4 The periphery rethinks the centre: inculturation, 'Roman' liturgy and the Ruthwell Cross

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This chapter celebrates a paradox. In the pre-Carolingian period, it is 'the ends of the earth', the periphery of Europe (such as the Atlantic Islands of Britain and Ireland) which provide the most sophisticated syntheses of 'Roman' liturgy: these peoples of the periphery are confident enough to rethink and make their own what they found in the centre, at Rome itself.[1] But the paradox, that the best syntheses of 'Roman' liturgy come from 'the ends of the earth', is not difficult to understand. In ecclesiastical terms, Rome was overwhelmingly rich: in its many basilicas, in its variety of traditions and liturgies, in authority. It was impossible for any northern ecclesiastical visitor to assimilate all this richness, still less to carry it home. They had to pick and choose, create syntheses that were comprehensible and relevant to their own local communities. They had, in short, to engage in the vital process of inculturation. It was not a matter of choice to rethink Rome, to make their own those elements of the city's traditions which could be used to transform the values of Northern cultures: it was an absolute necessity.[2]

For an Irish or Anglo-Saxon cleric, getting to Rome involved a long journey there and back again, usually through Francia, usually with several digressions to monasteries and saints' shrines.[3] The experience of Frankish and Northern Italian cities and shrines must always have been

[1] On *Imitatio Romae* in this period, see C. Vogel, 'Les échanges liturgiques entre Rome et les pays francs jusqu'à l'époque de Charlemagne', in *Le Chiese nei regni dell'Europa occidentale e i loro rapporti con Roma sino all'800*, Settimane 7 (1960), pt 1 (of 2), pp. 185–295; É. Ó Carragáin, *The City of Rome and the World of Bede*, Jarrow Lecture for 1994 (Jarrow, 1995); J. Hawkes, '*Iuxta morem Romanorum*: stone and sculpture in the style of Rome', in G. Hardin Brown and C. Karkov (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon Styles* (New York, 2003), pp. 69–100.

[2] On inculturation in the early Middle Ages, see B. Luiselli, *La formazione della cultura europea occidentale* (Rome, 2003); on the theory of inculturation, see A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation. Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville, MN, 1992).

[3] D.J. Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages. Continuity and Change* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY, 1998).

important for the thinking ecclesiastic from the Atlantic Islands, such as, for example, the Irish delegates from Munster who were sent to Rome in AD 631 to find out about the Roman celebration of Easter or, some twenty years later, the young priest Benedict Biscop and his companion Wilfrid, a cleric but not yet ordained, who came to pray at the tombs of the apostles and to learn all they could about Roman liturgy and ecclesiastical customs: knowledge that they would later apply, with due modification and adaptation, at home.[4] By the later seventh century, and during the whole of the eighth, Frankish cities were likewise anxious to learn from Rome: this meant adapting Roman ceremonies to their own situations and resources, and combining new Roman material with their own ancient traditions.[5] Thus an Anglo-Saxon or Irish cleric would have found in these cities intelligent ways of selecting from the confusing variety of Roman traditions, and of adapting those customs they selected to the pastoral conditions and needs of their own islands. Nor was the traffic in ideas simply one-way: in the seventh and eighth centuries Rome was receptive to ideas from other churches: not only from Constantinople and Syria, but also from Milan and Francia. From Francia, Rome imported, for example, the cult of St Martin of Tours, and the season of Advent which Rome subsequently rethought for itself, shortening the season from six weeks to four.[6] Educated clerics from 'the ends of the earth' were well aware that liturgical exchange was a two-way process; for them, imitating Rome must always have involved picking up suitable

[4] Ó Carragáin, *The City of Rome*, pp. 1–9.

[5] This process can be seen, in detail, in the *Ordines Romani*: ed. M. Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani du haut moyen age*, 5 vols. (Louvain, 1931–61): in particular, compare the Roman stational mass (Ordo I: vol. II, pp. 1–108) with the Frankish mass in Ordines IV (vol. II, pp. 135–70) and XV (vol. III, pp. 93–125); for the catechumenate and baptism, to be discussed below, see Ordo XI (vol. II, pp. 363–413).

[6] E. Ewig, 'Der Martinuskult im Frühmittelalter', *Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte*, 14 (1962), pp. 11–30; for the argument that the mass 'Adnuntiatio Domini et Passio eiusdem' for 25 March, composed for Old St Peter's, Rome, in the 670s, may have been inspired by the fixed Easter vigil on 27 March celebrated in the basilica of St Martin at Tours, see É. Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood. Liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the* Dream of the Rood *tradition* (London and Toronto, 2005), pp. 88–91; for the adaptation of the six-week Gallican Advent to four weeks at Rome, see A. Chavasse, *Le Sacramentaire gélasien (Vaticanus Reginensis 316). Sacramentaire presbytéral en usage dans les titres romains au VIIe siècle* (Paris and Tournai, 1958), pp. 412–26. On the structure and development of the chant for the Roman Advent, see M.E. Fassler, 'Sermons, sacramentaries, and early sources for the Office in the Latin West: the example of Advent', in M.E. Fassler and R. Baltzer (eds.) *The Divine Office in the Latin Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 15–47; and J.W. McKinnon, *The Advent Project. The Later-seventh-century Creation of the Roman Mass Proper* (Berkeley, CA, and London, 2000): this important but controversial book is best read in the light of the detailed reviews by J. Dyer (*Early Music History* 20 (2001), pp. 279–309) and P. Jeffery (*Journal of the American Musical Society* 56 (2003), pp. 167–79).

