

THE MISSION: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL VIEW OF AN IRISH RELIGIOUS OCCASION*

LAWRENCE J. TAYLOR

The summer had ended and the people of the mountainous parish of Glencolumbkille, in southwest Donegal, looked forward to the few events which promised to punctuate the dreary stretch of darkening days until Christmas. 'Well there's the "feadh ceoil" at the end of October, and there's the "mission" at the beginning of the month.

A mission is a highly structured Catholic parish revival, carried out by a team of priests from one of several religious orders specializing in such activities. Vincentians, Oblates, and most often in Ireland, Redemptorists, come to such parishes as Glencolumbkille every two years or so and submit the local populace to a one- or two-week religious 'total immersion'. The fathers visit homes, hear many hours of confessions, celebrate daily Mass and preach special sermons every evening of their stay.

Missions, especially in such quiet rural areas with a strong sense of

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community, are special events which break the monotony of the ordinary rounds of activity or inactivity. Like pilgrimage and 'pattern', the rural mission is a social occasion, a communal festival appropriately preceded by the arrival of the 'mission stalls': large kiosks set up in front of the church several days before the opening of the festivities. From these stalls the locals will purchase from a wide selection of rosaries, statues, and other religious objects – and even a few cap guns and monster teeth for Halloween. The excitement, the air of expectation, especially among the older people, is quite palpable. The obvious theatricality of the mission, however, does nothing to detract from its religious impact. Quite the contrary. The mission is by design a dramatic religious occasion whose power and meaning in such regions depends as much on form as on content. Considered as a piece of historically dynamic, interactive religious theatre, the mission offers the anthropologist an opportunity to explore the nature of local Catholic religious experience, as well as processes of more general incidence and significance.

Sociologists and historians have recently produced a number of important studies of Irish Catholicism (see, for example, Connolly 1982, Keenan 1982, Corish 1985, and especially Inglis 1987). Anthropologists have, however, so far contributed little to our understanding of religion in Ireland. Some of the reasons for this may lie in the current dissatisfaction with the limitations of community studies along functionalist lines, which seems to have led some researchers to the conclusion that local ethnographic studies are necessarily naive and misguided attempts to ignore the larger context – in both time and space – of village or parish. A concern for large-scale historical and sociological process, the state, and the 'world capitalist system' need not, however, necessitate the abandonment of ethnography in favour of political economy. It is in the home, church, workplace, school-room, pub, and road-side that culture, wherever it is produced, informs individual consciousness. Regimes, secular and religious, are typically well aware of this fact and seek to penetrate into such settings and occasions, or else introduce new ones of their own.

Such general socio-cultural theorists as Weber (1963), Elias (1978, 1982) and Foucault (1978), have attended, in different ways, to this phenomenon: the growth of regimes through the cultural domination of critical settings and interactions. In the cases of Elias

and Foucault, in particular, there is an awareness of the critical role of certain settings – whether they be knightly courts, prisons or hospitals – not only in establishing social relations of super- and subordination, but in generating cultural forms, material and verbal, which give the setting an emotional force for the individual who finds him or herself in it.

Analysis of the emotional, as well as conceptual aspects of cultural forms has emerged within anthropology most clearly in the interpretation of symbol and ritual, perhaps most notably in the work of Victor Turner (e.g. 1968, 1969). But the processual concerns of, for example, Elias' (1978, 1982) 'Civilizing Process' point to problems in the synchronic approach to rituals: problems to which anthropology might creatively respond. An historical view suggests that rituals, and indeed other cultural forms, which may at a given point in time have great emotional force – whose symbols powerfully evoke associations and penetrate the individual psyche – may eventually find their charisma (to use the Weberian formulation) 'routinized', and thus emotionally defused. For religious regimes in particular, whose power and authority may depend to a degree on the effectiveness of symbol and ritual, such a state of affairs can be problematic, and particularly so when other competing ideological regimes threaten to capture moral authority through the creation of more compelling symbolic occasions, or the co-optation of extant ones. An historically-minded ethnography can explore this dynamic. The case at hand, Glencolumbkille's Redemptorist mission, presents just such an opportunity.

The arrival of the mission there in the autumn of 1986 can be grasped as one moment in an ongoing process: the Catholic Church's penetration into Irish life and culture. Yet, upon closer inspection, that church may appear less monolithic. As Bax (1987) argues, within the Church rival religious regimes may compete with one another. Finally, however, the ethnographic perspective may reveal that local communities and individuals are not entirely passive in the fact of this institutional intrusion. The mission is also a local event, and its meanings for those in the community are derived from its place in their own 'fields of religious experience'. The historical role and local meanings of the mission are, however, intimately related to one another, and it is the intention of this essay to allow each aspect to illuminate the other.

