1961

The Relation of the Veneration of the Cross to the Dream of the Rood

Mary Ignatia O'Connor
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License. Copyright © 1961 Mary Ignatia O'Connor
THE RELATION OF THE VENERATION
OF THE CROSS TO THE
DREAM OF THE ROOD

by

Sister M. Ignatia O'Connor, O.S.B.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

February
1961
LIFE

Sister Mary Ignatia O'Connor, O.S.B., was born in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, November 24, 1911.

She was graduated from St. Scholastica High School, Chicago, Illinois, June, 1929, and from Mount St. Scholastica College, Atchison, Kansas, June, 1936, with the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

In 1935 she took summer courses in speech pathology and stagecraft at the University of Iowa. From 1936 to 1942 she studied at the Goodman Memorial Theatre of the Art Institute of Chicago and was instructor in speech and drama at St. Scholastica High School, Chicago. From 1936 to the present time the author has also been teaching English and French at the same high school. She began her graduate studies in English at Loyola University in June, 1950. In the summer of 1958 she was a member of the Hill Foundation Language Workshop at St. Teresa's College, Winona, Minnesota, and is currently enrolled at the Institute of Languages and Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, D. C.

In collaboration with Florence Mahoney she is co-author of Angel Wing, St. Paul, Catechetical Guild, 1952.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Source of the poem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Purpose of the poem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Purpose of the thesis</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Examination of the doctrinal ideas contained in the poem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Explication of the references and allusions to the cult of the cross</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Procedure of the author</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Major problems of the thesis</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Doctrinal subject matter as opposed to the structure of the poem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Apparent disunity between structure and content</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Source of emotion and imagery in the poem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Poetic style as opposed to the doctrinal basis of the poem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Historical background of the poem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Review of scholarship relative to the topic</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. THE DOCTRINAL BASIS OF THE POEM</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Summary of the doctrine contained in the poem</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Doctrine of Redemption</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Doctrine of the veneration of the cross</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Analysis of the doctrinal content of the poem</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Subject matter derived from a contemporary cult rooted in a doctrinal inheritance</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Subject matter divided into four parts in order to reflect the doctrine and deal with the cult</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a. Victory .............................................. 13
b. Redemption ....................................... 14
c. Suffering ........................................... 17
d. Other related dogmas .............................. 17
C. Analysis of the doctrinal basis of the poetic structure ........................................ 18
1. Fact of the triumph ................................ 19
2. Nature of the triumph ............................. 19
3. Story of the triumph ............................... 20
4. Premulgation of the triumph ..................... 21
D. Analysis of the problem of unity in the poem ......................................................... 31
1. Apparent disunity of structure and content of the poem ................................. 31
   a. Deviation of the structural pattern from the inner line of theological content .... 31
   b. Accumulation of elliptical patterns in the imaginative grasp of dogmas ....... 32
   c. Flux of emotion in the doctrinal interpolations ................................. 33
2. Possibility of organic unity in the poem ......................................................... 34
   a. Popular consciousness of doctrine ......................................................... 34
      (1) Age of faith .................................... 35
      (2) Monastic system of education ......................................................... 35
   b. Nature of doctrine .................................. 35
      (1) No intrinsic change ........................................ 35
      (2) Some extrinsic explication ........................................... 35
E. Evaluation of doctrinal basis and doctrinal unity of the poem ................................ 38
1. Evidence of subject matter and treatment characteristic of the Patristic period ..... 39
2. Evidence of subject matter and treatment characteristic of the Scholastic period ...... 39
III. THE CULT OF THE CROSS: A SOURCE OF EMOTION AND OF IMAGERY IN THE POETIC STRUCTURE ........................................ 41
A. Poetic awareness of the cult evident in a tabular analysis of the content of the poem ......................................................... 41
1. Nature of poetic knowledge in general intuitive and imaginative ......................... 41
2. Principal means of expression of poetic knowledge ........................................... 41
   a. Emotion ........................................... 41
   b. Imagery ........................................... 41
3. Source of poetic knowledge as a creative experience ........................................ 41
   a. Poetic intuition sustained and absorbed over a period of time ..................... 41
   b. Poetic knowledge transmitted as the complete content of the poet's mind ........ 41
B. Liturgical source of emotion and imagery
   evident in the content of the poem

1. Context of the liturgy
2. Participation in the liturgy

C. Cult of the cross evident in emotion and imagery
   of the poem

1. Emotion and imagery suggested by the liturgy combined into a single creative image
2. Emotion and imagery suggested by the liturgy reproduced in the order presented in the liturgy
   a. Spatial
   b. Temporal

D. Parallel analysis evident between the poetic emotion and imagery and the contemporary cult of the cross

1. Observance of the vigil for Good Friday
2. Adoration of the Paraseve
   a. Exaltation of the cross
   b. Veneration of the cross
   c. Other peripheral rites of the cross
3. Reading of the lessons and prayers for Good Friday

E. Final evaluation of emotion and imagery

1. Cult of the cross a major source used to reveal
   the poetic significance of the subject
2. Poet's interpretation of the emotion and imagery
   quickened by use of a creative symbol: the speaking cross

IV. THE CENTRAL CONCEPT IN THE POETIC FORM: A CREATIVE INTERPRETATION OF DOCTRINES AND LITURGY

A. Nature of the central concept

1. Apparently determined by ideas or structural pattern
2. Actually determined by the poetic form
   a. Nature of form in general
      (1) Form as a structural factor
      (2) Form as a constitutive principle
   b. Form in the Dream of the Road
      (1) Determined by essence of the poetic experience
      (2) Operative on liturgical art-principle
      of transfiguration
B. Importance of the central concept ............... 74
   1. Controlling purpose of the poem ............... 74
      a. Determines the technique of expression .... 74
      b. Dictates the logic of construction ......... 74
      c. Inspires the type of imagery ............... 75
      d. Suggests the point of emotional emphasis ... 75
   2. Basis of a creative interpretation of subject matter ............. 75
      a. Imitation as defined by Aristotle .......... 75
      b. Imitation as achieved in the Dream of the Rood ... 76
C. Image of the Wood as the unifying concept ........ 76
   1. Significance of the key words for the poet .... 77
   2. Significance of the key words for the reader ... 80
D. Final measurement of poetic unity determined by the appropriateness of the genres selected ........... 87
   1. Definition of genre as opposed to form in poetry .......... 87
   2. Identification of the genres found in the Dream of the Rood ........... 87
      a. Lyric heightens the sense of joy and exultation ... 87
      b. Dramatic projects the dream-vision for the poet and evokes the empathy of the reader ... 88
      c. Heroic encourages the hope of ultimate success and happiness .................. 89
   3. Effect of the genres selected for the Dream of the Rood ................. 90
E. Summary of the creative interpretation achieved through the central concept .............. 94
   1. Spiritual and aesthetic elements fused in the poetic form .................. 94
   2. Unifying principle sustained through the central concept ............. 95
   3. Transfiguring catharsis operative in the dream-vision ............. 95

V. CONCLUSION ........................................ 96
   A. Summary of findings ......................... 96
   B. Unity of form, content and style ........... 100

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................. 102
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The *Dream of the Rood* is the first piece of literature in the English language which deals with the theme of the cross. The poem is contained in the *Codex Vercellensis*, a miscellany of Anglo-Saxon homilies interspersed with six other poems: *Andrew*, *Fates of the Apostles*, *Address of the Soul to the Body*, *Falseness of Man* (fragment); *Dream of the Rood*; and *Elene*. This manuscript of 136 folios, written in tenth-century West Saxon, is still in the capitular library of St. Andrew's at Vercelli in northern Italy.

Two of the poems contained in the *Codex* deal with the theme of the cross: *Elene* and the *Dream of the Rood*. *Elene* is fundamentally a narrative about the finding of the cross. The *Dream of the Rood*, a religious lyric, offers, with classic restraint and a depth of genuine emotion, a masterful interpretation of the whole Christian spirit of adoration. In the key lines of the poem, the selection of the theme of the cross is justified and the poet's purpose is disclosed: to preludiate the veneration of the cross.

unveil in words that this wood is glorious
since God Almighty suffered on it
for the many sins of all mankind,
and for Adam's deed done long ago. (Lines 97–100)¹

It is the purpose of this thesis to explicate all references and allusions to the cult of the cross and to examine the doctrinal and liturgical basis of the poem. No attempt, however, will be made to treat the poem itself as a source of material which directly confirms the growth of the cult. Such an approach would be proper to a theological treatise, which this study in no way claims to be.

In order to parallel the text closely in developing an analysis and appreciation of the doctrinal influences evident in the poem, the writer will deal with the initial explication in running commentary style. The original Anglo-Saxon has been retained in quotations from the poem which are cited in Chapters III and IV because in these chapters the emotion, imagery and other poetic elements are under analysis. In Chapter II, however, which deals fundamentally with the doctrinal basis of the poem, a translation of the text has been used, since there is never any intrinsic change in doctrinal material. For this same reason the writer has seen fit to base most of her analysis of the doctrinal content in the poem on the statements of modern theologians.

One term used within the text of the thesis needs careful definition: form. Form is to be understood as the vital principle which animates the poem, determining the technique, controlling the structure, creating the central concept or generic character of the subject matter and the interpretation the poet wishes to give it.

The writer's research on the Dyse of the Road has been limited to four very simple problems, the answers to which have suggested the major subdivisions of the thesis. Does the doctrinal basis of the poem explain the poetic structure of the poem? Is there a real or only an apparent disunity
between structure and content? To what extent do the emotion and imagery suggest an awareness of the cult of the cross? Is the poem interpretative of both doctrine and cult through the use of a central image? The deep-felt emotional response evident in the poet's style as opposed to the doctrinal basis of the poem has indicated to the present writer the necessity of investigating also, though somewhat briefly, the historical background of the poem, particularly in its relation to the contemporary cult of the cross.

The Codex containing the Dream of the Reed was first discovered at Verceillii in 1822 by a German scholar, Dr. Elms, who extracted all the poems in the manuscript and published them. In 1843 they were translated into English verse and edited by J. N. Kembie. Stephens made the first translation into verse in 1866.

Less than fifty years prior to the discovery of the Verceilli manuscript in Italy, archaeologists in the British Isles came upon an immense Latin cross carved from native Northumbrian rock at Ruthwell in Amandale, eight miles from Dumfriesshire near the Scottish border. This beautiful cross of red sandstone, seventeen and one-half feet tall, with a shaft two feet broad at the base and fifteen inches thick, was sculptured with flowers, foliage, and figure-subjects from the New Testament. Carved on the narrow strips that

2 Stopford A. Brooke, English Literature from the Beginning to the Norman Conquest, New York, 1898, 325.


framed the transverse panels of the cross were scroll patterns and inscriptions in Roman capitals and old Teutonic runes which told in verse the story of a vision of the Holy Rood. 5

The occasion and date of erection of this elaborate cross have never been clearly determined, but it stood in the church at Ruthwell until 1642. 6 On July the twenty-seventh of that year, the General Assembly at St. Andrew's, inflamed by Puritan zeal, ordered that it be overthrown on the earthen floor of the church and broken along with all other semblances of papist idolatry found in the precincts. When this legislation was executed, the horizontal shafts of the cross were lost; and the mutilated pieces were not reassembled until 1790. After its restoration in 1823, the large shaft was set up once again in the old manse garden of the church at Ruthwell. Under the Ancient Monuments Act of 1887 the cross was given proper recognition once again and was transferred to the apse of the church at Dumfriesshire where it still stands today. 7

None but archaeologists were concerned with the Ruthwell cross until Kemble announced in 1842 that the lines of poetry carved on the cross corresponded with fourteen lines of the Dream of the Rood as recorded in the Vercelli manuscript. The poem then merited consideration in the field of both paleography and iconography, and the relative dates of the Vercelli poem and the Ruthwell inscriptions became the subject of extensive cross-examination by scholars in both fields of research. Was the Ruthwell cross a coadjutor of the

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
Vercelli poem? Was the latter perhaps a composite text expanded originally from a shorter, simpler version, from which the Ruthwell inscriptions were extracted? Or was the Vercelli recension the product of an amanuensis who had recorded a complete original text?

There is no question but that the Vercelli manuscript was written and produced in England, though the tenth-century West Saxon form may have been a copy of an earlier version. All Anglo-Saxon prose surviving in late manuscripts passed into the West Saxon tongue, which became the literary medium for English prose and verse when the cultural center shifted from Northumbria to Wessex. 8

No direct evidence, however, exists in explanation of the presence of an old English codex in Italy; and what indirect evidence there is in the Guala story is far from conclusive. 9 For paleographical reasons the work has been assigned to the second half of the tenth century. 10

Still another trace of the poem is to be found in the carving on an eleventh-century reliquary of the true cross in St. Michael's Cathedral, Brussels. 11 The couplet bears a fundamental resemblance to the thought sequence expressed in Lines 42, 44, and 48 of the Dream of the Rood.

Rood is my name. Once long ago I bore
Trembling, bedewed with blood, the mighty King.


That the reliquary was the handiwork of an English craftsman may be deduced from the verses inscribed on it: "Aethelmaer and Aethelwold his brother, caused this cross to be made to the glory of Christ, for the soul of Aelfric their brother." This type of inscription on memorial crosses and other works of art was in common use in England before the Norman Conquest. However, the presence on a Brussels cross of lines resembling the Vercelli poem does not in any way argue that the inscription on the reliquary and that on the Ruthwell cross were both adapted from the Codex. The exact origin of the poem remains unknown.

A conclusive theory of authorship is no less difficult to establish. Three old English poems have as their theme the veneration of the cross: Klæm and Christ III, bearing Cynewulf's signature, and the Dream of the Reed. Klæm is narrative; Christ III and the Dream of the Reed are both lyrics. Klæm and the Dream of the Reed contain references to a conversion of life following a vision of the cross. In line 126 of the Dream of the Reed, line 851 of Christ III, and line 1297 of Klæm, the poet prostrates himself in prayer before the cross and begs, in strikingly similar language, for release into the land of eternal joy. In all three poems the author glorifies Christ as a heroic warrior of the New Testament and His cross as the symbol of victory, and in general amplifies a type of subject matter drawn ostensibly from doctrinal and liturgical sources.

Only four poems of Cynewulf's, however, are signed, and only these

---

13 Brooke, English Literature, 197.
our can be accepted as authentic: Elene, Christ III, Fates of the Apostles, and Juliana.

We must not forget that anonymous survivals of an imaginative literature all resemble each other in certain respects, but they do not, however, necessarily point to the style of a single author. Also, in consideration of the uncertainties which are still extant in the field of Anglo-Saxon poetry, let us content ourselves with studying only authentic works, signed by the poet himself, and leave to subsequent investigation the pseudo-Cynwulfian texts. 14

Contemporary scholars, notably Kennedy, favor the theory that the Dream of the Rood was composed by a poet or poets of the Cynwulfian school, not because The Fates of the Apostles and Elene, the two poems bearing the runic signature of Cynwulf, are contained in the Vercelli Codex, but because of the sensitive lyric style discernible in the Dream of the Rood, the skill in phrasing and imagery, and the reverence shown in handling the theme of the cross. 15

In 1943 Kennedy was willing to admit Cynwulfian authorship on the basis of similar diction in Elene and Christ III. 16 Juliana also reveals a close parallel to the long epic lines in the Dream of the Rood. More recently,

14 Marguerite-Marie Dubois, Les Éléments Latins dans la poésie Religieuse de Cynwulf, Paris, 1943, 50. "Il ne faut pas oublier que divers moments d'une langue imagée se ressemblent tous par quelques points mais qu'ils ne caractérisent pas pour autant le génie d'un unique auteur. Aussi, devant les incertitudes qui règnent encore dans le domaine de la poésie Anglo-Saxonne, nous [sic] contenterons-nous d'envisager l'œuvre authentique, signée par l'ouvrier lui-même, en reservant pour une étude ultérieure le groupe des textes pseudo-cynwulfiens."

15 Kennedy, Early English Christian, 79.

however, Kennedy has hesitated to suggest that authorship can be determined so precisely. "There is little firm evidence to establish authorship of the poem, Cynwulfian or otherwise," he concluded in 1952. "At most we know that we have here a lyric of religious faith and adoration, somewhat in the Cynwulfian manner."17 Krapp, too, although he conceded that Cynwulfian authorship was not unlikely, refused to recognize positively any theory based on general and circumstantial evidence.18

Confronted with the problematical data available from these recent investigations concerning the Dream of the Reed, the writer has found herself in accord with a statement of Magoun: "At this date, speculation about origins is rather idle."19 The calculation of definite sources, although certainly not to be deplored, has seemed relatively less important than the investigation, for example, of the doctrinal basis of the poem, of the underlying principles governing the poetic structure, and the use of a central image for poetic interpretation of both doctrine and liturgy inherent in the poem.

A similar study of this kind, unavailable to the present writer, was completed at Harvard University in 1933 by George Douglas Chrétien: The Relation of "The Dream of the Reed" to the Ruthwell Cross and to the Veneration of the Cross. Because of the consideration Chrétien evidently gives to the Ruthwell cross, it is probable that the purpose of his work was to investigate

17 Kennedy, Early English Christian, 79.
18 Krapp, Verselli, xi.
the external forms of the veneration of the cross as expressed in Old English Christian art and literature. For such a study of origins and chronology, the method of historical criticism may well have been employed.

In the present thesis the writer would like to offer, in contrast, an *explication de texte* of the *Dream of the Reed* in terms of the doctrinal and liturgical heritage underlying both the content and the style of the poem. So far as the writer has been able to determine, no original criticism of the poem has, to date, been undertaken from this particular point of view.

It is hoped that the present elementary study may help to stimulate renewed interest in a "body of verse that has the timeless vitality of Christianity itself."20 The *Dream of the Reed* and other Anglo-Saxon religious poems belong to the literary tradition which is a part of our western culture. We cannot claim such a wealth of religious poetry in the language that we can afford to neglect the contributions of these early English writers. They merit further consideration in the field of twentieth-century criticism.