material, ideas and expert advice on the journey through Northern Italy and Francia. Bede, for example, was quite aware of this necessary process of adaptation and inculturation, and evidently approved of it. It is he who preserved for us the moving advice of Gregory the Great to Augustine of Canterbury: 'Therefore choose from every individual Church whatever things are devout, religious, and right. And when you have collected these as it were into one bundle, see that the minds of the English grow accustomed to it.'[7] Bede emphasized the skill of Benedict Biscop, the founder of Wearmouth, in taking the best of seventeen existing rules so as to create an original customary for his new monastery.[8]

The Old Gelasian sacramentary provides the most famous example of an original liturgical synthesis, combining Roman and local material, developed outside Rome.[9] This book was copied about AD 750 in northern Francia: possibly at Chelles, possibly at Jouarre: Frankish monasteries with close links to Anglo-Saxon England.[10] The greatest expert on the sacramentary, Canon Antoine Chavasse, argued that the core from which the Old Gelasian developed was a Roman book, a sacramentary of the sixth century.[11] Other liturgical scholars immediately expressed doubts about the Chavasse thesis, and such doubts about whether the archetype was compiled in Rome itself are now widespread.[12] The arguments against thinking that behind the Old Gelasian manuscript lay a well-planned Roman book have been summed up by Matthieu Smyth, in his magisterial work on the Gallican liturgy.[13] As Smyth points out,

[7] *Ex singulis ergo quibusque ecclesiis quae pia, quae religiosa, quae recta sunt elige, et haec quasi in fasciculum collecta apud Anglorum mentes in consuetudinem depone*: Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), vol. I, chap. 27, pp. 82–3.

[8] Bede, *Historia abbatum*, chap. 11, ed. C. Plummer, *Venerabilis Bedae opera historica*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1896), vol. I, pp. 374–5; trans. D.H. Farmer, in J.F. Webb and D.H. Farmer (eds.), *The Age of Bede* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 198.

[9] The Old Gelasian Sacramentary, ed. L. Mohlberg, P. Siffrin, and L. Eisenhöfer, *Liber Sacramentorum Romanae Aeclesiae Ordinis Anni Circuli*, third edn, Rerum Ecclesiastarum Documenta, Series Maior, Fontes, 4 (Rome, 1981). For a good recent survey of scholarship on the Old Gelasian, see M. Smyth, *La Liturgie oubliée. La Prière eucharistique en Gaule antique et dans l'Occident non romain* (Paris, 2003), pp. 125–41.

[10] On Jouarre as the scriptorium which probably produced the manuscript, see R. McKitterick, 'The diffusion of insular culture in Neustria between 650 and 850: the implications of the manuscript evidence', repr. in R. McKitterick, *Books, Scribes and Learning in the Frankish Kingdoms, 6th–9th Centuries* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT, 1994), paper 3, at pp. 406–8; R. McKitterick, 'Nuns' scriptoria in England and Francia in the eighth century', repr. in the same volume, paper 7, at pp. 7–11, and, for the English contacts of these scriptoria, pp. 27–35.

[11] Chavasse, *Le Sacramentaire gélasien*.

[12] There is a good survey of the scholarly reception of Chavasse's thesis in Smyth, *La Liturgie oubliée*, pp. 129–32.

[13] Ibid.

there would have been no local Roman need for a 'typical' or normative synthesis, bringing together and combining the various usages of the city. Instead, Smyth argues, the archetype of the Old Gelasian was probably compiled at a city of central Italy, outside Rome. When the compilation reached the Naples area (which for northerners was 'Roman', in the sense that the Bishop of Rome had metropolitan authority over Campania), a number of masses for Campanian saints were added to it. The Old Gelasian possibly shows, in addition, elements from Northern Italy; and, before reaching Chelles, the compilation was probably revised and re-edited in Anglo-Saxon England: for links between Anglo-Saxon England and the Naples area, one need only think of Abbot Hadrian, who accompanied Theodore and Benedict Biscop to Canterbury in AD 669.[14] But, even if Canon Chavasse's hypothesis of an archetypal and normative sacramentary from the city of Rome was mistaken, his great book nevertheless provides massive evidence that many of the Gelasian masses were indeed celebrated at Roman basilicas. Thus Smyth convincingly classifies the Old Gelasian as 'Roman with Gallican elements': to use the clear distinction which Jesse Billett proposes in the present volume, the Old Gelasian is essentially Roman, but contains many non-Roman incidentals.[15] The Roman material would have reached the original compilers, working outside Rome, piecemeal, in informal collections or *libelli*. Clerics who needed a synthesis that was at once 'Roman' (in the sense that the text of the mass which the book provides, while referring to 'local' Gallican saints as well as the saints of the ancient Roman canon, is essentially Roman in form) and 'local' (in the sense that prayers for masses for non-Roman celebrations had been incorporated within the collection), recopied and expanded such a collection. Chavasse himself began his great book with seventy meticulous pages in which he analysed the last stage of the compilation's growth: the prayers for the Frankish rituals which, in the early eighth century, were added to the original Italian core.[16] The title of the Old Gelasian Sacramentary proclaims that it is 'The Book of prayers of the Roman Church for mass and the sacraments, ordered according to the course of the year.'[17] Matthieu Smyth, concerned to emphasize that the book was compiled outside Rome, understandably warns that 'we should not be too impressed by that [title]'.[18] On the contrary, the title, properly understood, should be taken very seriously: it indicates that, for Northern compilers, fidelity to

[14] Ibid., pp. 132–3, with references to the earlier scholarship.
[15] Ibid., pp. 133–4. [16] Chavasse, *Le Sacramentaire gélasien*, pp. 1–71.
[17] Gelasian Sacramentary, ed. Mohlberg *et al.*
[18] '*qui ne doit pas trop nous impressionner*', Smyth, *La liturgie oubliée*, p. 127.

the Roman liturgy involved developing that tradition, and adapting it to fit local conditions and changing circumstances. The title provides valuable evidence that the compilers saw themselves as participating in and contributing to a living tradition, not preserving a fossilized one. In the present volume, Yitzhak Hen demonstrates that, in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, Carolingian liturgists felt they had the same freedom to supplement the Roman books with local material, and to adapt them to their own liturgical needs.

