves and rocks.

The day of the Lord, the King of Kings most righteous, is at hand: a day of wrath and vengeance, of darkness and cloud; a day of wondrous mighty thunderings, a day of trouble also, of grief and sadness, in which shall cease the love and desire of women and the strife of men and the lust of this world.

Orion wanders from his culmination the meridian of heaven, the Pleiades, brightest of constellations, being left behind, through the bounds of Ocean, of its unknown eastern circuit; Vesper circling in fixed orbits returns by her ancient paths, rising after two years at eventide; these, with figurative meanings, are regarded as types.43

These are just five of twenty-four stanzas that tell the story of the creation, the fall, and the final judgment. The whole poem is faintly reminiscent of the later Latin poem, Dies Irae, which is still used in some Catholic services.

The next example is still religious in nature, but seems to have been written by a monk with less education than St. Columba.

    Alone in my little cell,  
    no paltry man for company--  
    this were my chosen pilgrimage  
    before trysting with death.  

    A little secret hidden place  
    for forgiveness of sin  
    so that to holy heaven I bear  
    a clear untarnished mind.  

    To train and sanctify the flesh,  
    manfully trample on it,  
    and with the tears of feeble eyes  
    to wash out all desires.  

    My food, all the things I have,  
    are a longed for captivity;  
    I warrent that what I eat  
    will rouse no wrong proclivities.  

    Bread stale and weighed  
    (bow low the head in reverence)  
    and be the drink I drink  
    clear water from the mountain stream.
And Christ, God's son to visit me,  
my creator, my king—  
and then my mind to seek him out  
in the kingdom where he lives.⁴⁴

Both this poem and the next one are good examples of what  
the average monk felt about his religion, and how it re­  
lated to the world around him. In no way can these be  
called nature poems in the way a modern poet might use the  
term, but are another of the monk's means of appreciating  
the action of God in his surroundings.

Smooth the tresses of yew-green yew-trees,  
glorious portent;  
place delicious with great green oakwoods  
increasing blessing.

Tree of apples huge and magic,  
great its graces;  
crop in fistfulls from clustered hazel,  
green and branching.

Sparkling wells and water torrents  
best for drinking;  
green privit there and bird-cherry  
and yew-berries.

Resting there are herded swine  
goats and piglings;  
wile swine too, deer and doe,  
speckled badgers.

Great woodland bands troop like fairies  
to my bothy;  
and great delight when timid foxes  
show their faces.

Though you enjoy all you consume
and wealth exceeding,
I am grateful for the riches
my dear Christ brings me

No hour of trouble like you endure,
no din of combat:
I thank my Prince who so endows me
in my bothy.\textsuperscript{45}

Even though the authors of these poems may not have been among the best educated men in Ireland, it is certain that they must have had a good education indeed to compose these.

Another poetical form quite common among the Irish is the whimsical, amusing, or satirical poem that comments on the society in which it was produced. This seems to have been a favorite form of the secular bards, but was used upon occasion by monks as well. The following poem is one of the best known poems of this type from the Irish monastic period.

I and Pangur Ban, my cat,
'Tis a like task we are at;
Hunting mice is his delight,
Hunting works I sit all night.

Better far than praise of men
'Tis to sit with book and pen;
Pangur bears me no ill will,
He too plies his simple skill.

'Tis a merry thing to see
At our tasks how glad are we,

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., pp. 59-60.
When at home we sit and find
Entertainment to our mind.

Oftentimes a mouse will stray
In the hero Pangur's way;
Oftentimes my keen thought set
Takes a meaning in its net.

'Gainst the wall he sets his eye
Full and fierce and sharp and sly;
'Gainst the wall of knowledge I
All my little wisdom try.

When a mouse darts from its den,
O how glad is Pangur then:
O what gladness do I prove
When I solve the doubts I love!

So in peace our tasks we ply,
Pangur Ban, my cat, and I;
In our arts we find our bliss,
I have mine and he has his.

Practice every day has made
Pangur perfect in his trade;
I get wisdom day and night
Turning darkness into light.46

This poem, written in Irish, was found on the edge of an
eighth century manuscript. It actually appears to be a
social comment, the work of an Irish monk who finds the
monastic way of life and his scholarly duties far more
rewarding than any lay occupation would be.

Other artistic endeavors were not neglected. En¬
amel work on metal, and metal work itself were widely

46 Chauvire, op. cit., p. 35.
practiced in Ireland, often reaching unparalleled heights. Stone carving, in the form of large crosses, still amaze visitors to Ireland by their fantastic form and designs. The most widely acclaimed of the Irish Medieval artwork was in the field of illuminated manuscripts. The best of these is probably the Book of Kells, an eighth century set of the gospels probably made at Iona. There are, however, many others, scattered all over Europe by the Medieval Irish monks who carried them or the technique of their manufacture. The best modern publications that give good examples, in color, of this art work are: Irish Illuminated Manuscripts, ed. by J. J. Sweeney and Ireland, Harbringer of the Middle Ages by Ludwig Bieler. There is no way to describe them, and the line drawings shown in this thesis do not do them justice.

Such work as the illuminated manuscripts did require time, talent, training, preparation, and money. Due to the impressive results it is evident that the Irish monasteries that produced these did not lack any of these essential ingredients. The production of the illuminated

Source: De Paor, L. & M., Early Christian Ireland, Fig. 34. Irish Urnes patterns. a, b. Lismore crosier; c, d. St. Manchan's shrine; e. Cashel sarcophagus; f. Dysert. O Dea Cross; g. Clonfert doorway; h. Glendalough cross; i, j. Tuam Cathedral east window; k. Kilmore doorway; l. Killeshin doorway. Not to scale (New York: Praegar, 1958), p. 169.
Examples of Irish animal-ornament. a. The Book of Durrow; b, c and d. The Book of Kells; e, f and g. The Lindisfarne Gospels; h and i. The Tara brooch. Different scales. New York: Praegar, 1958, p. 117.
manuscripts also presupposes peace, patience, and a great deal of love for his work on the part of the artist. In most cases the artist was a monk and his work was done in a monastery, and the manuscripts themselves were works of religious importance, such as sets of the gospels, missals, or hymn books. This means that it was the Church that sponsored such works, and all the artists of merit worked for the Church. Although the metal work was not entirely ecclesiastical in its motif, patronage, and distribution, the other art forms were, which is an indication of the high place held by the Church in the estimation of one of the most influential portions of the population. 49

Irish monasticism was unique in many ways. While the continental monasteries were designed as retreats from a hostile, war-torn world, in Ireland the monasteries were dedicated to the dissemination of culture and knowledge in a peaceful environment. On the continent the monasteries were organized to operate within the existing ecclesiastical territorial organization, with the local bishop holding authority over the abbot. In Ireland the abbot was the highest local Church authority, with the bishop under him

49 De Paor, op. cit., pp. 110-123.
and a member of his monastery. The territorial organization of Irish ecclesiastical lands was often based on the tribal holdings, with the artificial episcopal territories created by St. Patrick forgotten or ignored.  

The Irish Church was very influential among the lay society, both in Ireland and overseas where Irish missionaries had established monasteries. Irish monasteries became educational centers for all of western Europe, and a great many persons well-known to history received their education at a monastery in Ireland, including even a Merovingian king of the Franks. The English historian and saint, the Venerable Bede, gives several examples of noted personalities traveling to Ireland to receive schooling.  

