Monasticism: Its Influence on Education in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Centuries.

Ann-Maureen Pliska

One of the reasons we study the past is to gain knowledge for our present and wisdom for our future. By standing on the shoulders of what others have written, we not only get a better view but we give ourselves the opportunity to reflect on the greatness of heritage. In this paper, I hope to ignite a spark of reflection of the role that monasticism has played in the annals of education. This paper will not create a religious conversion as much as it will create a respect for the journey of monasticism and the role its discipline played in bringing some interesting highlights to education during the early centuries. It will create a picture in the minds of the reader of the monks, as scholars and Patrick as preacher of Christianity in Ireland. The respect and the picture will bring a scholarly inquisitiveness to the minds of the reader to ponder what it was that enabled them to become a beneficent influence in the lives of so many of their contemporaries.

In this paper, I try to bring the reader to an awareness of the rise of monasticism, and move to the particulars of an influential preacher that is known to most everyone regardless of cultural or ethnic background: St. Patrick. I give a synopsis of Patrick, who he was and the image of Patrick's experience of monasticism that settled in his value system despite his desire to be a preacher. I outline the role that Patrick played in, not only bringing Christianity to Ireland, but influencing monasticism in the country with pagan roots. Lastly, I bring the reader to the schools themselves and present to the reader a living and creative community which generated scholars throughout Europe. What is presented here, is several small snapshots that reflect a larger picture of the influence of monasticism in the world of the early centuries, particularly its influence on education. Without the call to the ascetic life, without the Patrician effort to convert Ireland, and without the scholarly yearn of the monks in early Ireland there would be no **Irish Monastic Schools** that inspired greatness for implementing values in the real world of practical events in early century Europe.

Brief Tale of Monasticism

Asceticism was a way of life practiced back in the early centuries, AD. Some say that Jesus and John the Baptist were ascetics during their times, as they too, were solitary figures dedicated to the work of God. Thus, asceticism could claim to be found earlier than the first century. Yet, the ascetics of the early centuries experienced a more respected place in the world, and were not as outwardly and violently condemned as Jesus and John the Baptist were. The ascetic life was a pathway to the discovery of self; it was a means of reaching out to others; and it was a way of finding God. There were four forms of asceticism: virginity, poverty, abstinence from meat and wine, and fasting. Sometimes the individual would practice all four forms; sometimes they would aspire to one or two. It was not necessary to follow all to be considered an ascetic.

The ascetics enjoyed the highest esteem within the church in the early centuries. "In gatherings for public worship they were advanced to places of honor immediately next to the clergy (Ryan 1931, p.9)". The ascetics and cenobites (a strict form of monasticism) were respected by the cultures of the time.

The call to asceticism was answered by females and males. These men and women, sought their God with deep and spiritual longing. They did not want to leave the world but rather influence it. In the New Testament, Acts of the Apostles, it is related that four daughters of St. Philip the Deacon were virgins and prophetesses at Caesarea. St. Paul, himself, became an ascetic after his conversion on the road to Damascus. The men and women that answered the "call" did not reject the world. They remained knowledgeable of the times. When they spoke, people listened.

Until the third century, ascetics did not live in community, but consecrated themselves to a single life of service to God and lived in their own homes. It happened, but it was frowned upon, that ascetics of opposite sex live together or travel together. Exceptions were made if this was the family home that contained both brothers and sisters.

The roots of monasticism, which reflected a communal living, began with St. Anthony of Thebes (251-356 AD) who is regarded as the Father of the cenobitical manner of living (Morse, vol. 17, p.6151) which reflected a community life with strict observance of rules. The roots began with him in Egypt. He was born in 251 AD in Coma, a village in middle Egypt. He never went to school and never learned to read his Coptic language. He did not speak Greek which many people did at the time. When his parents died in AD 270 he became an ascetic (Ryan 1931).

He lived alone for awhile practicing ascetic virtues, but then heard of a aged holy man who lived a rigorous life on the outskirts of town. He came to be influenced

by the man and went to live in the man's neighborhood.

He spent his day in manual labor and prayer. He observed other ascetics and their personalities. He tried to emulate them and eventually was esteemed by all who met him as a man of sanctity as well as gentleness of spirit and learning. To mortify his flesh, he subjected it to rigors of eating only bread, water and salt and only after sundown. He slept on either the bare ground or a mat of reeds. He often would spend the night in prayer (Ryan 1931).