For northern clerics, the Old Gelasian collection was particularly useful because it included the prayers for ceremonies which were pastorally important: such as, for example, the Lenten and Eastertide ceremonies of the catechumenate, baptism, and the reconciliation of penitents. Indeed, that collection provides us with our earliest surviving evidence of how northern clerics could have carried out such ceremonies 'in the Roman manner'. An important theme in the Gelasian catechumenal and baptismal ceremonies was that of spiritual gestation: during Lent, the catechumens and public penitents were both seen as growing, in the womb of the Church, towards the new spiritual birth that would be enacted in the baptismal ceremonies of the Easter Vigil.[19] In Lent, the bishop told the catechumens that 'already [in Lent] having conceived you, the pregnant Church rejoices',[20] and images of pregnancy and new birth predominated in the solemn blessing of the font during the Easter Vigil.[21] From the font, as from the womb of the Church, the neophytes would emerge to new life. The baptismal theology of the Gelasian catechumenal and baptismal ceremonies is consistent with that of Leo the Great (pope 440–61), who in his sermon for Christmas Day AD 444 stated that Christ

> placed in the font of Baptism that very origin which he had assumed in the Virgin's womb. He gave to the water what he had given to his Mother. For, the same power of the most high and overshadowing of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35) that caused Mary to bear the Saviour makes the water bring the believer to new birth.[22]

[19] Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 137–41.
[20] '*Iam uobis conceptis pregnans gloriatur ecclesia*', Gelasian Sacramentary, ed. Mohlberg, *et al.* p. 48, par. 309.
[21] Gelasian Sacramentary, ed. Mohlberg, p. 73, par. 445. See E. C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, second edn (London, 1970), pp. 186–7.
[22] *Originem quam sumpsit in utero Virginis, posuit in fonte baptismatis, dedit aquae quod dedit matri: uirtus enim Altissimi et obumbratio Spiritus Sancti, quae fecit ut Maria pareret Saluatorem, eadem facit ut regeneret unda credentem*, Leo I, Sermon 25, par. 5, ed A. Chavasse, *Sancti Leonis Magni Romani pontificis tractatus septem et nonaginta*, 2 vols *CCSL* 138–138A (Turnhout, 1973), vol. I, p. 123, trans. J. Freeland and A. Conway, *Saint Leo the Great: Sermons*, Fathers of the Church 93 (Washington, 1996), p. 103.

The Ruthwell Cross, a sculptured monument some six metres high, can be dated to the first half of the eighth century. It was erected at what eighth-century clerics, including Anglo-Saxon clerics, would have thought of as the ends of the earth: a small ecclesiastical settlement at the extreme north-west of English territory, an area which had only recently come under Anglian control.[23] Nevertheless, that cross provides the most sophisticated visual and verbal celebration, anywhere in pre-Carolingian Europe, of the 'Roman', and in particular the 'Gelasian' ceremonies of Christian initiation: catechumenate and baptism, culminating in the reception of the body of Christ in the Eucharist. For understanding the Ruthwell Cross, it is important to be aware of that unified progression, Catechumenate – Baptism – Eucharist. As we shall see, the cross was designed by an experienced liturgist, for a community which evidently performed some variety of the Roman liturgy, no doubt with the local variants usual in the period. The cross is unique in insular sculpture in being provided with a wealth of inscriptions, in two languages (Latin prose and English verse) and in two scripts, Roman and runic: an eighth-century runic edition of the central narrative of the crucifixion poem, later preserved as *The Dream of the Rood*, forms an essential part of the original design.[24] Clearly the designer was uniquely optimistic about the present and future literacy, and continued liturgical awareness, of his or her community. It is likely that this optimism was unrealistic: when, at the end of the eighth century or at the beginning of the ninth, the community added a crucifixion panel on the base of the first side of the cross, they made no provision for inscriptions on it; and no later high cross, whether from Britain or from Ireland, has anything like the wealth or variety of *tituli* that we find at Ruthwell. It would seem that the golden moment, in which liturgy, literacy, and learning could fuse in a unique synthesis, soon passed, never to recur. A major scholarly problem in discussing the Ruthwell Cross is how to understand, and account for, its uniqueness.

[23] Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, figs. 1–4 (pp. xxi–xxix) provides a full map of the Ruthwell Cross iconography and inscriptions and, in later pages, a full set of photographs of the monument. Good sets of photographs of the monument can also be found in B. Cassidy (ed.), *The Ruthwell Cross* (Princeton, 1992), and in F. Orton, I. Wood, and C.A. Lees, *Fragments of History. Rethinking the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Monuments* (Manchester, 2007).