The Mission in History

The mission as a form predates the foundations of the Redemptorist order and can indeed be traced back to a very old tradition within the church of wandering friars (such as the Franciscans and Dominicans) whose theatrical preaching attracted huge crowds in the later Middle Ages and afterward (see Burke 1978: 101–2). Both Protestant and Catholic Counter-Reformation preaching drew upon this tradition. The Jesuits especially became famous in the seventeenth century for their dramatic missions; clearly their overseas experience was not wasted on them. These missions were notable for their introduction of new ritual forms, such as processions of the 'Stations of the Cross'. Processions, of course, have an ancient history in the Mediterranean, and the Jesuits should perhaps be seen as creative adaptors of the very same popular traditions they often preached against. The most elaborate missions were those the Jesuits conducted in the Kingdom of Naples in the middle of the seventeenth century, where dramatic sermonizing was conjoined with processional ritual (Burke 1978: 231). The Redemptorist mission arose in this context as part of a general Counter-Reformation church strategy, wherein the Church began to devise means to creatively deal with the threat of competing ideologies and regimes – sacred or secular. Within this schema, the Redemptorist mission was especially directed, at least initially, at the relatively peripheral peasantry.

The Redemptorist Order was founded in Italy in 1732 by Alphonsus de Liguori, the son of a Neapolitan gentleman who, after a brilliant career as a lawyer, purportedly took up the religious life. His aristocratic connections as well as his piety were instrumental in the success of Alphonsus' order. By the end of the century the Redemptorists had houses, not only in the Kingdom of Naples, but as far afield as Poland, Austria and Switzerland. Notwithstanding struggles with various states who were not anxious to see the foundation of permanent houses (a general difficulty among religious orders in the period) and occasional run-ins with other clerical bodies, such as the fathers displaced when the Redemptorists took over the shrine of the Blessed Virgin at Triberg in the Black Forest, the Order spread and developed an apparently consistent approach to its task (Stebbing 1924, anon. 1933). Considered from the perspective of Church as political regime, that task was one of a series of strategies through

which the Catholic Church sought to regain, extend, or consolidate its control over the people of Europe.

Alphonsus can be seen as adapting the florid Neapolitan tradition in which he was raised to eighteenth-century conditions as he saw them. He continued the preaching tradition of the already established missionary groups, but at once strengthened and simplified the language. He also introduced the *vita devota*, wherein 'the last few days of the mission were devoted to building a popular piety through the teaching of a simple method of meditation and a basic "rule of life" designed to safeguard the fruits of the mission' (McConvery: personal communication). Contained amid St Alphonsus' many writings are not only religious texts for every occasion, but many directives concerning how missions should operate and why they are effective. Following Liguori's own implicit categories, an anthropological view of the mission may distinguish three inter-related elements: 1) discourse, 2) performance and 3) symbolics.

By discourse is meant the texts of the sermons which, over the course of the four weeks of mission, amounted to many thousand words – an intensive course, to use modern educational language, in basic Catholicism. The language of this discourse, according to Liguori's directive (de Liguori 1890), was to be above all simple and direct, avoiding not only the flowery idiom of pedantic ecclesiastics but intellectual musings, novel observations, even jokes 'that leave the people remembering the witticism but not the Word of God'. He called instead for a simple and coherent argument which established the nature of sin, the listener's sinful state, the awfulness of the Hell that awaited the sinner, the Salvation of Jesus Christ, and finally, the Church's possession of the sacraments through which that salvation could be achieved.

The argument sought to convince the listener of the absolute necessity of immediate and authentic participation in the sacraments of the Church. This authentic, as opposed to mechanical, participation could only be achieved through a genuine act of contrition – the 'general confession', which involved a thorough examination of conscience and confession of a lifetime's mortal sins. This act amounted, ideally, not so much to renewal as to conversion, and it is that term St Alphonsus uses. Thus the end sought through the mission discourse was a 'rite de passage' of life-crisis proportion.

Finally, the miraculous or official priestly sacramental 'magic'

was by no means eschewed in the symbolics of the mission. The miracle of the Eucharist was imbued with new life through the ritual of the Exposition and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the special powers of Marian iconography and devotions were fully availed of in the nineteenth century. The Redemptorists even succeeded, by the middle of that century, in literally capturing from the Augustinians in Rome their very own miraculous icon with a reputation for curing 'Our Lady of Perpetual Succour' (Buckley 1948). Thus the power of the Word was always accompanied by displays of other sorts of power capable of triggering strong associations in the psyche and culture of the 'folk'. The continued efficacy of the mission was ideally assured by the confraternities (of The Holy Family) the Redemptorists organised, which sought to institutionalise the devotions introduced by the mission.

From a Weberian perspective it might be argued that the discursive element of the mission, rationally argued as it was, helped achieve the historical shift from a 'magical' to an 'ethical' religion for the peasantry, thereby aiding the domination of the confessor-priest. If so, then it must be pointed out that this transition was not achieved through rational discourse alone. The performance element of the mission brought a vital emotionalism to the text, conjuring the 'reality' of Hell and evoking equally strong emotional reactions from the listeners. St Alphonsus himself was well aware of the special impact of the religious/stranger which could play upon the folk traditions of prophetic charismatics. That role was further enhanced for the missioner by the appearance of other-worldly severity – typically contrasting with the more comfortable mien of local clergy.

