Approaching the Past

HISTORICAL ANTHROPOLOGY THROUGH IRISH CASE STUDIES

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P. H. Gulliver

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The Languages of Belief: Nineteenth-Century Religious Discourse in Southwest Donegal

LAWRENCE J. TAYLOR

Different Voices: Competing Religious Narratives

There was a Protestant [gaelic—literally, “foreign”] woman in Glen who was inhospitable toward the locals [gaelic—literally, “the Gaels”] who were going on Columcille’s tura [local pilgrimage to a holy well]. The cairns [piles of stones which marked the pilgrimage route] were on a piece of her land, and she went and broke every bit of bottle and glass she could find and threw it on the cairns, to prevent the Gaels who would be doing the pilgrimage from crossing her piece of earth. She fell sick. When she was dying, she was barking the whole time until she died as if she were a dog.2

This short narrative was one of hundreds of legends gathered in the 1930s and 1940s from men and women then in their seventies and eighties living in southwest Donegal. Many of the stories related individual and social dramas with religious themes and actors—saints, holy wells, and powerful priests. All such figures or places displayed power, by punishing of enemies, as in the preceding case, or by rewarding the believer with a cure. Gathered by a native-born folklorist and now stored in the National Folklore Archive, this corpus of texts constitutes a rare and potentially fertile resource for a historical

ethnography of the region in the late nineteenth century. The collection may also represent a larger opportunity: to assess some features of the role of language in local religious life generally and, thus, to shed anthropological light on questions concerning the historical sociology of religion. In this respect, as we will see later, the region in question stands as a complete case study for what might be called an anthropologically oriented, Weberian treatment of the changing face of Catholicism—for the role of competing discourses in the growth of church domination is critical if little understood. The problem is what to make of such stories, how to contextualize and interpret them, and how to weigh their social and cultural impact.

We can begin by noting that stories, like the one about the well, were not the only religious narratives to be heard in that time and place. In mid- or late nineteenth-century west Donegal, the mainly bilingual Catholic population could read and/or hear an interesting variety of texts. Consider the following two extracts, the first from an issue of Duffy’s Fireside Magazine and the second from a sermon book of the Redemptorist missionaries.

Twas a calm evening in summer. A peasant went forth to a sequestered wood, to perform his devotions at a shrine of the Virgin Mary. He knelt before an altar, on which there was an effigy of our Lady, and ornamented with those simple charms which artless piety is wont so happily to suggest. Then in the depth of solitude, he chanted [sic] a hymn of love, and offered to the Queen of Heaven the outpourings of a devoted soul. Near the shrine there was a river, whose gentle murmurs seemed to harmonize with the peasant’s song. The moments sped swiftly as he prayed. Tears fell from his eyes, but they were joyous tears, emanating from the heart, that peerless fountain of eternal love. The glowing sunbeam was on the wane, and the peasant, revolving past memories, and inspired with hopeful visions of the future, sank into a dreamy reverie.3

What voice of God is this? Is it the voice of the Eternal Judge, who sentences you to be thrown into the abyss of hell, thus to depart from him for evermore? No! It is the voice of your merciful Saviour, who visits you today, who invites you to make your peace with him—who offers you the great, extraordinary, rare grace of a mission—“Come,” he says, “depart not from me—Come to me.” Before the commencement of the Mass you witnessed the opening ceremony “This is the acceptable time.”4

These three pieces—folk story, sermon (see appendix 4.1), and magazine piece (introduction to a poem, see appendix 4.2)—suggest something of the range of religious voices and imagery available in
The Power of Reciprocal Mammary

Because understanding involves seeing something in relation to other things, and because the understanding of one thing is often based on the understanding of another, the process of understanding is recursive. In this way, the understanding of complex systems is not achieved in a single step, but rather through a series of recursive interactions.
The Languages of Belief

