
Religious Orthodoxy and Popular
Faith in European Society

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8. See, for example, Brandes (1980:177–204), Gilmore (1984:38–39), Riegelhaupt (1984:109), and Silverman (1975:165–166).

9. Clerical efforts to combat the evils of the dance were not restricted to Brittany, as the Portuguese examples described by Riegelhaupt (1984:110) and Bret-tell (this volume) attest.

10. See Jorion (1982) on this point.

11. For discussion of the relationships elsewhere in Europe among saints, their festivals and shrines, and local identity or socio-centrism see Christian (1972), Mitchell (1988:30–37), and Riegelhaupt (1973), among others.

12. For discussion of the Christian symbolism of the lamb see Metford (1983:157).

13. Here I do not mean to deny the possibility that actual books of magic formulae, analogous to those mentioned by Goody (1968:16), may have existed in rural Brittany. However, like Favret-Saada (1980:133–135), who has done extensive ethnographic research on magic in Normandy, I have concluded that the role of magic books in Breton sorcery is minimal. Rather, these books have symbolic importance as indicators of the supernatural power of those people who are believed to own them.

As in Brittany, peasants in the Alto Minho of northwestern Portugal link the magical abilities of priests to their educated status, their knowledge of Latin, and their sacramental power (Pina-Cabral 1986:206). Similarly, Devlin (1987:20–21) notes that the identification of priests as sorcerers was common in many parts of rural France during the nineteenth century.

14. The *pardon* continues to be held each year, although it now attracts fewer pilgrims and the procession around the lake no longer takes place.

15. For examples of this development elsewhere in Europe see Silverman (1975:220, 224) and Weingrod and Morin (1971:313).

16. However, opinions differ as to whether or not priests have completely abandoned their magic skills. While priests as a class are no longer accused of working spells against the poor, specific individual priests continue to have the reputation of performing nonmalevolent types of magic, primarily healing. These clerics correspond to the *bruxo* priests who practice as “white witches” described for northwestern Portugal by Pina-Cabral (1986:201–202).

17. French examples that present a particularly close parallel to the Monts d'Arrée material are reported by Sébillot (1907:249), who notes that monks in Picardy and Franche-Comté are reputed to have enforced the *droit de cuiassage*.

18. Similarly, the Portuguese Estremadura examined by Riegelhaupt (1984:112) is also described as a dechristianized area.

CHAPTER 7

Stories of Power, Powerful Stories: The Drunken Priest in Donegal

Laurence J. Taylor

“THERE was a priest here not long ago, and with all respect to his cloth, he had a taste for a wee drop. He was up in the village one day, and he with a drop taken. Well, he went into a pub and asked the boy that was there behind the counter for a drink. The boy said that he wouldn't give him one, that he had had enough as it was. ‘Well,’ said the priest, ‘if I come in to you at this time tomorrow and ask you to give me a drink, you'll get it for me and welcome the sight of it!’ He went out the door then and said not another word.

“That was fine, the boy went to bed that night, and on the next morning when he arose he was so blind he couldn't dress himself. Well he knew that it was the priest who had brought that upon him with the words he had spoken the evening before. He sent a messenger for the priest, who came to him in his own time.

“‘What's kept you in your bed there?’ the priest said when he went into the room. ‘O Priest,’ he said, ‘Whatever happened to me since I went to bed last night I am blind and I can't put on my clothes.’ The priest only put his two fingers on the boy's eyes and in a short while he had his sight back as good as ever before. ‘Now,’ said the priest as he was leaving, ‘when I come again and ask something of you that I want you'll know not to refuse me!’” (Ó hEochaidh 1945: 43–44, my translation).

This story is one of twenty-three “priest stories” collected in one notebook by folklorist Seán Ó hEochaidh from his natal community of Teelin in Donegal, Ireland. The notebook containing these Gaelic tales is dated 1945, but there are also dozens of other priest stories scattered through the more than seventy volumes of oral lore recorded by Ó hEochaidh in his nearly half-century (beginning in the early 1930s) of folklore collecting in the area. The stories relate the exploits of local curates and parish priests—many of them named—in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

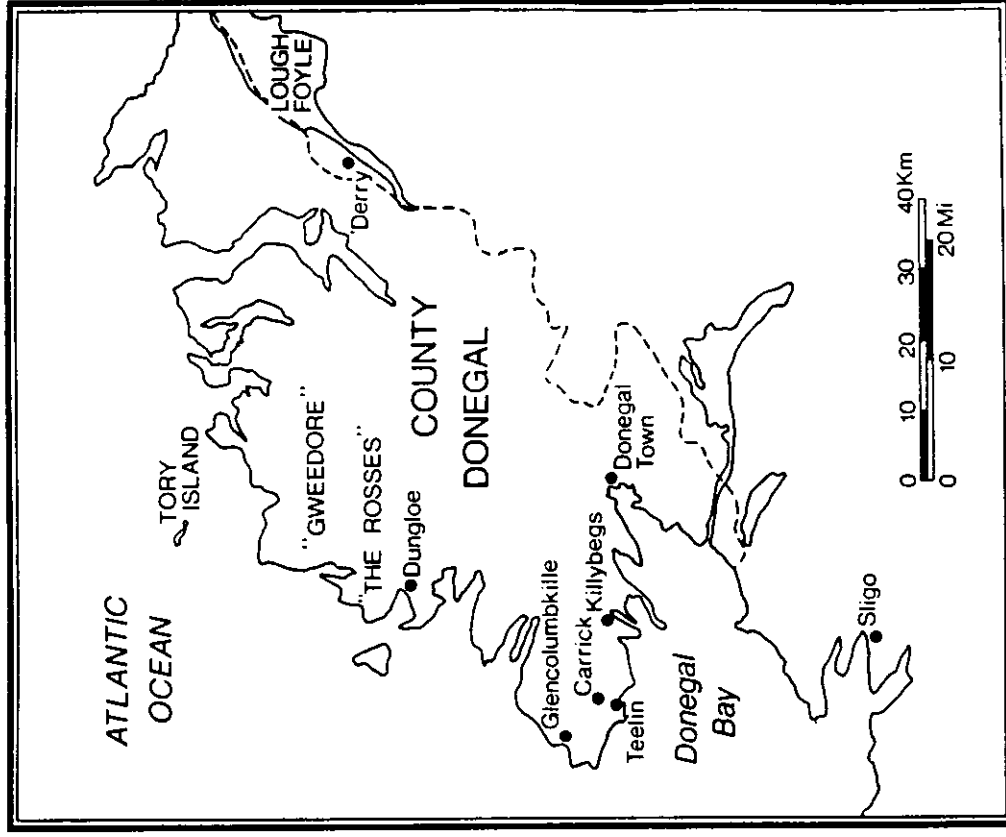
The narratives fall very neatly into two categories. In one, priests, whom I will call “heroic,” battle the evil forces of the Protestant ascendancy in their local incarnations: landlords, agents, bailiffs, Protestant

