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‘Receiving scorn and mocking’: the iconography of the *Christ aux outrages* in Wales and the Western European tradition

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Through an examination of aspects of the late medieval iconography of the Passion of Jesus Christ that is to be found in both the Passion Plays and the work of visual artists working in stained glass, wood, stone and mural painting, both in Wales and England, and elsewhere in western Europe, particularly in Brittany, this essay seeks to demonstrate the close relationship which existed between the various art forms, and how all drew out the message of Salvation that was both explicit and implicit in the Christian gospel narratives, and the literature which derived from them. It illustrates that in the iconography of the Passion, the surviving examples from Wales demonstrate that the devotional and liturgical life of Christians here was fully in accord with that to be found elsewhere in Catholic western Europe in the later Middle Ages.

In the late medieval iconography of the Passion of Jesus Christ there is no significant difference between the artist and the dramatist. In the surviving plays of the Corpus Christi cycles, whether they are from England, Cornwall or Wales, and the artwork, be it in wood, stone, glass or paint, we find the same ‘impassioned emotionalism’ and ‘sensational realism’ described by J. W. Robinson.[2] As Eamon Duffy has pointed out, ‘late medieval religion stressed the spiritual value of vivid mental imaging of the events of the life of Christ, especially his Passion.’[3] The Christian is more than observer, more than spectator; through imagining, which is at the same time imaging, he or she becomes a participant. Thus the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* directs that the Christian should ‘make hym-selfe present in his thoghte as if he sawe fully with his bodily eghe all the thyngys that be-fell abowte the crosse and the glorious passion of our Lorde Ihesu.’[4] Here we are put in touch with that intensely inner spiritual life which is so much a feature of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century western Catholic Christianity, what might be called an ‘interiorization’, which is at once representational and transformative.

In this paper I propose to explore one particular aspect of that spiritual life, for which evidence survives in Wales as elsewhere in western Europe; evidence which introduces us to ‘the essence of the practical soteriology of late medieval religion.’[5] However, as it would be impossible to do justice to this theme in one paper, I have chosen to focus not upon the imaging of the crucifixion itself, but upon rather less familiar aspects of the Passion story which are closely related to it. Each of the chosen subjects demonstrates not only a symbiotic relationship between artist and dramatist, but also that in respect of affective piety and devotion, Welsh Christians in the late Middle Ages were at one with their fellows elsewhere in western Christendom.

Spitting and buffeting

Although there are earlier examples, it was not until the period under consideration here, primarily the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, that images of Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin began to include that moment described in the synoptic gospels when He was subjected to physical violence and abuse, being struck and spat upon. The earliest of the gospels, that according to Mark, describes it thus: ‘Some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophesy: and the servants

did strike him with the palms of their hands'.[6] The gospel of Matthew, here dependant on Mark, gives this account: 'Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?'[7] Despite these accounts being short, nonetheless the event it describes was recognized as having a profound theological and devotional significance. The mocking and buffeting of Jesus was interpreted as a 'type' of the crucifixion, which was soon to follow.[8] This violence has, as Jeffrey Heltermann has pointed out, none of the sublimity of Calvary, but nonetheless the crudity and the very pettiness of the indignity inflicted in the spitting and buffeting accentuates the humility of Christ. 'The buffeting was seen as an absolute example of godhead assuming manhood', says Heltermann.[9] It is therefore an epitome of the Incarnation, of that kenosis of which the apostle Paul speaks in his letter to the Philippians: 'Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.'[10] In the spitting and buffeting is found the voluntary abdication of reputation, the humility and the obedience of which the apostle speaks. 'Every species of outrage was heaped upon [Jesus], so that he became the perfection of human humility'.[11] This voluntarily endured suffering elicits a response from the Christian onlooker as imager and imaginer; as the fourteenth-century English spiritual writer Richard Rolle expressed it: 'I thank thee, swete Lord Jhesu Cryst of the pynus and of the schamus that thou suffryd before the byschopus and maystres of the lawe, and of thine enemys, of buffetys and of neckedyntes and of many other scahmes that thou suffred.'[12] Given the recognized theological importance of this humiliation of Jesus, as Rosemary Woolf observed, it 'required that the scenes of the buffeting and scourging should be as extensive as possible' in their dramatic representation.[13]

Luke's gospel, following a hint in Mark's, has the mocked and abused Jesus first blindfolded.[14] It is this account of the mocking which inspired the carving on several of the Breton *calvaires* from the mid-fifteenth century onwards into the seventeenth, notably those at Pleyben (Fig. 4),[15] Guimiliau,[16] Plougastel,[17] Plougonven[18] and Saint-Thégonnec.[19] The imaging of the blindfolding, so dramatically portrayed in these carvings, many post-dating the Protestant Reformation in England, however, introduces us to other significant layers of the Passion story, and suggests a linkage between this 'static' iconography and the 'active' iconography of, at least in England and Wales, the somewhat earlier medieval drama.[20]

