

## **KNOCK - WHAT IS THE "APPARITION" TRYING TO TELL US?**

About 15 people said they saw the Blessed Virgin Mary appear in a great light flanked by St Joseph and supposedly St John at the gable wall of the Roman Catholic Church in Knock on the 21st August 1879. A lamb standing on an altar was also reported. A cross was standing behind the altar.

The apparition made some seeming errors. One interpretation of the apparition is that it was a tableau based on the biblical Book of Revelation. The Church teaches that this book is scripture - that is writing that must be obeyed and revered as the word of God. The Lamb of God is taken from Revelation 5 and 6 and the Lamb's job is to inflict punishment! The altar is out of Revelation 8:3.

The Book of Revelation states that there was a woman about to give birth wearing a crown of twelve stars. The Church fancifully says this woman was Mary. Attempts have been made to argue that the Mary of Knock is inspired by Revelation. But no witness said the vision was pregnant. The Woman of Revelation is said to be pregnant - we simply do not know for definite if the witnesses at Knock thought the woman they saw was pregnant. She wore heavy robes. But they would have said if she were.

Those who think that the Virgin is probably depicted as the Woman of Revelation will have to admit there are errors in the design of the apparition. There was no crown of twelve stars mentioned by the witnesses. The Woman of Revelation had one. The only similarity is that the Mary of Knock has a crown the upper part of which seemed to be sparkles according to Patrick Hill only. But are sparkles necessarily stars?

John was there dressed as a bishop preaching with a book in his hand, it is believed. John was thought to be the apostle and adopted son of Mary. Tradition says he wrote the Book of Revelation. Considering the context of Knock as inspired by Revelation, it seems most likely that the book was meant to depict the Book of Revelation. But scholars know that the Revelation was not written by John the apostle!

The Book of Revelation rejects the trendy Christian view that we must love God's enemies. It has the saints and Jesus promoting vengeance - eg Revelation 6:10,16. Knock is not an apparition of peace if its about promoting Revelation as scripture and the word of God.

Modern Catholicism would have a problem with the apparition of Knock if it were not centred on the Lamb on the altar. Church teaching says the reason we honour the saints and Mary is so that they can bring us closer to Jesus represented as the Lamb. The witnesses said they saw Joseph at Knock who was bowed towards Mary who was standing beside him. The bishop taken to be John the Apostle was said to be turned a little from Mary towards Lamb on the altar representing Jesus Christ.

There was a man in white like Joseph the husband of Mary who was bowing to her. Was it really Joseph though? Joseph was not mentioned in the Book of Revelation. An old man in white is mentioned in the book. But he depicts Jesus - the man was white like the man in Revelation 1:13-16 who it tells us is Jesus. But would Jesus appear as a man at Knock and as the Lamb? Why not? Revelation has Jesus appearing as a man and then it symbolises him as the Lamb. Is Knock telling us Jesus worships Mary?

Some say that Joseph was bowing at the Lamb on the altar. There is no evidence for that notion. It is far-fetched. Joseph stood furthest from the altar and Mary was beside him in the way. It contradicts Mary Beirne's sister Maggie Beirne who said, "his head [Joseph's] inclined towards her [Virgin Mary]". As he was turned towards Mary who was wearing a crown and he was beside her, it was her to whom he was bowing. Her crown makes her the real centre of attention - you would expect a man bowing in the direction of a queen to be bowing at her! Strange that God put Joseph there if he were venerating Jesus! If the vision is from God would God not know how to make it clear that Joseph is revering Jesus?

It is argued by some that as there was a dark mearing between Joseph and the rest of the figures that he was somehow "out" of the group. The Catholics reason that as Joseph was a saint of Old Testament times it follows that he was left out as he was not a baptised Christian. Others say Joseph might have been baptised but it is clear that Joseph died before the formation of the Christian Church so he could not have had a Catholic baptism. The vision is evil for it has a man being demoted just because he was not baptised!

Page 134 of The Apparition at Knock, The Ecumenical Dimension says that Hill's wording is very unclear and seems to be saying the whole spaced occupied by Joseph was dark. He speaks of a dark mearing - meaning a boundary between

landlords estates – so that Joseph was clearly shown as standing in a separate place from the Virgin.

The John figure wore a small mitre. The mitre came in around the 13th century. It was only much later that mitres became large and tall. Ballyhaunis Church depicts St Augustine wearing a small mitre in a stained glass window. The Knock witness would never have seen any bishop wearing a small mitre. The argument of some that the vision wears a small mitre to show approval for the Church of Ireland which revered the small mitre though bishops didn't wear a mitre is far too speculative. Also the Church of Ireland did not officially revere the mitre. It only used it in some art.

And John can be taken as preaching about Mary from his book. He was turned away from her for he had to tell the people about her. It is said in some of the accounts that he was looking in the direction of the people.

What was the book John was preaching from? As he had his hand raised in blessing clearly the book stands for the Roman Ritual which contained the blessings. The witnesses said he seemed to be saying something forceful. But in times of calamity a bishop might bless his people in such a manner.

The reasoning, "John was partly turned to the Lamb on the altar so he was preaching about it not Mary" is bizarre. Some say his posture shows he was speaking about both. Witness Margaret Beirne said John was on the left of the Virgin "with a book in his left hand, and his right hand raised, as if reading or preaching out of the book." The Lamb was not even in his head. He was reading. If the Lamb was his focus then why did some witnesses not mention the Lamb? Why did he stand next to Mary as if preaching about her? Had he stood on the other side of the altar it could be taken that he was preaching about the Lamb. The three figures got the attention rather than the Lamb.

