

**Dr. James Gallagher, alumnus Kilmorensis:
Bishop of Raphoe (1725 – 37) and Kildare & Leighlin (1737 – 51)**

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Preamble

During the course of this short essay I hope to do a number of things: (i) to sketch a brief outline of Dr. James Gallagher's life; (ii) to deal with the issue of the popularity of his *Sermons*; and (iii) to look at the content of the *Sermons* themselves. With regard to the second of these three things, the popularity of the *Sermons*, I would also like to pursue two other issues which directly relate to the matter – firstly the question of the number of issues the *Sermons* went through and secondly, the influence that these sermons exerted on the literature, culture and people of Donegal and its surrounding environs.

The year of Gallagher's birth is commonly given as 1681 without any great evidence or justification, as far as I can see. I have proposed a theory elsewhere that he was born around the year 1684.¹ His birthplace is also unknown although I have put forward the thesis that he may well have been born in the general area of Kinlough, County Leitrim where the borders of the dioceses of Raphoe, Kilmore and Clogher meet.² He was awarded an MA by the University of Paris in August of the year 1715³ and was appointed bishop of Raphoe in 1725. He administered that diocese until he had to flee from the area in 1735 owing to the severity of the persecution under the Penal Laws. According to one source I have read, he took refuge on an island in Lough Erne, having fled Raphoe, and during the year 1735 is alleged to have spent that year writing and preparing the sermons.⁴ These sermons were published for the first time in Dublin in 1736 and the following year, Gallagher was translated to the diocese of Kildare. He died in 1751 after a long and very active ministry. Like the exact whereabouts of his birth, Gallagher's final resting-place is unclear, although he is supposed to have been buried at Cross-Patrick near Kilmeague, County Kildare.⁵ He was very definitely an *alumnus* of the diocese of Kilmore.⁶

¹ Ciarán Mac Murchaidh, 'Nótaí Beathaisnéise ar an Dr Séamas Ó Gallchobhair', *Irisleabhar Mhá Nuad 1998*, (Maigh Nuad, 1998) pp 169-186. Cf. also Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Séamus Ó Gallchobhair/James Gallagher' in *Collège des Irlandais Paris and Irish Studies*, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies 2001, pp 122-3.

² Ciarán Mac Murchaidh, *Seanmóirí Uí Ghallchóir: Téacs agus Cúlra*, 2 vols (*Téacs & Cúlra infra*) (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth 2003), i, pp x-xii.

³ L.W.B Brockliss and Patrick Ferté (eds), 'Prosography of Irish Clerics in the Universities of Paris and Toulouse, 1573-1792' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, lviii (2004), pp 7-166 at p. 26.

⁴ M. Comerford, *Collections relating to the Dioceses of Kildare and Leighlin* (3 vols), (Dublin, 1833-6), i, p. 76.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁶ Mac Murchaidh, *Téacs & Cúlra*, vol. i, pp xi-xii.

The last edition of Gallagher's *Sermons* to appear was prepared by Father Paul Walsh of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth and published in 1911.⁷ On page xii of that edition, a list of 24 different issues of the *Sermons* aside from his own appears. This list was provided by Séamus Ó Caiside.⁸ (I propose using the term 'issues' here as I want to avoid the term 'edition' since some of the issues described by Walsh were merely reprints of previous volumes and were not new editions at all.) Most commentators since then mention a figure of about '25 editions' when talking about the popularity of Gallagher's *Sermons*. They use this figure to illustrate the point that the *Sermons* were so popular and in such demand that they went through 25 issues between 1735 and 1911.⁹ I don't wish to deny the principle of this point, but I would like to deal with some of the 'phantom' issues on Ó Caiside's list.

The first thing we must establish is that Gallagher's *Sermons* were published for the first time in 1736. There were sixteen sermons in all in this edition. Ó Caiside's mention of a 1735 edition is taken from Edward O'Reilly's book, *Irish Writers*, which was published in 1820, and the reference is incorrect. The 1737 issue referred to in a pamphlet (containing two of the sermons) by Father Joseph S. O'Gallagher of Amboy, Illinois, is most likely another mistake, as I can find no reference to it anywhere else. Similarly, the 1740 issue of the *Sermons* cited by O'Reilly is incorrect. Bourke, who also mentions the 1740 issue in his 1877 edition, was simply relying on what O'Reilly had written. This was the year that an extra sermon, which Gallagher wrote and which was entitled 'On the Joys of Heaven', was supposed to have been added to the original collection. I have not been able to trace any verifiable reference to the 1740 issue in any of the sources I have consulted. Neither have I so far encountered any copies of the issues mentioned by Ó Caiside for the years 1792, 1793, 1805, 1813, and 1817. This is not to say that editions or reprints were not produced in these years, although I have been unable to find any verifiable references for them in any of the usual sources. We have also seen that the information provided on page xii in *Breathnach* is less than reliable in some instances or that there is a reliance on information in other sources, which is itself unreliable. You will note, too, that no bibliographical details at all are given for the 1805, 1813 and 1817 issues. As a result of all this uncertainty, I prefer to count the number of issues we actually know to exist. This means that between 1736 and 1911, there was one issue of *Sixteen Irish Sermons* (1736), 15 issues of *Seventeen Irish Sermons* (1752, 1767, 1777, 1795, 1798, 1807, 1809, 1819, 1831, 1835, 1841, 1877, 1878, 1881 and 1911) and one issue with only two sermons in it, the one that was published in 1900. In the years 1877, 1878 and 1881

⁷ Pól Breathnach (eag.), *Seanmóirí Muighe Nuadh*, iml. iv, (Baile Átha Cliath, 1911).

