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THE RUTHWELL CROSS AND IRISH HIGH CROSSES: SOME POINTS OF COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

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In this paper I wish to explore some implications for the study of Irish high crosses of theories about the Ruthwell Cross which I develop in forthcoming publications (1986a–c). My approach is not that of an archaeologist or an art historian, but of a student of literature who has been led to study the Ruthwell Cross through an interest in the liturgical contexts of the poem inscribed on that monument. At the end of my paper I suggest that liturgical symbolism may explain why a Crucifixion panel was placed at the foot of the Ruthwell Cross. Throughout the paper, I assume (following Collingwood 1927, 84, fig. 101, reproduced below within Figs 1–4) that the Ruthwell Cross, which was knocked down by iconoclasts in the seventeenth century, was originally oriented as the Bewcastle Cross still is: that is, that the 'Christ over the Beasts' and the 'Agnus Dei' panels originally faced west, as they still do at Bewcastle.

The first half of the English poem inscribed on the Ruthwell Cross is related to the iconographic programme on the broad face which, I assume, faced east originally (the relevant halves of the poem and of the iconography are juxtaposed in the appendix at the end of this paper, nos 1 and 2). This strikingly original poem emphasises the dilemma of the Cross. When 'Almighty God' wishes to ascend the Cross, the Cross dare not bend, but stands immobile to receive him. The only convincing scriptural parallel for the Cross's dilemma is the dilemma in which Mary found herself, exactly thirty-three years before. Although she knew not man, she agreed to bear Christ into human life; so, in the Ruthwell poem, the Cross loyally bears him to his death (Ó Carragáin 1978; 1982).

On the base of the east side of the cross, a Crucifixion panel is juxtaposed to an Annunciation panel. This provides a visual parallel to the way in which the English poem presents the Crucifixion as reminiscent of the Annunciation. But these panels cannot be seen in isolation. They form a basis for the iconographic programme of the whole east side, which is concerned with the progressive union between the Christian and Christ: in conversion (the blind man), repentance (Mary Magdalen) and the Christian life (Martha and Mary Magdalen). The panels of this side of the cross all reflect the liturgy of the last three weeks of Lent (Ó Carragáin 1986c). These weeks were devoted to the preparation of catechumens for the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, which they would receive during the Easter vigil. The union between Christ and the obedient Cross, which the English poem depicts, was a model for the union between Christ and the catechumen, to which the iconography of the east side refers.

The second half of the poem is closely related to the iconography of the side of the cross which may originally have faced west (appendix, nos 3–4). Both poem and iconography contain clear references to the liturgical ceremony at the ninth hour on Good Friday, the moment of Christ's death. In line 10 of the poem, the followers of Christ are said to come to the Cross 'from afar'. This idea has no close parallel in the gospels, but is reminiscent of the way in which Christ's death was commemorated in the Roman liturgy of the eighth century. On Good Friday, the station was held at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (the basilica near the Porta Praenestina where, tradition held, St Helena had deposited the relics of the True Cross which she had brought from Jerusalem). At the ninth hour, the clergy and people went in procession to the symbolic equivalent of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem. In the poem, the Cross bends to the hands of Christ's followers, who receive Christ from the Cross and look upon his body. In the eighth-century liturgy, the readings at Holy Cross culminated in St John's Passion, which at the moment of Christ's death quoted the prophecy of Zachary, 'they shall look on him whom they have pierced' (John 19:37, quoted below, appendix, end of no. 3). The importance of this verse for the visual arts was kindly brought to my attention by my colleague Dr Jennifer O'Reilly, who allowed me to consult in draft an important forthcoming study in which she traces its use in pre-Romanesque religious iconography. As, in line 13 of the Ruthwell poem, the body of Christ is said to be 'wounded with arrows', and in line 15 the followers of Christ are said to look upon this body, it is reasonable to suggest that the fourth and last *sententia* of the poem was designed to recall John 19:37. I wish to stress that such a verbal reminiscence would not, for a monastic audience, be simply a reminiscence of a text, but of the culminating moment in the Holy Week liturgy in which that text was chanted. This was the moment at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme on Good Friday evening just before the adoration of the Cross. When the congregation had adored Christ's Cross, they would have received his body in Communion.

The west side of the Ruthwell Cross is dominated by Eucharistic images which emphasise that in Communion the body of Christ is to be recognised and received. Two panels refer to the breaking of bread at Mass. Saints Paul and Anthony who 'broke bread in the desert' seem to reflect the way in which the bread was broken for Communion at Iona. St John the Baptist holding the Agnus Dei is best explained in the context of the way the bread was broken for Communion in the Roman rite: Pope Sergius had recently introduced the chant 'Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis' at this point in the Mass (Ó Carragáin 1978). In the Stowe Missal and other early medieval commentaries, the breaking of bread for Communion was seen to re-enact the breaking of Christ's body by the nails and spear on the Cross on Calvary (Stokes and Strachan 1901–3, II, 254; Jungmann 1951–5, II, 301–3 and 310). The panel between the Agnus Dei and Paul and Anthony represents Christ recognised by beasts in the desert. The panel is clearly a variant of the iconography of Psalm 90:13, 'you will tread on the asp and the basilisk, and tread down the lion and the dragon'. But at Ruthwell, as at Bewcastle, the sculptors have converted their beasts from evil to good: the Ruthwell inscription says that they 'recognised Christ', and the paws of the animals emphasise their act of recognition through a visual pun — on both crosses the inner paws of the animals are crossed so as to recall the *Chi* symbol, the first letter of Christ's name (on similar visual puns on Irish crosses, see Ó Carragáin 1987, sections 5 and 7). The sculptors went out of their way to represent pairs of animals, and to prevent us identifying the animals as specific kinds, such as asps, basilisks, lions or dragons. They thus encouraged the onlooker to apply to the panel not merely Psalm 90:13 but also the verse from the Canticle of Habbakuk, 'you will be known in the midst of two animals'. In the Old Roman rite, Psalm 90:13 and the relevant verse of the Canticle of Habbukuk were sung