The social structure of Ireland's secular society was closely related to the Church, in ways other than those mentioned above. On many occasions the abbot of the monastery would be in the same clan or family as the local chieftain. The Irish kings were as strongly influenced

---


51 Chauvire, *op. cit.*, p. 31.


by the Church as their overseas contemporaries. The annals, our best source of secular history, mention almost no disturbances of the peace during the 250 years of the height of the monastic culture. There are, on the other hand, many mentions of kings, chieftains, and various nobles giving up their secular privileges to become priests or monks. The following are a few examples from the eighth century:

(703) Ceallach, son of Raghallach, King of Connnaught, died, after having gone under the yoke of Priesthood. 54

(719) Sealbhach, Lord of Dal-Riada, went into holy orders. 55

(765) Niall Frosach, son of Fearghal, was seven years king over Ireland when he resigned; and he died at I-Colum-Cille, on his pilgrimage eight years afterwards. 56

Although it was not unknown for kings to give up their thrones in other countries (Charlemagne's brother, for instance), it happened with rather more frequency in Ireland, indicating a substantial motivation within the society.

55 Ibid., p. 319. 56 Ibid., p. 369.
57 I arrived at this conclusion from reading the annals, where it is far from unusual.
The secular rulers were not the most important leaders of Irish society. The leaders of the Christian community served as an ideal for the society as a whole. People like St. Columba could command almost fanatical loyalty from large segments of the population, especially if they were allied with his clan. Columba was not the only saint of international stature to emerge from the monastic society of this period. The annals, usually devoted entirely to the notation of secular events, list the deaths of no less than 140 saints between A.D. 481 and 787. Every one of these saints was native to Ireland. This does not include large numbers of abbots, anchorites, holy fathers, bishops, priests, or other men listed in the annals. The Martyrology of Gorman, presumably more accurate in such spiritual affairs lists a total of 750 saints who died between A.D. 450 and 666. True or not (and there is no reason to believe that they are not), these figures indicate that the saints were highly respected and the there

58 O'Donovan, op. cit., p. 193.
59 See: O'Donovan, op. cit., vol. I.
60 W. Stokes, The Martyrology of Gorman (London: 1895, introduction.)
was a large number of individuals considered worthy of this respect.

Even the lay society seemed willing to subject itself to the same kind of rigors and discipline as the monks. The large number of penitentials written in and about Ireland indicate that there was some demand for them. These penitentials, although they had sections dealing with clerics, aimed their attention to the type of sins likely to be committed by a lay person, such as drinking, fornication, stealing, lying, and other sins more commonly associated with the general public. There is no way we can know how effective these penitentials were, but it can be assumed that the population as a whole was reasonably impressed with Christian virtues to want to emulate them to some degree.

We cannot tell what proportion of the population was directly involved with the monasteries, that is were either monks, or nuns. We cannot even tell what the population of the island was at that time, except that it must have been substantially smaller than it is now, agricultural techniques being what they were. The indications, such as an abnormally large number of saints, personnel connected with the Church, and monasteries themselves, all
much higher proportion than any comparable area on the continent, point toward the conclusion that a very high number of people must have been involved, in one way or another, directly with some monastery. I estimate about twenty-five percent, a personal estimate based on readings of annals, etc., of a population of not more than one million (about one-quarter the present population), were directly involved with the monastic movement.

Starting about A.D. 795, Ireland, specifically the Irish Church, was the target of a new wave of Germanic invaders from northern Europe (see next chapter). The effect of this fierce, warlike, people on the Irish society devoted to peace and love, was devastating. In this sense there can be no doubt that the Christian society of Ireland contributed to its own destruction by the weakening of its warrior class. As it was, it took the Irish warrior class over one hundred and fifty years to contain the Viking threat. This is not to say that the Irish would not have been threatened by the Vikings under other circumstances, but it did add to the danger.

The lack of clearly defined episcopal authority also contributed to Ireland's weakness in the face of external and internal disturbances. The monastic Church,
organized as it was on the basis of tribal territory with no central authority, served to rein­force the independence of the local chieftain at the expense of the central government. When Christian principals were widely accepted it made little difference; but when strength through unity was needed, there was none.

Ireland's greatest work was in the evangelization of previously non-Christian areas of Europe. In those areas where Irish missionaries had established monasteries, the Roman branch of the Catholic Church had been successful in absorbing the Irish institutions by the end of the eighth century. In Ireland the unique practices, including use of the vernacular, and the monastic organization, were not supplanted until the twelfth century. This meant that, while Ireland was able to maintain its independence from foreign control, its Church was unable to offer spiritual leadership at a time when the Church on the continent was at its strongest. The-Irish Church was almost as responsible for its own decline, and the decline of Ireland, as were the several other factors of that decline (see below, chapter V).

The time the church in Ireland reached the apex of its influence was probably about A.D. 750. The artistic,
cultural, and spiritual influence of the monasteries had never been greater, and Irish missionaries were still in many parts of Europe that had never before been Christian. But for several reasons, that year can also be considered the beginning of the decline. The Martyrology of Gorman listed the last of the great Irish saints as having died in A.D. 666. In The Annals of the Four Masters the number of saints listed diminishes rapidly after the first half of the eighth century. From these and other indications, it is increasingly clear that during the last half of the eighth century the golden age of the Irish monastic civilization was drawing to a close.

61 Ibid.
At the beginning of the period under scrutiny, about A.D. 750, the Irish Church was near the peak of its influence. At the end of this period, A.D. 1014, Ireland had just emerged from the most destructive period in its history, the Viking invasions, and found all its traditional institutions destroyed or paralyzed. During this time the Irish Church slipped from the most influential single institution in Ireland to a position where it was able to do little to influence even its own constituents. The secular leaders had regained control, and were in the process of making Ireland into a land where Christian principles had as little influence on the social leaders as they do in our society today.

There is some evidence that the Irish began to lose respect for their Church long before the Viking raids began. This evidence is in the annals, but recorded so infrequently that one is led to believe that the number of incidents was low. The first such incident was listed under the year 730:
St. Flann, son of Conaing, Abbot of Cill-mor-Dithraibhe, was slain.¹

The killing of a saint, to say the least, was a highly unusual act, and it is uncertain just what it signifies. The first time an occurrence that could be considered ignoring a Church principal, or an indication that local loyalties were more important than Christian loyalties, is this entry from the year 732:

The battle of Fochart, in Magh-Muirtheimhne [was fought] by Aedh Allan and the Clanna-Neill of the North, against the Ulidians, where Aedh Roin, King of Ulidia, was slain; and his head was cut off on Cloch-an-chommaigh, in the doorway of the church of Fochard ... The cause of the battle was the profanation of Cill-Cunna by Ua Seghain, one of the people of Aedh Roin . . . .²

The high king of Ireland (Aedh Allan) apparently saw nothing wrong with his act of the profanation of an enemy’s church to revenge a similar act by an enemy.

At the middle of the eighth century there was some expansion of what we may only term atrocities against the church and its personnel. These included burnings of monasteries, miscellaneous plunderings, and even murder of Church officials. The following are examples:

¹O'Donovan, op. cit., p. 327.
²Ibid., p. 331.
(750) Cluain-mic-Nois was burned on the 21st of March.\(^3\)

(751) Beanchairmor was burned on Patrick's day.\(^4\)

(752) Cill-mor-Dithraibh was burned by the Ui-Crumthainn.\(^5\)

(755) Eutighern, a bishop, was killed by a priest at the alter of St. Brighit, at Kildare, between the Crocaingel and the alter; from whence it arose that ever since a priest does not celebrate mass in the presence of a bishop at Kildare.\(^6\)

It seems strange that there was a necessity to pass legislation to separate priests and bishops at Kildare to keep them from murdering each other. If nothing else, these quotations show that no longer does the population hold the Church and its institutions in such awe and reverence as they once did. It also shows that the Church personnel were susceptible to the same temptations as laymen, and this was being noticed by the public.

