



Occasions of Faith: An Anthropology of Irish Catholics

Lawrence J. Taylor

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Devotional "occasions" or experiences by Irish Catholics form the foundation of this consummate anthropological study of Irish Catholicism. Lawrence Taylor's twenty years of field work in Banagh in south-west Donegal have yielded rich ethnographic material that is illuminated by wide-ranging archival sources, vivid renderings of individual experiences, and sympathetic scrutiny of religious questions and theories. In answering questions central to the study of religion (What is it? How do official and popular religions differ? What is the relation between power and meaning, and the roles of political and religious "regimes" in the social construction of religion?), Taylor draws upon two major theoretical traditions: that of Geertz, Durkheim and Turner, and that of Marx, Foucault and Asad. Basic fears and needs propel the people of south-west Donegal - and all of us, Taylor contends - to respond creatively to strong personal religious experiences and to invent forms to express them. 'The world of Occasions of Faith is the world of Synge's *The Well of the Saints* and Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *Wonderful Tennessee*, the world that provides the central axis for Seamus Heaney's *Station Island*. If for no other reason, read it for the light it sheds on those works and others. But read it too for its own distinctive pleasures.' - Katherine McKenna, *The Recorder* '...a delight... Moving with remarkable ease from vivid descriptive accounts of both landscape and individual action to a syncretistic mode of analysis that accords importance to local discourse, social context and historical process, the reader is taken on a voyage of discovery through some of the principal dimensions of Irish Catholic religious experience. This is a book that should be read by all those interested in the anthropological study of religion, in the role of religion in Irish society, in Catholicism, and in the anthropological study of Europe.' - Michael Allen, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 'A work of major importance. Informed by a deep knowledge of anthropological writings on religion and a wide-ranging and thorough engagement with Ireland, it furnishes a compelling and perceptive exploration of Irish Catholicism.' - *Irish Review* 'A marvellous book - thoughtful, insightful and inspiring: we are greatly in Lawrence Taylor's debt for this compelling, comprehensive, yet highly sympathetic study.' - Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill

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