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CHOSEN ARROWS, FIRST HIDDEN THEN REVEALED: THE VISITATION–ARCHER SEQUENCE AS A KEY TO THE UNITY OF THE RUTHWELL CROSS

Éamonn Ó Carragáin

At conferences at Kalamazoo (2002) and Winchester (2003) I had the privilege of discussing the Ruthwell Cross with Patrick Wormald. He was healthily sceptical about the theories of those modern scholars who, as be put it 'for thirty years have been trying to pull that monument apart'. Together with another old friend. Michael Wood (also with us at Kalamazoo), we planned a television documentary on Ruthwell to be broadcast on or near 25 March 2005, when the Annunciation would coincide with Good Friday, making the day at once 'Adnuntiatio Domini et Passio eiusdem'. My last contact with Patrick was an e-mail on or near 25 March 2004, celebrating Spring and the Annunciation: he and Michael hoped soon to get down to working on the project, and he was particularly looking forward to participating, that September, in the annual Medieval Rome seminar, organized by University College Cork at the British School at Rome: during it we would decide on the Roman visual images to use for the documentary. But his illness recurred, and the week of the Rome seminar tragically coincided with his death. In those years, Patrick regularly recited the Latin *Liturgia Horarum*. He did so as a spiritual exercise, but also delightedly told friends what insights it daily offered into the early medieval monastic imagination. Patrick, always witty and generous with information and ideas, would have enjoyed the sophisticated gift-exchange implied by the Ruthwell Visitation–Archer sequence, where sculpted images were designed to recall liturgical chants, which in turn reveal new meanings in scriptural texts.

In 1967, Barbara Raw wrote a brief but revolutionary paper on the Archer panel and its context on the upper stone at Ruthwell.[1] She demonstrated that in medieval symbolism arrows represent not only the attacks of the devil, but also the word of God'.[2] Raw was the first to give the Archer a positive religious interpretation: as a preacher, who shoots God's words into the hearts of his hearers. She was also the first scholar to suggest links between the Archer and the rest of the upper stone: not only the Eagle on the Vine-branch, originally just above the transom on this first side (see Fig. 4a); but also, on the other side of the upper stone, the *Agnus Dei* at whom John the Baptist points (see Fig. 3).[3] Though there was some initial resistance to Raw's hypothesis,[4] it has been accepted in all recent scholarship.[5] It prompted me to suggest that the large satchel, which hangs in front of the Archer's body, 'represents a book-satchel, and that the squarish object in the satchel represents either a copy of the scriptures or a book-shrine (*capsa*) in which the scriptures were kept'.[6] If so, the details of the panel

confirm Raw's hypothesis: the arrow in the Archer's bow is drawn from scripture. Therefore, I later suggested that '[t]he archer-preacher complements the sequence of four large scriptural panels below [Annunciation, Blind Man, Repentant Magdalen, Visitation], adding an urgent motivation: one must repent here and now'.[7] The Archer panel, on the lower arm of the crosshead, helps us to see that the first side of the tall shaft has a unified fourfold programme. However, to date no scholar has seen any special connection between the Archer and the Visitation panel directly below it on the upper stone. In the book just quoted, I discussed the Visitation panel in chapter 2, but left the Archer panel to chapter 3.[8] That was a mistake, due to my failure to apply fully a liturgical approach to the monument. But a liturgical community at Ruthwell, whether clerical or monastic, would have understood the Archer panel to emphasize that the Visitation panel celebrated the Incarnation: especially by recalling the chants sung for the solar Incarnation-cycle which, near each solstice and equinox, shaped the four seasons.

In order to understand why this was so, we need to recall how closely the liturgy of the seventh century and later (whether Roman or Gallican) linked the conceptions and births of the two cousins, Christ and John the Baptist. Scripture suggested strong reasons for such linking. In Luke's gospel, the Virgin Mary sets off to visit her cousin Elizabeth directly after the Annunciation, because the angel Gabriel had just informed her that 'this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren'.[9] Bede, following Ambrose, saw the Visitation as showing that humility was central to Christian experience: at the Visitation the greater pair (Mary, in whose womb the Word was made flesh) came to visit the lesser (Elizabeth, with John the Baptist in her womb). The Visitation therefore pointed towards the supreme example of humility, the *kenosis* (self-stripping, self-emptying, self-giving) of God at the Incarnation, classically expressed in the Epistle for the Sunday before Easter when it says Christ 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant' and 'humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death; even to the death of the cross' (Philippians 2:7–8):

> Virgin [i.e. in particular, nun, monk or cleric] learn Mary's humility, so that you can be chaste in your body and devout in your heart. The young person visits the old, the virgin greets the wife. Indeed it is fitting that the more chaste a virgin is, the more humble she or he will be; so that, deferring to older persons, he or she should make the habit of chastity more attractive by having humility as its herald. [Explained] in an other manner. Mary comes to Elizabeth, the Lord comes to John: so that she [Elizabeth] may be filled with the Holy Spirit and that his [John's] baptism may be consecrated; and, in each case. the act of humility by the greater persons particularly involves the exaltation of the lesser ones [*maiorumque humiliatio minorum est utique exaltatio*].[10]

St Luke tells us that, when Mary enters the house of Zachary. ‘as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child exulted in her womb [*exultnauit infans in utero eius*] and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she cried our in a great voice and said, “blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting. the child in my womb leapt for joy”’.[11] Bede follows Ambrose’s commentary:

> Note the distinctions between, and the appropriate meanings of. the individual words. Elizabeth first heard the voice, but John first telt the grace: she heard in the natural way, he exulted by means of the mystery: she perceived Mary’s arrival, but he sensed the coming of the Lord. The women communicate grace by speaking; the children work within and bring the mystery of sacred love [pietatis … mysterium] into creative encounter [adoriuntur] with the processes of maternal growth [maternis … profectibus]: and so, in a double miracle, the mothers prophesy with the Spirit of their little boys. The infant exulted, and the mother was filled. The mother was not filled before her son; but when the son had been filled with the Holy Spirit, he filled his mother also.[12]

