Introductions

It was still light when I was piloted out of Kilkeeragh and headed east over the

FELDS AND REGIMES OF IREISH CATHOLICISM:

THE HEALING MASS:

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The journey, from the poor, Gaelic west of Donegal to the more fertile and anglicized East of the country, was one that many generations of their ancestors had made before them. Their grandfathers and mothers had been on their way "hiring feis", seeking to supplement the meager family incomes eked out of six rocky acres and a cow on the mountain through seasonal work on the larger and typically Protestant farms further east. This time the destination was a "Healing Mass" — a recent charismatic addition to the regional religious scene which had for some time been drawing mini-bus loads to its well advertised monthly sessions.

Southwest Donegal is a peninsula, several hundred square miles in extent, jutting into the Atlantic from the northwest corner of Ireland. Its bogs and mountains, and few, small, fertile glens, are home to some ten thousand souls living in mountain farms, small valley hamlets, street towns, and, on its eastern versant, of the largest fishing port of Killybegs. Although several thousand Protestants lived in this area up until the 1920s, the population is now almost entirely Roman Catholic. Most of the people still do at least a little of the traditional subsistence farming that has sustained them over the years, supplemented by sheep-keeping, some fishing, factory work, much social welfare, and, lately, renewed emigration. As elsewhere in Ireland, the Catholic Church plays a vital and visible role in the economic, political, social, cultural, and spiritual life of the region. Lately, however, the Church there, as elsewhere, is in a certain state of flux, which manifests itself most clearly in just such unusual but not extraordinary events as the "Healing Mass".

The current status of the Roman Catholic Church and faith in Ireland is a matter of some dispute. Popular commentators of the 1960s and 70s were prone to announce the final erosion of the monolithic, ascendant Church. Whether they greeted the change with joy, relief, or dismay, few questioned the final arrival and growing hegemony of the forces of secularism. A number of more recent events, however, have cast some doubt on that perception. The success of the referendum making abortion unconstitutional and the subsequent failure of another referendum proposing a very limited legalization of divorce demonstrated the existence of an apparently vigorous, and at least temporarily successful, resistance to the onslaught of "paganism" or "enlightment", depending on your point of view.

But Catholicism was not only asserting itself on the legislative front in the form of a new "moral majoritarian". Statutes of Mary moved all over Ireland, to the amusement of many and the consternation of some, including much of the clergy. This is a manifestation of an altogether different sort of religiosity, but one which cannot be dismissed as irrelevant because it does not conform to the "legalistic" stereotype to be found in much critical commentary on the Church. A respectable, rule-following Catholicism is certainly evident in both the behavior and world view of many, perhaps especially middle class, Irish Catholics. Yet there are more ways of being Catholic in Ireland than such a model imagines, and the religious meanings and experience which characterize the various forms of Irish religiosity are not accessible to statistical surveys: to date almost the only method with which social scientists have attempted to plumb those depths.

The ethnographic approach to Irish Catholicism taken here makes a very different contribution to our understanding, offering a tightly focused view of a particular "religious occasion": in this case the "Healing Mass", for which the above bus riders are bound. Such a perspective is more likely to penetrate into the structure of experience in such settings, and in the process may do something to reveal the complexity underlying the superficial appearance of uniformity. The Healing Mass, when put into context, also offers an opportunity to use a feature of local Irish religious culture to understand the ways in which the Catholic Church, and indeed other religious bodies, build both institutions and experience. The Healing Mass is, after all, a political event within the Church, and potentially part of a larger political-religious process.

The bus ride serves as a metaphor for the personal and social construction of experience, for the changing circumstances of both the terrain and one's life. In another sense, however, it is more than a metaphor, for it is often the bus in its absolute mundane reality that takes people as individuals and in groups from one occasion to another, from one experience to another. The women on the busride to the Healing Mass are cases in point. As I later found out, they were bound from, and hence to, significantly different religious experiences.

