

LEAVING CERTIFICATE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICE
Draft Sample Lesson Plan for Teaching Elements of the Syllabus

Unit Three SECTION I: RELIGION: THE IRISH EXPERIENCE
Part Three Christianity in Ireland

Syllabus Objectives	<p><i>Knowledge</i></p> <p>§ be aware of some of the features associated with religion in Ireland before the coming of Patrick</p> <p>§ trace the development of religion in Ireland through the study of one or two key moments in that development</p> <p><i>Understanding</i></p> <p>§ understand that religion in Ireland is of ancient origin, has developed over thousands of years and is still developing</p> <p>§ be aware of the particular contribution of Christianity and its denominational expressions to Irish culture and society</p> <p>§ understand the meaning of inculturation and its relevance for the Irish experience of religion</p> <p><i>Skills</i></p> <p>§ identify evidence of religious belief in ancient and contemporary Ireland</p> <p>§ show how the Christian message was inculturated in the Irish context</p> <p>§ recognise changing patterns in religious belief in Ireland</p> <p><i>Attitudes</i></p> <p>§ appreciation of the Irish religious heritage and the contribution of Irish religion to the development of religion in Europe and elsewhere</p>
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Topic 3.1 The coming of Patrick to Ireland

Procedure

Introduction - Christianity in Europe at the time of Patrick

Review a time line on the history of the Christian Church from 1st to the 5th centuries.

Or Research Assignment: Christianity in Europe at the time of Patrick

Sources: The Irish Experience – J.R. Walsh Veritas; etc.

Discuss: On this timeline when did Patrick come to Ireland?
 What was Patrick’s background before he came to Ireland?

Take feedback and conclude that Patrick was a product of the Romano-British Church and a member of the Celto-Roman gentry. It is held traditionally that he was born about 385 but many modern scholars argue for a later birth date and for a totally fifth-century career for the Apostle of Ireland. His father Calpornius was both a deacon of the Church and a decurion - a hereditary local government official. A grandfather, Potitus, was a Christian priest.

the ‘inculturation’ of Christianity in Ireland

Brainstorm students on the meaning of the word ‘inculturation’

Take feedback from students and recall that when sending missionaries to England, Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604 CE) laid down the principle that they should not abolish pre-Christian practices when these could be adapted to the Christian message and given a new meaning. ‘No one,’ he said, ‘can doubt the impossibility of changing everything at once in rude and untrained minds.’ Patrick and his fellow missionaries seem to have followed this principle over a hundred years earlier.

Discuss: What examples are there of inculturation from the time of Patrick?

Or

Distribute briefing cards from Student work: Inculturation and give students time to read the information on their card and explain how it describes an example of inculturation.

Take feedback and conclude explaining that Patrick's policy was one of 'inculturation' wherever possible he attempted to adapt the values and practices of the pagan Irish to Christianity.

- The waters of baptism replaced sacred streams and rivers, springs were given Christian respectability as holy wells and shrines in groves of trees were adopted by the new religionists and adapted to their own purposes.
- The Croagh Patrick pilgrimage on 'Reek Sunday' replaced dancing at Lughnasa and Samhain became the great annual commemoration of the dead with Christian cemeteries taking the place of burial mounds.
- The new clergy was soon to find a privileged position having dislodged (or ordained) the druids
- The shamrock (the lesser yellow trefoil) with its three leaves was particularly significant for Celts since groups of three had especial importance for them. They viewed the world around them in triplets: the heavens, the earth, the underworld; earth, air and water; past, present and future; and so on. Their society was organised in a tripartite hierarchy of kings, nobles and freemen. They regarded the numbers three, three-squared and three-cubed as sacred; and so they were more open than most to the possibility of their supreme divinity having a triple identity. They already had three-faced stone idols. The Gaels were, consequently, more open than pagans who were not Celts to being persuaded of the truth of the central Christian belief in the Holy Trinity.

Assignment: Research **one** of the following :

 | the cult of saints | pattern days | pilgrimage | charms and cures

or Interview older people about a local holy well and customs associated with it.

