Born for a Cross

Stanley L. Stiver Jr.

STANLEY L. STIVER JR.

Over 1900 years have passed since a simple wooden cross was erected at Calvary. Today the cross is the one universally recognized symbol of Christianity.

However, in the first three centuries after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the cross was not openly used as a Christian symbol. This was due, in part, to the persecution suffered by the earliest believers. Christians in Rome held secret worship services in the catacombs beneath the city, using a religious symbol whose significance could be hidden. One such symbol, the anchor cross, has been found in the ancient section of the Roman catacombs Callixtus and Domitilla. The anchor, a sign for fishermen, contained a crossbar and so was adopted as a disguised cross. The anchor itself was also a symbol of hope, perhaps stemming from these words to the Hebrews: "We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope" (Hebrews 6:19). As such, the anchor has been called both "the cross of the catacombs" and "the cross that is not a cross."

Another disguised cross was the tau cross, formed as the Greek letter T. This mark was used by the Hebrews when they wrote with blood on their doorposts on that first Passover in Egypt. It was also said to have been the shape of the standard on which Moses raised the bronze serpent in the wilderness. The tau cross with its several meanings has been called "the cross of many names."

A variation of the tau cross was the ankh, a cross with a loop at the top. The ankh was the Egyptian hieroglyphic for "life" and can be seen on ancient obelisks in Istanbul and Turkey, on the Hippodrome, and on the golden mask of King Tut. It was adopted by the Coptic Church of Egypt because Christ is the "tree of life."

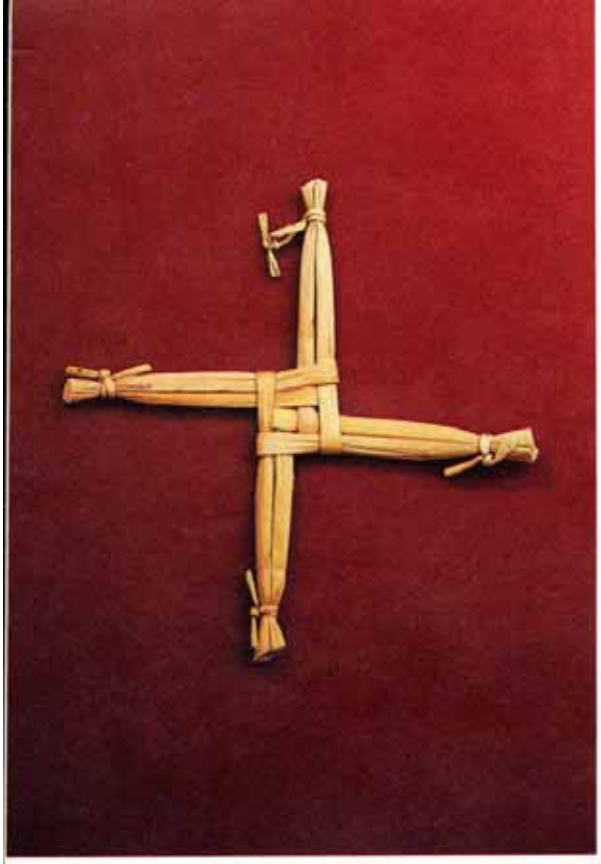
The Emperor Constantine's vision of the cross in 312, his official recognition of Christianity by the Edict of Milan in 313, and the discovery of the "true cross" in Jerusalem by Constantine's mother, Helena, in 326 began to stimulate public acceptance of the undisguised cross. At this time, Constantine also abolished punishment by crucifixion in honor and in memory of the passion of Christ. In the Roman forum Constantine erected a statue of himself holding a cross-shaped lance. The cross also appeared on the imperial diadem, scepter, and coinage. He replaced the Roman eagles and the thunderbolts on the Roman Empire banners with the cross.

When Christianity became the official religion of the empire, the cross that was seen in public and carved on monuments was the simple Latin cross. This cross is the most familiar. It has a long vertical arm and a shorter horizontal one higher up. This was the way the cross appeared in the fourth and fifth centuries.

About the sixth century artists, desiring to decorate or embellish the plain cross, pointed out that Jesus called himself "the Lamb of God." Therefore, a lamb was artistically placed on the cross. The Greek Fathers at the Council of Trullo, 692, felt that the time had come for a more emphatic assertion of the personality and human nature of the Redeemer in sacred art. They decreed: "Instead of a lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ should be shown hereafter in his human form."