farmers, and the rare Catholic collaborator (see Lawrence Taylor 1985). Such clerics are typically armed with the paraphernalia of the church, such as the priest who dons his stole and recites from his book in order to bring a Protestant up from Hell as an object lesson to his unregenerate family. The other category, which includes the story related above, features clerics who "have a taste for the wee drop" or, to translate the Irish euphemism, "drunken priests." These protagonists perform their magic, whether to help or harm, usually unaided by anything but their inherent charisma.

Such legends are not so often heard as in former times. However, they are still told formally and, far more often, informally in various of the households and pubs of southwest Donegal, Ireland.¹ The priest who blinds the boy in the above story, in fact, is still the subject of many stories currently told. I will return below to the question of their performance, but suffice it to say for now that the narratives are rarely if ever presented as "fiction" and that no one laughs when such stories are told (though some may smile in apparent discomfort). Arguments sometimes ensue about whether or not such and such an account or version is strictly accurate, in whole or in part, but the story is "taken seriously" by all tellers and most listeners. Moreover, as we shall see, the powers of such priests are not confined to narratives. Individuals sought, and continue to seek, such clerics for their special powers, particularly for curing.

This essay will explore the stories, beliefs, and practices concerning drunken priests as they operate, historically and currently, in southwest Donegal, Ireland (map). In so doing I hope to shed light on the character of the drunken priest as an element in the local religious world view, as well as on some of the general issues of local versus orthodox religion with which this volume is concerned. The beliefs and stories about drunken priests reveal much about the dynamic, rather than static, relation of local "folk" and imported "orthodox" religious world views. Attention to this corpus also sheds light on the special role of discourse—informal conversation and anecdote as well as formal narrative—in shaping what I will call a chthonic "field of religious experience," that is to say, one of several locally shared perspectives on the meaning of those events, occasions, and experiences which may be called (following local usage) religious.²

For most academics who have an interest in such forms priest stories are "legends," with motifs that are in some respects akin to others of similar type found throughout Europe (see Thompson 1955–1958) and in certain special features reminiscent of specifically Irish or perhaps Celtic traditions. As such, they may enjoy various human and social functions: for example, as occasions for moral *exempla* (Ó hÉalaí 1974), the celebra-



Map of Donegal showing details of region.

tion of communal solidarity, or artistic expression (Glassie 1983). The content of these stories and the contexts of their telling, however, suggest that they can also be viewed as both playing a part in, and offering a special insight into, the religious life of the people of the region. Priest stories, and the beliefs and behavior associated with such clergy, are aspects of local religion—collective representations of priests and priesthood, and meditations, as it were, on the nature of religious power.

Anthropologists studying local religious life have considered talk about priests mainly under the rubric of "anticlericalism," and have understood

such verbal acts to be manifestations of the distance and hostility between "folk religion" and "orthodoxy." Following historian Bossy's (1970) seminal treatment of the social objectives of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, Riegelhaupt (1973, 1984), Brettell (this volume), and Badone (this volume) have seen anticlerical remarks and stories as an expression of local resentment of and resistance to the anticommunal campaign of the Catholic church which began with the sixteenth-century Council of Trent. From this perspective the local priest is an outsider representative of the ever-extending hegemony of the institutional church. To this political perspective Brandes (1980) and Gilmore (1984) add a psychological consideration of the extremely sexual form of anticlericalism that seems to characterize at least some of the Mediterranean culture area.

While Ireland is by no means devoid of "anticlericalism" in several of its modes, it does not seem to play anything like the central role it does in Portugal (Cutileiro 1971; Riegelhaupt 1984), Spain (e.g., Brandes 1980; Gilmore 1984), or Italy (Silverman 1975). In my experience Irish priests are far more typically praised than damned, and while individual clerics do run into opposition on particular issues, Irish priests are awarded a general respect and even veneration that would be the envy of their Mediterranean colleagues. As for the "stories" as such, only a tiny percentage of those Ó hEochaidh collected or that I heard could, by any stretch of the term, be called "anticlerical." Yet the stories about drunken priests, as is evident from the opening example, are at least ambivalent, and the nature and roots of that ambivalence require exploration.

It might be argued, with some cogency, that the absence of anticlericalism in rural Ireland is a testament to the total domination of the institutional church. If that is the case, however, it has not produced a static uniformity of religious belief and practice nor an elimination of the difference and tension between local and official religiosity. Stories about both "heroic" and "drunken" priests are certainly not expressions of "orthodox" Catholicism. Rather they are local compositions (though in many cases with much borrowing of elements from other "localities"). They can be understood in this light, along with other elements of local religion, as a people's creative response to their experience of religious power. The stories may thus express a dialectic of opposition between locals and intrusive political, cultural, and psychological forces.

While the priest as sorcerer, using the sacred books and objects of the church, is a familiar enough figure from the folklore of other parts of Catholic Europe, for example Brittany (Hélias 1975; and Badone, this volume), in the case of the heroic priest stories, clerics who might elsewhere in Europe be perceived as part of the problem become, in Ireland, a magical solution to Protestant domination. Although Ó hEochaidh's stories were of nineteenth-century clerics, I was told one tale of a local par-

ish priest who, with the aid of his stole, froze two Black and Tans (1920s British occupation forces) to their seats overnight. Yet the church in Ireland was never perceived as the unflinching ally of the folk, and less so of their culture. Local clergy were agents of another "civilizing process" (Elias 1978, 1982) aimed at purging folk Catholicism of its heterodoxy and, even more so, folk society of its unruliness. This "civilizing offensive," to use the more appropriate Dutch term (see Verrips 1987), seems to have had a profound psychological effect. By the later nineteenth century the rural Irish seem to have had so well internalized certain forms of religious repression that local resentment rarely took the form of sexual innuendo as it does elsewhere in Europe (and elsewhere in the Catholic world), though comments about clerical avarice were more usual.

