

## Receiving Messages from God in Ireland?

Deal W. Hudson

In a remote city in central Ireland lives an alleged locutionist named "Anne." For the past five years she says she has been receiving auditory messages from Jesus Christ, His mother, His father on earth, and a variety of saints, including the great mystic St. Teresa of Avila. Anne's apostolate, Directions for Our Times, has "lay apostles" in 31 countries and sponsors monthly prayer groups in 43 of the United States.

Over 700,000 of the books containing these messages have been distributed throughout the world in English, French, and Spanish, while versions in Chinese, Dutch, German, Lithuanian, Polish, and Portuguese are nearly complete.

Married to a farmer and the mother of six children, Anne does not travel much and has not travelled at all in the last 18 months. "I only travel when I am specifically told to," she told me a few days ago when I interviewed her in the living room of her mission. When she does, it is usually to participate in Eucharistic Days of Renewal, which she leads with permission from her bishop.

The bishop also approves everything published in Anne's books. Further, her newsletter and monthly messages are read by her spiritual director, Rev. Darragh Connolly, and Rev. John Murphy, leader of the local parish, before they are distributed. It was clear to me from the few days I spent with Anne and other members of her apostolate that everything was being done to observe the rigors of canon law regarding private revelation.

I asked Anne her opinion on why there is any private revelation at all. "Perhaps it is because the job is not getting done, and God wants to help us at a specific time and a specific place." She talks about her locutions as seemingly "normal" and being "hard work," and that is precisely the impression you get of her; someone who works hard at what she calls her "rescue mission," but without the drama or theatrics.

Some might be disappointed to find that Anne is not the wild-eyed mystical type you might expect of someone who claims to hear God. She is a handsome woman with bright gray eyes, and speaks with a quiet authority. "The pain of disobedience is so great in our society that people are looking for Christ again -- He is truly present at every moment and accepts our humanity completely."

She has been accused of not having the kind of life -- her first marriage ended in divorce -- that would attest to the authenticity of her locutions.

"They said I am not holy enough, and they are exactly right," she says with a laugh. She says that when she takes her unworthiness to Christ, he laughs at her. "I am constantly learning it needs to be less Anne and more Jesus."

I began our interview with a personal question, and she became immediately uncomfortable. "People can make me a distraction, and I don't want that to happen." So I shifted over to the topic of the persons she says she hears interiorly. "Our Lady," she says, "is earnest and pleading; St. Joseph is steady, calm, and always obedient; and the always joyful Christ wants us to have confidence in His love for us."

Anne emphasizes the need to not take ourselves "too seriously" and end up making Satan "bigger than he really is." Satan's relation to God is like comparing an "ant to the Empire State Building." Too many religious people, according to Anne, make the enemy a distraction and "stare into the darkness so long they don't see God any longer."

Father Connolly was appointed Anne's spiritual director by Bishop Leo O'Reilly in the summer of 2006. As chaplain of the local high school, Father Connolly had known Anne for several years before that. Ordained in the midst of the clergy sex scandal, Father Connolly believes that Anne's apostolate is helping some recover their enthusiasm for the Church. He points out that 6,000 people attended their 2007 Divine Mercy Conference held in Dublin.

Anne explains the impact of the scandal on people who now no longer automatically love their priests, instead viewing them with suspicion. Such an attitude has serious ramifications: "This is crippling, not to want to run into the arms of the Father." Ann said this pain of discontent is slowly starting to change, but the upcoming release of an investigation of sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Dublin may open the wound again.

Her apostolate, in spite of being rooted in Anne's private revelation, is moving into the mainstream of the Church in Ireland. In addition to the support of several bishops, she corresponds with priests, religious, and seminarians. She often receives a letter or e-mail from a priest beginning with the phrase, "I'm not really into this sort of thing [locutions]," before telling her how helpful her writings have been to him. (Her books are distributed free of charge to clergy.)

The overarching message of Anne's apostolate is God's joyful embrace of our humanity, but she says she has encountered other facets of God as well. "I heard His wrath when people are working with Satan in the most destructive fashion, making war against God's children."

God's invitation to holiness has an undeniable moral demand, one that should not be understood as "dictatorial," she said. We should resist sin because it "wounds the self, the soul, and moves out in the world, leaving behind human debris."

Whatever you think of Anne as a locutionist, that's a message the world needs to hear.