Sacrifice and salvation in Echtgus Úa Cúanáin's poetic treatise on the Eucharist

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The Eucharistic feast is fundamental to Christianity, as a commemoration and enactment of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and as a liturgical celebration of the salvation promised by his resurrection. However, the exact nature, properties and function of the bread and wine at the Eucharistic feast have long been the subject of debate and dispute.[1] In 1080 or 1081, as the Berengarian controversies continued to rage on the European stage, clerics in the southwest of Ireland wrote to one of the greatest living authorities on Eucharistic doctrine, Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury, to ask him questions of theological and practical importance, regarding whether or not the Eucharist need be administered to newly baptized infants in order to ensure their salvation. In his response (which was in the negative), Lanfranc highlighted the conjunction between the narrative of Christ's execution and resurrection, and the salvation of the individual, as they are enacted through the Eucharistic feast. Commenting on Christ's declaration that 'Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you' (Jn 6:54), Lanfranc wrote:

> Therefore the Lord's saying must be understood in this way. Let every believer who can understand that it is a divine mystery, eat and drink the flesh and blood of Christ not only with his physical mouth but also with a tender and

1 For a theological and historical overview of the development of Eucharistic doctrine in Europe, see Edward J. Kilmartin SJ, *The Eucharist in the West: history and theology*, ed. Robert J. Daly SJ (Collegeville, MN, 1998). For detailed studies of the period under consideration here, see Gary Macy, *The theologies of the Eucharist in the early Scholastic period: a study of the salvific function of the sacrament according to the theologians, c.1080–c.1220* (Oxford, 1984); J. de Montclos, *Lanfranc et Bérenger: La controverse Eucharistique du XIe siècle* (Louvain, 1971). For a discussion of the Eucharist

> loving heart: that is to say, with love and in the purity of a good conscience rejoicing that Christ took on flesh for our salvation, hung on the cross, rose and ascended; and following Christ's example, and sharing in his suffering so far as human weakness can bear it and divine grace deigns to allow him. This is what it means to eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood truly and unto salvation.[2]

Thus, the letter's Irish audience is reminded that the Eucharist involves both a real transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, and also a symbolic re-enactment of Christ's Passion. Lanfranc makes explicit the link between the crucifixion and the Eucharist, but also offers his audience the opportunity, 'so far as human weakness can bear it', to share in Christ's suffering, and invites them to eat with the heart as well as with the mouth. The Eucharist, as it is presented in Lanfranc's letter, is both an institutional ritual and an intimate moment of affective piety. In the same letter, Lanfranc goes on to refer again to Christ's suffering on the cross, here quoting Augustine:

> Blessed Augustine expounds this text in his book *De doctrina Christiana*, where he says, 'He seems to be ordering us to commit an outrage or an obscene act. It is therefore a figure of speech: we are directed to share in the Lord's suffering and to meditate tenderly and profitably on the fact that it was for us that his flesh was wounded and crucified'. It is figurative speech that Augustine calls 'a figure'. He does not (as many schismatics have thought and have not yet ceased to think) deny that the flesh and blood of Christ are really present. The Lord himself says in the Gospel, 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me and I in him'. Blessed Augustine expounds this text as follows: 'To eat and drink the flesh and blood of Christ until salvation is to dwell in Christ and have Christ dwelling in you'. Even Judas who betrayed the Lord, received in his mouth as the other apostles did; but because he did not eat in his heart he received the judgment of eternal damnation.[3]

and bread and wine used in Carolingian Francia, see Chazelle, this volume. 2 *The letters of Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson (Oxford, 1979), no. 49. *Necesse est ergo predictam Domini sententiam sic intelligi, quatinus fidelis quisque diuini misterii per intelligentiam capax carnem Christi et sanguinem non solum ore corporis sed etiam amore et suauitate cordis comedat et bibat: uidelicet amando et in conscientia pura dulce habendo quod pro salute nostra Christus carnem assumpsit, pependit resurrexit ascendit, et imitando uestigia eius, et communicando passionibus ipsius in quantum humana infirmitas patitur et diuina ei gratia largiri dignatur. Hoc est enim uere et salubriter carnem Christi comedere et sanguinem eius bibere.* 3 *Letters*, no. 49: *Quam sententiam in libro* ***De doctrina Christiana*** *beatus Augustinus exponens sic ait: 'Facinus uel flagicium iubere uidetur. Figura ergo est precipiens passioni dominicae communicandum esse, et suauiter atque utiliter in memoria recondendum quod pro nobis caro eius uulnerata et crucifixa sit'. Figuram uocat*

Again, a balance is maintained between the Eucharist as an institutional, collective act, and the Eucharist as a moment of interiority: Lanfranc condemns the 'schismatics' who continue to deny the reality of Christ's presence in the bread and wine, while simultaneously repeating Augustine's direction to 'share in the Lord's suffering' and to 'meditate tenderly' on his wounds and his crucifixion.

