



**XAVIER**  
UNIVERSITY of LOUISIANA

Xavier University of Louisiana  
**XULA Digital Commons**

---

Electronic Thesis and Dissertation

---

1932

## Catholic Leadership and Catholic Action in the Works of Canon Sheehan

Irma Louise Henry

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.xula.edu/etd>



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

---



CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP AND CATHOLIC ACTION  
IN THE WORKS OF CANON SHEEHAN

\*\*\*\*\*

A Thesis Presented For The Degree Of

BACHELOR OF ARTS

By  
Irma Louise Henry

XAVIER UNIVERSITY

1932



XAVIER UNIVERSITY LIBRARY  
NEW ORLEANS, LA. 70125

XAVIER UNIVERSITY LIBRARY  
NEW ORLEANS

Approved  
S. Casella Marie

RB  
378.2  
H502c  
1932



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Under The Cedars And The Stars-----	Sheehan----	Longmans----	1915
Parerga-----	"	"	----1916
The Intellectuals-----	"	"	----1917
My New Curate-----	"	"	----1915
Luke Delmege-----	"	"	----1902
The Blindness of Dr. Gray-----	"	"	----1915
Lisheen-----	"	"	----1916
The Graves At Kilmorna-----	"	"	----1915
Miriam Lucas-----	"	"	----1912
Glenmaar-----	"	"	----1905
Canon Sheehan of Doneraile-----	"	"	---1912

Magazine Articles

Catholic Action -----	January -	1932
"	"	----- February- 1932
"	"	----- March - 1932



oooooooooooo

## OUTLINE OF THESIS

THESIS: The qualities of an ideal Catholic leader and the aims and great possibilities of Catholic Action are set forth in the works of Patrick Canon Sheehan.

### I. Reasons for choosing subject

#### A. Familiarity with Sheehan as to

1. Life
2. Writings
3. Characteristics

#### B. Necessity of writing a thesis

#### C. Catholic Action Movement

#### D. Necessity for knowing what the Catholic Action Movement is.

### II. Origin of Catholic Action Movement

#### A. Present Pope commands in encyclical

1. His message

### III. Definition of Catholic Action

- A. What does it embody
- B. " brought it about
- C. Its purpose

### IV. Canon Sheehan the Man

#### A. Boyhood

1. Parentage
2. Early education
3. Vocation to the priesthood

### V. Canon Sheehan The Priest

A. Priestly training

1. Student life

B. Ordination

1. When and where

2. His first Mass

C. Missionary work

1. England

2. Ireland

VI. Canon Sheehan the Writer

A. First Book

B. Later works

C. Favorite themes

VII. Ideal Catholic Leadership

A. What a leader of any kind should be

B. What a Catholic leader should be

VIII. Consideration of characters of Sheehan for manifestations  
of these qualities

A. Consideration of prominent characters

1. Male characters

a. St. Bray and Henry Lifford

b. Denny Don and Anthony

c. John Delaney

d. Robert Maxwell

e. Myra Cogan and James Healy

2. Female characters

a. Maria Linn

b. Anne O'Rourke

c. Mary Liston

d. Nance

e. "Granny"

IX. These characters are ideal Catholic leaders

X. Consideration of these characters in the light of  
Catholic Action.

A. Examples of practitioners of Catholic Action

1. Betty Lane

2. Nance

3. Luke Delmege

XI. These characters are reflections of Sheehan's ego.

A. He was deeply religious

B. He stimulated Catholic Action

C. He sought justice for Ireland

D. He was charitable

XII. "Nemo dat quid non habet."

A. Sheehan only wrote what was partly himself

XIII. Conclusion

## CATHOLIC ACTION AND CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP

THESIS: The qualities of an ideal Catholic leader and the aims and great possibilities of Catholic Action are set forth in the works of Patrick Canon Sheehan.