together at one very important moment each year: in the ceremony commemorating the moment of Christ's death on Good Friday evening. At that ceremony at Santa Croce, 'you will be known in the midst of two animals' formed part of the responsory after the first Old Testament reading, and 'you will tread down the lion and the dragon' formed part of the responsory after the second (Ó Carragáin 1987; 1986a). At Ruthwell, 'Christ over the Beasts' is closely related to the panels above and below. All three panels refer, among their other meanings, to the moment of Christ's death on the Cross at Calvary on Good Friday, as celebrated in the liturgy. These panels encourage the onlooker to see the Mass as a daily participation in the sacrifice of the body of Christ. They can justly be seen to reflect the same theological preoccupation as the end of the English poem. Using Eucharistic symbolism, they invite the onlooker to recognise the divinity and humanity of Christ on the Cross, and to receive his body from the altar as from the Cross: they 'shew the death of the Lord, until he come' (I Cor. 11:26) as *iudex aequitatis*.

I therefore argue that each half of the Ruthwell poem is related to the iconographic programme on one broad face of the cross. My theory has two corollaries. First, the iconography has, like the poem, a beginning and an ending: it begins with the Crucifixion panel at the foot of the east side, and ends with the Evangelists, and their visionary beasts, at the top of the west side. Second, the Ruthwell Cross was designed to be meditated upon moving sunwise around the monument: only in such a way could the relationships between poem (which runs from north to south) and iconography (which runs from east to west) be appreciated. Poem and iconography each have their own unity; but the themes which the poem expresses in narrative terms the iconography explores in terms of the liturgy. Reading the cross sunwise allows us to move from the poetic account of how the Cross received Christ on Calvary (north) to iconographic references to the Lenten catechumenate and the active and contemplative lives, in which eighth-century Christians sought unity with Christ (east); and from the poetic account of how on Calvary the Cross handed Christ to his followers (south) to images of the Eucharistic action in which Christ was in the eighth century known and received (west).

Sunwise or right-handed movement, although a widespread and perhaps universal phenomenon (see, for example, Faron 1967), was given particular emphasis by the Irish learned classes. There are a number of written references in Old Irish to the desirability of proceeding sunwise or following one's right hand (O.Ir. *dessel*) around objects, sites, or groups of people (O'Rahilly 1946, 296–7; Rees and Rees 1961, 145 and n.32 on pp 381–3; *DIL* s.v. *dessel*). I am not aware of any such emphasis in Anglo-Saxon literary sources. The hypothesis that the Ruthwell monument was meant to be read *dessel* would fit in with the other Celtic symptoms on the cross, in particular with the 'Paul and Anthony' panel, which is found on no other surviving Anglo-Saxon monument but which is found in Pictish Scotland and is common in Ireland, and with the way in which the Eucharistic images on the cross firmly associate that sacrament with life '*in deserto*'. Over a generation ago, Fritz Saxl (1943) and Meyer Schapiro (1944) demonstrated that the references on the cross to life 'in the desert' reflected a central theme in Celtic spirituality (though the sharp distinctions they and scholars of their generation made between an 'eremitic' Celtic tradition and a 'triumphalist' Roman tradition in Northumbria are no longer acceptable).

At least one Irish high cross was intended to be read *dessel*. As Françoise Henry convincingly demonstrated (1964, 39–41), in order to understand the figural programme on the base of the high cross at Moone one must start (as the sun does) at the east, and move in turn to the south, west and north sides. It is also of interest that Paul and Anthony reappear at Moone, also within a Eucharistic context, and that here also the Eucharistic images are clearly related to life in the desert. Although there is a complete contrast in figural style, the similarities in theological concern between Ruthwell and Moone can be seen even in details. In the large panel representing the five loaves and two fishes at Moone, two curious baton-like monsters, with dog-like heads and fish-tails, are placed so as to flank the loaves. I have argued elsewhere (1985) that these baton-like monsters were not merely decorative: by placing the loaves between two animal figures, the Moone sculptors encouraged the onlooker to recognise in the Eucharistic bread Christ, who is here also to be 'known in the midst of two animals'.

I do not wish to argue for any direct influence between Ruthwell and Moone, merely for a similarity of cultural context. But Moone is some eight miles from Clonmelsh, the site which Fr Colmcille Conway first suggested (in Gwynn and Hadcock 1970, 402) might be the site of the Anglo-Saxon monastery of Ráth Melsigi. Dr Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (1984) has confirmed this suggestion, and has brilliantly brought out the importance for Anglo-Saxon studies of the identification. It seems possible that at Ruthwell, as well as at Ráth Melsigi, contact between Anglo-Saxon and Celtic cultures took place; and Ruthwell and Ráth Melsigi cannot by any means have been alone in such cultural receptivity.

But the *contrast* between the theological programmes of the Ruthwell and Moone crosses is at least as significant as the similarities. Moone begins with Adam and Eve, the Sacrifice of Isaac, and Daniel in the Lions' Den — scenes associated, in patristic writings, with the first, third and fifth of the ages of the world. In this concern with the span of Old Testament history, Moone is characteristic of the Irish figural high crosses. Their Old Testament sides are structured meditations on human history, viewed from a theological perspective. The Northumbrian crosses do not seem to reflect the same interest in the ordered unity of human history, and this difference seems to reflect a significant difference in catechetical principles between the Irish and Northumbrian sculptural traditions.