Stories and beliefs about drunken priests, however, were and continue to be common. Not only did I hear stories concerning living and recently deceased priests, I have known many individuals, young and old, who sought the efficacious prayers and blessings of such clerics even in the sanatorium. Taken together, such beliefs, stories, and practices may be interpreted as a kind of folk commentary on priestly power in general, as well as a commentary on the people's response to the increasing domination of the institutional church, and perhaps a less conscious way of handling psychological repression. All this will be apparent through a closer inspection of the stories, beliefs, and practices themselves. I will begin with a brief consideration of the historical and contemporary religious scene in the west of Ireland, then proceed to an examination of the content and performance of the stories, and return finally to an assessment of the overall significance of drunken priest beliefs and stories in this Irish case and in the comparative study of local religion.

CATHOLICISM IN THE WEST OF IRELAND

In comparison with other European Catholic countries, such as those treated in this volume, certain basic aspects of local and national religious life in Ireland are striking. Nearly 90 percent of all Irish Catholics attend mass at least once a week. While the figures are lower in cities (mainly Dublin), in areas such as southwest Donegal virtually every able-bodied Catholic man, woman, and child goes to Sunday mass. Women attend other devotional activities in the course of the week and year with far greater regularity than males, but the presence of many men at most regular church functions is in vivid contrast to many other Catholic countries, and particularly those in the Mediterranean (though Malta is an interesting exception in that region). Moreover, the local priest in most of rural Ireland and certainly in southwest Donegal is typically an important and highly visible part of all aspects of local life. Due in part to the

relative vacuum of parish political authority—there is nothing like a mayor at the village or small-town level—priests have often played an important role in parish-level politics. They have often been taken as the natural representatives of their parishes by government and other outside officials in addition to acting as “brokers” to the outside world for locals. While such a role is not unique in Catholic Europe, their authority and credibility in Ireland has made them unusually powerful in this regard.

Ironically, much of the strength of the Catholic church in Ireland, and of the diocesan organization in particular, can be credited, directly and indirectly, to the British. Soon after they completed the conquest of Ireland in the late seventeenth century, the English passed a series of “penal laws” persecuting Catholics and the practice of Catholicism. Priests in particular were left in precarious circumstances, and while the various local conditions under which they operated no doubt varied and their difficulties may be exaggerated, the folk memory certainly recalls the “penal days priests” as heroic outlaws performing wilderness masses under constant threat of persecution from “redcoats.” Toward the end of the eighteenth century the laws were considerably relaxed, and it would seem that the British, as sociologist Tom Inglis (1987) has put it, decided to turn to the Catholic church for aid in civilizing the “wild Irish.”

A critical event in this process was the establishment in 1795 of a state-supported national seminary at Maynooth, outside Dublin, providing an Irish center for the training of a secular clergy. This academy soon supplied curates (assistant priests) as well as parish priests to most parishes. By 1829, when legislation finally removed all remaining legal impediments to the practice of Catholicism in Ireland, the mainly Maynooth-trained bishops were firmly in place. As Inglis points out (1987), their role was both symbolized and effected through the building of churches throughout the country.

These new, bigger, and far more expensive churches, which in areas like southwest Donegal replaced thatched huts or even open shelters called *scáilín*, provided the institutional setting for what Larkin (1972) called the “devotional revolution.” Well provided with priests, the peasantry in these remote areas now began to attend mass regularly and in great numbers. They were also introduced to the revival and expansion of devotional practices then popular on the continent. This was especially so after the arrival of archbishop and papal legate Paul Cullen who, in 1850, convened the first Irish synod since the Middle Ages.

Cullen’s church produced an ever-increasing flow of Roman devotional practice and language, aimed particularly at the growing Catholic middle class. Like the Counter-Reformation, the devotional revolution of nineteenth-century Ireland was aimed at the firm establishment of a religious

regime. The later movement was, however, far more able to penetrate into local fields of religious experience. From a Weberian perspective the Maynooth-trained diocesan clergy might be seen as poised to accomplish the transition from “magical” to “ethical” religious belief and practice. A step along the historical road toward rationalization, for Weber that general transition was also a means by which true priestly domination was achieved. Indeed, the devotional revolution seems a classic case of the institutionalization of charisma. The weekly mass became the central ritual in a religious field dominated by a discourse and iconography which affirmed the power of the church as institution.

The discourse of the church establishment was in large measure a middle-class Victorian one whose definition of civility and morality did not much differ from that of Protestant England and America, or much of Europe. It linked those more generally held cultural attitudes, however, to a particular institutional matrix—that of the Irish Catholic church. Some idea of the nature of the discourse can be gathered from the pages of the *Irish Catholic Directory*, an almanac of the year’s Catholic events published annually from 1836 and distributed among the growing Catholic middle classes. The discourse of the annals through the nineteenth century, mainly authored by well-established clergy, is characterized by two different idioms, often appearing on the very same page: the idiom of opposition/persecution and the idiom of empire.

The idiom of opposition/persecution involved the constant iteration of the theme of British oppression and the consequent moral opposition and superiority of the Irish Catholic people and church. Writers would seize in particular upon occasions with dramatic potential, such as the doomed efforts of Protestant proselytizers in the West, or the eviction of helpless Catholic peasants in West Mayo and Donegal. In such cases the annals would stress the role of heroic clerics as defenders of the oppressed tenantry and the solidarity of the Irish Catholic people in opposition to the British.

Even as they extolled the embattled and famine-stricken peasants resisting the persecution of “bigoted Protestants” and “oppressive landlords,” the writers of the annals listed and described in sumptuous detail the achievements and growing power of a Catholic empire whose seat was in Dublin and Maynooth. Not only could the hierarchy provide an alternative state to British Ireland, they could also claim to head an alternative world empire. If Australia was a British colony, then Catholic Australia was increasingly an Irish dominion. Thus the description of yearly events in the directories alternated between the idiom of persecution and the idiom of empire, but increasingly through the middle decades of the century it was the latter that predominated.

The very solidity and growing security of that regime, however, might

also have led to a dulling routinization of the charisma so alive under direct British persecution in the eighteenth century. Various forces contributed to the continuing cultural and emotional force of the church in its institutionalizing phase. To return once again to Inglis's apt analysis, the church offered a route to respectable civility and middle-class status. That route, I would add, was through participation in an increasingly rich ritual structure equipped with a veritable myriad of new and revived devotions tying individuals, families, and communities to the sacramental symbols of the church.

