

Approaching the Past

HISTORICAL ANTHROPOLOGY
THROUGH IRISH CASE STUDIES

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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 an attractive 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.

Twasa 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 chaunted [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

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The Languages of Belief: Nineteenth-Century Religious Discourse in Southwest Donegal¹

LAWRENCE J. TAYLOR

Different Voices: Competing Religious Narratives

There was a protestant [*gallia*—literally, "foreign"] woman in Glen who was inhospitable toward the locals [*gaedhil*—literally, "the Gaels"] who were going on Columcille's *turas* [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

Irish and English to the inhabitants of western Ireland by the middle to late nineteenth century. The very coexistence of these quite disparate voices and idioms demands that we listen to them as the people did, not according to the pristine and artificial isolation of our own intellectual categories, but in concert—however disharmonious. Clearly, the proper context of even the “traditional” folk story extended beyond the confines of any narrowly defined “peasant” social world and language to include a complex network of associations and con-tending constructions of reality that characterized (though certainly not uniquely) Donegal in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. My intention here is to explore that diversity in an effort to discern something of the complex character of popular Catholicism in that particularly interesting, transitional period in Irish history—when the renewed vigorous intrusion of the institutional church coincided with other important social and economic changes discussed later. In the process, light might also be shed on two issues of more general interest: first, the role of discourse in structuring religious experience in complex societies; and second, the ways in which anthropological interpretations of discourse can be useful to historiography and the theoretical problems of historical sociology. Here the term *discourse* is meant to suggest a *langage* in Foucault’s sense, which both constitutes a particular reality by talking about it and disallows other, competing discourses.⁵ I am arguing that the three texts cited earlier may each have represented a competing discourse within the realm of Irish Catholicism in the late nineteenth century. Viewed in this way, these and other narratives may have represented a discursive struggle between competing forms of power.

The Power of Religious Narrative

Anthropology—particularly in Europe—has paid far less attention to religious words per se than to religious action. Although there are many studies of “folk religion” in the ethnography of European Catholicism, the emphasis has been on ritual, a bias reinforced not only by anthropological leanings rooted in Durkheim but by explicit or implicit comparisons with Protestants—where the “text” may purport to replace the rite. After all, anthropologists, like many other Western intellectuals, have tended to view religion rationally from the Protestant perspective forged during the Reformation. According to this received wisdom, Catholicism consists mainly of ritual magic, and Protestantism, particularly in its more “purified” forms, is char-

acterized by reasoned speech and a focus on the Biblical text. It is no wonder that in turning to their own continent, ethnographers sought out colorful rites in Catholic Europe. Consequently, even though some progress has been made in noting and analyzing Protestant ritual, Catholic discourse has been routinely undervalued.⁶ Folklorists may have done more with narrative texts in particular, but in Ireland, texts have been used mainly as raw material for typological classification or as expressive evidence of a general worldview.⁷ Yet a consideration of any late-nineteenth-century (or indeed, twentieth-century) European Catholic population—no matter how “folksy”—reveals not only that religious discourse (which typically survives in narrative texts) figured importantly in daily life but that, as our own case shows, folk stories were not the only sort of religious narrative encountered.

Thus, there is reason to develop an approach—at once historical and anthropological—to interpreting religious narratives and, more generally, the discourse in which such narratives played a critical role. Although European historians and anthropologists have worked out some of their most creative borrowing in the analysis of symbolism and systems of thought and meaning, in Ireland there has so far been little sign of this sort of reciprocity.⁸ Where historians of Irish religion have turned to anthropology, it has been to the somewhat outmoded functionalist concepts of magic developed by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown explaining local heterodoxies as simply responses to basic needs or community relations.⁹ Although such observations have not been without merit, they did not constitute a great advance over the doctrine of “survivals.” This reluctance to incorporate more recent anthropological approaches in Irish historiography has been in marked contrast to the interaction between historians and anthropologists working on such topics in France or Italy, where the cross-fertilization has been extraordinarily productive.¹⁰ From this interdisciplinary field, a dynamic model of religious culture has been evolving, one attentive to the ways in which the generation of rituals, devotional forms, and discourse create both meaning and power.