Bede, following Ambrose, sees the Visitation as indicating what the Incarnation itself involved: every prophetic insight stems from the advent of Christ, whose Spirit inspires John to silent but physical prophecy. The prologue to St John’s gospel states that John the Baptist ‘was not the light, but came to testify to the light’ .[13] Later in John’s gospel, the Baptist himself proclaims that ‘he must increase; but I must decrease’ .[14] The early medieval Church therefore constructed a fourfold solar cycle, in which the conceptions and births of Christ and John were celebrated on the equinoxes and solstices of the Julian calendar. The conception and birth of Christ, the light of the world, was celebrated on the ‘growing days’, the equinox and solstice when the sun grew stronger than the winter darkness; while John’s conception and birth were celebrated on the corresponding ‘lessening days’. Thus the feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist, near midsummer, balanced the midwinter feast of Christ’s Nativity; and the conception of John, near the autumn equinox, balanced the Annunciation of the Lord (and his Passion) which took place near the spring equinox. This Christian solar cycle, which is found, for example, in the Martyrology of Bede,[15] can be summarized as follows:

1 a[nte] d[iem] VIII Kalendas Ianuarias (25 December) Nativitas Domini [**dies crescens**]

2 a.d. Vlll Kalendas Apriles (25 March) **ADNUNTIATIO DOMINI ET PASSIO EIUSDEM** [**dies crescens**][16]

3 a.d. VIII Kalendas Iulias (24 June) Nativitas S. Ioannis Baptistae [**dies decrescens**]

4 a.d. VIII Kalendas Octobres (24 September) Conceptio S. Ioannis Baptistae [**dies decrescens**]



Fig. 1 The Bewcastle Cross. a) (left) The south and west sides showing interlace ornament, plant scrolls and sundial. b) (right) The west side, showing figures of the falconer. of Christ recognized by the beasts in the desert, and of John the Baptist with the *Agnes· Dei*. Both photographs © Department of Archaeology, University of Durham. Photographer: T. Middlemass

This solar cycle provides a key to the symbolic structure of the Bewcastle Cross (Fig. 1). The four sides of the surviving Bewcastle cross-shaft are best read sunwise, starting from the north side, proceeding to the great vine-scroll or Tree of Life on the east side; and then going from the south side, which has a sundial (Fig. 1a), to the climax of the sequence: the figural panels on the west side, the side which Christians would naturally face in private or public prayer (Fig. 1b).[17] On the south side of the Bewcastle shaft, the sundial is set into a panel of foliage scroll which visually recalls the great image, on the east side, identifying this high cross with the *Arbor Vitae*. The designer brought sundial and Tree of Life together to provide a unique visual metaphor, the meaning of which is 'revealed' in the Christ-Baptist sequence at the corresponding level of the west side (Fig. 1b).[18] As each of these two figural panels was designed to recall chants [dies decrescens] sung, or lections intoned, on Good Friday at the ninth hour, when Christ's death was commemorated, the sequence was particularly appropriate to the shaft of a high cross.[19] But the sun-tree panel would have reminded a clerical or monastic audience that the cousins were to be related in another, complementary way: through the solstices and equinoxes of the Christian solar cycle. The brilliant idea to link Christ's Passion with his Incarnation, still at a relatively embryonic stage at Bewcastle, was to be fully developed on the Ruthwell Cross.

Both cousins, Christ and John the Baptist, were the greatest messengers (*angeli*) of God's word.[20] The opening verses of Psalm 18 (19) provided the scriptural *locus classicus* for understanding how the sun's course symbolized both the way in which Christ, in his own person, brought humankind and divinity forever into an indissoluble unity, and also the Church's mission to preach, even to the ends of the earth, this marriage between the human and divine natures. The *Tituli Psalmorum* found in early medieval psalters regularly made clear the christological and ecclesiological implications of Psalm 18,[21] and St Augustine had given classic expression to this traditional Christian interpretation:

> He himself set his tabernacle in the sun [18:6], that is, like a bridegroom, when the Word was made flesh, he found a bridal bed in the virginal womb; from which He came forth united to human nature as though from the purest of all bridal chambers, humbler in mercy below all others, stronger than all in majesty. What is meant by he exults like a giant to run his course [18:6] is that he was born, be grew, taught, suffered, rose again, ascended; he ran his course, he did not tarry on the way. He himself, the bridegroom who did these things, placed in the sun, that is, on display, his tent, that is, his holy Church. Do you want to hear what road he has run so swiftly? His going out is from the end of heaven, and his circuit even to the end thereof [18:7].[22]

These verses from Psalm 18 were thus sung as antiphons, or paraphrased in Office hymns, each year during Advent when celebrating the Incarnation.[23] Recent scholarship has shown how important to Bede and his circle was the idea that the gospel had in recent centuries been preached even to Ireland and Britain, those islands at the ends of the earth.[24]

To celebrate the solar incarnation-cycle liturgists chose lections and chants which related the Incarnation of Christ both to the Archer/preacher image and also to the idea of 'the ends of the earth'. The Introit or entrance-chant sung at the Day Mass on the Nativity of John the Baptist (24 June) was designed to recall John's prophecy at the Visitation:

> ANT. De ventre matris meae vocavit me Dominus nomini meo & posuit os meum ut gladium acutum sub tegumentum manus suæ protexit me posuit me quasi sagittam electam. Psalm. XCmo I. [Bonum est confiteri Domino]. AD REPET. Justus ut palma. [Psalm 91:13].[25]
>
> From my mother's womb the Lord has called me by my name: be has made my mouth like a sharp sword; he has protected me under the covering of his hand, and placed me like a chosen arrow. [Psalm: 91:1] It is good to give praise to the Lord [For the repetition:] The just shall flourish like the palm tree [Psalm 91:13]

This Introit significantly varies the *topos* of the archer as preacher: here. the archer is God himself, and John the Baptist, still hidden in Elizabeth's womb, appears as God's 'chosen arrow'. On the previous day, the Introit of the Vigil Mass bad already recalled John's Visitation-prophecy:

> ANT. Ne timeas Zacharias exaudita est oratio tua & Elisabeth uxor tua pariet tibi filium & vocabitur nomen ejus Johannem & erit magnus coram Domino Spiritu Sancto replebitur adhuc ex utero matris suæ & multi in nativitate ejus gaudebunt. […][26]
>
> ANTIPHON: Fear not, Zachary, your prayer is heard: and Elizabeth your wife will bear you a son, and he will be called John; and he will be great before the Lord, and will be filled with the Holy Spirit already from his molher's womb: and many will rejoice in his birth […].