introducing or promoting new ways of being religious by symbolically and dramatically acting out and depicting the central beliefs, attitudes, and emotional stances. At the same time, however, locals themselves appropriated such occasions, revealing in their own accounts of missions, for example (as we shall see later), a different sort of religious experience from that intended by the missionaries. I have called this subcultural diversity of religious perspectives “fields of religious experience,” by which I mean to indicate a loosely bounded “interpretive community” with a generally shared understanding of religious meaning. That is, at any religious occasion there will be individuals in attendance representing more than one field of religious experience. In mid- to late nineteenth-century Donegal, we can usefully distinguish at least two distinctive “fields” in this sense: a “chthonic,” or earth-oriented, religiosity of most of the peasantry and a “civil” Catholicism primarily associated with the middle class. Yet it was not simply a question of folk versus official religion, for new fields could begin among various groups of locals (witness apparitions or, more currently, charismatic Catholicism) or particular branches of the clergy. The difference among fields of religious experience is indicated by the variation in religious texts with which this paper is concerned. However, these narratives are not being presented here merely as passive expressions and hence evidence of subcultural religious differences. Rather, I am claiming that such texts may have played a crucial and active role in creating and maintaining the distinctive perspective of such fields of religious experience.

Religious discourse takes different forms in the different fields (it can be formal and informal, written and oral), but in all fields narrative has a privileged role. If we consider discourse to mean a way of talking about and hence seeing the world (or some section of it) that depends on a range of critical words, oppositions, and so on, then narratives, or stories, are perhaps the most affective, and hence effective, expression of any discourse. Beliefs and knowledge are often, and certainly most strongly, embodied in the form of stories. Aside from whatever deep structures or unconscious repressions they might express (or secrete), narratives about human or anthropomorphic subjects command attention through their ability to make abstractions concrete and to provide opportunities for identification. None of the self-conscious creators of discourse—states, churches, and professions—have been slow to realize this. Thus, narratives may represent competing cultural and social realities and occasionally regimes seeking (consciously or not) hegemony. In those cases, two sorts of narration have been critical. First, there are the stories that

vivify the institution or regime and its worldview: stories about saints, revolutions, or even prototypical psychological cases that are the Freudian equivalent of the exempla. Second, there are the stories one learns to tell oneself and others about oneself: the selective self-narration of autobiography. The true internalization of a discursive worldview is both achieved and expressed in the relation (aloud or not) of the incidents, experiences, and emotions of one’s own life in the terms provided by the discourse. This process is perhaps clearest in the cases of something like conversion, when the reorganization of experience into a new order is striking; but that is only a more extreme version of the role of narratives in what anthropologists have broadly called enculturation.

Religion offers particularly striking examples of these powers of narrative. In religious stories the general human interest in plot is much heightened by the possible inclusion of elements of wonder and promises of power. This was true not only of the folk story with which we began but of all three of our texts, in each of which something of the potential functions of religious narrative was evinced. That is, they all not only portrayed a religious world but, in at least two cases—the folk story and the sermon—they asked the listener to enter that world, to put himself or herself in the story. Although such narratives, as our opening examples illustrate, can be very different in form as well as content and thus have, by virtue of their differences, distinctive inherent characteristics, they all share properties that gave narratives a particular cultural force. An understanding of the role of religious discourse in late nineteenth-century Irish Catholicism requires an appreciation of both the peculiar and general characteristics of these narratives. Such texts, however, can hardly be understood apart from the situations and occasions of their use, so I will begin with a sketch of the social context and then turn to the power and meaning of the texts.

The Audience: Changing Social Context

Several changes, hardly unique to southwest Donegal, took place through the middle decades of the nineteenth century. All were potentially crucial to the production and consumption of religious (and other sorts of) discourse. Three transformations were particularly relevant: first, a change in the number and composition of social classes; second, a shift in the settlement pattern; and third, an in-
The process of reading, "comprehension," involves the reciprocal relationship of reading and the reader. The reader is guided by the text, while the text is shaped by the reader. This interaction is considered a dynamic process, where the reader and the text are in continuous dialogue.

In reading, the reader is not a passive recipient of information, but an active participant whoconstructs meaning through engagement with the text. This active engagement includes inferring, making connections, and synthesizing information. The reader's prior knowledge, emotions, and experiences all contribute to this process.

The text itself is structured to facilitate this dialogue. It includes elements such as headings, subheadings, diagrams, and highlighted sections, which provide cues for the reader to form connections and make sense of the material.

Reading is not just a linear process but involves a cycle of encoding, processing, and retrieving information. This cycle can be broken down into smaller steps, each requiring a different set of skills and strategies.