This interdisciplinary approach has obvious relevance for the history and ethnography of Irish Catholicism, where the interactive relation between local religious practice and “official,” institutionally generated forms of devotion has been both complex and vital to any understanding of local experience. Some of the complexity has been revealed by focusing on “religious occasions” (as I have done elsewhere),¹¹ such as a mission, pilgrimage, or healing mass. Several such occasions (e.g., missions) could play a particularly crucial role in

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.¹² 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.¹³ 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-

creased presence of external institutions and of the culture they promoted.

The rise—with the aid of landlords—of an indigenous Catholic merchant class began with the depression after the Napoleonic Wars; by the 1870s, the market towns of the region—Carrick and Ardara—essentially had achieved their present appearance.¹⁴ These towns, though hardly imposing even by rural European standards, did come to constitute a significantly new kind of social space that both housed and symbolized the new class. The petty bourgeoisie were not the only users of the town. Clearly, that class always represented a minority of those to be found on the streets or, more important for our concerns, in the pubs, which were licensed during the 1870s and which slowly replaced or at least supplemented the home and the rural “shebeen” as the principal sites of social drinking. The local peasants who came to the towns, whether on market days or more frequently, were of course the main clientele of the pubs and thus found themselves drawn into social interaction and especially communication not just with other peasants coming in from other directions, but with publicans.¹⁵ In this emerging social world, these publicans, like the millers of whom Ginzburg wrote, served a crucial function as perhaps the most important mediators and interpreters of local information.¹⁶

The home circumstances of those peasants had also changed. The old *clachan*,¹⁷ a nucleated hamlet settlement pattern with a rundale field system, had been reorganized by improving landlords in the 1840s. These small clusters were replaced with the contemporary social geography of more “dispersed” and hence isolated homesteads. The rise of the town and pub thus coincided with a reduction in at least some aspects of communality in the countryside.

Finally, the development of physical and social closeness in town and increasing isolation in the countryside was accompanied by the simultaneous penetration of two institutions from the outside world. The Catholic church accelerated a process it had begun earlier, the building of chapels capable of housing the entire parish and thus providing a crucial symbol of and stage for introducing a new religious discourse. At least equally significant was the proliferation of national schools, spreading the English language and a form of civility that echoed the rhetoric of the church.

It is clear that these transformations each contributed importantly to the production and consumption of the various forms of religious discourse we have discerned. However, addressing the questions of

who read and/or heard, how they understood the disparate forms, and what was the historical impact of such texts, is not so simple.

Two sorts of evidence strongly suggest that such texts exerted a powerful influence on local religious experience. Historically, the transition in religious behavior that Larkin called the “devotional revolution”—the process whereby Roman devotions and regular church attendance became the Irish norm by the middle of the nineteenth century—was accompanied by what contemporaries described as powerfully and emotionally received parish missions.¹⁸ Moreover, the impact of the sermons was evidenced in the folk reaction—stories about the miraculous occurrences at missions—to be found in the folklore archives. There was also, however, my own ethnographic experience of the role and power of narratives in this part of Ireland (though I doubt it is peculiar in that respect). I saw what was left of formal storytelling, but it was the general attention awarded narrative in whatever form and situation that I found most striking. An anecdote, when told well, riveted the audience in house or pub, and the Victorian tendency to commit written verse or story to memory was still an attribute of the older locals. They told me of the yet more vital role of narrative in the world of their parents, and historical descriptions as well as the volume of stories in the folklore archives convinced me that they were right. Finally, there is the logical possibility that narratives played an exaggerated role in Irish Catholicism, which, for reasons of local religious tradition as well as English suppression, was relatively weak in iconography and ritual pomp.