CHAPTER II

THE DOCTRINAL BASIS OF THE DREAM OF THE ROOD

The subject matter of the *Dream of the Rood* is derived from the doctrine of Redemption and the doctrine of the veneration of the cross. This doctrinal basis of the poem may be summarized in a single statement: Christ conquered, but He had no easy claim to victory.

The unknown author of the *Dream of the Rood* establishes the essential unity of his poetic form through his use of the doctrine of Redemption as expounded in the theology of St. Paul: "For it has pleased God the Father that in His all His fulness should dwell, and that through Him he should reconcile to Himself all things, whether on the earth or in the heavens, making peace through the blood of His cross."¹

The doctrine of the veneration of the cross, as it had shaped itself during the early ages of the Church, is also evident throughout the poem. Every touchstone of the doctrine is incorporated in the subject matter, not, of course, in the precise vocabulary of a theological treatise, but in tracing the essential idea underlying the doctrine of Redemption: the cross of suffering is the cross of glory.

Without the suffering of Christ on Calvary, the cross, so long an

---

¹ Col. 1, 19-20.
object of contempt and disgrace, would never have been glorified. In fact, Christianity would have had no cross to venerate. But once the redeeming death had been consummated, it was fitting that a genuine, clear-cut veneration or cult should be rendered to the relics of the true cross and to all its images or representations. The doctrine of the veneration of the cross is, then, based on the doctrine of Redemption, of which it is a corollary.

The death on the cross was freely chosen by the Redeemer, in preference to any other, for reasons mysterious and infinitely wise . . . It [the cross] has truly been the blessed instrument of universal redemption and the redemption of every individual soul . . . It was [is] then the weapon with which we, through our Saviour, have vanquished the demon, with which we, too, in Christ, have triumphed over the powers of darkness and regained the hope of our salvation.

A survey of the doctrinal content of the poem as a whole demonstrates even more fully the degree to which the subject matter, derived from this contemporary cult of the cross, is rooted in a doctrinal inheritance. Such preliminary analysis seems to indicate that the poet has divided his subject matter into four major parts in order to accomplish two things: to reflect the doctrinal inheritance and at the same time deal with the cult.

Victory, Redemption, suffering—if analyzed closely, these aspects of


3 Ibid. "La mort sur la croix a été librement choisi par le rédempteur, de préférence à toute autre, pour des raisons mystérieuses et infiniment sages . . . Elle a été véritablement l'instrument bénît de la rédemption commune et individuelle des hommes. (2372) Elle fut donc l'arme avec laquelle nous avons, nous aussi, en notre Sauveur, triomphé des puissances mauvaises et reconquis la possibilité de notre salut."
the doctrinal inheritance appear to have determined the fundamental content of the poem: by His suffering and death Christ achieved His victory and redeemed mankind. In the key lines of the poem, Lines 97-100, Pauline theology, which secures the doctrinal unity of the entire poetic structure, is discernible. The specific mention of "Adam's deed" is significant. It exposes the doctrine underlying the *Dream of the Reed* as doctrine based on the earliest and most direct apostolic tradition. One of the constituent elements of Paul's teaching involves the "relationship between the first Adam, the cause of sin, death, and the fall; and the second Adam, the author of justice, life, and restoration." Paul is the Church's foremost exponent of the doctrine of Redemption or the doctrine of the cross. Line 101a, "There He tasted death," conforms also to the major theme of the Apostle's teaching.

The fact of the death of Jesus becomes thus the centre of the whole Pauline system. The Christianity of the Apostle is summed up in the person of Christ; but this person Himself acquires all His redemptive importance only at the moment of His death upon the cross. Other dogmas related to the Redemption, for example, the Resurrection, Ascension, and the Last Judgment, are mentioned in the poem because the early Christians would have labeled as incomplete any exposition of the Passion which was not substantiated by a subsequent treatment of the Resurrection.

---


2. Ibid., II, 16.
In the eyes of Paul Christ's death is inseparable from His Resurrection, without which, from a soteriological point of view, it is incomplete. The death of Christ was never preached without the Resurrection, for the one is the complement and corollary of the other.

That is why the *Dream of the Rood*, composed under the influence of the apostolic catechesis, begins with a description, not of the cross of suffer-ing, but of the cross of glory. The author of the *Dream of the Rood* grasped in a kind of doctrinal retrospect the entire impact of God's redemptive plan. That is why the poem reflects convincingly not only the fact of the triumph but also the true nature of the triumph as established in Scripture and sus-tained by ecclesiastical tradition. God had destined the first Adam to share His own life of glory; and although Christ made reparation for sin by His death on the cross, He restored supernatural life essentially by becoming the second Adam and rising triumphant from the grave.

This prevailing note of victory runs throughout the poem, suggesting that the victory of a leader has made possible a kind of ideal kingdom, a transfigured and "fair . . . creation . . . [a] noble creation." This king-dom is symbolised by the "noblest of trees . . . brightest of wood." Although the person whom the cross of victory represents is never seen, there is sug-gested, as though in fulfillment of the prophecies, a kind of messianic splen-dor with which He is served by "holy spirits, man upon earth, and all this noble creation."

The poetic concept of victory corresponds to the earliest tradition

---


of Christian doctrine. "According to the Synoptists, the central idea of the teaching of Jesus, an idea to which all that teaching can be reduced, is that of the Kingdom of God."\(^8\) Nor is the kingdom one in which the power "upon earth" affirms the domination, as the Jews had anticipated it would. "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."\(^9\) It was necessary for Christ to admonish even His followers that the kingdom of which He was founder was a kingdom above, not "upon earth." It should be noted that in the psalm the standard of victory is beheld "aloft lifted . . . the earth beneath."

The devotional section developed after the vision fades is permeated, though less obviously, with the same Pauline theology of victory which is found in the opening. "I prayed to the beam . . . I shall go seek the victory-tree . . . my will is bent to it . . . and my hope of safety goes straight to the cross."

In contrast to his extensive treatment of the theme of victory, the poet's treatment of the doctrine of Redemption is almost Pauline in its terse exposition. He does, however, treat it comprehensively enough to support, in correct doctrinal sequence, the idea of victory. The "fair creation" was God's first revelation to mankind, attainable after the fall only through the graces brought by His second revelation: the redeeming death of His Son. This, perhaps, explains the doctrinal foundation for the sense of sorrow and penance which is interwoven not only with the poet's concepts of the cross of suffering

\(^8\) J. Tissot, *History of Doxology*, I, St. Louis, 1921, 60.

\(^9\) Matt. 22, 21.
but also with his concepts of the cross of glory. One who is "stained with sins, wounded with wrong," cannot glory in "the wondrous . . . victory-tree," Christ and the evangelists preached incessantly this change of heart, or spirit of penance, as essential for membership in the heavenly kingdom. "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say: Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."10 The intended effect of Redemption, as expounded by the Apostolic Fathers, is to destroy sin.11

The key lines demand special scrutiny because of certain intrinsic elements of the doctrine of sin and of Redemption which are compressed in them.

unveil in words that this word is glorious
since God Almighty suffered on it
for the many sins of all mankind,
and for Adam's death done long ago.

Already in the fourth century Christ had often been portrayed in the role of the second Adam "who in some way gathered up all mankind in Himself so that in His death for sin all died with Him and were thereby restored to newness of life."12 Certain Greek theologians, however, who agreed that all men suffered punishment for Adam's sin, did not affirm positively the inheritance of the sin itself. After almost three hundred years of theological debate on the nature and extent of original sin, the matter was settled July 3, 528, by a decree of the Council of Orange: "By sinning, Adam injured not only himself, but all his posterity; to which he transmitted both the death of the body, which is the

10 Matt. 4, 17.
punishment of sin, and also sin, 'quod more est animae.' 13

A century later further explication of the doctrine was still necessary in the face of persistent theological queries. Did Christ's Redemption make reparation for original sin as well as "for the many sins of all mankind"? The Sixth Council of Toledo (698 A.D.) replied in the affirmative: "Redemption includes, indeed, original sin as well as all actual sins."14

The poet incorporated in the key lines of the Dream of the Reed a succinct and clear statement concerning the relationship between sin and Redemption. It would seem, then, that he understood the final decision of the Church on this subject. Otherwise, in a phrase lamentary of the cross of Redemption on which "God Almighty" [died]..., "for the many sins of all mankind" he would not suddenly shift his point of view in order to subjoin an explicit reference to original sin. The position of this reference to "Adam's deed done long ago" suggests further that the poet was familiar with the dogmatic history of the subject, since he distinguishes so carefully between "the many sins of all mankind" and "Adam's deed." Barring such awareness, he would not be likely to isolate in two short lines of poetry the varying aspects of a theological problem which had so long been under controversy.

His sureness of the Church's doctrine is further evinced by the fact that he places an erstwhile controversial subject in an emphatic position at the end of a metrical pattern and at the end of a major thought sequence,

where, if the matter were still under debate, it would be instantly noted and attacked. Presumably, then, it was no longer under controversy. The poet concludes the key lines in words similar to those with which the Church herself answered the last question concerning the nature and extent of original sin and the reparation made for it. The position of "Adam's deed" after the "many sins of all mankind" seems to indicate that the poet was more conscious of the decree of the Council of Toledo (638 A.D.) than that of the Council of Orange (529 A.D.). It is the former which emphasized, not the transmission of original sin, but the extent of the entire debt due for sin.

In the poet's treatment of suffering as the penalty paid for Adam's sin and "the many sins of all mankind," he is basically scriptural in his account of the crucifixion and the traditional emphasis he places on the agony and death of Christ as the constituent element in Redemption. The poem also bears some trace of a doctrinal trend anterior to the year 600 A.D. During the fourth century, three theories concerning the doctrine of Christ's suffering began to crystallize from earlier views held by Greek and Latin theologians. The Physical or Mystical theory claimed a redemptive value for the Incarnation itself. Popularized throughout the Eastern Church, the Satan's Rights theory was originally intended simply as a warning to the faithful that he who sins may quite easily become the servant of sin from whom Satan will eventually claim his "wages." The third, which gained prominence among western theologians, emphasized the actual sufferings and death of Christ and was known

as the Realistic theory. The latter finds unmistakable echo in the Dream of
the Rood, especially in the fifteen lines of the Ruthwell extractions.

In summary, then, the doctrinal material on which the poem is based
deals with the theme of victory, of Redemption, of suffering and other related
dogmas. An analysis, however, of all this doctrinal content still leaves the
basis of the structure unexplained. The poet does not treat of victory,
Redemption, suffering and other dogmas in either logical or chronological se-
quence, dismissing one as he turns to another. How explain, for example, the
pattern of thought initiated in the lyric introduction, which quickly yields
to dialogue set in the framework of a dream-vision in which a speaking cross
addresses the poet and commands him to promulgate a devotional cult?

Close analysis of the poetic structure has suggested to the writer
that despite the doctrine compressed in the Dream of the Rood the poet himself
was perhaps not actually concerned with theological distinctions. Today's
reader, studying the text in retrospect, easily approaches the poem in a spirit
of scholastic inquiry. With what, however, was the poet himself predominantly
concerned?

It has seemed to the writer that the poet was concerned with the
total impact of meaning embedded in the theme of victory, Redemption, suffering,
and other related dogmas. He was concerned, somewhat practically, with four
aspects of the veneration of the cross: the fact of a triumph, the nature of
the triumph, the story of the triumph, and the promulgation of the triumph.
The poet's purpose, as stated in the key lines, was, after all, simply to pro-
mote this veneration: (1) He wished to proclaim with lyric enthusiasm the fact
that Christ had achieved a triumph on the cross (lines 1-12); (2) He proceeded to analyze the exact nature of the triumph (Lines 13-27); (3) He endeavored to ponder every important detail of suffering which the Gospel narrative supplied in the story of the triumph (Lines 28-77); (4) He determined to promulgate the cult of the cross and to confess his deep personal devotion and allegiance to it as the instrument of salvation and the emblem of the kingdom established by the Son of God (Lines 78-156).

In the lyric introduction the theme is one of victory. The poet sees a shining cross as a banner of triumph.

Lo, I will tell the best of dreams
that came to me dreaming in the midst of night
when living men had sought their rest.
It seemed that I saw that noblest of trees
aloft lifted, wound with light,
brightest of wood; all that beacon
was flooded with gold, and gems stood
fair on the earth beneath; there were five more
up on the crossbeams. The Lord's angels all gazed upon it
fair throughout creation—that was no felon's gallows—
but there behold it holy spirits,
men upon earth, and all this noble creation. (Lines 1-12)\(^\text{16}\)

The fact of the triumph encourages the poet to consider the nature of the triumph. Man, created by God to be a little less than the angels, had incurred the guilt of which only a rational nature is capable.\(^\text{17}\) He had rebelled against the universal order established by the authority of God the Father.

The beacon "flooded with gold" and blazing with gems is, therefore, perceived

\(^{16}\) Williams, Word-Heard, 206-212. All translations of the text of the poem, unless otherwise indicated, are from this source.

\(^{17}\) Ps. 8.
by the post as a warrior's emblem; and the warrior is "the young Her[c]... God Almighty," the Holy Strong One Who defeated the powers of darkness and restored primeval order in the universe. 18

Wondrous was the victory-tree, and I stained with sins, wounded with wrong. I saw the tree of glory clad with honour, shining joyful, girded with gold; and noble gems had worthily clasped their Maker's tree.

Yet through that gold I could see afar the struggle of poor ones, when it first began to sweat on the right side. I was all troubled with sorrows, fearful was I for the fair sight; I saw that eager beacon change its raiment and colour; now it was bedewed, wet, stained with blood poured out; now wound with treasure. (Lines 13-23)

The radiant wood, emblem both of battle and of victory, seems to inspire in the poet contrition and renewed confidence in the leader whom it represents.

Yet I, lying there a long while, gazed heart-repentant on the Healer's tree. (Lines 24a-25b)

The post next suggests that the cross is more than an emblem. "It spoke aloud..." to the post. "It uttered words, that best of wood." The words it uttered confirm the reality of the crucifixion. Thus, after a very brief investigation of the nature of the triumph, the post records in the dream-vision the story told by the Rood, the story of the triumph and the apparent defeat in battle (Lines 26a-73a); the burial of the token of victory (Lines 73b-75a); its discovery and ultimate acclaim (Lines 75b-77b).

At line 77, which concludes the first half of the doctrinal content,

18 The title "Holy Strong One" is bestowed on the Savior in the Greek and Latin responses to the Improperia or "Reproaches," a series of antiphons still sung in today's Roman Catholic ritual for the veneration of the cross on Good Friday.
namely, the fact, the nature, and the story of the triumph, there occurs simultaneously a transition into a brief survey of the historical development of the cult of the cross. Is there, perhaps, an implied reference to the incorporation of the cult into the early worship of the Eastern Church?

His friends, found me
and set me then in gold and silver. (Lines 75a-77b)

It was not until 320 A. D., that the cross, buried near the foot of Calvary, was discovered. 19 Soon after its discovery a large portion of it was enclosed in a precious reliquary in Jerusalem and exposed for the veneration of the faithful. 20 Perhaps in order to emphasize the fact that the cross was a direct and intimate witness of the Redemption, the poet extends the metaphor of personification into this section of the poem which deals with a survey of the development of the cult.

Now mayest thou hear, my loved heart,
how I have borne the bale of evils,
of sore sorrow. (Lines 78a-80a)

The general subject matter of the remainder of the poem, essentially didactic and devotional in nature, deals with the promulgation of the cult and with contemporary trends of devotion. To the latter there is affixed a kind of paraphrase of the second to the seventh articles of the creed, interpretative

19 K. A. Heinrich Kellner, Heortology, a History of the Christian Festivals, St. Louis, 1908, 889.

20 Henri Leclercq, "Culte et querrale des images," Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie, ed. Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq, Paris, 1908, Tome 7b, 222. "L'expansion de la fête se fit assez rapidement... Sacrée, Sosimène, Théodoret et Théophane parlent du partage de la vraie croix en deux parties, dont l'une, placée dans une grande reliquaire d'argent, fut laissée à Jérusalem."
especially of the scene of the Last Judgment. In the final paragraph there is
adjoined a confession of the author’s personal devotion to the cross, connected,
perhaps, with a conversion of life subsequent to some poetic or prayerful
experience associated with the Holy Road. The poem concludes with a series of
meditative lines which revolve once again around the theme of Christ’s death
and Ascension and the hope of salvation through the merits of the Redeemer.

Special attention should be directed to Lines 80b-82, which continue
the historical pattern in the development of the cult, and which may have been
intended to emphasize two inter-related events which affected both the Eastern
and the Western Church: the recovery in 628 of that portion of the cross which
had been stolen by the Persians, and the consequent renewal of devotion to the
cross throughout the entire western Church. 21

Now is the time come
that men over earth, and all this noble creation,
shall give me honour far and wide. (Lines 80b-82b)

Again in retrospect, Lines 83-86 suggest, though not, of course, con-
clusively, that the poet was familiar with the orante, precious reliquaries of
the true cross which became prevalent throughout Europe in the early seventh
century. 22

They pray by this bright sign; on me God’s Son
suffered once; for that I am shining now,
lifted high under heavens; and I can heal
any of those who bear me reverence. (Lines 83-86)

Do these same lines imply a reference to the claim of miraculous favors

21 Kallmern, Hagiology, 138.

22 Hartig, cited in Howard R. Petch, “Liturical Influences in
attributed to the use of relics of the cross? At any rate, a statement of the Church's stand in regard to the cult of relics is reserved for Lines 97-98.

In defense of the cross as a symbol of triumph, a short parenthetical passage next occurs. The digression is partly a historical apology and partly a lyric transition which leads directly into the key lines of the poem. The acclamation of the victorious Christ is united with the theme of glory and the triumphant wood of the cross, already extolled in the opening paragraph of the poem.