⁸ *The Irish Book Lover*, (IBL *infra*) Jan.-Feb., 1930, p. 28.

⁹ The question was exercising the curiosity of "O." in IBL, Sept.-Oct., 1929: 'Of books printed in the Irish Language, what book has run into the greatest number of different editions? It has been stated that Bishop Gallagher's *Sermons* holds the record. Is this true?', p. 116. Séamus Ó Caiside replied as follows in the Jan.-Feb., 1930 issue of IBL: "I have examined fifteen or sixteen editions (1736, etc.) of Bishop Gallagher's *Irish Sermons*, and there were probably other editions which may have escaped [*sic*] my notice. See my bibliography in Father Pól Breathnach's edition (1911).", p. 28.

Canon Ulick Bourke of Tuam in County Galway produced a bilingual edition of the text, which had the Irish text on left-hand side and an English translation on the facing page.

While there is a difference between claiming that 25 'editions' of the text were published between 1736 and 1911 and arriving at a figure over half of that, as I have done, the number of issues we know to have been produced is still a great testament to the interest in and popularity of this book of sermons. At the same time, it is important to try and clearly establish when the various issues of the *Sermons* actually appeared. It is quite obvious that there was a demand for the book and that various printers were happy to reproduce it at fairly regular intervals.

Influence of the Sermons

When Bishop Gallagher published his collection of sixteen sermons in the Irish language in 1736, I doubt if he realized how important a text it would become, even within his own lifetime and certainly for a very long time thereafter. He could hardly have imagined the tremendous influence it would exert on the literary and cultural heritage of Donegal and indeed that of the island of Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries especially. In their monumental review of the literary tradition of the Irish language from earliest beginnings, which was published at the end of the 1970s, the authors J. E. Caerwyn Williams and Máirín Ní Mhuiríosa had this much to say about Gallagher's *Sermons*:

No other book in Irish was as much in demand except, perhaps, for the *Pious Miscellany* of Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin which was first published in 1805.¹⁰

The frequency with which the sermons were published in the period between 1736 and 1911 accounts in part for the high profile this work enjoyed. Other subsequent religious texts in Irish further highlighted the regard in which later authors held Gallagher's work. The Douay bilingual catechism, for example, has the following remark on its title page:

The Douay Catechism in English and Irish for the use of schools, to which is prefixed a method of learning to read the Irish language without a master, for the instruction of such persons as have neglected this useful study in their youth; and it is a most excellent introduction to the reading and understanding of Dr. Gallagher's seventeen Irish sermons, so universally read throughout the Kingdom of Ireland.

In an article he wrote in the *Journal of the Eighteenth-Century Ireland Society* and which was published in 1994 concerning Bishop Anthony Coyle of the diocese of Raphoe, the historian Father John J. Silke mentions the wide influence these sermons had on the ordinary public. In fact he remarks that the sermons were not only heard at Mass but

¹⁰ J.E. Caerwyn Williams & Máirín Ní Mhuiríosa, *Traidisiún Liteartha na nGael*, (Baile Átha Cliath, 1979), pp 276-7.

were recited and, in many cases, known by heart by local *seanchaithe* or storytellers. Silke described some of these people as ‘sermon-readers’. They seem to have been rather like the catechists one finds working in association with the local priest in parishes in missionary countries. In his article Silke is critical about the entry on Bishop Gallagher in the fourth volume of the *New History of Ireland*, when he states that ‘it has nothing to say about those who by reading aloud the *Sermons* ensured O’Gallagher’s continuing and extraordinary influence, but [Anthony] Coyle [Bishop of Raphoe 1782-1801] was well aware of the part they played in pastoral work.’¹¹ These ‘sermon-readers’ assisted the priest by reciting extracts from the sermons for the community on Sundays or feast-days when no priest could be available to celebrate Mass. That this might happen on occasion in Donegal was not very surprising as Gallagher’s diocese was ‘over-run with Scottish presbyterians’ in the 1730s according to a report regarding the state of the church in the Province of Armagh, which was sent to Rome in 1735 by the Papal Nuncio in Brussels. Gallagher himself had to flee his diocese in that same year because of the severity of the persecution.¹² The report states that:

... persecution has flared up in Raphoe because of Gallagher’s great zeal, and the bishop lives in misery, and wanders about, unknown, like a fugitive, at the greatest risk to himself; there is little hope he will ever be able to function peaceably as a bishop in Raphoe ...¹³