Where successful, the mission certainly augmented priestly domination, in the Weberian sense (1963), but of which priests depended on the Church political situation. As Bax (1987) points out, in areas like Belgium where a weakened diocesan clergy allowed for the permanent settlement of the Redemptorists and their undertaking of regular pastoral duties, the Order could pose a competitive threat. In Ireland, to which the Redemptorists came in 1851, the situation was very different.

Although under British rule, Ireland's Catholic Church – if not the mass of her Catholic peasantry – had made great strides since the penal days of the previous century. As Inglis (1987) persuasively argues, the British had relinquished attempts to turn the Irish into

English Protestants and had turned instead to a policy of fostering the development of a strong diocesan-dominated Catholic Church, in the hopes that they would succeed in 'civilizing' the wild Irish. By the time of the arrival of the first Redemptorist mission team, hundreds of new churches had been built throughout the country and a better trained army of parish priests, now often assisted by curates, were bringing constant pastoral attention into even the most remote mountain fastnesses. That attention was further augmented through the new national school system which, although state supported, was once again under the control of the Church. The religious orders, crippled during the eighteenth century, were in a sorry state, and the well-organized national diocesan clergy was now ruled by papal legate/archbishop Paul Cullen. It was Cullen who had invited the Redemptorists to Ireland, no doubt confident that they imposed no threat but rather would serve him, much as they served the Pope on the continent, as shock troops in the spread of Roman devotionalism. Although the religious orders constituted no threat to his regime, Cullen was wary of the Gallican bishops whose Catholicism was too Irish, and hoped that the Redemptorists would aid in what Emmet Larkin (1972) called 'The Devotional Revolution'.

They did. Father Prost (Hosp 1960), the Austrian leader of the first mission team, has left an account of his efforts which describes something of the impact of the Redemptorists in their first few years of operation in Ireland. The first missions were held in the cathedrals of Limerick, Waterford, and Raphoe, and Prost's description of the huge and apparently highly charged crowds reminds one of the great meetings of the Methodists. Prost reports, for example, the introduction of 'The Procession of the Stations of the Cross' and 'The Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament' to Galway and Donegal. The Icon of 'Our Lady of Perpetual Succour' was displayed and Marian devotions encouraged. In this contribution to the 'Devotional Revolution' the Redemptorists were following in the path of the few other missioners who had preceded them, such as the Jesuits, Vincentians, and Rosminians. The Rosminian Gentili, for example, brought 'The Forty Hours' and the devotions of May 29 to Dublin in 1849 (O'Donnell 1981). If all such missions had, for Cullen, the function of bringing Ultramontane Orthodoxy to the Irish – and especially to the too independent bishops of the West like John McHale, archbishop of Tuam – it is interesting to note that in the staging of

the events themselves it was possible for the bishops to bask in the imported charisma of the mission. McHale, for example, having witnessed the Redemptorist procession of the Stations of the Cross, encouraged them to do an elaborate version of it for the multitudes, with himself leading the procession (Hosp 1960). In such contexts, unlike Belgium (as discussed above), the Redemptorists promised to recharge the charisma of the local clergy – if the diocesan priests could rise to the occasion – rather than threaten them with an alternative religious regime. Only in the cities of Limerick and Belfast, and especially the former, were the Redemptorists able to establish a permanent base for the growth of their own pastoral regime, drawing congregants away from parish clergy and establishing Confraternities of the Holy Family whose membership cut across urban parish boundaries. Elsewhere the Redemptorist mission may have brought a 'foreign' piety to the people, but in so doing it reinforced and extended diocesan clerical domination.

These early Irish missions were extraordinary events, however, and as such generated a particular kind of fervor appropriate to the life-crisis they sought to engender. It is difficult to be 'born again' every few years. Later missions, however, even though reaching most parishes with regularity, when contrasted with ordinary religious life still had the aura of the unusual and perhaps liminal experience. This power was brought to bear, in an apparently more and more systematic fashion, on the social control of the peasants and labouring classes. Reconciliation of faction-fighters, an early focus, gave way to an unremitting assault on the evils of drink, and of unsupervised and potentially uproarious social occasions that might involve its use. This policy, as Connolly (1982) has observed with regard to the pre-famine diocesan clergy, was a central concern of the nineteenth-century Irish church in general. Inglis (1987) applies Elias' notion of the 'civilizing process' to these Church strategies, but neither historians or sociologists have paid much attention to the specific role of the Irish missions in this endeavour, bringing as they did a particular power and authority to the enterprise.¹ Following recent Dutch usage, this sort of active attack on local social practice

¹ Elsewhere in Europe more attention has been paid to the Redemptorists and their missions, but the impact may have varied with local conditions. See, for example, Eugen Weber (1976: 365–67) and Hellas (1978) for some views of the French nineteenth and early twentieth century experiences.

might be better called a 'civilizing offensive' (Verrips 1987).

Something of the impact of the missions on the 'folk' is conveyed by the stories which have found their way into the National Folklore Archives, the few catalogued 'mission stories'. Most were collected from elderly men and women in the 1930s, relating stories of missions of their youth or that of their parents. The emphasis in these short narratives is on the forceful, and fearful, power of the occasion. Several speak of miraculous feats, such as keeping candles lit in high winds and, in maritime communities, bringing fish into local waters. Others stress the conversion of an especially inveterate sinner, typically involving the renunciation of drink. No doubt the 'poitin missions' of the latter part of the century, in which the theatrical conclusion involved the burning of stills around a mission cross, left a particularly vivid impression, but the folk narratives focus on the miraculous.