The above-mentioned thesis was chosen for many reasons. First of all I have a personal interest in the life and works of Canon Sheehan, an interest which was engendered during my college career. This interest was fostered and developed further during my Senior year by a course in Modern Catholic Writers, in which a closer study was made of the life, works and literary characteristics of Sheehan. Another reason is that a thesis had to be written, and since one should always endeavor to write on topics with which he is familiar, I have chosen this thesis.

Then again, Catholic leadership and the Catholic Action Movement are intimately related and are two vital questions in the modern world. To-day paganism, lawlessness and vice have an ever-increasing hold on the world, especially the youth of to-day. If the Catholic Church wishes to combat these evils successfully, it will be necessary for her to have capable leaders and a well-informed laity.

The following questions arise, what should a Catholic leader be, and what is the ideal set by the Church? It is necessary to know the answers to these questions in order to first: know how to train youths to be future Catholic leaders, and secondly to know what to expect and how to recognize a true Catholic leader. The answers to these questions may be found by making a close study of the novels of Canon Sheehan's novels. It will be found that among the qualities of these leaders are: education, wide reading, familiarity with existing problems and conditions, and a strong conviction that responsibility of furthering the Catholic cause rests on him.

Furthermore, the next question which presents itself is, what is this Catholic Action Movement, and how did it originate, and what is its purpose? Not very many Catholics could answer the question intelligently, and yet is a movement in which each laymember must take part in order to bring it to a successful issue. In order to know something about it, Catholics should read about it. Canon Sheehan's works were written long before the present Catholic Action Movement; however it must be remembered that such a movement is by no means a new idea in the Church, for such an idea can be traced back to the time of the Apostles. For this reason, it can be seen that Canon Sheehan, being the learned visionary that he was, could see the far-reaching effects and the great possibilities of such a movement. Naturally we shall find that his words contain his ideas along this line.

In order to clear up any erroneous ideas along this line, and to explain something about this Catholic Action Movement, a few words here would not be amiss.



The present Pope, Pius XI is a man of unusual ability. It is but necessary to note the many issues he has brought to a successful close during his pontificate, or to note the modern improvements he has made in the Vatican City. These things show him to be a man of the times. He is respected throughout the world, and his messages are headlined in the newspapers and broadcasted over the radio. He perceived the time to be ripe for a great union of souls in the Church he represents, so within the current year he sent out an encyclical on Catholic Action. This encyclical caused quite a stir in the Catholic and non-Catholic world. Immediately the bishops and priests throughout the world set about to put this before the laity and to enlist their aid in putting over the mighty program contained in the two little words, "Catholic Action".

The principal idea contained in the Pope's encyclical on Catholic Action is as follows:

"Catholic Action consists not merely of the pursuit of the personal Christian perfection, which is however, before all others its first and greatest end, but it also consists of a true apostolate in which Catholics of every social class participate, coming thus to be united in thought and action around those centers of sound doctrine and multiple social activity, legitimately constituted and as a result, guarded and sustained by the authority of the bishops."

It is now necessary to turn the attention to the man upon whose writings, the proof of the thesis is based. Patrick Canon Shehan, an Irishman was born March 17, 1852 in the parish of

Mallow. He had two elder sisters and a younger brother. His early life was happy for his family was comfortably situated. The first school he ever attended was the local National School. As a boy he was delicate physically. On account of these characteristics he did not indulge in the usual rough games of the other boys, but preferred to go to some quiet nook to read or meditate. Or again he loved to wander through the woods and fields, which were so beautiful in that section, and commune with Nature. He loved the outdoors because of its wild yet delicate beauty. In this way his soul became saturated with this poetic which is present in all of his works. Besides being a dreamer, Sheehan was a brilliant student and did especially well in mathematics. But the peaceful monotony of Sheehan's boyhood was changed suddenly into sadness. The death of his father and then a year later, the death of his mother gave Sheehan his first taste of life's bitterness. After this sorrowful event Sheehan was placed under the guardianship of Father John McCarthy who proved to be a lifelong friend and counsellor to Sheehan. He was sent to St. Colman's College which was a prep school. While there he read extensively, especially the classics which he loved. About this time, the idea of becoming a priest was steadily growing on him, so that at the end of his brilliant course at St. Colman's, he entered Maynooth Seminary.