Once was I the greatest of tyrants,
most hateful to men, until I made wide
the way of life to speech-bearers.
Lo, He has honoured me, the Prince of glory,
over all the trees of the wood. He, the Keeper of Heaven,
even as Almighty God, for mankind's sake
honoured His Mother, Mary herself,
the most worthy of all women. (Lines 87-94)

Here the poet emphasizes again how sacred to all Christians were the act of Redemption and the instrument directly employed for its fulfillment. Perhaps that is why the poet has the speaking cross command him to share with all his fellow Christians this knowledge of the Holy Rood, or at least his poetic experience concerning its value and beauty.

Now I bid thee, my beloved one,
tell of this sight to other men. (Lines 95-96)

The key lines of the poem follow immediately upon the poetic command of this vision. These lines, as the reader will recall, state the purpose of the poem and summarize the doctrine of sin and Redemption. Included also in the key lines is a clear statement of the Church's teaching in regard to the exact type of veneration to be given images and relics of the cross. The poetic phrasing of the doctrine coincides with the decree of the Council of
Nicaea (A. D. 787) which solemnly defended the use of the cross and other images.

But the Council points out that we must not render to these objects the cult of latria \(\text{absolute adoration}\), 'which, according to the teaching of faith, belongs to the Divine nature alone . . . the honour paid to the image passes to the prototype; and he who adores the image, adores only the person whom it represents.'

The key lines confirm the doctrine of the cross as expounded in the

**Dream of the Rood** as orthodox. When the poet states explicitly that the wood of the cross is glorious only "since" because God suffered on it, he distinguishes between the veneration proper to images and relics, even those of the true cross, and latria, or true adoration, which is the worship reserved to God alone. In the former type of worship, the honor given to the cross passes to Christ when it represents. The cross is to be given only the type of worship known as relative adula, a veneration which, as stated by the Council of Nicaea, passes over to the person represented by the image or relic.

However orthodox in its devotional tone, the **Dream of the Rood** is not in any way palesic. The doctrine in the key lines is accepted and acclaimed, not defended. When the Council of Nicaea decreed de fide (as an article of faith) that the veneration of relics was licit and useful, it "condemned those who dare to reject any one of the things which are entrusted to the Church, the Gospel, or the sign of the cross, or any pictorial representation, or the holy relics of a martyr." Hence according to the Council those who deny the doctrine of veneration sin per definition.

---

25 Ibid., 163.
Do the key lines in praise of the wood of the cross suggest any other controversial point of dogma? Are they, for example, a poetic paraphrase of the Church's reply to the iconoclastic heresy of the eighth century? Most probably they are not. Although in general the iconoclasts rejected both the use and veneration of images, they did venerate the image of the cross. "The cross of the Saviour . . . held so eminent a place in the devotion of the faithful, that the iconoclasts made an exception in its favor and did not forbid veneration of it." 26

In sequence to the key lines, with their summary of the doctrine of Redemption, the poet introduces material which may at first glance appear to be extraneous. From the doctrinal standpoint, however, these lines do not in any way violate the principle of unity in the poetic structure.

yet the Lord arises with great might, so to help men. (Lines 101b–102b)

Just as the Resurrection proved the Divinity of Christ, so the Ascension was effected by the same power: "Then He mounted to Heaven." (Line 103a) Reference to the two glorious mysteries in the life of Christ is not, the reader will recall, to be labeled irrelevant to the rest of the doctrinal material included in this part of the poem. Nor is the brief portrayal given the scene of the Last Judgment.

thither shall He come
into this middle-earth to seek mankind
on Doomsday, the Lord Himself,
Almighty God, and His angels with Him.

26 LeClair, "Culte," Dictionnaire, VII, 2190. "La croix du Sauveur . . . tenait une place si éminente que les iconoclastes dérogèrent en sa faveur à leur ostracisme."
Then will He give, He who yields doom forever,
judgment to each one, as he earned it before
in the swift-passing days of life.
Now will anyone be unafraid
of the dread words that the Wielder will say. (Lines 103b-111)

Prat, in his analysis of the cardinal points of the apostolic cate-
chesis, states that Paul made the Last Judgment a corollary of the Resurrection.
"Good exegetes are of the opinion that the signal victory won by Christ over
death presupposes as sequence for its meaning the universal resurrection." 27
Since at the universal resurrection all men will be judged, the Church subsumes
the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, as well as the Last Judgment, in one
single article of the Creed.

Damiélon also points out that the primary work of the Son of God is
to execute what the Apocalypse call judgment, that is, "the discernment of the
good and the wicked, the annihilation of evil powers, and the rewarding of the
just." 28 Both Damiélon and Prat are merely reminding today's readers of what
the earliest Christians took for granted. If the Resurrection established
Christ's claim to Divinity, and the Ascension served as the means of uniting
humanity to the life of God, then there should be no delay in the accomplish-
ment of the primary task assigned to the Redeemer. He had promised to return
and bring back with Him to His Father the members of His Mystical Body whom he
judged deserving of a reward, that is, of a share in His own eternal glory.
This was the common opinion of the early Christians.

27 Prat, Theology, II, 360.
28 Jean Damiélon, S. J., The Salvation of the Nations, New York,
1950, 72.
St. Paul himself believed that the sole reason for delay "was the necessity of evangelizing the entire world and of the acceptance of God's message by all nations before the Second Coming." On this point, asserts Daniélou, God's plan was, of course, still a mystery to Paul. Centuries were to unfold before the conversion of the nations was to be achieved. The delay was to extend far beyond the Apostle's own lifetime. Yet to consider the Second Coming as imminent "has always been characteristic of the Christian economy," lest the vigil in expectation of the Last Judgment be relaxed. To associate this latter event with the Resurrection and Ascension, the other two mysteries accomplished through the Divinity of Christ, is in conformity with the earliest Christian tradition and certainly offers a historical defense for the doctrinal unity of the Dream of the Reed.

In this same section, dealing with the Last Judgment, special note should be taken of Lines 112-121 which bear witness to another central point in the doctrine of Redemption.

Then shall He ask before those many men which of them, for the Lord's name, willed to taste of bitter death, as He did on the Cross-beam. But they shall then fear, and think a little what they could say to Christ in answer. Now need anyone be then afraid who bears in his breast the best of beacons; but through the reed each shall seek a kingdom, every soul some from earth-says who with the Wielder wills to dwell. (Lines 112-121)

Once again it is Paul who reminds us that the fruits of Redemption, though

29 Ibid., 80.
30 Ibid., 61.
universal de jure, are conditioned de facto by the cooperation of each individual man. The victory of Christ over death will be effective only in him who accepts the whole plan of Redemption: "who bears in his breast the best of beacons."

Union with the death and life of Christ must include the whole redemptive plan, conceived by the Father from eternity, fulfilled in the course of the ages by the Son, Who, making Himself one with us and uniting us to Himself by a bond of mysterious identity, makes what is ours pass to Him, and what is His own pass to us.32

A rather intense personal awareness of the preceding doctrinal truths is admitted in Lines 122-122a:

I prayed then to the beam, blithe in mood,
with hearty will, when I was alone
and few near me. (Lines 122-122a)

As the vision of the cross fades, the poet professes belief in the total meaning of Redemption, namely, the necessity of seeking to cooperate perseveringly with the graces of Redemption in order to attain his own personal salvation.

Then was my heart's thought
urged on its far way, oft it had borne
times of weary longing, I have hope of life now,
that I shall go seek the victory tree;
much more often now than all other men
I honour it well. My will is bent to it,
strong in my heart, and my hope of safety
goes straight to the cross. (Lines 122b-131a)

The hope of participation in the merits of the Redemption generates in the poet confidence in the reality of everlasting happiness for himself and for all faithful followers of the King of glory.

32 Frat, Theology, II, 20.
I have now but few
friends on earth, but they are gone hence
from the world’s joys, seeking the King of glory.
They live now in Heaven with the High Father;
they dwell in light, and I lingering
long for that day when the Lord’s rood
which here on earth I once gazed upon
will come to fetch me from this fleeting life,
and bring me there where is great bliss,
joy in heaven, where the Lord’s folk
sit feasting in bliss unending,
and set me there where I may forever
dwell in glory, safe with the holy ones,
and taste their blessedness. (Lines 131b-144a)

Twelve devotional lines, centering around the death and Ascension of
Christ, and introduced in the form of a prayer, supplant the doxology with
which early Anglo-Saxon religious poems traditionally conclude. 33

May the Lord be my friend
who once suffered here on earth
on the gallows tree for men’s sins.
He set us free and gave us life,
a heavenly home. Hope was made new
with blossoms and with bliss where He bore burning pain.
The Son was victory-fast in His far-going,
mighty and enriched when He came with many,
a spirit-army into God’s kingdom,
The Almighty Lone-Wielder was bliss to the angels
and all holy ones who are in heaven
dwelt in glory, when their Ruler came,
Almighty God, where His homeland was. (Lines 154b-156b)

In Line 134 the poet indicates that the Son’s redeeming task, cosmic
and heroic though it was, was performed in humble obedience to the Father.
"Christ did not seek His own glory. He never sought it, whereas He might with
justice have done so . . . There was always in Him a desire to bring all
things to the Father, to bring souls to Him." 34

34 Daniélou, Salvation, 114.
In Lines 150-152 there is still, indirectly, a trace of this total subordination of the Son's conquering deeds to the authority of the Father. After an implicit reference in Line 151 to the "harrowing of hell"—"when He came with many"—Christ is spoken of as having returned to heaven, "victory-fast . . . mighty and enriched." Yet even as the leader of this triumphant "spirit-army," He entered humbly as "The Son" into the kingdom of His Father.

The poem embraces few other direct references to any doctrine. That the poet is conscious of the solidarity of membership in the Mystical Body is evidenced especially in Lines 131b-135a and 143b-148a. He confesses his belief that friends who sought the King of Glory while on earth will partake forever of the lot of the saints in light. His fellowmen are justified by faith, which means they are enjoying "the subjective application of the redeeming death of Christ." Theirs is the bliss of the kingdom which they have inherited and of which Christ spoke at the Last Supper: "Take this and share it among you; for I say to you that I will not drink of the fruit of the vine,

35 Ronald Knox, The Creed in Slow Motion, New York, 1949, 111. The term "harrowing of hell" is used figuratively in Anglo-Saxon religious poetry, not in reference to a place of eternal punishment, but to Limbo, a kind of borderline region outside the actual precincts of Paradise where there is no suffering but where the beatific vision is not yet enjoyed. When this theme occurs in Anglo-Saxon poetry, Christ is portrayed as a triumphant warrior, plundering this borderline region and releasing from captivity the souls detained in Limbo as a result of the enmity of Satan and the sin of Adam, and awaiting redemption by His liberating death upon the cross.

36 Col. 1, 12.

37 Patr., Theology, II, 11.
until the kingdom of God comes."\textsuperscript{38} Luke's image has suggested, perhaps, the heavenly banquet described in Line 111.

The Trinity is not mentioned explicitly in the poem; only the Father and Son relationship is referred to in Lines 134, 150, and 152. In Line 83 the Reed declares that "on me God's Son suffered once." Reference to the Holy Ghost would not be expected in a poem dealing primarily with the sacrifice of Calvary. "From the time of Our Lord's coming, and particularly from the time of His Passion . . . God took up His dwelling in the Person of Our Lord; likewise from then on . . . the spirit of prophecy (the mission of the Holy Ghost) passed in its entirety into Our Lord."\textsuperscript{39}

The foregoing analysis, incorporating content and structure, seems to the present writer to reveal to what extent the poem depends both on a doctrinal inheritance and a contemporary cult. Victory, Redemption, suffering—each of the major divisions of the poetic theme is developed along clearly defined doctrinal lines relative to Redemption and the promulgation of the cult. However, even such a reconciliation between structure and content does not seem, at least to the present writer, to solve entirely the problem of organic unity in the poem.

An initial difficulty presents itself in analysing the problem of apparent disunity between structure and content. The underlying simplicity of the structural pattern does not always follow the inner line of theological content. "Conceptions of theology, dogma, and Christian Doctrine are notably

\textsuperscript{38} Luke, 22, 18.

\textsuperscript{39} Daniélou, Salvation, 99.
rare in Anglo-Saxon poetry. When they do occur, as in the Dream of the Reed, the doctrine is often implied rather than actually stated; and the implications are usually heightened by the addition of cognate material drawn from various liturgical sources, scriptural, devotional, and patristic. True to the Anglo-Saxon poetic pattern, a composite of scenes and images is allowed to accumulate rapidly with analogies drawn from more than one liturgical source.

For example, in the lyric introduction the poet so enlarges the first concept of the shining cross that he seems to wish to include the vision of a whole new creation. In this new creation the act of universal salvation is anticipated. "For in Him were created all things in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether Thrones, or Dominations, or Principalities, or Powres." The poet suggests that cosmic numbers of angels are assembled. "And the number of them was thousands of thousands." As though forgetting that he was composing a psalm, and not a litany, the poet conjures up nine successive images of the shining cross within the first twelve lines of the psalm. Such broken thought patterns, easily disconnected by overtones of emotion and imagery, were common in the ancient Church litanies of praise, such as the Laudes Regiae: "The Laudes invoke the conquering God,

---


12 Col. 1, 16.

13 Apoc. 6, 11.
Christ the victor, ruler, and commander. In the poem, too, there is implied a similar, repeated cry of victory like that with which the Lament begins:

**Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat.**

The liturgy thus easily sponsors an imaginative, interpretative grasp of dyes in anyone poetically inclined. Such interpolations do, perhaps, impart a certain energy to the poetic verse by representing more impressively before the imagination the *rex* or idea underlying the poetic form. However, as is evident in the above example, a somewhat circular, repetitious treatment of the subject matter often results; and because of the accumulation of emotion and imagery the modern reader is at times unaware of the exact progression of thought within the poetic structure. In the first twenty-seven lines of the *Dream of the Rood*, it is almost impossible to focus upon any clearly contained structural pattern. One series of images after another is replaced, with photographic dispatch, by a series of thought-responses, propelled in turn by a retroactive chain of imagery. At times the imagery accumulates in an elliptical pattern, suggestive of the double-association technique characteristic of modern poetry; some of the imagery, too, amounts almost to what may be termed liturgical ecstaticism.

The emotion in the poem is also sustained by an underlying principle of liturgical prayer. The latter, though usually dependent on one major

---


15 Ibid.
doctrinal idea, is seldom dominated by any emotion which persists beyond a single verse or antiphon. Rather, a kaleidoscopic flux of emotion occurs as the varying interpolations in the understanding and interpretation of a text are offered to the reader. Manifold and motley emotions are thus encouraged. "Popular prayer, like popular song, has its own inward powers and rights and tends to take freer, more spontaneous forms." 46 Certainl the *Dream of the Rood* is free and spontaneous in the imaginative interpretation of subject matter contained within the poetic form.

Is there, then, no possibility of recognising organic unity in the poem—apart from the Pauline theology inherent in the subject matter? Not unless the poem is viewed in its own proper historical setting. After her conversion to the faith, England discovered in that same faith a primary source of material for her own first national poetry. Under the influence of Augustine and his forty Benedictine monks, a systematised Christianisation had been inaugurated. The ideas expounded in the pastoral homilies, which were a means of popular instruction, as well as in Scripture itself and in the hymnology of the Church, quickly supplanted in a primitive national literature the confusing superstitious traditions which had shaped the early Germanic pagan poetry. This transformation occurred completely enough and early enough in the history of the nation to enable her poets to express an immediate and direct interpretation of the Christian culture that had given it birth into a new life.

Such indoctrination, begun by instruction in the truths of faith, was

---

supplemented by a monastic system of education. Art and letters were offered, not only to professional churchmen who spoke and wrote with deliberate emphasis on dogma, but also to the commoners. In the monastic and cathedral schools learning and theology flourished in a single curriculum. The ordinary Christian could become well enough versed in rhetoric, doctrine, and patristic learning to be able to re-create in a genuine national poetry the ideas he had absorbed from the Latin of classical poetry and ecclesiastical exegesis. The possibility of organic unity in the *Dream of the Rood* may first of all therefore be traced to these early ages of faith and to an integrated education in Christian art and letters. With both laymen and the hierarchy cognisant of the doctrine of the cross, a sustained popular respect for the integrity of a doctrinal theme may be assumed in any expansion or recension of the Gospel story of the crucifixion.

An even more fundamental reason for organic unity is suggested by the doctrinal content itself. Although doctrine never changes intrinsically, it does undergo a process of extrinsic explication, hence the possibility of there being incorporated in a single poem the reflection of a somewhat extensive historical development of doctrinal subject matter without the organic unity being in any way impaired. A clear understanding of the exact distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic development of dogma is perhaps indispensable at this point.

---


Doctrine means "that which is taught." In the ecclesiastical sense of the word it means the entire catechism of a religious creed, "that body of revealed and defined truth which a Catholic is bound to hold." It is in this sense that St. Paul used the word "doctrines" in his epistles to Timothy. He is simply referring to the body of truths taught by Christ and transmitted by the Apostles in Scripture and tradition. This fundamental and total subject matter of faith is contained in the Apostles' Creed. The Church started with this revelation founded on the authority of God and nothing has been added to this deposit of revelation since the death of St. John.

Since these doctrines expounded by the Church are verbal expressions of Divine Truth, they pertain to the nature of Divine Truth and are per se inalterable because they are founded on the authority of the Divine Word by Whom they were revealed. It follows, then, that revealed doctrine can undergo no process of substantial or intrinsic change. Doctrines can never develop in such a fashion as would "result in adulteration of the original meaning of God's revealed word." Its explication, however, by the magisterium or teaching

---


50 Ibid.

51 I Timothy, iv, 13, 16; II Timothy, iv, 2.

52 "Dogma," Catholic Encyclopedia, V, 89.