There were women, like Fiona, who not only attended weekly and even daily Mass at their home churches, but who were regular attenders at a local Charismatic prayer meeting. Margaret, another woman on the same bus, although equally punctilious in her regular Mass attendance, considered such prayer meetings "over the top" — emotionally excessive and doctrinally suspicious fanaticism. For her, the excursion to the Healing Mass was the latest in a series of trips to usually more established religious shows: the Vigil at Knock (a Marian shrine), for example, or the recent "parish mission" conducted by members of the Roman Order in her home town. She might well bring her personal "intentions" to such occasions, but in seeking, for example, a possible cure for her arthritis, she was not anticipating a reconstruction of self, like Fiona had and was experiencing. Then there was Una, who had come down into Killybegs from a mountain farm in the next parish west. For her it was not the Mass, but the presiding priest, Father Heaney, that drew her to undertake the voyage. Raised with stories of the miraculous curing power of certain priests, Una had heard that this strange cleric from the North of the County might be possessed of the "cure". She sought his efficacious touch and prayers.

In depicting the difference among these three women's religious experiences and perspectives, I do not wish to overemphasize the idiosyncrasy of the individual. No doubt every person on the bus was to some extent unique in this respect. What is more interesting and more important for understanding the social and cultural processes with which anthropology is concerned, are the ways in which such interpretive frameworks are generated and shared. The bus trip to the Healing Mass is only one stage in a longer journey, or, rather, in two journeys. The first is the life historical voyage of these women and their neighbors. Fiona was not always a charismatic, three years ago she would have shared more in perspective with Margaret, less with Una. Either Una or Margaret might become a charismatic prayer group member, though I suspect from different points of entry. Such personal movements are not, however, purely personal, for there is also the much longer journey — the historical process in which the personal movements of these women join the flow of decades and centuries of development in the Irish Church. It is extremely unlikely, for example, that either Margaret or Fiona will move in the direction of Una's sort of religiosity. The charismatic movement, whether it succeeds or fails, is coming into being at this historic juncture, Una's folk religion is not.
The appropriate function of various historical and cultural traditions and values in the development of a successful and productive society is a matter of great significance. The role of cultural traditions in shaping the social and economic structures of societies has been a subject of intense debate and research. The following are some of the key points that emerge from this discussion:

1. **Cultural Traditions and Social Structures**: Cultural traditions play a crucial role in shaping the social structures of societies. They provide a framework for understanding and interpreting the world, and this framework influences the way people think, feel, and act. For example, in many societies, the role of women is determined by cultural traditions that dictate their social and economic roles.

2. **Economic Development**: Cultural traditions can also have a significant impact on economic development. For instance, traditional values that prioritize family and community over personal gain can lead to a more collaborative and cooperative approach to economic activities. However, in other cases, traditional values that emphasize individual achievement and competition can hinder economic growth.

3. **Cultural Diversity and Inclusion**: The diversity of cultural traditions in a society can enrich the social fabric and enhance inclusivity. However, this diversity also presents challenges in terms of communication and mutual understanding. Efforts to promote cultural understanding and respect are essential for fostering a harmonious society.

4. **Cultural Education and Policy**: Education is a powerful tool for shaping cultural traditions. Policies that emphasize the preservation and promotion of cultural traditions can help ensure that these traditions are passed down to future generations. Conversely, policies that encourage the replacement of cultural traditions with modern values can lead to a loss of cultural identity.

5. **Globalization and Cultural Traditions**: In the era of globalization, cultural traditions are increasingly being challenged by the spread of new ideas and values. While this can lead to a loss of cultural identity, it also presents an opportunity for cultural exchange and the creation of new, hybrid cultural traditions.

In conclusion, the role of cultural traditions in the development of a successful and productive society is complex and multifaceted. Understanding the ways in which cultural traditions shape social and economic structures, and the implications of these traditions for economic development and cultural diversity, is essential for creating a more equitable and prosperous society.
The Healing Mass treated here can thus be viewed as a "border occasion" — in a geographical as well as conceptual sense. It stands, like a beacon, at the verge of the charismatic field of religious experience, drawing pilgrims from the west. It is a prime example of how a religious regime promulgates itself through the promotion of just such "border" occasions, attracting adepts and novices alike. More accessible than the prayer meeting (for reasons that will emerge in the course of our exploration of the event), it is more likely to draw people by degree into a new discourse. In so doing, the Mass both taps and creates power, building new institutions as well as new religious world views.

II. — HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In order to interpret the meaning of the Healing Mass for the participants, and assess its role in emerging religious regimes, we need first to trace the historical developments whereby the present state of Irish Catholicism — and its specific regional incarnation — was constituted. Having indulged in a necessarily brief and schematic survey of the recent history of Irish religious regimes, we can then profitably return to the Healing Mass and its place in the contemporary scene.

Historians and sociologists have certainly recognized the fact of religious change in Ireland over the past several hundred years, although they dispute the timing and precise nature of those transformations. The "devotional revolution," described by Larkin (1972) for the middle decades of the XIXth century, despite the arguments put forward by critics (2) concerning the "mechanization of religion" and how and when these transformations took place, is a useful way of referring to what was undoubtedly a general process of religious change. As Larkin's work points out, the changes were political as well as devotional, involving the development of a religious regime as well as new fields of religious experience.

The religious regime in question was diocesan, and its dominance in Ireland can be traced, ironically enough, to the Penal Law days of the XVIIIth century, during which the religious orders suffered a blow from which they were not to recover (see Fenning, 1972). Although the diocesan structure was also crippled, as Inglis (1987) notes, by the end of the century the British government finally saw the advantage of a strong Catholic Church which might achieve, if not the conversion, at least the "embourgeoisement" and "pacification of the peasantry. It may be further supposed that the English preferred an episcopally dominated Catholic regime, less thoroughly connected to the power centers of Catholic Europe than were the religious orders. The establishment in 1795 of a state supported national seminary at Maynooth, outside Dublin, provided an Irish center for the training of a secular clergy. This academy soon supplied curates as well as parish priests to most parishes. By 1829, when legislation finally removed all remaining legal impediments to the practice of Catholicism in Ireland, the bishops, all secular rather than regular clergy, and many Maynooth trained, were firmly in place. As Inglis points out (1987), their rule was both symbolized and effected through the building of churches throughout the country.

The diocesan regime was firmly established and centralized with the accession of Archbishop, later Cardinal, Paul Cullen, who brought an iron hand and ultramontanism to the Irish church. The Religious Orders offered little in the way of alternative religious regimes. Rather, the central dialectic of the church was between the dominant ultramontanism of Cullen and his party, and the Gallican leanings of several bishops, most notably Archbishop McHale of Tuam. This opposition was political, referring to do with the degree of direct control over the Irish church to be enjoyed by the Vatican, but it also had its cultural side, which brings us to the matter of fields of religious experience.

Like the Counter-Reformation, the "devotional revolution" of the XIXth century Ireland was aimed at the firm establishment of a religious regime. The later movement was, however, far more able to penetrate into local fields of religious experience. From a Weberian perspective, the Maynooth-trained diocesan clergy were poised to accomplish the transition from "magical" to "ethical" religious belief and practice. A step along the historical road toward rationalization, for Weber that transition was also a means by which true priestly domination was achieved. Indeed, the devotional revolution seems a classic case of the institutionalization of charisma. The weekly Mass became the central ritual in a religious field dominated by a discourse and iconography which affirmed the power of the Church as institution.

Sociologist Tom Inglis (1987) has pointed out the applicability of Norbert Elias' (1978, 1982) concept of "Civilizing Process" to this transformation of what the French would call the mentalité of the devolutionally revolutionized Irish (3). Inglis argues that the role of late XIXth and early XXth century local clergy was crucial in providing models of middle class civility combined with a strong attention to body and self control. For the middle class or aspiring Catholic, the Church offered a model for respectability not unlike the English one. Ironically, in this respect Irish middle class "civil" Catholicism out-victoriated the Victorians. The "secret life" of such Irish men and women, if there was one, awaits discovery. As in other Victorian cultural formations, psychological state and sensibility were learned and acted out in particular settings and occasions — both sacred and secular — such as schoolroom, parlors or churches. In the Irish Catholic case, these culturally charged settings were much enhanced by the elaborate rituals of the Church. Irish Catholicism also provided its own discourse, adding to the standard Victorian world view an idiom of opposition to the British which extolled the virtues of an oppressed Catholic peasantry even as it praised the growth of a Catholic world empire (4). It is within this nexus of language, settings, and occasions that we may locate the emerging field of religious experience characterizing the provincial middle class Irish Catholics. New settings and occasions — for example, missions, new devotions — were experienced and interpreted from within this framework.