What is striking in all these tales is the lack of separation between ethical/behavioral transformations and so-called magical power. The general confession which was for the Redemptorists themselves the point of the mission, figures in the folk memory mainly in terms of extraordinary penance – which for them only naturally accompanied a transforming religious experience as a liminal, powerful, and penitential event on the order of, for example, a Lough Derg pilgrimage. These interpretations, it must be noted, would still have done nothing to detract from the efficacy of clerical domination.

The New Mission

An examination of mission sermon texts from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century reveals little change through this period. Popular wisdom has it that the real modernization of Irish society only began in the 1960s and coincided with the religious transformations of Vatican II. Rural depopulation from immigration in the fifties and from movement to the city later on, no doubt

² The National Folklore Archives contain a marvelously rich and still underused resource for the study of local religious beliefs, behaviour, and discourse. Although only very few stories are catalogued under the specific heading of 'missions', my evaluation of the general religious discourse on this and related topics is based on my own field work and the more than one hundred and fifty stories I have so far read of the vast number collected from the area of folklorist Seán Ó hEochaidh since the 1930s.

also contributed to some weakening of the clergy in these areas. Although Irish Catholics continued to be among the most observant communicants in the world, the Irish Church began to share the loss of confidence, in the 'traditional' structures and rhetoric that seemed to characterize the world Church in that period. The Irish Redemptorists apparently also felt the need for a new relevance and accordingly convened in Dublin in 1971 to reassess the mission.

Although the document this conference produced, which still stood as the model for missions in 1986, does not recommend the elimination of devotional symbolics, or even the basic sermon series that is the centerpiece of the mission, much attention is paid to both altering significantly the nature of discourse, and supplementing the formal interactions with the structured informality of other group interactions. The following passage will be as familiar to the upwardly mobile American agnostic as it would be strange to the survivor of a 'poptin mission'.

Let us just take one aspect of our world. We live in a very personalistic world. The person is sacred. We stress the inviolability of the person, his or her rights, preferences, uniqueness, dreams ... the stress on the individual can be a very revolutionary thing ... In the past the preacher was in the pulpit, the people in the pews ... they were passive ... now today the people want to speak, express themselves, be themselves. In the house meeting they speak, they express themselves, they teach... It is an exercise of a personalistic age... In the past you had the 'powerful' sermon. The missionary had a thunderous voice. He thumped the pulpit. He laid it on the line ... the crowd ... was being dominated... (People) want to be talked to, treated maturely as persons, approached with respect, quietly... (Donlon 1971: 4-5)

It will be noted that this amounts to a prescription for a radical shift in mission discourse and performance. The very 'personalism' which might be, and certainly was, condemned by the Church as fundamentally unethical, is now celebrated as an awakening. The language of psychologism is adopted as mission rhetoric, in which salvation is barely distinguishable from self-actualization. Confession is still the central sacramental act, but the ideal format described is egalitarian and therapeutic – in the modern sense of the term. One is reminded of psychological counselling sessions. This shift is presented as an accommodation to a changing social world;

the old style fitted older circumstances as the new one will fit today's. It is more than that, however, for the recommended change of discourse and performance represents a shift in the relation of the mission as it went to the ordinary life-world of the congregation. The power of the mission was a function of its extraordinary character, of a language and performance that condemned and challenged. The rite of passage sought required a 'ritual death' (Van Gennep 1960) which forcibly separated the participant from his former life. The 'new mission' eschews the dynamics of opposition and seeks, instead, to present its demands as merely the most effective version of 'the good' as it is defined in contemporary Western secular discourse – it is the best therapy in town. Whether or not this is a smart strategy is a question to which we can return in the conclusion, but for now we must note that whatever the nature of the new mission in suburban Dublin, the structure we have been discussing bears very little relation to the Glencolumbkille mission of 1986, to which we can now return.

The Glen Mission

The newly installed parish priest turned his congregation over to the head of the mission team at Sunday's second Mass, but the masterful manner of the Redemptorist and his striking costume – floor-length black soutane, distinctive white collar, and, most of all, the large crucifix slung in his belt – rather suggested a take-over by elite troops of some carelessly run regular army camp. Nothing in the next week detracted from this initial impression. Humorous and homey though he might occasionally be, the Redemptorist never ceased to cut a dramatic and powerful figure in church, shop, or parish road. The mission team was composed of three priests who, because of the dispersed nature of the parish, were forced to act independently, one preaching to each of the three parish congregations. This description is based on the mission as conducted by the team leader in the parish church of Carrick.