[24] For recent debate on this question, see E. Okasha, 'Script mixing in Anglo-Saxon inscriptions', in A.R. Rumble (ed.), *Writing and Texts in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2006), pp. 62–70 (at p. 66); É. Ó Carragáin, 'Who then read the Ruthwell poem in the eighth century?', in C. Karkov and H. Damico (eds.), *Aedificia Nova. Studies in Honor of Rosemary Cramp* (Kalamazoo, MI, 2008), pp. 43–75; P. Conner, 'The Ruthwell monument runic poem in a tenth-century context', *Review of English Studies* 59 (2008), pp. 25–51.

The rest of this chapter concentrates on how 'Roman' ideas of the catechumenate, the reconciliation of sinners, and Lent were reflected in a tightly organized series of images on the first broad side of the Ruthwell Cross. It is best to start at the centre of the programme of the first broad side: that side probably faced East originally and, if so, was illuminated each day by the morning sun.[25] Here, between Annunciation and Visitation panels, the designer juxtaposed two images of encounter with Christ (Fig. 4.1). The sequence on the shaft was clearly designed to be read upwards from the Annunciation panel. Just above that panel comes an image of what the catechumenate involved: Christ heals the man blind from birth (John 9:1–38), an image of conversion. Next, above that image of enlightenment and just below the Visitation panel, we get an image of repentance: the woman who was a sinner kneels at the feet of Christ (Luke 7:36–50). Each of these two images had strong associations with Lent, the season in which the catechumens were prepared for baptism, and in which the public sinners, as well as the whole community, did penance. The long captions for these panels quote from appropriate Gospel pericopes, each of which has Lenten associations. The healing of the man blind from birth in St John's Gospel (9:1–38) was chanted as the Gospel for mass on Wednesday of the fourth week in Lent, at a major ceremony (the 'opening of the ears' or *apertio aurium*) in which the four Gospels were symbolically 'handed on' to the catechumens, preparing for Easter baptism.[26] The high-relief sculpture represents the dramatic moment when Christ, having mixed earth with his own spittle, anoints the sightless eyes of the man born blind. Like the archangel Gabriel in the Annunciation panel just below, Christ leans forward slightly. A thin incised line runs from Christ's right hand to the blind man's face (Fig. 4.1): a rod may originally have been attached along this line, to represent, in a vivid three-dimensional image, the rod with which Christ applied to the blind man's eyes earth that he had mixed with his spittle. The designer has chosen to focus our attention on an action which implied that the enlightenment of faith particularly involved a response to Christ, in whom God has become man. Augustine had seen Christ's mixing of his own spittle with (*Adam*-like) earth as symbolizing the way in which Christ had, in his own person, forever unified the divine with the

[25] Throughout this paper, I assume that the Ruthwell Cross was originally designed to stand out of doors, and that it was oriented as the related Bewcastle cross-shaft still is: that is, that the sequence of panels representing Christ acclaimed by the Beasts, and John the Baptist pointing to the Agnus Dei, originally faced west at Ruthwell, as they still do at Bewcastle: see Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 32–47.

[26] For the *apertio aurium* ceremony, see *Ordo Romanus* XI, ed. Andrieu, vol. II, pp. 365–447.

Fig. 4.1. Ruthwell Cross: The Blind Man; Mary Magdalene

human: 'And we were born blind from Adam, and we have need of him who enlightens. He mixed saliva with earth: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."'[27] As we shall see, this first side of the Ruthwell

[27] *Et nos de Adam caeci nati sumus, et illo illuminante opus habemus. Miscuit saliuam cum terra: 'Verbum caro factum est, et habitauit in nobis'*, Augustine, Tractates on St John's Gospel: *Sancti Aurelii Augustini in Ioannis evangelium tractatus CXXIV*, ed. R. Willems, *CCSL* 36 (Turnhout, 1954), *Tractatus* 34, 9, lines 6–8, p. 315. See also *Tractatus* 44, 2, p. 382.

Cross uniquely relates spiritual growth (conversion in this panel, repentance in the panel just above) to the Incarnation of Christ and his growth towards birth in the Virgin's womb. For this designer, conversion and repentance primarily involved responses to the humanity of Christ: only through such responses could Christ's divinity be intuited.

The lection telling of the repentance of the woman who was a sinner (Luke 7:36–50) was read just before Lent. Gregory the Great, followed by Bede, identified this repentant woman with Mary Magdalen. Thus the Ruthwell community would have seen this vivid scene as beginning a major spiritual biography: the repentant love which here brought her forgiveness would lead Mary Magdalen to stand by the cross on Good Friday (John 19:25), and, on Easter Sunday, to be commanded by the risen Christ to announce the resurrection to the apostles (John 20:17). The Ruthwell *titulus* emphasizes how intense her repentance was: 'She brought an alabaster box of ointment, and standing behind, (beside) his feet, she began to moisten his feet with tears, and with the hair of her own head she wiped (them)' (Luke 7:37–8).[28] These verses were paraphrased in a Roman antiphon sung on Holy Thursday, the day when public sinners who, in order to do Lenten penance, had been formally 'expelled' from the church on Ash Wednesday, were reconciled and readmitted in time to celebrate Good Friday and Easter as members of the Christian community.[29] Once more, the designer has chosen to stress that Lenten spiritual growth involves a developing encounter with Christ's incarnate divinity. The sculptor has skewed Christ's legs towards the right of the panel so that both of his feet are visible (Fig. 4.1). Mary's intent face bends over his right foot to bathe it with her tears, while she stretches out her right arm and hand to dry his left foot with a smooth hank of her hair. Mary Magdalen responds here to Christ's humanity, symbolized by his feet, with an intense love which will lead her, as the great contemplative, to worship his divinity by anointing his head (Mark 14:3, 8; Matt. 26:7). As Bede put it,

> By our Lord's head, which Mary anointed, is represented the sublimity of his divinity, and by his feet the humility of his Incarnation. We anoint his feet when we proclaim with due praise the mystery of the Incarnation which he took upon himself, we anoint his head when we venerate the loftiness of his divinity with an assent that is worthy of being spoken of.[30]

[28] *Attulit alabastrvm vnguenti. & stans retro secvs pedes. eivs lacrimis. coepit rigare. pedes eivs. & capillis capitis svi tergebat*: see Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, p. 131.