What, however, of the peasantry? Even in areas like Southwest Donegal, new, bigger, and far more expensive churches replaced the thatched huts or open shelters in the course of the XIXth century, providing the institutional setting for the "devotional revolution". Well provided with priests, the peasantry in these remote areas now began to attend Mass regularly and in great numbers. They too were introduced to the revival and expansion of devotional practices then popular on the continent. Under these conditions, the clergy achieved considerable success in both social control and priestly domination. It is clear, however, that the religious field (as we have defined the term) of a considerable portion of the local populace in many areas remained, if not resistant, at least creatively adaptive in the face of the official church. In southwest
The mood was elation and excitement, the need for action was strong, the resolve was clear. The collective movement in the form of running feet and waving hands, the coordination of restraint and passion in the face of adversity, the expansion of thought and action, the expression of creativity and determination, all were part of the experience. The mood was not just a reaction to the events of the moment, but a part of the ongoing story, a part of the struggle.

The memory of the past, the anticipation of the future, the hope for change, were all woven into the fabric of the moment. The mood was not static, it was dynamic, it was evolving. The mood was the embodiment of the spirit of the people, the embodiment of the promise of the collective.

In the end, the mood was the product of the struggle, the product of the fight, the product of the determination. The mood was the proof of the power of the people, the proof of the potential of the collective. The mood was the testament to the strength of the spirit, the testament to the resilience of the human.

The mood was the expression of the journey, the expression of the dream, the expression of the change. The mood was the symbol of the hope, the symbol of the future, the symbol of the possibility. The mood was the embodiment of the power, the embodiment of the light, the embodiment of the promise.

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I had been invited to come to the Mass by Fiona and her two friends, Mary and Ellen. The three women had been to Medjugorje, the current Marian apparition site in Yugoslavia, where they had all been transfigured by the experience. Their language and manner were, to use the American Protestant idiom, "born again". My wife and I were greeted with "kisses of peace"). Given your, and beatific smiles all around: to judge from my experience in the region, decidedly atypical behavior. They took turns telling their Medjugorje stories, each of which had an articulate narrative structure. Margaret, the fortyish, fashionably dressed wife of a local grocer, went first:

"I went to Medjugorje on a holiday really, filling in for someone who had cancelled... I saw the cross on the hill illuminated — all lit up — but then I discovered it was only a concrete cross... there was a group of English people there staring at the sun and yet it wasn’t bothering their eyes. We looked too and I could see the rays separated from the sun itself, and sun was a disc with a « V » (wedge) out of it, and a friend of mine saw the rays touching the mountain. No one was dazzled by the sun like you would be, you didn’t see spots when you looked away. Then the sun seemed to turn blood red and go behind the cross. When I saw the sun with the little piece missing I thought it meant that a small portion of the world would be saved... I didn’t really believe in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist before going to Medjugorje, and about six months after returning I went to a funeral in Frassos (Donegal) and Father Michael performed the mass, and suddenly I saw, when he held up the host, the image of the sun at Medjugorje and I really believed in the presence of Christ — the sun had been the host with the piece missing like when the priest breaks off a piece — and I was overcome and cried".

The other women told similar stories of miraculous experiences, each of them stressing a powerful moment, if not of conversion or rebirth, then at least of direct and ecstatic contact with the numinous. Two of them spoke of feeling "an electric shock" from touching the hand of one of the visionaries who communed nightly with Our Lady, and all of them remarked on the mystical feeling of peace and oneness that dominated the scene there. "The three hours of the service go so fast... even though I was tired, you paid attention to what was going on..." an interesting twist on Vatican II, here the non-intelligibility of the service augmented its religious power). The three women organized the Killybegs prayer group, which had been meeting weekly for about a year, as a result of their Medjugorje experience.