In that Vigil Mass, the Epistle had linked the martyr, John the Baptist, with Jeremiah, the persecuted Old Testament prophet: and the images in that Epistle which, for a Christian audience, most clearly recall the Visitation scene were now sung as the Gradual chant for the Day Mass of 24 June:

> RESP. GRAD. Priusquam te formarem in utero novi te & antequam exires de ventre sanctificavi te. V. Misit Dominus manum suam & tetigit os meum & dixit mihi […][27]
>
> RESPONSORY/GRADUAL: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and l hallowed you before you came out from the womb. VERSE: The Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth and said to me […]

Thus the Mass for 24 June continually referred to the Visitation, the scene of John's first prophecy. The Ruthwell sculptor, by representing the Archer's 'chosen arrow' with such vivid detail (Figs 4 and 6c), encouraged the audience to see the Visitation panel not as a static icon, but as one of an important sequence of historical events leading to the midsummer Nativity of John the Baptist, God's 'chosen arrow', and to Christ's own midwinter Nativity.

Any conscientious nun, monk or cleric would certainly have known the scriptural source for the Introit 'De ventre matris meae', because the Epistle of that Mass was Isaiah 49:1–7, from the opening verses of which the *libretto* for the Introit had been adapted:[28]

> [1]Listen, you islands, and give ear, you people from far off
> [Audite insulae et adtendite popule de longe]
> The Lord has called me from the womb:
> from my mother's womb he has remembered my name,
> [2]and made my mouth like a sharp sword:
> in the shadow of his hand he has protected me [in umbra manus suae protexit me]
> and has made me like a chosen arrow [et posuit me sicut sagittam electam];
> in his quiver he has hidden me [in faretra sua abscondit me] […]

But Jerome, in his extended commentary on Isaiah, had made it clear that all of chapter 49 should be taken to refer to Christ himself ['omnia ex persona Christi debere accipi'].[29] Jerome interprets the 'islands' of 49:1 as the Churches made up of the gentiles; and the phrase 'afar off' to refer to the ends of the earth.[30] The meaning of the verses beginning 'the Lord has called me from the womb' became clear when the angel Gabriel announced to Joseph the virginal birth of Christ.[31] That God 'protected me in the shadow of his hand' refers to the Annunciation, when 'the lowliness of flesh was covered with divine power'.[32] The 'chosen arrow', 'hidden in [God's] quiver', refers uniquely to Christ, whose divinity was hidden under the covering of flesh and, at first, additionally concealed in the Virgin's womb:

> When he says: 'chosen arrow', he shows God to have many arrows which are not chosen: these arrows are the prophets and apostles, who hasten over the earth. […] Christ, however, is the single chosen arrow, [chosen] from many arrows; and the only-begotten Son, [chosen] from many sons. [God] hid him in his quiver: that is, in a human body, so that in him the fullness of divinity should live bodily.[…] And the Bride, when she receives a wound from that arrow, says in the Song of Songs: 'I am wounded of love'.[33]

Jerome's commentary enables us to see how daring was the liturgical decision to use Isaiah 49:1–7 as the Epistle for the Nativity of John the Baptist, and to paraphrase verses 1–2 for the Introit. Phrases which in the tradition referred to the unique Incarnation of the fullness of divinity in Christ were, on that midsummer morning, applied to Christ's cousin. Placed as it is, the Ruthwell Archer, with the book-satchel from which he has taken his 'saggitam electam', made clear to any monastic or clerical audience that the encounter between the two pregnant mothers would lead to two events which would transform the history of the world: first, to the birth of John the Baptist (on 24 June) and, six months later (on 25 December, when the 'lessening days' had run their course), to Christ's Nativity, from the bridal-chamber of the Virgin's womb, to bring light to a darkened world. The Gospel for the Day-Mass on John's Nativity (Luke 1:57–68) ended with the *incipit* of the Canticle of Zachary (the New Testament canticle sung every day at sunrise, at the Office of Lauds). This verse presented the Incarnation as itself a Visitation:

> Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel
> quia visitavit et fecit redemptionem plebi suae (Luke 1:68).[34]
> Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel
> for he has visited, and wrought redemption for, his people.

The Ruthwell Archer was placed so as to make it clear that the Visitation can only be understood in the context of the Incarnation: that is, of the gift-exchange in which God the Son courageously humbled himself (in *kenosis*), taking on a human body and nature in order to divinize humankind (in *theosis*).[35] Only in the later Middle Ages would a separate feast of the Visitation begin to be celebrated: but the early chants for the Nativity of John the Baptist continually recall the Visitation scene, and so associate it with the solar Incarnation-cycle. Appropriately, Luke 1:39–56 (the Visitation, including Mary's canticle, The Magnificat) was also intoned as the Gospel lection for the Nativity of the Virgin (8 September).[36]



Fig. 2 The Ruthwell Cross, upper stone with Visitation and archer.
Photograph © Department of Archaeology, University of Durham.
Photographer: T. Middlemass