The earliest crucifix probably had the figure of Christ etched on it. The Christ generally was shown dressed in a robe reaching to his feet; his outspread arms did not hang but lay straight across the transverse beam, and his feet were placed side by side upon a supporting ledge. The head was erect with a kingly crown, wreath, or diadem; the eyes were

Photo: Iona Cross



frequently open and looking forward. The side was not pierced and often the hands and feet showed neither wounds nor nail marks. With the Christ generally resting against the cross rather than being attached to it, it was a cross of the victorious Jesus reigning from the tree. In this early Christian period attention was focused more on the cross as a symbol of salvation than on the actual suffering of the crucified Christ.

Later, in the ninth and tenth centuries, Christ was painted on the cross with his eyes closed, his head falling to his right shoulder (perhaps in the direction of the good thief), and his feet parallel on a footrest. During the 11th and 12th centuries the robe he wore was shortened to the knees and gradually to the loincloth. Francis of Assisi is credited with bringing a suffering Christ to the cross. Francis said: "Let us have a flesh and blood Christ on the cross; let us have the real thing." In the 13th century, complete realism in depicting Christ on the cross was reached. Christ was then portrayed hanging on the cross wearing a crown of thorns, his diaphragm contorted with pain, his body twisted, his hands bent back, his face in agony, and blood flowing from his wounds. The knees were always bent, indicating pain. At the beginning of the 14th century there was a sudden change in the position of Jesus' feet. Instead of being parallel on the bar piece and secured with two nails, his feet were superimposed and held by one nail. It is believed this change was done for artistic motives to bring a more moving and devoted pose.

The Crusades brought about a widespread erection of crosses and use of cross forms throughout Europe. At the Council of Clermont, France, in 1095, Pope Urban II, the motivator of the First Crusade, said to the crusaders: "The cross of Christ is the symbol of your salvation. Wear it, a red and bloody cross on your breast and shoulders, as a token that his help will never fail you, as the pledge of a man which can never be recalled." Knights could not be identified by the armor they wore, so they became identified by the color and design of the cross on their tunics and shields. The colors were: England, white; France, red; the Flemish people, green; Italy, blue; the Knights Templar, red and white.

As Christian soldiers marched forth into battle, they carried a shield bearing the heraldic cross of their leader. Many new cross forms were developed, often by combining two or more forms to create a more distinctive identification. Many beautiful and unusual cross designs resulted. Never before in Christian history and at no time since have

No event in the history of the world has so captured the imaginations of artists and poets as the life of Christ. Particularly, the events surrounding the birth and death of Jesus have received the most attention. Skilled artists on every continent have set their brushes to the recreation of these moments.

Although it may seem that the agony of Jesus' death on the cross is far removed from the excitement of the Bethlehem story, the drama is the same. The message of the angel to Mary, the resounding proclamation to the shepherds, and the extraordinary sign among the constellations of the night sky all point to the cross. The child born in the Bethlehem manger was born to die on a cross. While it is the birth of Christ and the celebrations of that birth that receive the greatest public attention, it is the cross that has become the universally recognized symbol of the salvation wrought by him who was born in a stable.

The event of Calvary lifted the birth story to unknown heights and sent it soaring over national borders, over rivers and oceans, to encircle the earth. None who gathered at the Bethlehem stable would have suspected that in God's plan of recovery this child would be "wounded for our transgressions . . . bruised for our iniquities." Only someone who had lived with the vision of Isaiah could have seen the print of nails in the baby's hands and a cross silhou-

Photos: St. Brigid Cross
Irish High Cross

people given such attention to the symbol of the cross.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, European adventurers took the cross with them as they explored the new land of America. On his first voyage, Christopher Columbus carried both the Spanish standard and a banner bearing a cross. A painting in the United States Capitol shows Columbus standing with a raised cross and an unfurled banner, taking possession of the land for God and for King.

The 17th century saw the rise of baroque art, with its use of dazzling materials. To the average person in those days this splendor compensated for the harshness of their everyday life. People were given palaces in the form of churches. The church building was the image of heaven on earth. Baroque artists continuously searched for the most dramatic moment. Christ was represented on the cross usually as a suffering Christ, with his head cast back, eyes lifted upward, mouth open in pain.

etted against the star-lit sky. Old Simeon caught a glimpse of the cross as he cradled the baby in his arms and said to Mary, "A sword will pierce your own soul also."

God had promised to send one who would restore the relationship between himself and his people. This one came as a child. The word became flesh. God became incarnate for the purpose of dying on the cross and rising again for our salvation.

The words, "O little town of Bethlehem . . . the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight," have meaning only because we also sing, "In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time. All the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime."

Crosses on gables and spires began to be popular, as evidenced by St. Peter's in Rome and St. Paul's in London.

Centuries ago it was the custom to erect stone or marble crosses in the marketplace to remind those who bought and sold to deal in a Christian manner.