In all this, the discourse of middle-class Catholicism, as described above, served a crucial function in structuring the consciousness of those who lived in that cultural world. Peculiarly if not uniquely Irish, the historical and political circumstances allowed the prevailing religious regime to promote middle-class civility and actively oppose various forms of dangerously uncivil behavior, even while it identified itself with the oppressed peasantry. A discourse that managed (and still manages) to link a comfortable clergy to the outlaw prophets of penal times keeps class-conscious anticlericalism at bay even as it revivifies the charisma of dramatic opposition in the face of routinization.

The folk, however, had their own language, a discourse to some extent accessible in the many stories on religious themes contained in the Irish Folklore Archive at U.C. Dublin. In such Gaelic-speaking areas as southwest Donegal the middle-class discourse described above reached most local ears mainly in the contexts of the schoolroom and church, where sermons and pastorals brought this perspective to bear on local experience. The national school system and its teachers warrant further investigation as sources of popular middle-class Catholic discourse as well as manners (see Inglis 1987) in this period. In domestic and other public contexts, however, the idiom was different. The stories recorded in the archives are an invaluable source of this sort of "talk," and the priest stories with which this article is concerned can be viewed within this historical context. They suggest something of the world view which both experienced and responded to the devotional revolution as well as the other social and economic changes that characterized the region (see also Lawrence Taylor 1985).

PRIEST STORIES

The "heroic priest" stories, mentioned earlier, show that the idiom of opposition was as important for the folk as for the hierarchy. In southwest Donegal it was *Gael* (as in Gaelic or Irish) versus *Gall* (foreigner), the latter term designating the substantial minority of Church of Ireland Protestants resident in the area since early in the eighteenth century. Moral

and political issues, such as eviction and persecution, are central to these tales in which the priest uses sacramental magic to triumph over his evil enemies.

Drunken priest legends, however, are a very different matter, as one can see from the opening example of the priest who blinded the boy. Such narratives invariably begin with a phrase something like, "there was a priest here and he was fond of a wee drop." Disclaimers such as "with all respect to his cloth" or "though I shouldn't say so" are sometimes inserted for apparently prophylactic purposes. The stories are never set in a church or other ecclesiastical setting; rather the drunken priest is out walking in nature or among his people. Protestants, regular characters in the heroic priest stories, rarely appear in the drunken priest narratives and almost never as enemies; when the priest faces adversaries, they are his own innocent parishioners—guilty only of attempting to deprive him of drink or money.

In a story similar to the priest who blinded the boy, a drunken priest falls asleep at a baptism party, at which point the man of the house hides the one remaining bottle out in the byre. Upon waking the priest asks for a drink, only to be told there is not a drop in the house. "Go out to the byre and get the bottle you hid there" the man is told, and the poor fellow is cursed for his trouble, losing five sons to consumption. In another story a shopgirl refuses a loan of a few shillings for drink and wakes up the next morning with a beard (Ó hEochaidh 1945: 40–42). The drunken priest is not always malignant, however. There was, for example, the one who found a party of men hesitant to start the haymaking in the face of a threatening storm. "Work away" he told them, reclining against a tree with a jug of whiskey. The rains came in torrents, but not a drop fell on the field where the men labored (Ó hEochaidh 1945: 23–26).

Most often the benevolent drunken priest *cures*—either humans or beasts. As mentioned earlier, such miracles are performed without the aid of stole or book, usually with blessings but sometimes with the further action of contagious magic. There was the story, for example, of the time a woman from Teelin, desperate over the decline of her prize sow, finally sought the miraculous Father MacShane, the very same priest, as it turns out, who blinded the boy (and to whom we will be returning at length below). She saw him approaching along the road, but before she could tell him what was wrong he said, "I know what trouble has brought you to me," and with that he scraped a bit of the dirt from the sole of his boot and told her to mix it in the pig's food. A complete recovery ensued (Ó hEochaidh 1945: 37–39). Religious artifacts may come into play in such cures, but they are natural substances or associated with the landscape, like blessed salt or holy wells.

As the two accounts concerning priest McShane illustrate, cures and

courses are attributed in several cases to the same priest; it is not a case of good and bad priests but rather priests whose power is both strong and capricious. They look into mortal minds, they control the forces of nature, and they are as likely to harm (if crossed) as they are to help. Justice doesn't come into these stories, although it is central to the heroic priest stories.

The power of such priests is further illustrated by the manner in which these stories are performed. Folklorist Ó hEochaidh (1945) has an interesting note prefacing his collection which translates as follows: "Stories about priests are wonderfully difficult to collect because people believe that it is neither right nor proper to be telling such stories for fear that something will befall them for the telling, especially if there is something wrong with the priest in the story." If the old stories were not often told, they were heard frequently enough to be known, and if warnings were included about the danger of telling such stories, then these admonitions, like the phrases "with all due respect for his cloth," only served as extensions of the protagonists' power—they could reach out of the text and blind the narrator. I suspect that such stories were not so willingly told for the collector, not so much because he might be an outsider but because he was writing them down or, worse, recording them and thereby concretizing the event of the telling.

While the formal context of the *seanchaidh* (storyteller) is rarely encountered in southwest Donegal today, I found that many older people knew at least some of the stories Ó hEochaidh recorded and were quite willing to add others of their own. Whenever I told a story I had heard, listeners would adopt an attentive and apparently believing attitude, shaking their heads at the wonder of the priests' miracles. I was also present at discussions in pubs and homes where a small number of men or women, having raised the topic of priestly power, would relate such stories—sometimes in the "classic" narrative form discussed above and sometimes more in the way of less apparently structured anecdotes. The anecdotal form often related events much more recently transpired.

There was a Father Heany for example, who died only four or five years ago. He was known not only to take a drink but to see patients in the local bar. "Oh Father Heany was very good," a neighbor of mine told me, "my boss John—he's not even a Catholic—had a terrible pain in his neck. He was having a drink in the pub and he told Father Heany about the pain, and Father Heany just put his hand on John's neck and kind of rubbed it. Well the pain just went away and it never came back. Oh Father Heany was a very great priest." I heard another tale, more in the formal style, told of a good Protestant farmer further north in the county who had contributed to the education of a miraculous drinking priest whose father had labored on his farm. Years later the farmer found him-

self in dire straits with the sheriff threatening to take away his cattle. The young priest commiserated with the old Protestant farmer over a drink and said it would be a shame if his cattle ever strayed past the stream they used to take them to on the edge of the farm. The next day nothing could get the cattle over that barrier.