Although Lanfranc undoubtedly embraced a Paschasian belief in the substantive transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ,[4] his letter to the Irish clerics – with its mildly exasperated tone induced by the literalism of the Irishmen's question – emphasizes a slightly more figurative understanding of the Eucharist than does his *De corpore et sanguine Domini adversus Berengarium Turonensem* (composed in 1062–3, edited by Lanfranc in 1079),[5] which is a polemic written to refute Berengar's rejection of the Real Presence. Lanfranc never presented a systematic theology of the Eucharist, and it must be borne in mind that his writings on this topic are responses: *De corpore* a response to Berengar, his former teacher, and the letter to Domnall Úa hÉnna and his colleagues a response to an Irish misunderstanding of the English and Continental position on the necessity of receiving the Eucharist in order to ensure the salvation of the soul. Nevertheless, Lanfranc's letter to the Irish clerics articulates many of the problems that faced early medieval theologians when they considered Eucharistic doctrine: to what extent are Jesus' words to be understood literally or figuratively? How does one overcome instinctive revulsion at the cannibalistic overtones of Jesus' commandment? How does the intention of the person giving or receiving the Eucharist affect its salvific efficacy?

These same questions are explored in a medieval Irish poetic treatise on the Real Presence in the Eucharist, written probably at some point between *c.*1050 and *c.*1150, by Echtgus Úa Cúanáin of Roscrea, in modern-day Co. Tipperary. Indeed, perhaps it was Lanfranc's letter, so emphatic in pointing out his Irish correspondents' misunderstanding of a particular point of doctrine, that impressed upon Munster clerics the need for wider clarification of the theology of the Eucharist and the importance of having uniformity of belief among clergy and laity alike.[6] Echtgus' treatise outlines in clear but sophisticated terms the

figuratam locutionem; neque enim negat ueritatem carnis et sanguinis Christi, quod plerisque scismaticis uisum est et adhuc non cessat uideri. Et Dominus in euangelio: 'Qui manducat carnem meam et bibit sanguinem meum in me manet et ego in eo'. Quod exponens beatus Augustinus ait: 'Hoc est namque carnem Christi et sanguinem salubriter comedere et bibere: in Christo manere et Christum in se manentem habere'. Nam et Iudas qui Dominum tradidit cum ceteris apostolis ore accepit; sed quia corde non comedit iudicium sibi aeternae damnationis accepit. 4 Paschasius Radbertus, *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, ed. Bede Paul (Turnhout, 1969). 5 Lanfranc of Canterbury, *De corpore et sanguine Domini adversus Berengarium Turonensem*, *PL*, 150, 407–42; *Lanfranc of Canterbury on the body and blood of the Lord: Guitmund of Aversa on the truth of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist*, trans. Mark G. Vaillancourt (Washington, DC, 2009). 6 For an overview of the sources for, and a useful synthesis of recent scholarship on, Eucharistic doctrine in medieval Ireland, see Neil Xavier O'Donoghue, *The*

theological significance of the Eucharistic feast, with the stated aim of educating the clergy and the laity in correct Eucharistic doctrine.[7] The text of Echtgus' poem on the Eucharist survives in ten early modern or modern manuscripts, dating from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.[8] Some of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century copies ascribe to the text a sixteenth-century date of composition (1544, 1554 or 1564), which in itself is interesting, given the context of Protestant objections to the doctrine of transubstantiation, but the evidence of the text would suggest that this is without foundation.[9] Linguistically, the text is Middle Irish, and I see no reason that it should not be dated, following the opinions of Aubrey Gwynn and Gerard Murphy, to the eleventh or twelfth century.[10] There are two main families of manuscripts, one of which transmits a version of the text that comprises eighty-six quatrains, the other of which comprises only the first thirty-five quatrains. The manuscript-witnesses of the longer version are older, and there is internal evidence to suggest that this represents the earlier form of the text. For that reason, this study will focus on the entire eighty-six-quatrain text, rather than the shorter, later version. Although matters of style are outside the scope of the present discussion, it is also worth noting briefly that, in terms of rhyme and metre, the text is an accomplished literary work that adheres to the norms of medieval Irish poetic composition. More pertinent to our present purposes, however, is the simple but important fact that this is poetry as theology, and theology as poetry. This dynamic interplay