On the basis of your research explain how this is an example of pre-Christian devotion and practice.

Discuss the question: Do Christian churches today take inculturation seriously?

Higher Level - the development and characteristics of 'Irish Christianity'

Although there were no cities or towns in fifth-century Ireland Patrick and other evangelists would seem to have set up local Churches under the care of bishops, priests and deacons. At the same time monasticism was becoming more popular in the island. Irish monasticism was derived from the primitive religious houses of Egypt, the monastery of Lérins off the southern coast of France and some of the fifth-century foundations in Britain. The monasteries themselves came to be viewed as cities. Monasticism thrived in the sixth and seventh centuries and played a hugely significant part in the life of the Irish Church.

Research Assignment:

Pick one of the following people and research their life and work under the following headings:

- Background
- Calling to religious life
- Prayer in their religious community
- Work of their religious community
- Mission
- Búite of Monasterboice (d. 521)
- Enda of Aran (d. c. 540)
- Finnian of Clonard (d. 549)
- Ciarán of Clonmacnoise (d. 555)
- Brendan of Clonfert (d. c. 577)
- Colum Cille of Derry (d. 597)
- Canice of Aghaboe (d. 600)
- Fintan of Clonenagh (d. 603)
- Kevin of Glendalough (d. 618)
- Finbarr of Cork (d. c. 623)
- Brigit of Kildare (d.c. 520)
- Gobnet of Ballyvourney (d. c. 520)
- Moninne of Faughart and Killeavy (d. c. 545)
- Ita of Killeedy (d. c. 570)

Take feedback from the research assignment and conclude with reference to the following points: Irish monasticism was to a certain degree original, in the way it combined elements from earlier institutions and emphasised some rather than others of these elements e.g.

- combination of apostolic and monastic ideals and duties
- prayerful (use of the Divine Office and frequent resort to the confessional)
- ascetic
- engaged in evangelisation - Colum Cille, Columban etc.
- stressed intense study & craftsmanship-calligraphy, book binding and metalwork etc.

Irish (Celtic) Christianity has its own spirituality, that is, its own experiential vision that embraces relationships with God, self others and the world.

Outcomes:

- describe the pattern of Christian belief and practice in Europe at the time of Patrick
- give two examples of the inculturation of Christianity in Ireland
- *Higher Level* - identify two key moments in the development of 'Irish Christianity' and explain their significance
- *Higher Level* - name two characteristics of 'Irish Christianity'.

Resources which teachers have suggested include:

De Paor, L. (1993; paperback 1996) *Saint Patrick's World*

Hanson, R. P. C. 'The Mission of Saint Patrick' in Mackey, J. P. ed., *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, pp. 22-44.

Loan, P. (1980) *The Holy Wells of Ireland* Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Smythe

Ó Duinn, S. (2000) *Where Three Streams Meet* Dublin: Columba pp. 231-259, 283-387, 308-312.

Walsh and Bradley, (1993 second edition) *A History of the Irish Church*, Dublin: Columba,

Corish, P. J. (1972) 'The Christian Mission' in *A History of Irish Catholicism* Vol. I., part 3 (gen. ed. P. J. Corish)

The Irish Celts worshipped a horned god similar to the stag-god Cernunnos venerated by the Celts in Gaul. Cernunnos was sometimes equated with Mercury, Mars or Jupiter and is linked with wealth and prosperity, warfare, fecundity and virility. One of his emblems is the serpent, universally recognised as a phallic symbol. The medieval carving of Saint Patrick from Faughart, County Louth, now in the National Museum of Ireland, has the saint trampling on a serpent.

The Celts believed that rivers and springs possessed supernatural properties. In the light of the Christian symbolism of water, (e.g. in Baptism), this belief was adapted to the new faith, and the result is that many springs that may once have been places of pagan ritual have survived as 'holy wells' down to our own time.