The Passion Play

In the plays of the Wakefield Master, that which focuses upon the mocking of a blindfolded Christ, the *Coliphizacio,* explores the message inherent in the image, namely, spiritual blindness. The Wakefield Master uses his drama to meditate upon the paradox that here the Incarnate Word made Flesh is silent, despite the constant demand of the tormentors that he speak. The dramatist understands that it is his very silence which speaks most eloquently; it is the presence of the silent Word, suffering in humility, which is itself the message. All the words spoken are by the tormentors, and they are but nothing before the Incarnate Word. Woolf has pointed out, for example, that in many of the plays, both in England and on the Continent, the action of the buffeting and striking is 'accompanied by brutal description of the torment, so that words should make vivid to the imagination the sufferings which could only be enacted on the stage.'[21] Writing of earlier Greek drama, T. S. Eliot asserted that 'behind the dialogue . . . we are always conscious of a concrete visual actuality, and behind that, of a specific emotional actuality. Behind the drama of words is the drama of action, the timbre of voice and voice, the uplifted hand or tense muscle, and the particular emotion.'[22] In the description combined with the 'visual actuality' in these medieval plays, we find the same thing; the 'emotional actuality' is the reaction and involvement of the spectator who thus becomes participant.

What is conveyed is the understanding that although it is the Word in the person of Jesus who is blindfolded, it is the tormentors who are blind. They cannot 'see' the truth that is before them. They demand that Jesus 'prophesy', that is, forth-tell the will of God as revealed in the events of the moment. Ironically, they do not realize that the still, silent, blindfolded Jesus is doing just that; revealing by his humble submission it is God's will that here in Jerusalem He should 'suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day'.[23] It is the playwright's hope that his audience can 'hear' the message of the silent Jesus, and 'see' the truth about the blindfolded Lord, namely that in His silent blindness He reveals not only human humility, but the awesome power of the Son of God. Nowhere, perhaps, is this understanding better conveyed than in the carved figure of the blindfolded Jesus on the *calvaire* at Saint-Thégonnec, where the standing figure, bound by ropes between two agitated, somewhat ugly and grotesque, persecutors, exemplifies a calm, almost reposeful, dignity.[24]

The Wakefield Master does not stand alone in his exploration of this theme, though arguably his dramatic skills are of the finest. The Chester cycle of plays also includes the assault on a blindfold Jesus,[25] as, seemingly, did the craft plays of Hereford and Worcester, though no texts survive.[26] There is also a reference to this humiliation of Jesus in the preamble of the surviving Welsh play.[27] Although it is unlikely that many, if any, of the people of Wales saw the work of the Wakefield Master, some at least might well have seen the cycles performed along the borders, at Chester, Worcester or Hereford. Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, among those present if not actually participant there were possibly artists and craftsmen whose work took them into Wales, if they were not Welsh themselves. It is worth emphasising in this context that the performance of such plays were the prerogative of the members of the craft guilds; at Hereford, for example, the play depicting the buffeting was performed by the carpenters.[28]

One further point needs to be made here. A characteristic of these dramatic representations is that the mockers are, as Rosemary Woolf has pointed out, and noted earlier, 'sometimes ugly peasant figures, sometimes mailed soldiers'; whichever, they are 'equally grotesque, characterized through their speech and action'.[29] This same characterization is to be seen on the Breton *calvaires.* In this context Woolf makes an interesting point: 'whilst the use made in Nazi Germany of the medieval iconographic tradition of Jewish caricature has nowadays made it offensive to all sensibilities, the dramatic, visual use of this tradition was probably almost as innocent of immediate malice as the convention of symbolizing an evil soul by a black skin.'[30] However, Woolf's apologia here may not embody the whole truth. Whilst very few of the participants or onlookers would have had any personal acquaintance with the Jews (who had been banned from the kingdom, and remained so until the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell in the seventeenth century), in popular religious thought, as Woolf says, conveyed through a widespread iconographic tradition, they, perhaps far more than anyone with a black skin, were seen, because of the gospel accounts of their participation in the events of Good Friday, as an epitome of sinful humanity, visibly depicted in grotesque and distorted physiognomy.

What would have made at the very least as much impact as this is the fact that the mocking and abuse in which they engage is strongly reminiscent of children's games of great antiquity, but still played in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, namely *Hot Cockles* and *Frog in the Middle.* In the latter, one sits or squats whilst others dance about him, striking him as they go. If he succeeds in catching one of his tormentors, then the one caught has to take his place. In the former, which as *Kollabismos* would have been known to the tormentors of Jesus and to the gospel writers, a player is blindfolded and he is struck by another player and asked to identify who struck the blow. Again, if the tormentor is correctly identified, then he has to take the place of the victim.[31]

Many of those witnessing this play would have recognized what was depicted and identified it with the games; they would have been able to identify with the 'victim' from personal experience. Thus the dramatist's intention, to elicit the sympathy and understanding of his audience, would have been achieved.