That first morning was a typical Mass, followed by good natured salutations from the Redemptorist and exhortations to come to the mission and to bring family and neighbours. The mood was upbeat and the mission was presented as both a duty and a potentially enjoyable occasion, a proposition made somewhat convincing by the presence and rhetorical flair of the preacher. The first full mission

session began that evening with a degree of pomp and an apparently heightened sense, among the parishioners, of ritual occasion. The preacher led a recital of one decade of the rosary in Irish, establishing his Gaeltacht credentials, and then spoke briefly of prayer to God and Mary, the Queen of heaven – ‘She’s everybody’s mother, so she’s all love, and she’s the Mother of God, so she’s all power...’ The sermon which, like the mission in general, was conducted in English, began with a text drawn from an inspirational book about the British prisoners of war on the river Kwai and their spiritual survival through prayer and the discovery of the saving power of Jesus. Although the example might have suggested that salvation could be achieved by the sincere efforts of any group of believing Christians, the story was immediately followed by a more material commentary on the meaning of salvation, which involved being saved only ‘through remaining in the Body of Jesus’, i.e. through the sacraments of the Catholic Church. The sermon was followed by the Exposure and Adoration of the Divine Sacrament, solemnly performed with the accompaniment of incense.

The ensuing days of the mission followed this pattern. Morning Masses were further elaborations of central themes, though often pointed particularly at the National School children who were brought by their teachers every morning. On one such occasion, the preacher spoke of the multifarious character of prayer – any sort of prayer was alright, whatever suited your inclinations. ‘You might have seen charismatics on TV waving their arms and singing away and you might have thought, “sure, I don’t know how to pray at all.” ...well, you just pray the way you’re able, that’s fine for them, they have a beautiful way of praying – for them’. Having said that, however, he proceeded to instruct the children in the specific times, places, and appropriate manner of praying, leading them in the recital of a traditional Irish prayer (though in English).

The morning and evening sessions continued in this manner over the ensuing week, with a combination of sermon and sacramental ritual interspersed with the recitation of numerous prayers and the singing of songs mostly unfamiliar to the locals. The greatest break in this pattern was a slide-sermon on the Shroud of Turin to which we will return below. Between and after the formal mission session, visitations to the sick and many hours of confession were conducted by the missionaries.

Through all these sessions it was clear that mission discourse, though not the ‘personalistic’ one described in the Redemptorist Conference Manual, had in some measure changed over recent years. The word ‘hell’, for example, was not mentioned nor even directly alluded to. Purgatory was similarly unnamed, though that place never figured very large in mission rhetoric. Sin, confession, and salvation were still, however, the central themes, though their order of presentation was significantly altered. The Carrick mission began, not by conjuring the reality of Hell and sin, but rather by describing salvation as something we all naturally yearned for. The preacher then turned, in subsequent sessions, to the various sacramental means through which – and only through which – such Salvation was to be achieved. Sin stood in the way, and the nature of sin, as elaborated over the week, was hardly the failure to ‘be in touch with oneself’ as implied in the 1971 document discussed above – it was breaking a rule of God or Church, whether that rule was ethically connected to social life, as in the cases of dishonesty, theft, slander etc., or simply a rule (so the presentation implied) – as in sexual violations.

Throughout the sermons, as in the first one described above, the preacher would begin with a general ‘truth’, whether folksy or spiritual and often with a ‘contemporary’ ring to it, but then turn, as if compelled by the logic of the argument, to the necessary sacramental structure of the Church. As the week progressed, and the character of sin was made clearer, the missionary also built upon the concrete imagery of the crucifixion which stands, of course, at the center of Catholic ritual practice. The sufferings of Jesus were vividly described: the pain endured by both Him and His Mother to assure salvation. If the verbal imagery of the preacher were not sufficient to evoke the sufferings of the Saviour, then the slide show of the Shroud of Turin certainly served the purpose. The missionary presented and commented on the slides in a manner that can only be described as forensic. Every wound of Christ was illustrated in close-up detail, and the preacher even went so far as to ‘correct’ the traditional representation of the Crucifixion in a number of points, such as the placement of the nails which, ‘science shows’, could not have been put through the palms, since the body could not be supported in that manner. Instead, the nails must have gone through the wrists, precisely in the manner shown on the Shroud of Turin. The crown of

thorns, we were told, was instead a 'helmet of thorns' which, one can and should imagine, 'caused Our Lord horrible pain as they penetrated not just the skin but probably the skull and into the brain'. Thus this missionary added the authority of science to the task of conjuring a very corporal Christ, whose physical pain and suffering added a concrete reality to what otherwise might have been metaphorical notions. The lead missionary returned again and again, over the course of the week, to the imagery of Christ's blood, which evoked both the guilt of the listener, whose sins 'added to the suffering of Christ' and the cleansing of the Church: 'come under the Cross and let the blood of Christ wash over you'.

Some sense of the 'performance' aspect of the mission can be had from the preceding description. Although outright shouting and 'pulpit-thumping' were not in the missionaries's repertoire, he did make effective use of theatrical shifts in tone and volume. Typically a sermon would begin in a seductively easy, even folksy and humorous manner, the missionary, a Mayo man, making it clear that he was, like the congregation, a country man with good common sense and a lively sense of humour. He was one of them, an age mate of anyone over thirty, wryly remembering the changes of the last few decades ... 'Remember when we were young the only sin was sex...' Tentative chuckles from the audience – 'then in the 60s and 70s, sex wasn't a sin at all anymore!' By now the congregation relaxes and smiles along with this easygoing preacher. Suddenly, the tone shifts dramatically and the listener is caught – 'Wrong! People don't think sex is a sin at all ... but I tell you, the fornicators and adulterers will not get into heaven!' This style of alternating tone and relationship – from peer to authority – characterised the entire mission. It was apparently effective in holding the audience's interest and emotional involvement, to judge from the reactions and bore little relation to the 'New Mission' document.