If the "communitas" Turner (1969) spoke of seems to glow at Medjugorje, it should not be assumed that all present experience the occasion in precisely the same manner — from within the same field of religious experience. The three women of the prayer group expressed dismay at the growing number of religious objects — rosaries, statues, and the like — left by visitors at the apparition site. "I think it takes away from the sacredness of the place... all those bits of paper and objects were like Doon Well (a Donegal Holy Well with a considerable reputation for curing)... it’s all phishogues (superstitions)". Though they fully accepted the supernatural character of the apparition site, these women were thus anxious to distinguish their own religious field from that of the peasants, which involves, among other things, the manipulation of objects. As the group's distinct emergence, as we shall see below, in reactions to the Healing Mass.

The Healing Mass of Castlefinn had been going for about a year, held on the first Wednesday of the month by parish priest Father Heaney in the Doneyloop parish church. Our minibus brought 24 women and one male anthropologist about fifty miles to the event. Inside the church we joined the other bus loads that had come from many points in the surrounding countryside and from the city of Derry about twenty miles north. About 250 people gathered that night, something like 90% of the women. While a majority of them were between forty and sixty, a full age range was present. People milled around the church in a more relaxed manner than usual for mass. The priest was hearing confessions, and several young people were setting up microphones for their instruments in the front of the church.

The priest turned the congregation over to "Donny", the young leader of the local prayer group who asked us to stand up and "praise Jesus in your own way". Donny proceeded to give out a fairly fluent though restrained stream of pentecostal style "praise", including a few moments of apparent "longues". To judge by the halting, half-whispered, half-mumbled "praising" from the pew, however, it appeared that many of the congregation were neither familiar nor comfortable with the form. This impression was reinforced by the priest's message that "those who want to learn how to pray like Donny should join your local prayer group... it takes about one year to pray like that". The mass itself proceeded in the usual manner, though the reading — Christ and the lepers — and sermon dealt with the theme of healing. Live music and much singing of a more or less evangelical nature once again clashed with the typical Donegal church experience. More extraordinary business was to follow.

The priest stepped down from the altar before the congregation and asked if there were any who wanted to tell of how the power of prayer had healed them or their loved ones. Several came up, one at a time, and "witnessed". Relating stories of family members in hospital, close to death. These testimonies were delivered nervously and, at least by contrast with American Protestant Pentecostals, amateursly. There was no well-worn phrasing — the "praise the Lord’s" that punctuate witnessing in, for example, the Holy Ghost churches of the American South.

With the completion of the witnessing, the service proper came to an end. Most of the congregants rose to chat with one another at the back of the church, or repair to the community center next door for tea and biscuits. Several dozen remained in the first few rows of pews however, for what was the most unorthodox aspect of the occasion. Members of the prayer group arranged themselves in four groups of three along the aisles, one of them including Father Heaney. These were healing groups, and the congregants remaining in the pews were prospective patients. Several other prayer group members acted as ushers, sending the congregants up to one group or another as vacancies occurred. Each "patient" was warmly greeted and, having seated her or himself with the group of choice, commenced to talk of problems and pains, after which the prayer group members would "lay hands" on the afflicted and pray silently but with visible fervor.

Two women in their fifties, by their dress and speech from the west of the county, sat near me through the mass. Their behavior throughout betrayed an uncertainty with then entire event. "Well", said one of the other at the conclusion, "what did you think of that?". "It was different..." replied her friend unsteadily. "It’s what they call Chris-matic", the first related, by way of information. What had brought them here two, or the many others who come for the first time (regularly estimated newcomers to be something like a third of the congregation) to this religious occasion?
The Confessional Expansion in the Twentieth Century.

The confessional movement has been a significant development in the twentieth century, with its roots in the mid-twentieth century. This movement has had a profound impact on the Catholic Church, particularly in the areas of liturgy, education, and social justice. The confessional movement can be traced back to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which called for a renewal of the Church’s liturgical practice and a greater emphasis on personal and communal participation in worship.