Eucharist in pre-Norman Ireland (Notre Dame, IN, 2011). However, as O'Donoghue notes, many of the relevant sources are in dire need of re-editing, and there is much basic groundwork to be done before more concrete conclusions can be drawn. I hope that my current work on Echtgus' text will make some small contribution in this regard. **7** The text was edited from Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS 5100–4, pp 16–18, by A.G. van Hamel during the First World War: 'Poems from Brussels MS 5100–4', *Revue Celtique*, 37 (1917–19), 345–52 at 345–9. Without wishing to diminish van Hamel's achievement in completing this work in what must have been very difficult political circumstances, his edition is sadly inadequate, containing numerous errors of transcription. Therefore, all quotations from the text in what follows are from my own semi-diplomatic transcription from that manuscript, which I have completed as part of a forthcoming edition of the text, to be published in the *Medium Ævum* Monographs Series; all translations are my own. The translation published by Gerard Murphy ('Eleventh- or twelfth-century Irish doctrine concerning the Real Presence' in J.A. Watt, J.B. Morrall and F.X. Martin (eds), *Medieval studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn SJ* (Dublin, 1961), pp 19–28) is rather loose in places, which is particularly problematic in a text expounding a theological doctrine that relies so heavily on grammatical and semantic interpretation (for example, a great deal of doctrinal debate regarding the Eucharist centres on how one understands the *est* in *hoc est enim corpus meum*). **8** Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS 5100–4 [B]; Dublin, University College, MS Franciscan A33 [F]; Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 708 [C]; Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS G315 [G]; Maynooth, National University of Ireland, MS 3F19 [M1]; Maynooth, National University of Ireland, MS 3F20 [M2]; Maynooth, National University of Ireland, MS 4B2 [M3]; Dublin, RIA, MS Fvii [D1]; Dublin, RIA, MS 23G24 [D2]; Dublin, RIA, MS 23G25 [D3]. **9** D1 and D2 give the date of composition as 1544; G and D3 as 1554; M1 and M3 as 1564. **10** Aubrey Gwynn and Dermot F. Gleeson, *A history of the diocese of Killaloe* (Dublin, 1962), p. 74; Murphy, 'Eleventh- or twelfth-century

between form and function raises similar questions to the studies of the interplay between theology and visual art that are found elsewhere in this volume. We might ask ourselves whether the form in which Echtgus wrote his text had any theological implications for his treatise, and even how its form affects our own appreciation of both its aesthetic and its doctrinal value. In the case of Echtgus' composition, I would argue that the act of writing theology in a mode that requires adherence to strict metrical rules acted as a form of insurance, so to speak, fixing the text within the constraints of rhyme and metre, and perhaps thus ensuring a more reliable transmission for this elucidation of a central point of Christian doctrine.

While Echtgus wrote the text, as he tells us, to educate priests and the laity in correct Eucharistic doctrine, he is also concerned with his own salvation. He writes: 'Oh Christ, who suffered for my sake, there is nothing better than prayer to you; forgive my sins, oh God, oh son of the Virgin Mary'.[11] Echtgus continues: 'For the Lord's sake, pray with me, that I may attain union with the king of the stars, I have practised my calling without aversion, Echtgus my name, I am a descendant of Cúanán'.[12] This personal declaration illustrates several themes that give the text its literary and theological coherence: first, the significance of the salvation of the individual – in this case, the author himself – second, the importance of the priest in his role as enactor of the narrative of sacrifice and salvation as it is played out in the Mass (here illustrated by the use of the term *gairm*, 'calling' or 'vocation', to indicate Echtgus' own clerical status),[13] and third, the idea of completeness and unity. This latter theme is expressed on a number of levels throughout the text, and pertains to the completeness of the body of Christ as it is present in each Eucharistic host and simultaneously in heaven; the completeness or virginity of Mary throughout Christ's conception and birth; and also the completeness or unity of the church, both among its constituent members, and in the relationship between Christ and the church, as in this example where Echtgus hopes for ultimate union with God. The purpose of the present study is to highlight instances of these various thematic strands, insofar as they reflect the text's concern with the narrative, the performance, and the theology of sacrifice and salvation.[14]

doctrine', p. 20. **11** §83: *A C[h]rist rochés tar mo chenn, [t]'atach nocon fhuil ní as fèrr, maith mo chaire damh, a Dhé, a meic Maire ingine.* **12** §84: *Ar in coimdhidh guided lem, co ris aéntaidh righ na renn, ro chlechtus mo gairm gan gráin, Echtgus m'ainm im ua Cúanáin.* **13** We have no biographical information about Echtgus, but can infer from this reference that he was a monk and/or a priest. It has been assumed by some scholars that Echtgus is the same person as an Ísác Úa Cúanáin, bishop of Roscrea, whose death is recorded in the *Annals of the Four Masters* in 1161 (see, for example, the *Dictionary of Irish biography*, http://dib.cambridge.org/, in which there is one entry under 'Ua Cúanáin, Echtgus (Isaac)'). However, given the nature of the medieval Irish ecclesiastical system, in which families were often linked with particular ecclesiastical foundations for many generations, this identity cannot be asserted unreservedly. Echtgus and Ísác may be the same person, or they may simply have been members of the same family. **14** For the importance of the unity of

Echtgus begins his text by emphasizing the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ within the bread and wine of the Eucharistic feast. He then locates that feast within the context of the narrative of Christ's Passion, thus establishing the connection between Christ's sacrifice and the salvation promised by the Eucharist. He writes: 'Have you heard of the bread and the wine, truly the body of Christ, and his blood, which he gave to his disciples – beautifully he relinquished them – the Thursday before his suffering?'[15] Echtgus' wording here deliberately echoes aspects of the account of the Last Supper as it is described in the liturgy:

> Who the day before he suffered, took the bread into his holy and venerable hands: having raised his eyes to heaven, unto thee, O God, his Father almighty, giving thanks to thee, blessed, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, all of you, and eat of this: For this is my body.[16]

The influence of the liturgy on Echtgus' text can most notably be seen in the 'Thursday before his suffering' (*dia dardain riana chésadh*), 'which he gave to his disciples' (*tuc dá muintir*), and 'truly the body of Christ' (*corp crist ... iar fír*). I suggest that the purpose of these liturgical echoes in the Irish text is to evoke the idea of Christ as a priest, performing the Eucharistic rite, alongside his depiction as the principal character in the narrative of the Last Supper. That Echtgus consciously sought to interlink the Last Supper with the words of the liturgy is supported by his later explicit characterization of Christ as a priest: 'The best priest under heaven, Christ himself as you know, gave his body and his blood to Judas; since he was evil it did not help him'.[17] We might note the use of the word *sacart*, 'priest', to describe Christ; this in contrast to the depiction of Judas as the apotheosis of the wicked priest: 'Judas, though the ordained man was evil, if he

the church in a visual context, see Harley McGowan, this volume. **15** §6: *In cuala in abhlatinn sin fín, corp Crist is a fhuil iar fír, tuc dá muintir caín roscar, dia dardain riana chésadh* **16** *Qui pridie quam pateretur, accepit panem in sanctas, ac uenerabiles manus suas: eleuatis oculis in caelum ad te Deum Patrem suum omnipotentem, tibi gratias agens, benedixit, fregit, dedit discipulis suis, dicens: Accepite, et manducate ex hoc omnes. Hoc est enim corpus meum.* This section of the 'words of institution' combines elements from Mt 26:26–7, and 1 Cor 11:23–4. In the absence of any consensus about the form of the Mass being used in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland, I have opted (admittedly arbitrarily) to cite the form as found in *Le canon de la messe romaine. Édition critique*, ed. B. Botte OSB, *Textes et études liturgiques*, 2 (Louvain, 1935), p. 38. I have added punctuation and capitalization; the translation is my own. See also *The missal of St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, with excerpts from the antiphonary and lectionary of the same monastery*, ed. Martin Rule (Cambridge, 1896), pp 42–3. **17** §24: *In sacart is ferr fo nimh, Crist fodéin, is deimbin libh, tucc d'Iudas a chorp 'sa fhuil, uair rob olc ní rofhogain.* See Lanfranc's letter to Domnall Úa hÉnna: *Nam et Iudas qui Dominum tradidit cum ceteris apostolis ore accepit; sed quia corde non comedit iudicium sibi aeternae damnationis accepit*; 'Even Judas who betrayed the Lord, received in his mouth as the other apostles did; but because he did not eat in his heart he received the judgment of eternal damnation', *Letters*, no. 49.

had given the body of Christ to a holy man, after believing and after repenting his sins, it would have been a complete, pure sacrifice'.[18] Although the translation, 'ordained man' (literally 'man of ecclesiastical rank'), is slightly awkward, it indicates the contrast expressed in the text between the priest, Christ and Judas, who is not accorded that title. Of particular significance is the last line of this quatrain, which emphasizes that, notwithstanding the sinfulness of the cleric who dispenses the Eucharistic host, the sincerity and virtue of the recipient ensures its salvific function. Here we see a balance established between the significance of the priest, as enactor of the Eucharistic feast, and that of the individual, whose pure intention can overcome the sinfulness of the priest dispensing the Eucharist. This may have had particular resonance during the period of ecclesiastical reform in Ireland, when the morality of priests was brought into question, and the issue of clerical chastity was foregrounded in religious rhetoric. Echtgus' statement that the salvific efficacy of the Eucharistic host is undiminished by the priest's unworthiness may have been made with particular individuals in mind. Certainly Echtgus' non-priestly audience (whether that consisted of monks who were not ordained priests, or a wider lay audience, or both) is reassured that, whether the priest is worthy or not, the Eucharist can be a complete and pure sacrifice. As noted above, the theme of completion and wholeness is key to understanding the text.

The word *ógh*, meaning 'complete', 'entire', 'perfect' and 'virgin', occurs no fewer than fourteen times in the text.[19] Elsewhere, other vocabulary and imagery are employed to emphasize the completeness of Christ's body, both within the Eucharistic host, and simultaneously as it exists in heaven. For example, Echtgus tells us 'There is no blade or fire, there is certainly no element, which boasts tonight, oh Son of God, that disperses the resurrected body'.[20] That the body of Christ is present in each Eucharistic host, and yet is simultaneously complete in heaven, is an issue that is addressed extensively in Echtgus' poem, but we should note that it was also a central concern for Lanfranc in his objections to Berengar's interpretation of the Eucharist. Berengar suggested that if the body of Christ were present in the Eucharistic host, Christ as he exists in heaven would be divided, and thus lessened, when the host was broken into pieces and eaten. Lanfranc countered that the body of Christ was present in each host, and that when the host is broken and eaten, Christ's body continues to exist simultaneously in heaven, complete and entire.[21] Indeed, Echtgus' vocabulary of unity and completeness is reminiscent of Lanfranc's description of Christ's body in heaven as 'immortal, inviolate, whole, uncontaminated and unharmed'.[22] Echtgus emphasizes this point by stating that