Those watching would have been moved from pity to piety by the realization that here the victim was no hapless child at play, but the Son of God. Here the game is no game, and here the victim plays by not playing. He is silent, and makes no effort to identify His tormentors. He is still, and makes no effort to catch them. For in this game there can be no substitute; Jesus alone can be the 'Lord of the Dance'. For those who had no access to the Scriptures in the vernacular, and who were reliant on occasional expositions of the gospel narrative in the context of the liturgy or by peripatetic friars, such vivid dramatizations, which chimed in with their own personal experience, brought home the essential message of that narrative as perhaps nothing else could.

Wall painting

We are, perhaps, now in a position to better understand the significance of the wall-painting discovered above the lintel of a window in the nave of the small Glamorgan parish church of Llandeilo Talybont, which has been reconstructed at The Museum of Welsh Life in St Fagans, with artwork, furnishing and fittings recreating those which would have been in the church in the early years of the sixteenth century.[32] In this wall-painting there are three figures, shown head-and-shoulders only (Fig. 1). The central figure is depicted full face, the others, one on either side, in profile. With the sole exception of the central figure not being blindfolded, it is a most moving depiction of the subject we have been considering, revealing a symbiotic relationship with the craft plays, with which it is contemporaneous. The profiled figures are shown in the act of spitting, the spittle clearly delineated, and drops of it fall from the face of the central figure, which gazes directly at the onlooker; the face of Christ.

Let us first consider the profile figures. Here are Rosemary Woolf's plebeian, nameless men. They are deliberately caricatured as such by the artist, with their bulbous noses and expressions of hatred and contempt for the figure between them. By contrast the face of Jesus wears what has been called 'a stern, almost brooding expression,'[33] an expression created by the artist through the way in which he has delineated the eyes, eyelids and eyebrows, and by the skilful use of red and black pigments in the iris and pupil. As noted above, following the Matthean gospel account, this figure is not blindfolded; the attention of the onlooker/worshipper is drawn immediately to the face, to an expression at once calm and challenging, and also, in its air of restrained sadness but not despair, one that is fully in accord with classical and patristic convention.[34]

The purpose of this painting is identical with that of the three-dimensional images of the same scene on the Breton *calvaires,* and, like them, inspired by what one of the leading commentators on those images, the Abbé Castel, calls the 'pantomimes populaires' of the time.[35] Here at Llandeilo Talybont we have an example of the 'sensational realism' of which Robinson spoke, which by its very nature challenges the observer and enriches his or her spiritual communion with God. The painting is at once icon, biblical commentary, and exegesis.

Before leaving this particular image, it is worth drawing attention to the ubiquity of the spitting, profile head. Through its use on cheap block-prints and indulgences from the late fifteenth century onwards,[36] it was familiar to all those, including, as Eamon Duffy contends,[37] the poor in whose homes such were pinned up. It became one of the 'shorthand' references to the story of the Passion, and a trigger for meditation and prayer. It also found its way into somewhat unexpected places. On a late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century doorhead at Rhyd Owen, a house owned by Sir Rhys ap Thomas, we find the same affronted figures, divided not this time by the face of Christ, but by stiff, conventional foliage (Fig. 2). However, the carving of the foliage itself suggests spittle. Where then is the Christ? The carving is on a doorframe, and this position immediately suggests two scriptural texts: 'the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner',[38] and 'except the Lord build the house, they labour

Fig. 1. Early sixteenth-century wall painting above the lintel of a window in the nave of Llandeilo Talybont Church (Glam.) depicting the mocking of Christ. *Photograph: © Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW).*

in vain that build it’.[39] Against such a house, founded on Christ, neither mockers nor tormentors will prevail.

The flagellation of Jesus

As with the mocking before the Sanhedrin, the flagellation of Jesus before Pontius Pilate occupies little space in the gospel narratives, but possesses nonetheless an equal theological and devotional significance.[40] As a prelude to crucifixion under Roman law, the accused man would be judicially sentenced to be whipped, the judge being present. There is a reference to this in the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus, Pontius Pilate directing that Jesus should be whipped ‘according to the laws of former governors’.[41] The imaging of this scene emerges in western Christian art in the ninth century. In the Stuttgart Psalter of this date there is an illustration of the scene accompanying one of its Old Testament ‘types’, verses fifteen and sixteen of Psalm 35: ‘In mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not: they did tear me, and ceased not with hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth’. Here Christ is shown naked and bound to a pillar which He faces, being beaten by two men. As Schiller points out, here already we have an example of the three-figure representation of the flagellation which became general at a later date.[42] What we do not have is an affective image; this is something which develops from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the figure of Christ is portrayed facing towards the onlooker, either from behind or in front of the pillar.[43]

Fig. 2. Late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century doorhead in the house at Rhyd Owen, Llanarthney (Carms.). *Photograph: © Crown copyright: RCAHMW.*