As should be apparent from preceding accounts, the manipulation of material symbols was as vital an element of the performance as was the language; each added force to the other. Beyond the Redemptorist costume – the crucifix was occasionally removed from the belt and held overhead in dramatic emphasis – and the regular symbols of the Mass, a number of special ritual acts such as the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, served not only to enhance the religious experience but to make the constant point that the sacramental

magic necessary to Salvation was in the possession of the Church.

There were also many specifically Marian rituals, which were given added force by the display through the mission of a large rendition of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. The feminine forgiving mediator was thus a constant presence beside the increasingly stern figures of the crucified Christ, and the Redemptorist himself. The identification of these latter two was rhetorically achieved in descriptions of the act of confession, in which the priest acts for Christ, but was more dramatically acted out in the culminating ritual moment of the mission: a mime of the Last Supper. The apostles were silently played by a dozen local youths while the parish priest read the gospel and the missionary, with grand gestures, took the leading role.

The rituals described above, some special to the occasion and some not, added force to the verbal message, the discourse of the mission, but their use in the event also succeeded – to judge from the reaction of participants – in recharging the charisma of the symbols themselves. For the locals, the mission was an occasion of power, and they accordingly brought in for blessing their own religious articles, such as rosaries, scapulars, and even salt, which when blessed is considered in much of Donegal to have curing power.

This seeking after power as well as 'graces' is a common feature of local religious behaviour at other liminal settings – such as holy wells or apparition sites – where divine power is felt to be more immediately present than elsewhere or at other, more ordinary, times. Indeed, an appreciation of the meaning of the mission for locals requires a consideration of their observable behavior both during and after the event. As much as the missionaries might seek to define the nature of the occasion, it was up to the people to place it in their own field of religious experience.

The church was well filled each night, and the morning masses (there were two to choose from) were attended by the great majority of the local populace. A few of the unmarried young men would come less regularly, or, more rarely, not at all. Otherwise, the attendance equalled or surpassed that of Sunday Mass (nearly universally attended), drawing a few from the neighbouring parish as well. The mood, especially at the evening sermons, was palpably more excited and expectant than at weekly Mass. Most people clearly looked forward to the mission and a performance that would, in some sense, entertain as well as edify them. They never seemed disappointed in

this expectation. That is not to say that the congregation was either passive or non-religious in their attitude. Far from it. Weeping and fainting are no longer aspects of congregation behaviour, but many listeners were clearly moved by the exhortations and by the rituals, whose critical moments were met with a silence and intensity of attention perceptibly different from that typical at regular church rituals. Most took advantage of the unusual privilege of taking communion twice in one day. Tears were more than occasionally visible in the eyes of the congregants, and especially of those who remained in the rear pews after the mission each night, awaiting confession.

Locals also talked about the mission, and about former missions memories of which were evoked by the occasion. Many people spoke, before and after the mission had begun, of how today's missions were very different from those that prevailed up to ten or fifteen years ago. In the 'old days', they reminisced, it was all Hell and brimstone, with the missionaries intent on frightening the congregation as badly as possible. The current mission was perceived, by contrast, as absolutely benign. When the missionary did lash out at the dishonest big farmer or craven adulterer, nearly all listeners could rest in the assurance that they themselves were not under discussion, but rather the one or two neighbours that sorely deserved the chastisement. A few of the older people told stories, of the sort that are contained in the Folklore Archive, about former local missions. 'I remember my father telling me about the mission in the next parish there, back in the early years of the century', a local publican regaled, 'and there was a young woman there who was maybe distracted, you know, and anyway she was watching a bird fly around the ceiling of the chapel – a bird had flown into the chapel – and the missionary was going on about the Devil, and he saw the girl and he thundered out "the Devil can take any shape to fool us, even the form of an innocent bird!"'. And the girl heard that and she fainted dead away from fright ... and they took her away from there to a mental hospital.' This sort of tale stresses the emotional power of the mission and although the point was made that contemporary missions were not as tough as those of former days, neither were they being presented as the complete opposite. As the mission progressed and the rhetoric became increasingly forceful, the people began to associate the experience more directly with the missions of memory and story, maintaining an ambivalence rooted in the simultaneous contrast and resemblance be-

tween past and present missions.

By contrast with evangelical Protestant occasions, however, that emotional expression can only be described as extremely restrained. When the mission ended each evening, people poured into the main street and gaily went about their business in shop and pub. Conversations in public places afterward, if they mentioned the mission at all, did so by comparing it favourably with former missions as discussed above, or else with a simple acknowledgement of its quality – 'Isn't it a good mission'. The one element that aroused some criticism was the slide-sermon on the Shroud of Turin which, as noted above, queried the traditional representation of the crucifixion. 'What about all those stigmata (sic)?' one reflective shopkeeper reasonably mused. His assistant added that she certainly wasn't going to confuse her children with such novel views. There was also a little critical speculation on the cost of the mission, but the overwhelming view seemed positive.