Many legends have sprung up concerning the cross. In one elaborate tale, a branch of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is said to have been planted in Adam's grave. Later, Solomon had it cut down to use in building the temple, but it was found unsuitable. Instead it was used as a bridge across a brook. Later it was buried in the pool of Bethesda. At the time of the crucifixion it floated up and was used for Jesus' cross. After Jesus' death, his cross and those of the two thieves were buried. When the mother of Constantine went to the holy land seeking the cross of Jesus, she found that a temple had been built where the three crosses had been buried. The temple was pulled down, and in the digging the three crosses were found. However, they could not distinguish the true from the others. So, the body of a young man who had died that day was brought to the crosses, and each cross was in turn laid upon his body. When the true cross touched him, he came alive again. It still retained the power from the tree.

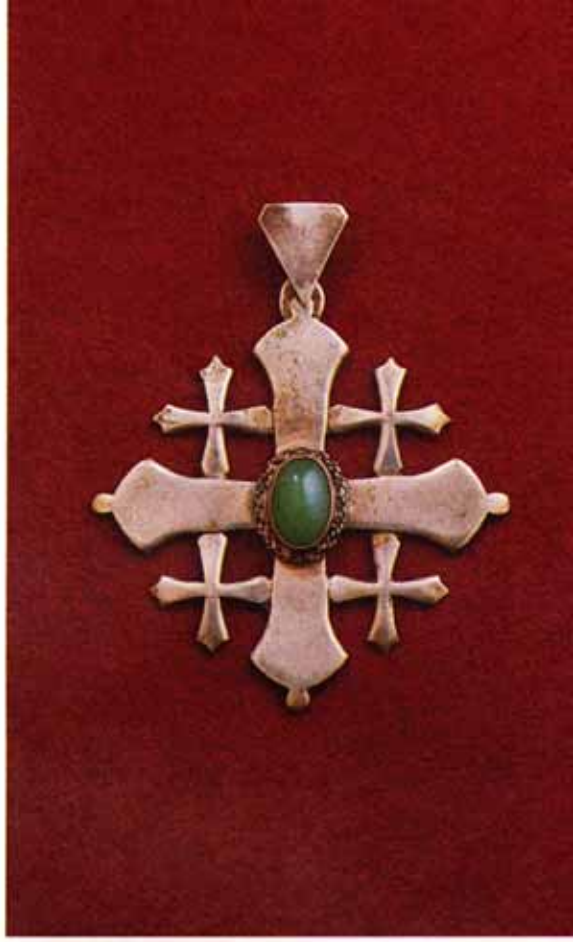
There are about 400 various cross forms, with perhaps 50 being the most familiar. These crosses consist of five basic forms. They are:

The tau cross. This T-shaped cross form is also called the pre-Christian or anticipatory cross because, with the loop added to the top to form a handle, it is identical with the Egyptian ankh or key of life.

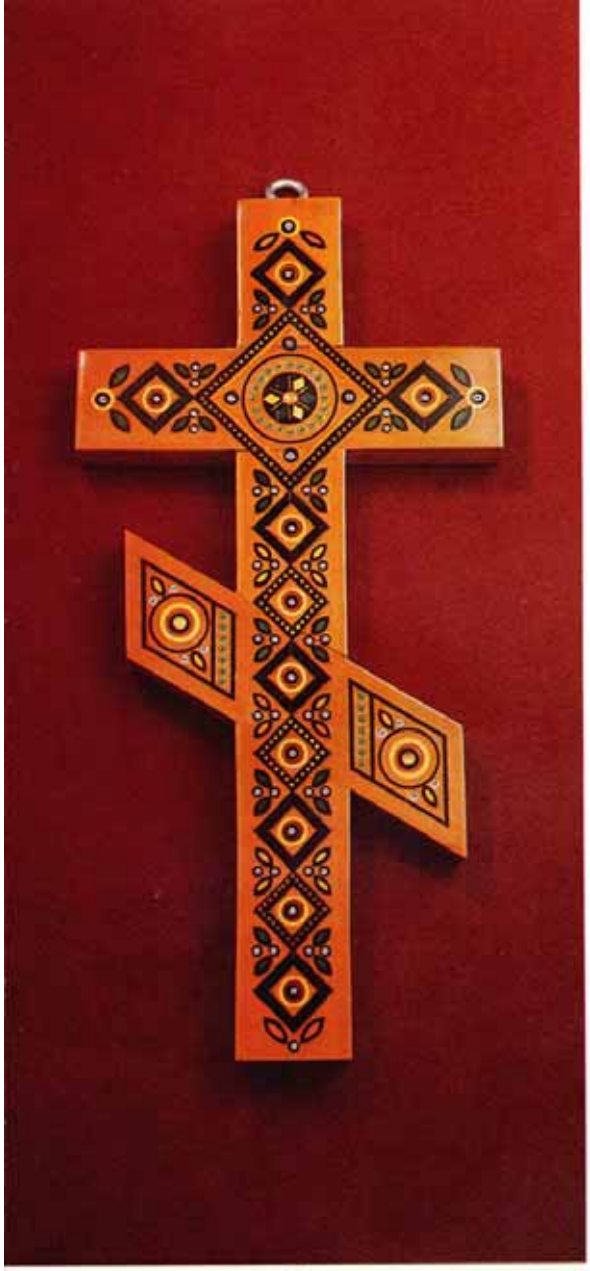
The Latin cross. This common cross form is distinguished by an upright arm that is longer than the transverse arm. There are many variations of the Latin cross.