[29] The antiphon is quoted and discussed in Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, p. 132.

[30] *Per caput autem domini quod unxit Maria sublimitas diuinitatis eius per pedes humilitas incarnationis exprimitur. Et pedes ungimus eius cum mysterium susceptae incarnationis debita laude praedicamus caput ungimus cum excellentiam diuinitatis digna uerbi opinione ueneramur*, Bede, Homilies: *Bedae Venerabilis Homiliarum Evangelii Libri II*, ed. D. Hurst, *CCSL* 122,

The theme of 'the Word made flesh', the Incarnation of divinity in Christ, is an important aspect of the paired images of conversion and repentance we have just examined. But those paired panels are themselves framed by two panels, which together represent Christ's Incarnation and growth towards birth: the Annunciation panel below, and the Visitation panel above, on the upper stone (Figs. 4.2, 4.3). Throughout Europe, the Annunciation and Visitation lections were read, in that order, in the weeks before Christmas: Christ's Advent was seen to comprise three progressive stages, Annunciation-Visitation-Nativity. In the second half of the seventh century, the Annunciation and Visitation lections found additional uses, when the four so-called Marian feasts were introduced into the Roman (and Rome-inspired) liturgical year. The Annunciation was now read, not only in Advent, but also on 25 March, on the feast of the Annunciation; and the Visitation was now read, not only in Advent, but also on 8 September, the Nativity of the Virgin Mary.[31] At Ruthwell, the Annunciation is represented in a remarkably dramatic manner, as a confrontation between the archangel Gabriel, who advances from the left, and the Virgin Mary, who shrinks suddenly back: Mary's dress swings back so far that its hem invades the right border (Fig. 4.2). With her right hand Mary points at her own body just under her chin – a gesture expressing her perplexity – while her left hand clutches her dress in front of her body as though in surprise or alarm. The long Latin *titulus* can be reconstructed as Luke 1:28: 'The angel, coming in, said to her: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" '.[32]

The idea that Mary is blessed among women seems to have been still more strikingly expressed in the damaged Latin *titulus*, in runes, for the Visitation panel on the upper stone (Fig. 4.3). On the left border the name 'Marþ[*a*]' can perhaps be made out: if this reading is correct, it is possible that that damaged border at one time bore the names '[*Maria et*] Marþ[*a*],' with reference to the sisters Mary and Martha of Bethany. The upper border apparently reads 'Mar[*ia*] m[*ate*]r +', 'Mary the mother [of Christ]'. The damaged inscription on the right border begins with runes which read '*dominnæ c* – ', 'ladies – ': apart from the initial letter of the second word, the rest of the phrase is lost. Thus the Visitation panel seems to have praised Mary among other women, taking up the theme of the damaged left-border *titulus* for the Annunciation panel below (Luke 1:28: 'among women': '*in mulieribus*'). It was particularly appropriate to

pp. 1 378 (Turnhout, 1965), Book II, Homily 4, ll. 105–10, p. 210; trans. L.T. Martin and D. Hurst, *Bede. Homilies on the Gospels*, 2 vols. (Kalamazoo, MI, 1991), vol. II, p. 37.

[31] See Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 95–106.

[32] *et ingressus angelus ad eam dixit have gratia plena Dominus tecum benedicta tu in mulieribus*. The *titulus* for the panel is discussed in Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 95–9.

Fig. 4.2. Ruthwell Cross: The Annunciation

name [Mary and] Martha of Bethany among these women. In the first place, we have seen that Mary Magdalen (identified by Gregory the Great and Bede with Mary of Bethany) is movingly represented just below the Visitation panel, at the top of this side of the lower stone (Fig. 4.1): it is possible that the beginning of the runic *titulus*, on the left border of the Visitation panel ('[*maria et*] marþ[*a*]'), was designed to be read upwards, starting from just above the Mary Magdalen panel, in order to reinforce

Fig. 4.3. Ruthwell Cross: The Visitation; the Archer

the thematic unity of the two stones. Secondly, the usual Gospel for the feast of the Virgin Mary's death and entry into heaven (15 August) was the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42). On that day, the greatest Marian feast of the year, Christ's praise of Mary Magdalen, 'Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her',[33] was by

[33] Luke 10:42: *Maria optimam partem elegit quae non auferetur ab ea.*

implication applied to the Virgin herself. The transference of the lection, from the Magdalen to the Virgin, was startling but appropriate: the lection told how Mary of Bethany had chosen not to be a handmaid like Martha, but to listen to God's word. Christ's praise of her choice was now, on 15 August, used to honour her namesake, the Virgin Mary: the handmaid of the Lord whose free choice to bear the Word would cause all generations to call her blessed.[34] At Ruthwell, as usual, the spiritual implications of the liturgy are explored: the designer could hardly have found a more forceful way to reiterate the idea, already expressed on the lower stone, that Mary was blessed among women. In the Ruthwell Visitation panel the two mothers, Mary (left) and Elizabeth (right), celebrate their pregnancies with remarkably physical gestures. Elizabeth's open left hand, on which the separate fingers and thumb can be distinguished, touches and feels the life within Mary's womb, while Mary's right forearm reaches out to touch her cousin's left upper arm. Mary thus agrees, and collaborates with, the exploratory gesture of her cousin.