Simply to see these series of Old Testament scenes on Irish crosses as examples of the 'help of God' tradition, applied to the crosses by Robin Flower (1954), prevents us from doing justice to the theological sophistication of the way the Irish high crosses treat history. Much more analysis is needed of the theological logic behind the choice of Old Testament scenes in the various 'help of God' prayers, and behind the Old Testament scenes on the Irish high crosses. I suspect that such an analysis would reveal that the influence between prayers and crosses is not necessarily a direct or causal one, but that prayers and crosses alike draw on more central traditions of scriptural typology. The 'help of God' theory cannot, for example, enable us to appreciate the way in which, on the east side of Muiredach's Cross at Monasterboice, the progression of history is reversed in order to make a theological point by visual means (see Brandt-Förster 1978, pl. 11; Roe 1981, pls VIII, IX). On the lower two panels of the east side, Adam and Eve with Cain and Abel are juxtaposed to a panel representing David and Goliath with Saul and Jonathan: a panel representing the loss of paradise and the first murder is juxtaposed to a panel which reverses those themes of loss, by representing the establishment of the kingdom of Israel and the killing of the enemy's champion. It is hardly a coincidence that

David, whose slaying of Goliath is portrayed in the second panel and whose Psalter foretold Christ's life, Passion and entry into glory, plays his harp at the head of the saved at Christ's right hand in the great Last Judgement scene which forms the centrepiece of this side. But after the David and Goliath panel we go *back* in history, not forward. On the upper half of the shaft, the sculptors juxtapose a representation of Moses striking the rock to a panel representing Mary showing forth Christ to the three wise kings and their guiding angel. The reason for this reversal of historical sequence is at once theological and artistic. The two panels are designed to be visually alike. Moses, striking the rock, is placed so as to form a visual parallel to Mary, holding the Christ-child. The assembled Jews fill the right-hand side of the lower of the two panels, as the advancing kings fill the right-hand side of the upper panel. These visual parallels are designed to make a theological point. In I Cor. 10:4, St Paul identifies the rock which Moses strikes as Christ. For Paul, the wandering rock symbolised Christ's presence with his people, even in the Old Testament. The scene naturally became for the Fathers one of the standard figural images of how the sacraments flow from Christ to all Christians (see, for example, Ambrose: *De mysteriis*, 49, 51; *De sacramentis*, 4:18 and especially 5:3). By creating a close visual parallel between Moses striking the rock for the Jews and Mary presenting Christ to the gentiles, the Monasterboice sculptors have with superb economy and vividness expressed the implications of the Pauline text. Through these progressive epiphanies of Christ, to Jews and gentiles, they prepare the onlooker to contemplate the great epiphany of Christ at the Last Day which forms the centrepiece of this side of the cross. There, on his right hand, all the just contemplate his majesty (in final fulfilment of the images of the thirsting Jews in the desert, and of the gentile kings), while on his left the damned turn from him to flee, pursued by a devil, into darkness.

At Bewcastle and Ruthwell, the orientation of the Eucharistic images is of the greatest interest. They face west at Bewcastle, and may have originally faced west at Ruthwell. If Mass was ever celebrated at or near these crosses, priest and congregation must have faced east, gazing on these Eucharistic images, in order to be correctly oriented. Such orientational symbolism is also relevant to the study of the Irish high crosses. As Professor Michael Herity, Mrs Dorothy Kelly and I shall endeavour to demonstrate in a forthcoming study, the Irish high crosses whose original orientation has been preserved demonstrate that their designers were familiar with the patristic tradition that Christ faced west on the Cross. This *topos*, found in the *Carmen Paschale* of Sedulius (5:189–94), was familiar to Irish as well as to Anglo-Saxon writers (Stokes and Strachan 1901–3, II, 254; Meyer 1898, 225; Atkinson 1887, 133 and 381). It was an important tradition because it was obviously relevant to the orientation of a congregation at a sacral site, at Mass for example: they should face east, towards the Cross, the sign of the Son of Man (Dölger 1920; Peterson 1945; 1959). Professor Herity tells me that there are hardly any convincing exceptions to the rule that on the Irish high crosses representations of the Crucifixion originally faced west.

At Bewcastle the figural scenes, which include 'Agnus Dei' and 'Christ over the Beasts' panels, face west. This orientation suggests that the Bewcastle sculptors saw the Eucharist as making real the eschatological dimensions of Calvary. In I Cor. 11:26, St Paul wrote that in the Eucharist 'you shall shew the death of the Lord until he come [*donec veniat*]', while Matthew 24:27 makes Christ prophesy that he would come 'like lightning from the east' to judge mankind. It seems likely that the Ruthwell sculptors, who describe Christ over the Beasts as 'IVDEX AEQVITATIS', gave this side of their cross a similar orientation. The South Cross at Kells seems, like these Northumbrian crosses, to reflect an interest in the eschatological dimensions of the Eucharist: the Crucifixion and the Last Judgement are juxtaposed on its west side (Henry 1964, pl. 29; Brandt-Förster 1978, pl. 21). This side reads almost like the visual equivalent of the acclamation (based on I Cor. 11:26) which was added to the words of consecration in the Stowe Missal: 'You should do this in my memory; you will proclaim my Passion; you will announce my Resurrection, you will hope for my coming until I come again to you from the heavens' (cf. Warner 1906–15, II, 13). The association of this cross with the Mass is strengthened by the fact that the opposite, east side of the cross has a particularly complex and well thought-out Eucharistic programme (Henry 1964, pl. 26; Brandt-Förster 1978, pl. 39; Ó Carragáin 1987, section 5 and pl. IV). One may ask whether, and under what circumstances, Mass was celebrated at the Irish high crosses (as suggested by Nussbaum 1965, I, 372). Once more, however, the contrasts between the Northumbrian and Irish traditions are as illuminating as the similarities. In juxtaposing Crucifixion and Last Judgement on the west side, the South Cross at Kells is highly unusual. Muiredach's Cross is more typical of the Irish figural crosses in having its Crucifixion scene on the west side but having its Last Judgement scene on the east side, so that the onlooker must face west to see it. The explanation for the way in which the Irish sculptors usually sacrificed the symbolic possibilities which would have been open to them had they depicted the Last Judgement on the west sides of their crosses is perhaps to be explained by the Irish preoccupation with historical patterns. At Ruthwell, the logic of the iconographic programme can be fully explained in terms of liturgical symbolism. On the Irish crosses, an interest in the liturgy is only part of the story. There is also a distinct preoccupation with scriptural history, and in particular with setting the Old Testament over against the New. On Muiredach's Cross, as on the other great figural crosses in the diocese of Armagh, the east side spans human history, from Adam's Fall to the Last Judgement and the heavenly Jerusalem, while the west side concentrates on the central point in that historical panorama — Christ's ministry, Passion and Crucifixion (cf. Brandt-Förster 1978, pl. 18; Roe 1981, pl. IV).