It is tempting, and to a limited extent justified, simply to interpret the form and function of the texts from the perspective of class relations. The folk story was a peasant cultural form from this perspective, the magazine piece a distinctly middle-class expression, and the sermon a text consciously contrived to domesticate the “wild Irish” peasantry—part of what might be called the church’s “civilizing process”—or better, “civilizing offensive.”¹⁹

If both the classes and texts are considered in isolation from one another, this reading is convincing. But in southwest Donegal, and probably in any other region, the picture was a bit more complicated. The relatively few members of the local middle class hardly lived in a totally distinct social and cultural milieu, though, as we shall see, discourse may have played an important role in building a class culture. Moreover, although presumably such periodicals as *Duffy’s Fireside Magazine* would have enjoyed only limited circulation in this region in the mid- or even late nineteenth century, the contents of

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 emended 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. Columille's *turas*, 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 primordially: 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-

tive has difficulty laying hold of it. In such cases, other events, even infrequent and apparently (to the disinterested observer) undramatic ones, may be cast in an important narrative role because they can be made to carry a certain symbolic weight. The folk narratives I shall consider here can be understood from this perspective; they have sustained a particular field of religious experience through such direct and indirect appropriations of historical events and processes.

To understand this dialectic between narratives and historical experience we need to take a long—however schematic—view of the process. In particular, I want to focus on the subject of the story I began with, holy wells, whose devotions and stories throw a particularly illuminating light on the history of Irish Catholicism.

The respective fates of holy well devotions illustrate the differences between the paths taken by continental and Irish Catholicism. As Brown demonstrated, the cult of saints in early Christian Europe made the graves and relics of saints, and the shrines associated with them, the sites of pilgrimage.²² Since these shrines were controlled by the bishops, such devotions served to strengthen episcopal domination. In Ireland there seems to have been less use of relics in early saint cults; rather, their devotion was concentrated on holy wells associated with miraculous acts during their lives. Particularly along the western seaboard of Ireland, such wells were unassociated with bishops or other centralizing religious regimes. Instead, they were associated with eremitic monastic communities (and later, their ruins) on wild moor, mountain, and island. Geographically and politically, they celebrated the power of the periphery, not the center. Their liminality was an appropriate expression of the dangerous power that was present there, for it was at such locations that one also met, and to some extent still meets, fairies and ghosts. This early monastic form, unlike the continental cult centers described by Brown, reinforced rather than challenged existing notions of a metaphorically parallel, powerful world to which one might get access at liminal points of time and space.

What of continuing devotions at holy wells? Most historical accounts have referred to the “patterns”: festivities on particular days—sometimes an associated saint’s day, but not always—when any number of people gathered to “do the stations,” proceeding around the well or from one pile of stones to another, saying so many *avers* and *paters* on the way. According to numerous contemporary accounts from the twelfth through the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries, these patterns were occasions of postdevotional heavy drinking, faction fights, and sexual liaisons. However, when and where Ireland

became home to a more Romanized religious regime (beginning with the Vatican-supported Anglo-Normans), the clergy, or various members of it, attempted to limit or eliminate such practices, but apparently with relatively little success before the mid-nineteenth-century famine. After that point, however, such liminal chaos was successfully attacked and the patterns were either terminated altogether or domesticated.²³ The priest then could lead the people through the passive rounds, after which they went peacefully home. Indeed, many clergy so successfully coopted and tamed such devotions that by the twentieth century, clerics began to revive defunct pilgrimages in order to reinvigorate what could now be perceived as quaint “local custom.”

Does that mean, however, that the “folk field of religious experience,” based as it was, to some extent, on well devotions, was also successfully domesticated, and liminal conceptions of power replaced by vertical ones mediated by priest and saint? To some extent the answer is yes, and the process was well named by historian Larkin as the “devotional revolution.”²⁴ Yet the evidence of discourse reveals ways in which such change was mitigated. For the stories about wells shed a different sort of light on both the character of the religious experience involved in the devotional exercises—what it meant or means to the people—and the people’s reaction to the drastic changes brought about so recently by clerical domination—the devotional revolution mentioned earlier. To what extent, we can ask, did the discourse of well stories keep alive an older field of religious experience that emphasized not the vertical relations of Roman devotional structures but the parallel world of natural power mediated by liminality?