It is the pillar itself that requires our attention for a while. Neither the canonical gospels of Mark, Matthew and John, nor the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus, have any mention of Jesus being bound to a pillar. It has, however, a firm place in the iconography of the flagellation from the outset, through inference which may well be based upon tradition, current practice, and an eisegetical reading of the texts. Certainly by the late Middle Ages the pillar of the scourging was itself an object of veneration. In the fifteenth century it was shown to pilgrims in Jerusalem,[44] and in 1418 York Minster was given a portion of it, which became a focus of devotion.[45] By this date the image of the flogged Christ bound to a pillar had become widespread throughout Europe, in stone, wood, glass and manuscript illumination.[46] It was also an arresting image in late medieval drama, and there is a detectable symbiotic relationship between the two. For example, on the Flemish triptych now in Tewkesbury Abbey a naked Christ is shown before the pillar, and whilst two men flog Him in the presence of Pilate, a third is engaged in binding Him. Such an image is given dramatic realization in Passion Play II of the N Town Manuscript, where the stage direction requires of the Jews that they 'arryn [Jesus] and pullyn of his clothis and byndyn hym to a pelere and sorgyn hym.'[47] Rather closer to home, the surviving Welsh play makes several references to the binding and flagellation. Pilate himself orders the soldiers: 'Ye knights of cruelty / take Jesus [and deal according] to your wisdom, / and bind him fast to a post, / and with scourges scourge him.'[48] In his turn, the chief 'knight' requires of the other, 'bind him fast enough / to a post, strong, large, cruel.'[49]

Such images as that on the Tewkesbury triptych are rich and elaborate. However, the stark simplicity which characterizes the Stuttgart psalter was never lost sight of, and the fifteenth century artists occasionally returned to it. As Schiller says, there is such 'a richness of artistry which yet avoids all presentation of external trappings [and] enables the artist to produce a profounder spiritual vigour and an intense religious impact.'[50] This is fully in tune with the affective piety we have already noted in respect of the mocking of Jesus. Once again, Wales provides us with just such a profoundly moving image, Although ruthlessly scraped and insensitively 'restored' in the nineteenth century, the stone pulpit in Newton

Church, Porthcawl, realizes Schiller's description. Here we have only the three figures of convention, and the merest hint of the pillar. The Christ is calm and serene, His gaze fixed resolutely upon the onlooker (Fig. 3). By contrast, His tormentors are vigorously active, energetically wielding their scourges. Once again we are confronted with the grotesque, grimacing, nameless men described by Rosemary Woolf, and who we met with at Llandeilo Talybont. One cannot help but recall the patristic association of such action and expression with the presence of sin and vice.[51]

At Newton what survives today is a cold stone image, but there remain indications that, in common with other such images, the carving here was originally painted. Now lost from the figure of Christ, therefore, are the speckles of blood all over the limbs and torso, which we find, for example, on Barna da Sienna's wall-painting of the mid-fourteenth century at San Gimignano, and the Master of the Breviary of Jean's sans Peur's illumination in a fifteenth century Book of Hours. Such painting was not only an expression of realism, but the recollection of the Old Testament 'type' of the flagellation, the affliction of Job. Job, as Davidson has pointed out, is 'a figure of Christ's sufferings and Passion', an association made at least as early as St Jerome in the fourth century.[52] By the hand of Satan, Job, God's righteous servant, 'a perfect and an upright man…there is none like him in the earth',[53] is smitten 'with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown'.[54] Jesus, too, in His incarnate life, is a perfect and upright man, the servant of God His Father, and the sores which are opened up over every part of His body by the flogging are compared with Job's boils. The Newton Christ of the Flagellation is a devotional image, the image

Fig. 3. **a** (left) The fourteenth-century stone pulpit in Newton Church, Porthcawl (Glam.); **b** (right) depiction of the tormented figure of Christ on the pulpit. *Photographs: © Crown copyright: RCAHMW (a); John Morgan-Guy (b).*

of patient suffering. The message would not be lost on the observer: 'Christ is…the one who through the pain of His ordeal cleanses and clears all His disciples through history'.[55] As one twelfth-century commentator put it, 'He has scraped off the poison of our iniquity' as Job, in ashes, scraped off his boils with a potsherd.[56]

The Bound Rood

Perhaps the most arresting and memorable of the images of the Passion now surviving in Wales is the seated figure in Bangor Cathedral known as 'The Mostyn Christ'. It has been in the cathedral in fact only since the twentieth century, and its earlier history is obscure and has been much debated. Dr Enid Roberts has argued a convincing case for its identification with the figure seen and described by the north Walian poet Gruffudd ab Ieuan ap Llywelyn Fychan (*c*. 1485–1553) at Rhuddlan Priory in 1518.[57] There is no good reason to doubt that the image had a pre-Reformation *locus* in Wales, and was preserved thereafter by a sympathetic family. The Norton Priory St Christopher in nearby Cheshire would provide a parallel example. It is only unfortunate that the most recent extended study of the Mostyn Christ in English contains many inaccuracies, and thus its true significance has been somewhat obscured.[58]