After a while, he left the neighborhood and went to live in a cave, yet still kept in touch with other ascetics. He did this for fifteen years until he felt a calling to greater solitude. He left the cave and went to a region across the Nile called Pisper. This was a wild and lonely area. While wandering the area, he came across an abandoned fort. He transformed this into a rustic abode for himself (Ryan 1931). For twenty years, he lived in isolation and lived off a spring of water nearby and food found in the desert.

Word spread of Anthony. Other ascetics, wishing a purer life and deeper union with their God, sought him out for guidance. Around 305 AD, newcomers came determined to become his disciples. At first annoyed, Anthony soon surrendered and agreed to let them join him.

> So in a moment of high importance for the future of the church, the venerable anchorite sallied forth from long solitude to teach, advice and direct a group of enthusiastic followers...It was the dawn of Christian Monasticism.
>
> (Ryan 1931, p. 18)

Pachomius was a follower of Anthony. He founded a great monastery on an island in the Nile. He drew up the first monastic rules and destined the leadership of monasteries to be under the rule of a singular head, an Abbot. He revolutionized monasticism by introducing three entirely new elements: corporate life, obedience, and work. He organized fully residential communities under the direction of the abbot where a good portion of everyday was spent in materially productive work for the benefit of the monks and the outside world (Huges 1966). A monastery for women was founded by his sister (Morse, vol. 17, p.6151).

Monastic houses started to grow. Names associated with various places are:

Rome/N.Italy--St. Athanasius;
Center of Africa--St. Augustine;
Gaul--St. Martin of Tours.

Religious revival by St. Benedict in the beginning of the sixth century gave western monasticism its peculiar and permanent form (Morse, vol. 17, p.6151). Many monastic orders still follow the Rule of St. Benedict. A monk by the name of Gildas was the ablest and most venerated teacher of the Celtic people in the sixth century and it is because of him more than any other that monasticism grew in Ireland. Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland and influenced monasticism, but Gildas made monasticism grow. Patrick was a preacher and, though he respected monasticism, his life choice was to preach and convert.

Various sources attribute the "family" aspect of monasteries to St. Basil of Cappadocia. For him, cenabitism (strictest form of enclosed monasticism) was the highest form of life. He was also anxious that monasteries should have schools where boys might be trained in "godliness", and that his monks should devote themselves to the service of the sick and suffering, observing the second great commandment of Christianity--"Love thy neighbor as thyself". Even though he encouraged his monks in contemplative prayer, he built an almshouse and a hospital and attached a school to his monastery. His sister, Macrina, turned the family house into a convent for women. In times of famine, she went out to gather up the babies who had been abandoned on the roads, and she and the nuns saw to it that the babies were taken care of. His brother started out as a hermit but ended up finding people that needed help and assisted them (Hughes 1966). Thus, he had to leave the isolation of the hermitage to do this. Basil combined the solitary contemplative life with community life. He did not want the monks cut off from the reality of the world and at the same time he wanted the world to have the influence of the contemplative life. In this day, we might refer to them as "semi-cloistered".

Briefly, this is a look at the journey of monasticism and some of the key pilgrim people on the journey.

The Influence of St. Patrick in Ireland

Patrick is the most influential person in the Irish journey into Christianity. Learning about Patrick, the man, gives a richer understanding in the discourse of the Irish Christian story. The following narrative is actually a brief synopsis to an otherwise rich life of a great priest and preacher. Patrick was born in Britain and was named Sochet (Bieler 1979). For the sake of this narrative, it is uncertain if this was his first or last name. His father was a son of a Deacon and his name was Cualfornius. His mother's name was Concessa.

At sixteen, he was taken captive and brought to Ireland which was barbarian at the time. He was held captive for six years by a king known for a harsh and severe temperament. While in captivity, Patrick tried to make the best of it. He would pray a hundred times during the day and a hundred times during the night giving praise to God. His religious fervor was intense, and he enjoyed frequent visits from an angel named "Victoricus" (Bieler 1979). Some writers say that Patrick named the angel. Some writers say that the angel told Patrick that

this was his name. However, this angel became an important figure in Patrick's return to Ireland as a preacher.