53 Theodore M. Hesburgh, God and the World of Man, Notre Dame, 1955, 11.

54 Ibid., 30.

office of the Church must be shaped both in conformity to and in defense of new aspects of truth upon which the eye of each succeeding generation is focused. In this sense extrinsic evolution of doctrine does take place. Although the continuity of Catholic doctrine remains intact, the meaning of truths contained in the sources of divine revelation becomes more clearly and more profoundly understood.

From time to time the Church explicitly intervenes to determine a controversial point of doctrine. When she does so, the formal definition pronounced concerning the revealed truth in question is called a dogma.56 A dogma is a truth contained in the word of God, written or handed down, and which the Church either by a solemn judgment or by her ordinary and universal teaching, proposes for belief as having been divinely revealed.57 Dogma comes from the Greek, ἰδέα, meaning to think.58 That is exactly what the Church does before she pronounces a dogma. She thinks deeply and seriously as she studies the data of revelation, a "process under the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit, by which the contents of the deposit of faith are explicitly drawn out."59

The faith of the Christian is obliged to accept such a pronouncement since the dogma thus evolved is only a re-statement in clear, precise technical formulas of the intrinsic truths already contained in the teaching of Scripture.

56 Timman, History, I, 2.
57 Smith, Faith and Revealed Truth, 76.
59 Dodd.
and early Christian tradition. 60

In these dual aspects of doctrine, therefore, may be discovered a major underlying cause of organic unity in the Dream of the Reed. On the one hand, it is precisely because doctrinal subject matter never changes intrinsically that such unity is possible in a poem, the various parts of which may have been composed over a period of centuries in the history of Anglo-Saxon literature and developed respectively by more than one author. On the other hand, the principle of extrinsic development in doctrinal subject matter may corroborate a theory of joint authorship and to some extent elucidate the historical obscurities which attend both origin and authorship. Within the framework of an early text of the poem, based as it is on the paradox of suffering and triumph intrinsic to the doctrine of Redemption, any later Christian poet or poets could not only have embellished the original theme but also incorporated contemporary developments in the cult of the cross, such as these referred to at greater length in Chapter XIII of this thesis. Completed in such a fashion, the poem is of necessity somewhat episodic and lacking in artistic unity; but the organic unity has remained intact. The doctrinal matter which animates the entire poem is inextricably woven into a unified structural plan.

One final historical question remains to be considered. It is the opinion of the writer that the poem as a whole substantiates a theory of doctrinal unity exclusive of any confirmed sources of origin and authorship. One may measure the extent of influence of any source of inspiration for literature not only by the ideas taken for granted in a specific composition, but also by

---

60 Tixeront, History, I, 2.
the underlying questions proposed by the poet. In Part I of the poem the covert phrase, "It seemed that I saw," implies the indirect or rhetorical question, "Did I really see?" Here it seems to the writer that one may discover a trace of the spirit of analytic inquiry which is more characteristic of the Scholastic period of Church doctrine than of the first seven centuries of the Patristic age. 61 "Creda, ut intelligas [Believe, in order that you may understand]," declared the writers of the earlier era, while the process of reasoning employed by the Scholastics allowed nothing to be taken for granted which could not be demonstrated to reason. Their axiom was the reverse: "Intellige, ut credas [Understand, in order that you may believe]." The line, "It seemed that I saw," may, therefore, have been added at a later date to the lyric introduction, which is composed in the spirit of the Patristic age—a spirit of adoring faith in the "beacon flooded with gold." On the other hand, the lyric introduction itself may either have been edited from an earlier poem or composed at a transitional period in English literature and Catholic doctrine, namely, between the seventh and the ninth centuries, at the crossroads of Patristic and Scholastic theology, the same period in which Anglian culture began to shift from Northumbria to Wessex. Further argument for the completion of Part III at this same era may be drawn from the total absence of apocryphal references in the poem. After the ninth century countless old chests of books were explored in Wessex, and a mass of apocryphal and legendary material infiltrated the country as a result of the literary interest aroused by King Alfred. 62


Hence it is safe to conclude that any poem on the cross which bears no trace of apocrypha was completed prior to the beginning of the ninth century.63

The popular consciousness of the cult of the cross evident in Parts I, II, and III constitutes a confession of simple faith in the triumph of Christ on the cross: "Creda ut intelligas." But the key lines and Part IV in general reflect the more Scholastic consciousness of a people who not only hearkened with faith to the cry of the Church in her liturgy, *Ecce lignum cruosis*; but who knew what they venerated in the cross, why they venerated it, and in what manner they venerated it: "Intellige ut credas."

From the preceding general analysis of the *Dream of the Reed* it seems to the writer that the following conclusions are reasonably justified: (1) The subject matter of the poem is derived from the doctrine of Redemption, of which the doctrine of the veneration of the cross is ancillary; (2) The content of the poem is divided into four structural parts which in turn reflect the doctrinal inheritance and deal with the contemporary cult; (3) There is a doctrinal basis for the poetic structure as well as for the organic unity of the poem.

---

CHAPTER XIII

THE CULT OF THE CROSS: A SOURCE OF EMOTION AND OF IMAGERY IN THE POETIC STRUCTURE

A tabular analysis of the central concept in the Dream of the Rood discloses a poetic awareness, besides a theological awareness, of the liturgy of the cross. As a poet the author is not seeking to uphold religious dogma but to express a poetic knowledge of his subject.

Poetic knowledge is intuitive and imaginative.\(^1\) It is the knowledge which expresses itself not only in the ideas or intellectual content of a poem but also in the emotion and imagery. The source of the latter may be traced fundamentally to a creative experience (the first or formal cause) which becomes operative in the channel of poetic language (the material cause) after some poetic intuition has been sustained and absorbed over a period of time by the poet (the efficient cause), and is then transmitted as poetic knowledge or the complete content of the poet's mind (the final cause).

"A man does not suddenly say, 'I will compose poetry.'\(^2\) Although he will seldom be aware that his poem has a formal, material, efficient, and final

---


cause, the subconscious clarification of these constituent elements of an art form is antecedent to any poem which achieves a unified whole, a complete expression of the poet's craft and the subject he has pondered.

When a strong wind is abroad it fills sky and land and sea. Its touch and its voice are omnipresent. The trees in its path bend all in one way, the way the clouds go in the same wind. When a strong spirit is abroad the activities of men will be turned for the moment in one direction, responding to one impulse. The spirit abroad in the days of Bede was possessed of a power capable of giving unity to various forms of human activity. In his own words, 'all men's minds were taken up with the thought of the heavenly kingdom of which they had just heard.'

Dramatised in the liturgy of the Church, the cross was easily accepted as a poetic subject in pre-Norman England. It was through participation in the liturgy that the Anglo Saxon Christian became aware of the cult of the cross. He knew the Pauline theology of the cross, explained in the cycle of the Church year, especially in the Epistles, which were an annual means of his instruction and in whose language he often prayed. Much of the emotional and imaginative content in poems expressive of contemporary devotion to the cross may be traced either to some poetic experience nurtured by the liturgy or to an interpretation of some poetic area suggested by popular devotions peripheral to the liturgical life of the Church.

3 Williams, Word-Heard, 200.

4 Henry H. Howorth, Christianity in Roman Britain, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, II, London, 1885, 121. "Venantius Fortunatus, writing in the year 580, speaks of St. Paul's writings having reached Britain and even 'ultima Thule'.

Et qua sol radiis tendit, stylus ille cucurrit,
Arctos meridies, hinc plenus vaper et ortus
Transit et oceannum, vel qua facit insula portum,
Quasque Britannus habet terras, quasque ultima Thule."
That the liturgy should exert a poetic no less than a doctrinal influence is not to be considered adventitious. In poetry, as in the liturgy, imagery and emotional formulas are generated and almost exclusively governed by an interpretation of some context or experience. As a source of poetic inspiration the liturgy offers both context and experience: context in the theology of the Vulgate and in the lections and Latin hymnology of her services; experience in the direct congregational participation in the ritual of the Church year, more especially the great solemnities of Passiontide and Easter.

Patterned as it is by certain elements of ritual in the liturgy of the cross, the Dream of the Reed seems to depend, to a considerable extent, on the cult of the cross as a source of emotion and imagery. It should be noted, however, that the poet's purpose is not to display in his poem the structure of the liturgy or to manipulate the liturgy into the poetic structure. Nor is the emotion evoked in the poem elicited by a series of lyric ejaculations uttered in response to images copied from the liturgy of the cross. The poet did, of course, work with the materials of the liturgy—symbol, ritual, words; for a poet simply must have concrete things with which to establish insight into the relationship of things. In the Dream of the Reed he does this, not by way of reproductive images, which simply copy a perceptual experience, but by way of a creative image which modifies, selects, improvises, transforms and recombines the data of previous sensory impressions in new relationships interpretative of the subject.

---


According to the fundamental law of association, images stored in the memory tend to be expressed in the order, spatial or temporal or both, in which they were originally experienced. For all its originality as a poetic form, the Dream of the Rood is patterned on the services in honor of the cross. For example, the principal service in honor of the Holy Cross was that known as the Adoration of the Parasceve, held annually throughout Christendom on Good Friday. The service was divided into three major parts: (1) The glorification of the cross; (2) The veneration of the cross; and (3) The reading of the lessons and prayers. That the liturgy of Passiontide, with its hymn, the Vexilla Regis, and the Adoration of the Parasceve were familiar to the Anglo-Saxon Christian is evident from early canons concerning these festal celebrations. Bede describes the solemn veneration of the cross as the chief feature in the Good Friday services in early England: "Therefore Holy Church hath ordained that on the Good Friday men should do Hymn that great high worship that

7 Victor M. Hanna, The Pattern of Criticism, Milwaukee, 1951, 111.

8 M. S. McMahon, Liturgical Catechism, 2nd ed., Dublin, 1927, 251. "Parasceve is a Greek word meaning preparation, and is the term applied in the New Testament to the day on which our Lord died—a day of preparation for Easter day. The Greek Church applies the name to every Friday; the Latin Church to Good Friday alone." On Good Friday in the Roman Catholic Church, the image of the cross receives solemn veneration, an act of homage known as the "Adoration of the Parasceve."

9 Joseph Stevenson, ed., The Latin Hymns of the Anglo-Saxon Church, [The Publications of the Surtees Society, XXXI], 168 vols., Durham, [1851], 78. The Vexilla Regis is prescribed for Vespers on the feasts of the Holy Cross and during Passiontide.
day, not to the crosse that the priest holdeth in his hand, but to Hym that
did for us all that day upon the cross." 10

In Rome the vigil, or preparation preceding the Adoration of the
Parasceve on Good Friday, began at midnight; the Gallican churches observed the
vigil beginning at 3 a.m. 11 Either of these times may have been observed in
England, a fact that perhaps suggests the setting of the dream or poetic experi-
ence "hwæt mæ gemaētē to middre nihte" (Line 2). 12 Such an hour for a
poetic experience foreshadows a feeling of mystery and the anticipation of
wondrous events: "Syðan reordberend ræste wunedan" (Line 3). The poet does
not seem to be sure whether he is awake or dreaming: "Ýũhte mǣ ðæt ic
gesāwe" (Line 1a). As the poetic experience takes hold of him, the cross
appears to be luminous. He thinks he sees, almost imperceptibly at first, an
aura of light glowing around the figure of the cross; and he continues to gaze
upward in reverent wonder until the full light breaks around "syllicre trēow
... on lyft læðan, léchte bewunden" (Lines 1b-5b).

In Line 1lb the poet assures the reader of the joy he feels: "Gesseah
ic wuldres trēow." The anacrusis in "gesseah," like that in "gemaēttē," empha-
sizes the poet's enthusiasm for the "bēam beorhtest" as something more than an
ordinary poetic image. He further describes the "bēam" as "begoten mid golde."

10 The Venerable Bede cited in Gasquet, Medieval Parish Life,
London, 1909, 179.

11 "Good Friday," Catholic Encyclopedia, VI, 643.

12 Henry Sweet, ed., "The Dream of the Rood," An Anglo-Saxon Reader,
9th ed., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1928, 154-158. All quotations from the
original text, unless otherwise indicated, are from this source.
"Begotten" infers that the gold is actually poured out on the cross to such a degree that the cross in turn becomes a light-bearing power which sheds its radiance into the darkness around him. Perhaps, too, this repetition of the image is the poet's way of reiterating that he is quite sure he does not perceive an ordinary spectacle: "Syllic wæs se sigebœam" (Line 13a). He infers that the cross he sees is an animated cross whose vitality springs from an inner power or light-giving principle. Beyond that single exclamation, however, words in praise of the tree of glory seem to fail him. He is helpless to capture his subject, as poets often do, in reasoned discourse or in many words. To him there has been granted the fulness of poetic experience. He simply looks at the cross and lets it speak to him.

The reader will recall the reference to the theory that the initial stir of poetic intuition, once experienced, usually subsists in a latent state until such time as the poet feels urged to recall it. When he does so, he finds that in its total impact the memory of the poetic experience has lost nothing of its power of emotion or creativity. It is, of course, impossible to determine how long after a poetic experience a poet may record such an experience: "Dryhtnes rød, þe is hēr on eor ð ‡ aðr scœawoda" (Lines 136b-137b). When the author of the Dream of the Rood wrote his poem, he seems to have done so in a spontaneous though delayed response to what may be termed the command of the vision:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{onwrœoh wordum} & \quad \text{hæst hit is wuldres ōeam}, \\
\text{se ðe ælmihtig God} & \quad \text{on ðrowode. (Lines 97-98)}
\end{align*}
\]

13 Maritain, Situation, 74.
The initial exclamation of the poem, "Hwaet!" is a sudden, abrupt opening characteristic of Anglo-Saxon poetry when the lines are dominated by lyric emotion rather than by a rhetorical plan. There is no rhetorical plan evident in Parts I or II of the poem. Imagery suggestive of a night sky and the contrasting brilliance of the cross prevails in a series of double-association images and ellipses, calculated, perhaps, to arouse a sense of vastness and regal magnificence in the opening of the poem.

First there is the image of the luminous cross, delicate as the pinions that surround it: "Behold the angel Dhythnae calls" (Line 9a). Next, the poet perceives the blazing gems that seem to rest beneath the cross: "Gimnas stōdon fægere æt faldan scæatum" (Line 7b–8a). This latter image is evidently intended to attribute to the cross a kind of prismatic beauty. In "fægere burh forgesæaf" (Line 10a) the poet suggests an image in which the descent of the jewels on the cross spills its radiance and warmth out into the darkness, illuminating the universe with a shattering explosion of light. "Gimnas stōdon" may be interpreted as a cluster of precious gems on which the cross rests, as on a base, or on a cluster of stars or planets. "Feeling charges the imagination and causes it to flash forth spontaneous images." Thus imagery and emotional formulae are generated by the context of the opening verse paragraph.

11 Adeline C. Bartlett, The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry, Columbia University, 1936, 70.


16 Haus, Pattern, 111.
In Part I, however, a restrained use of color prevails, an apocalyptic method of description which aims at universal rather than particular perceptions, a sub specie aeternitatis which synthesizes a certain richness and dignity of emotion and imagery in a poem. Gold is the only specific color mentioned, and the manner in which it is mentioned is suggestive not of gold as a hue but gold as a refraction of light from the "bësocen ... begoten mid golde" (Lines 6b-7a). The poet perceives a reflection of color not only from the gems beneath the cross but also from those on the crossbeams. A similar treatment of color occurs in the Apocalypse. In the vision of the throne of God the four and twenty ancients are "clothed in white garments, and on their heads were crowns of gold."17 Before the throne is a sea of glass like to crystal, suggestive of refracted light rays; and there are myriads of jewels of rainbow hues.18

Such sublime heights of ecstasy, however, are not long sustained, even in a poetic experience. As the cross seems to move down closer to the poet, he is suddenly aware of his own disloyalty in the light of the "wuldræs tréow." He utters a cry of personal guilt: "And ic symnum fǽh, forwundod mid wummm" (Line 13b-14a). Disloyalty is the key word in his confession: "Fǽh" denotes hostility, even hostility in the criminal sense. Apparently the poet wishes to admit that he has been opposed to what the cross represents, or to the person whom it represents. "Symnum" means also an inimical act, a guilty crime; "wummm" suggests the impedimentum of the Latin, hence a barrier between the poet and the leader symbolized by the cross.

17 Apoc. 4, 4.
18 Apoc. 4, 3.
After this brief act of compunction, the poet allows his emotion to soar again in four succeeding lines of verse in praise of the "Wealdendes treow." Then the lines settle into a final commingling of joy and sorrow as the light of glory which surrounds the tree blends and deepens into shadow. "Hwæðre is þurh þæt gold ongytan meahtæ earama ðærgewinn" (Lines 18a-19a). The poet suggests that something like a mist, at first crimson, then glooming and purpureal, appears: "þæt hit ðærest ongam swæstan on þá swiðran healfe" (Lines 19b-20a). He has glimpsed the paradoxical truth of Christianity. Although "hwilum mid since gegyrwed" (Line 23b), the "wuldres treow" also throbs with blood poured out: "Mid wæstan bestēmed, besyled mid swētes ganges" (Lines 22b-23a).

The ebb and flow of the initial movement of emotion and imagery end in Line 27 of Part II. A feeling of finale is sensed in a deceleration of both rhythm and phrasing at the end of Line 23b which evokes a deliberate retard, at least in the thought pattern, and sustains the poet's mood of compassionate prayer at the foot of the cross. The final cadence (Lines 24-27) serves as a prelude to Part III of the poem and establishes the setting for the story told by the Rood. Once focused on the blood-stained cross, the poet's vision takes and keeps this image of the cross of suffering. The use of red in this paradoxical image once again parallels the color employed in the Apocalypse: "Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God, in thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation."\(^{19}\)

The use of blood in the concluding image of Part II also foreshadows what is to be experienced poetically in the dream-vision of Part III, in which

\(^{19}\) Apoc. 5, 9.
the Rood speaks to the poet. In early dreamlore, gold and blood are synonymous colors and are used interchangeably. The use of blood to symbolize gold or treasure was justified in the minds of the early writers because blood was so frequently spilled in the acquisition of gold.