It was appropriate for a Bernician patron to provide a visual reference to 'the chosen arrow', and so to Isaiah 49:1–7, on a high cross in an area which had recently come within Northumbrian power. In 668, just before appointing Theodore to Canterbury, Pope Vitaliao had quoted the *incipit*, 'Listen, you islands, and give ear, you people from far off' when writing to encourage King Oswiu of Northumbria to 'fulfil our desire and dedicate the whole of your island to Christ our God'.[37] In June 716, the great pandect brought by Wearmoth-Jarrow monks, led by Abbot Ceolfrith, as a gift to the newly elected Pope Gregory II contained a liturgical note indicating that Isaiah 49:1 was intoned 'in s[an]c[t] i ioh[annis] bap[tistae]' ('on [the feast] of St John the Baptist'), i.e. that it was the *incipit* of the Epistle lection for 24 June.[38] The note indicated that the islands had listened: that Isaiah's prophecy had been received and incorporated into the

liturgical life of Ceolfrith's 'far off' community.[39] Far from being simply an image of the preacher, the Ruthwell Archer with the book-satchel symbolizes the way in which God, the author of Scripture, visited humankind in the person of his Son in order to shape human history, even to the ends of the earth. Perhaps, like the angel Gabriel in the Annunciation panel, below at the beginning of the iconographic programme. the Archer particularly symbolizes, *fortitudo Dei*, the strength and courage of God embodied at the Incarnation.[40]

Understanding the function of the Archer panel enables us to appreciate the dynamic unity of the upper stone at Ruthwell. The new historical reality of the Incarnation, visually hidden as yet in the Visitation panel, and then given metaphoric shape in the Archer's 'chosen arrow', is still more fully revealed on the second broad side, where the adult John the Baptist, now a majestic messenger (*angelus*) from the Court of Heaven, dressed in fine (liturgical?) garments, stands pointing to the *Agnus Dei* whom he cradles in his left arm (Fig. 3).[41] Directly above, just opposite the Archer panel, St Matthew (pointing to his symbol the Angel), occupies the lower arm of the crosshead in which the four evangelists with their symbols probably surrounded Christ, portrayed either in symbolic or human form: an image of the heavenly liturgy of Apocalypse 4: 1–5:14.

The upper stone is badly damaged, and only fragments of its *tituli* have been preserved, but these support the present interpretation. All the *tituli* for the panels of the first side of the upper stone are in runes, while those for the panels on the second side were apparently all in Roman capitals. Runes had the significance of 'secret, hidden', while Northumbrian Christianity celebrated the mysteries of the faith in Latin chants. On the upper stone, the designer used scripts iconographically, reinforcing the figural progression from 'hidden' to 'revealed' by a progression from runes to Roman script.[42] The ascending sequence of panels on each broad side of the lower stone already contains a threefold pattern from 'hidden' to 'revealed':

> Stage (1) [foot of the shaft]: from Christ hidden in Mary's womb in the Annunciation, to the Christ-child indicated by Mary's hand in the 'Return from Egypt';
> Stage (2): from the still-unseeing 'Man blind from Birth', to the Eucharistic recognition of Christ's body in the 'Paul and Anthony' panel (like the Visitation, an image of courteous humility);
> Stage (3) [top of the lower stone]: from the majestic Christ who blesses Mary Magdalen, to the even more majestic Christ on the second broad side, the second Adam acclaimed by the animals: Paradise recreated on the sixth day (Good Friday).

On the upper stone, where the pattern reaches its eschatological climax, the designer reinforced it by the progression from runes to Roman capitals. No audience familiar with techniques of variation in Old English poetry could fail to appreciate this innovation. The incremental variation between the layout of scripts in stages (1)–(3) on the lower stone and in stages (4)–(5) on the upper stone reinforces the unity of the cross's five-stage ascending progression, using scripts to emphasize that, first on the upper shaft and then on the crosshead, the pattern from 'hidden' to 'revealed' becomes increasingly urgent.[43]



Fig. 3 The Ruthwell Cross, upper stone, showing John the Baptist with the *Agnus Dei* and St Matthew with his angel. Photograph © Department of Archaeology, University of Durham. Photographer: T. Middlemass

The *lituli* of the Visitation and *Agnus Dei* panels make important contributions to stage (4) of the pattern. As we have seen, the Day Mass of 24 June, remarkably, celebrated John in scriptural texts which the tradition applied to the unique Incarnation of God in Christ. It was acceptable to use hyperbole to honour John on his birthday, especially because of the Christian solar cycle which closely united the conceptions and nativities of the two cousins. Bede, in his commentary on the Visitation (quoted above, p.187), gave the rationale for such a generous gift exchange of texts: 'the act of humility by the greater persons particularly involves the exaltation of the lesser ones' ('maiorumque humiliatio minorum est utique

exaltatio'), as in the Incarnation itself, where Christ's act of divine *kenosis* was undertaken to bring about human *theosis*.