At age 23, he escaped from Ireland and returned to Britain aboard a ship. The ship was filled with pagans who grumbled about their hunger and meager quarters. Upon docking, the people began roaming the land trying to get to their desired place. In some cases aimless, and in most cases hungry, the group began to grumble. Like Moses, who prayed to God for food for the wandering Jews from Egyptian captivity, Patrick prayed to God for food for the crowd. Instead of getting quail like Moses, he got pigs. They also, like John the Baptist in the desert, found locust and wild honey (Bieler 1979). So, by prayer, their hunger needs were met. After being refreshed with pork meat, locust, and wild honey, the group disbanded, and Patrick made his way home. Patrick's family was delighted to see him on his return. They had thought him lost for good. Yet, he stayed home for seven years and at age thirty, he decided to go to Rome to prepare for preaching the faith to foreign nations (Bieler 1986). Thirty was considered the age of full maturity for a man because it was age thirty that Christ set out on his journey of evangelization. Patrick never made it to Rome. On the way, he was attracted by the fame and austerity of two Godly men: Germanus and Honoratus. These men gave influence to his priestly yearn and the monastic spirit. Outlined here, first, is Germanus, but some say that Patrick met Germanus later after having been influenced by Honoratus. Several studies mention Germanus first and pose him as the catalyst for Patrick's ordination and journey to Ireland as a missionary. Whatever the case, both are mentioned because of the influence they had on Patrick. Patrick was influenced by the fame of the bishop named Germanus (Bieler 1986) in the city of Auxerre in Gaul. He stayed with him for many years in order to train for the religious life. He became subject to him and practiced obedience and charity. He learned, loved, and practiced knowledge, wisdom, chastity and every good disposition of spirit and soul as was his heart's desire with great fear and love of God (Bieler 1979). He was a "virgin" in body and spirit. He studied the Canon (Old and New Testament) under Germanus yet did not receive training in literature (Ryan 1931). Because of his time in captivity, it is possible that Patrick did not have rigorous schooling except in a few areas and except for those areas that prepared him for priesthood.

Germanus had founded a monastery on Yonne not far from his episcopal city of Auxerre. It seems, perhaps, that Patrick might have stayed at the monastery while being trained. The question might be asked whether Patrick belonged to that community or rather to the clergy. It seems probable that he was clergy rather than monk as he was preparing now for an apostolate as priest and preacher and would thus be anxious for a training that fitted him directly for an active calling. However, he was greatly influenced by this community life.

Research says that Patrick received a vision from the angel, Victoricus, while with Germanus and within this vision he was urged to begin his mission among the Irish people. As for the vision, Patrick says:

> And there indeed, I saw in the night vision a man whose name was Victoricus coming as it were from Ireland with countless letters and he gave me one of them and I read the beginning of the letter which was entitled, "The Voice of the Irish"; and while I was reading aloud the beginning letter I thought that at that very moment I heard the voice of them who lived beside the wood of Folcut which is nigh unto the Western Sea. And thus they cried as with one mouth, "We beseech thee, holy youth, to come hither and work once more among us."
>
> (Ryan 1931, p. 65)

Germanus sent him in the company of a priest, Segitius, to a bishop named Amatorex who lived nearby. He it is that ordained Patrick. Initially, Patrick is not sent as head of the mission of Ireland because Pope Celestine, at the time, had entrusted that mission to Palladius. It is thought that while traveling to Ireland to be an assistant to Palladius, Patrick found out, when he stops for rest in Ebmoria, that Palladius has died in Britain after returning home from trying to convert the "wild Irish" (Bieler 1986, p.222). He then continues his journey to Ireland.

Some legends show that before Patrick even got to Germanus, he was roaming about and in his travel on the isle of Lerins found an abbot whose method of guidance was more systematic than any yet known. This impressed Patrick, and he went to live with this abbot. The abbot's name was Honoratus. It is assumed he went to the monastery on Lerins to live. Patrick put himself under the training of this abbot just like other monks. This was Patrick's initiation into monastic life. Patrick calls the monks "...waifs from the shipwreck of the storm tossed world" (Ryan 1931, p. 64). Disciples of Lerins later come to Ireland to teach in the monastic schools, and it is thought that perhaps it was due to Patrick's influence that they came. Patrick disciplined himself by the interior discipline of the will and exact observance of the rules with unquestioning obedience to the Superiors. His later career as a bishop manifested the excellence of early training (Ryan 1931).