18 §25: *Iúdas, gerbh olc in fer gráidh, da tucadh corp Crist do fhir chráidh, iar creidimh iar coi cinad, ropad edbairt ogh idhan.* **19** §§3, 4, 22, 25, 27, 34, 38 (4 times), 39, 57, 61, 85. In this regard, it may be significant that the death-notice for Ísác Úa Cúanáin in the *Annals of the Four Masters* describes him as *ógh* ('virgin') (see n. 13, above). **20** §69: *Ní fhil iarann na teinidh, ní fhuil nach dúil co deimhin, maidhes anocht a meic Dé, scailes corp na héiseirge.* **21** *De corpore*, c.11. **22** *De corpore*,

'though the wafer can be divided in its own form, the body of the king cannot truly be divided in any way',[23] and that 'though there be many hosts on the paten, all believe – question it not – that every single host is complete, without flaw or weakness, that it is a perfect body'.[24]

But another kind of completeness with which Echtgus is greatly concerned is the completeness, or wholeness, of the church. He describes the desirability of having a 'complete/perfect church',[25] and invokes the topos of Christ as the head of the church and the believers as its body. He explicates the mixing of the water and the wine in the chalice thus:

> By the water – gentle judgment –
> the believing people are understood;
> Christ, head of all, without sin, is understood,
> by the smooth wine, without doubt.
>
> As they have been joined as one,
> the water and the true lovely wine,
> Christ is joined, noble completeness of knowledge,
> together with the church.[26]

Importantly, we are reminded that the unity of the church is not merely an abstract concept, but rather it has real, practical implications. Echtgus offers this pastoral advice to priests: 'My counsel to ordained people: if the ignorant approach them, do not give them the manifest body, until they might discover correct belief.'[27] Indeed, in the final quatrain of the text, we see the practical application of Echtgus' composition. He writes: 'A blessing upon all pure, ordained people, for the sake of the king of heaven and earth. Let them commit this to memory for God's sake; let them deliver it to the people'.[28] The text was ostensibly written to be learnt by priests and preached to the people.[29] Here we see the text functioning

*c.*18 (*PL*, 150, 430C): … *immortali, inviolato, integro, incontaminato, illaeso* … ; *Lanfranc of Canterbury*, p. 66. **23** §69: *Acht cia gaibh in abhlu eimh, rannugadh ina deilbh féin, ní gheibh co fír ó nach mudh, corp in righ a rannughadh.* **24** §72: *Cidh imdha pars forsin tesc, creitit cách ná bíd 'na ceist, is lomnan cen locht cen lasc, is corp comhlan cech aenphars.* **25** §27: *Ar aí chena is edh is chóir, don ecclais airmitnigh óig* … **26** §32–3: *Triasan uiscce bithe in breth, tuicter popal na creitmech, tuicther Crist cenn cáich cen col, triasin fín mbláith cen baeghol./ Mar ro haccomlait maraen, in t-uiscce isin fín firchoémh, accomblatar sáer slán fis, Crist maraén ris an eclais.* **27** §82: *Comairle uaim don aés gráidh, madhat huirb tísat 'na ndáil, ná tabhrat dóibh in corp nglé, co fágbat cóir na creidme.* **28** §86: *Beannacht ar an aes ngráidh nglan, ar dáigh righ nimhe is talman, mebraighet sin ar Dhia ndil, derlaiccet dona daoinibh.* **29** There remains the interesting question of the exact context within which the text would have been 'delivered to the people'. We might, for instance, consider the text as some sort of poetic homily, which would have been preached during Mass. There are other vernacular Irish poetic texts with strong catechetical elements that raise similar questions of function and performance, such as the twelfth-century poem on the origins of liturgical chant, which was

within a wider context of ecclesiastical reform, not only in the poem's obvious themes, in its stated desire for uniformity of belief at all levels of society, but also in the more subtle themes – particularly the emphasis on the role of the clergy, but also perhaps in the text's concern with virginity (another form of completeness, which recurs in the text).[30]

Echtgus and Lanfranc use the same passages from the writings of Ambrose to emphasize Mary's virginal state throughout Christ's conception and birth. Although Echtgus may have had access to complete copies of Ambrose's *De mysteriis* and *De sacramentis*, it is equally possible that Lanfranc's *De corpore* was Echtgus' immediate source, given that all of the passages in Echtgus' text that I have been able to identify as deriving from Ambrose, are also quoted in *De corpore*.[31] For example, Lanfranc quotes Ambrose directly, saying

> If we seek the usual course, a woman after mingling with a man usually conceives. It is clear then that the Virgin conceived contrary to nature. And this body which we make is from the Virgin. Why do you seek here the course of nature in the body of Christ, when the Lord Jesus himself was born of the Virgin contrary to nature?[32]