Sources also indicate that the sermons were recited at wakes and funerals and even at fireside story-telling sessions. A comment often made in respect of a priest who had a particular talent for preaching in Irish was “Is furust a aithne gur léigh sé an Dochtúir Ó Gallchóir.”¹⁴ Silke also notes that the last of these sermon-readers died as recently the early part of the last century. His name was Paidí Mór Mac Maonghail and he passed away on 13 May 1920 and is buried in the cemetery at Fintown in County Donegal.¹⁵ There is evidence too that the famous Gaelic poet Tomás Rua Ó Súilleabháin (1785-1848) knew of and had read the sermons. We find a reference to Gallagher in a stanza in one of his poems “Amhrán na Leabhar” (‘The Song of the Books’), in which Ó Súilleabháin laments the loss of a large number of his collection of books in a boating accident.¹⁶

Much other evidence exists to show the extent to which Gallagher’s sermons had an influence on the cultural, literary and oral traditions of the Donegal area in particular. Seaghan Bán Mac Meanman noted in an article in the 1954 *Donegal Annual* that storytellers existed in the mid-nineteenth century who could recite Gallagher’s entire

¹¹ John J. Silke, ‘Bishop Coyle’s Pious Miscellany’, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (ECI *infra*), 9, (Dublin, 1994), p. 115.

¹² Cathaldus Giblin, ‘Nunziatura di Fiandra’, *Collectanea Hibernica*, ix, (Dublin, 1966), p. 47.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁴ Séamus P. Ó hÉigeartaigh, ‘Séamus Ó Gallachóir: Easpag Ráth Bhoth 1725-1737’, *Irisleabhar Muighe Nuadhat* 1961, p. 89. “It’s easy to see that he has read Dr. Gallagher.”

¹⁵ Silke, ECI, p. 115, no 11.

¹⁶ Máire Ní Shúilleabháin RSCJ, *Amhráin Thomáis Rua*, (Maigh Nuad, 1985), p. 23.

collection of sermons from memory.¹⁷ Similar stories exist about such feats of memory well into the twentieth century. The famous Donegal writer Séamus Ó Grianna noted in an article in *The Irish Press* of 15 November 1950 that he was aware of a significant number of people in the Gaeltacht areas of Donegal who could recite long extracts from the sermons.¹⁸

Another reference to such people may be found in the text *Dánta Diadha Uladh* (The Religious Poems of Ulster) which was published by the great poem- and song-collector, Henry Morris, in the last century. Morris collected a wonderful 235-stanza poem entitled 'The Life and Death of Our Saviour' from a schoolteacher near Annagry in the County Donegal Gaeltacht whose name was Anthony Doherty. Doherty stated that he copied the poem from his mother in 1908. She was born in 1829 and died in 1909. Doherty had the following to say about his mother:

She was a peasant woman from near Kincasslagh in Donegal. She could understand English reasonably well but would never speak it. She could neither read nor write Irish. But she had a tremendous memory. She could recite Dr Gallagher's sermons – every single one of them from beginning to end – by heart.¹⁹

This familiarity with Gallagher's sermons, which many poor uneducated people had, seems to be borne out by a reference in a book called *The Last of the Name*. This book, edited by the famous Irish playwright, Brian Friel, is an account of the life of a weaver and tailor by the name of Charles McGlinchey who lived in north Donegal between 1861-1954. A local schoolteacher, Patrick Kavanagh, recorded his story in longhand in the late 1940s and early 1950s. McGlinchey states in the book:

My father was at a school run by old William McLaughlin in the Glen before the time of the national schools. He learned to read English and picked up the Irish reading himself. I learned to read a bit of Irish myself the same way. My father always had a few Irish books of his own, mostly on religion, the Irish catechism and Dr Gallagher's sermons. He could read the sermons well... Dr Gallagher's sermons were great reading. No one going now will be saved according to these sermons, for there's nobody living up to them. I read the sermons myself many a time ...²⁰

Hugh Dorian's memoir of social life in Donegal in the nineteenth century contains the following comment about a character called Hugh French:

¹⁷ Seaghan Bán Mac Meanman, 'Life in County Donegal in Pre-Famine Days', *Donegal Annual*, iii, (1954-'5), p. 11.

¹⁸ 'Léigheann Gaedhilge', p. 2.

¹⁹ Énrí Ó Muirgheasa, *Dánta Diadha Uladh*, (Dublin, 1936), p. 70.

²⁰ Charles McGlinchey, *The Last of the Name*, (Belfast, 1986), p. 12.

Hugh French comes next; like Pat Wiseman he had no book-learning whatever but had to depend to his memory for everything, and this faculty was extremely acute and retentive to an extraordinary degree. Anything ever heard by him worth retaining was never forgotten and was always near to him when wanted or when occasion arose – whether passages from the authors of great works, say Caesar for instance in his Gallic Wars, or into the religious subjects, Dr. Gallagher’s Sermons, or quotations from sermons heard by him years before, or verses from the Scriptures, especially in support of his own religion.²¹