The Latin runic *titulus* for the Visitation panel seems to have embodied this spiritual principle, by alluding to another famous liturgical example of textual gift-exchange. The *titulus* is fragmentary and difficult; I have elsewhere suggested that it might be punctuated and interpreted as follows: '[Mary and] Martha, Mary the Mother [of Christ]. Ladies […].'[44] If, on 24 June, an Old Testament prophecy referring to Christ was applied to John on his birthday, the pattern was reversed on 15 August: the greatest Marian feast of the year, her entry into heaven (*Natale*, *Dormitio*, *Assumptio*). On that day, the Gospel told of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42). First the Byzantine, and then (from about 650) the Roman liturgy used the honour Christ gave to Mary of Bethany, who had chosen not to act as handmaid but to listen to the Lord's word, as an analogy for the greater honour he gave that August day to his own mother, the handmaid of the Lord whose decision to bear the Word into human life would cause all generations to call her blessed and, particularly, blessed among women: for 'Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from her' (Luke 10:42).[45] From the second half of the seventh century, two Marian feasts had begun to be celebrated, within just over three weeks of each other, at the end of summer. While the Martha/Mary episode was read in the greatest of these (Dormition, 15 August), the Visitation itself was read on the lesser (Nativity of the Virgin, 8 September). Mary was thus closely associated with the sisters of Lazarus at Bethany, as well as with her cousin Elizabeth who, like Gabriel, had proclaimed her to be 'blessed among women' (Luke 1:28, 42). There is a congruence between the way in which the Archer panel recalls how, on 24 June, a scriptural text associated with Christ was sung to celebrate the lesser cousin, John the Baptist, and the way in which the runic *titulus* to the Visitation panel refers not only to Mary as Mother [of Christ] and blessed among 'ladies', but probably also to the sisters named in the gospel of her greatest feast day: [Mary and] Martha. On 24 June and 15 August, the liturgy effected a 'gift-exchange' of scriptural texts in order to bring lesser figures into intimate relationship with greater ones: both feasts embody the principle that 'the act of humility by the greater persons particularly involves the exaltation of the lesser ones'. In the case of Mary Magdalen as understood by Gregory the Great and Bede, 'the exaltation of the lesser' would lead to great things: though once simply, 'the woman who was a sinner' (Luke 7:37), she would, as Mary Magdalen, stand with the Virgin Mary by the Cross on Good Friday (John 19:25); and on Easter Sunday she would encounter the risen Christ and announce the Resurrection to the apostles. At the tomb, the angels addressed her as 'woman' (John 20:13); Christ at first also calls her 'woman' (v. 15); but when she tells him whom she is seeking he calls her by name, 'Mary' (v. 16). St Ambrose saw this as

an image of how all spiritual growth, for men and women, involves re-enacting the Virgin Mary's role at the Incarnation: 'when she did not believe, she was "woman"; when she begins to be converted, she is called "Mary": she receives her name who brings Christ to birth, for now she is a soul who spiritually brings forth Christ'.[46]

The Visitation panel at the top of the first broad side, and the crosshead of which the Archer panel comprises the lower arm, bring to completion the sequence which, of all early medieval sculpture, most coherently celebrates the Incarnation of Christ and its implications for the rites of Christian initiation. The Annunciation and Visitation panels [stages (1) and (4)] enclose, in an 'envelope-pattern, images of conversion and repentance [stages (2) and (3)]: a key concept behind the sequence is the idea that Christ 'placed in the font of Baptism that very origin which he had assumed in the Virgin's womb'.[47] Sculptural details of each of the two panels enclosed by this symbolic 'womb' encouraged educated onlookers to think of the Incarnation. Thus, the panel representing the healing of the Man born blind [stage (2)] lays great stress on the rod (Latin, *virga*; OE *stæf*, *rōd*) with which Christ applies to the blind man's eye the mud which he has mixed from earth and his own spittle (John 9:11).[48] Christ's rod visually echoes the rod of office borne by Gabriel, *fortitudo Dei*, in the Annunciation panel just below. The rod's course can now be traced by a line incised in the stone. It is possible that an actual wooden rod was once fixed along the line, which would have added to the three-dimensional realism here, as throughout the cross. For St Augustine. earth recalled the first man, Adam (whose name was interpreted as 'dust, earth'):

> We, too, have been born blind of Adam, and have need of him to enlighten us. He mixed spittle with clay: *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us* [John 1:14]. He mixed spittle with earth; hence it was predicted. *Truth has sprung from the earth* [Psalm 74:11]; and he said Himself. *I am the way, the truth, and the life* [John 14:6].[49]

Just above, in the panel where the repentant Mary Magdalen bathes the feet of Christ with her tears and dries them with her hair [in stage (3)], the legs of the standing figure of Christ are skewed to the right so that both of his ankles and feet can be seen: it is through her devotion to Christ's incarnate humanity, symbolized by his feet, that Mary Magdalen will gradually become the great contemplative, the first witness to the Resurrection.[50]

On the second broad side, the panel of John the Baptist pointing to the *Agnus Dei* [in stage (4)] brings to completion the sequence of panels which, of all early medieval sculpture, most coherently explores how Christ is to be seen and recognized in the Eucharist. The *Agnus Dei* panel also provides a transition between the incipient eschatology of Christ adored by the beasts as 'Iudex

Æquitatis' [in stage (3), just below, at the top of the lower stone], to the fully revealed eschatology of the crosshead [stage (5)], that quincunx–image of the heavenly liturgy. Of the *titulus*, only the words '[A]DORAMVS VT NON CVM' ('We adore, so that not with […]') survive (Fig. 3). The verb reads downwards along the lower left border; of the final three short words, the first V is placed directly after the S of '[A]DORAMVS' and aligned with it, so that the word 'VT' is divided between the left border and the lower border.[51] One would expect a lower border to carry the end of an inscription (as in the Mary Magdalen panel on the lower stone); but what was the point of ending a *titulus* with 'VT NON CVM'? This phrase would normally link two clauses, but here only the verb of the first clause survives and, of the second, only this three-word *incipit*. The link-phrase 'ut non cum' is rarely found in early medieval Latin. Only three examples are recorded in scripture, all of them from St Paul.[52] Of these, one is highly relevant to the panel under discussion. The Epistle at the Mass of the Lord's Supper (*Missa in Caena Domini*) on Holy Thursday afternoon was I Corinthians 11:20–32, 'Fratres, convenientibus vobis in unum […]'('Brothers, when you come together […]').[53] This lection contains the earliest description of a Christian eucharistic synaxis ('coming together'). The idea of 'synaxis' was important to the Ruth well designer: the second runic verse *titulus* to the vine-scrolls on the lower stone re-imagines one, in heroic terms. In the poem, the followers of Christ hasten to receive his body from the Cross on Good Friday evening. In a unique image, for which no narrative or iconographic parallels have been found, the cross then bows down to hand the body of Christ to his gathered followers; and they, standing at his head and feet, contemplate his body.[54] This is the supreme example on the Ruthwell Cross of Bede's principle, central to the structure of the monument, that 'the act of humility by the greater person particularly involves the exaltation of the lesser ones'; indeed their 'exaltation' follows immediately for, if onlookers proceed sunwise around the monument, they find that this second runic *titulus* leads them to the fivefold sequence of eucharistic images on the second broad side, in which all creation is transformed by Christ's self-sacrifice. That sequence reaches its climax in stages (4), John the Baptist pointing to the *Agnus Dei*, and (5), the apocalyptic crosshead. The Holy Thursday Epistle ended with a passage in which St Paul drives home the importance of reverence at eucharistic synaxes by reminding the Corinthians that the Eucharist pledged Christ's imminent return to judge the world and in particular, those who failed to recognize his presence in the breaking of bread:

> [26]For as often as you shall eat this bread, and drink the cup, you shall show the death of the Lord, until he come. [27]Therefore whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord. […] [32]But whilst we are judged,

> we are chastised by the Lord: that we be not condemned with this world ['dum iudicamur autem a Domino corripimur **ut non cum** hoc mundo damnemur']. (emphasis added)

The last clause of the lection, I Corinthans 11:32b, was widely quoted because it stressed both the importance of the Eucharist and the imminence of Judgement[55] lt made sense for the designer to end the *titulus* with a laconic variation on this famous clause: the phrase '[-] [A]DORAMVS VT NON CVM· ('we adore, so that not with …') reinforced the eschatological urgency central to the panel, and complemented the description of Christ as 'the Judge of fairness· ('IhS XPS IVDEX ÆQVITATIS') directly below, at the top of the lower stone (Fig. 3). The surviving fragment admirably sums up the *raison d'être* of a Christian community, whose adoration of the *Agnus Dei* would lead to their names being inscribed in the heavenly Book of Life (blessed by Christ as Judge in the panel just below) only if, in fear of the Lord, they rejected actions and values unworthy of followers of the sacrificed Lamb: values which, when his glory is revealed, will be condemned. The implied warning, 'ut non cum [*hoc mundo damnemur*]' was reinforced by its eucharistic and eschatological context.



Fig. 4a Ruthwell Cross, detail of eagle on branch.
Photograph © Department of Archaeology,
University of Durham. Photographer: T. Middlemass



Fig. 4b Durham Crosshead, showing eagle, sun and moon. Photograph © Department of Archaeology, University of Durham. Photographer: T. Middlemass



Fig. 4c Ruthwell Cross, detail of archer. Photograph © Department of Archaeology, University of Durham. Photographer: T. Middlemass

The Ruthwell Cross is a triumph of liturgical inculturation. Its images. such as the Archer and the Eagle on the Vine-scroll (above the transom on the same first broad side as the Archer) operate at several levels of meaning, like the Ruthwell poem (the runic *tituli* to the vine-scrolls on the narrow sides of the lower stone).[56] The cross's stress on Incarnation, and thus on *sermo humilis*, is significant: the images of the cross work, even for the uninstructed, as convincing symbols of natural processes: pregnancy and growth, food and protection, grief and hope, and, in the case of the Archer, heroism and force. The cross was meant to be lived with: it revealed its theological coherence gradually, in particular to members of a monastic or clerical community who, year after year, sang the liturgy. This activity of deepening meditation involved seeing more in earlier pre-theological levels of understanding, rather than rejecting them. The cross challenges all facile distinctions between 'sacred' and 'secular': it provides a series of images which work at a non-theological level, and then gradually can be seen to be, at the same time, 'sacralised secular images'.[57] This principle can seen in Stage (5), the fragmentary crosshead. The Archer evidently aimed at something on the transom: 1 have argued elsewhere that, as Fritz Saxl first suggested in 1943, the iconography of the first broad side of the transom may have been something like that of the later, fragmentary, Durham crossheads.[58] If so, the Archer may have aimed his arrow, chosen from his quiver, filled with scripture, at a crouching catechumen being also exorcized by a cross-wielding cleric (Fig. 4b).

This eagle is an image of longing (Fig. 4a). While its body faces us, its head is turned to the right, so that its hooked beak can be seen, limned against the surface of the upper stone. This iconography recalls Psalm 102/103:5, 'your youth will be renewed like the eagle's'. That verse refers to an ancient legend: when the eagle gets old, its hooked beak grows down over its lower beak and prevents it from eating; but it can rub away the overhanging beak on a rock and feed again, so that its youth is renewed. This legend was seen to prefigure the situation of the neophytes during the Easter Vigil, who, first, at the baptismal font, participated in Christ, the life-giving rock (I Cor. 10:4); then hastened to receive the Eucharist, the food of immortality. The Eagle on the Branch, therefore, looks forward in longing to the powerful eucharistic programme on the second broad side; in this it is consistent with the Visitation-Archer sequence below, where a mystery at first visually concealed (at the Visitation), and then imaged in metaphor (Archer/arrow) is more fully revealed in eucharistic images on the second side (Baptist and *Agnus Dei*). Any lay Anglo-Saxon audience would have been responsive to the idea that eagles, those birds of battle, were 'eager for flesh', and so to the scriptural idea that 'where the body is, there the eagles will gather' (Matthew 24:28). Indeed, the eagles gather on this crosshead: at the apex of the second side there is another eagle, the symbol of St John the Evangelist. Placed as they are,

the two eagles made the cross visually recall a Roman standard. Roman 'eagles' were correctly understood to be symbols of victory;[59] while, because in scripture the eagle was an image of God's care for his people, the Ruthwell eagles could also remind the community that through baptism they were 'a royal people', under divine protection.[60] In the eagle-images at the apex of the crosshead, this 'highest comer-stone, chosen and precious' (I Peter 2:6), secular and sacred associations fuse and reinforce each other.