Echtgus makes the same point thus:

> It is thus were ever born,
> The children of Adam for all time,
> Of the lust of a man in union with woman,
> From their joining besides.
>
> Mary bore a good son,
> Christ, our abbot and our noble lord,
> Without lust in her body,
> Without joining of her virginity.

edited and translated by Brian Ó Cuív: 'St Gregory and St Dunstan in a Middle-Irish poem on the origins of liturgical chant' in N. Ramsey, M. Sparks and T. Tatton-Brown (eds), *St Dunstan: his life, times and cult* (Woodbridge, 1992), pp 273–97. **30** On the movements for ecclesiastical reform in Ireland at this time, see Denis Bethell, 'English monks and Irish reform in the eleventh and twelfth centuries', *Historical Studies*, 8 (1971), 111–35. See also Martin Holland, 'Dublin and the reform of the Irish church in the eleventh and twelfth centuries', *Peritia*, 14 (2000), 111–60; Martin Brett, 'Canterbury's perspective on church reform and Ireland, 1070–1115' in Damien Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century: reform and renewal* (Dublin, 2006), pp 13–35. **31** On Lanfranc's extensive familiarity with Ambrose's writings, see Margaret Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec* (Oxford, 1978), pp 40, 83. **32** Ambrose, *De mysteriis*, 8:52, 53; quoted in Lanfranc, *De corpore*, c.18 (*PL*, 150, 431C–D): *Si ordinem quaerimus, viro mixta femina generare consuevit. Liquet igitur quod praeter naturae ordinem Virgo generavit, et hoc quod conficimus corpus ex Virgine est. Quid hic quaeris naturae ordinem in Christi corpore, cum praeter naturam sit ipse Dominus*

Complete before the birth of her son, great deed,
Complete at his birth, without doubt,
Complete after his birth, enduring the practice,
Complete throughout time perpetually.

If you believe in the birth of Christ, without concealment,
From the virgin in the face of nature,
Believe that he is concealed (it is not sinister),
In the form of wine and wafer.[33]

The emphasis placed on Mary's virginity not only echoes Lanfranc's *De corpore*, but may also have resonated with a clerical audience in light of contemporaneous debates about clerical chastity and the issue of hereditary entitlement to ecclesiastical office.[34]

The wider intellectual context of ecclesiastical debates in eleventh- and twelfth-century Munster remains to be fully explored and is outside the scope of the present study. However, in an analysis of the twelfth-century high cross at Roscrea, which depicts Christ on the cross on one side, and a bishop on the other, Raghnall Ó Floinn has suggested that the depiction of the bishop wearing a mitre more reminiscent of papal than episcopal headgear, on this and other contemporary crosses, may have been 'a deliberate attempt to stress the apostolic role of the bishop in the twelfth-century Irish church'.[35] Ó Floinn notes that Bernard of Clairvaux, in his Life of Malachy (Máel Máedóc Úa Morgair) of Armagh, describes how, after instructing Malachy to return to Ireland with the palls and to convene a general council, Innocent II 'took his mitre from his own head, and placed it on Malachy's head', thus representing direct papal authority for Malachy's reforming agenda.[36] Bernard's Life of Malachy, written shortly after Malachy's death in 1148, may also provide a context for our understanding of Echtgus' text.

Jesus partus ex Virgine?; trans. in *Lanfranc of Canterbury*, p. 68. Other examples from Ambrose that appear in both Echtgus' text and Lanfranc's *De corpore*, ch. 18, are Moses' staff turning into a serpent and then returning to its original form (see Ambrose, *De mysteriis*, 8:49–51) and the provision of manna to the Israelites as described in Exodus (see Ambrose, *Epistola ad Irenaeum*). For the theological and philosophical discussion of nature, and specifically Christ's nature, in the works of Eriugena, see Hawtree, this volume. **33** §§36–9: *Is amhlaidh ro chinset riamh/ clanna Adaim co himcian,/ d'accobur fhir d'ëentaidh nnó/ dia n-accomul archena./ Ruccastar Muire mac maith/ Crist ar n-ab is ar n-ardfhlaith,/ cen accobur ina crí/ cen accomhal a hóigi./ Ogh ria mbreith a meic maith modh/ ógh icá breith ní baeghol,/ ógh iarna breith buan in bés,/ ógh tria bithiu do bithghrés./ Ma creti gein Crist cen cleith/ ón óigh i n-aighid n-aienidh,/ creit a beith fo cleith ni clé,/ i ndeilbh fhina is abhlainne.* **34** For a sceptical view of the significance of this issue, see Martin Holland, 'Were early Irish church establishments under lay control?' in Bracken and Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century*, pp 128–42. **35** Raghnall Ó Floinn, 'Bishops, liturgy and reform: some archaeological and art historical evidence' in Bracken and Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century*, pp 218–38 at p. 234. **36** Cited in Ó Floinn, 'Bishops, liturgy and reform', p. 234.