The performance character of the mission for the congregants is also indicated by their aesthetic evaluations. 'Wasn't that a beautiful mission' was a frequent, typically female, comment. 'Are you enjoying the mission?' Once again, it must be noted that such an appreciation does not indicate a lack of specifically religious interest. However, in marked contrast to Protestant revival meetings in Pentecostal communities, there was very little demonstration, verbal or behavioral, of a conversion experience. As stated above, a few parishioners, again mainly women – both young and old – demonstrated a degree of emotional involvement, thier eyes tear-filled during services, and their mien withdrawn and serious between them. As for the others, most had serious in-church demeanour, and seemed happy, elsewhere, that a show was playing on the local stage.

Such was the public discourse, but more private occasions yielded a far deeper interest on the part of several parishioners, one of whom said that her 'life had changed'. The missionary spoke to me of his own more personal contacts with the people. Many came to see him over the week and most of them, especially the old, were most concerned with 'illness, loneliness, and 'nerves'. Thus the mission takes its place among many occasions in the local 'quest for therapy'.

The foregoing description of local reaction to the mission suggests that although a dramatic personal conversion is probably not the typical outcome, the mission is still an important and powerful religi-

ous occasion. For individuals, it is an opportunity not only to 'change one's life' – which I suspect is rather unusual – but to capture the divine power loosed at liminal points of time and space. They seek cures or at least a means of coming to terms with personal difficulties, that is, a cultural framework which makes sense of their own experience. Not that the mission does this job alone. Rather it is one of several settings and occasions which act together to maintain what might be called a 'field of religious experience'.³ These include regular church services as well as such special occasions as visits to 'healing priests', and even story-telling sessions which reiterate idealized experiences with the Divine. While many such rituals and occasions have their respective origins elsewhere, they acquire a particular local significance by virtue of the place they take in the local field of religious experience. That field is thus created by those people who, together, participate in and interpret such events, sharing a discourse which establishes the meanings from which the individual, in his or her need, may draw.

Conclusions

The meanings of the mission for those who attend it are thus the product not only of its particular features, but of the place it comes to occupy in the network of local experience and association. Meaning, however, has power not only in a psychological, but in a political sense. Historically, the task of the missions has been the extension and consolidation of institutional church domination through the dramatic revitalization of a too routinized charisma. As Tom Inglis (1987) has argued, the Catholic Church played the central role in nineteenth-century Ireland's 'Civilizing Process' (Elias 1978, 1982). In that war against the incivility of peasant culture, the Redemptorists were the shock troops. In the case of Donegal, the Redemptorist journals⁴ from the period around the turn of the century show the fight against immorality continuing, with attacks on poitín distilling and 'big nights' – musical get-togethers in houses unsupervised by clergy. In this way, the dramatic power of the missions were

³ This phrase is further defined and explored by Taylor (1987b: intro.): 'These "fields" comprise, not so much distinctive rituals or even beliefs ... as distinctive, shared interpretive frameworks embraced by loosely bounded groups of people'.

⁴ Fragments of these reports were sent to me by Fr. O'Donnell from the Redemptorist archive in Belfast.

brought to the aid of the parochial clergy in their domination of the local peasantry, and to the 'civilizing offensive' of the state.

Yet this domination was accomplished not through an ethical religious attack on prevailing magical fields of local religious experience, as the Weberian evolutionary model would have it. Rather, the missions allowed locals to incorporate the character of preacher-judge, an ethical aspect of the priest, into that very field. Though the language and performance have been modified, this continues to be the case today.

Yet the ideal 'new mission' described in the 1971 conference manual bears very little resemblance to the Carrick mission described in this paper. The 'new mission', like so much promulgated by the Church, represents a reaction to a perceived crisis. The Redemptorists who compiled the manual evidently felt the need to adopt a new discourse and style suitable for a new society. As pointed out, the Church in general has been seeking a new language more appropriate to the times. Or perhaps, languages. As is especially evident at such critical historic junctures, the Church is not monolithic, and various segments within it have always competed for both political power and cultural authority. Discourse plays a vital role in this competition and where the prevailing language has broken down, an opportunity exists for groups within the Church to propose new ones through which the people may interpret changing experience.

Where the Church is relatively less strong vis-à-vis the state and national culture, as in the United States, the new religious discourse may seek to accommodate itself to the prevalent cultural framework. The Church, or groups within it, may adopt, for example, the therapeutic idiom, and invent a new series of ritual occasions – retreats, marriage encounters, etc. – which are based on it. Another possibility is the reassertion of a very authoritarian and traditional religious discourse and ritual which offers an alternative to alienating anomie. Both strategies have been, and are being tried, and both have found their way into contemporary Irish religious life as well. Politically, the religious orders such as the Jesuits and Redemptorists have played a key role in the dissemination of the novel therapeutic forms. They may have a stake in disturbing the diocesan status quo and they have the time and the places to introduce people to new ways of being religious, which they may find more meaningful and interesting.