The Mostyn Christ is a seated figure, the head crowned with thorns, the limbs bound with ropes, and dressed only in a loincloth.[59] The face bears an intensely moving if not haunting expression of grief and exhaustion. Ifor Edwards, in his discussion of the figure, says that 'in medieval religious history the Bound Rood [a generic term for this kind of image] is a rare form of iconography.'[60] On the contrary, it is both familiar and widespread, and many examples of it survive throughout Europe north of the Alps. The Mostyn Christ is an example of an image known as the *Christus im Elend,* the 'Christ in Distress', which evolved from the late fourteenth century onwards, and owed its inception and intellectual background to the deepening of the Passion mysticism which we have already noted. The seated figure is also sometimes referred to as *sessio.*[61]

Unlike images of the mocking and flagellation, it has no direct New Testament scriptural inspiration. Rather, the artist has drawn his inspiration from Old Testament typology and the Liturgy of Holy Week. As with the flagellation, one Old Testament 'type' is the afflicted Job, seated on a dunghill,[62] another is that of the prophet Jeremiah weeping outside of the city of Jerusalem: 'He sitteth alone and keepeth silence'.[63] Here we have the prototypical image of the outcast. The Jeremiah image in particular was mediated to the fifteenth-century worshipper through the liturgy of Holy Week, which included much of the relevant text of the prophet's 'Lamentations', and his challenge 'Is it nothing to you, all ye who pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow,'[64] was echoed in the repeated antiphon 'O vos omnes'.[65]

The Mostyn Christ, a *Christus in Elend,* is seated on Calvary, and awaits crucifixion.[66] That the scene is Calvary is indicated by the presence at the foot of the image of a skull, recalling the tradition that Golgotha (the 'place of the skull') was the burial place of Adam. Here the onlooker may mine a rich vein of imagery for contemplative devotion. As it was through the disobedience and 'fall' of the first Adam that sin entered into the world, so through the obedience and 'rising' of the second, Christ, that world is redeemed. 'Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.'[67]

The presence of the skull of Adam at the foot of the cross at this time was a widespread image, of which there are several surviving examples in the stained glass of this period in Welsh churches. It is a forward-reference to the resurrection, but also to the 'harrowing of hell', especially as described in the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus, in which Christ movingly takes Adam by the hand, gives him His peace, and then 'holding Adam by the hand, delivered him to Michael the archangel, and he led them into Paradise, filled with mercy and glory.'[68] This remains to this day the paramount paschal iconographic image in the Orthodox tradition; Adam, the first to fall, is also the first to be redeemed. So even in the imaging of the

Fig. 4. Two Breton figures of the bound Christ: (left) on the *calvaire* at Playben and (right) in a niche forming the apex of the fifteenth-century arch of the inner doorway of the south porch of Église Saint-Jérôme at Cast. *Photographs: John Morgan-Guy.*

exhausted, isolated Christ awaiting His crucifixion there is an indication of the triumph that is yet to be. It is possible, if not probable, that the cult of the *Christus im Elend* entered Wales through Brittany where it was, as many surviving examples indicate, widespread in the fifteenth century. The image appears, for example, in stone at Cast (Fig. 4) and Beuzec, and in wood at Dol Cathedral[69] and — a late and rather effete representation — at Notre Dame de Bonne Nouvelle, Locronan.[70] Outside of Brittany a significant image can be found over the principal doorway of the main ‘ward’ of the Hôtel-Dieu in Beaune. Built in 1443 by Nicholas Rolin, Chancellor of the reigning Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, the *Christus im Elend* dominates the 1452 Great Hall of the Poor, so positioned that visitors, exiting after consoling the patients in their curtained beds, were reminded that Christ Himself had shared human suffering, and by that contemplation, moved to compassion — and perhaps generosity — for the hospital’s inmates. The *Christus in Elend* is an encapsulation of all the pain and grief of the journey to Golgotha, the Via Dolorosa; an icon rather than a biblical commentary.

More Welsh examples

The Mostyn Christ is not the only surviving Welsh example of the genre. There are two others, though one since 1913 has been located in the church of Saints Philip and James, Whitton, Twickenham. This is an alabaster panel, which, with its fellow, an image of St Armel, a saint with a widespread cult in Brittany, and one greatly favoured by Henry VII, seems to have come originally from the private chapel of a house near Llangollen.[71] Here again we find the seated bound Christ awaiting crucifixion, surrounded by the instruments of the Passion, and with indications of the presence of the cross behind. The other is a further wall-painting at Llandeilo Talybont. Here again the figure is seated, bound, with a crown of thorns and wearing a loincloth, surrounded by emblems of the Passion and with the skull at the foot, identifying the

locus as Calvary. This last image has been misinterpreted, for at its head are the words ECCE HOMO — 'behold the man' — the words uttered by Pontius Pilate and recorded only in John's gospel,[72] when Jesus 'wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe' put on Him by the soldiers, is led out of the judgement hall to the waiting crowd.[73] This is the moment captured and imaged, for example, at Saint-Fiacre and Serignac in Brittany, and at Aachen. The ECCE HOMO is usually, though not universally, a standing figure, for, as in a column figure in Vienna, the Christ is sometimes shown seated — a composition again influenced not by scriptural text but dramatic performance.