The assigning of the date 1 February to Imbolc is as a calendar convenience as making Samhain fall on 1 November and Lughnasa on 1 August, but the placing of the feast day of St Brigit of Kildare (d.c. 520) on the same date as Imbolc is an example of how the reconciliation of old and new was achieved. The early Christians transferred many of the attributes of the Celtic goddess Brigit to the cult and legends surrounding the Christian holy woman of the same name. The folklore survivals of Lá Fhéile Bríde as practised until very recently in Gaeltacht areas combine pagan and religious elements. The religious invitation to the saint to enter and bless houses conceals an old urgent plea for the spirit of spring to come and banish the dark miseries of winter. (The veneration of St Brigit at Kildare in the middle ages included the tending by nine virgins of her perpetual sacred fire. Fires were an important part of mid-winter rituals.

The Gaelic *áes dána* (men of art) had a special honoured position in pre-Christian society. They were bards, poet-seers, scholars, physicians etc. The druids who had some responsibility for ritual and religious ceremony were also likely to have been members of this order because of their practical or intellectual skills, their understanding of astronomy etc. Prepared for their positions by up to twenty years of study; the druids were respected for their skill, learning and magic and the poets feared for their satires and lampoons. Members of the *áes dána* were recognised and protected nationally and not merely locally. It was advisable - indeed essential - for the bringers of the Christian faith to establish friendly relations with the members of the *áes dána*. The many wonder tales associated with Patrick have him confront and neutralise the druids. That he and his colleagues were successful is made clear by the fact that, within a hundred years of his death, not only was Christianity the paramount faith of the Country but the system of Irish monasticism was well established and Colum Cille had left for Iona. By 575 the poets had been officially recognised but reduced in power and status at the Convention of Druim Ceatt.

Colum Cille, the other major native saint, survives in tradition as much as a Celtic warrior demi-god, prophet, seer and miracle worker as a Christian monk-missionary. Certain superstitions cling to his memory - the use of Gartan clay in homes to prevent fire or untimely death and of Tory clay for rodent-control; a night spent lying on Leac na Cumha (the flagstone of loneliness) as an antidote to homesickness. These customs are part of a rich folk tradition of charms. Folk medicine has cures for most maladies - coughs (an infusion of whin-juice), sore throats (a poultice of salt), boils (nettle tea), styes (piercing with nine gooseberry thorns), etc. Folk veterinary medicine has many cures, mostly preventative - the throwing of the after-birth over the cow after calving, for example. Certain families are reputed to have cures for specific ailments and these are handed down from one generation to the next.

Three of the great Celtic seasonal festivals of Samhain, Imbolc, Bealtine and Lughnasa were in time depaganised and adapted to suit the Church calendar.

- Samhain became without much forcing the period of All Saints and All Souls, and the name is retained in Oíche Shamhna, the Irish name for Hallowe'en, with its bonfires and feasting
- Lughnasa was Christianised as Lammas, a festival of first fruits and also 'Reek' Sunday, the occasion of the pilgrimage to the top of Croagh Patrick. There is a tradition that towards the end of his life Patrick made a retreat of forty days on top of the reek during which he was assailed by demons, but he stayed, as the story tells, until he won from God the right to be a kind of defence counsel for Irish souls at the Last Judgement. At the end of his ordeal a myriad of white birds circled his head, the number of souls he would save from hell.

(Adapted from Religion: The Irish Experience - J.R. Walsh)

Topic 3.3 Religion, spirituality and monasticism

Procedure

Introduction - the hermit tradition

Brainstorm students on the meaning of the word 'hermit'.

Take feedback and conclude by explaining that towards the end of the third century, as the likelihood of martyrdom lessened with an end to the active persecution of the Church, Christian men and women sought opportunities to live by Our Lord's double precept of love towards God and one's neighbour (Mk 12:29-31) through contemplation and self-denial as hermit. (The word hermit describes those devout men and women who withdraw from the world to live a solitary life of silence, prayer and mortification.) The word 'hermit' is derived from the Greek *erémia*, 'desert.' The Latin word for 'desert' is *desertum*, and from this comes the Irish 'dísert,' 'hermitage.' From the beginning of the fourth century hermits lived in the deserts of Egypt, Syria and Palestine. It is probable that the idea of living as a hermit came to Ireland from Egypt via Gaul and Britain. The Irish placename 'Dísert,' 'Dysert,' and placenames of which 'Dísert' is a component, for example, *Dísert Diarmata*, Castledermot, bear witness to the existence of hermits and hermitages in ancient Ireland. Monks in Ireland usually lived in community, but it seems that some monasteries did have a *dísert* nearby where individual monks could live as hermits. Hermits who were renowned for their sanctity often attracted disciples. One of the features of the Ceilí Dé reform was the growth in the hermit tradition.