The Lamb so failed to stand out that the witnesses could not agree on what the lights were around the Lamb. There was something surrounding the Lamb. Patrick Hill said he saw headless angels going around and round and he saw their wings but not their faces or the front of them. Mary McLoughlin reported that gold like stars surrounded the lamb like a halo. Beirne said they were like stars or something reflecting a light "from some luminous body". She makes it clear she does not know where the reflection is coming from. Decades later she would imagine that the light came from the Lamb! Hill repeated his testimony to G P Warren in 1880. Curry contradicted what Hill said and claimed he saw no wings. He said he just saw twinkling lights.

The Lamb so failed to stand out that the witnesses could not agree about the cross on the altar. Patrick Hill said there was a plain perpendicular cross. Others saw no cross and said so. Some witnesses mentioned the altar being plain. Only Dominic Beirne senior said that there engravings of angels and saints on "the lower part" of the altar. This reminds us of how the temperance medal shows a lamb and a cross on an altar and below the altar images of people are engraved. The Church always checks if witnesses to apparitions may be copying something and takes that as a sign that they got carried away by imagination or their memory was playing tricks.

The Lamb so failed to stand out that when Mary McLoughlin first saw the figures she did not see an altar. She went to Beirnes and on the way back she saw the figures and the altar then (page 112, The Apparition at Knock, The Ecumenical Dimension).

Mary Beirne then McConnell said in the thirties that the Lamb shone the brightest but this was decades after the vision and nobody had said that before. Dominick Beirne Sen near the time of the vision officially testified that the images shone like the noon-day sun as if they were all equally bright. The other problem is that angels and lights surrounded the Lamb according to some witnesses meaning that they could have been the reason for the brightness and not the Lamb. There is no room for the notion, "The Lamb was the brightest therefore the vision was about the Lamb".

The Knock Virgin holds her hands up with the palms facing each other without touching – the orans. In the early Church, the soul of a dead person was depicted in the cemetery. The person is shown using that particular prayer pose. The pose was also used by priests at Mass. She is the only one engaging with God as she looks up to Heaven. Even the Lamb doesn't look up to God. She won't even look at the Lamb. Patrick Hill says the Lamb was looking in the direction of the Virgin and Joseph. Mary Beirne says it was looking in the direction of John. It is best to hold that it was simply looking at the figures and not any one in particular or that it was looking only at the Virgin. It would imply that the Lamb of God is worshipping the Virgin. The Virgin is the only real intercessor with God. Even Joseph will not talk to God directly and asks her to talk to him. The saints intercede with her.

Mary Beirne said that the Virgin was life-size and the figures of Joseph and John were smaller or lower down. Judith Campbell said the Virgin was higher than the other two. The Virgin was the centre of the apparition. It was most likely then that she was the person the Lamb's attention was fixed on.

The Knock vision was comprised of statues. Suppose the vision is from God. It then can only be a divine nod of approval for the sectarian Catholic practice of putting statues outside the Church to differentiate the Church from a Protestant one!

Mariolatry is worshipping Mary as if she were God or better than God. Knock was well inside the mariolatry genre that characterised the Catholicism of the time. The Church had approved the apparition of La Salette where Mary spoke of restraining Jesus from hurting the people. Clearly she was superior in compassion.

Mary wears a crown and is the highest figure and stands in the pose of a priest at Mass with hands facing each other with her eyes raised to Heaven. Joseph is praying to her on her right. St John faces out to the people as if he was ignoring her and has his hand raised in blessing - he is blessing the people. He holds the gospel book in the other hand. Then there is the altar that looks like the altar on the temperance medal.

Catholic doctrine says Mary prays to God for us. But to have a saint, Joseph, praying to Mary, would imply that the saints pray to Mary which contradicts Catholic doctrine. It would imply that the saints cannot influence God directly but need to use her as a mediator. A saint who is with God and who experiences God directly does not need to ask another saint to pray or to pray to a saint. Knock reflects the popular yet unorthodox and blasphemous belief among Catholics of the times that Mary was Queen of Heaven and could just give the word and Jesus would change his plans and his mind. In the apparition of La Salette of the same century, she said that she was holding her son's vengeful hand back and was running out of strength.

Mary wears a crown to indicate her superiority to the other figures including the lamb - the symbol of Jesus the Lamb of God. She acts as a priest and looks directly to God and ignores her son on the altar. She tells the people they can go directly to God and don't need the Mass for that. They can go to her instead of a priest for she acts like a priest. The bishop blesses the people and his holding the gospel book implies he has taught the gospel to them and is blessing them now. The bishop then is none other than John McHale, the Archbishop of Tuam who taught the people and was the only bishop they probably ever had seen. This is the best identification. The apostle John would not be properly depicted in episcopal robes and in a mitre - these did not come into being much later. The apostle John wrote his gospel on a scroll. He would have been unlikely to appear holding a codex or book.

Mary is higher even than the bishop which contradicts Catholic doctrine. Though Mary is the greatest of the saints and Queen of Heaven Catholic doctrine says she has no right to function as a bishop or better than a bishop or to exercise episcopal powers.

The altar tableau indicates a call to temperance is being made. That this was never realised is a sign that divine grace was not working to promote this apparition and explain it. In other words, the apparition was not from God. It contradicts Catholic doctrine and supports the crude folk Catholicism in which priests were often disparaged and Mary was preferred and which didn't concern itself very much with going to Mass. This kind of Catholicism is documented in the book Knock The Virgin's Apparition in the Nineteenth Century.

Apart from a random medley of images, the apparition can be made to say what you want to say. And anything it does say is riddled with problems and impossibilities! That alone indicates a possible hoax.

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