Of all the local drunken priests, Father McShane, who blinded the boy and cured the pig, certainly figured largest in the local repertoire, and an extended look at McShane stories and how they are told reveals much about the meaning of the stories for their tellers and also about the historical circumstances that may lie behind such legends.

I first encountered the blinded boy story in the archives in the form presented in this paper. Returning to the region, I asked a man of about eighty, in the midst of a general conversation about priests and their powers, if he had ever heard anything about the powers of priests who drink. After a pause and with some small show of discomfort with the topic, he pointed his pipe stem up the road toward the nearby market town. "Sagart [priest] Condy Rua," he began, "he was a McShane from Carrick, from the house there by the post office—you know it—you know the shop there, well that was Johnny Condy Rua's, and Sagart Condy Rua would be his brother. Well he took a drink and once he went into the house [pub] that was there across the road—it was McShane as well—and, whatever happened, he asked the boy who was behind the bar there for a bottle of whiskey that was up on the shelf. And the boy didn't want to give it to him—maybe he owed too much, do you see. Anyway, he said to the priest that he couldn't see the bottle. The priest said to him that he would wish he could see it tomorrow. And he left. Well the boy woke up blind the next morning. So . . ." Thus the story ended. "And did he ever see again?" I asked. "No."

Some time later I was asking a local school teacher if he knew anything of the priest McShane. "Aye, that would be Sagart [Priest] Condy Rua, Johnny's brother. I grew up next to him there in Carrick. He was already dead when I was born, but I often heard Johnny talk of him, and my mother had great faith in him." He then proceeded to tell me a version of the blinded boy story similar to the one above but without specifying at what point the boy went blind. "Did he go blind right away?" I asked. "I think it must have been maybe six months or a year later," came the reply. At this point the teacher's wife, a very pious, college-educated woman who had married into the community from a far more sophisticated region of Ireland, remarked that of course such a story could not be true. Her husband, also college-educated in Dublin, was visibly upset by her comment. He insisted with stubborn and humorless determination that the story was in fact true, that he knew the parties involved. He

went on to relate another incident, closer to home, involving the miraculous Father McShane.

"My mother died last year at the age of ninety, and she often told me the story her mother told her, about when my mother was born with a deformed lip and my grandmother was going to take her to the doctor to have it operated on. Well, she stopped in the McShane house there in Carrick on her way, and Sagart Condy Rua was there at home visiting [his natal family]. He said that he knew she was on the way to the doctor for the baby's lip but that she should not go. 'I'll tell you where you will find a cure for that lip,' he said, 'at the holy well in Kilarc [the next parish and his own curacy]. Just go to the well and do the stations and put a drop of the water on the lip of the child.' Well, she did that, and within days the lip was completely perfect. Now my mother often told me that."

Several months later, Mary, a neighbor woman in her fifties, came to visit me and my wife for tea. Conversation began as it almost always did with a discussion of the immediate neighbors and what they were up to. Her conversation was suggestive of her world view—in the sequence of anecdotes as well as in their individual content. Speaking of one household, she said that she had attended the "stations" (a mass held in the

home with the neighbors as guests) held there by the new parish priest. With that observation she diverted herself to the topic of priests and how some of them were "holier" than others. I then told her that I had recently spoken with the housekeeper of Father Heany (the recently deceased cleric whose barroom curing is described above, who had resided in retirement about fifteen miles away) who had told me of the hundreds of people who would line up for blessings and cures every weekend. Mary was apparently unfamiliar with Father Heany, however, and seemed disinterested in discussing him, but began instead to tell us of her experience with Father O'Donnell (pseudonym), a charismatically inclined priest whose monthly "healing mass" was attended by hundreds of people from all over the county and beyond. She had taken a local minibus to the event the month before (see Taylor 1987b).

"I had this terrible gash in my leg I got when I fell in the house, and it wasn't healing well. And this pain I had in my side—just a terrible sort of ache that would come and go. Well I went to the priest and told him my trouble and he bent his head and listened, and then he put his hand on my side and kind of moved it across me here and prayed over me. And that pain just went away and it hasn't come back since!" Mary then continued, with no provocation from me, to recall the exploits of Father McShane of story fame.

"He had wonderful power. He cured many a one around here. My father went to him once with a very bad eye [here her tone changed to that of serious storytelling], and Father McShane asked him why had he come to him.

'For you to cure my eye,' he told him.

'And do you believe I will cure it?'

'I do.'

And he told my father to kneel down by a table he had there, and he pulled the cloth that was on it over my father's head and said an office [blessing] over him and then my father went home. Well, that eye cleared up and never troubled him again. Oh Father McShane was a very great priest. . . . you know Seamus [her father's brother's son and neighbor]; he has his boot. Ask him and he'll show it to you."

I did on the next day. I found Seamus, a successful small farmer of fifty-six, at home and told him that I had heard he knew something of the priest McShane. Seamus then proceeded to relate how, in his youth, he had come across the boot when cleaning out the byre and had almost thrown it away with the trash.

"Boys, oh boys, oh dears, where are you goin' with that boot?" me father asked me.

'Many's the cures that's in that boot,' he told me, and that was the boot of Father McShane. So I put it back in the byre for the cattle like."



Nineteenth-century photograph of a Protestant tourist being shown a holy well on a mountain. (From Lawrence Collection, National Library, Dublin)

"And I keep it shined up," his wife added.

Later on his wife produced the boot for our inspection and asked those present if we "wanted to take a blessing off it" (that is, to touch the boot as one would holy water, blessing oneself after contact).

The same man told me another story about Father McShane: "They say that Father McShane was out walking through the countryside, and he came upon two carters [men who made their living transporting goods in carts to the far-flung small shopkeepers in remote regions]. He would often be out like that and ask someone for money—I guess for drink. Anyway, he asked this one man for money, and he told the priest that he hadn't enough for him. 'Well, you have the money now,' the priest said to him, 'but you won't have money in the future.' And then he came to another carter, a fellow called Boyle—he'd be a cousin of mine—and he asked him for the money, and the Boyle fellow had only half a crown, just enough to feed himself and his horse like, but he said he'd give it to him. And he did. And the priest said he would never have empty pockets, and by God it was true for him. That man never married, but he left a good packet of money to some of his relations—gave them a good start like."