Of course, it is no great surprise to us to discover that these sermons were an integral part of the folklore of the Donegal area in a period when there was a very strong link between the firmly-held religious beliefs of a largely rural population and the rich native heritage of the county, especially in Gaeltacht areas. What should surprise us even more is the extent to which Gallagher’s work impacted on the wider community who, by and large, were not speakers of the Irish language. For example, the noted short story writer, William Carleton, who hailed originally from the Clogher Valley in County Tyrone, included several references to Gallagher’s sermons in his work. In the story ‘The Hedge School’ we learn that the local people wanted to appoint a new teacher in the local school. On the list of desirable abilities the successful candidate was to have was found the following:

And above all things, he must know how to tache the Sarvin’ of the Mass in Latin, and be able to read Doctor Gallaher’s Irish Sarmints, and explain Kolumkill’s and Pastorini’s Prophecies.²²

Other references such as this one may be found elsewhere in Carleton’s work, as in the story *Denis O’Shaughnessy Going to Maynooth*:

Young Denis O’Shaughnessy was old Denis’s son; and old Denis, like many great men before him, was the son of his father and mother in particular, and of a long line of respectable ancestors in general. He was, moreover, a great historian, a perplexing controversialist, deeply read in Dr. Gallagher and Pastorini ...

The editor’s note in the particular edition of this story which I examined proves even more interesting for he says: Pastorini’s ‘History of the Christian Church’ was at one time well known to the Irish peasantry, and Dr Gallagher’s ‘Sermons’ [in Irish] are considered classic.²³ It is also interesting to note that Pastorini’s text is on a list of books being offered for sale by the publisher at end of the 1798 edition of Gallagher’s *Sermons*. It was

²¹ Hugh Dorian, *The Outer Edge of Ulster*, Breandán Mac Suibhne & David Dickson (eds), (Dublin, 2000), p. 127.

²² William Carleton, ‘The Hedge School’ in *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, (London, 1896), p. 217.

²³ William Carleton, *Denis O’Shaughnessy going to Maynooth*, vol. 2, (Dublin, 1973 edition), p. 1.

selling for six shillings and sixpence. Gallagher's book was also listed in the advertisement and was priced at two shillings and two pence.²⁴

Quite a few people know the storyline of *Denis O'Shaughnessy Going to Maynooth*. It is a satire on the airs and graces and pseudo-learning that the sons of poor families who hoped to send their sons to Maynooth to be trained as priests assumed very often among their peers in the local community. It is 'the case of the whitehead boy who is set aside by his family and given every assistance to fulfil his vocation to the priesthood.'²⁵ Producing a priest was considered a significant boost to a family's status in the locality from which he came. In the story the narrator attempts to indicate the level of learning, which the father of the prospective clerical student possessed. Carleton lambastes this pseudo-intellectualism and he puts the following words in the father's mouth by way of illustrating the supposed cleverness of the son:

I tould you, Phadrick! There's the boy that can rattle off the high English and the larned Latin, jist as if he was born wid an English Dictionary in one cheek, a Latin Necksuggawn [Lexicon] in the other, an' Doctor Gallagher's Irish Sarmons nately on the top of his tongue between the two.²⁶

The point I really wish to make is that these references in the work of a very prominent writer in the northern part of Ireland help to show the demand and respect which existed among not only the Irish-speaking community but the community of letters in general for this collection of sermons by James Gallagher. Carleton is recognized as a keen observer of the traits and foibles of the rural Irish community. It is very obvious that his familiarity with this community and its traditions had left him with a firm impression of the importance of Gallagher's work in the canon of Irish literature as well as in the oral tradition.

One of the reasons Gallagher's sermons were so well known, I suspect, was their wide availability. Not only were they often reprinted and re-edited, as we have already seen, but they were copied into manuscripts, which still exist in libraries and academic institutions throughout Ireland. The irony of this, of course, is that while Gallagher himself went straight to the printing-press at a time when the Penal Laws were being fairly harshly imposed when the book first appeared, we find scholars copying them out longhand 100 years (or in some cases 150 years) later.²⁷ There were various reasons for this, chief among which was the apparent distrust of the printing press by traditional Gaelic scholars, some of whom tended to view it as a weapon of officialdom and an arm of the establishment.

²⁴ James Gallagher, *Seventeen Irish Sermons in an Easy and Familiar Stile* (Dublin, 1798), p. 213.

²⁵ Maurice Harmon, 'Introduction to Volume Two' in Carleton: *Denis O'Shaughnessy going to Maynooth*, (Dublin, 1973), p. vii.

²⁶ Carleton, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

²⁷ Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, *Lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge Chólaíste Phádraig, Maigh Nuad*, Fascúl II, (Maigh Nuad, 1965), Ich 86, no. 29.