The Greek cross. This square, equal-limbed cross looks very much like the plus sign. Beauty-loving Greek artists recoiled from the cruelty suggested by the literal Latin cross and preferred to indicate the sacrifice by a square cross decorated with conventional designs rather than by an agonizing crucified figure.

The Eastern or Slavic cross. Greek Orthodox and Russian Orthodox churches both use the upright bar crossed by three transverse bars, of which the top transverse is shorter than the main transverse. The lower



Photos: Jerusalem Cross
Cross Botonée



crossbar or footrest, called the suppedaneum, is slanted.

The crosses of heraldry. Some of the cross designs that resulted from heraldry are St. Andrew's cross, the crosslet, the barbee and fitchee crosses. St. Andrew's cross is shaped like an *X*; the barbee is the fishers of men cross, with each end terminating in barbed fish hooks or fish spears; fitchee or the pilgrim cross is sharpened to a point at the bottom so that it might easily be driven into the ground as the pilgrim rested at night on his long journey to the holy land.

Of these fundamental types there are many variations.

St. Brigid Cross

In Ireland, St. Brigid is revered only less than St. Patrick. Brigid's emblem is a cross woven of rushes. In many districts people still weave these crosses on the eve of her feast day, February 1. They hang them inside the eaves of their homes or from the ceiling of the kitchen to invoke St. Brigid's blessing on the house and the land. The genesis of the emblem and the custom focuses on a pagan chieftain who lived in the neighborhood of Kildare. The man was dying, so some Christians in his household sent for Brigid to talk to him about Christ. When she arrived the chieftain was raving. As it was impossible to instruct this delirious man, hopes for his conversion were diminishing. Brigid sat down at his bedside and began consoling him. As was customary, the dirt floor was strewn with rushes both for warmth and cleanliness. Brigid reflectively stooped down and started to weave them into a cross, fastening the points together. The sick man asked what she was doing. She began to explain the cross, and as she talked his delirium quieted and he questioned her with growing interest. He believed and was baptized at the point of death. For this reason the primitive cross of rushes has been venerated in Ireland for 1500 years.

Irish High Cross

High crosses in Ireland were erected not to commemorate the dead but to celebrate the everlasting victory of Christ's resurrection. Carved out of hard sandstone, their average height is 12 to 15 feet, with some as high as 21 feet. A circle intersecting the arms of the high cross signifies eternity. The circle is the Celtic cosmic symbol for the revolving sun, denoting resurrection, perfection, and timelessness. Sometimes the stone ring has been a sort of solid wheel. On many of these high crosses are carved spirals and interlacing designs. The carvings also include Bible stories, which are called sermons in stone. People who could not read could be told the story carved on the high cross.

The Irish Belleek replica of a 10th century high cross pictured is composed of three basic parts: the base, the cross, and the cap. The cap is shaped like a house with shingled roof and gabled ends, exacting the form of a wooden church. The cross has a ring surrounding the upper middle of the cross. The ring in most crosses is open.

Iona Cross

The Iona Cross, sometimes called St. Martin's Celtic Cross, is found on the island of Iona, 50 miles west of Scotland. The 14-foot high cross has stood for a thousand years 200 yards from the Iona cathedral. The center illustration on one side of the cross shows the Virgin and Child surrounded by angels. A lion is portrayed on each crosspiece. Beneath is a portrayal of Daniel in the lions' den, while still lower is a figure giving the benediction. The boy David, playing his harp to Saul, with intertwining serpents and circular bosses completes the obverse side. (Bosses are small protuberances, most in groups of five, symbolizing the five wounds of Jesus.)

Iona is an island about three miles in length and a mile across. St. Columba, considered the greatest of the itinerant saints of Ireland, in the year 563 went with 12 disciples to Britain. Looking for an island where he could practice Christianity, he found Iona. Scotland and Iona were dominated by the king of the Picts. According to Scottish legend, two years after Columba arrived he made the sign of the cross over the Pict royal house. The door immediately opened. He again made the sign of the cross over

Photos: Russian Orthodox Cross
Penal Crucifixes

the head of the king, and the king dropped his sword from a withered hand which remained withered until the king believed in God. His hand was then restored.