When Sheehan entered the seminary he fully realized the importance of his step. He had very high ideals as to what type of man a priest should be, and also the type of training

a priest should receive. At the time which he entered, Maynooth was going through a period of transition and unrest, consequently there were many things which annoyed Sheehan's temperament in connection with the administration and the curriculum. Nevertheless, he never forsook his ideals and he had recourse to his meditations and readings as a means of consolation. The effects of his wide reading and the depth of his thoughts were all evidenced later in his writings. While at the seminary he was always reticent and gentle, while at the same time his scholastic work was so brilliant, that he finished his course in 1874 with the highest honors. He was too young to be ordained so he was allowed to return home, during which time he prepared himself for ordination by prayer and meditation. He also accompanied the priests on sick-calls and stations. It was in doing this that he saw missionary life as it really was, and found it to be very different in practice than in theory. He complains in one of his manuscripts of a curious sense of unpreparedness at this revelation.

He was ordained the following year in 1875 on April 18, at St. Mary's Cathedral in Cork. This was without doubt a most happy day for Sheehan, however, there is no record of his experiences and thought on that memorable day. His first Mass was said at the Vincentian Monastery.

After this even Sheehan was appointed to an English mission, namely the Cathedral at Plymouth. He was pleased

with his new surroundings and found countless opportunities for bringing souls to God. So busily engaged was he, that he found little time for reading and meditating on the great mysteries around us. He was an excellent preacher, his characteristics as such were brevity and directness. His sermons made deep and lasting impressions on his hearers. A notable example of his ability as a preacher is as follows. He once preached a sermon on charity which was scarcely five minutes in length. But forty years later it was reproduced verbally by an unlettered woman of eight<sup>4</sup>eight to one of the priests. Unfortunately, Sheehan being delicately constituted began to feel the strain of his labors and was forced to take a vacation. He went to Lourdes and upon returning felt himself strengthened and refreshed both physically and spiritually. Shortly afterward he was sent to Exeter. There was less noise and dirt and the air was more wholesome. The people in the place were cultured and refined. Sometimes a group would gather on appointed evenings and interesting but highly intellectual discussions were held. Sheehan was greatly benefitted by his experiences with these people, and perhaps these meetings gave him the idea for his later work, "The Intellectuals."

After a successful administration at Exeter, during which time he gained the love and respect of Catholics and non-Catholics alike on account of his sincerity and straightforwardness, he was sent to Ireland as curate in his native

town of Mallow. Although he rejoiced at the idea of returning to his native land, there were misgivings in his heart. He knew that the Irish temperament was diametrically opposed to that of the English with whom he had been connected during the years previous. He also knew that a curacy in a country town would offer small chances for organization and improvement. However he returned with a cheerful heart to Mallow. His efforts and his zeal were met with an unsympathetic attitude. He was not understood and consequently he received no cooperation from his parishoners. He had an uphill struggle right along. However, as the months passed the situation improved. He organized a Literary Society which had for its aims, to discover latent talent and to foster a taste for literature, and at the same time develop expression and logical reasoning. He also had two confraternities to take care of the religious needs of the youth, for he was primarily interested in Irish youth. The reason for this was because he believed that Ireland's salvation lay in the training of leaders among her youth. He said at one of its meetings:

"It is to make you, gentlemen, worthy of yourselves, worthy of your religion, and worthy of your country that this Institute has been established. We know the vast importance that attends the education of young men, we know what a power they are in every community, what great influence they yield for

good or evil. We utterly disdain the intention of making this Institute a mere place of amusement, where a few hours may be spent with pleasure, but without profit. We have a higher ambition. We desire to make it the means of supplying to you a knowledge of all subjects that are interesting to the modern world and are familiar to the minds of educated men."