Assignment: Research the life story of a hermit e.g. St. Anthony *or* St. Pachomius
Sources: The Irish Experience – J.R. Walsh Veritas; etc.

Discuss: How is St. Anthony story and example of someone living according to the hermit tradition?

Take feedback and explain that from this hermit tradition evolved what we call monasticism or the religious life. Its essence is living in community that implies the existence of a rule to which all assent. For the early monks and nuns the main characteristics of their rule were poverty, chastity and obedience. Monasticism, which had developed in the Eastern Church, came to the West. Martin of Tours founded the first monastery in Gaul c. 360CE. John Cassian (d. 435CE), a monk trained in Palestine and Egypt, established two monasteries at Marseilles, one for men and another for women. Cassian's writings and his form of monastic life greatly influenced Celtic monasticism of later centuries. Virginity and the monastic ideal were highly valued. The cult of the martyrs and saints grew, and pilgrimages to their shrines were popular.

The community in monastic Ireland & the monastery as centre of learning, worship and healing

Read Student Work: Clonmacnoise

Or Research Assignment: Monastic life in Ireland

Sources: The Irish Experience – J.R. Walsh Veritas; etc.

Research a monastery from the period 600-900 e.g. Glendalough, Monasterboice or Gougane Barra. e.g. monastic sites in Ireland - www.goireland.com

When students have completed the research take feedback and explain that Irish monasteries were normally built inside ring-forts and consisted of clusters of little huts around a small church. In the typical Celtic monastery these huts would have included kitchen, dining room, library (or scriptorium), washhouse, guesthouse and cells. Throughout most of the island these buildings were made of wood and wattle-and-daub, impermanent structures that have disappeared without trace. Occasionally, however, where timber was scarce, stone was used and so some early monastic buildings, like those on Sceilg Mhíchíl, Innismurray and Duvillaun, have survived.

The guest-house, in Latin *hospitium* (note the link with the word 'hospital'), where travellers, the poor and the sick were received, was one of the most important buildings of the monastic settlement. Brigid of Kildare is noted for her care of the poor and the hungry, and her concern for the sick is shown by the

miracles she is said to have performed for a man who was blind and for a girl who was dumb. Colum Cille, who was famous as a scribe of biblical texts and as a teacher of scripture, also worked miracles in favour of the sick.

Discuss: In what ways did the presence of a monastery contribute to the life of people in its locality?

Take feedback and identify the ways in which it was a centre of learning, worship and healing.

Irish founders of monasteries in Europe

- an overview of the movement into Europe
- one founder: his life and work

It has been claimed that religious who lived the contemplative life converted half of Europe.

Discuss: Is this statement true?

Take feedback and conclude that from the sixth century onwards Irish monks left their native land and went into exile. Going into exile was for many of them a form of voluntary penance. But having left their homeland they were also ready to get involved in preaching the Gospel among the unbelievers. From the end of the eighth century many scholarly monks left Ireland to pursue their learned activity away from the threat of Viking disturbances. Among the best known of those who left their homeland are Colum Cille and Columbanus.

Research Assignment: Profile the life and work of an Irish monastery in Europe
Sources: The Irish Experience – J.R. Walsh Veritas; etc.

For an account of their lives see Walsh and Bradley, *A History of the Irish Church*, pp. 73-82 and 93-104; see p. 107 for the story of St. Gall, who had been a companion of Columbanus. See also T. Ó Fiach, 'Irish Monks on the Continent,' in Mackey, J. P. ed., *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, pp. 101-139.