Other Catholic preachers came very obviously under Gallagher's influence. One of the aims Gallagher set himself in the English-language preface to his 1736 edition was the following:

I have compos'd the following Discourses for the Use of my own Fellow labourers principally; and next for such as please to make use of them; that they may Preach them to their respective Flocks, since my repeated Troubles debar me of the Comfort of delivering them in Person.²⁸

Two later preachers who benefited from a close knowledge of Gallagher's text were Father John Heely from South-East Ulster, a priest of the archdiocese of Armagh who died in 1831 and Father Tadhg Ó Conaill, who was a Calced Carmelite and lived for much of his life in the Carmelite Monastery in Kinsale, County Cork and who died in 1779. Ó Conaill translated the French religious text *La Trompette du Ciel* ('The Trumpet of Heaven') into Irish.²⁹ Two things are worth mentioning about this priest. While he translates the original French text quite accurately he frequently introduces material from Gallagher's sermons into his translation. This happens when he encounters a word, phrase or sentiment in the French text, which triggers a remembrance of a similar word, phrase, or sentiment in Gallagher's sermons. This sets him off and he unconsciously includes material from Gallagher in his translation, which is not in the original French text at all. I think this has to mean that he was extremely familiar with Gallagher's text to the extent that he must have known many extracts by heart or nearly by heart. There are between 25 to 30 instances of such intrusions in Ó Conaill's translation. The second point I would make is that Ó Conaill's familiarity with Gallagher's *Sermons* shows that they were well known to clergy and were popular throughout the whole island of Ireland. For example, in the *First Report of the Commissioners of Education Enquiry* of 1825, we find *Gallagher's Irish Sermons* listed as a text for religious instruction being used in schools in Counties Donegal, Kildare, Galway and Kerry.³⁰

John Heely was working much later than Tadhg Ó Conaill. His sermons are written in a phonetic script of Irish. A Ph.D. thesis completed at the University of Ulster some years ago shows how much under Gallagher's influence Heely actually was. In fact Heely was not beyond blatantly plagiarizing long extracts from Gallagher's work. Although Heely mentions some of the sources he drew upon when compiling this *prône* or *homilarium* – that is to say, a sermon-book – he never mentions Gallagher at any point in his work.

From the time that Gallagher's *Sermons* were first published in 1736, the Irish-speaking and clerical communities in Ireland have been drawing on them in various ways. This was exactly what Gallagher himself intended. The *Sermons* were a tool which priests could employ to help them serve the catechetical and homiletic needs of the people. There is no doubt that Gallagher viewed the Irish language as a pastoral tool and that he

²⁸ James Gallagher, *Sixteen Irish Sermons in an Easy and Familiar Stile* (Gallagher *infra*), (Dublin, 1736), p. ii.

²⁹ Cecile O'Rahilly, *Trompa na bhFlaitheas*, (Dublin, 1955).

³⁰ Antonia McManus, *The Irish Hedge School and its Books, 1695-1831*, (Dublin, 2002), p. 246.

also wished to help promote the use of Irish as far as possible. He makes the following statement in his preface, which illustrates his concern about the state of the language in his own time:

If my Brethren will admire, why Irish Sermons should come cloathed in English Dress, which seems not to suit so well the Irish language. One reason is, that our Printers have no Irish Types. And another, that our Mother-language, sharing so far the Fate of her Professors, is so far abandon'd, and is so great a stranger in her Native Soil that scarce one in ten, is acquainted with her Characters. Lest any, then should be discouraged from making Use of this little Work, by being strangers to its very Elements, I have made Choice of Letters, which are obvious to all; and in spelling, kept nearer to the present manner of speaking, than to the true and ancient Orthography. This seeming Difficulty being removed, I hope that as many as can speak or tolerably pronounce the Irish, If furnish'd with any stock of Zeal to discharge their Duty, with little Pains, soon read and understand the following Discourses.³¹

During the period of the Penal Laws and afterwards, indeed, the Irish bishops were laying great emphasis on preaching as a means of teaching the people about their faith and at the same time refuting the 'heretical doctrines' of the reformed faiths. Preaching and the composing of sermons were happening on a large scale across the main religious groups in Ireland at the time. Many priests, like John Heely, made their own of Gallagher's work and of other religious material, much of it in other languages, mainly French and Latin, in order to put together a collection of sermon material for their own personal pastoral use. Such a collection of sermon material was commonly referred to as a *prône* and all priests were expected to have at least one in their library. Dr Joe Ó Labhraí states in his Ph.D. thesis on Heely that sermons 'were being copied, translated, modified and exchanged throughout the length and breadth of Ireland almost as if it were a cottage industry among clergy.'³² Gallagher hoped that his provision of a collection of sermons would assist priests in their work. Towards the end of the preface to the Sermons he states:

Take then cheerfully, beloved Fellow labourer, this small Mess, of which I make you a gift; with which you may Feed your Flock once a Month through the Year, and have some to spare. Nay, rather than they should Fast, spare not to give them each Sunday a Part of the Loaf, by Preaching a Point, or even a Paragraph; for there are some by their Length, which can afford to be divided. And by the time your store is

³¹ Gallagher, p. iv.

³² Seosamh Ó Labhraí, *Téacs na Seanmóirí i Lámhscríbhinn MF4 i gColáiste Phádraig, Maigh Nuad leis an Athair John Heely*, (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Ulster, Coleraine 1998), p. 12. Is é "Bhí seanmóirí á gcóipeáil, á n-aistriú, á leasú agus á malartú ar fud na tíre mar a bheadh tionscal tí i measc na cléire." an tagairt chruinn.

exhausted, you'll acquire a Facility both of Expression and Invention, to serve up fresh Dishes of your own dressing.³³

It would appear that Gallagher more than adequately achieved the aims he set out in the preface to his book. His influence went far beyond the reach of his own area and his own time. The enduring popularity of the *Sermons* and the many references attesting to this which are to be found in the work of Irish and English language writers in Donegal, in particular – writers like Séamus Ó Grianna, Patrick McGill and others – all serve to highlight the importance of this book, not only as a religious text but also as an important social document.