One genre of stories concerned the origins of wells, which were not in fact always associated with saints. In Donegal, for example, the Well of the Holy Women (*Tohar na mBan Naomh*) and Doon Well (*Tohar an Duine*), the latter having a very active devotion, were not connected by tradition to any particular saint, nor was there a single clear origin story.²⁵ For most wells, however, legends did account for their origins in the acts of, predominantly, early Celtic saints whose lives were set in a kind of prehistorical dreamtime when and where they wandered through the landscape destroying dragons and the like and not always acting as paragons of virtue. Rather, they were capricious, powerful creatures whose power was demonstrated in stories as alternately damning or blessing. As far as the wells were concerned, they, like other features of the landscape, were marked by some gesture of the saint, such as a fallen tear or a staff striking a

rock. These saints, and their wells, were autochthonic. They were the relations of chiefs whose genealogies could be traced backed to the hero-gods of Gaelic mythology. As for the "stranger converter 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 *tebar na mban naomh* 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.³⁴ 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 decidedly 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 McGlinchy, 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.³⁵ These eighteenth-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 inveterate 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

described in the typical vocabulary of the transforming religious experience. The mission was treated as a liminal, powerful, and penitential event on the order of, for example, a pilgrimage to a holy site like Station Island in Lough Derg.³⁶ These interpretations, it must be noted, would still have done nothing to detract from the efficacy of clerical domination. They would, however, have had the unintended consequences of possibly reinforcing the very world they sought to undermine—what we might call the folk or chthonic field of religious experience.

“*A Chant of Love . . .*”: “*The Peasant at the Shrine*”

Clearly, the experience of reading the *Duffy*'s piece (see appendix 4.2) was different in every possible way from hearing either of the other two texts. One can imagine—unfortunately, only imagine—the shopkeeper, who was financially most likely to receive this periodical, sitting in his or her parlor with a copy of *Duffy*'s or some other piece of popular literary culture. The social interaction, unless the piece was read aloud, would have been between the reader and the text, a civilized act in a civilized setting. In such circumstances, the act of reading may well have made for the individual a crucial connection between the class culture and notions of petit bourgeois civility, on the one hand, and religiosity, on the other.

The Victorian act of reading such literature, of course, would have been matched by the civility in the content of the magazine extract and of the poem that it introduced and that continued in a similar vein. Such a text would have worked very differently from both the other narratives in that the reader was not in this case being asked to put him or herself into the story. The probably middle-class reader of this rather standard piece of Victorian sentimentality (in its Catholic guise) was hardly expected to identify with the peasant at the shrine. Indeed, the effect was more likely distancing: even though represented as a fellow Catholic, the peasant as “folk” was clearly “other.” The identification was instead with the writer—the fellow middle-class sentimentalist—and in that way the impact of this text was likely to be very different indeed from the Redemptorist sermon. Of course it was aimed at a different audience. Although the sermon served the “civilizing offensive” by seeking to domesticate the savage peasant through control and domination, the poem may have contributed to Elias’s “civilizing process” by providing an example of language and thought for emulation.³⁷

Although such a discourse of peasant otherness might have merely reinforced the thoroughly bourgeois self-image of a city dweller, there is some irony in the possibility of such newly minted, middle-class merchants as would have been found in the west contemplating such a depiction of their first cousins. If they did, however, it probably contributed to the growth of a rural class consciousness among the new petit bourgeois of that area. In the experience of reading *Duffy*'s magazine, one identified oneself as a “reader” and, by virtue of that activity, a participant in a particular cultural community. One may also have learned to see the “peasant” (formerly a neighbor or relation) as the sort of person one “read” about, the sort of person who lived in stories of this sort (unlike in folk stories, where the listener was asked to identify with the subject).

At the same time, the text sentimentalized religion in general (see appendix 4.2), and in that sense it would have directly affected the reader's own religious worldview. The field of religious experience presented in the text involved an interesting twist relative to that field represented in the folk story about Columcille's well. The *Duffy*'s piece too placed a “peasant at a well” or rural shrine—accurate enough location of a significant point of mediation with the divine—but the piece associated the shrine with Mary, who then enters into the story. Although Mary was a familiar enough personage in the chthonic field of religious experience, the folk image of Mary was quite different, at least as evidenced in folk narratives. O'Laoghaire described the “homely and intimate fashion in which the Bardic poets spoke of Mary” and the easy familiarity of peasant prayer to the Mother of God.³⁸ If Mary was familiar and addressable through prayer, however, she was (and has continued to be) not much localized in that idiom and not nearly so woven into the landscape as the Irish saints, even though in several of the folk narratives she accompanied those saints (Brigid in particular) in their wanderings through mythic dreamtime. The magazine piece, on the other hand, depicted an altogether different cosmos: a characteristically Victorian religious blend of the homely and the powerful—in that most useful of all versions—Mary. Where Protestantism prevented such direct Marian expression, as in English and American popular religious discourse, *Mother* was used in place of Mary, and rather than a holy shrine in the forest, one would have read about the Mother's grave.