One of the major privileges of the Church has always been its non-combative status in war, but early in the ninth century it was found necessary to pass legislation to prevent its (forced) participation. The following quote from the year 799 (corrected to 804) records the specific incident:

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 353 \quad ^4\)Ibid. 
\(^5\)Ibid., p. 355. \quad ^6\)Ibid., p. 359.
Aedh Oirdnihe assembled a very great army to proceed into Leinster and devastated Leinster twice in one month. A full muster of the men of Ireland (except the Leinstermen), both laity and clergy, was again made by him [and he marched], until he reached Dun-Cuair, on the confines of Meath and Leinster. Thither came Connmhalt, successor of Patrick, having the clergy of Leath-Chuinn along with him. It was not pleasing to the clergy to go on any expedition, they complained of their grievance to the king, and the king, [i.e., Aedh] said that he would abide by the award of Fothadh na Canoine; on which occasion Fothadh passed the decision by which he exempted the clergy of Ireland for ever from expeditions and hostings . . . 7

It seems strange here that the clergy could not prevent their being called upon to go on this raid without the intercession of the Bishop of Armagh (successor of Patrick) and another respected cleric. What is even more strange is that the high king (Aedh Oirdnihe) did not apparently see anything wrong in his act.

Acts of deliberate profanation of the Church seem to have been rare. This example, from the year 789, is one of the few:

The profanation of the Bachall-Isa and the relics of Patrick by Donnchadh, son of Domnall, at Rath-Airthir, at the fair. Cluin-Iraird [Clonard] was burned on Easter night precisely. 8

7Ibid., p. 409. 8Ibid., p. 391.
The loss by the Church of the hearts and minds of the people was by no means deliberate or conscious on either side. There was no apparent reason for the Irish Church to decline. The motives and ideals of the leaders had not changed, but neither had the methods of their application. Yet the direction was definitely away from the old spirit of the Church. Perhaps the loss of influence in most of the overseas areas to the resurgent Roman missionaries was a factor, but Ireland was still an educational center right up to the beginnings of the Viking invasions.

In any event, it was not internal weakening that eventually destroyed the Irish Church as the most effective voice in the leadership of the country and people— that was done by the Vikings. Yet, the Viking invasions happened at a point which could have been decisive in the internal development of the Church even without their interference. The process of internal disintegration had begun, and may well have been as ultimately destructive to the society as the Vikings.

There can be no doubt that the Viking invasions were a profound shock to all of Europe. Ireland probably suffered more than any other single country from the Vikings, because the centuries of peace had allowed the Irish
to build up a very rich civilization. The Vikings were the first serious outside military threat the Irish Christian civilization had ever faced, and it was unable to protect itself. Due to the relative intermittent nature of the Viking attacks, the Irish were eventually able to recover and defeat the invaders, but not until the society had been drastically altered along secular military lines similar to the pagan Irish organization.

The Annals of the Four Masters give the first appearance of the Vikings in the year A.D. 795:

The burning of Reachrainn by plunderers, and its shrines were broken and plundered.  

This entry probably refers to Rathlin island, in the North Channel between Scotland and Ireland. For twelve years the Vikings raided only the outlying islands, but in 807 the first attack on an inland monastery occurred.

The Church of Culuim-Cille at Ceamannus was destroyed. Inis-Muireadhaigh was burned by foreigners, and they attacked Ros-Commain.

For several years the Vikings made raids against many of the Irish institutions, concentrating more on those near water, as suited their hit and run tactics.

---

9 Ibid., p. 397. 10 Ibid., p. 412.
The first significant resistance on the part of the Irish was recorded under the year 812:

A slaughter was made of the foreigners of Umhall. A slaughter was made of the Conmaicni by the foreigners . . . . A slaughter was made of the foreigners by Cobhtach, son of Maelduin, Lord of Loch-Lein. 11

The Irish struck back whenever they could, often inflicting heavy casualties on their opponents. The Viking tactics, a quick raid and departure before the local troops could be organized, usually allowed them to get away and strike again someplace else. The local government, often headed by the Church, was unable to meet the threat or to direct the resistance. As a result the secular chieftains, formerly with little to do but fight among themselves—an activity not encouraged by the Church—found themselves once again in effective leadership of the people. But, for the time being, nothing could be done.

The Viking raids escalated rapidly throughout the next few years. In 839 Turgis, a Norse chieftain, arrived in Ireland and supervised the most serious warfare up to that time. The following entry is the Irish impression of his accomplishments:

11 Ibid., p. 419.
There came after that a great royal fleet into the north of Erinn, with Turgeis, who assumed the sovereignty of the foreigners of Erinn; and the north of Erinn was plundered by them, and they spread themselves over Leth Chuinn. A fleet of them also entered Loch Eathach, and another fleet entered Lughbudded, and another fleet entered Loch Rai. Moreover Ard Mach was plundered three times in the same month by them; and Turgeis himself ursurped the abbacy of Ard Macha, and Farannan, abbot of Ard Macha, and chief comharba of Patrick, was driven out and went to Mumhain, and Patrick's shrine with him; and he was four years in Mumhain, while Turgeis was in Ard Macha and in the sovereignty of the north of Erinn ....12

Although Turgeis himself was defeated, captured, and executed by the Irish in 845,13 the fact that he was able to do as much as he did shows how impotent the Irish were in that area of the country.

The first phase of the invasion ended about 880. Since the Irish were still not too effective on the battlefield, it was likely due to the inability of the Vikings to maintain their pace.14 Before that time the Vikings had become well enough organized to make their raids look more like a slightly hazardous but highly profitable commercial

13Ibid., p. 15.
enterprise than a military expedition. The annals record
this by devoting a great deal of their space and attention
to engagements with the invaders. Between 795 and 870, a
total of 132 major contacts were recorded between the Irish
and the Vikings. The peak of the invasion came in the
twenty years between 830 and 850, when 88 contacts were re­
ported. These figures include all kinds of depredations by
the Vikings, such as plunderings, burnings, raids, and the
like. They also include such battles, slaughters, or other
engagements of a purely military nature fought between the
Irish and the Vikings.

The plundering of Edar by the foreigners, who
carried off a great prey of women.

There came after that a fleet on Loch Dergderc, and
they plundered Inis Celtra, and they drowned its
shrines, and its relicks [sic], and its books; and
they plundered Muc-Inis of Riagall and they
churches of Dergderc; and they plundered Tir-da­
glas, and Lothra, and Cluain-Ferta, and Cluain­
mic-nois, and Inis Clothrann, and Inis-bo-finne,
and the churches of Loch Ribh, in like manner; and
the west of Midhe and the south of Connaught; and
they killed Duach, king of Aithne, and numbers of
others; and they arrived safely again at Luimnech,
without battle or conflict.

---

15 Ibid., pp. 319-332.
16 O'Donovan, op. cit., p. 431.
17 Todd, op. cit., p. 39.
There came, after that, another fleet into the north of Erinn, four years after the death of Aedh, son of Niall, at Ath-da-Fert; and they plundered Bencurh of Uladh, and brake the shrine of Comghall, and killed its bishop, and its doctors, and its clergy: they devastated, also, the plain.  

The belfry of Slaine was burned by the foreigners, with its full of relics and distinguished persons, together with Caineachchain, Lector of Slaine, and the crozier of the patron saint, and a bell [which was] the best of bells.  

These were the mighty deeds of the sons of Elge, and of the ships of Ath Cliath, in Leth Cuinn and Laighin. But their plunders, and their battles, and their conflicts, are not fully in recollection, and are not enumerated in books.