Several days later I was on the other side of the parish on a remote mountain road when I spotted an interesting-looking local man cajoling a donkey up the brae with a cartload of turf. I stopped and we chatted in



Father McShane's boot. (Photograph by V. M. Hickey)

Irish about the place, and he asked where I was staying. I told him, and he asked if I knew a cousin of his who lived nearby: Seamus—the very man with the priest's boot. I asked him if he knew the story of McShane and the carter.

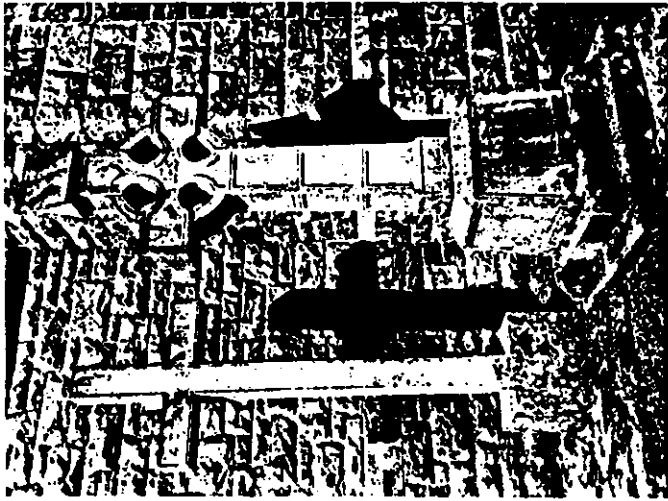
"Indeed I do, wasn't it my own uncle, there, who was in it," he said, nodding toward his own home on the mountainside. "He was carting for that Haughey shop there in Meanacooly and he gave the priest money and prospered for it." He went on to identify the other carter in the story and his townland.

"And a funny thing about that story," he added. "My uncle himself never told us that story, and he lived with us all his life and died when I was twenty years old [about thirty-five years earlier]. And the day he died neighbors who knew him told us what had happened with him and the priest."

This corpus of McShane stories and the contexts of their telling suggest much about the role of the drunken priest in local consciousness. But before proceeding to that analysis we need to take note of the historical circumstances of Father McShane, for he certainly lived, and his local situation suggests some of the reasons both for his suitability for the narrative role of drunken priest and for the historical, cultural, and psychological genesis of this narrative form.

McShane was curate, or assistant priest, under a parish priest named O'Donnell who served the parish of Kilcar from 1893 up until his death in 1910. O'Donnell is memorialized in his parish in two forms. First and foremost is the parish church in the village of Kilcar, which in ornateness is reputedly second only to the diocesan cathedral in Letterkenny. While there is some good agricultural land in the parish, there is far more that is very poor and mountainous, and in most respects Kilcar was a typical west Donegal parish, that is, nothing would lead one to expect the rather impressive parish church there. A local antiquarian told me that in fact the church was built through money raised in America, and, what is more, that it was the curate McShane who was sent there on a number of occasions to collect funds. According to his account (which of course has to be considered as a "story" itself—true or not—rather than simply "history"), O'Donnell was an imperious, egotistical, and crassly materialistic man who resented and exploited the more spiritual and intellectual McShane. According to this account, McShane, exasperated with his constant travels, finally refused to go off to America, and O'Donnell had him "silenced" by the bishop—with drink the legitimating excuse.

The other memorial, which also sheds light on O'Donnell's relation to the parish, is a large concrete "mission cross" dated 1907 (see figure). Such crosses were erected during Redemptorists' parish missions, when representatives of that preaching order took over a parish for several



Mission cross, Kilear. (Photograph by V. M. Hickey.)

weeks of intensive sermonizing and confessions. These missions had two chief foci and effects. First, they brought Roman devotionism to rural Ireland, that is, they were "shock troops" in what Larkin (1972) calls the "devotional revolution." Second, and this was especially so in the west of Ireland in the period in question, the missionaries made a special contribution, in particularly dramatic form, to the ongoing clerical attack on uncontrolled drinking and the unsupervised socializing of "big nights" (parties held in houses). A successful mission "campaign" would be concluded with the erection of just such a memorial cross, and indeed such missions often etched themselves into local memory as powerful events (see Taylor 1989, for a full discussion of Irish missions). O'Donnell was for these reasons a perfect representation of the church as oppressor of local life, a point extended in another story I was told wherein he actively opposed the local IRA efforts during the fight for Irish independence.

Thus there is in the O'Donnell/McShane pair a perfect binary opposition between parish priest and curate in terms of politics, temperament, and their respective relationships with the people. Moreover, they have both ascribed and achieved characteristics that lend deeply resonant symbolic dimensions to the opposition. O'Donnell arrived from another part of the diocese and not only ran but actually built a most impressive church. His further association with the Redemptorist mission, memori-

alized in the cross, makes him the perfect personification of the increasingly successful forces of religious domination and institutional authority that so characterized local experience throughout most of the nineteenth century. On the other hand there is McShane: born locally and thus intimately associated with the sacred landscape—including the local holy well—drunk, wandering through the countryside, and especially so after being "silenced" by the bishop. There is also a wonderful inversion in the types of "begging" the priests do: O'Donnell's is for the church, McShane's is for drink. Clearly there are two kinds of power figured in this opposition, but equally clear is the fact that the conceptual opposition did not originate with these two historical personalities. Rather, the perfect experiential opposition made McShane a particularly appropriate and potent magnet for beliefs about drunken priests.

CONCLUSION

Why, however, do drunken priests have such powers? I found the people with whom I discussed these matters quite willing to talk about the subject but usually unable to come up with an explicit theory; their conceptual schema was both created and embodied in narratives. Typically the response would go something like, "Somehow it's the priests that take a drink that always have the power, the old people always said that, and it's still the way it is—whatever's in it." One old woman ventured a tentative explanation: "Maybe its because when the drink is on them they can't control themselves so much."

The theme of control is an interesting one and consonant with views often expressed concerning that other and closely related type of powerful cleric (combined, in fact, in the case of McShane): the silenced priest. A silenced priest is one who has been removed from the pulpit, in the event very often for excessive drink. Of such clerics it is said, "the *smacht* [control] of the bishop is off them." A local, and sober, priest elaborated: "They think that the priest's miraculous power is under the control of the bishop, so that he is not allowed to work miracles. If the priest is silenced, the power is released." This commentary on the folk theory indicates a marvelous reversal of the official church position conveyed by the term "silenced." Such priests, from the folk religious point of view, have voices indeed. But the uncontained power, no longer channeled into the safe conduits of the sacraments, is both stronger and more dangerous. Following Douglas (1966) and Turner (1969), such priests would be labeled "anomalous" and "liminal." Out of the *smacht* of the bishop—no longer part of the institutional church—the priest is a shaman.