Themes

The sermons are based on themes popular in sermon-books and in the approach to preaching in the post-Tridentine period. They aim to clearly enunciate Catholic teaching and doctrine on topics thought by the Church's hierarchy to be particularly important for the practice of the Catholic faith. The following are the main themes addressed by Gallagher in his work: one sermon deals with the Assumption of the Blessed Lady, one concerns the Last Judgement, another treats of the importance of loving our enemies, four deal with the themes of sin, repentance, confession and penance, two deal with issues concerning the Eucharist, two with the importance of prayer, another addresses the issue of working out our salvation, two deal with the theme of death, one sermon tackles the issue of swearing and bad language, and the final two sermons in the collection look at the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ and the Joys of Heaven, respectively.

Translation of the Sermons

All editions of the sermons appeared in the Irish language until the year 1832. From 1832 until 1835, a Mr James Byrne translated each sermon and published it in pamphlet form at the price of three pence per pamphlet. The printer for at least eight of these was T. O'Flanagan of 26, Bachelor's Walk in Dublin. Another printer called I. Field of 4, Stafford Street in Dublin, was responsible for seeing at least four through the press. I have only managed to see twelve of the original pamphlets so far, as they are very rare. In 1835 W. Powell of Dublin published the pamphlets as one volume. They were described on the flyleaf as having been translated by Mr James Byrne but 'revised and corrected by a Catholic Clergyman' who alas, remains anonymous. This was the first time that the sermons appeared in English in one single volume.

In the same year as Byrne's translation appeared in Dublin [1835] an English translation appeared in the United States. It is the only edition of Gallagher's *Sermons* ever to have been published anywhere outside of Dublin to the best of my knowledge. It was printed by Fielding Lucas Jnr of Market Street in Baltimore. It did not, however, include Gallagher's English language preface in which the bishop outlines the main reasons he

³³ Gallagher, p. v.

composed the work and the readership at which he aimed his text. Neither does it include a contents page.

Content

These sermons contain many elements of Catholic and post-Tridentine doctrine as it was clearly Gallagher's aim to present his clergy and the clergy of other dioceses with sermon material in the Irish language in order to better help in the work of preaching and to aid the catechesis of the Catholic faithful by providing clear and unequivocal direction as to the teachings and practice of the faith in the language they used in their daily lives. We shall see from the areas of religious belief and practice towards which Gallagher directed his energies that he was deeply concerned with the moral edification of the people under his care and that of his priests.

We may gain a better insight into the kind of pastoral and theological approach Gallagher had to the work in hand by establishing which aspects of the faith were of the most interest to him. It will come as no great surprise to learn that he was greatly concerned with sinfulness and the perils of wrongdoing for the immortal soul. He spends a great deal of time outlining the various types of wrongdoing to which people are prone and what the likely outcome of such wrongdoing will be. He gives some fairly graphic descriptions of Hell and the Last Judgement, and frequently refers to Christ as a stern and rigorous judge. He does advise people how to stand firm against the devil, as the enemy of humankind, and in the sermon about the Blessed Lady, speaks of her as a caring and powerful mediatrix between Christ and humankind. It must be said, however, that the emphasis is clearly on the need to avoid wrong and to seek to do right at all times. Gallagher, as you shall see, plays on people's fear of eternal damnation, punishment and suffering in order to encourage them to fight sinfulness at all costs.

Types of Sin

In so far as we can ascertain from the sermons, Gallagher saw the sins committed by people as falling into two main categories: sins against one's neighbour and sins against God. In his 'Sermon on Confession' he states:³⁴

Well, now, is it not a counterfeit confession the man makes who is given to drinking and to intoxication; to telling lies and to swearing; who gives way to a thousand libidinous, obscene thoughts, and hesitates not to carry them into effect; who keeps not his hands from immodest touches, nor his mouth from unchaste kisses; a man into whose mind no thought enters but those that relate to the world, who is withal irascible, passionate, and vindictive?³⁵

In another sermon he chastises the faithful for their indifference in matters of faith:

³⁴ All translations of Gallagher's material in the following quotations come from Ulick Bourke's bilingual edition first published in 1877, unless otherwise indicated.

³⁵ Ulick J. Bourke, *Sermons in Irish-Gaelic* (Bourke *infra*), (Dublin, 1877), p. 75.