Although the destruction cannot be measured, there is little doubt that the Viking invasions can be counted among the most destructive forces in recorded history.

There was a forty year lull in the invasion from about 880 to about 920. The Irish could recover little, for the invasions started again with renewed force. This phase of the invasion lasted about one hundred years, but was probably not a serious military threat to the Irish after the beginning of the eleventh century. Between 920

18 Ibid., p. 7.
20 Todd, op. cit., p. 39.
and 990 the Viking reached the height of their control and destruction of Ireland. The Irish, at least in some areas of the country, were not only unable to resist, but were placed under a very effective military government by the Vikings. The following is an Irish version, dated from about 980, of the foreign domination:

There came after that an immensely great fleet, more wonderful than all the other fleets (for its equal or its likeness never before came to Erinn), with Imar, grandson of Imar, chief king of the foreigners, and with three sons, viz., Dubhcenn, and Cu-allaidh, and Aralt, sons of Imar. These landed and encamped in Inis-Sibtond, in the harbour of Luinnech. Mumhain was plundered and ravaged on all sides by them, both churches and chieftanries, and they levied pledges and hostages from all the men of Mumhain, both Gaill and Gaedhil; and they afterwards brought them under such indescribable oppression and servitude to the foreigners and the Danes. Moreover, he ordained kings and chiefs, stewards and bailiffs, in every territory, and in every chieftanry after that, and he levied the royal rent. And such was the oppressiveness of the tribute and rent of the foreigners over all Erinn large and generally, that there was a king from them over every territory, and a chief over every chieftanry, and an abbot over every church, and a steward over every village, and a soldier in every house, so that none of the men of Erinn had power to give even the milk of his cow, nor so much as the clutch of eggs of one hen in succor or in kindness to an aged man, or to a friend, but was forced to preserve them for the foreign steward, or bailiff, or soldier. And though there were but one milk giving cow in the house, she durst not be milked for an infant of one night, nor for a sick person, but must be kept for the steward, or bailiff, or soldier of the foreigners. And, however long he might be absent from the house, his share or
his supply durst not be lessened, although there was in the house but one cow, it must be killed for the meal of one night, if the means of a supply could not be otherwise procured. In a word, although there were an hundred hard steeled iron heads on one neck, and an hundred sharp, ready, cool, never-rusting, brazed tongues in each head, and an hundred garrulous, loud, unceasing voices from heach tongue, they could not recount, or narrate, or enumerate, or tell, what all the Gaedhil suffered in common, both men and women, laity and clergy, old and young, noble and ignoble, of hardship, and of injury, and of oppression, in every house, from these valiant, wrathful, foreign, purely-pagan people. 21

The writer of this certainly gives the impression that the Irish were suffering under unendurable and endless misery. Despite such accounts, the Viking domination seems to have been over only part of the island. Within the free areas, the Irish were forming a resistance movement that was eventually successful. The main evidence for the fading of Norse influence from 980 on, is the annals. The Annals of the Four Masters record a total of 86 major engagements between the Irish and the Vikings between 921 and 980. At the same time the Irish fought twenty-five battles against the Vikings, while during that period they fought forty-one engagements among themselves. This latter figure does not seem to indicate a people that felt a strong

21Ibid., pp. 49-51.
external threat, for it seems logical to assume that if they were threatened they would spend less time fighting among themselves and face the common enemy.

Along with the lessening of overt hostility between the two sides, there is strong evidence to suggest that the Viking elements in Ireland were gradually becoming absorbed into the society. This began sometime in the tenth century, long before the Vikings were supposedly eliminated at Clon­tarf in 1014. The following quotation is one of the ear­liest indications, and dates from the year 937:

Ceallachan, King of Caiseal, with men of Munster, and Macca Cuinn, with the foreigners of Port­Lairge, went into Meath, and seized upon a great prey, and took spoils and prisoners of Cill­eichneach and Cill­achaidh; and took two of their abbots . . .22

The Irish could not have been too hostile toward the Vikings if they used them in their depredations against their fellow Irishmen. The great king Brian Boru (925-1014), usually considered to have carried out a crusade against the pagans, was not above using them to keep his subject Irishmen in line, as is shown in this entry from the year 1001:

A hosting by Brian, with the foreigners, Leinstermen, and Munstermen, to Ath-Luain, so that he weakened the Ui-Neill of the South and the Connaughtmen, and took their hostages.23

Other mentions of collaboration, on both sides, are quite numerous between 950 and 1014, and Brian even had Viking troops in his army at Clontarf. There were also Irish forces fighting with the Vikings.24

The merging of the two societies was evident on other grounds. This notation, from 979, is a demonstration:

Amhlaeibh, son of Sitric, chief Lord of the foreigners of Ath-cliath, went to Hi on his pilgrimage; and he died there, after penance and a good life.25

The son, or grandson, of this same man was one of the Viking leaders at the battle of Clontarf. If the Vikings followed the normal practice of northern Germanic barbarians, the fact that the leader was a Christian is pretty strong evidence that a large portion of his men were as well. Since the Irish Church was the only one operating in that area, it is more than reasonable to assume that it was

---

23 Ibid., p. 745.
24 Todd, op. cit., pp. 165-169.
contact with the Irish Church that brought about the conversion of the Vikings. The Church, at this time, still served as the cultural center of Irish life, and thus was no doubt influential in bringing the Viking into still closer ties with the Irish. The Church was probably at least partly responsible for the lessening of overt hostilities between the two cultures.

The final destruction of the Viking power and influence in Ireland is usually assumed to be the battle of Clontarf, outside present Dublin, on Good Friday (23 April) of 1014. The battle was the culmination of a long struggle for the high king, Brian Boru. Brian was the first high king of memory not from the O'Neil clan, and he was the strongest native king in the island's history. His life is usually regarded as a long struggle against opposition from both Vikings and Irish. Clontarf itself, although a very definite Irish victory, was not really decisive. The Vikings, at that time, were busy elsewhere, and the Irish had regained effective control of their own land some time before. After the battle the Vikings still made occasional raids into the interior of Ireland from their untouched settlements, Dublin, Wexford, Limerick, Waterford, and others, along the coast. Long after the battle of Clontarf
the annals still record expeditions by the Vikings against
the warlike chieftains of the interior. (see below, chap-
ter V)

The lawlessness and destruction brought by the ini-
tial and renewed Viking onslaughts was probably at least a
partial cause of the Irish losing faith in their Church and
its powers. The Vikings raided only the ecclesiastical
centers at first, primarily because there were no other
kinds of centers in Ireland. The annals record innumerable
occasions where churches and monasteries were plundered and
burned, and monks, priests, and women were killed or carted
away with other loot. The conduct of the Vikings had a
very profound effect on the native population of Ireland.

The refectory of Lann-Leire was burned by Domhall,
son of Murchadh; and four hundred persons were de-
stroyed by wounding and burning there, both men
and women.\textsuperscript{26}

This act was committed in 968 by one of the powerful Irish
chieftains, a deed truly worthy of the most pagan and
fierce Viking warrior. This was by no means an unusual
entry. By tenth century, especially the second half of it,
destruction of Irish churches by Irish was more and more
frequent. Certainly evidence of this nature suggests that

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 693.
the lawless example of the Vikings may have led the Irish to renewed attacks upon their own Church.