Jerusalem Cross

The Jerusalem Cross was the coat of arms of the first ruler of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, Godfrey of Bouillon, victorious in the Crusade of 1099. Later the cross was used extensively by the Crusaders. The Jerusalem Cross is a Greek cross with four Greek crosslets between the arms. The five crosses have been said to represent the five wounds of Jesus—in his hands, feet, and side. Another interpretation of this symbol is that the four small crosses represent the wounds of Jesus in his hands and feet and the large central cross shows forth his death to the world. Yet another meaning given is that the four small crosses symbolize the four corners of the earth and the large one, the church in Jerusalem. Another explanation says the five crosses represent the five crusader countries of Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. Still another theory is that the crosses symbolize the Savior and the four evangelists.

Cross Botonée

Cross Botonée (or Budded Cross) is a cross of heraldric design from the time of the Crusades. When heraldry first became popular in England, the Angevin kings were rulers and French was the language of the court and nobility. Because of this many of the cross forms designed during this period were given French names.

The arms of the Cross Botonée end in a trefoil, representing the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is sometimes called the Budded Cross because of the moderate form of the trefoil ends.

The Cross Botonée pictured is a mosaic pectoral cross. At the trefoils on the top and the bottom are Christmas roses; at the trefoil to the left is a column like that to which Christ was tied when beaten 39 times across the back before his crucifixion; on the right is a ladder such as the one used to take the body of Christ down from the cross. In the center is the monogram Chi-Rho, formed of the first two letters of the name of Christ in Greek.

Angel Cross

Southeastern Spain is known for its medieval Castle of the Holy Cross and for its church in Caravaca, which houses a famous crucifix. This crucifix is carried through the streets every May in recognition of its healing power.

The legend of this cross is that when the Moors captured prisoners, they tested them to determine if they were good at a particular trade. If they were, their lives were spared. Thus, if they captured a cobbler, they would ask him to make a pair of shoes and if the shoes were satisfactorily made, they would spare his life. One day they captured a priest and they asked him what he could do and what tools he needed. The priest said he needed a table, three linen cloths, two candles, and a crucifix, also a cup, bread, and wine. The Moors produced everything they had, but no crucifix. They were about to put the priest to death when from the heavens two angels descended holding a cross which they held over the table while the priest said mass. His life was saved.

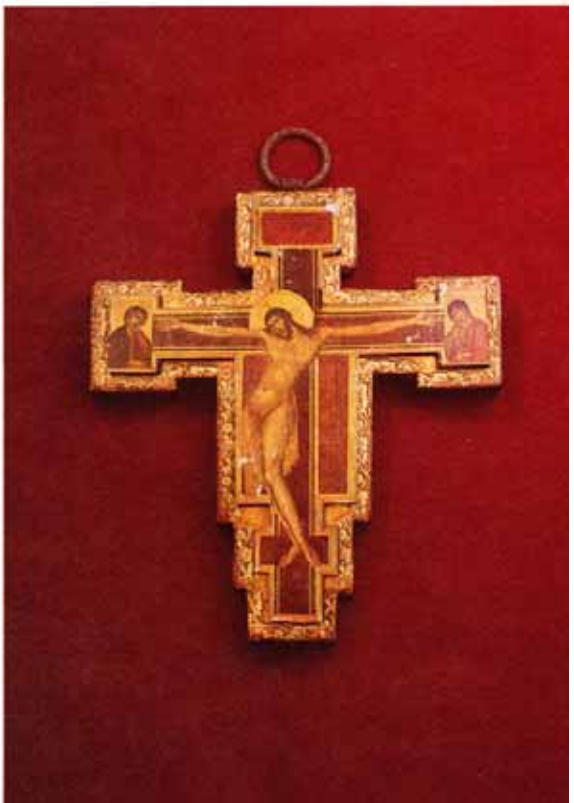
This ancient cross has two wide transverse bars; the head and arms of Christ are on the topmost bar and his feet, just below the center transverse, are affixed by a single nail. Mary, his mother, is situated below his feet between two cherubs, one on each side of the cross, holding it up. Because the angels are holding up the cross, it is called the Angel Cross.

The cross is designed to hold sacred relics within its two parts. It is a brass reliquary of the type affixed to doorways of old Caravaca houses, whose occupants say, "When the two parts of the reliquary open of their own accord, a storm is brewing."