The importance of reading and comprehension in education cannot be overstated. It is a critical component of the developing brain and is foundational for all academic learning and personal growth.
that and other urban-oriented periodicals might very well have found their way to a wider audience through the relation of narratives or opinions, in whatever emend form, to nonreaders, especially by such crucial mediators as publicans, priests, and schoolteachers. In the other direction, however, the flow was fairly certain and important. That is, folk religious narratives were well known and, from my experience, not often belittled by the more middle-class inhabitants of the region. As for the mission sermon, it is certain that nearly everybody was subjected several times during his or her life to such performances, and the actual texts are available.

Individuals thus participated in more than one discursive world; but that is not to say they were not pulled in particular directions. Further, the texts themselves, as we shall see, reveal an interesting interaction among discourses and the social/cultural worlds for which they stood. They appropriated and transformed one another. Thus, they did not amount to evolutionary layers, although they entered the fray at different historical points. Rather, they contended and borrowed and persisted through adaptation as long as some semblance of the social formation that generated them continued. Let me turn to this complex relation between religious discourse and society by taking up the texts one at a time.

Charismatic Landscape: The Folk Narrative

The folk narrative told the story of Protestant interference with a local pilgrimage and the divine retribution that followed. Columcille’s toras, like the vast majority of local religious pilgrimages in Ireland, required the devotee to follow a prescribed route through local terrain, stopping for “stations” (obligatory prayers) at any number of sacred spots, but culminating at a natural spring, or holy well, marked in this case by a cairn: a great pile of stones brought by pilgrims. Like many local religious narratives, it was a legend of power and exemplary of several genres suggested by one or another feature: holy well stories, saints’ stories, Catholic versus Protestant stories, place-name explanation narratives.

It may immediately strike the reader that the holy well story is composed of structural and possibly historical elements. On the structural side, depending on your theoretical bent, you might penetrate to various depths of primordiality: from shared Indo-European folklore motifs to universal human themes of divine power, to the symbolic expression of the basic structure of either the human mind (Lévi-Strauss) or personality (Freud). Yet there may also have been a particular, historical side to this story. In fact, the pilgrimage in question did cross a number of what were Protestant holdings on its way to the well. A woman of one of these farms might have interfered with the pilgrimage, and certainly such a woman would have died, perhaps soon after (although the story does not claim it), and perhaps horribly.

The historicity of such stories is yet clearer in other cases. In fact, I first became interested in the relation such narratives bear to historical processes and events through my serendipitous discovery of a collection of estate agent’s letters discussing, among other things, the eviction of the parish priest from his small holding in 1876. I was subsequently taken to the home of a ninety-one-year-old woman who recited in Gaelic the folk version of the event at which her own father had been present. Considering the data contained in the letters and other contemporary sources, I concluded that the folk version, which included a number of miraculous feats on the part of the priest, was probably not strictly accurate. Yet the folk version was interesting not just as an example of locally garbled history but as an indication of the way locals appropriated events to form an ideology that to some extent both defined and framed their perception of local reality.20

In terms of events, the preceding example well illustrates the possible form such a relationship may take. Following Turner, I would argue that there is a dialectical relation between social dramas like that of the priest’s eviction and the stories told about them.21 The priest, as familiar as anyone with the prerequisites of symbolic confrontation, may well have constructed the event in a culturally meaningful way. By doing so he provoked a narrative, but the narrative that was eventually formed selectively appropriated the event. Finally, insofar as these stories provide an ideological framework that influences behavior, they may act as both models of and models for history.

But why are some events more culturally interesting than others? If a corpus of stories helps sustain a particular interpretive framework—a cultural ideology or field of religious experience—it must do so in the face of “real” experience. Sometimes events conform well enough to such cultural expectations that they can be taken up into the narrative structure with only appropriate embellishment, as in the case of the priest versus the agent. However, a historical experience may be important and deeply felt, but either because it takes the form of process rather than event or because other cultural forces are powerful enough to repress its direct representation, narra-
Some benefits of life include a longer, better or a well-stocked bank account. The other factor of the undersea world underpinning the economic growth of the region. As the world unfolds, the benefits of power are distributed in ways that foster sustainable development. A combination of economic, political, and social forces produces gains for some at the expense of others.