He studied the lives of the most perfect Saints and followed vigils and abstinence to the letter of the rule. In faith, hope and charity, modesty of gait,

serenity of countenance, obedience, heroism of silence he became a very successful monk. Patrick found Lerins a celestial resting place (Ryan 1931). However, monks did not take vows of stability at that time, so Patrick's missionary zeal influenced him to leave and move on. It was after leaving Honoratus that some say he ended up going to Gaul where he met Germanus.

It seems that St. Patrick was trained as a monk and loved the monastic order but it was as a cleric not a monk that he began his work among the Irish people.

Patrick's Journey into Ireland

What Patrick found on his arrival in Ireland in 432 AD was a land with a religious life of paganism. The pagan Irish were organized by the druids and filid (seers). The filid were poets but also spoke prophesies. They were graded according to ability and came from literary schools where the repertoire and technique of oration was learned. The filid wielded such power and control that anyone who was satirized by them lost their rank in society so recognized was the power of the word.

Pagan thought divided Ireland into fifths. The center of Ireland where the five areas joined together was Uisniach and the sight of druid fire ceremonies. The fifths were considered cosmological and represented grades or castes in society.

Magical beliefs were attached to many actions. Fasting against a king meant someone was trying to shame a king into changing his decision on some legal matter of disagreement. Thus, fasting by ascetics has clear pagan origins. Yet fasting had been around for centuries. Fasting sometimes took place to promote something. Even Jesus told his disciples that certain demons could be caste out only by fasting.

Fertility, earth, sun, fire and water were all important parts of pagan ideology and polytheism. The king was a vital figure in the ideology. Furthermore, sacred groves were foci for rituals. Hence, it will be seen later that Patrick challenged the king during a ritual at a sacred grove and roused serious trouble for himself. The pagan belief system was not based on any intellectual framework and worked on fear (Mytum 1992).

AD 432 was the opening year of Patrick's Irish mission. Reigning at the time was a great pagan king named Loiguire. Loiguire reigned in Tara, the capital of Ireland. The king had around him druids and seers who were also fortune tellers, sorcerers, inventors of every evil craft according to paganism. They were able to know and see everything before it happened. The king had two leading druids and seers, Lochra and Ronal (Bieler 1979) who, by their magical art, prophesied frequently that a foreign way of life was about to come to them. It would put to an end the traditional native way of life (Bieler 1986). They also prophesied about the man that would do this. They were actually foreshadowing Patrick.

Patrick unknowingly challenges the king when on his first Easter in Ireland he decides to celebrate the feast in the plain of Brega near Tara. His lighting of the sacred fire in the Easter vigil night coincided with the kindling of the new fire of the rite of spring a prerogative held only by the king. The rival fire aroused the anger of the king. The druids warn the king, however, to stay away from the man and they will handle the situation. Thus, the druids put Patrick through numerous tests to actually pit his God against their gods. Patrick survives the various tests put forth by the druids including drinking poisonous wine. During the testing, a druid is killed (Bieler 1986). Eventually, the king sees that his powers and influence cannot overcome Patrick's strengths in character and spiritual might. Thus, he comes to a point in his own spiritual awareness where he realizes Patrick's God has a higher power than his gods, and he converts to Christianity. As he converts, the people of Ireland are drawn into this way of Christianity, and eventually they follow the king and convert. It is not uncommon during these times, that the people follow the religion of the king. Thus, Patrick begins his journey into converting and preaching in Ireland. Christianity became a major influence on the times, and flourishing classes of native intellectuals, jurists, poets, musicians and craftsmen converted to Christianity (Bitel 1990).

Influence of Irish Monasticism

When Patrick came to Ireland he brought with him the Lerins tradition, that which he experienced under Honoratus: discipline of the will; Latin; and Holy Writ. Yet, the deficiencies of his own education and the condition of affairs in the country did not favor the rapid learning of these. His instruction to converts and young men destined for ecclesiastical orders was kept simple and probably based on Holy Writ or the Bible. To enable them to read this, they were given elementary grounding in Latin. When they progressed sufficiently to be able to read the psalter (psalms), and had acquired a general mastery of Catholic doctrine and practice (the lex catholica) they were ready to join the missionaries and assist in the work of evangelization (Ryan 1931).