St. Damian Cross

One day in the early 1200s, tradition tells us, Francis of Assisi was passing by the church of St. Damian in Assisi, Italy, when he felt an overwhelming impulse to go in and pray. The old church had once been a holy place, but it had fallen into

Photos: Angel Cross
Coventry Cross of Nails
Italian Wooden Crucifix



ruin. Inside the ruined walls of the church, where weeds were coming up through the paving stones, was a simple stone altar. A large painted wooden cross hung by a chain from the ceiling. Francis knelt before the altar and prayed for guidance. As he prayed, he looked at the large Byzantine crucifix. It represented Christ with head up and eyes looking out over the suffering world. The attitude of the figure was as though Christ was saying, "Come unto me." Francis gazed at the figure of Christ and proceeded to pray. Hearing a voice, he opened his eyes, looked about, and saw that he was alone. He believed he had heard the Lord speak to him and say, "Rebuild my church." He was sure that the voice came from the cross itself. He believed Christ had spoken to him. "Gladly, Lord," he said, "will I rebuild it." This Francis did.

This large wooden painted crucifix is still in existence today and can be seen at the Church of Santa Chiara at Assisi. There is a special chapel for this cross, and on the door entering into it are these words in several languages: "The cross that spoke to St. Francis."

Italian Wooden Crucifix

In Italy the transition from the triumphant Christ of the earlier centuries to the suffering Christ of the latter Middle Ages was made through the medium of cruciform panels. These painted wooden crosses had squared-off extremities. Economics influenced the development of this cross design, as wood was less costly than precious metals. There were three or four basic shapes of this cross, but many modifications of each. The crosses also varied in size—six, eight, ten, twelve feet long.

Sometimes called "inhabited crosses," the cruciform panels to the left and to the right of Christ were painted with images of his mother Mary and the beloved disciple John. They were also called "storied crosses" when there was not only a painted crucifix but also small scenes of the passion.

Cimabue (his real name was Cenni di Peppi) began painting the suffering Christ in this style on the panels. He was the first to paint the body of Christ tautly S-shaped. The original of the cross pictured hung in the Franciscan church, Santa Croce (St. Cross) in Florence from the later 1200s until 1966, when it was destroyed in a terrible flood.

To prepare these wooden panels for painting they were first covered with a preparation of glue and plaster known as gesso. The paint was applied by the tempera method using powdered pigments mixed with egg and water. The backgrounds are usually burnished gold leaf. The results are strong, bright colors allowing the painting to be seen in the dim candlelit interiors of the churches.

Latin Cross with Skull and Crossbones

The Latin cross is the most familiar form of the cross. Many times it is called the long cross because the cross has a long vertical arm and a shorter horizontal arm fairly high up. Its shape represents the cross of the crucifixion.

Often a skull and crossbones are shown just below the figure of Christ on this cross. The skull and crossbones represent Adam; their location at the foot of the cross is symbolical of the sin of humankind. The blood of the Lamb of God drips down upon it, washing away believers' sins.

Russian Orthodox Cross

The wooden, inlaid Russian Orthodox cross pictured here has two arms of equal length. The upper arm where the hands and the head of Christ would be, and the lower arm, the footrest, which is slanted at an angle less than 45 degrees from the horizontal bar. The origin of the slanting footrest is explained in various ways. The Russian Orthodox explain that Jesus was crucified with his feet side-by-side and not crossed over as is seen in many crosses. The footrest was supposedly wrenched from its normal position as Jesus, in his agony, pressed down on the footrest to get air into his lungs in his cramped suffering position. Others believe that after Jesus died, the Good Friday earthquake caused the footrest to slant. Many explain that the footrest is set at an angle to suggest St. Andrew's cross, as this

Photos: Mexican Straw Cross
Latin Cross with Skull and Crossbones

apostle is believed to have introduced Christianity to Russia. St. Andrew, according to tradition, was put to death on a cross in the shape of an *X*. He is the patron saint of Russia.

This cross can be seen on the tombs of the czars and on the steeples over the onion-shaped domes of all three cathedrals in the Kremlin in Moscow.

German Wax Crucifix

Craftsmanship of a 500-year-old German folk art is seen in elegant wax castings drawn from antique wooden cookie molds. Clever or beautifully shaped cookies were a familiar part of nearly every Northern European holiday. Traditionally made of gingerbread, the cookies were formed by pressing the firm dough into laboriously handcarved baking forms. Close-grained fruitwood was the material of choice because it could tolerate the rough treatment of a working kitchen tool and still lend itself to a delicate line and fine detail.

The molds were highly prized as heirlooms and were handed down through the centuries from mother to daughter. Sold year-round at churches, shops, and country fairs, the cookies represented a lively and subtle form of communication—often using a traditional symbolic code to convey the message. They announced births and weddings, commemorated important holidays and deeply religious themes.