One benefit is the increased availability of wells, which were previously inaccessible. However, when and where lifting

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rock. These saints, and their wells, were autochthonic. They were the relations of chiefs whose genealogies could be traced back to the hero-gods of Gaelic mythology. As for the “stranger convector saint,” Patrick, his legends and associated places converted him as well into part of the immovable landscape. In short, all early Irish saints were autochthonic ancestors.

Unlike legends about the origins of wells, stories concerning the actual power of wells were set in “real time” and sometimes involved named individuals firmly placed in the recent historical landscape. The power of wells was displayed in such narratives in two ways: curing and punishing.

I frequently heard curing narratives that often took an anecdotal form. A typical variant was the following:

Oh there’s great curing in that well. There was a woman brought her daughter to that well once and nothing could cure the child. She was that sick, and couldn’t walk at all. She had brought her to all the wells, even Doon Well down in the North there, and nothing did any good for her. Anyway her mother brought her here to tobar na mban naoná: and she spent the night by the well, and her mother took her away in the morning and she was cured. And by god, she stayed that way because she lived to a great age and she used come here to visit over the years—we all knew her as an old woman—and it wasn’t long ago that she died.26

Such stories served to demonstrate the primary power of the wells and to justify and encourage their continued use. Interestingly, they rarely, if ever, mentioned the saint other than to denote the well; rather, the well was pictured as powerful in itself. Curing was not achieved through intercession but through proper contact with the liminal power accessible at such holy places. However, it is neither helpful nor accurate to distinguish this sort of devotion as magical versus a more religious saint-mediated curing. Both may involve “automatic” power and both may consider the moral state of the individual as relevant to the efficacy of the act.

Another class of narratives did not take the story form but simply described significant aspects of the well. They may have been included in the performance, preceding actual legends about the well’s powerful achievements, or they may have been offered in response to inquiry from the listener. Such narratives often spoke of the presence in the well of an apparently immortal fish—a trout or a salmon—that may have appeared to the devotee. This manifestation may have been a sign of either imminent cure or death, of the viewer or someone connected to him or her. Not only was this fish unconnected to the saint but its appearance once again manifested the well’s liminal position and power—a power that might have been dangerous as well as helpful; it was a window into the other world and hence potentially divinatory or oracular.

The other narrative type was the sort with which we began, which presented the power of the well in another light, as a potentially destructive force vis-à-vis its enemies. There were many stories on this theme, all of them involving Protestant interference with holy well devotions. Either they took the form of our first legend, wherein a landlord or landholder tried to prevent access to the well, or they portrayed a scoffing Protestant who attempted to demonstrate the powerlessness of the well. A recurring version of the latter theme had a Protestant putting his foot into the well to demonstrate its ordinariness. He was unable to remove his foot until aided by a priest, and then—in some variants—only with a promise of conversion.

In all these stories the central opposition is of Gael (local Irish Catholic) versus Gall (Protestant interloper—literally, foreigner). The pitting of the autochthonic forces embodied in the well against the intrusive foreigners is not in itself surprising. It is interesting, however, that the clergy themselves, who were, after all, the more persistent and concerned enemies of at least the earlier forms of well devotion, were not depicted in any tales as enemies of the well. Indeed, anticlerical folklore has been conspicuous by its relative absence in Ireland—when compared especially to the Mediterranean region. I suggest that the nineteenth-century campaigns of the clergy were successful, not only in stamping out liminal behavior but in repressing expressions of sexuality and hostility toward itself. As a result, the only way the alternate, essentially non-church-oriented religiosity of well devotion could be sustained by locals was through a symbolic sublimation that replaced one intrusive enemy—priests—with another—Protestant foreigners.27

In fact, the folk field of religious experience, to which this well discourse contributed, included an appropriation of the clergy itself in the popular narratives about—and indeed continuing devotion to—drunken priests.28 In the many accounts concerning the power of alcoholic priests, junior members of the clergy—typically curates rather than parish priests—were opposed both conceptually and politically to the controlling authority of the institutional church. Like the early saints, they were depicted wandering through nature, curing and cursing as capriciously as any shaman—and sometimes directing people to wells for help with their ailments: clearly liminal types.
Redemptorist’s dramatic manifestation of power and authority was far more distancing. Most of the congregants were hardly encouraged to see the missionary as a model of anything they could hope to emulate; his language condemned, and if the sermon narrative drew the listener in, she or he was made abject before the powerful God/missionary.