It is the opinion of the writer that any images associated with the vigil for Good Friday may, therefore, have suggested a certain amount of the emotion and imagery in the lyric introduction to the poem. After the night vigil, the early Church service for the Adoration of the Parasceve on the morning of Good Friday opened with the exaltation of the glorified cross, another ceremony which may easily have influenced the poet, at least to some extent, in the arrangement, both spatial and temporal, of the emotional and imaginative content of his poem.

The ceremony of the exaltation of the cross originated in Jerusalem early in the fourth century A. D. where the authentic wood of the cross was exposed annually for the veneration of the faithful. That this exposition of the sacred relic originally constituted the opening rite for the Good Friday services in the Eastern Church is confirmed by the full and lively account given in the _Peregrinatio_, a collection of letters written by Etheria, a Spanish abbess, to her community of nuns while she was on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land during Lent, A. D. 385.

At 7 a.m. the bishop, followed by a procession of priests and deacons,


entered the chapel of the cross, a large court in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where his throne had been set up between the standing image of the cross and the basilica itself. At the end of the procession the priests laid an immense gold and silver coffer containing the relics of the True Cross on an altar erected in front of the bishop's throne.

There was a stark simplicity, a desolation in the liturgical setting for the ancient veneration of the cross, during which all attention was focused on the cross itself. The altar was stripped, save for a linen cloth on which the relic rested. Lamps and candles were extinguished. In the Dream of the Reed, by way of a parallel thought pattern, the poet indicates no particular locale or background for the vision of the triumphant cross. No historical scene is sketched; not even the precincts of a church are provided. Evidently the poet wishes to establish a deliberate freedom from time and place in order to indicate that a true understanding of the poetic vision can best be grasped in a world of the spirit where no distinction any longer exists between the cross of suffering and the cross of triumph. Poetry, like theology and the liturgy, is possessed of the power to transcend and transform historical substance. Not history, but mystery is celebrated. In the liturgy the fundamental concern is not a mere commemoration of the act which Christ once accomplished at this very spot in Jerusalem, but rather the effort of each member of

22 Ibid., 308.

23 Kay, English Medieval Literature, 98.

24 Clifford Howell, S.J., Of Sacraments and Sacrifice, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1953, 125.
the human race to get vitally in touch with the sacrifice of the cross, so that the merits which flow from it may be bestowed upon him. 25

The lengthy procession of participants in the foregoing ceremony of the glorification of the cross may also have suggested to the poet the number and kind of witnesses he assembles at the foot of the cross.

so hine ȳsér behēlde nāhlice gāstes,  
upon ofer noldan, and call ȳsēs eored gescaeft. (Lines 11-12)

Line 9b contains, possibly, a symbolic reference to the deacons who formed a cordon of honor around the altar after the priests had carried the relic to the bishop: "Behēlde ȳsēs ęgelse Dryhtnes calls" (Line 9b).

Memory of the immense jeweled relic placed on the altar may also have governed the poet in his choice of words in these phrases descriptive of the glorified cross:

wadam geseor Æod,  
gegyred mid gelde,  
bewigan wear Ælice  
Geseah in wuldres trōcwe,  
symmen scēnan,  
gimman hēfido  
Wældende trōcwe. (Lines 11b-17b)

At the conclusion of the procession, when the receptacle of the cross was opened, both the wood and the superscription of Pilate were placed upon the altar. 26 The bishop then took the holy cross in his hands and began the ceremony of the exultation of the glorified cross. Gradually the bishop proceeded to raise the cross thrice for all the assembled multitude of the faithful to see. Each time he raised the cross somewhat higher, advancing as he did so in


three gradations to the center of the altar, and chanting, each time on a higher pitch, the joyful anthem, Ecce lignum cruxis [Behold the wood of the cross]. The priests and deacons joined in the words which followed: In quo salus mundi suspensus [On which hung the salvation or Savior of the world]. To this the multitude of the faithful, gazing steadily each time, responded: Venite adoramus.

This ceremony of the exaltation of the holy cross was intended to remind the faithful of the gradual glorification of the cross of Christ, at first venerated only in obscurity, then preached to the convert Jews, and finally proclaimed throughout the world.27 Note should be taken of the fact that in the Besan of the Road the cross is first perceived as "en lyft länden," that is, carried on high as it was carried by the priests participating in the Good Friday procession. After the latter, when the relics were deposited in the hands of the bishop, the latter addressed the assembled congregation in the words: Ecce lignum cruxis!

In the liturgy the gradual elevation of the cross by the bishop makes it more completely and readily visible; in the psalm the images of beauty and wonder are increasingly perceptible in a spatial sense. The higher the cross is raised in the imagery suggested, the more light the gold and jewels seem to reflect. The poetic cross is described first as "lýchte bewunden," then "beyden mid gelde." Similarly, in the liturgy the relic is seen first in its gold and silver jewelled case. Closer and closer comes the reliquary until it

is laid on the altar in front of the bishop, where it is also closer to the congregation. Full realization of the wonder of this symbol, "wädmun gewoodod," would be very likely to enrapture the congregation at this point in the liturgy, as it perhaps also enraptured the poet.

A close parallel of the gradual elevation of tone with which the bishop chanted the Ecco lignum cruxis may also be detected in the visual imagery of Parts I and II. The imagery is handled in such a way that an upward kinaesthetic response on the part of the reader is skilfully elicited. Initially, the poet's attention is arrested by something above him. The reader, too, instinctively looks up: "[j] ühte mō ḟaēt ic gesāve." Closer observation reveals what seems to be a cross "on lyft lāedan." Because the cross is "lāchte bewunden," the poet's gaze seems to be more intensely directed upward. At the mention of the beacon "begoten mid golde" the image tends to become somewhat dazzling and enlarged, and at "bēama beorhtost" appears to soar beyond the confines of the poet's immediate habitation and to move back and up into the outer regions of space. There it rests, not in diminishing perspective, but in full splendor: "Gimus stōdon faēgere sēt foldan scēatum"—at the point of a vista both elevated and extended. Outward and upward the eye of the poet continues to follow the cross to where it is suspended, so to speak, between heaven and earth. At this point the poet observes for the first time that "swylos ḟ āēr fife wērēon uppe on ḟ an eaxlgespanne" (Lines 8b-9a). The brilliance of gems seems to highlight the cross in three-dimensional proportion, so that "bēhāldon ḟ āēt ēngel Dryhtnes ealle." An almost cinematic depth and breadth projects the cross as "faēgere ḟ urh forgescaft."
It will be noted that throughout Parts I and II of the poem there is established in the emotion and imagery a theme of glory as the essential characteristic of the cross. The theme has received emphasis by means of interlaced parallels, expressive of intricate nuances of thought in the imagery proposed for the glorified cross: "lēchta bewunden ... bēsma beorhtost ... begoden mid golde ... gīmmas stōdon feðere sēt foldan sceāsum ... feðere þurh forðgesceaf ... waðum geweorðod, wynnum scīnan, geyređ mid golde ..." The vitality of the poet's invention of images results in an overall perception of the cross which is almost tactile in its effect, so clearly crystallised is the image of the "wulldres trēow," resplendent "þurh forðgesceaf."

In both the poem and the liturgy, however, a spirit of exaltation is counterbalanced by one of compunction and humility. After the exaltation of the cross of triumph in the ceremony described above, a procession of the laity formed and moved towards the altar where the bishop then seated himself, holding the extremities of the sacred wood firmly in his hands and thus allowing the people as they passed and bowed before the relic to touch both the wood and the title (Pilate's superscription) with their foreheads.28 This act of veneration, which constituted Part II of the Adoration of the Parasceve, would tend to inspire in the poet and in all the faithful a deep sense of personal

28 Père J. B. Thibaut, O.P., Ordre des offices de la semaine sainte à Jérusalem du IVème au XIIème siècle, Paris, 1926, 91. "L'évêque, assis, appuie de ses mains les extrémités du bois sacré ... tout le monde passe unanum, en s'inclinant et en touchant d'abord la croix du front et des yeux avant de la baiser, mais nul n'y porte la main." The mandate in regard to handling the relic was originally prescribed in order to prevent worshippers, as they kissed the cross, from biting off a splinter to take home as a relic of their own, for which purpose the deacons who surrounded the altar kept a close watch over each pilgrim who knelt for veneration.
unworthiness to be so close to the cross of the young Nero. Such a feeling of
compunction would be induced whether the poet venerated only a symbol of the
cross or a genuine relic of the True Cross. In either case he would be mindful
that in the face of the Church triumphant and the Church militant ("mnam ofer
moldan") it is well-nigh impossible to deny one's frailties and cowardice:
"And is symnum fah, forwundod mid wyxnum." The poet's confession is direct and
spontaneous.

This entire rite of the primitive Eastern Church was preserved at
Rome where it was introduced into the West sometime before the reign of the
eastern Pope Sergius I (687-701).29 The Roman ceremony blends a deep spirit
of compunction with the splendor of Grecian-Oriental lyricism in "the most
dramatic observance ever introduced at Rome."30 Perhaps Lines 90a-91a empha-
sise the eighth-century enthusiasm for the observance of this rite in the West:

Hamst, m5 Ñ geower þodc wuldres Eldor
ofer holtwudi, heofournesc Weard.

The Roman observance on Good Friday provided that the Pope and the
palatine clergy should assemble at 2 p.m. in the Lateran Palace where the relic
of the true cross was kept in the oratory of St. Lawrence.31 After the cardini-
nals had venerated the sacred wood, a procession was formed, during which a
deacon carried the relic, enclosed in its jewelled case adorned with precious

Arthur Levelis-Marks, New York, 1925, 211.

30 Louis Bouyer, Orat., The Paschal Mystery, trans. Sister Mary
Benoit, R.S.M., Chicago, 1950, 230.

31 Dom Jean Gaillard, Holy Week and Easter, Collegeville, 1951, 85.
gems ["on lyft lædan"]). The Pope walked barefooted, like a humble pilgrim ["hrēowsearig"], swinging a perfumed censer before the reliquary. The procession thus formed moved from the Lateran to the Church of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, while the choir chanted Psalm cxviii, *Beati immaculati in via*, a psalm which extolls the excellence of virtue as consisting in the observance of God's commandments and in the avoidance of "fāh." According to the Ordo of Einsiedeln, the anthem *Ecce lignum crasis* was repeated after certain verses of Psalm cxviii. 32 The Pope's acting as thurifer, a rubric not found in any other ceremony of the Latin liturgy, may have heightened the post's sense of compunction as demonstrated in this rite. The Pope's action was certainly a public confession of humility and repentance made in the name of the entire Church. 33

The "fūse bēasen . . . mid since gegyrwed" easily suggests an image of the cross entwined with incense, the latter symbolic of the language of the Apocalypse and the prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, reparation, and petition addressed to God in the name of "mēon ofer mولدan and eall þēos mǣre gesceaf." Once again the imagery suggested by the liturgy is apocalyptic: "And the smoke, the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended before God from the hand of the angel." 34

In the Roman observance for Good Friday, the Pope, upon his arrival at the stational basilicas of the Holy Cross, placed the relic on the altar and exposed it for veneration. Before kissing the relic, the Pontiff himself

---

33 Schuster, *The Sacramentary*, 211.
34 *Apoc. 8*, 5-5.
prostrated in prayer: "\[\text{saer liegenda lange hwile.}\]" \(^{35}\) Bishops, priests, deacons, and subdeacons then approached the altar, after which the relic was placed ad rubas where the faithful were allowed to venerate it.

The solemn chanting of the Ecce lignum, originally intended for use only in those churches which possessed a relic of the True Cross, was retained even where an ordinary cross was used as a substitute. In the early Church, crosses were not the kind of crucifixes customary today. Instead of bearing an image of the suffering Savior, the early crosses, made of carefully chosen wood and devoid of any figure of the Redeemer, were richly ornamented with gold and studded with many jewels, an added incentive for a poet to conceive of the cross as "mid since gegyrwed."

By the fifth century the figure of Christ was added to the cross, but He was invariably represented as a King or High Priest, clad in royal or priestly garments: "Gegyrwed mid golde ... \(\text{[and]}\) gimnas." He was usually crowned and frequently carried a sceptre. \(^{36}\) Hence the custom arose of veiling the triumphant cross for the Adoration of the Parascove. This part of the ceremony prevailed in England and throughout the Latin Church before the year 600 A.D. \(^{37}\)

The Latin rite of veiling the cross at the beginning of the Good Friday services heightened the dramatic tension of an ancient ceremony already

\(^{35}\) DuBose, *Christian Worship*, 482.


\(^{37}\) "Good Friday," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, VI, 643.
as composite as it was unique in the canons of both the Eastern and the Western Church. The unveiling of the triumphant cross occurred simultaneously with the singing of the *Ecce lignum cruxis*. While the celebrant elevated the cross in three stages and intoned the anthem in three ascending keys of the musical scale, the deacon unveiled the cross. At the first intonation he allowed the top of the cross to become visible; exposition of the right arm and head followed; and finally the whole cross was unveiled. Notice should be taken of the fact that in the poem the cross of suffering is depicted as gradually revealing the signs of agony: "*sêt hit sûrest ongann swêtan on swâ swiðran healfes*" (Lines 19b-20a).

It is possible that to the poet, the cross, so long as it was not totally unveiled, was to be thought of as the cross of suffering, since its gradual elevation and unveiling symbolised the gradual glorification of the cross of Christ. Yet in a kind of anticipation of what is about to be revealed, the poet already seems to see the cross "*wëndan wëddum and blōum*" (Line 22a).

After the third and final response to the congregational chanting of *Venite adoremus* at the unveiling of the cross, all remained kneeling: "*Hwaē sêre is sêr liengend lange hwile*" (Line 24). The celebrant then laid the cross on the purple cushion or rug and with sentiments of compunction and reverence, removed his shoes, a penitential custom similar to that of the Pope's walking barefooted in the capacity of thurifer before the reliquary of the cross. The celebrant, accompanied by the officiating ministers, withdrew to a spot some distance from the altar where he performed a double genuflection and

---

prostrated to the floor of the church. He then arose, advanced a certain measured interval, and repeated the ceremony. The third time the prostration was performed at the foot of the cross which he reverently kissed, after which each member of the congregation approached in like manner to venerate the cross which the celebrant usually held in his hand. This rite of solemn veneration of the cross was known as "creeping to the cross" and constituted the chief feature in the Good Friday services in Anglo-Saxon England. 39

Certain other peripheral rites expressive of devotion to the cross, though not universally observed, were permitted by the rubrics and were common in pre-Norman England. 40 The ceremony of "creeping to the cross" was frequently practiced on Palm Sunday in anticipation of the last three days of Holy Week. 41 At times the Palm Sunday veneration may simply have been performed as the worshipper approached the great cross which hung facing the congregation in the gallery or rood loft, which crossed the nave of the church at the entrance of the choir or chancel. 42

Another favorite custom on "long Friday," as the day was called by the Anglo-Saxons, was the rite of the Burial of the Rood. 43 For this ceremony a sepulchre hung round with a dark curtain was constructed behind the main

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 51.
42 Ibid.
altar in the church. Here the deacons, singing anthems, carried the cross wrapped in a winding sheet. The procession, of course, was subsequent to the solemn liturgical veneration of the cross. Before the sepulchre containing the buried cross, which rested in "the tomb" until Easter morning, two, three, or four monks kept constant vigil day and night, chanting psalms or meditating. The poet's familiarity with these customs suggests further explanation of the liturgical and semi-liturgical influence evident in Line 24: "Husēt ǣfre in þær liegende læge hwile . . ." Even more evident in terms of liturgical influence is the initial setting of the vision: "Husēt mǣ gemætte tē middre nihtē" (Line 2). Patch concluded that Lines 21b-23b were written in interpretation of another commonly observed rubric, that is, the variety of colors sanctioned for crosses during Lent and Eastertide. In northern England during the eighth century, a general Lenten use of blood-red crosses prevailed. For Palm Sunday a more ornamental cross was often introduced. The liturgy did not permit the simultaneous exposition of these two kinds of crosses to the faithful. Nor does the poet perceive them thus. The liturgical distinction seems to be clear in his mind: "Geesseh is þæt fûse bæscen" (Line 21b).

From Easter to the Ascension the croix de Christallo was carried in Anglo-Saxon churches. Rubies and jasper were commonly embedded in these ornate crosses, which were in use in northern England by all churches and monasteries that followed the ordo of York Cathedral. Tatwine's Riddle mentions a cross.

---

11 Patch, "Liturical Influences," 236.
15 Ibid., 234.
carved of shining beryl, which would certainly appear to be "lēchte bewunden." Before the eighth century richly ornamented crosses were common in England, notably the famous crux at Hagham Priory.

In the Easter cross, the crossbeam and sometimes the vertical beam were jewelled; usually five precious gems studded the former, a Byzantine influence which asserted itself noticeably in early English Christianity. That the poet perceived "fife waðron uppe on þām earlegespans" (Lines 8b-9a) is a curious fact, since this type of decoration is more characteristic of the Middle Ages than it is of early England. However, regardless of the variation in the arrangement of dots or bosses, even on carved stone crosses, five units of ornamentation prevailed, almost without exception; and these five units were probably seen by the poet on a Celtic cross. This was the most familiar cross of the time; the arms were of equal length, pattée style, and designed in a circular form. At each angle in these Celtic crosses, there was frequently a dot or smaller cross, making with the circle or boss at the center junction of the beams a quincunx or design of five jewelled units.