The Llandeilo Talybont painting is not a true ECCE HOMO, a Christ displayed to the crowd, but a *Christus im Elend,* a Christ in Distress. However, the presence here of the legend ECCE HOMO is a salutary reminder that our tidy categorization of these images can be too restricting, and by that restriction we can miss the point. Both the image *and* the superscription are intended to invite contemplation and devotion. The challenge of the exhausted Christ, at the end of the long road to Golgotha, is made to the onlooker, who by contemplating the image enters into the story as participant. ECCE HOMO: We behold the man of sorrows.

My final example from Wales also bears the superscription ECCE HOMO, and for the same reason as the Llandeilo painting. Again, however, the iconography is different. Wooden panels now forming a reredos at Betws Gwerfil Goch, but which may originally have been part of the now dismantled rood screen or loft of the church, depict the instruments of the Passion, figures of Mary and John, identified by name, and, in the centre, a figure of Jesus (Fig. 5). Here, as on the Whitton alabaster, the cross is

Fig. 5. Fifteenth-century wooden panels now forming a reredos at Betws Gwerfil Goch Church (Denbs.), possibly originally part of a rood screen or loft, depicting the instruments of the Passion, figures of Mary and John, and the figure of Christ. *Photograph: © Crown copyright: RCAHMW.*

delineated, but the Christ does not hang upon it. The head of the figure, with its nimbus, occupies the whole space in front of the intersecting arms of the cross, which pass behind it. The upper part of the body is covered with a cloak — the purple robe. The inspiration for this composition is the Mass of St Gregory. According to legend, Pope St Gregory (590–604) received a vision, when saying Mass, of Christ seated on, or standing in, His tomb, displaying His wounds, and surrounded by the instruments of the Passion. The iconography of this vision became popular and widespread, as did representations of the instruments on their own — a ‘shorthand’ aide-memoire for the legend. Again, the imagery was intended to assist affective meditation.

Angel figures bearing shields upon which are depicted instruments of the Passion still survive in some numbers, particularly in ‘Angel roofs’ both in Wales and England. The instruments appear on a shield now affixed behind the tomb of Bishop Bromfield in Llandaff Cathedral.[74] It is worth recalling Gabriele Finaldi’s observation here: ‘Devotion to the wounds of Christ was very widespread in the Middle Ages’ and one extension of this devotion was the *Arma Christi,* what Alexander Sturgis has noted ‘comprise both the instruments of the Passion and other objects which serve as hieroglyptic reminders of the episodes of the Passion narrative’. These can include the nails and hammer with which Christ was fastened to the cross, pincers for removing the nails, the thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas Iscariot, and the dice with which the soldiers guarding the crucified Jesus were playing. During the fourteenth century hymns were composed, which addressed individual instruments, and these, allied with the ‘disembodied’ images served as aids to contemplation.[75]

However, the Betws panel focuses not upon the instruments, but upon the figure of Christ. The representation of the tomb, usually depicted as a simple stone chest, is missing, but otherwise the Betws figure is a good example of the Image of Pity. It is also, it would seem, an early one. The discovery in the last quarter of the twentieth century of a mid-fourteenth-century Image of Pity, accompanied by the figures of Mary and John, has pushed back the dating of this iconography somewhat,[76] but nonetheless to find such an image in the heart of Wales shows that this depiction, which seems to have originated with the mendicant orders, and the devotion it implied, was current here within a relatively short time of its initiation. It is further evidence that, far from being on the fringe of western Christendom, Wales stood in the mainstream of the theological and devotional life of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Here at Betws the worshipper was invited by this image to enter into a meditative contemplation of the King of Glory who was crucified. In the 1490s we find the image on the tomb of Bishop Marshall in Llandaff Cathedral,[77] though the panel is clearly not in its original position. With the advent of printing, the image was endlessly reproduced, particularly on Indulgences, and it remained popular for some years after the Reformation. Even if the words of the Indulgence were struck through, the Image of Pity was not defaced.

Conclusion: Wales and the wider world

Although much of the religious iconography of medieval Wales has been lost or destroyed, much still remains, the majority overlooked and disregarded, and its significance unremarked. For the subject of this paper I have chosen to discuss a series of images relating to the Passion of Jesus which, I hope, give some indication of the richness and diversity both of the iconography and of the piety associated with it. Each and every one of the Welsh examples has a similar if not exact counterpart elsewhere in western Christendom, which are of the same date. In this respect, as in many others, the church in Wales was at the heart of the theological and spiritual movements and developments which characterized the late Middle Ages. It was in no way an onlooker or a poor relation.