Patrick, himself, did not found any monasteries but his most important work next to baptizing, confirming and ordaining clergy was foundations of churches (Ryan 1931). Patrick was chief bishop of the Irish Church and supreme local ruler. His first foundation was at Armagh. It is likely but not certain that the "family" to whose care Patrick confided a church was monastic (Ryan 1931). The churches were placed inside an

ecclesiastical enclosure. This enclosure looked like a little fort but was really a little community. Groups of people were put in charge of these enclosures and it is quite possible that the "families" were, as said before, monastic communities.
He was an architect in mind if nothing else. Patrick, according to record, allowed seven score feet to the ecclesiastical enclosures that were built. Twenty-seven feet to large houses, 17 feet to kitchens and 7 feet to the oratory. A normal settlement was 140 feet in diameter surrounded by a high wall of earth. It usually consisted of the three buildings where clerics dwelt, a church or oratory where Mass was celebrated, and a kitchen. "And it was thus that the houses of the ecclesiastical establishment were built always" (Ryan 1931, p. 89).

These dimensions lent themselves to a monastic settlement quite easily. They might not have started out as monasteries but, in time, some of these became monasteries. Monks, nuns, and religious matrons were regarded by Patrick as the fairest fruits of his missionary labors (Ryan 1931). These little settlements had a manner of life inside that was severe. The discipline was strict because of the younger candidates for orders who received religious and intellectual training within these settlements. They did not profess to be monastic but would differ little in externals. These little settlements were not unusual to Ireland of the time because "hearth and family" became the Irish social focus. Networks of relationships that linked one family to another formed the building block of Irish society. Patrick saw to it that the church was set up in similar fashion (Bitel 1990).

As mentioned earlier, Patrick did not found monasteries but rather, influenced others who did found the monasteries. The monks were an important, though minor, following of Patrick. Great saints like St. Finnian and Columkill (Columba) founded monasteries as did Gildas. The monasteries of Ireland such as Iona, Lindisfarne and Tallaght show themselves throughout the literature as places of prominent learning.

Following the sixth century, there was a great development of monasteries in Ireland. The monk, Gildas, was probably the one that influenced monasteries the most in Ireland. Monasteries became the homes of learning. Monks were the teachers of the world and went forth as missionary preachers into all European nations (Morse, vol. 17, p. 6151). As said before, it was not common yet that monks took a vow of stability where they remained in one house always. That is a discipline more common now and came up much later in history for reasons and purposes related to later historical events.

Despite his conversion success among the ordinary people, Patrick was very pleased to know that the vocation of so many to the stricter way of life was being embraced:

> For Patrick, then, it was much that a nation like the Irish, ignorant of the Almighty and addicted to the worship of idols, should become a people of the Lord and be called children of God, but it was a veritable triumph when he could point out that sons of the Scots and daughters of the chieftains are seen to become monks and virgins of Christ.
>
> (Ryan 1931, p. 91)

Patrick did not engage most of his time in monastic issues. He was busy with the church of the every day people. Only in one case did Patrick appoint an abbot (a head of a monastery). He generally gave spiritual care to bishops and priests but he approved of a stricter way of life and encouraged prelates to embrace it. He was shocked, though pleased, at the amount of women desiring a consecrated life. He encouraged them to be placed in small groups close to the church in an enclosure to assist clergy rather than live in the monasteries (Ryan 1931).

Irish Monasticism and Schooling

Initially, the monasteries educated those who were destined to become servants of the church. Monks seem to have come from well-to-do families who could afford a good education, and could afford to send their young sons to the monasteries for individualized learning. It is possible that this refers to "dowries" that religious orders often ask of entering candidates. It also could relate to cost of traveling to get to the monasteries particularly if the candidate came from the continent. As time went on, however, news spread of the scholarly nature of the schools and the discipline of life at the schools, and people from all of Europe particularly Britain, began sending their children to Ireland to be educated by the monks.

