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Faith Today

By Dolores Leckey
NC News Service

Recently I visited Glan, a small mountain village in the north of Ireland. Many of the men and women there live in cottages built hundreds of years ago by their ancestors. Glan people are content to grow potatoes, tend the animals and to remember their history.

My son, who is related to many of these mountain people through his father, describes them this way: "They are like their land: old, strong, reliable and unmovable."

Unmovable. Does that mean unambitious? I think not.

Clearly those who live in Glan do not seem to be ambitious for new places, new people or new possessions. They are ambitious, though, for their land and for their people. They give their energies generously to both.

In summer, sunlight and moonlight mingle in this northern village. At 9 p.m. whole families are "doing the hay," cutting and stacking, taking advantage of the long hours of light.

Still, when we American cousins came upon them in their fields or cottages, they had time for tea and talk. And their talk was about big themes: political freedom, death, emigration and the ties of blood.

One mountain man studied my son's face for a long time and pronounced him a replica of his great-grandfather. "You have the quick, piercing look that sizes up a person," he was told.

Another person greeted him with the good news that he was born of a hearty race.

The Glan people talk for hours about those who have left, like my son's great-grandfather. But they have little curiosity about our high-powered, high-tech American jobs and homes. They prefer to study the mountain mists, the rocks, the trees, the rivers, the foxes and pheasants, and the hearts of men and women.

The ambition of the Glan people is of a different order. Their vision is that of the contemplative, looking deeply into what surrounds them — what is.

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Miles away in Wicklow Town, a young couple, Linda and Paul Saunders, have turned their ambitious energies toward en-



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On a visit to Ireland, Dolores Leckey found two contrasting views of ambition. They mirror, she writes, the two expressions of ambition found in today's Christian spirituality.

trepreneurship. With little money but with a great deal of enthusiasm, they bought a dilapidated Victorian dwelling. Once it was the rectory for the town's Anglican church.

Together the couple began the enormous task of renovation, us-

ing their own vision and their own labor. Moldings were patiently and painfully scrubbed clean with a toothbrush. New plumbing and wiring and appliances were installed. It took one year's day — manual labor — 16 hours a day — to yield the cozy refuge at the

edge of Wicklow Town.

When the Saunders looked around and saw they had refurbished a half dozen bedrooms, they realized their restaurant was also an inn. Two babies are part of the inn's warmth, bringing a texture of family life to it.

The Saunders, with their ambition to create something new, represent a different kind of ambition from Glan people. But like them, the Saunders' ambition is connected to the wellsprings of their own energy and hard, demanding work.

In Glan the goal is to preserve what is. For the Saunders, it was to build and create what might be.

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There are, I think, echoes of Christian history in the stories of Glan and Wicklow Town. Christianity always has carried within it an ambition to spread the Gospel. But how that ambition takes shape can be compared to the two approaches I saw in Ireland.

—One major life choice, historically, was that of the contemplative. For centuries, this meant living within a monastic enclosure.

—The other major choice was active, apostolic life in the world.

Many religious orders were organized around these two different styles of Christian living and commitment.

Contemporary Christian spirituality tends to involve both. This is particularly applicable to the late 20th-century lay person who is conscious of his or her complex vocation.

For today's Christians have many planes of commitment: homes and families, professions, civic communities, parishes and increasingly, the far reaches of the world.

We are ambitious for peace with justice in all these places.

But we know that for peace with justice to become a reality, we must open ourselves more and more to the influence of God's Holy Spirit.

The Spirit purifies our ambitions so that, like the people of Glan, we discover and celebrate the grace already ours; and so that, like the innkeepers of Wicklow, we can see what might yet come to be.

(Mrs. Leckey is director of the U.S. bishops' Committee on the Laity.)