Outcomes

- identify the origin of the hermit tradition in Ireland
- outline the lifestyle of one follower of the hermit tradition in the early Irish church
- account for the regard given to the hermit tradition
- describe the significance of community in monastic Ireland
- describe the role of the monastery as they became centres of learning, worship, and healing, naming a monastery associated with each activity
- explain the reasons for the move into Europe
- name three Irish founders of monasteries in Europe and monasteries they founded
- give a brief biography of one Irish founder of a monastery in Europe, outlining the significant moments of his life and work.

Resources which teachers have suggested include:

Healy, G. *Travelling Through Time*, pp. 30-38

Brockie, G. & Walsh, R. (1989) *Focus 1 on the Past*, Dublin: Gill & MacMillan pp. 167-186.

O'Dwyer, P. (1995) *Towards a History of Irish Spirituality* Dublin: Columba p. 20 -lists several 6th cent monasteries.

Walsh and Bradley, *A History of the Irish Church*, pp. 58-59 outline the daily life of a monk.

O'Dwyer, pp. 26-27, draws on the monastic rules of St Columbanus to give an idea of what life was like in Columban monasteries. The Rules of many other monasteries were influenced by those of Columbanus. For a more complete picture of Irish monastic life see Ryan, J. (1972) *The Monastic Institute*, in *A History of Irish Catholicism* Vol. I., part 2; gen. ed. P. J. Corish Dublin: Gill & MacMillan pp. 49-63.

www.goireland.com

Walsh and Bradley, *A History of the Irish Church*, pp. 59-61.

K. Hughes, 'The Golden Age of Early Christian Ireland' in Moody and Martin eds., *The Course of Irish History*, pp. 76-90.

Student Work: CLONMACNOISE

Clonmacnoise is situated on an esker ridge overlooking a large area of bog through which the river Shannon flows. Its location in earlier times was literally at the crossroads of Ireland where the north/south artery of communication, the Shannon, crossed the major east/west route-way along the gravel ridges of the glacial eskers.

Clonmacnoise is a very old church site, situated south of Athlone, near the centre of Ireland. Its location contributed to its development as a major centre of religion, learning, trade, craftsmanship and political influence. Clonmacnoise has a large collection of grave-slabs dating from the 8th to the 12th century, as well as one of Ireland's finest surviving High Crosses. In addition, the monastery contains many religious buildings.

The Round Tower at Clonmacnoise, though missing a large part of its top, is a fine example of a round tower or freestanding belfry so typical of Irish church sites. It was built by Turlough O' Connor and O' Malone, the successor of St. Ciaran in 1124.

There are several churches in Clonmacnoise. The smallest church is called Temple Ciaran and is reputed to be the burial place of St. Ciaran. It measures only 3.8 by 2.8 metres internally.

By taking a look at some of the important times in the life of Clonmacnoise we can see why it became and remains today a place of religious significance.

543 to 549 A.D.	St. Ciaran sets up the church of Clonmacnoise sometime between these dates. Ciaran dies within a year after the foundation of the church.
585 to 599 A.D.	St. Columbia (Colmcille) visits Clonmacnoise.
842 and 845 A.D.	Raids on Clonmacnoise took place by the Vikings who had settled around Lough Ree. They burned the wooden churches in the monastery.

In more recent times Clonmacnoise went through some important developments:

1955	The Representative Body of the Church of Ireland presented the graveyard, containing the main buildings, to the State.
1969	The dedication of the New Sanctuary at Clonmacnoise. A Visitor Centre was later built, to house the crosses while copies of the crosses were put standing on their original sites.
1979	Pope John Paul II visited Clonmacnoise.
TODAY	Clonmacnoise continues to be a place of pilgrimage.

(Adapted from the website <http://www.iol.ie/~mcgibbon/clon/clontime.html> and Clonmacnoise Visitors' Guide, Duchas The Heritage Service)

Questions:

1. Where is Clonmacnoise?
2. What is to be found there?
3. Why is Clonmacnoise a place of special significance for people today?