As a rule, the boy destined for a religious career was handed over to a cleric or hermit between ages five and seven. He had made some progress in letters before he sought admission among the monastic brethren. Study in his early, youthful years was paramount for the future monk. He would study grammar, rhetoric, geometry and Scripture before departing his parents home to live permanently among the monks (Ryan 1931). "To the Irish mind an illiterate monk was a contradiction in terms" (Ryan 1931, p. 378).

The Bible held a high rank in the monastic system of education. Once the boy had mastered the alphabet, a psalter (the psalms) whole or in part was placed in his hands. When he was able to read the psalms he committed them to memory. After the psalms would come other portions of Sacred Scripture, like St. Matthew and the Acts of the Apostles. A more advanced course, suitable to the adolescent would be the twelve minor prophets. The monks

spent a lot of their time in studying Scripture and writing commentaries. Peculiar Irish tricks and mannerisms survived over the centuries in documents found from as far back as the seventh and eighth centuries.

> One is the passion for analyzing, distinguishing, sub-dividing; another is the pleasure in numbers, many of which are held to have some figurative significance. Although neither of these characteristics is exclusively Irish in origin, they were carried by the Irish to extremes.
> (Hughes 1987, XVII p. 49)

Monastic studies for the monk-to-be had three main branches:

1. Study of the Latin Language;
2. Study of the ecclesiastical rules or theology including dogma, moral, canon law and ritual;
3. Study of the Sacred Scripture especially of hidden meanings.
(Ryan 1931, p. 378)

These reflect the initial studies a young man took on to become a monk. The actually "schooling" included other subjects. However, excelling in Sacred Scripture was an honor and the bearer of this honor earned the title of "sui letters" (Doctor of Letters of Sacred Scripture) and ranked among those who reached the highest degree in traditional native learning. They were classified as "ollam" and chief scholars of the nation (Ryan 1931).

Disciples of Lerins, the place where Patrick was educated in the monastic ways, carried the educational system of that monastery to the monasteries of Ireland, perhaps at Patrick's invitation as mentioned before. They emphasized Holy Scripture, Latin, theology and the study of profane letters. Learning of letters was a matter of course in the monasteries. It is clear from the peculiar way that Latin was pronounced in Ireland and was reflected in the native language that the Irish monks had the Britons as their chief Latin teachers (Ryan 1931). Since the clergy and monks succeeded druids as philosophers and theologians of the nation, it was taken for granted they should devote themselves to study. To counteract the hollowness they found in the pagan moral teachings that many had been exposed to in the past, the monks saw to it that their pupils practiced what they were taught and lived according to the laws of God and the church. According to one of the early monastic rules, the relationship between young and old monks was influential and hierarchical. Young monks were to seek out an ecnaid craibthech which was a devote sage, not necessarily the abbot, to guide him rather than trusting his own immature self-discipline. The novice was to revere older men and obey them. One of the most important relationships between older and younger monks was that of anmchairde or one of "soul friendship". The older monk became the younger's confessor and foster-father type (Bitel 1990).

The ceili de (clients of God), reforming ascetics of the 8th and 9th centuries, placed great importance on confession and on the relationship between monk and anmchairde. The bond between a monk and his confessor was strong enough to be maintained over great distances. However, they were able to switch confessors as they grew older and their needs changed (Bitel 1990). As well as confessors, these soul friends acted as the young monks' tutors.

Zeal for studies was worked into the Irish monastic system. It was a union of hard study and hard discipline. Monks were expected to apply themselves not only to religion but also to the cultivation of the intellect. When they, likewise, took up study of the native language and literature, their extraordinary position in the life of the country was assured.

It only seems likely that if they were considered the intellectuals of the time that their influence on society would be great. Eventually, the Irish monastic schools became attractive as great halls of learning for the outside world.

Irish Monastic Schools

With the dawn of Christianity in Ireland and through the Middle Ages there were two distinct systems of learning in Ireland:

1. The Bardic Schools
2. The Monastic Schools

The Bardic schools were pagan in origin and been around for centuries. They were considered secular in nature and trained poets, historians and lawyers. They focused their curriculum on the poetry and history of Ireland. The lawyers were taught to concentrate on the Brehon Code which was a code of laws that dated back centuries and even Patrick lived by them (Dowling, p. 9). According to tradition, the laws were revised and codified in 438 AD by a committee of nine appointed by King Laoghaire at the suggestion of St. Patrick (Graham 1923). The Bardic schools seemed to be attended by those "desiring a liberal education" (Graham 1923, p. 74). There are many passages in Irish history that note that the Irish had books before the introduction of Christianity. Both Bardic tales and tales of St. Patrick indicate that when Patrick came to Ireland he found literary and professional people. All of them were pagan--druids, poets, historians (Graham 1923). It can be proposed that they were educated at the Bardic schools.