NOTES

1. This paper is based on a lecture given to the International Millennium Conference 'Wales and the Welsh' at Aberystwyth University in April 2000, and to the Welsh Religious History Society at Coleg Trefeca in May of the same year.
2. J. W. Robinson, 'The late medieval cult of Jesus and the mystery plays', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 80 (1965), 508.
3. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 19.
4. Ibid. quoting from C. Horstmann (ed.), *Yorkshire Writers* (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1895), vol. 1, 198.
5. The phrase is Duffy's, op. cit. (note 3), 248.
6. Mark 14: 65, Authorized Version (AV).
7. Matthew 26: 67–8 (AV).
8. Mark in particular is careful to draw a distinction between the 'buffet' — a deliberate blow delivered with a closed fist — and the slap delivered with the palm of the hand. The distinction is clear in his original Greek text.
9. Jeffrey Heltermann, *Symbolic Action in the Plays of the Wakefield Master* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1981), esp. 141–2.
10. Philippians 2: 6–8 (AV).
11. Heltermann op.cit. (note 9), 142.
12. Quoted by ibid. 141.
13. Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) 253.
14. Luke 22: 64, following Mark 14: 65 (AV).
15. The largest of the Breton *calvaires,* dating from the mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth century.
16. The *calvaire* dates from the 1580s, and is carved in granite. There are almost 200 figures, many in contemporary sixteenth-century costume. The figure of Christ being mocked appears on the north side, facing the church. See the photograph in Eugene Royer, *Les calvaires Bretons* (Rennes: Ouest France, 1985), 49.
17. Erected 1602–04, with 180 figures, to commemorate a visitation of plague in 1598.
18. 1554, and thus one of the earliest of the Breton calvaries.
19. Y. P. Castel (A. Roue and J. Gad, trans.), *Saint-Thégonnec. Haut-Léon Area and Renaissance Architecture* (Chatelain: Art Printing Jos le Doare, 1969). The blindfolded Christ is illustrated on p. 9. The calvary was erected in 1610.
20. Castel, in his study of *Saint-Thégonnec*, refers to the composition of the calvary as a 'pageant', though there is no indication given by him that the inspiration was, indeed, a Passion play. However, it would be unwise to ignore the possible influence of the celebrated Breton *Burzud braz Jezuz,* a two-part play covering the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus, which was first published in 1530, but whose origins are earlier. Stanley Damberger and Ellin M. Kelly, 'The great calvaries of Brittany and the medieval Breton "Burzud braz Jezuz" ', *Comparative Drama* 25, no.1 (1991), 52–65. For the way in which the Passion Plays were performed in England, on the 'pageant wagons', see for example, Jerome Taylor and Alan H Nelson (eds), *Medieval English Drama. Essays Critical and Contextual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Maurice Hussey, *The Chester Mystery Plays* (London: Heinemann, 1971) and Stanley J. Kahrl, *Traditions of Medieval English Drama* (London: Hutchinson, 1974). The procession of the pageant wagons, each with its own scene, with actors wearing contemporary clothing, and using everyday speech, before a series of static audiences, resulted in what could be called a 'gradual disclosure'. With

no false historicism, the action had a particularity and temporality — a sense of simultaneity of past and present. This is itself sacramental. Between the scenes, as the pageant wagon moved on, the actors froze into *tableaux vivantes,* reinforcing the timelessness of the illustrated and explored soteriology, an understanding which has relevance for understanding the Breton *calvaires*, for example, or narrative stained-glass.

21. Woolf op. cit. (note 13), 254.
22. T. S. Eliot, *Points of View* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), 61, as extracted from his *Seneca in Elizabethan Translation* of 1927.
23. Matthew 16: 21 (AV).
24. Illustrated in Castel, op. cit. (note 19), 9. Woolf (op. cit. (note 13), 253) has drawn attention to what was something of a commonplace depiction of Christ's persecutors. Mattias Grunewald's early sixteenth-century (1508) painting of the mocking of the blindfolded Christ — a composition which conflates the mocking and the scourging — emphasizes this point.
25. Maurice Hussey, *The Chester Mystery Plays* (London: Heinemann, repr.1971), 96–7.
26. David N. Klausner (ed.), *Records of Early English Drama. Herefordshire and Worcestershire* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).
27. Gwenan Jones, *A Study of Three Welsh Religious Plays* (University of Minnesota PhD, 1918, printed 1930), esp. 153, line 10.
28. Klausner op. cit. (note 26).
29. Woolf op. cit. (note 13), 253.
30. Ibid.
31. The games are fully described in Iona and Peter Opie, *Children's Games in Street and Playground* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).
32. Gerallt D. Nash, *Saving St Teilo's: bringing a medieval church to life* (Cardiff: National Museum Wales).
33. 'Report on the wall-paintings of Llandeilo Talybont', Archives of the Museum of Welsh Life.
34. Moshe Barasch, *Gestures of Despair in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), esp. 138, notes 4 and 6.
35. Personal communication, 3 November, 1999.
36. e.g. British Library, MS Egerton 1821, fo. 8v, of *c*. 1500.
37. Duffy op. cit. (note 3), 239.
38. Peter 2: 7 (AV). Other translations replace 'disallowed' with 'rejected', which has more force.
39. Psalm 127: 1 (AV).
40. Matthew 27: 26, Mark 15: 15, John 19: 1, and the non-canonical apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus, 6: 23, a work of great significance in the imaging of the Passion.
41. Nicodemus 6: 23.
42. Gertrude Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art. Vol. 2. Passion of Jesus Christ* (London: Lund Humphries, 1972). The flagellation is depicted on the famous 'Platerias Portal' of the great pilgrim church at Santiago de Compostella. Cf. A. K. Porter, *Romanesque Sculpture of the Pilgrim Roads,* 10 vols (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1923) vol. 6, plate 680.
43. In this respect, the standing, polychrome figure of Christ at Saint-Fiacre in Brittany is particularly interesting. Here Christ is shown wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe associated with the aftermath of his trial before Pilate, his arms bound at the wrists, and holding in his right hand a long reed or bull-rush, as a sceptre. There is no suggestion of a pillar, so this is the Christ presented to the crowd of onlookers as 'King of the Jews'. The positioning of this figure close to the splay of a window, the light from which and the consequent shadows, makes it a particularly arresting