In common with the folk narrative, however, this magazine piece may seem, from our perspective, to empower the landscape: mediation happened in the forest—already in short enough supply in nineteenth-century Ireland—and nature apparently triumphed over cul-

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 depictions of female sanctity and influence challenged male authority. Indeed, 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 narrative 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 putting Christ on their altars. At various points in later Catholic history, Mary served the same function, in these cases replacing localized with generalized devotions.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 pilgrimage), 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 experience. 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 mediation 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 circumstances, 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 significance 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 available 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)

and Father Burke everywhere (including the Irish American community).⁴⁰ There were also those religious texts that reached that local world via devotional pamphlets, books, and popular magazines. All these may be said to have expressed another field of religious experience, a kind of "civil Catholicism" whose supernatural verticality replaced chthonic horizontality.

A consideration and comparison of these texts has allowed me to penetrate, at least to some depth, into the respective religious universes they both described and, to an important extent, generated. The exercise also points up the social and even political potentialities in such texts and the experiences they sought to capture and create: the relation between meaning and power. To the extent that these texts and fields were linked to social formations, both texts and formations may have competed. Especially in periods of rapid social change, the ability of particular narrative forms to make sense of experience is tested, even as new narrative forms are being introduced that resonate with new social realities. This is clear in comparing the narratives we have been exploring here. The folk narrative responded to changing circumstances by sustaining a basic view of power and mediation through incorporating new characters and situations into its story. At the same time, the church's participation in an increasingly vertical world—in terms of class as well as supernatural relations—was expressed in a different sort of narrative: the sermon. For particular individuals, one narrative form may have been more consonant with their experience of power, and if the other language or idiom lost for them its ability to represent the world in this way, it would have been drained of its potency. Thus, the contest was not only between beliefs and devotional forms but between the voices and languages that described and, in a sense, created them. Moreover, since these voices were embodied in particular individuals, groups, settings, and occasions, these too competed through the texts for cultural authority and, as a corollary, for social power.

Thus, the "civil Catholicism," which the other two texts expressed and to some extent helped bring about, involved social as well as supernatural verticality—that is, a new set of class relations. The sermon achieved this by tanning and controlling the peasantry; the magazine piece achieved it by contributing to a distanced bourgeois culture and identity. This social task was accomplished, or at least attempted, through the emotional power of religious narrative. The texts performed their functions differently; each had its own form and logic. Thus, the folk stories sought to create a sense of place through powerful imagery of magical intervention. The teller and the

listener stood in an egalitarian relation to one another, a relation both created and expressed by an act of communication that did not much privilege the speaker. For the narrator did not put her/himself in a mediatory position relative to divine power—although s/he may have accrued a certain status as mediator of the tradition and hence emblem of the "traditional community." The other forms of discourse explored here were very different in that they both issued from human authority in a more direct and concrete way and represented the speaker or writer (whether person or institution) as all-knowing, in contact with God or Godlike himself. Between the two—the sermon and the magazine piece—there are, however, obvious and great differences. The missionary "instructed" and so used the language of argument. The magazine piece, on the other hand—to use the nineteenth-century idiom—"influenced." In the terms of that central Victorian binary opposition, the sermon was masculine whereas the magazine piece was feminine.

Yet, as we saw, none of the fields or those who dwell in them have been passive; thus, the competition among them has been complex. In each one, certain elements occurring in the others were appropriated, transformed, and interpreted. Events and experiences were thereby placed within a master narrative whose purpose was to assert the dominance of one way of seeing over another. But to overpower another discourse, each narrative to some extent reproduced it, thus possibly sustaining the enemy with new life. This is clear, for example, in the competing narrative versions of the mission. Thus, we find not an evolutionary layer cake but a dialogical relation between conflicting social and cultural formations—wherein religious discourse, for reasons of its somewhat special historical potency, played an especially vital role. Here is a perfect instance of the mutual reinforcement of meaning and power.