These words show clearly Canon Sheehan's ultimate aim in bringing together the young people. Another measure which he brought to a successful issue was a general improvement in the courses of religious instruction for young people in the schools. He expended a great deal of energy and time on this project because by the Intermediate Act passed in 1878 by England, Ireland's entire educational system would in time become secularized. Sheehan fought hard for the maintenance of religious instruction among his fold, and he was very successful at Mallow and later at Doneraile.

When Father Sheehan was appointed to Doneraile, he was sent to a place such as he had always longed to be. Doneraile was a picturesque little town. Heuser describes it as follows:

"Doneraile is a small town in the county of Cork.

It is beautifully situated at the base of a western spur of the Galtee Mountains. This range of hills forms as it were a meeting place for the four counties of Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford, and Cork. A little stream the Awbeg, a branch of the Black-

water, passes Doneraile and, above it, separates into small pools and streamlets among rocky and shady declines, giving the country roundabout a pleasant, idyllic aspect. The vegetation is rich abundant, importing to rolling country an alluring beauty, to which an old castle adds an air of romance!

A meditative, poetic soul like Sheehan revelled at such a prospect. Sheehan looked at this appointment as a favor from the Bishop who told him that out in Doneraile he would have much time for "poetizing and dreaming". This was greatly appreciated by Sheehan because he had begun to realize that by means of his pen he would have a more far-reaching influence. Then he conceived a plan by which he would present his theories and ideas under the attractive guise of short stories and novels and thereby gain the attention of the general reading public more easily and more effectively. He thought such a movement on his part might mean the eventual inauguration of an apostolate of the Irish press. He realized that this would be a vast improvement over the hitherto didactic tone of his previous writings. In other words, Sheehan decided that he would attempt to do for religion's and Ireland's sake what Cervantes did for knight-errantry and what Dickens did for the paupers of England. In doing this he would likewise make use of humorous and at the same time corrective illustrations. He intended that one should complement the other, his ultimate purpose

of writing was to preach the divine truths not only to his parishioners but to every parish in Ireland. He did not dream at that time that his preachings would be heard beyond the shores of Ireland.

So shortly afterwards, Sheehan published the first embodiment of his new idea. The title was "Geoffrey Austin". It was a novel in which Sheehan exposed some of his pet theories along the lines of Catholic education. He was full of ardor on this subject, and it was one of his greatest desires to see his theories put into practice. However this work did not gain the wide attention which he sought. It was appreciated for its literary merit, but it was not widely read. In this work Sheehan was greatly misunderstood, and many believed him to be a fault-finder. As a sequel to his first work, he wrote "The Triumph of Failure". In this work he tried to prove that moral and religious training must be the groundwork on which the intellectual structure in the educative process must rest. This he tried to prove was the only the proper character growth could be insured and success in later life assured. But not even this work brought Sheehan the results he desired. He gained a wide appeal only when he wrote "My New Curate". This book was met with praise and acclamation from both the laity and the clergy. In it he introduces the lovable and well-known character, "Daddy Dan". He pictures clerical life in Ireland. Under the guise of an interesting story Sheehan shows condi-



tions in Ireland and suggests methods of improvement. He is always careful to make no direct or personal, although everything he portrays is somethings which he has experienced at sometime during his life. He wished to hurt the feelings of none. He frequently made use of exaggeration in order to make his picture more striking and more impressive on the reader. It can be said with all truth, that after Sheehan wrote this book he was "made". He had successfully gained the attention of the reading public and created a demand for that type of story.

His subsequent works and their themes are listed below. Several of his works went through several editions and many were translated into foreign languages.

#### FICTION

- Geoffrey Austin-----a story of student life.
- The Triumph of Failure--"" " " "
- My New Curate-----an interesting story showing a contrast  
between a zealous young priest and a staid  
but holy old priest.
- Luke Delmege-----a story of clerical life showing intimately  
its trials, blessings. It was first intend-  
ed only for clerical circles, but gained  
great popularity among the laity. It is  
considered by critics to be his best work.
- The Blindness of Dr. Gray--a picture of a lonely old priest  
who recognized all law except the law  
of love, but who succumbs finally.