That the Eucharistic controversies of eleventh-century Europe were well known to the Irish is not only suggested by Lanfranc's side-swipe at Berengar in his letter to the Irish clerics written in 1080/1,[37] but is also suggested by the fact that those debates are evoked in the Irish Eucharistic controversy depicted in Malachy's *Vita*. It is clear that Bernard would wish his audience to believe that there was some sort of Berengarian controversy in Ireland during Malachy's lifetime (1094/5–1148), and that Malachy himself acted in the role of Lanfranc. Although it may ultimately derive from a genuine Irish controversy, Bernard's narrative contains so many Berengarian elements that it possesses little value as an historical account. As he describes it, a learned cleric from Lismore preaches that the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is figurative rather than real:

> In his own eyes a knowledgable man, he had the presumption to say that in the Eucharist there is only a sacrament and not the *res sacramenti*, that is only the sanctification and not the true presence of the body.[38]

He is twice called before an assembly of clerics (the first behind closed doors, the second in public) at which he is denounced as a heretic after refusing to accept the orthodox position on the Real Presence. As with Echtgus, Bernard emphasizes Malachy's concern for uniformity of belief, and for the unity of the church. The parallels that Bernard draws with the Berengarian controversy are obvious, and need not detain us unduly, but it is worth noting that the vocabulary with which the Irish heretic is said to have described the Eucharist – that it is only the sacrament and not the *res sacramenti* – explicitly evokes Berengar's arguments as characterized by Lanfranc in chapter 10 of his *De corpore*.[39] Furthermore, the two assemblies of clerics are undoubtedly meant to echo the councils of 1059 and 1079 at which Berengar was made to recant his views on the Real Presence. In the absence of any other evidence, the idea that the Life preserves an account of a genuine Eucharistic controversy in Ireland cannot be substantiated. However, what are noteworthy for our purposes are the broader thematic parallels between Echtgus' treatise and Bernard's Life of Malachy. For example, through miraculous intervention, this hagiographical narrative brings an Irish heretic from his rejection of the Real Presence in the Eucharist to a deathbed acceptance of Catholic doctrine and receipt of the Eucharist, thus ensuring the heretic's ultimate salvation. While fleeing in dishonour from the second assembly, the heretic is seized by a

37 *Letters*, no. 49: *Neque enim negat ueritatem carnis et sanguinis Christi, quod plerisque scismaticis uisum est et adhuc non cessat uideri*, 'He does not (as many schismatics have thought and have not yet ceased to think) deny that the flesh and blood of Christ are really present'. 38 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Life of Malachy*, §57, *PL*, 182, 1073–1118 (1105C–1106A): *Is sciolus in oculis suis, praesumpsit dicere, in Eucharistia esse tantummodo sacramentum, et non rem sacramenti, id est solam sanctificationem, et non corporis veritatem. Bernard of Clairvaux: the life and death of Saint Malachy the Irishman*, trans. Robert T. Meyer (Kalamazoo, MI, 1978), pp 71–2. 39 *PL*, 150, 421A;

malady that leaves him unable to move. A passing madman tells him that this is a forewarning of death, but we are informed that it was God speaking through the madman, because the heretic had gained nothing from the counsel of sane men. The heretic is thus reconciled to correct doctrine on the Real Presence:

> Within the hour the bishop was called, truth was acknowledged and error rooted out. He confessed that he had been in the wrong and was absolved. Then he asked for the *viaticum* and a reconciliation was effected. At practically the same moment that his lips renounced all his faithless wrongdoing he was dissolved by death.[40]

The use of a divine miracle to confirm the truth of a Paschasian belief in the Real Presence, and therefore ensure the salvation of an individual, is evocative of Lanfranc's statement that God can use miracles as a way of convincing those who entertain doubts about the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ: 'worthy miracles ... by which the veil of visible and corruptible realities is removed, and Christ is seen as he truly is – his flesh and blood appearing to bodily eyes'.[41] Certainly, Echtgus also makes use of such a miracle to support his position on the Eucharist when, drawing on Paschasius Radbertus' *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, he recounts the narrative of the Eucharistic host being transformed, on the altar of St Ninian, into the Christ child.[42] In Echtgus' version of the miracle, the doubtful cleric Flagellus (in Paschasius' *De corpore*, the priest is called Plecgils) beseeches God to reveal the true form of the Eucharistic host, whereupon it is transformed into the infant Jesus.[43] As with the episode in the Life of Malachy, it is a cleric who takes the central role in this episode, and his individual salvation is assured after divine intervention allows him to recognize the 'true' form of the Eucharistic host. However, if we return to the letter from Lanfranc with which this study began, we might note a contrast here: where Lanfranc invites us, following Augustine, to 'share in Christ's suffering', and to 'meditate tenderly and profitably on the fact that it was for us that his flesh was wounded and crucified', Echtgus turns not to the crucified Christ, but rather to the Christ-child, as the object of affective piety. This affords his audience a different, though equally intimate, example of Eucharistic devotion.