This theme is clearly evinced in the stories of drunken priests as well, who, like McShane, are portrayed away from the church, wandering in

"Nature," and performing their miracles without aid of the symbolic im-
 plements of the institutional church. The matter of silencing, already
 achieved or threatened, indicates that the opposition between drunken
 priest and parish priest and/or bishop is more than conceptual, it is polit-
 ical. Although the case of McShane makes this particularly clear, it is
 worth noting that in every case of a historically identifiable "drunken
 priest" the cleric in question was a curate rather than a parish priest. In
 nineteenth-century Ireland there was a substantial difference in the
 power and income of parish priests and curates (see for example O'Shea
 1983:315), and the drunken curate was unlikely to rise in the hierarchy
 and hence was an excellent symbol of political subordination within the
 authoritarian church. The case of McShane also makes clear the real his-
 torical—as well as symbolic—character of such clerics and, potentially, of
 the situations portrayed in the stories. In that respect such legends offer
 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 (see Lawrence Taylor 1985). Following Turner (1982:72), I would
 argue that there is a dialectical relation between social dramas like those
 involving McShane and the stories told about them. The curate's confron-
 tation with O'Donnell was probably real, but it was also particularly
 meaningful in a cultural sense. Thus the conflict provoked a story. But
 the narrative that was eventually formed no doubt selectively appropri-
 ated 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.

The theme of control, subordination, and release within the church,
 however, is culturally interesting and resonant to the people who tell and
 hear the stories because it draws upon a variety of rich experiential
 sources and has the metaphorical potential to stand for similar themes,
 consciously or unconsciously understood, in their own lives.

In culturally constructing the type of the drunken priest the people
 have availed themselves of a variety of potent traditions. Within the non-
 Christian Irish and Celtic tradition one is reminded especially of the *file*,
 the poet whose words have magical efficacy to curse or help prosper.
 Drunkenness turns out to be one of the important ways and signs of in-
 spiration/possession for such poets and thus provides one line of cultural
 resonance for the drunken priest character (see Ó hÓgain 1983). More-
 over, the image of drunkenness has long been a central feature of the
 national-ethnic stereotype, and in my field experience it is still a highly
 ambivalent aspect of corporate and/or individual self-image. As such it is
 related to a whole series of attributes forged in the binary opposition of
 "reasonable" (read dull) Anglo-Saxon with "emotional" (read creative)
 Celt.

There is a tradition of internal symbolic opposition within the Catholic
 church as well, embodied in the dichotomy of the political/worldly versus
 the spiritual/natural. The latter form was of course rooted in the image of
 Christ and his disciples, a troop of prophetic mendicants who cured with-
 out tools or emblems of office. This charisma of poverty and anti-institu-
 tionality periodically re-emerged in the history of the church in the shape
 of several religious orders, such as the Franciscans, who appropriated
 that sort of image and power. Ireland, in fact, was home to one of the
 earlier forms of this monastic tradition, and most Irish saints (and all local
 ones) originate in the Celtic eremitic tradition of the early Middle Ages.
 Although Irish monasteries were certainly important and occasionally
 wealthy institutions acting directly in the political world, the stories of
 the early saints, which form another subgenre of folk religious tales, all
 feature lone, wandering figures.

These saints are clearly identified with Christ, about whom similar leg-
 ends are told. They wander, they are poor, even mendicant. They are
 also intimately connected to the landscape, especially to the holy wells
 which retain associated curing power, but also in the place names of more
 ordinary features of the local terrain. Their magic defies natural processes
 (growth, death, rain), and they have tempers. Associating the saints with
 Christ in this way serves to extend the foundation myth of the church in
 time, but more importantly, in space: it makes the local landscape sacred
 and thus symbolically associated with the Holy Land.

It is through this sacred landscape that the drunken priest wanders,
 and in this characteristic, as well as in his mendicant, holy, but dangerous
 ways, he is linked with these local saints, especially the major one, Co-
 lumille (St. Columba), who behaves very similarly in many narratives.
 In this context the relic of Father McShane's boot hanging in the byre
 makes sense, as does his linkage with St. Cartha's holy well. People speak
 of having "great faith" in a particular priest, with the same language used
 to discuss devotions to saints. Priests can be associated directly with both
 the poetic and saintly traditions by displaying such "natural" character-
 istics as insanity, drunkenness, and unpredictability, and especially if
 they run into trouble with "authority." Christ, in their stories, is more a
 shaman than a prophet, as is Columille, neither of whom, as noted, uses
 the paraphernalia of the church in performing miracles nor uses his magic
 against political authorities. Further, the drunken priest begs and pun-
 ishes those who do not recognize him, as do both Columille and even
 Christ in the folk if not biblical version of his exploits.

The folk construction of the drunken priest, and the theory of "control
 and release" elicited to explain him, can be read as a commentary on the
 process of becoming a priest but also on the longer historical process of
 the growth of institutional church power through priestly domination.

From this perspective the priest's charisma, whether natural (as some people indicate) or achieved through the rite of passage of ordination, is not augmented through religious training. What the priest learns is self-control; his charisma is institutionalized (see Weber 1963). The further a cleric rises in the church, the less sacred power he manifests. Another sort of royal charismatic power emerges at the top in the Pope, but the bishops are perceived more as politicians than princes; no one goes to bishops for cures.

Analogously, this figuring of priestly power can also be read as a metaphor for the church's attempt to civilize and contain the natural power of local folk religion and indeed of those elements of local folk life perceived as uncivilized. In Larkin's (1972) "devotional revolution" mid-nineteenth-century Irish Catholics were subject to the steadily increasing domination of the clergy. Mass attendance became regular, and official religious objects such as scapulars, miraculous medals, and rosary beads provided concrete foci of sacred power and devotion. Through the same period the church also represented the most active agency of general social control (see Connolly 1982). The people were not silent, however. There was and is power in the Word as well, and if they recognized the force of priestly language, the tellers of priest stories thereby exercised their own linguistic power by appropriating the clergy as actors in the very folk religion they typically opposed. In this sense the stories both react to and create history not only as event but as process. For the people the drunken priest represented, and to some extent still represents, a kind of chthonic power, less controlled or contained than that of the ordinary clergy: a force released beyond the walls of the church, in the mountains, or in stories of his parish.