One of the key themes of the confessional movement has been the importance of personal faith and religious experience. The call for a more personal and intimate approach to faith has been a central aspect of this movement, with an emphasis on the idea of the laity being called to participate more actively in the life of the Church.

The confessional movement has also been influential in the areas of social justice and education. The Church has taken a more active role in addressing issues of social justice, such as poverty, hunger, and discrimination, and has worked to create programs and initiatives to address these issues.

In conclusion, the confessional movement has been a significant development in the twentieth century, with its roots in the Second Vatican Council. This movement has had a profound impact on the Catholic Church, particularly in the areas of liturgy, education, and social justice, and continues to be an important aspect of the Church’s work today.

References:

- The Confessional Movement in the Catholic Church.
- The Role of the Laity in the Catholic Church.

Further Reading:

- The Confessional Movement: An Overview.
- The Impact of the Second Vatican Council on the Catholic Church.
- The Role of the Laity in the Catholic Church:
  - A Comprehensive Guide.

Additional Resources:

- The Catholic Church and Social Justice.
- The Catholic Church and Education.
individuals attend the Healing Mass with a cultural inattention to charismatic elements, seeking instead the curing touch of the unorthodox priest (and Heaney's outsider status within the diocesan clergy reinforces this interpretation) or his blessed salt. As for Margaret, and most other local middle-class Catholics, the Mass may be perceived as another devotional exercise more or less required for civil responsibility — particularly among women. Accordingly, some of them will occasionally attend the Mass, publically demonstrating respectable religiosity and garnering points towards salvation. For others among them, however, the troubling novelty of certain elements of the Mass may be more worrisome, and so they will cease attending — "I'd sooner go to Knock".

For others, however, the Healing Mass occupies a significantly different place — in a new field of religious experience. For those already enmeshed in a charismatic field, like Fiona and the other prayer group members, the Healing Mass takes its place not beside Knock or the visit to a curing priest, but with the weekly group meetings and the pilgrimage to Medjugorje (?). As we have seen, the Mass may also serve as a gateway (as can a trip to Medjugorje) into their charismatic field for those from either of the other two fields described above. My suspicion is that it is most likely to do so for those motivated by a personal affliction. Full membership in the charismatic field also offers a new community, however, which may be especially attractive to those who find older associations increasingly fragmented.

What of the larger historical process? Is the Healing Mass a religious occasion standing at the verge of a potential religious regime? The charismatic renewal is reminiscent of far older movements within the Church and Weber's (1968 : 1165) discussion of conflict between "hierarchy" and "charisma" may shed some light on the general phenomenon. According to Weber "fully developed office charisma inevitably becomes the most uncompromising foe of all genuinely personal charisma, which propagates and preaches its own way to God and is prophetic, mystic and ecstatic". The "Charismatic Renewal" movement is certainly viewed by many clergy in Donegal, as elsewhere, with some unease. In the words of one bishop, "I don't like charismatics — it begins with charism and ends with schismatics". The Bishop of the diocese which includes Killybegs has appointed a priest as "spiritual advisor" to the prayer groups, whose task it is to periodically attend local meetings and make sure they are not straying too far from orthodoxy. Even if they do not, however, the fact that they have religious experiences to the extent of access to the Holy Spirit — under their own steam is threatening enough. Moreover, the network of national and international association which links local charismatic groups to one another represents a nascent institution potentially outside the control of at least the diocesan clergy. Yet their theology leads them back to the sacraments of the church. The Healing Mass, whatever its innovations, had both priest and Eucharist at its center. Moreover, the core members of the Killybegs prayer group were the most regular attendants of church and priest run events, many of them attending masses and other devotions daily.

We must, however, return to the general political structure of the Irish Church, for that is the context that will determine the course of events in this regard. The Church is, of course, interested in institutionalizing whatever charisma the movement generates, but the present state of "flux" does present opportunities for various relatively out-of-power groups within the Church to seize upon such occasions or prayer meetngs or healing Masses to both demonstrate and augment their own power and authority.
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