The textual qualities of the sermon, especially when considered in light of their performance quality, are both powerful and strikingly different from those of the folk story. We should begin, however, by asking to what extent such a sermon was heard as a narrative by the people of late nineteenth-century Donegal. The Redemptorists, like other preachers, had frequent recourse to narrative exempla to illustrate an argument. As performed and heard, however, the opening sermon of the mission also had less obvious, but arguably compelling, narrative qualities. The task of this opening sermon was to narrate the mission itself, to draw attention to the dramatic structure of the event—indeed to make it “an event.” What is crucial is the quality of time, and that is the theme of the sermon—the “acceptable time.” The mission was portrayed as a potentially transforming experience, an event in the story of your life and the life of your community. This was, of course, the literal truth. Parish missions lasted for at least two weeks and, in rural hinterlands, were certainly events in all senses of the word. Moreover, the sermons that stretched over the time were a series of dramatically linked texts that told the story of salvation and how to achieve it. Thus, to the degree that it succeeded, the sermon promised to be its own story, to narrate itself and the lives of the parishioners. This made the listener, of course, a character in the story. What the missionary hoped and called for was a self-narration, a conversion story that, if told at some future date, would make of the mission the climax, the critical moment in the plot.

For the listeners, there were of course other things going on in and around this text. Like the folk narrative, it was concerned with describing the characteristics of supernatural power and representing the ways in which that power was mediated. Thus, it portrayed holy space as well as holy time, but in the sermon, that space was clearly vertical rather than horizontal. Heaven was above and hell below, as the listener would be reminded throughout the mission. Moreover, mediation was to be found not in the landscape but in the church, in the sacraments, and in the person of the missionary himself. If the mission was an “acceptable time,” it was also an “acceptable place.” Finally, this verticality was communicated not only through the content of the sermons but in the performance. In a sort of reverse Durkheimian way, the mission sermon helped produce and reproduce a social mirror of the sacred universe it described. That is, the missionary demonstrated priesthood as domination and, more generally, the overwhelming cultural power of the encroaching institutional world. In the process, of course, the specific language of the sermon, a particularly inflamed and Roman version of institutional church discourse, was empowered—including such key notions as heaven, hell, purgatory, sin, grace, penance, and so on. By all accounts, this performance quality, as well as the texts themselves, made mission sermons very different from ordinary Sunday homilies.

It is also worth noting that if the form of the mission was novel in places like nineteenth-century Donegal, the “master sermon” was not. Charles McGlinchey, of the then Irish-speaking Inishowen peninsula in the north of the county, remembered his father (b. 1810) reciting from the sermons of Father Gallagher. These eighth-century Irish language sermons by a noted bishop of Raphoe (Donegal’s diocese) were apparently available in printed editions through the ensuing century and were well known to the literate peasantry of that diocese. The Redemptorists—whether they knew it or not—were following in that tradition, for unlike several local priests, they missionized in Irish not in English and were probably more powerfully heard as a result.

What, in fact, did the local populace hear? Direct light can be shed on “listeners’ response” by turning to the people at whom the sermons were directed. Something of their impact on the “folk” is conveyed by the stories that have found their way into the National Folklore Archives. There are only a handful of catalogued “mission stories,” most of them collected from elderly men and women in the 1930s, relating stories of the missions of their youth or that of their parents. These short narratives stressed the forceful, and fearful, power of the occasion. Several spoke of miracles, such as keeping candles lit in high winds and, in maritime communities, bringing fish into local waters. The conversion of an especially invertebrate sinner may also have been related, typically involving the renunciation of drink. What is clear in such instances, however, is that the stories described the transformations as magical as much as moral.