Stevens sees in the number five a symbol of the five wounds of the Redeemer. Would such an allusion on the part of the poet be deliberate or fortuitous? Devotion to the five wounds was emphasized in the hymns and litan-

---

6 Rock, Church, IV, 290.
67 G. B. Armstrong, Art in Great Britain and Ireland, New York, 1909, 12.
68 G. B. Brown, Arts, II, 211.
gy of the period and was also a form of symbolism with which the laity in
general were familiar. It would be historically unsound, however, to attribute
to the poet the use of any more elaborate symbolism, such as the five grains of
incense placed in the Paschal candle during the Easter Vigil services; for al-
though these are intended by the Church to represent the glorious wounds of the
Savior, this custom was not introduced into the Roman liturgy until the twelfth
century. 50

One clue to an explanation of the imagery in Line 8a, which has re-
mained somewhat persistently obscure and which seems to imply an image of the
Easter cross, may be found in the translation of "foldan seσatum." Since
"foldan" means the earth's surface and "seσatum" the four corners of the earth,
it would seem that the poet may have wished to suggest that the image of the
blazing beacon had removed itself to the outer regions of space, from where the
vertical beam seemed just to touch the boundaries of earth and sky at a point
radiant with the splendor of jewelled lights. An equinoctial image is thus
suggested, that is, one in which the cross is perceived at a point where the
celestial equator intersects the ecliptic. "Seσatum" may also be translated
as "the heavens." In this sense the image could suggest that even the horizon-
tal beam was spread so far outward and upward across the sky that its apocalypt-
ic dimensions embraced the four corners of the earth: "I saw four angels stand-
ing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that
they should not blow upon the earth, nor upon the sea, nor on any tree." 51

50 McMahon, Liturgical Catechism, 262.
51 Apoc. 7, 1.
Emotional intensity becomes heightened in Lines 8-27. Does the poet begin already in Line 8 to foreshadow the immediacy of a dream-vision? To fashion gradually a synclastic image, the convex of a world bent inward with the impulse of the spirit towards the Sacred Wood? The writer hesitates to extend this suggestion too far; nevertheless there arises a poetic sense of expectancy within these lines, an effect created fundamentally perhaps by the increase in short lines preceding the cesura of Lines 19-27. A sense of retard seems to be evoked by the poet; then, after a "lange irile," the accumulation of images ceases. The living message of the Wood broods in readiness: "Hit hlæs rede; onganm pæ word sprecan wedu sēlēsta" (Lines 26b-27b).

In general the emotion and imagery of Parts I and II of the poem are characteristic of the lyric form.52 In the latter type of poetry the emotional stimulus tends to allow the accumulation of images which remain distinctively in the foreground of the poetic structure. This the poet has certainly permitted. "A lyric must acquaint the hearer or listener explicitly with the stimulus; otherwise we cannot know what moved the poet."53 In Part III, however, the Dream of the Reed assumes the structure of a dramatic monologue, a hybrid genre consisting of both lyric and dramatic qualities, in which the poet, although he continues the narrative in the first person, no longer represents himself as the speaker.

Since the emotional content in Part III is not derived directly from the personal feelings of the poet, attention may be expected to focus on some

52 Hamm, Pattern, 214.
53 Ibid., 224.
significant action that is whole, entire, and of some magnitude. The dramatic form more readily concerns itself with causal relationships than with a personal response to particular emotional stimuli and hence does not educe either the number or type of images peculiar to the lyric genre. The significant action in Part III is, of course, the story told by the Reed, a story set against the background of Good Friday, the Church's day of mourning. The immediate locale for the opening scene in the story is "gēara iū... holtes on ēnda." No sooner, though, has the Reed begun in leisurely narrative fashion to dispose of its own humble origin than a foreshadowing of impending tragedy quickens abruptly at the mention of the tree's being "āhēuan... ēstyred of stēfne mīnu." Suddenly in Line 30 the Reed neglects, in a deliberate ellipsis, the remainder of its own story; for it seems to feel itself caught up in the vortex of a crisis now rapidly approaching some central point between time and eternity.

In Part III the major problem in regard to imagery is the problem of a symbol which the reader must accept if he is to continue to follow the poet in a rather dramatic presentation of his poetic experience. It is the Reed, not the poet, that now speaks.

"Genēman mé āēr [the place is not specifically mentioned]... geworoten him þāēr... beārōn mé þāēr boernas on eaxlum... his mé on beorg æsetton... gefæstnodon mé þāēr fēondas genōge." The Reed's carelessness concerning the sequence of preliminary events on Calvary as recounted

in Scripture produces an accelerated tension, heightened by a few incoherent repetitions of scriptural fragments, as though the Rood had experienced such violent dread at the approach of this tragedy that it could not afterwards recount the events with accuracy or in their proper order. The abrupt departure (Lines 35-38) into a shortened hemistichal pattern betrays the stark terror of the Rood at the realisation of its own unique destiny: to become the instrument of the death of God. The Rood seems to be seized with a sense of powerlessness to compress adequately into words what is essential, namely, its own intimate knowledge of the hour in which "Wéop call gesceaf, cwī don syninges fyll: Crist wæs on rôde" (Lines 55b-56b).

Of three facts the Rood is certain: it raised aloft a young Hero ("ríhne cyning, heofna hlæfere") who suffered voluntarily ("hē mē wolde on gastigán") and suffered intensely ("call ic wæs mid blōde bestæmed, begoten of [hæs guman sīdan]).

A paradox of emotion colours Lines 35-45. There is an intensity of grief, a consternation at the thought of how degrading the gibbet probably appeared to most of the beholders, mingled with admiration for a warrior who could strip Himself and mount the gibbet voluntarily. A pagan warrior could not have done so and still be accepted as a hero. But this man had not been degraded in so doing: "Mōdig on manigra . . . hā hē wolde mantanm lýsan" (Line 41).

\[v ər i̞ pər ic əhā ne dorətə əfer Dyrhtnæs word\]
\[bügen ŏkə berstən, əhā ic bifian gesæh\]
\[œrən æn ææzəs: caIə ic nihtæ\]
\[fœñ̃ds əfəyllən, hwæ əfə ic fœñ̃ste stœd.\]
\[Ongyreb hɪnə əhā geong haIə ə, əpæt wæs God ələmhtig,\]
\[stræŋ ond stï̝s moD; gestä̝n hē on gaIægan hæänne,\]
mōdīg on manigra gesȳhte,   þā hē wolde mannumyn līsan,
Bifōde ic þā mē se beorn ymbclypte: ne dorste ic hwætere
būgan tō ecgān,
feallan tō foldan sceatam,   ac ic sceolde feæste standan.
Rōd wēs ic ðæt āreð,   abōf ic rīce cyning,
heofona hlāford,    hyldan mē ne dorste. (Lines 35-45)

The Rood's fear and trepidation yield to courage as it tells briefly of the young Hero's prowess in battle. In fact, enthusiasm for the warrior's courage and fame may be detected in the overtones of the account. The Anglo-Saxon poet was, of course, acutely aware that for his listeners this cross had to be a cross of glory. If the young Hero could not have complete glory in life, then he had to have it in death. "Crīst . . . on rōde" was Christ slain, but to the poet and to his listeners he was also Christ triumphant in battle.

The key lines compress the cause-and-effect relationship of the poem as a whole and also provide the key image of Part III, interpretative of the climax in the scriptural account of the crucifixion.

Nothing further is left to stir the emotions but the glory of a young Hero on a cross and the loyalty of the old comitatus bond which survives the depression usually induced by the "hlāfordless." The Rood stands guard, in quiet dignity, over the body of the slain warrior: "Forlēton mē þā hildarincas standan stēanne bedrifenne; call ic wēs mid strǣlum forwundod" (Lines 61b-62b). The wounds are trophies of victory. When the red drops of blood trickled down the upright wooden beam, the new covenant of Redemption was signed in the blood of God Himself, a covenant which had the cross for its parchment, blood for its ink.56 In Anglo-Saxon "crīst" denotes "the anointed one."


The cross is left standing somewhat in the background of the emotional overtones to the above scene—partly in highlight, partly in shadow; for the cross has both deepened and illuminated the poet's experience: "Æsæfond bewrigen mid wolcæm Wealdendorc hraew" (lines 52b-53b).

Certain other minor details of the dream-vision are also traceable to a liturgical source. Besides the adoration and veneration of the cross, the Good Friday services consisted of the reading of the lessons, to which the congregation listened; prayers for the conversion of all men, in which the congregation participated; and after the ninth century, the Mass of the Presanctified.

The first lesson in the reading service began with an extract from the prophet Osee, a prophecy concerning the word of promise of the oncoming Redemption ['wudu sælestæ']. The second selection, taken from the Book of Exodus (the enactment of the Jewish Passover), stressed a prophecy by way of action. Did this content of the reading service inspire the poet to combine narration and action in the framework of his poem?

After the reading service and the veneration of the cross by the clergy, the congregation approached for the ceremony mentioned previously, that of "creeping to the cross." During the procession the Improperia or Reproaches, a series of antiphons, were recited alternately by the celebrant and the deacons and sung by the choir to the melody of an ancient plagal chant, simple but stirring in its pathos. These Reproaches, put into the mouth of Christ as He hung upon the cross, were directed against the Jews, who had repaid His many benefits with base ingratitude. Popule meus, quid faci tibi? aut in quo contristavi te? respondes mihi [My people, what have I done to thee? or in what have I grieved thee? Answer me].
In the poem the point of view in reference to these remonstrances is shifted and embodies three levels of meaning. A series of self-reproaches is assumed by the Rood in the form of rhetorical questions, thus emphasising its own temptation to vanquish the "strange fœandas" and frustrate the divine plan. Perhaps also the poet intended to project upon the Rood the burden of requital which the Jewish people failed to assume as a nation. Or these succinct rhetorical arguments may have been intended as speeches of exsulpation. If the latter is true, then the Rood is distinguishing its own position from that of the Jews, and by an entreaty of necessitate pleads an overt speech of defense. The obvious departure into prosopopeia at the beginning of the dream-vision precludes any accusation of pathetic fallacy in handling the emotional and imaginative content of the poem as a whole.

The exact date for the incorporation of the Improperia into the liturgy of Good Friday has never been ascertained, but direct reference to it may be found in ninth-century documents and passing references as early as 600, when the officiant sang the Improperia and the congregation responded with the Trisagion. The latter, the Agios O Theos, was a three-fold hymn of praise borrowed from the liturgy of the Eastern Church but sung both in Latin and Greek in the Western liturgy for Good Friday. This ancient hymn may well have suggested some of the titles with which the Rood refers to the "wurada God"

\[
\text{Agios Theos}, \quad \text{"geong hæle\text{"} } \quad \text{Agios ischyros}, \quad \text{"rioney cyning" } \text{Agios}
\]

\[57\] Margaret Schlamach, "The 'Dream of the Rood' as Prosopopeia," Essays and Studies in Honor of Carleton Brown, New York, 1940, 32.

The graphic simplicity of the third invocation in Greek—Agiose
athanatos aleison inag—contrasts with Lines 55b-56a: "Wōp aall gassat f,
oxi ῥα δια συνίνες fyll." In the name of all creation, the Greek cries out for
mercy; the Anglo-Saxon mourns with all creation at sight of a dying God.

In the promulgation of the triumph, which constitutes Part IV of the
poem (Lines 77-156), twenty-three lines are devoted to a poetic summary of the
extrinsic developments in the cult of the cross and twenty-one to the recapitu-
lation of doctrinal tenets correlative to the veneration of the cross. As the
vision of the cross fades (Line 121b), an elegiac mood may be detected. With a
dignity that does not for a moment yield to sentimentality or self-pity, the
poet confesses his experience of the mutability of all earthly joys and the
limitation of earthly strength. He himself, perhaps with old age closing in
upon him and the loss of friends repeatedly sustained, finds in the Rood his
most profound consolation and hope.

A careful scrutiny in retrospect of the entire poem will point out
to the reader that in order to reveal the poetic significance of his subject,
the author of the Dream of the Rood has depended on the cult of the cross as
one of his major sources of emotion and imagery. Selecting, re-calling, com-
bining certain elements suggested by the cult of the cross—the glorification
and veneration of the cross in the official liturgy of the Church, as well as
the observance of contemporary peripheral rites in Anglo-Saxon England—

59 Ibid. The Trisagion was not incorporated formally into the
liturgy until the ninth century; but it was used by the Fathers at the Council
of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), and Germanus of Paris refers to its use in the
Gallican liturgy for the sixth century.
post has reproduced no one definite liturgical image but has achieved a creative image, the product of an energy of mind vigorous enough to project a symbol both universal and interpretative of a particular subject matter.

"Emotion needs thought to ground it in reality, and imagination to give it form and tangibility. Imagination needs feeling to rescue it from arbitrary and superficial activity, and intellect to deepen and enrich its vision."60 Grounded in the reality of scripture and the liturgy, the emotional content of the Dream of the Rood is quickened by the highest imaginative power of which man is capable, the creation of an interpretative symbol. 61

60 Ham, The Pattern, 117.

CHAPTER IV

THE CENTRAL CONCEPT IN THE POETIC FORM: A CREATIVE INTERPRETATION OF DOCTRINE AND LITURGY

In poetry the central concept is the controlling purpose of the poem, the tertium quid which effects a unity of interpretation in the ideas, emotion and imagery of the poem as a whole. This unifying concept is apparently determined by the content or structural pattern of the poem. Actually, however, it is determined by the creative principle of form.

What is form and how is it conceived? To Arnold form consisted fundamentally of style, of the effective arrangement of a varying succession of sounds and images through which the idea or experience of the artist is transmitted. In this restricted sense form is synonymous with mere technique in writing, with the external aspect of a poem. Nor does this explanation give the reader any notion of the origin of form. The idea which puts the form together cannot itself be the form.

The classical metaphysics of Aristotle and Aquinas is a sounder approach to the problem. According to this analysis, which is grounded in experience, everything possesses a constitutive principle in virtue of which it is what it is and does what it

---


2 Maritain, The Situation, 51.
does, without which we could have no way of perceiving it as a being. This principle is form.

Form, then, is not a structural factor. The reader will recall that in Chapter I of this thesis the present writer defined form as the vital principle which animates an entire poetic experience. This underlying principle a poet must discover before he can seize upon the generic character of his subject matter and interpret it for others. The essence of the poetic experience determines the form of the poem. In the Dream of the Rood, the essence of the poetic experience is that the poet has seen a cross "besyled mid swātes gange... mid since gegyrwed." And the cross has spoken: "Ongam þā word sprecan" (Line 27a).

Instinctively, perhaps, the poet recognized the fundamental kinship between the artist's poetic vision and the spiritual vision of the Church. The Church always sees the vision of universal reality underlying the liturgy, the transfiguration by which the fallen race of mankind is progressively assimilated to God. Transfiguration is the art-principle of the liturgy.

It is also possible that through the liturgy the poet grew close to the inner mystery, the generic character, of his subject. At any rate, he made transfiguration the art-principle of his poem. He fashioned a cross that had been a first-hand witness of the reality of the crucifixion and presented this cross as a cross of glory, symbolic of the fundamental message of the liturgy:

---

3 Hausi, Pattern, 138.

through transfiguration, the fallen race of mankind is progressively assimilated to God.

In the liturgy God's message is often implicit; it is the message of a hidden God, a _deus absconditus_.⁵ The Divine word conceals itself, at times, in created things, things as simple as bread or wine or wood.⁶ In the _Dream of the Rood_, the poet's message, too, is implicit. He projects his basic image through the metaphor of personification, then charges the wood of a living cross with the power of speech and entrusts to it a spiritual message.

Once the form of a poem is thus determined, the poet has seized upon the generic character of his subject. He can then work as nature works, transforming the raw materials of his poetic intuition into a new being, an artifact, which actualizes all the potentialities of his subject matter according to a plan, an order, a logic.⁷ This plan is the central concept, the controlling purpose of the entire idea behind the poem.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the central concept. It determines the techniques through which the poet's idea is expressed: the Rood speaking in the framework of a dream-vision. It dictates every premise in the logic of construction: Who it is that suffers on the Rood, why He suffers, and to what degree He suffers. It inspires a poetic vision of the tragedy and the beauty to be conveyed: the transfigured cross now wound with treasure, now stained with blood poured out. Without a single regression, the

---

⁵ Romano Guardini, _The Lord_, Chicago, 1954, 508.


architectonics of the poem provide for a succession of images arranged in an ascending order of importance and culminating in the climactic image: "Christ was on rods."

The central concept is, then, the basis of creative interpretation, Without a creative interpretation of subject matter, poetry is not, according to Aristotle, justified in claiming to be poetry. Aristotle's Poetics justifies poetry on two grounds [only]: the truth and validity, first of all, of poetry as an imitation of nature—or as a form of knowledge—and secondly, the morally desirable effect of this awareness upon the human mind.8

According to Aristotle, imitation is a mode fundamental to all art. When a poet imitates, he is a maker; he fashions a product, a poem, which corresponds to a true idea of some objective reality outside himself.9 In the Aristotelian sense of the word, imitation means the creative interpretation of a universal truth through a particular object portrayed in a particular setting. From the selective portrayal of an object or setting which evokes one emotion or poetic experience, a poet induces his reader to recognise universal emotions and experiences. Poetry is thus raised above the level of mere photographic representation.

What the poet records in imitating or creating a poem may be something he has never experienced in its entirety at any particular time or place in his own personal life. "Swans' cyst" may not actually have occurred "to middre nihhte," may never have been perceived in its entirety as a poetic vision.