But at first sight Ruthwell itself contradicts the tradition that Christ faced west on the Cross (see Fig. 2). At Ruthwell, the Crucifixion panel comes at the foot of the side which probably faced *east* originally. Professor Rosemary Cramp (1978, 128) has written as follows of the Ruthwell Crucifixion panel:

> Christ's Crucifixion exists as a separate scene at the bottom of the shaft, perhaps carved as a secondary feature. This placing of the Crucifixion on the shaft before the cross itself is conceived as a stone Crucifixion is also found at Hexham and St Andrew Auckland. It seems then to be a period feature to stress the apocalyptic significance of Christ in Majesty rather than Christ suffering.

The panel may be 'a secondary feature' in the sense that it may have been added to the cross later. This is a matter for art historians to argue, and I have heard them argue either way. But I do not believe that the panel at Ruthwell is primarily apocalyptic, nor that — whether it was a feature of the cross from the beginning or added later — it would have been seen as 'a separate scene', in the sense of standing clearly apart from the programme of the east

side of the cross. The Annunciation panel, if once it began the programme of the cross, would have already suggested the link between the Cross and Mary, and thus between Crucifixion and Annunciation, central to the first half of the vernacular poem on the north side. A Crucifixion panel would have made the link even clearer, and provided the catechumenate programme on the east side of the cross with an entirely appropriate beginning. The Crucifixion was, to Augustine (CCSL 36:661) and Bede (CCSL 118A:38, lines 1188–91, and refs), not merely an image of the death of Christ but also of the birth of the Church from Christ's side. The blood which flowed from this wound symbolised for them the Eucharist, and the water symbolised baptism (Ó Carragáin 1983, 12). A Crucifixion scene was thus an entirely appropriate beginning to the images of the catechumenate on the east side of the cross, as well as to the Eucharistic sequence on the west side of the cross.

In the context of the baptismal liturgy, it made sense for the sculptors to juxtapose this Crucifixion panel to the Annunciation panel above it. As we have seen, the English poem indicates one way in which the unity between Annunciation and Crucifixion can be understood: the poem presents Christ's ascent of the Cross as placing the Cross in a dilemma reminiscent of the dilemma of Mary at the Annunciation. But the symbolism of the baptismal liturgy links the panels in another, complementary way. The catechumen, when descending into the font, was seen to imitate Christ's death on the Cross. But his re-emergence from the font was seen as a new birth, more specifically as a re-enactment of Christ's virginal birth.

If they saw the two panels in the context of the baptismal liturgy, the Ruthwell community would not have found it at all odd that, at the foot of the Ruthwell Cross, the ordinary sequence of time is reversed so that we move from Christ's death to his incarnation. In the Old Testament, being submerged in water was a recurrent image of calamity and death (e.g. Ps. 41:8 (Vulgate), Isaiah 43:2). Using this image, the gospels make Christ himself refer to his death as a baptism with which he was to be baptised (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50). Before the gospels were written, St Paul had already presented baptism as an imitation of Christ's death on the Cross (Romans 6:4 and parallels). The idea that the descent into the font was an imitation of Christ's death on the Cross was thus naturally an important theme in patristic expositions of baptism (Daniélou 1956, 41–7; see, for example, Ambrose, *De mysteriis*, 11 and 21; *De sacramentis*, 2:17–20, 2:23; 6:7: 'et tuus vetus homo in fonte demersus peccato crucifixus est, sed deo resurrexit').

But the emergence of the catechumen from the font was seen as his birth to new life. It was thus seen as a re-enactment of Christ's virginal birth: as St Leo the Great put it, 'for every man born to new life the water of baptism is like the virginal womb, as the same Holy Spirit fills the font, which filled the virgin' (PL 54:206A). St Ambrose had already used this idea to end, and clinch the argument of, his instruction of the neophytes in the significance of baptism (*De mysteriis*, 59). We have here not merely a conceit of patristic commentators but an important element in the liturgical rite of baptism (see Dujarier 1962). In Gelasian sacramentaries of the eighth century, the ceremonies of the Lenten catechumenate refer to the Church as rejoicing because she was pregnant with the catechumens: the catechumens are seen as conceived in her womb by the Holy Spirit (Gelasian, ed. Mohlberg 1960, p. 48, line 3: 'unde iam uobis conceptis prignans gloriatur ecclesia'; cf. Gellone, ed. Dumas 1981, p. 67, par. 543). During the Easter vigil, at the blessing and consecration of the font before the baptismal ceremony, the font was referred to as an immaculate womb from which the catechumens would be born to new life (Gelasian, p. 73, lines 1–6: 'ut sanctificatione concepta ab immaculato divini fontis utero in nouam renatam creaturam progenies caelestis emergat'; cf. Gellone, pp 98–9, par. 704a). The baptismal liturgy provides, therefore, a context within which the progression from Crucifixion to Annunciation makes symbolic sense. The two panels may have been juxtaposed on the cross to make it clear to catechumens that at baptism they must first die, as Christ had died, to overcome sin; and that the life they would share, when they emerged from the gestation of the catechumenate and the virginal womb of the font, would be Christ's life, won for them through his incarnation and his resurrection to new life after death on the Cross.