The Ruthwell designer directed our attention to the significance of those two pregnancies by placing a vivid archer, drawing his bow, in the small crosshead-panel just above the Visitation scene and below the lost transom (Fig. 4.3). Slung over the archer's left shoulder, and hanging down in front of his body, a large satchel acts as his quiver. In the satchel is a rectangular object, its edges slightly bevelled: the satchel seems to be a book-satchel, and the square object a copy of the Gospels or of Scripture.[35] This archer seems to take his ammunition from the word of God: in Christian commentary, archers were traditionally seen as images of the preacher, who shoots the words of Scripture into the hearts of his audience.[36] But it is likely that the reference in this archer panel is not general but specific: to Christ himself, the Word incarnate, and his cousin, John the Baptist, the 'messenger' (Mark 1:2: Latin, *angelus*). The key to interpreting the archer panel, and its context on the upper stone, is a passage from Isaiah (49:1–7) which certainly had particular resonance for clerical audiences in Northumbria, 'at the ends of the earth', because it began 'Audite insulae':

> Listen, ye islands, and give ear, ye people from afar
> The Lord has called me from the womb,
> From my mother's belly he has remembered my name
> And he has made my mouth like a sharp sword.

[34] Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, p. 102.
[35] É. Ó Carragáin, 'The Ruthwell crucifixion poem in its iconographic and liturgical contexts', *Peritia* 6–7 (1987–8), pp. 1–71 (at pp. 41–2), *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 141–3.
[36] B. Raw, 'The archer, the eagle, and the lamb', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 30 (1967), pp. 391–4.

In the shadow of his hand he has protected me,
and has placed me as a chosen arrow:
he has hidden me in his quiver[37]

Early Christian commentary was unanimous in seeing this passage as a prophecy of the Incarnation of Christ, whose divine nature was hidden in a human body and further hidden, from Annunciation to Nativity, in the womb of the Virgin Mary.[38] For most of the year, we may assume that a literate member of the Ruthwell community would have seen the archer as primarily a reminder that, in the Visitation panel just below, Christ was still 'hidden in [God's] quiver', the womb of the Virgin Mary; and that the archer panel itself was a visual metaphor for the birth of Christ, the 'chosen arrow' who would then also be 'the light shining in the darkness' (John 1:5) of midwinter. But just after the summer solstice, on the feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist (24 June), these same verses were reshaped to form the *libretto* of the Introit, or solemn entrance-chant, for the mass of the day, *De ventre matris meae*:

Antiphon: From my mother's womb the Lord has called me by my name: he 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.[39]

The first scriptural reading for that midsummer Mass reminded every literate cleric of the source from which the Introit *libretto* had been shaped: it was the passage from Isaiah that we have just discussed ('Audite insulae', 49:1–7).[40] It is reasonable to conclude that, during the summer season in particular, the Ruthwell community would have seen the archer panel as primarily a reminder that, in the Visitation panel just below, John the Baptist was still 'hidden in [God's] quiver', the womb of Elizabeth; and that in the archer panel their community, a 'people from afar', had found a visual metaphor to represent the midsummer birth of John the Baptist, who 'was not the light, but came to give testimony

[37] English trans. by the present author, from *Biblia sacra Vulgata*, ed. R. Weber (Stuttgart, 1994): all quotations from the Vulgate are from this edition: *audite insulae et adtendite populi de longe : Dominus ab utero vocavit me / De ventre matris meae recordatus est nominis mei : Et posuit os meum quasi gladium acutum / In umbra manus suae protexit me / Et posuit me sicut sagittam electam : In faretra sua abscondit me.*

[38] For a comprehensive survey of commentary on the passage, see R.L. Wilken, A.R. Christman and M.J. Hollerich (trans.) *Isaiah Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, The Church's Bible (Grand Rapids, 2007), pp. 363–74.

[39] Trans. by the present author from R.J. Hesbert (ed.) *Antiphonale Missarum Sextuplex* (Brussels, 1935), no. 119, pp. 134–5: *ANT. De ventre matris meae vocavit me Dominus nomen meo & posuit os meum ut gladium acutum sub tegumentum manus suae protexit me posuit me quasi sagittam electam.*

[40] A. Chavasse, *Les lectionnaires romains de la Messe*, 2 vols. (Fribourg-en-Suisse, 1993), vol. II, p. [illegible]

to the light' (John 1:8). It is worth noting, in passing, how daringly original were the liturgists (from Rome or from elsewhere?) who composed the mass for John's Nativity. Even though the patristic tradition always referred Isaiah 49 to Christ, never to John, an unnamed liturgist now put it in John's own mouth: this transference of a scriptural lection, from Christ to his cousin, was just as daring as the transference, discussed above, of Christ's praise of Mary of Bethany into praise of his mother, the Virgin Mary. The Introit *De ventre matris meae* provided an unforgettable tribute to John on his birthday, and stressed the uniquely intimate links between the two cousins, whose conceptions and births were celebrated (in both the Roman and Gallican liturgies[41]) in a solar cycle which spanned the four seasons. Christ, the light of the world (John 1:5) was celebrated near the equinox and solstice on which the sun grew more powerful: his conception on the 25 March (the seventh day before the first of April: VIII kalendas apriles) and his birth on 25 December (VIII kalendas ianuarias). John, who was not the light, but who gave testimony to the light (John 1:8) was celebrated near the equinox and solstice on which the sun began to diminish: his conception on 24 September (VIII kalendas octobres) and his birth on 24 June (VIII kalendas iulias). Near the turning points of the sun's yearly course the liturgists who designed the Christian solar cycle created a cosmic cross-pattern: its rationale is summed up in the Baptist's words 'it is for him to grow greater, and for me to grow less'.[42]