APPENDIX 4.1 REDEMPTORIST SERMON

Today if you hear the voice of the Lord harden not your hearts.

Ps. 94

Introduction

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 . . . 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 all 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 extricate 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 Nineve—"the Ninivetes 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 Ninivetes—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-

dowed them with a special lustre of sanctity and of learning—fitted them out and sent them to rescue whole countries and nations from eternal ruin—drawing them out of the abyss of infidelity and immorality—Such men of God were St. Benedict, St. Bernard, St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. . . . St. Vincent de Paul, and last yet not least of all St. Alphonsus de Ligouri—They walked and worked in the spirit of Elias—And these saints gathered around them disciples—companions according to their own spirit—They founded religious orders, the chief end of which is nothing else, but to continue the work of Jesus Christ, the redemption of mankind—And these orders—these men—this work—have been blessed and approved of, are protected, empowered and highly favoured by the Popes and the Bishops of the Cath. Church—At present God has sent to you the sons of St. Alphonsus, The Redemptorist Fathers, to preach the glad tidings of salvation to preach peace and to offer you pardon. II Cor. 5:20 We are, therefore, as St. Paul says, ambassadors for Christ—God as it were exhorting you by us—For Christ, we beseech you, be ye reconciled to God—Behold now is the acceptable time—behold now is the day of salvation—During the acceptable time of the mission—during these days of salvation, God will shower his graces upon you—The dew of ordinary graces which are at hand at other times, become heavy showers of rain during the mission—There will be no lack or want on the part of God nor will there be any lack or want on our part.

11

The second party which must work for the success of the mission are the missionary fathers—We, too poor feeble men as we are must take a great share in the work Now what is our work? As I have said already, a mission is the continuation of the work of Christ Himself: a second redemption on a small scale—Thus the same as Christ did during his public life we are going to do during the next week. First of all Our Lord preached to the people, to them that were sitting in darkness, in ignorance, in the shadow of death. A light sprang up, the light of the gospel—Thousands flocked to him—followed him even into the desert—to listen to his sermons—And the banks of the river Jordan re-echoed with the voice of the divine missionary—He instructed them about God—their last end—He showed them the way of salvation—the enormity of sin—the obstacles of the way to

heaven—So do we—We shall preach to you the same Gospel—the Gospel of Christ—We do not preach a Gospel different from what you have heard and learnt already. This would be heresy—If an angel came down from heaven to preach another gospel, let him be accursed—do not listen to him—Turn your back upon him—We preach Christ and him crucified I Cor. To the Jews a stumbling block, to the Gentiles foolishness, but to them that are called, to you, brethren—Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God—We shall preach to you all you must know and do in a short time, and in clear simple language, so that your faith and the knowledge of your faith will be revived and increased in a few weeks. Again Our Lord prayed much for the people, whom, to save he had come down from heaven—Without prayer, without earnest and fervent prayer our preaching will not move you—It will be like sounding brass—It will reach your ear perhaps, but will not penetrate the depth of your hearts—Thus we too shall pray for you and with you throughout the mission—in morning—during Holy Mass—during our work—in the evening esp. we shall offer up the Rosary and after the sermon we shall say together 5 Paters and Aves for the conversion of sinners at the tolling of the bell.—Moreover Our Lord did not only stir the people up—did not only show them the enormity of sin and the abyss of hell as a natural consequence of sin—but he showed them the abyss of his mercy also—He forgave the sins of the people—He conversed with sinners—He led them back to God.—This mission was a mission of mercy—salvation—"I am not come to destroy. . . . Oh! how kind, how merciful was our dear Lord to poor sinners, who with a contrite heart explored his pardon—The woman caught in the very act of adultery was not rejected or condemned, but pardoned by him—How mercifully did he treat St. Peter and Matthew, that poor outcast, Mary Magdalene and the very thief hanging on a gibbet—We too shall do the same—follow his example—We are not come to throw you into despair, nor to reject and condemn you—We are among you—to help—to pardon—to save you—There is no sin however great—no crime however enormous which cannot be pardoned during this mission. If your sins were as red as crimson—they will be washed as white as wool, and if they were as numbertless as the stars in the sky—they will be blotted out, all without exception, provided you approach us with a contrite and humble heart and the firm will to amend your life—story of Mary Magdalen—story of the woman who died in the chapel—And our Lord fed the people with miraculous bread. He fed them even with his own flesh and blood—He sacrificed himself for the remission of their sins—So shall we do—

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, revolving 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 swelling 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 clear and tranquil sky.