How many perils and dangers, tribulations and afflictions do you go through in serving and satisfying the flesh; and how slothful, how spiritless, and alas! how seldom do you go to receive the blessed sacrament, or perform that service which you are bound to give to God! How great is your indifference, your indolence in going to hear mass on Sundays and holidays! How often are you wilfully distracted in prayer! How seldom do you fast, how rarely do you give alms!³⁶

He continues along the same vein towards the end of that sermon, 'On the Necessity of Working our Salvation, where he states:

What restriction do you impose on yourself in order to conquer temptations? Do you make an effort to keep your tongue quiet in time of anger, that you may not give scandal to your neighbour? Instead of praising God, and thanking him for his benefits do you not blaspheme His majesty, and provoke his anger, swearing by the name of God and of Christ, and consigning yourselves to the devils oftener than you bless yourselves? Do you restrain your gluttony or your concupiscence when you go to public houses? Or, rather do you stay there until you are drunk?³⁷

Gallagher, as I have already mentioned, devotes a whole sermon to the theme of swearing and it is worth quoting here one or two things he had to say on that particular matter:

The mouths of the most people now-a-days are so habituated to, and so fashioned at swearing, that they cannot tell a story or speak in jest without an oath; they cannot ask a question, or give an answer, or transact any sort of business without mentioning the devil or some demon, pour forth a curse or an imprecation at the beginning or ending of each sentence.³⁸

Indeed some of these curses were mild by modern-day standards, but were in English and drew Gallagher's ire because of that:

What will happen those people who most brazenly say "By God Almighty!", "By Jesus Christ!", and so many other abominable oaths which I cannot mention without quaking, and causing the hair on my head to stand up – "The devil take my soul!" and "Let him [the devil] take me!" and beyond that you hear a thousand

³⁶ Bourke, p. 251.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 259.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 317.

times “God damn my soul!”, “God’s blood and wounds!” in the mouths of people who have barely much more English than that.³⁹

Gallagher regarded these and other kinds of obscenities as mortal sins and defined explicitly for his listeners what he understood by that term:

Mortal sin kills the soul and the spiritual faculties in their supernatural power; it wounds the intellect; in a word, by it we lose God for ever unless we repent.⁴⁰

It is clear too, that Gallagher found the excuses people would offer for their weakness to be unacceptable:

You will behold a great many dissolute and wicked persons who when they come to confession have nothing to tell but slight or frivolous faults; and if you were to take their word for it, it is not themselves who are culpable in the evil that has been done, for they usually lay the weight of the faults on some other person. If they happen to swear, it was owing to some provocation or anger, and their children it was or their neighbours that provoked them to it; if they happen to stay long in the tavern, it was not for the sake of the drink, oh! no, it was for the sake of the company; if they injured their neighbours in reputation or property, it was only trivial. ... If possibly they may, with these apologies, blindfold the priest, of course they cannot blindfold the Sovereign Judge, who sees not only the bad deed, but even the inmost thoughts of their hearts.⁴¹

Gallagher rails against those who would risk eternal happiness for the sake of some worldly pleasure or gain:

O! wretched sinner, how will you appear before the true Joseph, Jesus Christ, constituted judge over you and the whole world, when you will hear him say to you these killing words: “You, who have been lovers of lust, sold me for a short-lived gratification; you, ye drunkards, who make your wealth and substance a sacrifice to your gluttony, and who have rendered yourselves even more senseless than the brutes, have sold me for a bottle of whiskey. You, ye merchants and dealers, who have played the cheat on the class who are not knowing; ye who obtain the price of good merchandize for that which is bad, have bartered me for a groat or sixpence. And you, housewives, who sell the hank of yarn with less than the true

³⁹ Bourke’s translation at this point is extremely loose and not entirely accurate. The translation here is my own. Cf. Bourke, p. 325 for his version.

⁴⁰ Bourke, p. 323.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 79.

measure on the reel, and without count, you sold Jesus Christ for a small cut of thread.⁴²

Gallagher does make some allowances for the weakness and frailty of human nature by acknowledging that the devil, in his many manifestations, is a cunning and resourceful adversary. He restates the old refrain that the allure of the world, the flesh and the devil must at all times be resisted and that one only need to consider the dire consequences of any other course of action to realize what is at stake – eternal damnation:

It is in the same sense that the holy doctor, St. Basil, who was a luminary for learning and sanctity in his lifetime, writes. “If the devil attempts to seduce thee, the world to allure thee, or the frail body to draw thee to sin, think on the terror of the judgment, on the severity of the judge who will come to bring thee to an account on the last day, and it is not possible but thou wilt conquer them.”⁴³

Gallagher makes frequent reference to Christ as judge and regularly refers to the fearsomeness and harshness he will show those who refuse to repent of their error of their ways and who neglect to strive for holiness. At the beginning of the ‘Sermon on the Last Judgment’ Gallagher makes the following assertion:

It is not usual with God’s justice to execute vengeance on people without warning; and on that account I am coming as a messenger from God to-day to announce unto you, if you do not amend your lives, and do penance, that you are in danger of damnation; and because I see that the love of God, who has created and redeemed you, is not effecting any change or feeling in your hearts, I shall endeavour to give you, this day, some notion of the wonderful manner in which Christ will come on the last day as a terrible judge to execute vengeance upon sinners. This shall form the subject of my discourse, which I will divide into two parts: First – Christ will come on the last day as a terrifying judge. Second – He will come as a rigorous judge, and will separate the elect from the sinners.⁴⁴

Gallagher uses this threat of the awfulness of the Last Judgement and the prospect of facing Christ’s harsh justice to drive home the point that people have it within their own power, through the offices of the Sacrament of Confession, to amend their ways, and avoid the terrible retribution of a vengeful God. References to the importance of contrition, confession, doing penance and making restitution, along with the necessity to have one’s soul in a state of readiness to meet one’s Maker punctuate the text of the sermons with unceasing regularity:

⁴² Ibid., p. 41.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 31.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp 29 & 31.