To sum up: educated clerics, nuns or monks at Ruthwell, who regularly saw the monument and who participated in the normal liturgical life of a clerical or monastic community, would have come, in the course of each year, to see the Visitation-Archer sequence as multivalent. Towards midsummer, the archer panels would have primarily interested them as a metaphor for the midsummer Nativity of John the Baptist, who in the Visitation panel was still in the womb of Elizabeth (the figure on the right); towards midwinter, the archer would have primarily interested them as a metaphor for the midwinter Nativity of Christ himself, who in the Visitation panel was still in the womb of Mary. If, while it still stood in the open air, the Ruthwell Cross was oriented as the Bewcastle cross-shaft still is, Mary, whose son's conception and birth were celebrated on the 'growing days', stood on the south side of the Visitation panel,

[41] On the early feasts of John the Baptist, see L. Duchesne, *Christian Worship. Its Origin and Evolution* (London, 1912), p. 271; A. Cardinali, 'Giovanni Battista', in F. Caraffa and S. Morelli (eds.), *Bibliotheca sanctorum*, 13 vols., repr. (Rome, 1998), vol. VI, cols. 599–634 (esp. cols. 609–10).

[42] John 3:30 *illum oportet crescere me autem minui*; see Ó Carrágain, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. [illegible]

and looked towards the north. Elizabeth, whose son's conception and birth were celebrated on the 'lessening days', stood on the north side and looked towards the south. Neither of these alternative perspectives would ever have contradicted the other: if, in due season, one might have been of primary interest, the other was always present and also accepted. Each seasonal perspective complemented and enriched the other, in the course of the liturgical year. At the relevant Nativity, at midsummer and midwinter, the community celebrated how a 'chosen arrow', no longer 'hidden in [God's] quiver' as in the Visitation panel just below, had set out to pierce human hearts with God's word.[43] This side of the upper stone continually reminded the Ruthwell community that, by carrying out their divine missions, the two 'chosen arrows' had transformed the history of the world and, in recent centuries, particularly that of Ireland and Britain, those 'peoples from afar'. Christianity had come from the south, and it is probable that the archer aimed his arrow towards the north, the region of cold and darkness.[44]

Jennifer O'Reilly has written eloquently of the importance, for Bede, of the idea that Britain and Ireland were northern islands at the ends of the earth.[45] In the Codex Amiatinus, the only marginal note to the Old Testament certainly added at Wearmouth-Jarrow specified Isaiah 49:1ff. as the Old Testament passage read at mass on the Nativity of John the Baptist (24 June): we can be certain, therefore, that that feast was celebrated at Wearmouth-Jarrow.[46] In commissioning the Codex Amiatinus, and setting off in June 716 to bring it to Rome, Abbot Ceolfrid was careful to emphasize that the islands had listened, and had incorporated Isaiah's prophecy into their own liturgical life in far-off Northumbria. Just as eloquently, the Ruthwell Cross makes a similar statement: that the Ruthwell community, having assimilated the implications of the Lenten catechumenate, understood that growth to spiritual maturity involves re-enacting the growth of Christ towards birth from the Virgin's womb.

[43] É. Ó Carragáin, 'Chosen arrows, first hidden then revealed: the Visitation-Archer sequence as a key to the unity of the Ruthwell Cross', in S. Baxter, C. Karkov, J. L. Nelson, and D. Pelteret (eds.), *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald* (Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT, 2009) pp. 185–204.

[44] On the symbolic significance of 'north' in medieval imagery, see B. Maurmann, *Die Himmelsrichtungen im Weltbild des Mittelalters*, Münstersche Mittelalterschriften 33 (Munich, 1976), pp. 135–203; Ó Carrágain, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 141–3.

[45] J. O'Reilly, 'Islands and idols at the ends of the earth: exegesis and conversion in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*', in S. Lebecq *et al.* (eds.), *Bède le Vénérable. Entre tradition et postérité* (Lille, 2005), pp. 119–45.

[46] Codex Amiatinus, fol. 526r: see R. Marsden, *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 189.

If, as seems likely, the first broad side of the Ruthwell Cross, the side we have just examined, faced east, the sun shone on that side every morning. In the course of the day, the sun swung past the south side, with its great vine-scroll for which the designer provided an ekphrastic vernacular verse *titulus* in runes. The two great columns of runes on the south side are designed to be read sunwise: first the right-hand column, then the left. They tell, in a uniquely original narrative, how on Good Friday Christ's Cross itself had bowed down to present his dead body to his followers, gathered from afar, who received and contemplated that body.[47] This vernacular narrative must have posed a challenge to any onlooker who read the runes, or heard them sung: how were they, here and now at Ruthwell, to recognize and contemplate Christ's body? Each afternoon, the sun suggested a majestic answer to this challenge: towards evening it shone on a uniquely rich sequence of Eucharistic images on the second broad side of the cross (Figs. 4.4, 4.5). In that sequence (reading from the bottom of the shaft) Christ is made known on the return from Egypt (like the manna in the desert); in the breaking of bread, as at Iona (in the Columban image of priest-monks breaking bread together, as Sts Paul and Anthony, monks but not priests, had once done in the desert); as acclaimed even by two wild beasts, who cross their paws between their bodies to form a *chi-* (X-) pattern (Fig. 4.4), the initial letter of the messianic title, 'Christ'; and, on the upper stone, as the Agnus Dei (Fig. 4.5). This second broad side thus brings to completion the catechumenal programme of the first side: during the Easter Vigil, as the climax of the rites of initiation, the neophytes (including infants) always proceeded, or were carried by their godparents, from the baptismal font to receive their first Communion.[48]