In areas like suburban Dublin, there is a relative weakness in diocesan clerical domination and, perhaps, a decline in the power of traditional religious discourse in the face of a social and cultural life increasingly disconnected from it. Such conditions make the adoption of a therapeutic discourse and attendant interactional forms a sensible strategy, not only for revitalizing the religious life of the people, but for augmenting the power of the Orders who control these occasions. Interestingly, the Redemptorists in Limerick are continuing to draw tens of thousands to their annual nineteenth-century style Forty Hours Devotions in June. Finally, we have the Redemptorists in such regions as southwest Donegal, where the parish continues to correspond to a real social unit still clearly dominated by the diocesan clergy. Here there is less opportunity or need for novel discourse; here an American style personalistic therapeutic language would find little reinforcement in other settings. A Charismatic 'Healing Mass' performed monthly near the eastern edge of Donegal (see Taylor 1987b) does promulgate a kind of therapeutic idiom, but it is interpreted by the many who attend it from a variety of religious perspectives, none of which seems psychological in the way the 'New Mission' is.

That is not to say the Donegal mission has not changed at all. As noted, the people certainly perceive a general softening, and the mission did seem far less concerned to criticize the actual character of local life than in former days. It remains, however, a piece of religious theater whose message of power is conveyed as much in the structure of the event as in the content of the sermons. Nor, it must be observed, do such religious occasions seem hopelessly out of step in a Catholic church whose Papacy has itself become something of a perpetual mission.

This description and analysis of the Redemptorist mission of Glencolumbkille is offered as a contribution to the ethnography of local religious life in the west of Ireland. It is also, however, intended to suggest some theoretical and methodological approaches to the anthropological study of religion. Methodologically, by focusing our analytic attention on a 'religious occasion', like the mission, we have been able to draw on a variety of types of evidence — historical, folkloric, and ethnographic. This focus allows a consideration of all these elements, which, taken together, can suggest a picture of what Mart Bax (1987) has called the 'mutual conditioning of meaning and

power'. Thus, in terms of an anthropological contribution to a theory of such religious forms, our approach illuminates the process whereby religious regimes seek to create or dominate 'occasions' and settings which play critical roles in the task of constructing meaning.

The case of the mission may serve to modify somewhat the Weberian vision of the growth of priestly domination through the institutionalisation of charisma, and the replacement of magical with 'ethical' religious values. Indeed, the case suggests the inadequacy of these labels which arose, of course, from an essentially Protestant as well as rationalist perspective. The power of the mission described here may be said to lie in its effective juxtaposition of so-called magic and ethics, and in a performance style which, historically, aided in the institutionalisation of folk charisma — through demonstrating that power lay in the Church, rather than in nature (for example). Yet the very same extraordinary character of the mission, which plays upon its contrast with the humdrum of regular church life, permits the people to relate the mission to the pilgrimage, the visit to a strange and gifted healing priest, and other special occasions of the manifestation of Divine power. These are linked in the local field of religious experience, maintained by a discourse of miraculous cures, punishments, and transformations. While the missionaries' texts do not necessarily encourage this interpretation of the mission, their performance does. Thus, the historical contribution of such missions to the achievement of priestly domination, in Weber's (1963) sense, or to the 'civilizing process' (Elias 1978, 1982) may lie in their having left room, so to speak, for a local construction of the meaning of the event.

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DIMENSIONS OF PROTESTANTISM: THE WORKING OF PROTESTANT IDENTITY IN A NORTHERN IRISH VILLAGE

GRAHAM MCFARLANE

This chapter seeks to extend the contributions which local level studies have made to the understanding of Protestant culture or cultures in Northern Ireland. After a brief discussion of recent writing on Protestants, and a brief consideration of the place of ethnography in this literature, ethnographic material from Ballycuan,¹ a village in the east of Northern Ireland, will be used to argue that local study should be valued not only as an adjunct to armchair theorizing about Protestants, but also as the only way to penetrate Protestant culture to any depth. I will argue that if one wants to understand the everyday relevance of being a Protestant in Northern Ireland, then one must have more than folk (and professional) sociologies of how Protestants perceive their society, one must also pay attention to the work which has to be done on these models in everyday life.

Protestants' in Northern Ireland

Few who pay attention to the ever-expanding body of literature on Northern Ireland and its conflict could fail to notice that the Protestant population's place on the historical stage has been extensively examined by researchers only over the last decade or so. Although they have been somewhat casually dismissed as the 'voice of unreason' (Bell 1976:9), as 'servitor imperialists' (Hechter 1975:236),¹ the fieldwork in Ballycuan on which this is based was carried out on a residential basis in the period 1975-78, and through intermittent visits between 1982-86. Fieldwork involved a blend of census surveys, formal and informal interviews on selected aspects of culture, gossip analysis and participation in local events and networks (this 'blend' counts as standard anthropological practice). I gratefully acknowledge the financial support offered at different times by the Northern Ireland Department of Education and by the (then) Social Science Research Council.

² There are, of course, many codings for the ethnic or national division in Northern