What then, is to be done, dear Christians; is there any means for quenching before hand those fierce fires? Is there anything that will help to cool the boiling cauldrons of hell? Or is there any means that can blunt the sharpness of those weapons which are being prepared by the demons of hell for the damned? Ah, Christians, there is one thing, and one thing only, and that is – penance. One tear from the heart, if shed for the pure love of God, and with real hatred for sin, will quench the burning flames, will cool the boiling cauldrons, will blunt the weapons, will change the countenance of Jesus from being fierce and enraged, to be cheerful and amiable, and it will obtain for us to go on the right hand of the Sovereign King in that strict separation which he will make between the elect and the sinners – a point which I promised to treat of in the second part of my discourse.⁴⁵

Much like many other preachers, Gallagher used stories (and sometimes some rather graphic imagery) to great effect in his sermons. Some of these stories and *exempla* derive from the writings of the Church Fathers, others from the scriptures, but Gallagher always uses them cleverly and judiciously. An idea of the kind of *exempla* he used may be gained from looking at some of the material he uses. In one instance, when talking about the wiliness of the devil, Gallagher uses the following image:

The wolf when he rushes on the flock, commonly seizes a sheep by the throat, and cuts the tongue out of her directly, lest she make any bleating or noise that might alarm the shepherd, who would rush to her rescue. In like manner the merciless wolf, the devil acts with many, especially with young people, when they go to confession, lest they would alarm Jesus Christ, the shepherd of their souls, with their tears or their sighs. He seizes them by the throat – he locks up their tongue in such a manner that they open not their hearts to the priest.⁴⁶

On another occasion he wished to convey the terror someone facing the prospect of his own damnation might experience and this is how he went about it:

Claudius Paradinus writes of a certain painter, who took pains to portray a man full of fright and terror. He conceived the idea of painting a wheel composed of razors, and a man in the middle of the wheel, and every limb, hand and foot, in a tremor, because he had no possibility of escaping any side without being made mince-meat of by the razors ... O my brethren! this man's position was no more than a place comparatively pleasant were he encompassed with all the razors in the world, when compared with the agony in which the sinner is placed at the point of death.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp 43 & 45.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 81. Gallagher was quite possibly drawing on Keating's *Trí Bior-Ghaoithe an Bháis* here. Cf. ll. 2322-2331, p. 74 for the same *exemplum* regarding the wolf gripping the sheep by the throat.

⁴⁷ Bourke, pp 289 & 291.

It is Gallagher's 'Sermon on the Last Judgement', however, which probably best encapsulates the kind of rhetoric he used to drive the fear of God into his listeners. In this particular sermon, there is a famous description of what events will occur on the Last Day. The description is worth quoting here because of its graphic nature. It might also help to fully understand its impact if we recall that when it was first preached roughly 260 years ago, Ireland was a place where large sections of the Catholic population were poor peasants. Most were uneducated and unable to read or write either Irish or English, but were highly accustomed to and acquainted with an oral literary tradition rich in references to the other world, the fairy-folk and the ancient tales and myths. One can only imagine the type of fear the following passage might have struck in their hearts:

In what state, think you, will the world be on that day when those signs will come? When the mighty sea will appear in red flames, raising its huge billows like high mountains in the air, making a tremendous and terrific noise; when the elements will be in commotion, and in war with each other; when darkness will veil the sun's face; when the moon will be changed into blood; the stars falling from the firmament; the earth trembling; the palaces and castles tottering; the great cities swallowed up; the tombs and graves of the dead being opened, and casting forth the bodies and the bones of the dead; the people dying with fear, and immediately after rising unto judgment. This is the day on which your eyes will see nothing but fire and flame. This is the day when your ears will hear nothing but thunder, and uproar unheard of: this is the day that will stop and dry up rivers and streams; that will shrivel the trees and the plants of the earth; that will burst stones and rocks; this is the day on which all creatures shall put themselves in array to aid this Judge, to execute vengeance upon sinners.⁴⁸

This extract is among the more famous passages in Gallagher's *Sermons*. Indeed, it might be described as a 'purple passage'. There are many other examples in the *Sermons* of Gallagher's powerful prose style, his use of the writings of the Church Fathers, the Scriptures and other sources to produce lively and colourful pieces of religious prose. All testify to the skills he possessed as an orator, preacher and writer.

Much work still remains to be done on the corpus of sermon material extant in the Irish language. A good deal of this material remains hidden away and unedited in manuscripts in libraries around Ireland. Thematic and comparative studies need to be pursued with much more vigour than currently obtains, although things are improving. Perhaps this article will help to shed more light on this Kilmore priest noted for his *Sermons*, and help bring about a renewed interest in the man, his work and the field of Irish preaching in general.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 37.