There can be no doubt that the Viking invasions contributed greatly to the decline of the Irish monastic Church. The tremendous destruction of the raids nearly wiped out the Church. If nothing else, the destruction of almost the entire physical superstructure of the Church may have demoralized the Irish to the point where they had no desire to rebuild to their former glory. In any event, from the remaining records it is extremely difficult to tell to what degree the Irish were influenced in their actions by the brutality of the Vikings, but considering the circumstances, it is logical to assume that strong influences were unavoidable.

Central authority, never very strong in Ireland, certainly did not survive the Viking ravages and the death of Brian at Clontarf. Local chieftains were forced again to rely upon their own resources, and their allegiance to the high king, enforced by the sword, deteriorated completely. The lack of any restraining central authority, weak as it had been, coupled with the already decentralized Church, was enough to make each local chieftain completely free to do as he liked. Localism had been the only
effective way of countering the Viking raids, and it had been reinforced too long for the permanent reestablishment of the central government. The Vikings were thus partially responsible for the destruction of Irish unity. 27

The period of the Viking invasions was one of the most critical in the evolution of Irish society. It was a most definite dividing line between the years of peace and Christian brotherhood, and the period of anarchy, terror, and unceasing warfare. During the period immediately following (1014-1172), Irish spiritual forces reached their point of lowest influence. During the Viking period the inclination toward a non-Christian society were massively reinforced, and by the time the reinforcement was removed, it was too late to return, for nothing was left. The Irish monastic culture had failed to direct the society toward the goals of its own choosing, and the warrior virtues of the pre-Christian era, similar to those displayed by the Vikings, became the foundations of the society.

27 De Paor, op. cit., p. 61.
CHRISTIANITY IN ECLIPSE: THE LAST YEARS OF NATIVE RULE, 1014-1171

From the battle of Clontarf and the cessation of the Viking threat in first decades of the eleventh century, to the arrival of a new wave of invaders, the Anglo-Normans (after 1167), the Church in Ireland was unable to give the effective leadership it had previous to the Viking invasions. The society itself became much more secular in its outlook, inasmuch as it no longer followed the ideals set forth by the Church. This period was characterized largely by governmental anarchy and almost constant internecene warfare. Beginning late in the eleventh century continental reform ideals began to have some influence in Ireland, but they were not able to make a great deal of headway against the native distrust of foreign innovations.

This period of social evolution might have had another chapter if the Anglo-Normans had not imposed their society upon Ireland. Even though the native reform movement was not a total success and met with opposition, had it been allowed more time there are strong indications that it would have been successful, and Ireland would have been
brought back into the mainstream of European affairs under her own power.

The dying out of the Viking threat brought about a change in the attitude of the Irish secular leaders. The two centuries of Viking incursions had trained the Irish in the most severe war school ever known on that island. Even though the Viking threat did not end as dramatically as the major victory at Clontarf would seem to indicate, the end of Viking opposition left large numbers of very effective soldiers more or less unemployed. This is not to say that they immediately set forth ravaging the countryside, but it is always easier to learn to fight than unlearn it if one has been a warrior all one's life. The local chieftains, lacking any loyalty to a central government, which was non-existent, saw their opportunity, and began to use military force to their own advantage.

The battle of Clontarf by no means destroyed the Vikings in Ireland. The battle did end whatever territorial control they may have had remaining in the interior, but it did not drive them from their settlements along the coast. Only five years after the battle of Clontarf, in 1019, this entry was made by an annalist:

Ceanannus was plundered by Sitric, son of Amhlaeibh, and the foreigners of Ath-cliath; and
they carried off unnumberable spoils and prisoners, and slew many persons in the middle of the church.¹

Viking raids, and participation in Irish wars, was mentioned frequently in the annals between 1014 and 1171. It is clear that the Viking elements in the society had not been wholly subdued by their defeat at Clontarf.

The Irish paid little attention to the Viking military power on the coasts. Starting in the second decade of the eleventh century, the Irish pushed themselves with ever increasing energy into seemingly senseless and nearly constant internecine warfare. The Church showed no evidence of being able to cope with the situation, and was apparently unable to control the persons responsible. The first phase of internal destruction came nearly six years after Clontarf; many of Ireland's leaders had been killed there, and apparently there was some confusion until the power structure had a chance to rebuild itself. The first of the Irish raids was in the year 1019:

The shrine of Ciaran was plundered by Domhnall, son of Tadhg; and he himself was killed at the end of the week, through the miracles of God and Ciaran.²

¹Ibid., p. 793. ²Ibid.
In the next year (1020) large scale attacks upon Irish ecclesiastical institutions got underway:

The seventh year of Maelseachlainn. Cormac Ua Finn, a distinguished Bishop of Munster, died. Ard-Macha was burned, with all the fort, without the saving of any house within it, except the library only, and many housed were burned in the Trians; and the Daimhliag-mor was burned, and the Cloitheach, with its bells; and Daimhlaig-na-Toc, and Daimhliag-an-tSabhaill, and the old preaching chair, and the chariot of the abbots, and their books in the houses of the students, with much gold, silver, and other precious things. Cill-dara, with its oratories, was burned. The burning of Cluain-Iraird, Ara, Sord, and Cluain-mic-Nois. The shrine of Patrick, and the Finnhaidheach [a bell?] of Patrick were robbed by plunderers, by Ua hArdith, and [the people of] lower Ui-Eathach; and they carried off with them seven hundred cows.  

Entries of this nature became more and more common as the eleventh century progressed.

Events during the next 150 years were similar. Destruction and apparent lawlessness slowly escalated. It is usually difficult to use quantitative measurements in history, but the Annals of the Four Masters present the opportunity to do just that. These annals list secular events that occurred in all of Ireland. Foremost among these secular events are military engagements, variously termed as: battles, conflicts, hostings, plunderings, raids, or any of

\[^3\textit{Ibid.}, p. 797.\]
the many similar titles. Throughout this period, the number of engagements showed a definite increase. From 961 to 1010 (during the last phase of the Viking invasions), there were 73 battles. From 1011 to 1060 there were 147 engagements. From 1061 to 1110 there were 159 battles. The trend, as freedom from outside interference was attained, was definitely toward instability. The biggest increase came between the years of 1111 and 1160, when the Irish fought 296 battles among themselves. Only eleven years later, in 1171, the Anglo-Normans arrived and greatly reduced the Irish capacity for inter-tribal warfare, but in those eleven years the Irish fought 90 engagements. If this trend had continued the next fifty year period would have shown a thirty percent increase in these battles.

These figures by themselves might not actually indicate anything until one examines the society where they were fought. A civil war or a war of national liberation might easily have this many battles. But this constant warfare in Ireland was not a civil war. Churches were not sacred or protected from the onslaught, but were as vulnerable as everything else (see below; quotes). Clergymen were not protected by their station or holiness. The Irish kings were not fighting for thrones or territories, they
were not fighting for principals or ideals. Many crimes and indignities were committed by the Irish chieftains upon their own people.