As the monastic schools became popular, there did not seem to be much rivalry between the two school systems since many monks in their earlier days before

conversion were, perhaps, educated at the Bardic schools. In various documents, it is seen that some Saints, who were later associated with monasteries, defended the Bardic school system because they themselves were educated as Bards. The monks themselves loved poetry and were often influenced by Bardic poets. Research tells us that St. Columkill (Columba) had practical experience of the Bards as teachers. After he spent some time at the monastic schools and having been ordained a deacon, he placed himself under the instruction of an aged Bard named Gemman (Graham 1923). The monastery schools emphasized religion and the Sacred Scripture as well as classical learning but the religious aspect was the primary emphasis while the Bardic schools were more literary.

English students frequented Ireland for the purpose of study in the monastic schools particularly in the seventh century. These were supplied with books and supported free of charge with their studies. Holy Writ was the chief subject. "Though Britain in those days had her own great schools, nevertheless many of her sons crossed to Ireland to pursue their studies there" (Dowling 1971, p. 25). They sought education from learned and pious men who led an austere life.

The Brehon Laws made provision for the education of girls as well as the boys. The convents usually took care to educate the girls, and the convents often educated males until age six when they were sent to monastic schools (Graham 1923). It seemed that after that age, coeducation was frowned upon, but

> we read that one of the daughters of the King of Cualann was sent to Cloard to learn to read her Psalms (in Latin), and...that women taught in this school.
>
> (Graham 1923, p. 83)

It is really unknown if there was a coeducational system in many monastic schools, but some Saints were "'strong in faith (and) they feared not the breath of temptation'" (Graham 1923, p. 83). In other words, some monks did not mind if women were at the school. So it is quite possible that in some schools women taught and girls attended.

Three sections of the monastic school were vital:

1. classroom
2. scriptorium, and
3. library.

The center of educational and intellectual life was the classroom. However, it was not uncommon for private instruction to take place with the monks in their cells (rooms). This was a very acceptable form of educating.

Though some books existed in Ireland, the schools had to produce much of their own. Irish monks preserved native language on vellum. They copied down traditional poetry and prose and laws as well as more orthodox ecclesiastical texts and lives of the saints. Monks composed or recorded almost all of these texts in the 7th and 8th century (Bitel 1990). This work took place in the scriptorium where, in silence, the younger members of the community and the students sat there writing out and multiplying books either from dictation or copying (Graham 1923). Sometimes, little human notes between students and monks or companions were jotted in the margins. These were notes carried on in "sotto voce" to evade the rules of silence (Graham 1923).

The libraries had no shelves or rows of books. The books were kept in satchels hung on pegs or racks round the room. Each satchel containing one or more volumes was labeled on the outside. The books were made of parchment and those of greater value were leather bound (Graham 1923). Vellum or parchment, pens, ink, wax tablet were all made by the monks. The wax tablets were usually used first to learn on and then the material was transposed to the vellum. Sometimes the scribes made these.

The head scribe was usually a scholarly monk but also known for a skill in penmanship. The Irish script was based on a Roman/Latin influence of four-fold organization and called "Ogham" (Mytum 1992, p. 54).

The teaching and learning were closely related. It seems that sometimes teachers were still students themselves, and were being educated by instructors in the grades above them and then they, in turn, would go teach students in lower grades. Education seemed graduated and probably lasted from age six to twenty- six. Latin and the native language were the vernacular of the classroom (Graham 1923). Research indicates that there was much discussion and questioning in the classroom along with a great emphasis on literature. Some scholars say Greek was not present in monastic learning but others claim that the study of Holy Scripture would be insufficient without the study of Greek. Some say that it was enough to know the Greek alphabet to understand the Greek notations found in scripture and that little evidence can be found that Greek was studied. Their claim is that the culture of learning came from Lerins through Britain and in Lerins the study of Greek did not exist (Ryan 1931). Others say that "the Greek views in philosophy and theology appealed in an especial manner to Irish scholars of this period" (Graham 1923, p. 146).