---

8 Bate, Criticism, 14.

9 Aristotle, Poetica, 2, 1448a, 626.
Hence it would be futile to search the poem for evidence that certain sections are autobiographical and other sections purely imaginative. To do so would be to ignore the fact that in order to imitate, the poet has more than likely be-taken himself to a variety of materials, some of them quite foreign to the medium through which he himself was initially stirred.10

With unfaltering discernment of the informing principle in his work, the author of the Dream of the Rood chose as the unifying concept of his poem the image of the wood. Universal in its appeal, this creative image is presented as a particular cross—a living cross—in a particular setting; the Rood speaks—the poet listens. From the selective portrayal of the Rood's emotions of joy and sorrow, the poet induces his reader to recognize the universal suffer-ering and transfiguration by which all men—not just he, the poet—are pro-gressively assimilated to God. In thus creating a central image with a universal appeal, the poet makes perceptible to other men the depth and beauty of his own poetic experience and reveals it with clarity and proportion: splendor vari, splendor ordinis, splendor formas.

The poet's concept of the wood as the unifying principle in the poem also establishes an atmosphere of imaginative realism, a poetic device condi-tioning the reader to the degree of insight requisite for the acceptance of personification in the vision technique. "In the liturgy, a certain thing is used as a symbol, not because it has nothing to say of its own, but precisely because it has so much to say that it may even insinuate many things other than itself."11

10 Gayley and Young, Introduction to English Poetry, xxxi.

The symbolism and the diction of the poem are interdependent. The 
diction has, of course, already been analyzed in conjunction with a survey of 
the poetic imagery; but further analysis is necessary. In order to demonstrate 
how the wood is sustained as the unifying symbol, the writer will here examine 
certain key words which confirm the poet's interpretation of the central 
concept.

The opening lines of the poem foreshadow the person who is symbolized 
by the metaphor of the living cross. True to the art-principle of transfigura-
tion, the poet selects to describe the triumphant cross in Parts I and II such 
words as herald the approach of a victorious leader. He does this indirectly 
by suggesting through the symbol a presence more luminous than the symbol it-
self. "Bēama" denotes, perhaps, the patibulum or crux of the Latin, the stand-
ard of a leader. In the Anglo-Saxon, "bēama" refers also to a principle of 
activity, a source of spiritual guidance, like the pillar of fire which beck-
oned the Chosen People to follow it and led them safely through the desert. 
The poet, therefore, infers by the word "bēama" that the cross is no mere spec-
tacle to be gazed upon; it presages a task to be accomplished. 12 Note should 
be taken of the fact that the poet uses "waefersýne" only in referring to the 
Rood before Christ mounts it: "Gesworhton him þær tō waefersýne" (Line 31a).

"Beorhtest" dignifies the initial image with certain exemplary quali-
ties usually associated with a leader: august, noble, beneficent; præclarus, 
eximius. "Bēacen" is akin to the Latin signum or vexillum, the standard used

12 Zundel, Splendor, 52.
by a military leader in time of war, hence indicative of one empowered to com-
mand, one who has already led the way to victory: the "geong hæleð." 

By way of prelude to the dream-vision, the standard of the "geong 
hæleð" is proclaimed as "lœchte bewunden" (wrapped, encircled, surrounded 
with light). In Anglo-Saxon, the latter phrase, like "bēama," is an active 
image expressive of a light-bearing principle. Perhaps the poet wishes to in-
fer that the cross "begoten" with gold is possessed of the power to transfigure 
those who follow it. Again, "begoten," from "be-gātian," may imply that the 
conqueror has achieved so a unique a victory that the gold has been poured out 
in tribute by those who serve him, namely, the "Dryhtnes" (multitude or army of 
angelic hosts) who attend him "for §gesceaf." It is probable, however, that 
in using the word "golds" the poet simply had in mind the typical Anglo-Saxon 
chieftain who had treasures (rings, etc.) to dispense. 

The use of the word "for §gesceaf" suggests that the leader has 
dominion over an extensive empire: res creatae, omnes creaturas mundi. Admit-
tedly the poet's choice of words establishes an atmosphere of epic power and 
grandeur. Is this because a knowledge of the battle by which so august a ruler 
has achieved victory is soon to be communicated to the reader? Is there also 
discernible here a second level of foreshadowing technique, by which the poet 
prepares his reader for a shift from the lyric form of Parts I and II to the 
dramatic monologue of Part III? In its treatment of a tragic incident, the 
dramatic method demands that the scenes a faire be portrayed, not merely narra-
ted. Hence if he is to justify the victory in a dramatic section of the poem, 
namely, Part III, the poet must actually portray the death-struggle of the
"geong haele's." It is the conclusion of the investigator that the framework of the dream-vision may have been conceived originally as part of the retro-spective dramatic technique employed in Part III, rather than as a heightening or extension of the poet's own lyric mood proper to Parts I and II.

In order to strengthen the position of victory for the leader whom the transfigured cross represents, the poet assures his listeners that the cross is no malefactor's gibbet: "Hēru fræcodes gealga" (Line 106). Nor is it "gealh-trēow" (a gallows-tree, unsanely for a warrior, hateful to a leader). To the early Christians, the cross, even a cross of glory, was inherently detestable. The poet, therefore, is extremely cautious in his invention of words. The cross, he insists, is a "sigebēam" (sign of victory). The tree is not "gealgan" or patibulum crux, but a "wuldræs trēow."

In "wæðum," modified by "gæweorcod," the poet is again concerned with the dignity of the person represented by the symbol. The vestments are appropriate to his acknowledged rank. Does "seinan" refer to shining armor, easily associated with the idea of a general's battle gear? Like "bēama" and "lēohte bewunden," "seinan" also implies a self-sustaining principle, so perhaps the poet wishes to emphasize that the real splendor emanates from the person, not from his clothing or insignia. "Wynnum" (joy, delight; laetitia, jubilatio) indicates another human capacity and may have been used to strengthen the idea of the enthusiastic response given by those who serve the "Wsaldæandæs" (sovereign ruler; dominator gentium, creatorem coeli et terrae).

At the mention of the word "ongyfant," the poetic awareness of the cross seems to quicken. "Ongyfant" suggests cognoscere, intelligere, a recognition in one glance of the essence of a situation. Is this key word used primarily to sustain the poet's own viewpoint or the reader's? Probably the reader's, for it would seem that the poet wishes him to discern without further delay that the person whom the glorious cross represents has experienced real suffering: "Hit sêrest ongann swêstan on þa swēðran heallfe" (Lines 19b-20a).

The sense of compassion which this image arouses is coupled with a foreshadowing of terror: "Forht ic waess for þêre fægræn geþe³se" (Line 21a). The poet thus encourages the reader to recognize that the cross "besyled mid swētes gængæ" (Line 23a) is nevertheless beautiful: "I was terrified at the beautiful sight." In the heights of tragedy, pain is charged with exultation. Line 21a foreshadows directly the tragic pleasure of Part III, awakening in the reader a deep sense of pity and awe, emotions which will soon be purged and purified in a poetic experience of the Passion.
Because he must sustain the poetic unity in his portrayal of the crucifixion in Part III, the poet accentuates the note of glory—"fægere"—in Parts I and II. He thus strengthens by way of anticipation the concept of divinity in the "geong hæleð" and avoids interpreting the suffering on the cross in a contortionistic sense, which obtains emotion through ugliness. The dignity of the leader is reconciled with His divinity, and a unity of characterization results.

The metaphor of personification reaches its height in Part III when the Rood speaks and the poet listens. Whom does the Rood represent? Is it the mind of the reader? If so, the dream-vision is simply borrowed from the classic elegiac monologue. Or is it the mind of the poet? It cannot be, for such an interpretation would destroy the basic image of the poem: the speaking cross. It is the opinion of the present writer that the poet, true to the unifying concept of his poem, allows the wood to represent only the Person who has suffered, and in suffering has transfigured the wood which now speaks to both poet and reader. The art-principle of transfiguration is particularly operative in the poet's construction of the dream-vision, a technique which alerts the careful reader to the Church's vision of the mystery of the cross as interpreted by the poetic experience.

The framework of the dream-vision, as the reader will recall, is a technique determined by the central concept of the poem. The poet cannot simply tell the reader about the speaking cross; he must let such a cross speak

for itself. It does so in the dream-vision of Part III. Aristotelian principles of dramatic criticism may therefore be employed to a certain extent in evaluating the dream-vision and pointing out how the key words selected for Part III corroborate the image of the wood as the unifying concept.

A poetic interpretation of the mystery of the cross is a subject of some magnitude, which means that it is a subject of sufficient universal importance to ensure a content worth disclosing, yet not too vast; for then a sense of the whole is lost. 16 Despite the layers of theological and scriptural connotations incorporated in the dream-vision of the poem, it does not bulge with a single irrelevant detail and is compressed in less than fifty lines (Lines 33a-76a). Hence the subject is of a magnitude which may easily be embraced in one view, 17 The portrayal is disclosed with order and proportion, with a beginning—"Oeseah is þa Frośan mannsymnes þeðstan ælne niote" (Line 33b); a middle—"Crist weas on röde" (Line 56b); and an end—"hæt þre mō þær Dryhtnes pegnas" (Line 75b). These essential parts of the poetic structure are arranged, not haphazardly, but in an order calculated to evoke in the reader a recognition of the universal truth being interpreted. Poetic unity is, therefore, achieved through the poet's conformity with the universal requirements of necessity and probability in portraying his particular subject.

The logic of construction within the dream-vision is determined by three facets of the theology of the cross: Who it was that suffered, why He

16 Aristotle, Poetics, 7, 1451a, 63b.
17 Ibid., 9, 1451b, 635.
18 Ibid.
suffered, and to what extent He suffered. Quite simply the poet chisels out an
image of Who it is that mounts the cross. His language is simple enough for
the most stolid to understand: "Frēan mæncynnes [mankind's Lord and Master]
... heāle [in poetry, a warrior or hero]... hlāford [ruler; dominus ]
... bcorn [in a poetic sense, a prince or nobleman, especially one who is
the chief warrior or general; dux principis]... cyning [king in Anglo-Saxon
strengthens the idea of rex, imperator]." Notice should be taken of the cli-
mactic order of images arranged by the poet.

The reason why this Person suffers is answered in a single state-
ment: "Hē mē wolde on gestigan . . . hē wolde mæncynn līsan" (Lines 33b-
34b). The Rood confesses, however, its own struggle with the desire to sup-
press this tragic event and its subsequent resolution to surrender its will
to the will of the Person mounted upon it:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{dēr } \text{is } \text{hā } \text{ne dorste } & \text{ ofer Dryhtnes word} \\
\text{būgan } \text{o } \text{Dē } \text{e } \text{berstan, } & \text{hā } \text{is hāflam gesæn} \\
\text{ecrē } \text{an scētas: } & \text{ecles } \text{ic mihte} \\
fōndes gefyllan, & \text{hwē } \text{ēre ic fēeste stōd. } \text{(Lines 35-38)}
\end{align*}
\]

The struggle is repeated three times in a series of rhetorical questions pro-
posed by the Rood but answered at once in favor of the will of "God ālamhtig!"
"Ne dorste ic hwē } īre būgan tō ecra } an feallan tō foldan scēstum, ac ic
sæscoldes fēeste stōdan . . . hyldan mē } ne dorste . . . } ne dorste ic hira
ānigum seq } īr } an" (Lines 42b-43b; 45b-47b).

In the portrayal of the victorious battle, the poet reveals con-
cisely but frankly the intense degree to which this Person suffers. Nothing is
omitted to guard the reader against the impression that the "geong heāle"
is
not really a human person and has therefore achieved a victory without too
much pain or struggle. The poet is careful to attribute to Him qualities unmistakably human: "Gesæah ic Æ Frēsan mancynnnes ġestan ñne micle... strang and stīṣmod; gestāh hē on gealgan hēanne mōdig on manigra gesyhē" (Lines 33b-34a; 40a-41a). The Rood actually feels the burden of His human weight: "Bifodes ic Æ mē se beorn ymbelypte" (Line 42a). More than that, the Rood sees Him possessed of a real man's body: "Onyrede hine Æ geong hæleð" (Line 39a).

As the action rises quickly towards the climax of the crucifixion, a catharsis begins to operate out of the ordered sequence of events both piteous and terrible. With photographic candor the Rood isolates the more vivid details of the struggle: "Þurhdirfan hī mé mid deorcān nāeglum, on mé syndon Æ dolg geslēn" (Line 46). This is the moment of transfiguration for the wood. It sheds its own exteriority as a material object: "Opens inwiddhēmmas... Bysmeredon hīe ung būtū setgāēðere" (Lines 47a and 48a). It becomes the instrument of death for the Person Whom it represents: "Crīst wæs on rōde." It is stained with the blood of God.

The living cross, both a participant and a spectator in the tragedy, so vitally enacts this dual role, not by way of narration, but of action, that it is possible for the reader to experience the same cumulative sense of anguish experienced by the Rood itself, an anguish culminating in a transfiguring, poetic experience of the Passion:

Owraēh wordum Æ stīt hit is wuldres beam
sē Þē aðlmihtig God on browede
for mancynnnes manegum synnum
and Adōmes ealdgēwyrhtum. (Lines 97-100)

19 Aristotle, Poetics, 9, 1452a, 637.
In the opinion of the present writer, the climactic line, "Crist waes on rodæ," and the key lines fulfill Aristotle's second requirement for the validity of poetry, namely, that it should have a morally desirable effect upon the human mind. These lines seem to demonstrate more strikingly than any other lines in the poem the possibility of a purgation and purification of the reader's emotions, "not by discursive persuasion but by sudden illumination." 20

In the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) the Church declared "as an article of faith that 'the Word of God suffered in the flesh, and was crucified in the flesh, and tasted death in the flesh.' " 21 The Rood confirms these three facts quite clearly: "Hyestro hæðdon bewrigen mid wolsumme wealdendes hraēw." (Lines 52b-53b). "Hraēw" means only a human body, dead or alive; hence the man Who died on the cross suffered in the flesh. The words " hē urhdrifan hā mē mid deorcgan naēgium" until "blōde" was "begoten of hē as guman sidan" could refer only to a human ("guman") death. "Gāst" in the Anglo-Saxon is synonymous with the Latin animae and would probably be used only in reference to a human soul: "Sidōn hē hæðde his gāst omēnded" (Line 49b).

The consummatum est of scripture remains unspoken. It is implied, however, not in terms of scientific analysis of the cause of Christ's suffering, but rather in terms of the numb, stark terror of the wood: "Geseah ic weruda God hē carle þānian" (Lines 51b-52a). With artistic restraint the Rood summa-


rises the final scene on Calvary. "\(\delta\)ystro" (gloom, spiritual darkness) surrounds the "waruda God" (God of hosts) Who is "\(\delta\) earle \(\delta\)enian." The word "\(\delta\) earle" indicates the degree, not the manner, of suffering and may be adjoined to Line 62b ("call ic waes mid strælum forwundod") to complete the picture of the intensity of pain sustained in the death-struggle.

scæadu for \(\delta\)æode,
wann under wolcen, Wēop eall gesceaft,
awi \(\delta\)don cyninges fyll: Críst waes on rōdes. (Lines 54b-56b)

Never once has the poet allowed the details of the Passion to shout. He now bestows upon this, the climactic image of the poem, a supreme reticence. The key image, "Críst waês on rōde," portrays with dramatic objectivity the suffering and the means of transfiguration for both the Person and the wood. That is all that is essential. The poet refrains from cluttering the scene with any additional imagery or permitting even the faintest echo of personal emotion to intrude. "Words are charged with an atmosphere which reveals what they do not say, what they cannot say, what no one can say, and what is perhaps the essential matter." It is the mystery of the cross, revealed through the unifying concept of the poem, which the poet evidently wishes to leave with the reader; for the vision will soon fade, and the voice heard in the vision will be stilled.

There is a psychological moment at which the song has made its most thrilling impression, and there the music should cease. There is an instant of persuasion at which the argument has had its force, and there it should break off, just when the nail is driven home, and before the hammer begins to bruise the wood.23

22 Zundel, Splendor, 281.

23 Henry Van Dyke, Days Off, New York, 1907, 317.
The final measurement of unity in the form and content of a poem is the appropriateness of the genre. Unlike form, which is concerned with selecting an appropriate symbol to represent the generic character of the poetic experience, genre is concerned with extracting and emphasizing the emotions intrinsic to a poetic experience. "When Aristotle sought the distinctive characteristics of tragedy, he looked for it in the emotions, the quality of experience involved, and found them to be pity and fear." 24

Three major poetic genres are evident in the Dream of the Rood. Lyric, dramatic and heroic qualities of experience are interwoven in the interpretation of the central concept. The use of more than one genre is not fortuitous. It does not result in dichotomous units lacking appropriate emotional emphasis and destructive of artistic unity in the poem. It is the opinion of the present writer that the three genres have been deliberately selected in order to precipitate cumulatively for the reader a transfiguring poetic experience of the Passion. The lyric emotions of joy and grief in Parts I and II branch from the same main pattern which mounts to tragic pity and fear in Part III, then resolves itself into the heroic genre, mingled with an elegiac lyricism, in Part IV.

At first glance it may seem to the reader that in Parts I and II the poet emphasizes emotions characteristic of the lyric genre, conjuring up image after image of the triumphant cross until the reader is almost mesmerized by the "sylicore tréow." So heightened is the sense of both exultation and sorrow that the poet fears to relinquish either the cross "besyled mid swëtes gange"

24 Haun, Pattern, 155.
or that "mid since gægrywed." Closer analysis of the poem reveals, however, that the genre of Parts I and II is not completely lyric; and the reader may find it interesting to note here that modern criticism recognizes a lyric poem as implicitly and sometimes explicitly dramatic in genre.25 Traditionally, the lyric perceives life as an experience of the present moment, but this the author of the Dream of the Rood does not do in Parts I and II. "Ic synnum fáh, forwundod mid wæmmum," emphasizes the past, a distinctive mark of the dramatic genre. "Hwæ ðre ic þæor licgendi lange hwile behold hréowcærig" (Lines 24-25a). A situation which brings men suddenly to account is fundamentally dramatic, not lyr...c.26 In fact, without this interrelation of past and present experience, the poetic interpretation of "hwilum wæs mid wætan bestemed, basyled mid swætes gange gægrywed" would be somewhat recondite.

