

## PATRICK BEIRNE UNDERMINES CASE THAT KNOCK VISION WAS A MIRACLE

About 15 people said they saw the Blessed Virgin Mary appear in a light flanked by St Joseph and St John at the gable wall of the Roman Catholic Church in Knock on the 21st August 1879. A lamb standing on an altar with a cross on the altar was also reported but only by a few. Surprisingly the event is treated by Catholics as a miracle. Paranormal experts might say it was a ghost story rather than a miracle story. And they would have their understandable reasons for saying that.

Donal Anthony Foley - Marian Apparitions, the Bible and the Modern World, page 210, "One theory advanced to explain the apparition was that it was due to someone painting the figures on the church wall with some type of phosphorescent or luminous paint. This was an idea favoured by a Dr Francis Lennon, a physics lecturer at Maynooth seminary, who was asked by the commission to examine possible ways in which the image could have been made. But this explanation is incompatible with the testimony of Mary McLoughlin, who saw the apparition in daylight, apart from the fact that no trace of any paint was found on the wall...This did not, however, prevent Dr Lennon from assuming a negative attitude towards the apparition."

Lesson from this, Lennon the expert and the scientist though a priest and conservative Catholic, concluded from his investigation that the vision could pass for the dull images made by luminous paint. He carries weight. He had got clarifications from the witnesses.

There is a problem with being confident that McLoughlin was sober that night.

Think about the testimony of the witnesses. It was written down. There are some variations in detail.

Given that vague images are sometimes taken seriously as images of Jesus or Mary or some saint we wonder how clear the actual vision was. It was clear enough for the witnesses to make identifications but we must remember that they already had it in their heads about what shape Joseph, Mary and John had. John was identified because some witnesses saw a statue similar to the image in Leckanvey. A person who had never seen holy statues or been influenced by the witnesses could have reported seeing nothing more than vague shapes. People swear that there is an image of Mother Teresa or the Virgin Mary on slices of toast while others say they see nothing.

If an experiment were performed on Catholics where they were tricked with images that broadly resembled at least the outline of Mary, the results could be very interesting. They could end up reporting a very clear and lucid apparition and maybe even say it was moving. Their imagination would take over.

The Knock witnesses did not see the apparition coming or going. Nobody knows how it came to be there.

Sworn testimonies were taken during a Church investigation. Today Knock is one of the major Marian shrines of the Roman Catholic Church.

Here is the case for the view that the witnesses only saw dull images. It does not really matter how the apparition was made. It suffices to show that it was not as clear and miraculous as we have been led to believe. If you know something has been stolen, it may not matter how it was stolen. Knock is in some way like that.

It would be superstitious and insulting to God to suggest that he could do no better miracle than show some shapes on a wall.

PATRICK BEIRNE

Patrick Beirne was one of the witnesses of the apparition. He testified to the Church investigation. This is the record.

Patrick Beirne was the son of the elder Patrick Beirne of Knock,

I am sixteen years of age ; I live quite near the chapel ; I remember well the evening of the 21st of August ; it was Thursday, the evening before the Octave day. Dominick Beirne, Jun., a namesake of mine, came to my house, and said that he had seen the biggest sight that ever he witnessed in his life. It was then after eight o'clock. I came by the road on the west side of the church. I saw the figures clearly, fully, and distinctly — the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and that of a bishop, said to be St. John the Evangelist. Young Beirne then told what he saw regarding the Vision, just as it has been described already by several persons who were present. The young fellow showed by his hands and position how the image or apparition of

the Blessed Virgin Mary and that of St. Joseph and St. John stood. I remained only ten minutes, and then I went away. All this happened between a quarter or so past eight o'clock and half-past nine.

Sullivan transcribed Beirne's testimony differently.

Here it is, "Testimony of Patrick Byrne. I live quite near the chapel; I am sixteen years of age; I remember the evening of the 21st August, Thursday, the evening before the octave; Dominick Byrne, junior, came to my house and said that he saw the biggest sight that ever he had witnessed before; it was half past eight o'clock; it was raining; I went with him to the gable of the chapel of Knock. (This witness came in from the road to the West of the gable; and from it, and as he was coming into the area, he saw the figures as just described, distinctly and clearly, and has given testimony in accordance with the other witnesses."

Sullivan is the best match to the existing original documents. So we can take his version of the testimony as the most accurate transcription. We can assume that it is the original. Sullivan has Beirne saying 8.30 pm while the other version says it was 8 pm. The original does not report what Beirne said about what the vision was like but merely what the priests said he said. Why not quote him? Why did they try to cover up what he really said? Why dwell on how he got to the gable and not on what he saw at the gable? He only saw the images when he got to the gable. He would have looked at the gable before entering the Church grounds. We are not told anything about what he saw then.

The testimony (either as we have it or as Sullivan preserved it) shows that the investigators did not want to let him speak for himself. They only selected parts of what he said. They wrote the rest. Whatever Beirne testified to in 1879, the Church refused to record it and used the following bluff: "Young Beirne then told what he saw regarding the Vision, just as it has been described already by several persons who were present. The young fellow showed by his hands and position how the image or apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary and that of St. Joseph and St. John stood. " This trick would have been used had Beirne been saying something damning.

"I saw the figures clearly, fully, and distinctly — the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and that of a bishop, said to be St. John the Evangelist." seems to have Beirne refuting the notion of a vague apparition. But we could argue that distinctly means different thing to different people. People say that images on their toast distinctly resemble the face of Jesus or Mother Teresa even though the image is good but not excellent.