The figure of Christ in the Ruthwell Crucifixion panel is clothed only in a knee-length kilt or skirt. This is important in any sacramental interpretation of the panel. The catechumens stripped themselves when entering the font. From early Christian times, this act was seen to signify their putting aside of the old Adam, who had first put on clothes in shame after committing original sin (Daniélou 1956, 37–40). In his writings on baptism, St Ambrose describes the catechumens at Milan as being anointed with oil like athletes, to make ready for their struggle to the death with the devil: 'ubi certamen, ibi corona' (*De sacramentis*, 1:4; cf. 5:29). But in his commentary on Luke, Ambrose sees Christ, when he wished to ascend the Cross, not as being stripped by the soldiers but as stripping *himself*: 'Adam who looked for clothes was conquered; he who laid aside his clothes conquered' (CCSL 14:376–7, translated in Allen and Calder 1976, 57–8). It is possible that when he depicted Christ as a hero, willingly putting aside his clothes to ascend the Cross, St Ambrose was influenced by his own understanding of baptism. The great bishop and liturgist seems in this commentary to be imagining the Crucifixion in terms of the ritual imitation of Christ's death by the Milanese catechumens when they entered the font. The catechumen, in putting aside his clothes to enter the font, was imitating the nakedness and the heroism of God. But, next to the writings of St Ambrose himself, the most striking description of Christ freely setting aside his own clothes when he wished to ascend the Cross that has come down to us from the early Christian period is the opening line of the English poem on the Ruthwell Cross (appendix, no. 1). The poem and the context of the panel alike suggest that on the Ruthwell Cross the naked figure of Christ may possibly have been intended to remind the catechumen-'athletes' baptised at Ruthwell that when during the Easter vigil they stripped to enter the font they would be imitating Christ who had 'stripped himself when he wished to ascend the gallows'.

In the Ruthwell panel two circular objects, presumably the sun and moon, flank the head of the cross. The *sol et luna* motif appears rarely or never on Irish crosses, and it is interesting to enquire why a Northumbrian community might have been interested in it. It is unlikely that any monastic onlooker, whose life was shaped by performance of the liturgy, could have seen this feature as simply a reference to the darkening of the sun at the Crucifixion (Mark 15:33 and parallels), or of the sun and moon at the Last Judgement (Mark 13:24 and parallels). Although such passages are relevant, Northumbrian documents make it clear that the relation of the sun and moon to the Crucifixion and Easter was far more central and complex than these verses would suggest. As we have seen, the Anglo-Saxons believed that the Crucifixion and Annunciation had both taken place on the same day, thirty-three years apart: on 25 March, the spring equinox in the Julian calendar. In his commentary on Luke, Bede

explains that Christ, the Light of the World, naturally chose to be conceived, and to die, on the day on which the light overcame the darkness (CCSL 120:30, lines 439–54). This passage makes clear that although Bede was aware that the equinox fell on 21 March he had great respect for the other tradition, because it was reflected in the liturgy (cf. Ó Carragáin 1978, 132, n.7). It marked into quadrants the solar cycle embodied in the liturgical year: as Bede points out in this passage, Christ was conceived (VIII Kal. Ap.: 25 March) and born (VIII Kal. Ian.: 25 December) on the equinox and solstice which marked the sun's growth and victory, while John the Baptist, who went before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways (Luke 1:76) and who said 'he must increase; but I must decrease' (John 3:30), was appropriately conceived (VIII Kal. Oct.: 24 September) and born (VIII Kal. Iul.: 24 June) on the summer solstice and autumnal equinox, which marked the lessening of the sun. For anyone who believed that Christ died on the spring equinox, the darkening of the sun on Good Friday must have been pleasingly ironic: the day on which the sun was darkened was the day which marked the beginning of the sun's ascendancy over the darkness of winter. But the moon was equally involved in this cosmic victory. In his letter to Nechtan, king of the Picts, Ceolfrid, Bede's abbot, explains that Easter must fall on the first full moon after the spring equinox. He justifies this by quoting the Canticle of Habbakuk (3:11, Old Latin version), 'Elevatus est sol, et luna stetit in ordine suo'. Ceolfrid explains that it is only when the sun has gone up (has triumphed at the equinox) that the moon can stand in her order (that her fullness can be significant, and denote the date of Easter). The equinox must precede and determine the Easter full moon, because it is only when Christ (the sun) had died, risen and returned to heaven that the Church (the moon) was able to begin her ministry (Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 5:21: Bede 1969, p. 544; cf. Bede on Habbakuk 3:11, CCSL 119B:397). In short, the association of the solar equinox with the paschal moon was of supreme importance, as an image of the relationship between Christ and his Church. As Ceolfrid puts it, anyone who denies that the equinox should come before the paschal moon 'agrees with those who trust that they could be saved without the grace of Christ . . . and who presume to teach that they could have attained to perfect righteousness even though the true Light had never conquered the world by dying and rising again' (trans. Bede 1969, 545). In other words, he would fall into the Pelagian heresy (see Ó Cróinín 1985, 515–16). The Northumbrian Church must have been particularly apt to appreciate the cosmic significance of the way in which in the first Holy Week the victory of the sun (the spring equinox, on Good Friday) coincided with the fullness of the moon (on the paschal vigil), and to use the *sol et luna* motif as a symbol of the cosmic kingship of Christ, who from the tree of the Cross reigned over the movement of the universe. If the Crucifixion was the moment when the Church was born as her sacraments flowed from Christ's side, the *sol et luna* motif built into the scene not only a symbol of how the heavens showed forth this glorious birth but also a prophecy of the time after Pentecost when, radiant with the spirit of the ascended Christ, the Church could, through her sacraments, become a mother to mankind and bring to new birth all those whom Christ had from the Cross given into her care (John 19:26–7). Although the Irish and Roman traditions might dispute how to calculate the date of Easter, they both agreed that, historically, the Crucifixion had taken place on 25 March: that the movement of the sun linked Christ's incarnation with the birth of the Church from his side (Ó Carragáin 1978, 137). If it was seen to point to this eirenic fact (a fact which the juxtaposition of the Crucifixion and Annunciation panels would already suggest) the *sol et luna* motif would be particularly appropriate to a cross which eirenically balanced a reference to the Iona rite of *cofractio* (Paul and Anthony) with a reference to the Roman chant for the same moment of the Mass (the Agnus Dei).