Indeed, pace Weber, in all these tales there is a noticeable lack of separation between ethical-behavioral transformations and so-called magical power. For the Redemptorists, the general confession was the point of the mission. But the folk memory appropriated the event in a different way, in which power and extraordinary penance were
covariate of this study—a longitudinal study of the effects of early childhood education on cognitive development. The results of this study suggest that early childhood education can have significant positive effects on children's cognitive development. In particular, children who receive early childhood education show improved performance on measures of cognitive ability, such as language, reading, and mathematics. These findings have important implications for policymakers and educators, as they highlight the potential benefits of investing in early childhood education programs.
ture. Yet if placed in the context of general Victorian discourse, this
text can be read neither as an instance of Romantic rebellion against
cultural authority (in this case, as embodied in the institutional church)
nor as a return to a folk perspective on natural power. Rather, the
sentimental otherness of scene and character might have served the
role of complementary opposition. Such a piece preserved and
domesticated its subject in harmless textual form; it no more challenged
bourgeois civility and church-centered religion than Victorian depic-
tions of female sanctity and influence challenged male authority. In-
deed, one can go one interpretive step further in this direction by
noting the seductive role of this discourse in the general church
campaign ongoing through the century to tame holy well “excesses.”
I say seductive because reconstructions of experience through nar-
native may have acted on the listener or reader very differently,
and arguably more effectively, from condemnations of peasant abuses.
Here discourse joins that ancient Christian strategy of reconsecrating
rather than destroying the “pagan” shrine. In Bede’s time, Saint
Augustine tried to redefine Anglo-Saxon notions of divinity by put-
ting Christ on their altars. At various points in later Catholic history,
Mary served the same function, in these cases replacing localized with
generalized dedications. 39

Conclusions: Meaning and Power in Religious Discourse

This essay has explored the contribution that competing religious
discourses may have made to the creation and maintenance of “fields
of religious experience” in late nineteenth-century Donegal. I use the
term explore advisedly, for the interpretation of such sources as are
treated here—particularly at this point in the state of the evidence—
can only contribute suggestively to our understanding of crucial but
complex cultural relations. Nevertheless, I argue strongly that the
excursion through such sources is very much worth the trip. First, it
is clear to any ethnographer or historian working in Ireland that
narrative discourse has had a generally important role in expressing
and thus defining the way the surrounding world has been perceived.
This is clear in a consideration, for example, of the use of “historical”
narratives in Northern Ireland. Second, those who have worked in the
area of Irish religiosity will also acknowledge the prevalence of
such narrative structures in that realm of experience.

Given these observations, it should be profitable to examine the
possibility that specific types of religious narrative played particular
roles in defining different, and in some cases competing, ways of
being religious—what I have called fields of religious experience.
Insofar as these different fields often shared a number of religious
occasions (e.g., Sunday Mass, Redemptorist Mission, even holy well
pilgrimages), their distinctiveness may have rested on their respective
ways of talking about such events.

The three narrative segments explored here—the folk story, the
magazine piece, and the Redemptorist sermon—do not represent an
exhaustive catalogue of distinctive, religious narrative types. They
do, however, suggest both the range of religious discourse available
in one corner of late nineteenth-century Ireland and the ways in which
such forms may have contributed to different fields of religious ex-
perience. We are inevitably struck by the differences in language,
imagery, and notions of the supernatural. Yet their differences are, of
course, meaningful only to the extent that there are similarities among
them. All three described where holiness was, how to get at it, and
what mediated between people and that world. Thus, they were
about the power—what we can call religious power—that resided in
particular points of time and/or space. Each text described this media-
tion differently and, in the course of telling the story, empowered a
kind of language to the extent that it succeeded in both describing
and, as an aspect of performance, re-creating the miraculous.

Insofar as they are distinctive, these discursively constituted realms
can be designated as different fields of religious experience. The folk
story issued from what we may call a chthonic, folk field and, given
the fact that such narratives were in the late nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries (and when I was in the field, still were to a much
reduced degree) regularly told and heard in a variety of circum-
stances, we can presume that they constituted (or were important
elements in) a religious discourse that sustained the understanding
of the supernatural world that we have discussed in this paper. That
religious cosmology may well have enjoyed further moral signifi-
cance as a metaphoric representation of the human world. Yet it is
also clear that in the period to which these stories can be certainly
dated—the middle to late nineteenth century—they were not the only
sort of religious language encountered by the Catholics of southwest
Donegal, or in the rural west of Ireland generally. Another sort of
Catholic discourse was embodied in both written and oral texts avail-
able to the inhabitants of even such peripheral areas. These texts
included sermons delivered in the churches by local and visiting
clerics, collections of such sermons by renowned individuals such as
Bishop Gallagher in Donegal (an early Gaelic language sermonizer)
him for evermore? No! It is the voice of your merciful Saviour, who visits you today, who invites you to make your peace with him—who offers you the great, extraordinary, rare grace of a mission—"Come" he says "depart not from me—Come to me."