The Church had to hack out whatever he said when he was talking in detail about the vision. If the vision was a bit unclear and if he was saying things that the other witnesses didn't agree with that would have been necessary.

And, "I came by the road on the west side of the church. I saw the figures clearly, fully, and distinctly" could mean that he saw them so clearly when he was at a distance. Close up they could have been less impressive.

It must be noted that not one thing in Patrick's testimony indicates a miracle. He doesn't even mention the alleged bright light. And though he said later that he stayed longer than ten minutes, it seems that he really did stay only ten minutes. Impressed wasn't he? Catherine Murray stayed only a half an hour or less so it was possible he was even less interested than she was.

Patrick Beirne made the following declaration before a priestly board of investigators of the apparition in 1932.

"I saw three figures on the gable surrounded by wonderful light. They appeared to be something like shadows or reflections cast on a wall on a moon-lit night. I approached nearer the gable and passed my hand along the wall to find there was no material substance there. The figures were towards the left hand side of the gable. The figures were those of the Blessed Virgin in the central position; to the right of the Blessed Virgin was St Joseph, and to the left was a figure suggested by a bystander to represent St John the Evangelist. To the right of the group, and at a higher level was a figure of a lamb in a reclining position and facing the figures. I spent between twenty minutes and a half an hour there when I returned home."

This is actually of extreme importance. He confesses the images were dull enough. He says the light was wonderful but he seems to mean by this that it was like the light of the moon and was wonderful in the sense that it was a dark night with the moon invisible and yet the light was there. He touches the wall and finds there is nothing there but the stones. He suggests the lamb was not standing but was reclining. This contradicts the testimony of some of the others.

As he was related to the main witness, Mary Beirne, and he was her neighbour all his life, he would not have said this unless it were true. And you don't contradict the witnesses who are the blue eyed boys and girls. His report was different from the clear vision she reported. She said the vision was out from the wall though she exhibited some confusion about that matter. He says it was on it. In 1936, she stated that the vision looked like a painting when close enough, "When we went near the wall, the figures seemed to go back to the wall, as if painted on it. Then when we came back from the wall, they seemed to stand out and come forward".

Whatever Patrick Beirne testified to in 1879, the Church refused to record it and used the following bluff: "Young Beirne then told what he saw regarding the Vision, just as it has been described already by several persons who were present. The young fellow showed by his hands and position how the image or apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary and that of St. Joseph and St. John stood. " This trick would have been used had Beirne been saying something damning.

Now do you see why his deposition had to be interfered with?

He made the following statement under oath on January 27 1936. "I, Patrick Beirne, of Knock in the County of Mayo, aged seventy-one years and upwards make oath and say, I remember the evening of the 21st of August 1879. My attention was called by another man named Dominick Beirne to a vision consisting of three figures, the Blessed Virgin, St Joseph and St John. It was then about nine o' clock. I was informed when I came on the scene that the vision was there since about a quarter to eight o' clock. The figure of the Blessed Virgin was in the centre; St Joseph was on the right; he was turned sideways and facing the Blessed Virgin. St John was on the Blessed Virgin's left. He had a book in his hand. The Blessed Virgin had a very brilliant crown on her head. She wore a brilliant white cloak. To the left of St John was a lamb lying on his side on the altar. The whole gable was lit up with a brilliant light. There was a heavy drizzle of rain. The rain did not appear to fall on the figures or the light. There were about fourteen or fifteen people there watching the vision with me; amongst them was Mrs Mary O Connell who is still living in Knock; she was then Mary Beirne. I remained there about an hour and then I went home."

In this one he exaggerates the brightness of the light. He does not say if the images were on the gable or at the gable. The priests obviously did not want him to testify that they were on it so they avoided asking him if they were on the gable or not. His claiming to have stayed for an hour is an outright lie. He says the rain was more drizzle than proper rain. That refutes the popular belief that the rain was torrential that night and he simply says it did not fall on the gable. If it was drizzle and not in the direction of the gable then the argument, "It was not a picture or painting or it would have been ruined" is invalid. The drizzle story is the truth.

The belief in heavy rain was started by the forged testimony of Bridget Trench.

He only says it did not look as if it fell on the images or the light. Notice that it might still have done so. He is careful not to say, "The rain did not fall on the figures or the light." That would be too definite. Nothing he says indicates a true miracle or vision.

In August 1936, he confirmed the 1879 Deposition as follows, "I confirm that deposition which I have now read, all except the statement, 'I remained only ten minutes and then went away'. This statement is incorrect. I came at nine o' clock and I remained until twenty past ten." Also during that occasion he was asked, "Was the brightness you saw pale like the moonlight or like sunlight?" His evasive reply, "The whole gable was as bright as snow. I could not describe to you what kind the light was, but that it was there and it was brilliant. It must be some supernatural light." Light is just light. He didn't want to admit the truth that it was pale light like the moonlight.

And he was asked, "Were the figures very clear and distinct?" "They were as clear and distinct as you could see any human being here." That is a lie for he testified before that the figures were flat on the wall so they were not like the three dimensional people who were in the room with him.

One priest involved in the commission stated at that time that he had reason to hold that Patrick was not the most reliable witness. This perception arose from the priest talking with the man's neighbours. We have to remember that Patrick was keen to promote the apparition so when he said things that make it sound far from supernatural, he should be assumed to have been telling the truth. It was not what he wanted to believe or wanted others to believe.