What the monastic schools were trying to do was combine the old and new cultures of Ireland and become both Irish and Christian. They did not want to abolish everything but did want to emphasize the Christian component:

> Thus the native laws, literature,

> music, and art became the handmaids of Christianity. The same liberal and enlightened conception of education would explain the success with which the Irish monks pursued the study of pagan classics...the Christianity of the Irish monk was sufficiently robust to prevent any of those scruples of conscience which were said to have haunted the continental monk who loved his Virgil.
>
> (Graham 1923, p.123)

Other subjects taught were music, art [Around the 8th and 9th century the monks added illumination using brilliant colors in their books to create elaborate designs. The Book of Kells shows an elaborate penmanship and illumination. One author says, "'Ireland may justly be proud of the Book of Kells...the art of ornamenting ...had a perfection almost miraculous in Ireland' (Graham 1923, p.159)."], stone carving (The Celtic Cross), geography, mathematics and science with emphasis on computation and astronomy.

There once was a great debate going on among some people about when Easter truly was. Easter was originally pagan in nature and centered around the winter solstice and the arrival of spring. It was based on the study of astronomy. Because of the controversy, the monks became scholars of astronomy in trying to prove the correct answer. Consequently, many of the Irish monastic schools became known for their strength in astronomy.

When monks traveled and found houses on the continent, they set up schools, therefore the monastic schools were not just in Ireland. The schools are acknowledged by scholars as some of the best in the wider fields of scholarship and that Ireland was known as a university to the continent (Graham 1923): "...these schools were indeed the greatest educational factor of early medieval times,...they were, in reality, the universities of the West, the lights that illumined the (so called) Dark Ages" (Graham 1923, p. 193).

Conclusion

In this paper which is a study that is still evolving, I have tried to reflect the rise of monasticism with snap shots of asceticism, its basic definition in the life of the early centuries AD, and the key men and women who embraced it. Having a "piece" of the heritage, gives one a richer view of the monasteries and the life of the community inside. I have attempted to note that without Patrick, Christianity would probably have been delayed in Ireland. With this delay, would have come a delay in the rise of monasticism in that country which in turn would have delayed monastic education. One could presuppose that the "schooling" would have taken place elsewhere as monasteries did exist on the continent. However, the Irish schools seemed to win favor with the continent and people sent their sons and, in some cases, daughters to be educated by the Irish monks.

I have tried to show how the curriculum within the walls of the school was enriching and yet diverse. Though Holy Scripture and Latin were key subjects in the schools, art, music, literature, geography, mathematics, science and possibly Greek were also taught. Some of the schools became known for their strength in astronomy after the monks had to defend an issue surrounding the celebration of Easter. Gifted scribes taught the students "Ogham", a special script of Roman/Latin origin, and how to make vellum on which to write. Around the eighth and ninth centuries, the monks added illumination using brilliant colors in their books which brought us The Book of Kells. Stone carving brought us the Celtic Cross. Truly, with discipline, Holy Scripture, and the scholarly endeavors of the Irish monastic schools, they became known as the universities of the West that illumined the Dark Ages.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bieler, L. (1986). *Studies on the Life and Legend of St.* Patrick. London: Variorum Reprints.

Bieler, L. (1979). *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh.* Dublin: The Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies.

Bitel, L. (1990). *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlements and Christian Community in Early Ireland.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Dowling, P.J. (1971). *A History of Irish Education.* Cork: The Mercier Press.

Graham, H. (1923). *The Early Irish Monastic Schools.* Dublin: The Talbot Press Limited.

Hughes, K. (1987). *Church and Society in Ireland AD 400-1200.* London: Variorum Reprints.

Hughes, K. (1966). *The Church in Early Irish Society.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Morse, J.L. (ed). *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Reference Encyclopedia,* (vol 17).

Mytum, H. (1992). *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland.* London: Routledge.

Ryan, J. (1931). *Irish Monasticism.* Cork: The Talbot Press Limited.

Sheils, W.J. and Wood D. (1989). *The Churches, Ireland and the Irish.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.