On the second broad side of the upper stone Christ and John the Baptist, hidden but implied in the Visitation panel and referred to metaphorically in the Archer panel, are finally revealed in eschatological glory. John the Baptist, now fully grown, stands facing the viewer (the original majesty of his standing figure is lessened by damage to the panel). Clad in soft (liturgical?) garments, he points across his body towards the Agnus Dei, who stands proudly, cradled in John's left arm (the Lamb faces in the same direction as the archer on the opposite side: perhaps north originally). The scene clearly refers to the heavenly liturgy of the Apocalypse, in which the Lamb of God is a central figure.[49] The Agnus Dei, and its place

[47] For the text, and full analysis, see Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 180–222.

[48] Ibid., pp. 125–6.

[49] See Revelation 4:1–6:17, and J. Hawkes, É. Ó Carragáin, and R. Trench-Jellicoe, 'John the Baptist and the *Agnus Dei*: Ruthwell (and Bewcastle) revisited', *Antiquaries Journal* 89 (2009), pp. 131–83.

Fig. 4.4. Ruthwell Cross: Priests breaking bread; Christ acclaimed by two beasts

in the heavenly liturgy, had become, since the beginning of the eighth century, an important feature of the Roman mass: Pope Sergius had directed that the chant 'Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, Miserere nobis' ('Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy

Fig. 4.5. Ruthwell Cross: John the Baptist acclaims the Agnus Dei; St Matthew acclaimed by his symbol, the Angel

on us') should be sung repeatedly in each mass by the assistants and people while the celebrant silently broke bread for Communion.[50] If, on

[50] R. Ó Carragáin, 'Liturgical innovations associated with Pope Sergius and the iconography of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses', in R. Farrell (ed.), *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, BAR 46 (London, 1978), pp. 131–47; Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 163, 447 9.

the first side of the upper stone, the *titulus* of every panel (even when, as in the Visitation panel, it was in Latin) was 'hidden' in runic script, now on the second side every *titulus* is proclaimed in Latin and in Roman script, the language and script of learning and of liturgical celebration. The designer has 'placed' the two scripts so as to reinforce the iconographic progression between the panels: from chosen arrows, hidden in God's quiver, to the full revelation of John's continuing role, now in the liturgy of heaven, as messenger of the Lamb's triumph. Like the Codex Amiatinus and the Lindisfarne Gospels, the Ruthwell Cross asserts, with confident coherence, that the community at Ruthwell have grasped the essentials of the Roman liturgy; that they have enriched it in local script with a highly original local narrative of Christ's heroic death (the runic verse *tituli* for the vine-scrolls of the lower stone); and that they have also placed a panel designed to recall the new Roman 'Agnus Dei' chant for the breaking of bread in significant relationship to a panel designed to recall a local (Iona) tableau for the Eucharistic breaking of bread between abbot and visiting priest (the 'Paul and Anthony' panel).[51]

Simply to point out the liturgical reminiscences on the Ruthwell Cross is to miss the point: it is vital to understand that these reminiscences have been transformed into a unique imaginative construct, at once visual and verbal, which in the service of its unified 'local theology' brings together sculpture, iconography, and poetic chant, in Latin and English, in Roman script and runes.[52] The designer's most interesting achievement was to develop, from a profound knowledge which can only have come with years of practice, a coherent meditation on the relevance of public rituals, most but not all derived from Rome, to the devotional life of the Ruthwell community. However, it is only by attention to eighth-century liturgical practice that we can appreciate the ideas and themes from which this synthesis was fashioned: those modern studies which ignore or dismiss the liturgical evidence have invariably failed to appreciate the coherence of the cross, and in particular the function and dynamism of the upper stone.[53] We do not possess a single page of manuscript

[51] É. Ó Carragáin, 'Ruthwell and Iona: the meeting of St Paul and St Anthony revisited', in M. Meek (ed.), *The Modern Traveller to our past. Studies in honour of Ann Hamlin* (Gretton, Northants, 2006), pp. 138–44; Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 153–60.

[52] On the concept of 'local theologies', see T. O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology. Humanity, World and God in Early Irish Writings* (London and New York, 2000), pp. 7–10.

[53] P. Meyvaert, 'A new perspective on the Ruthwell Cross: Ecclesia and Vita Monastica', in Cassidy (ed.), *The Ruthwell Cross*, pp. 95–166, misinterpreted both the Visitation and the *Agnus Dei* panels on the upper stone and, on that basis, proposed that that stone should be reversed. In this disintegrative approach, he was followed by P. O'Neill, *'A pillar curiously engraven, with some inscription upon it': What is the Ruthwell Cross?*, BAR, British Series 397 (Oxford, 2005), and by Orton, Wood, and Lees, *Fragments of History*

evidence for the existence of the vanished community at Ruthwell: but their great high cross still proclaims that they, 'at the ends of the earth', shaped images, derived from rituals imported both from Rome and from Iona, into a new and uniquely coherent exploration of how spiritual growth in the womb of the Church could lead to Eucharistic participation in Christ's heroic death and to his acclamation, in the liturgies of earth and of heaven, as 'Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi'.

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press,
New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521192170

First published 2011

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-19217-0 Hardback

Contents