There are, however, interesting differences of emphasis between the Ruthwell Eagle on the Vine (Fig. 4a) and the Eagle between sun and moon at the top of the Durham crosshead (Fig. 4b). With its cosmic symbols, the Durham eagle is an unambiguous image of Christ, triumphant in Resurrection and Ascension. But the Ruthwell Eagle is not flanked by images of the sun and moon. Its left foot perches on a branch of the Tree of Life or vine-scroll; its right foot is raised, as though it is anxious to launch into flight: one thinks of the word 'fusæ' ('eager', 'restless' and possibly also 'preoccupied by death') used of the followers of Christ in the first *sententia* of the second runic verse *tilulus* to the vine-scrolls.[61] In this eagle there is an element of tentativeness and longing which the assured Durham eagle lacks. In its eager restlessness the Ruthwell eagle seems to be not simply an image of God or of Christ, but equally, or perhaps primarily, an image of the Christian who hopes that, as a member of the body of Christ, even in death his youth may be renewed. Bede provides the best gloss on the complex religious dimensions of the Ruthwell eagle:

> Allegoria uerbi eadem uitae caelestis gaudia demostrat, ut: 'Vbicumque fuerit corpus, illuc congregabuntur aquilae', quia ubi mediator Dei et hominum est corpore, ibi nimirum et nunc subleuatae ad caelos animae et, celebrata gloria resurrectionis, colligentur etiam corpora iustorum.[62]
>
> Allegory of the word shows forth the same joys of the heavenly life itself, for: 'Wherever the body will be, there will the eagles gather' [Matthew 24:28]: indeed, souls are already being raised to heaven, where the mediator between God and man is now in the body; and, after the glory of the resurrection [of the body] has been celebrated, even the bodies of the just will be brought together there.

NOTES

1 'The Archer, the eagle and the lamb', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 30* (1967), 391–4, at 391. Earlier scholarly discussion of the pnnel is surveyed in E. Ó Carragáin, 'Sacralised secular images on the Ruthwell Cross: the archer panel and Christ "miþ strelum giwundad", in *Percepta rependere dona. Studi di filologia e di linguistica per Anna Maria Luiselli* (Olschki, Florence, forthcoming). 169–83.

2 Raw, 'The Archer', 393.

3 Ibid., 391.

4 R.T. Farrell, 'The archer and associated figures on the Ruthwell Cross - a reconsideration', in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. R.T. Farrell, BAR, Brit. ser. 46 (Oxford, 1976), 96–114, at 105.

5 For example, P. Meyvaert, 'A new perspective on the Ruthwell Cross: *ecclesia* and *vita monastica*' in *The Ruthwell Cross* ed. B. Cassidy (princeton, 1992) 95–166, at 140–45; he, however, did not refer to Raw's article.

6 Ó Carragáin, 'The Ruthwell crucifixion poem in its iconographic and liturgical contexts', *Peritia, 6–7* (1987–8), 1–71, at 42.

7 Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood: liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the Dream of the Rood Tradition* (London and Toronto, 2005), 143 (also 285).

8 Ibid., 99–106 (Visitation); 141–3 (Archer). I began to study the liturgy of 24 June after the book had gone to the publishers, when I had the good fortune to supervise Elizabeth Raggi-Killorin, 'Angelus Domini: the representation of John the Baptist in Anglo-Saxon England' (minor MA thesis, University College Cork, October 2004) (Raggi-Killorin discusses the Archer panel at 22–3).

9 Luke 1 :36.

10 On Luke 1:40 see Bede, *In Lucae Evangelum Expositio*. ed. D. Hurst. CCSL 120 (Turnhout, 1960), 35, lines 643–51, summnrizing Ambrose. *ExpositioEvangelii secundum Lucam*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 14 (Turnhout. 1957), 39–40, sections 19–22.

11 Luke 1:42–4 (this translation follows the Vulgate text).

12 Bede, *In Lucam*, 35–6, lines 654–62, following Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii*, 40–41, section 23, lines 318–27.

13 John 1:8; on this theme see É. Ó Carragáin, 'A liturgical interpretation of the Bewcastle Cross', in *Medieval Literature and Antiquities*, ed. M. Stokes and T. Burton (Cambridge, 1987), 15–42, at 36–7; *idem, Ritual and the Rood*, 83–4.

14 John 3:30.

15 Quentin, (ed.), *Les Martyrologes Historiques du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1908), 50, 52, 54 and 55.

16 On the tradition that Christ was conceived and died on 25 March, see Ó Carragáin,

Ritual and the Rood, 83.

17 The cross-shaft is illustrated and interpreted in this sequence in Ó Carragáin ‘At once elitist and popular: the audiences of the Bewcastle and Ruthwell Crosses’, in *Elite and Popular Religion*, ed. K. Cooper and J. Gregory (Woodbridge. 2006), l8–40, at 23–5.

18 See Ó Carragáin, ‘A liturgicnl interpretation’, 34–6.

19 Ibid., 18–19; idem., *Ritual and the Rood*, 160–64 and 201–8.

20 On John the Baptist as *angelus*, see Mark 1:2; on Christ himself as *angelus magni consilii*, see Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 325–7.

21 See F.M. Arocena and J.A. Goñi (eds), *Tituli Psalmorum, Psalterium Lilurgicum* (2 vols., Vatican, 2005), 1, 57, nos. 366–71.

22 Augustine, *‘Enarrationes ‘in Psalmos*, ed. E. Dek.kers and J. Fraipont, CCSL 38–40 (3 vols., Turnhout, 1956), I, I 09–10, lines 27–36.

23 Éamonn Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 321–5.

24 J. O’Reilly, Islands and idols at the ends of the earth: exegesis and conversion in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*’, *Bede le Venerable entre tradition et postérité*, ed. S. Lebecq et al. (Lille, 2005), 119–45.