It is easy to get an idea of what went on by reading the words of people who lived during those times. The following are from the annalist who wrote in what is now called The Annals of the Four Masters, and is dated 1041:

Maelruanaidh, son of Roen, royal heir to Teamhair, was slain. Faelan Ua Murdha, lord of Laeighis, was blinded by Murchadh, son of Dunlaing, after having been delivered to him by Donnchadh, son of Aedh, for it was Donnchadh that took him first, and then delivered him up to Murchadh, son of Dunnlaing. Muircheartach Mac Gillaphadraig was slain by the Ui-Caelluidhe by treachery. Gilla-chourghhaiill, son of Donnchuau, son of Dunlaing, was forcibly carried away from Cill-dara by Murchadh, son of Dunlaing, where the successor of Brighit was violated. The two sons of Murchadh, namely, Donnchadh and Gluniarn, were slain at Cill-dara by the two sons of Braen, son of Mael-mordha. A preying excursion by the Ua Neills into Ui-Eathach, and they carried off great booty. A preying excursion by the Ui-Ceinnsealaigh into Ui-Bairrchi; but Murchadh, son of Dunlaing, overtook them, and defeated them at Cill-Molappoc, where they were greatly slaughtered, together with Domhnall Reamhar [i.e., the fat], heir to the lordship of Ui-Ceinnsealaigh. Cuciche U Dunlaing, lord of Laeighis, and his son, and Cailleoc, his wife, were slain by Mac Conin at Teach-Mochua-mic-Lonain; and he [Mac Conin] himself was killed on the following day, by Ua Broenain, for this act; and this was a great miracle by Mochua. Fearna-mor-Maeadhog was burned by Donnchadh, son of Brian. Gleann-Uisean was plundered by the son of Mael-na-mbo, and the oratory was demolished, and seven hundred persons were carried off [as prisoners] from thence, in
revenge of the plundering of Ferna-mor, by the son of Brian, and Murchadh, son of Dunlaing, and in revenge of his brother, Domhnall Reamhar.\(^4\)

The number of acts committed by individuals diminished in proportion to those committed by groups later in the century. Many of these actions would not be too unusual on the continent, but not in this short a time period (one year). The above entry is typical of the entries throughout the middle of the eleventh century.

As the eleventh century entered its later phases, the violence and disorder shows a noticeable increase:

The Age of Christ, 1076. Cele, son of Donnagen, chief senior of the Daeidhil, and bishop of Leinster, died at Gleann-da-locha, after a good life. Murchadh, son of Flann Ua Mæeleachlainn, at the expiration of three days and three nights after his assuming the supremacy of Teamhair, was treacherously killed in the cloichtheach of Ceanannus, by the lord of Gaileanga, i.e. Amhleaibh, the grandson of Mæelan; and the latter was himself immediately slain in revenge, through the miracles of God and Colum-Cille, by Maelseachlainn, son of Conchobhar. Gairbheith Ua hÎnnreachtgaigh, lord of Ui-Meath, was slain by the men of Meath. Gillachrist Ua Duibhdara, lord of Fearsa-Manach, was slain by the Fearsa-Manach themselves, on [the island of] Daimhinis. Domhnall Ua Crechain, chief of Ui-Fiach-rach Ardascatha, was slain, with a slaughter about him, by the Ui-Tuirtri and the Cinel-Binnigh of the valley. An army was led by Toirdhealbhach Ua Briain into Connaught; and Ruaidhri Ua Conchobhar, King of Connaught, came into his house. The battle of

\(^4\)Ibid., pp. 839-841.
Belaith was gained by Aedh Ua Maelseachlainn and the men of Magh-Itha over the Cianachta, of whom a slaughter was therein made. There was a scarcity of provisions in this year. An army was led by the clergy of Leath-Mhogha, with the son of Maeldaluá, to Cluain-Dolcain, to expel Ua Ronain from Cluain-Dolcain, after he had assumed the abbacy in violation of the right of the son of Maeldaluá. It was on this occasion that a church, with its land, at Cluain-Dolcain, was given to the Cludees forever, together with twelve score cows, which were given as mulct to the son of Maeldaluá. A slaughter was made of the people of the son of Gillachomghaill by Ua Lorcain; and he carried three score and three heads to the hill south of Disert-Diarmada. Gillachrist, son of Cathalan, chief of Ui-nOcia, was slain by the son of Mac Tuathail.

The impressive number of depredations now list the clergy among their committors.

The beginning of the twelfth century brought little change in the attitudes and actions of the secular leaders:

The Age of Christ, 1115. Diarmaid Ua Briain, King of Munster, was taken prisoner by Muircheartach Ua Briain; and Muircheartach Ua Briain assumed his kingdom again, and set out with an army into Leinster and Breagha. Muircheartach Ua Ciarmhaic, lord of Aine; Domhnall Ua Conchobhair Ciarraigh; Murchadh Ua Flainn; the sons of Flannchadha, lord of Musclairgh, were slain. The Daimlaig [great stone church] of Ard-Breacain, with its full of people, was burned by the men of Munster, and also many other churches in [the country of] Feara-Breagh. A great predatory excursion was made by Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhar and the Connaughtmen,

5 The Culdees were a Christian religious order about which little is known.

6 Ibid. pp. 909-911.
and they plundered Thomond as far as Luimneach, and carried off countless spoils and many prisoners. A battle was gained by Domhnall Ua Briain and the foreigners of Ath-cliath over the Leinstermen, wherein fell Donnchadh Ua Mael-na-mbo, lord of Ui-Ceinnsealaigh, and Conchobhair Ua Conchobhair, lord of Ui-Failghe, with his sons, and many others besides them. Domhnall Ua Briain, i.e. the son of Tadhg, royal heir of Munster, was killed by the Connaughtmen. An onset was made at Ath-bo by the sons of Maelachlaimn, son of Aedh, son of Ruaidhri, upon Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair, King of Connaught; and they wounded him, so that he was lying in the agonies of death. Maelruanaidh Ua Ciardha, lord of Cairbre [died]. Maelseachlaimn Ua Maelachlaimn, royal heir of Teamhair, was killed.  

This is from the following year (1116):  

Cill-Dalua, with its churches, was burned. Corcach-mor-Mumhan, Imleach-Iubhair, the oratory of Maelisa Ua Brolchair, Achadh-bo-Chainnigh, Cluain-Iraird, the great house of the abbots at Ard-Macha, with twenty houses about it, and a great portion of Lis-mor-Mochuda, were burned in the beginning of Lent this year.  

The above entries show how little was sacred at that time. A large number of churches and monasteries are listed as having been burned and plundered. The motives of the leaders were nothing more than personal gain and glory, with little or no regard for their victims. Of special interest is the presence of Viking elements, allied with one  

7 Ibid., pp. 999-1001.  
8 Ibid., p. 1003.
of the chieftains, one hundred years after that defeat at
the battle of Clontarf.

The year 1145 was not unusual in a normal sense,
and was chosen because it typifies the state of Irish af-
fairs in the second half of the twelfth century.

The Age of Christ, 1145. Sluaghheadhach Ua Cath-
ain, bishop and virgin, of the people of Leith-
ghlinn, died. Treoit was burned by Donnchadh Ua
Cearbhaill, against the people of Ua Maeleach-
lainn, and three score persons were killed there-
in. Cluain-Flachra was burned. A battle was
gained by Cinel-Conaill, and by the son of Niall
Ua Lochlann, over Domhnall Ua Goirmleadhaigh and
the Cinel-Eoghan, i.e. over those north of the
mountain, where many were slain. A hosting was
made by the Cinel-Conaill, to go again to the re-
lief of Niall Ua Lochlann; and they were joined
by Donnchadh Ua Cearbhaill, with the Airghialla;
and they banished Domhnall Ua Goirmleadhaigh from
his chieftanship, and set up the son of Niall in
his place. Tighearnan Ua Ruairc, lord of Breifne,
turned against the Connaughtmen. A prey was made
by Tighearnan in Corann. A prey was made by
Breifne, and he carried off many thousand cows.
An army was led by Toirdhealbhach Ua Briain, King
of Munster, to Leitir-cranncha, in Sliabh-Bladhma,
to come against Ua Ruairc into Meath. Great war
this year, so that Ireland was a trembling sod. A
predatory excursion was made by Murchadh Ua Mael-
eachlainn into Fearnmhagh, and he carried off many
cows, and killed many persons. A prey was made by
Tighearnan Ua Ruairc in Magh-Luirg. A predatory
excursion was made by Murchadh Ua Maeleachlainn
into Airghialla, and he carried off cows from Cu-
ailgne. The men of Munster proceeded with an army
into Connaught; and they carried off Ui-Ceallaigh,
i.e. Tadhg, son of Conchobhar, lord of Ui-Maine,
and slew Ruaidhri Ua Flaithbheartaigh. A preda-
tory excursion was made by the Cairbri-Ua-Cuilinn
into Ui-Briuin, they burned Daingean-Bona-Cuilinn,
and broke three large boats, and carried off many cows. A plundering force was led by Murchadh Ua Mæleachlainn into Tir-Briuin-na-Sinna; and on this occasion Mæleachlainn, son of Domhnall Súgach, the son of Cochall Fliuch Mac Seánain, and many others, were slain by the Ui-Briuin. Finn Ua Cearbhaill, Tanist of Eile, was killed. An attack was made by the Ui-Briuin and a party of the Connaughtmen on the fleet of Sil-Muireadhaigh, and of the Tuatha; and Donnchadh Ua Mælbhrenainn, chief of Clann-Conchobhair, was slain there, and Donn Ua Mannachain, lord of Ui-Briuin-na-Sinna.9