Nothing went to waste in those days. Because the dough was sweetened with honey, the bakers often used beeswax to cast the form. Ornamented with delicate colors, the beeswax castings became the forerunners of modern Christmas ornaments. Today, handpainted castings in a specially developed melt-resistant wax have been struck from the original forms.

The wax crucifix shown (c. 1800-1850) refers to Christ's passion. It might have been sold for a pilgrimage during the Easter season when spring thaws made traveling pleasant. The major use of such a cross, however, was to extend hospitality after a burial, a custom still practiced in Germany today. Since the message was one of joy, resurrection, and new life for the departed, the facial expression is curiously cheerful for such a weighty theme.

Penal Crucifix

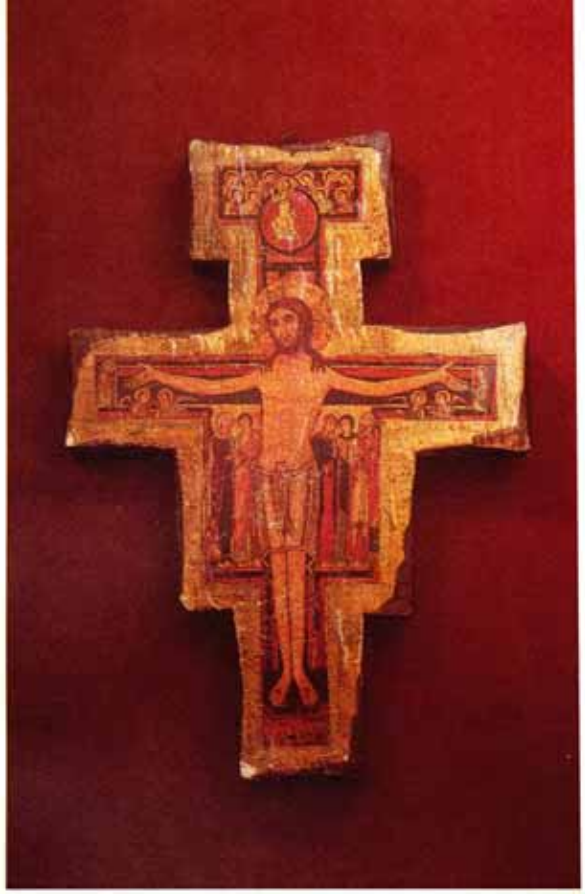
After the Irish Catholics were defeated by England and the Protestants at the Battle of Boyne in 1690, the Penal Laws were instituted. The Irish Parliament came under the control of the Protestants from 1692 until 1829. During this period of time Roman Catholic worship in Ireland was prohibited by law and Roman Catholic citizens were deprived of many of their natural rights of citizenship. A Roman Catholic was not permitted to hold office, serve as a juror, vote, attend public schools, or send children out of the country for schooling. They could not bear arms, could not be citizens of an incorporated town, could not own land. Anyone attending a Roman Catholic pilgrimage was subject to a fine and public whipping. No Roman Catholic prelate was allowed to reside in Ireland under the penalty of being hanged, drawn, and quartered.

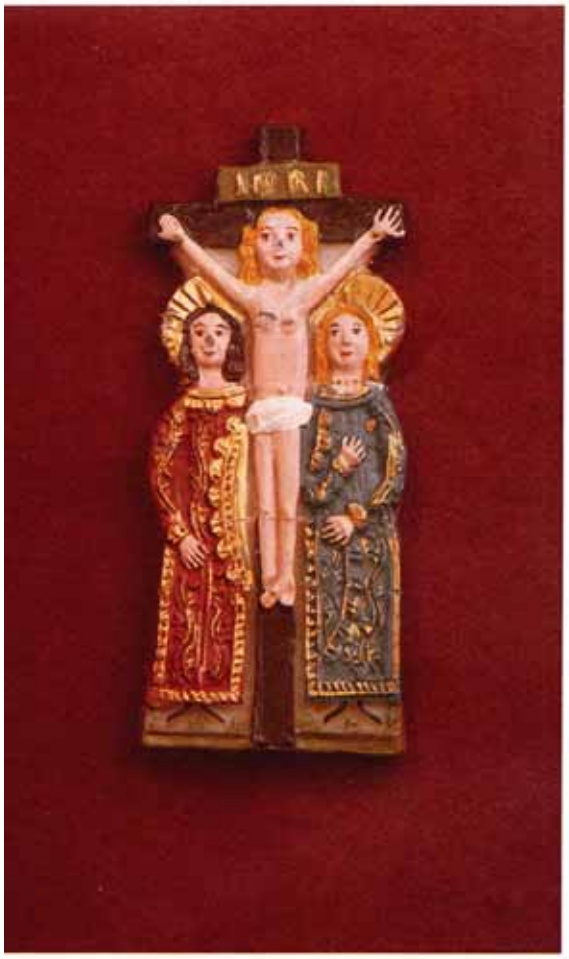
The Penal Laws had the effect of making the Irish people more consciously and deliberately Roman Catholic than they had ever been before. The more savage the persecution, the more they clung to their faith. While the Penal Laws were in effect there were those who desired a symbol of their redemption. They made what has become known as the Penal Cross, a purely native carving. Most of the figures are of crude, unfinished workmanship. All the arms of the crosses are short, so the cross could be easily hidden in the sleeve. These penal crucifixes are uniquely Irish folk art objects. Each is carved from a single piece of wood and bears symbols of the passion. These are replicas of two of the Penal Crosses in the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin.