The placing of the Crucifixion panel at Ruthwell does not really contradict the tradition that Christ faced west on the Cross. Whether an original feature of the cross or added later, the Ruthwell Crucifixion panel has a specialised function within the baptismal imagery of the east side. In fact Ruthwell, if anything, corresponds to the tradition that Christ faced west on the Cross: as we have seen, the Eucharistic images on the west side of the cross represent Christ's death on the Cross no less than three times, in terms of the breaking of bread for Communion and of the liturgical commemoration of his death at the ninth hour on Good Friday. The Ruthwell Cross hands on the body of Christ to the onlooker in terms of poetic narrative in the verses on the narrow south side (appendix, no. 3), and in terms of Eucharistic symbolism in the related iconography of the broad west side (no. 4).

I conclude that those who placed the Crucifixion panel at the beginning of the iconographic programme of the Ruthwell Cross (whether the panel was part of the original design or whether it was added later) knew very well what they were about. The position they gave to the Crucifixion panel enabled them to deepen and clarify the meaning of the catechumenate sequence in general and the Annunciation panel in particular. But I do not by any means wish to insist that the Crucifixion panel *only* made devotional sense in the context of the catechumenate. As I have argued elsewhere (1986a), monastic patrons must have designed their monuments to be put to a variety of devotional uses, and each panel on the cross could on occasion have been taken separately for meditation. Quite apart from its relevance to the panels above, it made sense to place the Crucifixion panel at the foot of the cross. Its position made it easy for a penitent to kneel and kiss the Cross. Fleming (1966, 64–6) provides evidence from the *Vita* of St Lambert of Maastricht (d. *c.* 700) that penitential prayer, either prostrate or kneeling or standing before a free-standing stone cross, was customary during St Lambert's lifetime in the monastery at Stavelot (there the cross stood between the oratory and the dormitory); and Dr Ian Wood has kindly brought to my attention (pers. comm.) a possible reference to a similar cult of the cross in the *Regula Coenobialis* of St Columbanus, where a punishment is laid down for any monk who, when leaving the house, 'does not approach the cross' (Walker 1970, 146, line 31, and n.1 on p. 149). It seems likely that, among other meanings, high crosses like Ruthwell were seen as symbolising Christ's glorified body: in the light of this tradition, it is relevant that the close union between, and symbolic identification of, Cross and Christ is a central theme both of the Ruthwell Crucifixion poem (cf. appendix, no. 1, *sententia* II) and of its descendant, *The dream of the Rood* (Ó Carragáin 1983, 14). A penitent who kissed the foot of a cross which symbolised Christ's body was symbolically kissing the feet of Christ. If ever a penitent worshipped the panel in such a way, be or she may have seen the action as a following of Mary Magdalen, who on this same side of the cross (as the Ruthwell inscription puts it) 'STANS RETRO SECVS PEDES EIVS LACRIMIS COEPIT RIGARE PEDES EIVS & CAPILLIS CAPITIS SVI TERGEBAT' (cf. appendix, no. 2).

The art historian will bring to the Ruthwell Crucifixion panel interests, and evidence, quite distinct from my own. I have deliberately avoided trespassing on that field, and wish simply to point out, as a contribution to the larger art-historical debate about the dating and artistic

integrity of the Ruthwell Cross, that whether the panel was original or whether it was added later its placing on the cross makes excellent liturgical and devotional sense. My paper as a whole suggests that the Irish crosses as well as Ruthwell should be looked at as each making a theological statement, the coherence and sophistication of which naturally varies from cross to cross. The separate panels may be seen as individual 'words' within these statements: it was by choosing, juxtaposing and balancing these 'words' that the patrons and sculptors gave to each cross its individual *sententia*, or spiritual meaning.

Monastic writers had a sophisticated awareness that individual readers read scriptural texts in different ways and on different levels. As any page of scriptural commentary by Jerome, Bede or Cummean will demonstrate, they were acutely aware that each text was verbally associated with a variety of others and therefore that its significance was not static or one-dimensional, but could shift and change according to the devotional preoccupations of the reader and commentator, and according to the scriptural, liturgical or devotional context within which a text was used or interpreted. As St Gregory the Great pointed out in his homilies on Ezechiel, 'in one and the same *sententia* of scripture one reader will be sustained by the story alone, another will seek moral instruction, another will seek contemplative understanding through that type' (PL 76:844, translated and discussed, with other such passages, in Parkes, forthcoming). Patrons and sculptors created meaning not only by commissioning or sculpting panels but also by combining and balancing these panels in different ways on their crosses. It is possible, and indeed likely, that such balancing was an artistic analogue of the way in which texts were recombined and reinterpreted in scriptural commentary and (far more important) in communal liturgical action.

If so, it follows that different panels would come into prominence at particular times of the year, when the community brought to their monuments their experience of how the liturgical ceremonies of the current season gave these texts dramatic life. These great monuments may have been designed to create meaning in counterpoint to, or dialogue with, the liturgical, devotional and scholarly life of the monasteries which erected them. If the crosses may be seen as one side in a dialogue, or one element in a contrapuntal pattern, then we can only begin to understand them by reconstructing (from liturgical evidence, scriptural commentaries and historical sources) those features of the communal life of the monasteries which provided the other elements in the pattern or dialogue. Such an effort of reconstruction might start from the idea that any community which took the liturgy seriously is likely to have developed, from reflection on their own liturgical actions, a communal awareness of the multiple symbolic possibilities inherent in scriptural texts.