Before the commencement of the Mass you witnessed the opening ceremony[]. This is the acceptable time . . . Jesus Christ hanging on the cross was by your parish priest carried to the entrance of the church to meet us, his ambassadors, as it were—to invite us, to preach the glad tidings of salvation to his people, we kissed the crucifix—we took it and carried it to the altar—"Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel" we sang "Blessed . . . Israel," because he . . . working the redemption of . . . the salvation from our enemies and from the hands of all that hate us. That we may . . . him without fear, in holiness and justice before him all our days (Is. 52.70) O' how beautiful are the feet of him that brings no good tidings and that preacheth peace, of him that showeth forth good, that preacheth salvation, that saith to Sion Thy God shall reign. Yes—Your God shall reign from this day forward—He shall reign in the parish—He shall reign in your family—He shall reign in your hearts—This is the object, this the End of the mission and of our coming: to establish, to confirm, to consolidate, to perfect the reign of God among you. Blessed be the Lord God—If a mission is to succeed well and for this we are looking forward—if a mission is to be to the glory of God and to the salvation of many in Israel, three parties must work hand in hand—stand side by side, linked heart to heart, must make common cause of this work:

I. God, who gives you the grace of the mission
II. The missionaries who preach the mission
III. The people i.e. you, who get the mission

Therefore, today if you hear the voice of the Lord, "harden not your hearts." Ps. 94 This is the acceptable time—spread it abroad—tell it to everyone and everywhere—on the house tops—in the streets at home—A mission is nothing less than a second Redemption on a small scale—What is a mission? A mission is a divine message, a divine calling—an invitation from on High—Every good gift and every good thing comes from on High, the Father of Lights—For Christ we are ambassadors—The end which God has in view when giving to a parish the grace of a mission is nothing else than the total conversion of the parish—not only the conversion of this or that man or woman, but the conversion of all and each one of us—to extirpate vice and sin—to plant—to plant virtue among the people of the parish—"There is a time to plant says the Holy Ghost and a time to pluck up; a time to build and a time to destroy."

Those who are living in vice and sin are called upon and will be enabled to give up their evil life—those who are slothful, lukewarm, on the point of being cast away from God altogether must take up their first fervour—those who are good and perfect must become better and more perfect still. If the vice of drunkenness prevails in the parish, this vice must be rooted out during the mission—The impurity, sloth neglect of the sacraments and of Holy Mass is to be found in the parish—These must be given up—If people are separated from each other by hatred spite envy jealousy the mission intends to reconcile them—priests and people—one heart and one soul—all—husband and wife, children and parents—in a word God intends to renew the spirit, the face of the whole parish—A great work indeed; a work, which can be done but by God himself—A mission—as I have described it just now—is not a new invention—missions are as old as the world as old as the church of God—and nowadays missions are so necessary, as useful, as important as they were in times past—There is always something either public or secret which must be amended—God has always been accustomed to send at certain times men, called missionaries, to people, whom he loves, in order to revive their religious spirit—Such missionaries were the prophets of old, Noe, Moses, Isaias—Jeremias, Jonas—Noe, whilst building the ark, preached to the people repentance. He gave a mission to them which lasted one hundred years. Jonas the prophet was sent to Ninive—"the Ninivites could not distinguish the right hand from the left"—"Forty days yet" he cried "and Ninive shall be destroyed" He gave a mission to them—His words sank deep into the hearts of the Ninivites—At the preaching of Jonas they all did penance in sackcloth and ashes, from the king on the throne down to the beast in the stable—all had been instruments of sin and stumbling blocks—Such a missionary—yea, the greatest, the best, the sublimest of all was our dear Lord, Himself—God who spoke to us at sundry times and in divers manners—in times past through the prophets to our fathers—spoke to us in these days through his own Son Jesus Christ—For three full long weary years he gave a mission to the people of Palestine—"do penance he said, change your life, return to God, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand,"—And Our Lord after having finished his own mission the work for which he was chosen and sent, chose and sent his apostles, his representatives, to continue his own mission—"Go ye . . ." Again in the course of time God raised special men up for the same purpose—filled them with his own spirit, en-
He knelt before an altar, on which there was an effigy of our Lady, and ornamented with those simple charms which artless piety is wont so happily to suggest. Then, in the depth of solitude, he chanted a hymn of love, and offered to the Queen of Heaven the outpourings of a devoted soul. Near the shrine there was a river, whose gentle murmurs seemed to harmonize with the peasant's song. The moments sped swiftly as he prayed. Tears fell from his eyes, but they were joyous tears, emanating from the heart, that peerless fountain of eternal love. The glowing sunbeam was on the wane, and the peasant, reviving past memories, and inspired with hopeful visions of the future, sank into a dreamy reverie.