Mexican Straw Cross

Mexican Indians make these crosses from straw. Or, they may use palm leaves of various textures and thicknesses, twisting and plaiting them to make crosses. One of the unusual features of the straw cross is the mask on the face of Jesus. In

Photos: St. Damian Cross
Oberammergau Crucifix Carving





Mexico, masks are often placed upon statues and sculpture to animate them. The Mexican Indian believes masks are holy objects, having the power to confer upon the wearer the spirit of the diety portrayed.

Coventry Cross of Nails

On the night of November 14, 1940, the German Luftwaffe dropped fire bombs upon the industrial city of Coventry, England, the longest single night air raid upon any British city during the war. Fire bombs fell on the roof of the old cathedral, the church of St. Michael, built in the 14th century. The walls of the church were stone, as was the altar; but the roof and the ceiling were made of great oak beams. The bombs set the roof on fire. The next morning, all that remained were the stone walls and the stone altar. In the ashes people found many large forged medieval nails, four to five inches long, that had been used to secure the roof beams. Three of these nails were put together in the form of a cross. The Cross of Nails was taken to the stone altar and placed there. With chalk someone wrote on the front of the altar, "Father forgive."

This Coventry Cross of Nails has become a symbol of resurrection and reconciliation. It is a precious possession of the new Coventry Cathedral built after World War II. In the new cathedral, called the Coventry Cathedral of Resurrection through Sacrifice, the Cross of Nails is lodged at the heart of the altar cross, a glorious silver-gilt cross.

Ethiopian Coptic Cross

Ethiopia is one of the earliest Christian kingdoms in the world. Ethiopians apparently had contact with Christianity from the days of the apostles; the book of Acts tells of Philip explaining Isaiah to the eunuch who served Queen Candace of Ethiopia. A great king of the fourth century, Ezana, was converted to the Christian faith. The coins of his reign eventually had a cross on them, the first among the earliest coins of any country to carry the Christian symbol. In the 15th century Emperor Yaqob of Ethiopia decreed that every Christian should wear a cross.

Photos: German Wax Crucifix
Ethiopian Coptic Cross

A week after a new birth, the Coptic priest is called by the baby's father to sprinkle the home with holy water. The priest will then arrange for baptism—for boys 40 days and for girls 80 days after birth. Baptism is a most complicated ceremony requiring the presence of several priests and deacons. A short neck cord called the *mateb* is tied around the neck of the child at Baptism, an indispensable part of the procedure. From this cord, a small cross will later be hung. The cross is the symbol that distinguishes an Ethiopian Christian from a Moslem or heathen. The small crosses worn by every Ethiopian Christian exist in an endless variety. There are 700 different designs found in Ethiopian crosses.

The cross pictured is the type carried by Coptic Orthodox priests. A blessing is given to the Christian by touching it to the forehead, the lips, and the breast. Larger crosses are used in processions and extra large ones are found on church doors. The cross inscription at the bottom of the cross is translated:

Jesus	The Nazarene
King	Jews

Oberammergau Crucifix Carving

In the 1200s when the monks in the monastery near Oberammergau saw that the soil in that region was not good for crops, they decided to teach the men of the town a different occupation—wood carving. The men became master carvers, passing the craft from father to son. Today there are 400 master carvers in Oberammergau, a town of 5000 residents. Most of the carving is from linden wood, a soft wood. The carving pictured, with a cross and figure of Christ, is of oak. An unusual feature of this carving is the top bar of the cross, which slants down on both sides. It is said that, because the weight of human sin on Christ became so heavy, the crossbar bent down at each end.

Planted in hate, the cross took root in believers' hearts as the emblem of Christian love. Brandished by Constantine, it emerged from the catacombs to crown cathedrals and emblazon crusader shields. As a visual expression of faith, the cross has soothed, comforted, and inspired millions of people.