The events speak for themselves.

What is the meaning of all this? Certainly violent acts were not confined to Ireland, for this was one of the most violent ages in European history. The difference lies in the motivation and the direction of the wars. On the continent men fought for a king, a cause, or a country. Churches, monasteries, clerics, and innocent bystanders were almost always left alone. The Church, although unable to stop war altogether, had enough power to redirect it somewhat toward a common enemy or to where it would do less harm. Clerics were respected everywhere, and few warriors would take it upon themselves to incur the wrath of the most powerful landholder on the continent (the Church), to say nothing of endangering their spiritual welfare. In Ireland, on the other hand, the leaders were known to

9Ibid., pp. 1077-1079.
attack churches or monasteries belonging to a rival, but would defend their own institutions to the death. There seems to be no concept of a unified Church or of the unity of Christian principles.

The Church itself seemed unable to improve its position. The eleventh century saw little attempt by churchmen to better their position, but after the beginning of the twelfth century there were numerous attempts at reform. As early as the last part of the eleventh century some Irish leaders felt it necessary to go out of the country for spiritual leadership. We have a letter written by "Muriardachus, king of Ireland" (probably Murchadh Ua Briain, king of Munster) to St. Anselm of Canterbury, thanking the saint for his help in finding a job for a relative. It includes these words:

What great thanks I owe you, Lord, for, as it has been reported to me, you keep the memory of my sins in your constant prayers . . .

St. Anselm's reply reveals more of the state of the Church in Ireland:

It is heard among us that in your kingdom marriages are dissolved and set aside for no reason whatever; that relatives, whether with the name

---

of the partner or of another relationship, do not hesitate to marry openly without blame against the canonical prohibition. Bishops, too, who should be a form and example of proper religious observance to others are, as we have heard, improperly consecrated either by only one bishop or in improper places. There are these things and others which your highness' prudence will know of which must be corrected in Ireland.\footnote{Ibid., p. 373.}

These letters were written about 1095. About fifty years later (1154), Pope Adrian IV wrote the Bull \textit{Laudabiliter} to Henry II of England, which set down many of the things that pope had heard about the Irish Church and felt should be corrected:

\begin{quote}
... to the extension of the boundaries of the Church, for the restraint of vice, for the correction of morals and for the implanting of virtues, and for the increase of the Christian religion, you may enter that island and perform there the things that have regard to the honor of God and the salvation of the land.\footnote{D. C. Douglas (ed.), \textit{English Historical Documents} (New York: Oxford, 1953), p. 776.}
\end{quote}

Apparently, even the pope had received information that the Irish Church was not doing its job.

Some of the Irish were aware of the need for reform in their own house. Early in the twelfth century, a synod was called to witness the giving of Caiseal by the king of
Munster to the religious community (in 1101). Although the synod did not discuss reform, it may have been the precedent for the calling of the first reform synod in 1111. The first reform synod to make any concrete accomplishments was in 1148, as this account narrates:

A synod was convened at Inis-Padraig, by Maelmeadhog, successor of Patrick, at which were present fifteen bishops and two hundred priests, to establish rules and morals for all, both laity and clergy.

The same synod also authorized St. Malachy (Maelmeadhog) to go on one of his numerous trips to Rome to seek help for the reformers.

Malachy's trip was apparently successful, for in 1152 a Cardinal Legate from Rome, Johannes Papiron, arrived in Ireland. A synod was called in that year, and the work of reorganizing the Church in Ireland was underway. This synod saw the creation of four archbishops, the first in Ireland, at selected urban centers: Armagh, Tuam, Cashel, and Dublin, with Armagh at the head of the Church in Ireland. This synod also considered and passed many other reforms, as the annalist relates:

---

13 O'Donovan, op. cit., pp. 967, 991.
14 Ibid., p. 1083.
A synod was convened at Droichetatha by the bishops of Ireland, with the successor of Patrick, and the Cardinal Johannes Paprion, with three hundred ecclesiastics, both monks and canons; and they established some rules there, i.e. to put away concubines and lemans from men; not to demand payment for anointing or baptizing (though it is not good not to give such, if it were in a person's power); not to take [simoniaclia] payment for Church property; and to receive tithes punctually.\textsuperscript{15}

It is apparently left up to the local officials to implement the reforms. There were four more synods before the arrival of the Anglo-Norman invaders, the first of these being in 1157, the next in 1158, and the last two in 1162 and 1167.

The one phase of the reform movement that was the most effective in the end, but received no mention in the annals, was the introduction of the Cistercian order into Ireland by St. Malachy in 1142. Malachy apparently met St. Bernard of Clairvaux on one of his trips through France to Rome. Malachy soon saw the value of the Cistercian movement, and left some of his monks there to learn. In 1142 they returned to Ireland and began building the first non-Irish monastery in Ireland. When it was finished in 1157, it was the first monastery in Ireland where all the monks

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 1101.
lived and worked under the same roof—unlike the simple individual cells that still composed the structure of the native institutions. It was not immediately popular, but had grown to respectable size by the time the Normans arrived in 1167.  

Ireland's reform movement was not allowed to complete itself. In one of the many wars in that land, a king of Leinster, Diarmaid Mac Murchadha (Dermot MacMurrough), was expelled from his kingdom by the high king, Ruaidhri Ua Conchobhair (Rory O'Connor). Like some Irish chieftains before him, MacMurrough fled to England to ask the help of that ruler in regaining his land. Unlike his predecessors, the English king, Henry II, gave permission for his followers to go to the aid of the Irishman. In 1167 MacMurrough returned to Ireland with a small band of Norman knights and adventurers. For the next four years the Normans were steadily reinforced and were able to beat off repeated attacks by the Irish. After several disastrous defeats, most of the Irish decided to get on the winning side; when Henry arrived in Ireland in 1171 to check up on his former retainers, and possibly to escape from public

---

16 De Paor, op. cit., p. 175.
sight after the Thomas à Becket affair, most of the native chiefs submitted to him. As the native chieftains eventually learned, the Normans were there to stay, and continued to extend their holdings at the expense of the natives. Ireland found itself once again under the heel of a foreign invader.¹⁷

One major effect of the Norman invasion was that it ended the independence of the Irish Church. After that time the Church was reformed under Norman control to bring it more into line with continental ecclesiastical practices. The question of how far the native Irish would have gotten with their reform can never be answered, but there is some evidence to show that they may have been able to complete their own changes without outside interference. The last independent synod, in 1167, fosters that impression:

A great meeting was convened by Ruaidhri Ua Conchobhair and the chiefs of Leath-Chuinn, both lay and ecclesiastic, and the chiefs of the foreigners at Ath-buidhe-Tlachtgha. To it came the successor of Patrick; Cadhla Ua Dubhthaigh, Archbishop of Connaught; Lorcan Ua Tuathail, Archbishop of Leinster; Tighearnan Ua Ruairc, lord of Breifne; Donnchadh Ua Cearbhaill, lord of Orghialla; Mac Duinn-sleibhe Ua hEochadha, King of Ulidia; Diarmaid Ua

¹⁷For the best account of the Norman invasion of Ireland, its causes, events, and results, see: Giraldus Cambrensis, Expunatio Hibernica (London: Rolls Series, n.d.).
Maeleachlainn, King of Teamhair; Raghnall, son of Raghnall, lord of the foreigners. The whole of their gathering and assemblage was thirteen thousand horsemen, of which six thousand were Connaughtmen, four thousand with O'Ruaire, two with Ua Maeleachlainn, four thousand with Ua Cearbhaill and Ua hEochadha, two thousand with Donnchadh Mac Fhraelain, one thousand with the Danes of Athcliath. They passed many good resolutions at this meeting, respecting veneration for churches and clerics, and control of tribes and territories, so that women used to traverse Ireland alone; and a restoration of his prey was made by the Ui-Failghe at the hands of the kings aforesaid. They afterwards separated in peace and amity, without battle or controversy, or without any one complaining of another at that meeting, in consequence of the prosperousness of the king, who had assembled these chiefs with all their forces at one place.\(^18\)

It is difficult to ascertain how effective this council would have been in the long run, for that was the year the Normans first landed in Ireland, but there is no real reason to believe that it would not have worked.

---

VI

CONCLUSION

I have presented a picture of a social evolution. A set of circumstances and historical perspectives caused the society of Ireland to be transformed from one where classical Christian values were the most important motivating factors, to one where principal drives of the people were for personal gain to the exclusion of most of the formerly highly regarded Christian principles. In other words, the Church, if such a term can be used to describe the loose organization of the Irish Christians, lost its hold on the people and ceased to provide the type of spiritual leadership it had done at one time. The circumstances that brought about this change were unique to Ireland, but Ireland had a background different enough to make the outlook of its people substantially different from that of the people on the continent, or even England.

Ireland shared a common background with the rest of western Europe until the beginning of the Christian era. About that time the Roman Empire had expanded its boundaries to include all the Celtic-speaking peoples with the exception of Ireland. With the peace and opportunities for
peaceful commerce brought by the Empire, Ireland maintained close commercial contacts with parts of that Empire. It was through this means that Ireland was first contacted by Christianity. The inability of the Roman Empire to protect its borders led to the resumption of piratical activities by the Irish against their more peaceful neighbors. A raid by Irish pirates brought St. Patrick to the island for the first time. Patrick was the most important figure in the early Christianization of Ireland, using his education to bring it closer to the Roman Empire, he, in effect, represented.

The Roman Empire was in its decline when St. Patrick started his mission, and by the time of his death, almost all contact had been lost between the island and Rome. That loss of contact and the death of the smaller number of Roman trained clergymen who had accompanied Patrick led to a different development of the Irish Church than might have been. During the long centuries of relative isolation the Irish Church proved to be the most viable form of Christianity that existed in north-western Europe throughout the period known as the barbarian invasions. Because of its physical isolation and fighting spirit (at least the reputation thereof) Ireland was spared the ravages of these
Germanic invasions, and as a result was able to produce a civilization rich in material objects and governed by Christian ideals while the rest of western Europe was still recovering. The high point of this culture was reached in the latter part of the seventh and first part of the eighth centuries, but started a decline about the midpoint of the eighth century.

The slip from the height of the Christian culture during the eighth century was at first hardly discernible. There is evidence to show that the Christian values that had guided the Irish society were losing their influence. In any event, it was an outside force, the Vikings, that finally and drastically altered the society. They did this by destroying the physical superstructure of the, by this time, very rich monasteries and other ecclesiastical foundations, also by showing that the strongly spiritually orientated lay authority could not cope with the problem. The Irish solved the problem, or at least alleviated its symptoms, much the same way as did governments on the continent faced with the same problem, by fragmentation and localization of government power. In Ireland a true feudalism never developed because of the local lord's inability to admit that he could be dependent upon another. The problem was
compounded by the very strong tribal antagonisms that dominated Irish politics at that time. The Irish solved the Viking problem in the only way possible, by temporary military unification under a strong authoritarian king. The damage had already been done, however, for the fragmentation of the government had only served to reinforce the localism and tribal loyalties that had been dormant throughout the era of the height of the monastic church.

The critical phase in the evolutionary process, or the secularization of the society, was near the end of the Viking era, when the Irish were able to function without an undue amount of outside interference. At this time the Irish Church, had its organization been strong enough to withstand the effects of the Viking attacks, should have started to reassert its influence on the secular leaders. On the continent, the Church organization was strong enough to enable it to recover, and eventually was able to influence the society of the High Middle Ages, although not to the extent the Irish Church had in Ireland earlier. The Irish Church, always fractionalized and locally oriented, had no strong central organization to demand its loyalty, and as the personnel of each church or monastery came to be drawn from an ever narrower territorial base, they lost
what sense of identification they had ever possessed with the Church as a whole.

After the middle of the tenth century it appeared that the Irish Church had lost too much to ever be able to recover its former position. Only by joining a strong outside organization would the Christian Church in Ireland be able to play the important part in the lives of the people of that country it once had. The Irish Church during the last century of independence reached the point of its lowest influence, at the same time the Church on the continent was going through a reform that revitalized it, and helped it reach the point of its highest influence. It was no doubt under the direction of the Church on the continent that the Irish Church began its own reform during the twelfth century.

The Irish reform took a different form than did the reform movement on the continent. The Irish Church was unusually corrupt; it did not have the effective power it once had. In Ireland the reform was prompted more by a few dedicated individuals than by any popular desire for reform among the general population. Men like St. Malachy, Archbishop of Armagh, who introduced the Cistercian order into Ireland, provided the spark and direction of the reform,
and it was they who persuaded the secular leaders a change was necessary. In spite of the increased influence of continental orders and renewed relations with Rome, the Irish reform movement did not have the chance to become completely effective before the arrival of the Normans.

The evolution of Irish society from the sixth to the twelfth centuries shows some parallels to the evolution of western society as a whole from the middle ages to modern times, although it would be inaccurate to take the analogy too far. I am referring to the change from a spiritually orientated society to a secularly orientated society. From the point of view of the Irish, the social change I have pictured was drastic and effected national development adversely. The stress placed on the social institutions of the Irish (specifically the Church) were enough to force those institutions to adapt or perish. The society was forced to abrogate what was most noteworthy in its existence for the people to physically survive. When the stress had passed, the society was not flexible enough to regain its former form. Ireland changed from a religious community through the stress of the Viking invasions, and ended a warrior culture--its virtues much like those of the invaders.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED

Primary Sources


Hancock, W. M. and O'Mahony, Rev. T. Ancient Laws of Ireland: Senchus Mor and Athbail, of Laws of Distress. Dublin: Stationary Office, 1865.


O'Donovan, J. Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters. Dublin: Hodges, Smith, 1856.


Secondary Sources


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


O'Clery (Ua Clerich), A. P. The History of Ireland to the Coming of Henry II. London: T. F. Unwin, 1908.