The Queen's Fillet-----a romance of the French Revolution which although historically inaccurate, is forceful and full of poetic imagination.

Glennaar-----a story which has to do with Irish history, namely the "Doneraile Conspiracy."

Lisheen-----a thrilling story in which the actual miseries begotten of English landlordism are concentrated into one gripping story.

Miriam lucas-----a story of a beautiful, brave Irish girl who fought hard to break down the social barriers which surrounded her.

The Graves at Kilmorna--a story depicting the rise and the suppression of the Fenian insurrection in 1867.

#### SHORT STORIES

A Spoiled Priest and Other Stories- a collection of stories built around incidents of Sheehan's life.

#### MISCELLANEOUS

Early lectures and Essays- a collection of writings previously published in various magazines.

Under the Cedars and the Stars-a volume containing brief

snatches of philosophy, science, ethics, theology, history, art, poetry, travel and reverie.

Parerga-----a volume written as a sequel to Under the Cedars and the Stars. Both works give the reader an idea of the extent of Sheehan's culture. His purpose in writing these two volumes says Heuser was to offer a "panacea for mental lethargy after serious labor, a tonic both pleasant to the taste and invigorating to the constitution that can assimilate it.

The Intellectuals-----the record of the meetings of a group of literati who discuss the problems and tries to solve the problem that confronts them in the guise of Irish self-government.

#### DRAMA

Lost Angel of a Ruined Paradise- written in 3 scenes representing the vocational attraction of some young girls recently graduated from school.

POEMS

Cithara Mea----- a collection of poems which represent the author as trying to solve the problems of life by the light of faith.

SERMONS

Mariae Coronae----- a collection of sermons made on various occasions.

In nearly all of his works Canon Sheehan is advocating either directly or indirectly, Catholic leadership. He shows what an ideal Catholic leader should be by showing what the actions of a Catholic leader should be. In "Luke Delmege", Luke is the leader, in "Lisheen" Robert Maxwell and Hugh Hamberton are leaders, in "The Intellectuals", the Catholic leader is a priest, in "The Graves at Kilmorna", Myles Cogan is the leader. In all these leaders we find firmness, sincerity, stamina and erudition. At the same time these characters are to a greater or lesser degree facsimiles of Canon Sheehan's own life. It is but necessary to read his life and see how earnest he was, and how completely self was forgotten in his struggles for the Catholic faith and for Ireland. Both things were part and parcel of Sheehan and he was their champion during his life. He had lived out what he believed to be true and right. Naturally his characters breathe his spirit.

Heuser says about this:

"His daily life was a verification of the principles which are represented in the characters he portrays as models of priestly and pastoral zeal.....The greater part of these images of real life was the reflection of his own correcting and chastening experience. All through his ministry he may he said to have striven to carry out to the full ability and beyond the measure of the opportunities given to most priests, the aims which he has sketched for us in his writings. As a true guardian of his flock he felt that should not confine his efforts to the administration of the sacraments, to preaching and teaching, to visiting the sick and relieving the poor to decorating his church and enhancing the divine worship for the edification of his parishioners. He did all this, but he did more. He looked after, and defended the temporal interest of his people, the public good of the community in which he lived, and labored conscientiously as a spiritual guide and pastor of souls."

But just what qualities should a leader have Catholic

or otherwise? First of all a leader should be sincere. He can do very little without this quality, for without it he will be unable to win followers. Next in order come intelligence and clear judgement, willingness to sacrifice self, courage, tolerance and steadfastness. The truly great leaders of the world have manifested these qualities. Now a Catholic leader is one who has all these qualities plus a genuine Christ-like spirit, which alone motivates and underlies all his actions.