Despite their lyric structure, Parts I and II of the poem elicit certain emotions intrinsic to the dramatic genre. Lines 13-25 already foreshadow the tragedy to be portrayed in the dream-vision. "Whenever significant action is represented so as to hold the attention of the recipient and enforce on him a sense of issue and import, there dramatic form is energizing."27 The genius of the poet manifests itself, or so it seems to the present writer, in the use of a lyric form with dramatic overtones as a prelude to the dramatic genre of Part III, the only genre vigorous enough for projecting the dream-vision, the heart of the poem, and evoking the empathy of the reader.

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 25k.
Temporal and causal relationships within a poem are significant in determining the genre. The lyric genre, because it transmits personal feelings of joy or grief, usually favors the present tense almost exclusively or creates an intense impression of the present moment. The brevity and intensity of any subjective experience implicates its transience; and therefore the poet tends to detain a fugitive joy or even an ephemeral grief by capturing it in the present tense, which thus seems, at least poetically, to arrest the escaping joy or sorrow until the full aesthetic or tragic pleasure has been distilled from it.

In the dramatic genre, the illusion of the present moment is derived not only from an intense subjective experience, but also from a deep awareness of the cause or result of a particular action in a particular situation. For example, the distinctive emotions of Part III, the pity and fear experienced by the Rood, are aroused by way of empathy for the suffering of Christ on the Rood because Christ is God and the Rood itself is the instrument of God's death. In narrative literature, on the other hand, particularly in the epic, may be found an awareness of present heroic actions as prophetic of future events. The glorification of the cross on the day of judgment and the hope of future happiness to which the poet refers in Part IV are given an emphasis which is heroic in genre. In the opening lines of Part I, a certain epic grandeur also emanates from the series of apocalyptic images of the glorified cross.

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
What qualities of emotion in the Dream of the Rood may be extracted as intrinsic to the poetic experience as a whole? Although Parts I and II seem to be predominantly lyric, Part III, a hybrid genre, reveals emotions distinctive of both the lyric and dramatic genres. Part IV is largely heroic narrative. Hence three distinct literary genres may be discerned in the poem, but the heroic-epic strain is subordinate to, not independent of, the dramatic and the lyric; and the dramatic governs whatever lyricism sustains the personification of the Sacred Wood.

Despite the fact that a brief elegiac mood is conjoined to the exultation proper to Parts I and II, the passing note of lamentation (Lines 18-25) does not have the depth of emotion portrayed in Part III. The lyric genre excludes any quality of emotion which involves a sense of conflict, such as that portrayed by the Sacred Wood in its concern for the "geong hāle S," or any suggestion of irascibility, another emotion momentarily evoked by the Rood's impulse to defend: "Ealle ic mihte fōondas gafyllan" (Lines 37b-38a). Such emotion is peculiar to the dramatic genre. There is no momentum precipitative of choice in the lyric genre; there cannot be, for choice demands consciousness of cause and effect, the interrelation of past and present issues. Traditionally, the lyric is restricted to a personal utterance in response to an immediate poetic experience. In the dramatic genre, on the other hand, the poet speaks in behalf of another as well as of himself. Even in a dramatic monologue he addresses another person, present or imaginary. Dramatic genre is communal. In the Dream of the Rood, the wood addresses the poet.

In both the heroic and dramatic genres, the original stimulus tends to be absorbed in the action told or dramatized; but in the lyric the initial
image remains in the foreground and controls the development of the entire poem until the accompanying emotion has exhausted itself or yielded to thought and resolution. Only in the lyric is a self-conscious poetic energy inverted towards the sensibility of the ego: "And ic synnum fāh, ferwundod mid wāsmum" (Lines 13b-14a). Unity in the lyric, is often achieved by fullness of utterance, such as that evidenced in the manifold repetition of images of the glorified cross in Parts I and II. In the dramatic genre, it is the causal action that issues in significant changes which both advance the plot lines and unite the areas of conflict, the sense of urgency and crisis: "Gesseah ic βā Frēan mannymnes qfstan qlne nicle, βāt hē mē wolda on gestīgan . . . ic bifian gesseah eor ðan seoētas . . . gestāh hē on gealga hlēna . . . Rōd wās ic ēruēd" (Lines 33b-34b; 36b-37a; 40b; 41a).

The lyric genre tends to comprise in one breathless moment a whole series of images, as in Parts I and II: "βūhte mē βāt ic gesāwe . . . gesseah ic βāt fūse bēoche wāndan wādum and hlēow" (Lines 4a and 21b-22a). Movement from point to point, as in the action portrayed in the dream-vision, is, on the contrary, characteristic of the dramatic genre. In the latter, time and place are peripheral. The central requirement is unity of action. No definite setting, save a hill, is provided in the Dream of the Rood: "Ωs ēsāt hīs mē on beorc ēsētna" (Line 32b). That is sufficient for the action under consideration. What is really essential is to portray this particular tragedy of suffering and what caused it: "Hē wolda mannymn līsan" (Line 41b). Then the token of victory can be discerned in the apparent defeat: "Scæadu for Sēōða,

31 Haen, Pattern, 260.
wann under welorum" (Line 544-55a). This is the moment of the tragic qualm, the sudden and appalling recognition of a plight in a universe indiscriminate of good and evil. The climactic image is placed in immediate proximity: "Crist waes on rode." The poet does not mention the wood again until he does so in the key lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Onyrōh wordum} & \quad \text{fect hit is wuldres bēam} \\
\text{sē ūe aelmhtig God} & \quad \text{on brōwodes} \\
\text{for mancyhnes} & \quad \text{manegum symum} \\
\text{and Adōnes ealdgwýrhtum.} & \quad \text{(Lines 97-100)}
\end{align*}
\]

It is the conclusion of the investigator that had the dramatic genre been omitted from the poem, the poet would have had no interpretative medium for transposing past heroic events into a present moment in which these events appear to be transpiring for the first time. Such an illusion heightens the circumstances out of which dramatic action is evolved, a process which is scarcely to be accomplished by the narrative method. With the annihilation of time and space admissible in the dramatic genre, the poet is also free to accelerate or retard the major steps needed to carry forward the interlocking chain of events: the proposition in Part I of the glorified cross, the glimpse in Part II of its potential issue, then the precipitating action developed retrospectively in Part III. Such a broken sequence of plot flashes, far from overcondensing the action to the point of unreal rapidity, strengthens the illusion that events are transpiring for the first time and forges an intensification of antecedent and subsequent facts in the structural relationship. The reader's emotional response to a poetic experience thus fashioned disposes him

---

32 Hamm, Pattern, citing Frye, 273.
to receive the full impact of the scènes à faire, for example, Lines 46-49, in which the turbulent scene of the death-struggle is projected. The poet's careful backstitching to the dual lines of interest in the poem—the empathy of the Rood and the catharsis experienced by the reader at sight of the bravery and suffering of the "geong haèle ṣi"—tightens the main thread of the story and smooths out the emotional transition from fear to pity, an adjustment often abrupt in the dramatic genre.

The latter is traditionally favorable to the retrospective method of plot development. Had the author of the Dream of the Rood not opened his poem in medias res, he would have been faced in advance with two problems: first, that of explicating the doctrine underlying the cross of suffering and the cross of glory—and the effort to do so would probably have degenerated into mere didacticism—and second, he would have had to curtail the length of the poem, lest it become so extensive that he would be suspected of having chosen the wrong poetic genre. However, the more compact a dramatic action, the more antecedent facts there are involved in it. In the Dream of the Rood, the establishment of the conditions precedent to the cross of glory could easily have resulted in lengthy polemics. Master craftsman that he was, the poet met the obligation of weaving in antecedent facts by providing the dream-vision with a lyric introduction. This spared him the temptation of reaching too far into the background of his story, to the point where scriptural events are inevitably lacking in poetic interest and have no dramatic value in the light of poetic experience. But the lyric introduction fades into the dream just at the point where the initial glimpse of the cross of suffering has been disposed of, namely, at a point as close as possible to the precipitating action
of the main proposition in the plot: the transfiguring power of the cross (Lines 22b-23b). The dream-vision in turn fades just as the complete emotional response to the poetic experience is released: "Gebād ic mā ḫā tō ḫan bēame" (Line 122). In its structure the poem gives evidence of order and proportion.

The emotions characteristic of the dramatic genre seem to justify, however, the length of the monologue in a poem such as this. The more universal a public deed, the more directive becomes the inner motivation of the hero or leader, the motivation of a will that knows itself: "Ongyrede hine ḫā geong haēle Ḫ." In the opinion of the writer, the monologue in the dream-vision is epic in character, lyric in tone, adaptable to dramatic structure, and handled in conformity with the liturgical art-principle of transfiguration, a fundamental hypothesis for the discernment of the informing principle in any sound Christian literary work.33

The quality of the poetic experience interpreted in the Dream of the Rood challenged the poet to the utmost discrimination in selecting the genres which would aid in effecting a transfiguring catharsis. Poetic experience, though comparable to the religious experience of union with God in prayer, is not sui generis mystical. "Poetic knowledge unites the poet with realities, not directly with the supreme reality, God Himself—this is the exclusive privilege of mystical knowledge."34 To give a creative interpretation to an intense poetic experience which has its source in doctrine and liturgy demands the highest possible sense of discernment between the spiritual and aesthetic

33 Hatafeld, "Renascence," 107.

elements to be fused organically in the res and verba of the poetic form. The poet accomplishes this fusion through his central concept, which is neither the doctrine nor the cult, but the living cross. And when the Rood speaks in the dream-vision, the "electrifying, transforming, transfiguring catharsis through that marvelous linguistic current from the poet's anima to the reader's anima takes place,"35 Herein lies the generic character of the poem. Through a central creative image with a universal appeal, the poet transmits to other men the depth and beauty of his own poetic experience.

35 Hatfield, "Renascence," 107.
CHAPTER V

The corpus of Old English poetry is rooted in an age that called men to conversion and to a conviction that the Kingdom of God was not of this world. The passport to that kingdom was the **sigebäam**, the victory-tree, a favorite theme of Anglo-Saxon Christian poets.

The first of these poems is the *Dream of the Rood*, which has as its purpose the promulgation of the cult of the cross. Historical ambiguities surround the origin and authorship of the poem. For this reason the present writer has limited the investigation of the historical background to an identification of the poem as a 156-line religious lyric contained in the *Codex Vercellensis* and to a summary of the relationship between the complete text of the poem and the Ruthwell extractions. The introductory chapter also includes a brief comparison with *Elene* and *Christ III*, two other early English poems dealing with the theme of the cross.

It has been the purpose of this thesis to examine the doctrinal ideas contained in the poem, analyzing, by way of an *explication de texte*, all references and allusions to the cult of the cross. In Chapter II the writer has dealt chiefly with the poetic content, namely, the doctrine of Redemption and its corollary, the doctrine of the veneration of the cross. Derived from a contemporary cult rooted in a doctrinal inheritance, the subject matter of the poem presented the first major problem of the thesis. In order to reflect the
doctrine and deal with the cult, the poet apparently divided his subject matter into four major themes: victory, Redemption, suffering, and other related dogmas. No one of these doctrinal themes, however, is treated in logical or chronological sequence. Theological distinctions fail to explain the overlapping and repetition of subject matter. The doctrinal content, if abstracted from the poem as a whole, leaves the basis of the poetic structure largely unexplained.

Further analysis has seemed to indicate that the structure is perhaps more closely associated with the purpose of the poem: to promulgate the veneration of the cross. The act of veneration embraces both doctrine and cult. Hence it is the opinion of the investigator that the poet has allowed neither the doctrine to displace the cult nor the cult to displace the doctrine, but has developed them simultaneously under four aspects with a single point of emphasis: the fact of a triumph, the nature of the triumph, the story of the triumph, and the promulgation of the triumph. The classification of the subject matter under these four aspects of the veneration of the cross seems to coincide with the basis of the poetic structure more satisfactorily than a division according to doctrinal themes only as stated above.

In a consideration of the apparent disunity between structure and content, it has been pointed out that although the structural pattern deviates from the inner line of theological content, the circuitous treatment of the subject matter results also from frequent interpolations induced by a flux of emotion and imagery based on liturgical sources. The possibility of organic unity in the poem has, however, been sustained by the fact that a popular
respect for the integrity of any doctrinal theme may be assumed in an age of integrated education in Christian art and letters. An even more fundamental reason for the possibility of organic unity has been suggested by the nature of doctrine itself. Although the latter never changes intrinsically, it does undergo a process of extrinsic explication. This fact explains the possibility of there being incorporated in the Dream of the Rood a reflection of the historical development in the cult of the cross without the organic unity of the doctrinal inheritance being in any way impaired.

The writer has not excluded the possibility that various parts of the Dream of the Rood may have been composed over a period of centuries and developed by more than one author. The principle of extrinsic development in doctrinal subject matter may even corroborate a theory of joint authorship and to some extent elucidate the historical ambiguities which attend both origin and authorship. Within the framework of the text of the poem, any later Christian poet could have embellished the original theme, as well as incorporated the contemporary trends in the cult, without in any way impairing the organic unity of the poem.

The popular consciousness of the cult as evidenced in Parts I, II and III has seemed representative of the Patristic period of doctrine—between the seventh and the ninth centuries—the same period in which Anglian culture began to shift from Northumbria to Wessex. Part IV, however, reflects in general more of a spirit of analytic inquiry characteristic of the ninth century—the Scholastic period. That the major portion of the poem was very likely completed prior to the year 900 is evidenced by the complete absence of the apocryphal material which infiltrated England during the reign of King Alfred.
In Chapter III the cult of the cross has been investigated in detail as a source of emotion and imagery in the poem. Although the purpose of the poet has not been to display in his poem the structure of the liturgy, or manipulate the liturgy into the structure, he has depended on the pattern of the liturgical cult. The speaking cross is an interpretative, creative symbol which reveals the poetic significance of the doctrine of Redemption. In conjunction with an investigation of the liturgy of the cross, there has been pointed out the parallel analysis evident between the poetic emotion and imagery and contemporary services in honor of the cross, more especially the vigil of Good Friday, the Adoration of the Paraseve, and other peripheral rites observed in Anglo-Saxon England.

It is the opinion of the writer that the emotional quality of the poem differs in the respective parts of the poetic structure. Parts I and II seem to be predominantly lyric in their emotional tone. Part III, a hybrid genre, reveals both lyric and dramatic qualities. Part IV is largely narrative; whatever emotion there is in that section may be classified as heroic.

Chapter IV deals entirely with the central concept as determined by the poetic form. Although form is sometimes considered a structural factor in poetry, the present writer has favored the theory that form is an inner constitutive principle which determines the generic character of a particular poetic experience and the interpretation the poet wishes to give it. Emphasis has been given the central concept as the controlling purpose of the poem and the determining factor in the technique of expression. The framework of the dream-vision, the arrangement of doctrinal material, the selection of imagery and
points of emotional emphasis within the poem are all fashioned in conformity with the unifying concept, the image of the wood. Universal in its appeal, this creative image is presented as a particular object, a living cross, in a particular setting, the dream-vision in which the Rood speaks to the poet. From the selective portrayal of the Rood's emotions, the poet induces the reader to recognize the universal suffering and transfiguration accomplished by the cross. In order to substantiate this theory of the central concept, the writer has examined certain key words to show that they strengthen the idea of the wood as the unifying concept in the poem. Their significance for both poet and reader has also been pointed out.

The appropriateness of the genre has been selected as the final measurement of unity in the form, content, and style. The use of three genres—lyric, dramatic, and heroic—has been justified by the nature of the emotional response which had to be elicited from the reader in order for him to interpret this particular poetic experience in such a fashion that it might have a morally desirable effect upon him, namely, a transfiguring catharsis. Throughout Chapter IV the writer has attempted to justify the poem as a poem according to Aristotelian requirements for the validity of poetry: imitation in the sense of creative interpretation of a universal truth; and a morally desirable effect upon the reader.

So far as the writer has been able to determine, no original criticism of the res and the verba of this poem has previously been made. No doctrinal analysis of the content, no complete parallel study of the contemporary cult as a source of emotion and imagery, no evaluation of the poem according
to Aristotelian principles of form, genre, or the central concept have been discovered in the course of research.

It is hoped that the writer has given full credit to the poet for extracting from his subject its highest, most spiritual significance, rather than offering a mere poetic paraphrase of doctrine and liturgy. The literary perfection of the poem may be traced to the unity of effect achieved through the single basic image of the cross, its greatness to the value of the elements harmonized in the central concept.

Into the Dream of the Rood the poet breathed something of the living spirit of the liturgy, the living voice of Christ within His Church. Thus the unknown author achieved a poetic unity of thought and feeling, doctrine and imagery, which flowed directly from the liturgy itself. The vision of the poet was the vision of the liturgy. Fulget crucis mysterium.


Benham, Allen R., English Literature from Widsith to the Death of Chaucer, New Haven, 1916.


Bishop, Edmund, Liturgica Historica, Oxford, 1918.


Brooks, Stopford A., English Literature from the Beginning to the Norman Conquest, New York, 1898.


Cook, Albert S., *The Date of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses*, Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, New Haven, 1912.


Stevenson, Joseph, ed., The Latin Hymns of the Anglo-Saxon Church, [Publications of the Surtees Society, XXIII], Durham, [1851].


Van Dyke, Henry, Days Off, New York, 1907.

Wardale, Edith, Chapters on Old English Literature, London, 1935.


Williams, Margaret, Word-Board, New York, 1940.

Willson, Elizabeth, Medieval Legends of Visits to the Other World, University of Chicago, 1917.

Winchester, Charles T., Some Principles of Literary Criticism, New York, 1925.

Zundel, Maurice, The Splendour of the Liturgy, New York, 1940.

B. ARTICLES


The thesis submitted by Sister M. Ignatia O'Connor, O.S.B. has been read and approved by a board of three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

20 Jan 61
Date

[Signature of Adviser]