The legend relates, that a spirit, attracted by his song, and captivated by the beaming smiles that played about his lips, solicited him to dwell in the land of spirits beneath the river's bed. Indignant, he scorned the proposal, and swooned away. At midnight it was discovered that his soul, no longer fettered by earthly ties, had winged its flight to the home of everlasting peace. The foresters say that heavenly music is often heard swaying on the breeze, and sometimes at the still hour of midnight, the Virgin comes in glory to keep watch over the peasant's tomb:

Far on a green and mossy glade the Virgin's altar stood,  
And around it waved the countless trees of a deep and lonely wood;  
Hard by, a noble river roll'd down its sparkling sand,  
And sunbeams dance upon its wave like nymphs of fairyland.

The passing breeze played calmly o'er the water's crystal sheen,  
And murmured soft, sweet melodies to heaven's Virgin Queen;  
The wide-spread boughs of the forest trees were mirror'd deep below,  
And brightly shone their trembling leaves in the evening's golden glow.

Vases of wild, but holy flow'rs, from mountain, stream, and dale,  
Of roses fair, and violets bright, and lilies of the vale,  
Bloom'd sweetly on the altar of her who reigns on high,  
And their odours wafted fragrance to the near and tranquil sky.

A censer fil'd with sweetest gums was swinging there the while,  
And a taper shed its chast'ning light, pure as an angel's smile.  
The ev'ning sun was sinking fast beneath the torrent's rill,  
While his parting smiles, o'er the mountain's brow, wax'd faint and fainter still.

A peasant knelt on the woodland sward, with tearful eyes and dim,  
Pouring to heaven a gladsome strain—'twas Mary's ev'ning hymn:  
"No wealth," he sigh'd, "is mine to give—no gems to deck thy shrine,  
But this heart, my sole, sole treasure, is thine—for ever thine."

Bright visions of the happy world flash'd o'er his raptur'd breast,  
And he long'd to soar to those blissful climes where the weary are at rest;  
Still, as the thrilling song he breath'd died faintly through the wood,  
Its echoes wak'd the river spirits that slumber'd beneath the flood.

Now, as he gaz'd on the Virgin's form, nor thought of else beside,  
A spirit, gliding o'er the wave, sprang forth from the streaming tide:  
In tones of mell'd music, straight it whisper'd words of love,  
But the peasant still pray'd fondly, for his thoughts were far above.

"Come to my home," the phantom cried,  
Beneath the roar of the deep, deep tide;  
Follow me—follow thy spirit-guide.

" Chaplets of coral I'll wreath for thee,  
And the rolling river thy shrine shall be;  
Child of earth, then follow me.

"I'll sing thee a sweet, a heavenly air,  
Nor trouble shall dim thine eyes, nor care,  
But joy's the purest shall greet thee there!

"Soft music of waters shall glad thine ear,  
Sounds which spirits alone may hear,  
More sweet than the lov'd song of childhood's year!

"Pearls the choicest will grace thy throne,  
Supreme thou'lt rule 'neath the dashing foam;  
Come then—oh! come, to my spirit home."

When the peasant heard those silv'ry tones, a frown rose on his brow;  
Fainting he shrunk from the phantom's clasp—his heart was Mary's now!  
When the chilling breeze of midnight blew coldly o'er the deep,  
The woodmen found him smiling in a calm and deathless sleep.

The song of the river spirit, by that wood is heard no more,  
But Mary's hymn still echoes, bounding softly from the shore;  
And oft on a summer's midnight, when moonbeams light the wave,  
The Virgin, cloth'd in fairest robes, leans o'er the peasant's grave.

F. K. P.

NOTES

1. The field and archival research on which this article is mainly based was conducted from July 1986 through July 1987 and in the summer of 1989. It was made possible by a fellowship from the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities and a research grant from Lafayette College. This article
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