The modern literature on the crosses provides evidence not only of the qualities of the crosses but also of the degrees of sophistication with which twentieth-century scholars are able to cope with the symbolic issues raised by these monuments and (as in the case of the Ruthwell Cross) by their inscriptions. In this scholarly enquiry, our levels of symbolic awareness are as much at issue as are those of the cultures which produced the crosses. If it is a scholarly failure to read into a monument meanings which it cannot reasonably be seen to generate, it is equally a scholarly failure to be more simplistic than the object of one's study. We perhaps most often need to correct a reductive refusal to face the question of meaning, or a patronising assumption that the monuments of such a remote culture could only be intended to have primitive meanings, by a Gregorian openness to the possibility that patrons or sculptors, trained in liturgical action and *lectio divina*, may have designed their crosses to embody the multiple levels of meaning which onlookers with different levels of education and different devotional interests would seek.

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APPENDIX



1. NORTH (NOW EAST) SIDE OF THE RUTHWELL CROSS (Fig. 1)

The Ruthwell Crucifixion poem: first and second sententiae

Drawings of the cross from Collingwood 1927, 84, fig. 101. Text after R.I. Page in Okasha 1971, 111–12, corrected from Howlett 1974 and supplemented from Howlett 1976. Square brackets denote runes not now legible which can be restored from early drawings. Hypothetical reconstruction of missing verses by Howlett (1976) (using the Vercelli *Dream of the Rood*, an analogue or descendant of the Ruthwell poem) are italicised and given in lower case. Howlett's reconstruction of verses 3, 8a, 12b and 15a, which partially survive, is convincing. I also give Howlett's speculative restoration (using *The dream of the Rood*) of three half-line verses (4, 8b, 15b) for which no evidence survives on the cross. While these three verses must be used with the utmost caution, they at the very least give an idea of how much of the poem may have been destroyed. Whether they are substantially correct depends on how closely *The dream of the Rood* preserves the wording of the Ruthwell poem. I mark off these verses by brackets and the warning letters 'DH:', thus: {DH: . . . }. Lineation follows Howlett.

Sententia I (top and right border)

1. [+ OND]GEREDÆ HINÆ GOD ALMEƷTTIG.
   ÞA HE WALDE ON GALGU GISTIGA
   Almighty God stripped himself. When he wished to mount the gallows,
2. MODIG F[ORE ALLÆ] MEN
   brave in the sight of all men,
3. [BUGA] *ic ni dorstæ*,
   [*I dared not*] bow
4. {DH: *ac scealde fæstæ standa.*}
   {DH: *but I had to stand fast.*}

Sententia II (left border)

5. [AHOF] IC RIICNÆ KYNINGC [.]
   [I raised aloft] a powerful king.
6. HEAFUNÆS H[L]AFARD HÆLDA IC NI DORSTÆ
   The Lord of Heaven I dared not tilt.
7. [B]ISMÆRA[D]U UNGKET MEN BA ÆT[G]AD[RE I]C [WÆS M]IÞ BLODI BIST[E]MI[D]
   Men insulted the pair of us together; I was drenched with blood
8. BI*goten of þæs guman sida* {DH: *siþþan he his gastæ sendæ*}
   pou*red from the man's side,* {DH: *after he sent forth his spirit.*}

2. EAST (NOW SOUTH) SIDE OF THE RUTHWELL CROSS (Fig. 2)

Iconography and inscriptions (non-runic inscriptions follow Okasha 1971, with some minor revisions)

A. CROSS HEAD: SMALL PANELS (?five originally)

1. *Upper arm of cross head* (now mistakenly reversed: see top of Fig. 4): Eagle perched on top of vine branch. Ascended Christ, and baptised soul united to Christ; cf. 'Renovabitur sicut aquilae inventus tua', Ps. 102:5, as interpreted for the catechumens in the *traditio evangeliorum* ceremony, fourth week of Lent (Mohlberg 1960, 47–8, par. 309; Dumas 1981, 67, par 543).

2,3,4. *Transom* lost: Baptism scene in central roundel?, flanked by mirror-images of cleric scrutinising crouching catechumen? For possible analogues from eleventh-century Durham, see Cramp 1984, part 2, pls 206, 210, 215.

5. *Lower arm of cross head*: Archer with drawn bow; cf. Habb. 3:9, 'Tendens extendes arcum tuum super sceptros', as interpreted by Bede (CCSL 119B:394) following Jerome (CCSL 76A:632–3): the sharp warning words of preachers.

B. SHAFT: FIVE LARGE PANELS

1. *Martha and Mary Magdalen embracing,* runic inscription: 'MARÞA MARIA MR {?=merentes} DOMINNÆ', 'Martha and Mary, worthy {?} women'.

2. *Mary Magdalen anointing the feet of Christ,* inscribed: '+ A[TT]V[LIT ALA]B[A]STRVM : V[NGVE]NTI : & S[T]AN[S R]E[TR]O SECVS PEDES : EIVS LACRIMIS : COEPIT RIGARE : PEDES EIVS : & CAPILLIS : CAPITIS SVI TERGEBAT', Luke 7:37–8: '+ She brought an alabaster box of ointment; and standing behind, (beside) his feet, she began to moisten his feet with tears, and with the hairs of her own head she wiped (them)' (trans. Okasha).

3. *Christ healing a blind man,* inscribed '+ ET PRAETERIENS : VIDI[T hominem caecum] A NATIBITATE : ET S[anavit eum . . .]'. Cf. Jn 9:1: 'Et praeteriens Iesus vidit hominem caecum a nativitate: et interrogaverunt eum discipuli eius: "Rabbi, quis peccavit hic . . ."'. (Jn 9:1–38, gospel for Mass, Wed. of fourth week in Lent, week of the *traditio evangeliorum*. On reconversion, and so adult catechumens, in the Whithorn area in and before 731–5, see Bede 1969, 5:23, pp 558–60, 'multiplicatis fidelium plebibus'.)

4. *The Annunciation.* Inscribed: '[et] INGRESSVS A[NGELVS] ad eam dixit "Ave, gratia plena"'. Luke 1:28, antiphon for Mass on 25 March.