composition. The reed is also prominent in the oil painting of the seated Christ at Saint-Malo Cathedral.

44. Peter Meredith (ed.), *The Passion Play from the N Town Manuscript* (London: Longman, 1990), 206, note 681.
45. Clifford Davidson, *From Creation to Doom. The York Cycle of Mystery Plays* (New York: AMS Press, 1984), 112.
46. The image of Christ bound to a pillar outlasted the English Reformation in Ireland. See, for example, the figure in St Canice's, Kilkenny (mid-sixteenth-century), from the local O'Tunney workshop, on the tomb-chest of Piers Butler, 8th earl of Ormond; a figure of the bound Christ, seated on a tomb-chest, over which is draped the 'seamless robe', on the Wellesly tomb in Kildare Cathedral, and dating from *c.* 1539; and another at the Carmelite Priory Church in Kildare, and dated to the second half of the sixteenth century.
47. Meredith op. cit. (note 44), 117.
48. Gwenan Jones, op. cit. (note 27), 169, lines 165–8.
49. Ibid. lines 177–8. On the Breton *calvaire* at Notre Dame de Trouven, the pillar is particularly prominent.
50. Schiller, op. cit. (note 42), 68.
51. Barasch op. cit. (note 34), 178 and notes. At Newton, in the apex of the arch, are two 'flying' angels, supporting a chalice. The positioning of this carving is intriguing, as the composition is usually associated with an image of the crucifixion, the angels collecting the blood streaming from Christ's wounds in a chalice — an overt Eucharistic reference. Was there formerly such a depiction in the wall-space above the lintel?
52. Davidson op. cit. (note 45), 110.
53. Job 2: 3 (AV).
54. Job 2: 7 (AV).
55. Davidson, op. cit. (note 45), 112.
56. Job 2: 8 (AV).
57. See Ifor Edwards, 'Fifteenth-century alabaster tables and the iconography of the Bound Rood and St. Armel', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 141 (1992), 56–73.
58. Ibid.
59. The figure lacks its right arm, and the lower part of the left, so only the rope binding the ankles now survives.
60. Ibid., 64.
61. St Augustine, in his commentary on Psalm 139: 1–2, uses the image of the 'down-sitting' as illustrative of the humility and obedience of Jesus, the Son of Man, who is sorely tried.
62. Inspired by Job 2: 8 (AV).
63. Lamentations 3: 28 (AV), though the whole of this chapter is relevant.
64. Lamentations 1: 12 (AV).
65. F. P. Pickering, *Literature and Art in the Middle Ages* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 111.
66. At Cast, in Brittany, Christ is standing. However, this depiction was clearly dictated by the composition; the figure is in a niche forming the apex of the arch of the inner doorway of the south porch.
67. I Corinthians 15: 21–2 (AV).
68. Nicodemus 19: 1–20 at v. 1.
69. Here, clearly inscribed at Christ's feet, is the word 'Outrages'.

70. With his crossed legs, and relaxed expression, this figure in Notre Dame de Bonne Nouvelle singularly fails to convey the agony of the scene; but note the presence of the skull at Christ’s feet. A similar figure, dating from *c*. 1500, at Église Saint-Nizier, Troyes, is almost its equal in sentiment.
71. Discussed by Edwards op. cit. (note 57).
72. John 19: 5 (AV).
73. Cf. the image at Saint-Fiacre, mentioned above.
74. Illustrated in Madeleine Gray, ‘The medieval bishops’ effigies at Llandaff Cathedral’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 153, fig. 2.
75. See the essays by Gabriele Finaldi and Alexander Sturgis in Gabriele Finaldi, *The Image of Christ. The catalogue of the exhibition Seeing Salvation* (London: National Gallery, 2000) and the accompanying illustrations.
76. H. W. van Os, ‘The discovery of an early Man of Sorrows on a Dominican triptych’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41 (1978), 65–75.
77. Illustrated in Madeleine Gray, ‘Piety and power: the tomb and legacy of John Marshall, bishop of Llandaff 1478–96’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 162, fig. 1.