25 R.-J. Hesbert, *Antiphonale Missarum Sextuplex* Brussels. 1935). 134–5. no. 119.

26 Introit, Vigil of St John the Baptist (cf. Luke 1:13–14 with Psalm 20:2ff.): Hesbert. *Antiphonale Missarum Sextuplex*. 32–5, no. 117. The gospel for this Vigil mass was Luke 1:5–17: A. Chavasse, *Les lectionnaires romains de la Messe* (2 Vols. Fribourg Suisse. 1993), 2, 32; U. Lenker. *Die westsächsische Evangeleinversion* (Munich. 1997), 359, par. 57.

27 Gradual (cf. Jeremiah 1:4 and 1:9): Hesbert, *Antiphonale Missarum Sextuplex*, 134, no. 119; for the Epistle, Jeremiah 1:4–10, see Chavasse, *Lectionnaires*, 2, 17.

28 Chavasse, *Lectionnaires*, 2, 17.

29 Jerome, *Commentariornm in Esaiam libri XII–XVIII*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 73A (Turnhout, 1963), 534, lines 20–21.

30 Ibid., 534, lines 29–30 and 34–5.

31 Ibid., 534, lines 38–2, referring to Matthew 1 :21.

32 Ibid., 535, lines 49–52, referring to Luke 1:35.

33 Ibid., 535, lines 54–65. Like Jerome, early Christian interpreters always referred Isaiah 49 to Christ, never to John. See R.L. Wilken (ed.), *Isaiah Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators* (Grand Rapids, 2007), 363–74.

34 Chavasse *lectionnaires* 2, 32.· Lenker *Die westsächsische Evangelienversion*, 359, par. 59 (in a few late Anglo-Saxon custom rites, Luke 1:18–25 was read at the Day Mass: Lenker, par. 58). In the Canticle of Zachary, see also Luke 1:78: ‘in quibus visitavit nos, oriens ex alto’ (‘in which he has visited us from on high, like the Eastern

[morning] star').

35 On gift-exchange, *kenosis* and *theosis* as themes on the Ruthwell Cross. see Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 60–62, 164–6, 287–92.

36 Lenker, *Die westsächsische Evangelienversion*, 376 par. 110 (early sources). On the feast of the Visitation, see J.V. Polk, '"Visitatio Beatae Mariae Virginis" da seicento anni nel Occidente liturgico', *Ephemerides Liturgicae*. 103 (1989), 269–74.

37 Bede, *HE*, III.29, 318–19 and 320–21: the political implicntions of Vitalian's letter to Oswiu are discussed in O'Reilly, 'Islands and idols', 132.

38 Codex Amiatinus, f.526r: R. Marsden, *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England*, CSASE 15 (Cambridge. l995). 189.

39 O'Reilly, 'Islands and idols', 127–8. l thnnk Dr O'Reilly for bringing these references to my attention.

40 On Gabriel as *fortitudo Dei*, see Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and th Rood*, 84–5, 93–4.

41 See J. Hawkes and É. Ó Carragáin, 'John the Baptist and the *Agnus Dei*: Ruthwell (and Bewcastle) revisited', *The Antiquaries Journal, 81* (2001), 131–53.

42 J. Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford, 1882), 804, s.v.; before the eighth century, the word was taken into the Irish language, with the meaning 'something hidden, a secret, a mystery': see *A Dictionary of the Irish language* (Dublin, 1913–76), s.v. *rún*.

43 On poetic variation, see F. Robinson, Beowulf *and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville, TN, 1985), 3–28.

44 Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 105.

45 Ibid., 102.

46 Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, 4:20. PL 16:271.

47 Leo the Great, Sermon 25:5, *Sancti Leonis Magni Romani PontificusTractatus Septem et Nonaginta*, ed. A. Chavesse. CCCL 138, 138A (2 vols., Turnhout, 1973), 123; Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 136–9.

48 Ibid., 126–9 and figs 26–7.

49 *Sancti Aurelii Augustini in Iohannis Evangelium*, ed. R. Willems. CCSL 36 (Turnhout, 1954) Tractatus 34:9, lines 6–10, p. 315; 44:2, lines 1–4. 20–24, p. 382.

50 Éamonn Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 128–37.

51 See R. Trench-Jellicoe's drawing of the inscription, in Hawkes and Éamonn Ó Carragáin, 'John the Baptist', 135.

52 Apart from the example to be discussed below, they are I Corinthians 16:2 and II Corinthians 2:3. I am grateful to Prof. T.O. Hill, who helped me search the Library of Latin Texts and PL databases. No parallel for the full fragment, 'adoramus ut non cum' was found.

53 Chavasse, *Lectionnaires*, 2, 14; Ordo Romanus XXIV for Holy Thursday, par. 11. *Les Ordines Romani du haut Moyen Âge*, ed. M. Andrieu (Louvain, 1931–61), 3, 290.

54 Éamonn Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 180–83 :md14. n.L:318–19.

55 See, for example. Fulgentius of Ruspe. *Epistola VII ad Venantiam*, ed. J. Fraipont, CCSL 91 (Turnhout, 1961), section 21, lines 340–43, 253; *Epistola VII ad Scarilam de Incarnatione Filii Dei*, in ibid., section 43. lines 114–53, 347–8; Caesarius of Aries. *Sermo CXIV*, ed. G. Morin, CCSL 103 (Turnhout, 1953). section 6, 476.

56 For discussion of the audiences of 1he Ruth well Cross, see Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 296–8; *idem*, 'At once elitist and popular'.

57 Ó Carragáin, 'At once elitist and popular', 39; *idem*, 'Sacralised secular images'.

58 .Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 146.

59 On Psalm 102/103:5, and on the secular Roman and Germanic associations of the eagle image, see Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 143–6.

60 Exodus 19:4–6, echoed in I Peter 2:6–10.

61 For the text and discussion see Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 181.

62 Bede, *De Schematibus et Tropis*, ed. C.W. Jones, CCSL 123A–C (Turnhout, 1975–80), 11, ii, 167–8, lines 257–62.