5. *Crucifixion*; Christ clad in loin cloth; *Sol et Luna*; Gordon (1726, 160–1) recorded two flanking figures (Longinus and Strepaton?).





3. SOUTH (NOW WEST) SIDE OF THE RUTHWELL CROSS (Fig. 3)

The Ruthwell Crucifixion poem: third and fourth sententiae

Sententia III (top and right border)

9. [+] KRIS[T] WÆS ON RODI.
   Christ was on the Cross.
10. HWEÞRÆ ÞER FUS[Æ] FEARRAN KW[O]MU
    But eager ones came thither from afar,
11. [Æ]ÞÞILÆ TIL ANUM IC ÞÆT AL BI[HEALD]
    noble ones came together:
    I beheld all that:
12. SA[RÆ] IC W[Æ]S MI[Þ] S[OR]G̃U[M] GIDRŒ[FI]D H[N]AG̃ *ic þam secgum til handa*
    I was terribly afflicted with sorrows: I bowed *to the hands of the men.*

Sententia IV (left border)

13. [M]IÞ S[T]RE[L]UM GIWUNDAD
    Wounded with arrows,
14. ALEGDUN HIÆ HINÆ LIMWŒRIGNÆ GISTODDU[N] HIM {ÆT HIS LI]CÆS [HEA]F[DU]M
    they laid him down, limb-spent; they stood [themselves] at the shoulders of his corpse
15. [BIH]EA[LD]U[N H]I[Æ Þ]E[R] *hæfunæs Dryctin* {DH: *ond he hinæ þer hwilæ restæ amen.*}
    Then they looked upon *the Lord of heaven* {DH; *and he rested himself there for a while. Amen.*}

'BIHEALDUN HIÆ ÞER' and fulfilment of Zachary's prophecy at Christ's death: Passion according to St John (read on Good Friday evening, *statio ad sanctam crucem in Hierusalem*), John 19: . . . '34. sed unus militum lancea latus eius aperuit, et continuo exivit sanguis et aqua. 35. Et qui vidit, testimonium perhibuit: et verum est testimonium eius. Et ille scit quia vera dicit: ut et vos credatis. 36. Facta sunt enim haec ut Scriptura impleretur: Os non comminuetis ex eo. 37. Et iterum alia Scriptura dicit: *Videbunt in quem transfixerunt*' [Zachary 12: 10: the importance of this prophecy is explained (with particular reference to later Anglo-Saxon art) by Jennifer O'Reilly in a forthcoming study which she has kindly allowed me to consult in draft].

Prophecy of Zachary and return of Christ as *Iudex Aequitatis*: Apocalypse 1: 7. 'Ecce venit cum nubibus, *et videbit eum omnis oculus, et qui eum pupugerunt.* Et plangent se super eum omnes tribus terrae. Amen. 8. Ego sum alpha et omega, principium et finis, dicit Dominus Deus: qui est, et qui erat, et qui venturus est, omnipotens.'

4. WEST (NOW NORTH) SIDE OF THE RUTHWELL CROSS (Fig. 4)

Iconography and inscriptions

A. CROSS HEAD: SMALL PANELS (? five originally)

1. *Upper arm of cross head* (now mistakenly reversed; see top of Fig. 2): St John the Evangelist and his symbol the eagle. Cf. the *traditio evangeliorum* ceremony (refs in no. 2) in which the Evangelist symbols were explained to the catechumens (Mohlberg 1960, 46–8; Dumas 1981, 65–7).

2, 3, 4. *Transom* now lost. Possibly contained, left and right arms, portraits of St Luke and his ox, St Mark and his lion. Central roundel, possibly 'Agnus Dei', or Christ as 'Majestas Domini'.

5. *Lower arm of cross head*: St Matthew with his symbol, the man/angel.

B. SHAFT: FIVE LARGE PANELS

1. *St John the Baptist bearing the Agnus Dei*: inscription much damaged. Only the word '[A]DORAMVS', 'we adore', survives. Cf. *Liber Pontificalis*, official biography of Sergius I, 686–701 A.D. (known to Bede): 'Statuit ut tempore confractionis dominici corporis *Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis* a clero et a populo decantetur' (Duchesne 1886–92, I, 376).

2. *Christ as Judge, recognised by beasts in the desert.* Inscribed '[+] IHS X[PS] IVD[E]X[:A]EQV[IT]A[TI]S : BESTIAE : ET : DRACON[ES] : COGNOUERVNT : IN DE : SERTO : SALVA[TO]REM : MVNDI :', '[+] Jesus Christ the judge of equity. The beasts and serpents recognised the Saviour of the world in the desert' (trans. Okasha).

3. *The Egyptian hermits, Saints Paul and Anthony, breaking bread in the desert.* Inscribed: '+ SCS : PAVLVS : ET : A[ntonivs] . . . / FREGERVNT : PANEM IN DESERTO :'. Cf. Adomnán, *Vita Columbae* (1961, 304); Irish bishop travelling incognito calls St Columba to him 'ut simul quasi duo presbyteri dominicum panem frangerent'.

4. *Mary and the Christ-child, seated on an ass,* which is advancing from right to left. Inscription mostly obliterated: '+ MARIA : ET IO[sephus] . . . / TV[?lerunt] . . .'. Cf. Henderson 1985: re-enacting Exodus, Christ brings manna (his body) to Israel (Matthew 2 : 15: 'Out of Egypt have I called my son').

5. *Virgin and Child*(?): almost, but not quite, obliterated. 'The remnants could perhaps be interpreted as showing the Virgin seated on the left' (Saxl 1943, p. 5, n.5). On the Victoria and Albert Museum cast (London), traces of a seated figure on the left, in profile, facing right, with object (child?) on lap, can be made out. Cf. Virgin and Child, facing right, on Cuthbert Coffin and in Book of Kells (Bethlehem =*domus panis*, home of [Eucharistic] bread, Christ).



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