A consideration is now necessary of the characters of Sheehan's stories. In all of his principleworks, the main characters are leaders of one thing or another. Sometimes they are political leaders or leaders among the social or intellectual world. Dr. William Gray, Luke Delmege, Daddy Dan, Mary Liston, Miriam Lucas, Robert Maxwell, Myles Cogan manifested every one of the qualities of leadership already mentioned. It is but necessary to read the novels in which they appear in order to find it out. Luke Delmege, a priest, tried to lead his people out of its backwardness and keep with the march of civilization. Dr. William Gray was a leader also. He wished to see Ireland become a leader among nations, but his intellectuality and his constant communings with the greatest philosophical minds made it difficult for him to come down to the people's level, consequently he was very much misunderstood. His assistant, Henry Liston was a learned man also, but it was easy for him to come down to the people's level. He could see things from their viewpoint and see their method of reas-

oning, and he was greatly loved for this. In other words his ideas along these lines are embodied in these words: "Come down from your high place in the empyrean and be a brother to your brethren." Nevertheless, Dr. Gray was a true Catholic leader. He never failed to denounce anything that was contrary to the laws of God or man, even when it meant a great sacrifice on his part. He always did his duty at any cost. These words taken from his farewell sermon give evidence of this:--

"Probably you thought I was exacting about dues; but it wasn't for myself; but I believed I had a duty to discharge...You thought me hard; but it was the hardness of a father who seeks the welfare of his child and puts his eternal salvation before everything else. Hence I know I was neither loved nor liked in this parish"...

And later on in the same sermon he says:

"All my own love, hope and ambition were centered in these two words: To do God's work however imperfectly, to serve Ireland however unworthily."

These words are sufficient to show the type of man Dr. Gray was.

Between Daddy Dan and Letheby another contrast in leadership can be seen. The former represents the milder, humbler but nevertheless determined type, the latter represents the youthful and therefore more ardent and impetuous type. It

cannot be doubted for an instant that these two were opposed to each other. They differed on minor matters, but wherever the interests and welfare of their people were concerned, they were as one.

Sheehan has also painted pictures of Catholic lay leaders. Robert Maxwell in "Lisheen" is a notable example. Maxwell belonged to the tyrannical English landlord class, but he was conscious of the injustice of the system, and he felt that he ought to do something about it. After much thought and reading he found that all the great work of the world had been done by those who, discontented with the existing order, sought to break through the crust of custom and establish a new order. He also read that everywhere and since the dawn of civilization man had been obsessed with the grand idea of sacrificing himself for the good of humanity. He became inspired and went to live incognito among his tenants in order to study conditions and get a taste of their lives. His efforts were crowned with success. He was a leader. He led the way for other landlords to follow. Another striking contrast in leadership is Myles Cogan and James Halpin. They were young patriots who fought for the emancipation of Ireland. They wished to keep Ireland and her religion and ideals unsullied and uncommercialized. Halpin and Cogan gave their lives for this idea. Their apparent failure did not detract from their ability as leaders.

Nor does Sheehan confine his portrayals to men alone. He shows some women leaders who are every bit as admirable.



Miriam Lucas was a brainy, Spirited Catholic girl who tried to improve the status of the Irish laborer. She also wanted to break down the wall or barrier which Society erected between itself and the rest of the world. She gained followers easily, she was intelligent, sympathetic, and best of all she had vision. Another excellent leader was Mary Liston in "The Blindness of Dr. Gray". She was of a quieter and less dynamic type, but she had a notable influence on those around her especially her brother, Henry Liston. Annie O'Farrell, niece of Dr. Gray had along with her many other fine qualities, the dominant quality of self-sacrifice. Never did the cost seem too great. She, by the sheer force of her character led her uncle, the great theologian, to see that there were certain things in this world that even he with all his learning was unaware. Not only that but by her splendid example she caused two Protestant youths to become Catholics. After all, none of the qualities of a leader will impress his followers as deeply and as permanently as his own example.

In the above-mentioned characters we have considered the best known characters of Sheehan's works. However Sheehan has drawn many other pictures and character studies equally as striking. These characters are ideal Catholic leaders. It is interesting to note that Sheehan does not confine his portrayal of leadership to religious circles, but shows the true Catholic leader in other circles. He is trying to show that a Catholic should and is necessarily better fit to be the ideal leader in every