Lanfranc of Canterbury, p. 51. **40** *PL*, 182, 1106: *Eadem hora accitur Episcopus, agnoscitur veritas, abjicitur error. Confessus reatum absolvitur, petit Viaticum, datur reconciliatio: et uno pene momento perfidia ore abdicatur, et morte diluitur*; *Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 72. **41** *PL*, 150, 427B: *digna miracula, quibus rerum visibilium atque corruptibilium ablatis tegumentis, sicuti revera est, appareret corporalibus oculis caro Christi et sanguis*; *Lanfranc of Canterbury*, p. 61. **42** *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, c.14. **43** Paschasius' source for this miracle was the *Miracula Nynie Episcopi*, which was known to him through Alcuin (ed. Karl Strecker, *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*, IV:II–III (Berlin, 1923), pp 943–61). I am currently preparing a detailed study of this passage of Echtgus' text for publication.

As with other texts composed within the context of the ecclesiastical reform movement in Ireland, Echtgus looks to Carolingian sources for elucidation of correct doctrine and exegetical interpretation.[44] In the case of the miracle of the Christ-child on the altar of St Ninian, it is Paschasius' *De corpore* that is Echtgus' probable source. However, that is not to say that Irish authors looked to earlier Carolingian sources to the exclusion of more contemporary sources. Indeed, Lanfranc may have been one such contemporary source, as I have suggested here. It is difficult to prove beyond doubt that Echtgus knew Lanfranc's *De corpore*, although the letter from the Munster clergy to Lanfranc suggests at least that he was known in Ireland to be an authority on Eucharistic doctrine. Both Lanfranc and Echtgus (and indeed other contemporary authors on Eucharistic doctrine, such as Lanfranc's pupil Guitmund of Aversa) looked to the same biblical passages and the same authorities – Ambrose, Augustine, Paschasius – for support of their doctrinal stance. Echtgus' transposition of his material into the Irish language makes it particularly difficult to identify instances where he might be drawing on Lanfranc's work, rather than directly from earlier sources. But what is important is that this Irish author was, at the same time as other better-known thinkers elsewhere in Europe, articulating an orthodox theological position on the Eucharist for the purpose of promoting uniformity of belief throughout the church. Furthermore, while doing so he drew on the same authorities and the same textual heritage as Lanfranc. This shows the extent to which the Irish church was participating in, and responding to, the intellectual debates that arose in Western Europe during the early scholastic period. That Irish churchmen felt able to write to Lanfranc to clarify issues regarding Eucharistic doctrine is further evidence of their integration in this intellectual *milieu*. In this regard, the emphasis in Echtgus' text on ideas of completion and perfection not only reflects the literary and theological sophistication of the text, but also alludes to the wider cultural context within which the text was composed: it is illustrative of a wider perception of the need for unity within the church, a need that was highlighted by movements for ecclesiastical reform throughout Europe.[45]

Although Christ's sacrifice on the cross implicitly underlies the Eucharistic celebration, Echtgus is more concerned with other elements of the Passion narrative, particularly Christ as enactor of the first Eucharistic feast at the Last Supper, and the resurrected Christ as he is present in the bread and the wine of the Eucharist and simultaneously in heaven, according to Catholic belief. Perhaps in this we can also see the influence of Lanfranc, who, in favouring the resurrection

44 Compare, for example, Gille of Limerick's use of Carolingian sources in his *De statu ecclesiae*: see Michael Richter, 'Gilbert of Limerick revisited' in Alfred P. Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas: studies in early and medieval Irish archaeology, history and literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin, 2000), pp 341–7.

45 For an overview, see Gerd Tellenbach, *The church in Western Europe from the tenth to the early twelfth century*, trans. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge, 1993).

theology of Ambrose, also downplayed the role of Christ's crucifixion in his Eucharistic treatise in comparison to, say, Paschasius Radbertus.[46] Echtgus' use of a miracle narrative in which the host is turned into the Christ-child on the altar moves the focus of devotion away from the crucified Christ, but still offers his audience an equally affective and intimate form of Eucharistic piety. The major doctrinal controversies that raged across Latin Christendom have long commanded scholarly attention, but localized, indirect, vernacular responses to these controversies (the reaction 'on the ground', so to speak) have generally been overlooked. However, by highlighting a few of the themes reflected in Echtgus' poem on the Eucharist, it is hoped that the present study has shown how the wider theological implications of the Passion's narrative of sacrifice and salvation might have been understood and expounded in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland.[47]

46 Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec*, p. 74. Gibson also emphasizes Lanfranc's concern for the unity of the church, which she argues was greater than his need 'to clarify the technical problems of Eucharistic definition' (p. 97), which suggests another point of comparison with Echtgus. 47 In addition to research presented at the 'Envisioning Christ on the Cross' conference at University College Cork, this essay incorporates work presented at research seminars in the Department of Celtic and Gaelic Studies, University of Glasgow, and the Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, and I would like to thank those who attended for their useful comments and suggestions. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Leverhulme Trust and the Isaac Newton Trust in funding my research.