A censer fill'd with sweetest gums was swinging there the while,
And a taper shed its chaste'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 glad some 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 'neath 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 joys 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 shrank 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 breathless 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

is part of a more general study of local religious life (for a book in progress), based on participant observation and extensive interviews in the area, as well as archival research particularly in the Redemptorist Library, the National Library, and the National Folklore Archive, both in Dublin. My work on religion follows from a long-standing research interest in the area that began with several months fieldwork in 1973, further fieldwork through most of 1976, and occasional return visits. Other aspects of local history and ethnography are treated in Taylor (1980a, 1980b, 1981, 1985, 1987). This paper has profited greatly from the comments, suggestions, and assistance of the participants at the Conference on Anthropology and History held in 1989 and from Maewé Hickey Taylor, Seamus Ó Catháin, Father Brendan McConvery CSsR, Howard Schneiderman, Pat Donoghue, and the editors of this volume.

2. *Roimn Béaloideas* V.142.
3. "The Peasant at the Shrine," F.K.P 1833.
4. From "Mission Sermons," undated (likely the last decades of nineteenth century). Notebook of the Redemptorist Order, Marianella House, Dublin.
5. Foucault (1972:21-71).
6. On the ritual orientation of folk religious studies in Europe see, for example, Badone (1990) and Christian (1972).
7. For classificatory studies see Ó Súilleabhain (1951); for more interpretive studies see Glasie (1983) and Ó Healáí (1974-76, 1977).
8. Rather, it has been in the area of social structure and organization that most mutual interaction has taken place.
9. See, for example, Connolly (1982).
10. See, for example, among historians, the works of Davis, Brown, Ginzburg, Sabean, and Burke and among anthropologists, those of Christian, Schneider, and Bax.
11. See Taylor (1989a, 1989b, 1990a, 1990b).
12. Taylor (1990b) has the fullest treatment of the concept of fields of religious experience.
13. See Bax (1987).
14. See Taylor (1980b).
15. In fact, the absence of a significant group of landless laborers in such communities made them very different from towns in other regions of Ireland. For a most marked contrast see Silverman and Gulliver (1986) and Silverman, this volume.
16. Ginzburg (1980).
17. See Buchanan (1970) and Taylor (1980a).
18. Larkin (1972).
19. See Elias (1978, 1982) and Inglis (1987).
20. See Taylor (1985).
21. Turner (1982:72f).
22. Brown, Peter (1981).
23. After the famine, a decreased population, especially among the poor-

est classes, allowed for a much higher priest/partisaner ratio and hence more effective social control of a population much more likely to acquiesce.

24. Larkin (1972).
25. See Logan (1980). My knowledge of both wells is based on fieldwork in the region.
26. Author's field notes.
27. See Taylor (1985, 1990a) on the theme of replacing the clergy as the enemy with Protestants.
28. See Taylor (1990a).
29. See Taylor (1989a).
30. See Whelan (1988b).
31. Faction fights were a commonly reported feature of rural Irish life involving ritualized battles between local groups. Early mission records reveal an interest in such matters.
32. Verrips (1987).
33. Inglis (1987).
34. An extract was given at page 143. A fuller text is given in appendix 4.1.
35. McGlinchey (1986).
36. Lough Derg is a small lake in County Donegal, near the Fermanagh border; Station Island is in the middle of the lake. Penitential pilgrims have been going there for centuries. Currently, about thirty thousand per year come and stay for three days of fasting and sleepless rounds of prayer.
37. See Elias (1978, 1982) and Inglis (1987).
38. O'Laoghaire (1982).
39. See Christian (1981) for a discussion of "localized versus generalized devotions."
40. Bishop Gallagher's sermons were published in Irish toward the end of the eighteenth century and reprinted at intervals through the nineteenth century. Father Thomas Burke's sermons, delivered in Ireland and America, were famous through the period and available in many editions.