There may well also be a less conscious, psychologically motivated metaphor at work in the priest stories, though one materially connected to the historical circumstances discussed above. As mentioned in our brief discussion of the Redemptorist mission, it was not only—or even mainly—heterodox religious practice that the nineteenth-century church sought to control. Rather, powerful religious dramatics were brought to the task of suppressing sexual and violent behavior. It is interesting in this regard that there are not in Ireland the sexual stories of priests that abound in other areas of the Catholic world. A Freudian addendum to our thus far historical, structural, and symbolic analysis of the drunken priest would suggest that perhaps the actual or implied opposition of drunken and ordinary priest metaphorically represents aspects of *self* with which that very church and its personnel have been, and are, intimately concerned. That is, the potent but capriciously destructive drunken priest may represent the *libido* "when the *smacht* of the church—and its internalized aspects of the self—is off it." This interpre-

tation does not seem arbitrary in light of both the actual historic role of the church in repressing sexuality and the evidence of its success in the high rate of celibacy that has long characterized the region. As noted, the rarity of sexual motifs in the Irish stories is in stark contrast with priest narratives from such regions as Spain. If the stories and beliefs do have this psychological aspect, then their telling and hearing might provide opportunities for "release," albeit in a more sublimated form than, for example, the sexual stories of the Spanish priest discussed in this way by Brandes (1980). If such were the case, it would make sense that these stories are both compelling and dangerous to tell.

The drunken priest, when put into historical as well as folkloric context, illustrates the dynamic nature of the relationship between local and official religion. The stories and beliefs examined here constitute part of an ever-changing field of local religious experience, which adapts to changing conditions—political, cultural, and psychological. Indeed, the degree to which these categories, in their conscious and unconscious forms, can be linked in such stories makes them powerful. The special role of discourse in this formation and maintenance of religious experience is also well exemplified here, for like religious symbols or rituals, discourse can be borrowed and applied in both directions. It is likely, for example, that the use of the idiom of opposition by the church in its publications rises from the folk use of the same idiom.

Finally, these beliefs continue to operate not just in stories but in behavior. The search for relief from affliction continues to motivate much religious behavior, and if alcoholic priests are not as popular as in the past, they are certainly still sought by individuals young and old. The reputations, in this regard, of contemporary clerics such as Father Healey rise and fall like those of holy wells, saints, and particular devotions. In all cases proof of efficacy is conveyed in narrative form, so that the power of the story is critical to the perceived power of the curer. Medicine shows no sign of obviating such needs, and even if their form shifts, such beliefs have a future. Mary, the woman who went to see the healing priest looking for a cure found herself at a Charismatic mass, a novel religious form imported to the region from America, home of the "Pentecostal Catholic" or "Charismatic Renewal" movement. There is a chance that her experience there may lead her, as it has others of her neighbors, to join a local prayer group. In the context of such a charismatic or pentecostal "community of affliction" she would, as in the storytelling sessions, take part in the corporate construction of experience. In such contexts, however, narrative serves a more radical enterprise. An idiom foreign to the ordinary situations of local life is adopted and the search for a cure becomes a quest for "healing," a key notion at the heart of a new discourse and a new field of religious experience.

This paper is based on field and archival research conducted in Ireland for eleven months in 1973 and 1976 and twelve months in 1986/1987. Fieldwork was generously supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and Lafayette College. I wish to thank the many individuals of the region that spoke with me on these matters (none of whom are identified by actual name in the text), and several scholars whose advice or comments on this and earlier versions of the paper were especially helpful, including Tom Inglis, Father Brendan McConvery CSSR, Sean White, and Gearóid Ó'Crualaich in Ireland and Dan Bauer, Susan Niles, Stanley Brandes, and Ellen Badone in North America. A great debt is owed to the Folklore Archives in Dublin and the generous assistance there of Séamus Ó' Catháin and Bairbre Ó'Floinn. Special thanks are due to my wife, Maeve Hickey Taylor, without whom the research for this paper would not have been possible.

1. This paper is part of a more general work, in progress, on forms of Catholicism in this region. For relevant accounts of other aspects of historical and local life see Lawrence Taylor (1980a, 1980b, 1981, 1987a, and especially 1985, 1987b, and 1989). A nearby parish is the subject of Shanklin (1985).
2. The theoretical concept "fields of religious experience" is an attempt to provide a mode of analyzing the multiplicity of meaning systems that can be discovered within a population of believers. In the region under consideration it is possible to distinguish such distinct if overlapping fields as "chthonic," "middle-class," and "charismatic." This notion is elaborated in the longer work in progress referred to in note 1.

Conclusion: Reflections on the Study of Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in Europe

Stanley Brandes

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF EUROPEAN RELIGION

THE anthropological study of European religion has developed in the context of the anthropology of complex societies. No matter where we go in Europe, no matter how large or small our unit of analysis, we inevitably discover the coexistence of several competing, mutually derivative systems of religious beliefs and practices. If it would be oversimplifying matters to speak of Australian aboriginal religion, Trobriand religion, or Ife religion, then it is an even graver injustice to refer to Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy as if these each reflected homogeneous, undifferentiated cosmologies, world views, and sets of ritual behavior. European religious systems are intricately patterned and highly elaborated; they have emerged over the course of centuries in response to an infinite variety of social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances. How, then, can anthropologists, with their usual focus on highly localized traditions, contribute to the more general understanding of religion in Europe?

In the main I would say that anthropologists, as well as historians who utilize anthropological modes of analysis, have relied on often very fragmentary evidence to reconstruct the religious beliefs and practices of the poorer, less literate peoples in Europe. In this volume Jane Schneider correctly points out that peasants (and, by extension, other dependent segments of European society) were hardly unreflective members of the religious communities to which they belonged. The growing corpus of microhistories to which she refers more than substantiates the sometimes thoughtful manner in which these peoples approached their relation to God and the supernatural. However, these peoples tended not to record their religious conceptions. Nor, with few exceptions, were their ideas systematized and codified into some internally consistent, all-encompassing cosmology, such as clerics, philosophers, and other intellectual specialists might have the time and inclination to develop.

Whether dealing with people past or present, the anthropological mandate is to resuscitate religious beliefs and practices such as those of the masses that would otherwise be lost to history. It is for this reason that