

Stained Glass Windows

By CHARLES J. CONNICK

QUESTIONS that are countless variations on one theme, "What shall we do about windows?" are gently suggested to me, or are stoutly hurled at me very often nowadays.

They usually come from sincere folks who really want to know the right answers, but I'm not always sure that I know how to reply briefly without missing the most important point involved in every question.

I am always eager to make known and appreciated one fact that may well be introduced by the remark of a distinguished committeeman representing a famous old Georgian church in Boston.

I had been asked to advise the committee what to do about enriching the windows of the old landmark with stained glass.

When I said that everyone should cherish the striated, bubbly old panes of glass inherited from olden days and that the committee should plan to have no stained glass windows whatever to challenge the character of that interior, I noticed a stir of surprise, and one dignified gentleman asked in utter astonishment: "Aren't you the stained glass man? Don't you make stained glass windows?"

"Yes, I make them for places where they belong. I don't put them where they don't belong."

He answered in even stronger accents with eyes riveted upon me: "Good gracious, you must be more artist than businessman!"

And that exclamation, brothers and sisters, is the first answer to your eager questions about the approach to problems involving stained glass and its patterned light and color.

In other words, stained glass is an art, and is worth considering seriously only as a creative art, although there are many reasons why it might be labelled an obscure, unimportant industry. The most glaring reason is that the art glass industry of America ruthlessly degraded church interiors from the eighteen-seventies to the early nineteen-hundreds and became the modern working and producing symbol of the "Money Changers in the Temple."

That is why lovers of beauty in God's House may still view all efforts to enrich windows with some apprehension and why they consult self-appointed experts and form defensive committees and ask questions.

It was to answer those questions and to relieve such apprehensions that I spent fourteen years, overtime, upon my big picture-book, *Adventures in Light and Color*, and why everyone in my studio and workshop always welcomes interested visitors.

When I say that the stained glass craft may be a superb medium for the creative artist, I am not forgetting that the creative spirit may be recognized in every human effort.

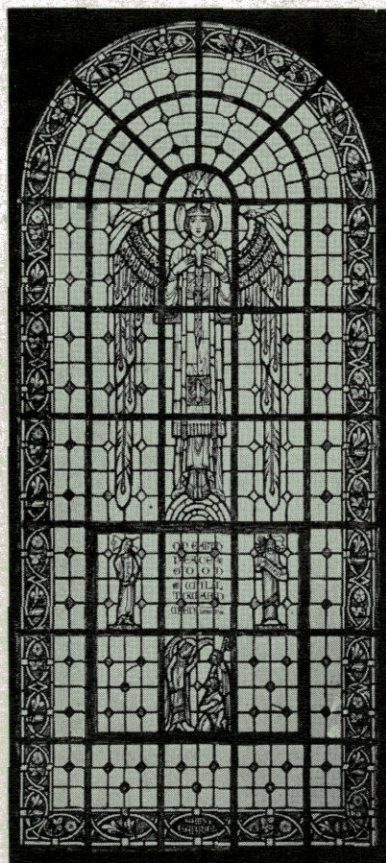
You all know teachers, preachers, doctors, lawyers, businessmen and shoemakers whose lives are devoted first of all to increasing the excellence of whatever they are doing. They are developing the art of living,—the greatest and most rewarding of all arts; and so you realize why I am eager to have you identify the creative spirit with what is excellent in the loveliest of all Christian arts, and why I suggest so emphatically that you know its essential qualities, what it can do to best purpose for you and what it cannot do.

A stained glass window is an architectural unit, and should serve its purpose as honestly as does a door or a chimney. It should let in light, though it should make that light beautiful and significant, so that it enters into the service of an interior and becomes a veritable singing window. It must always be luminous,—it must never shut out the light like a curtain.

The picture window of the art glass industry did that very thing so effectively that many churches we all know have dull, uninviting interiors that give no rewarding sense of a living, active light, even on days that dance in sunlight.

Sensitive windows are the color of the weather. Their moods take on the mood of Brother Sun, although often they seem almost magically to retain yesterday's sunlight on gloomy days.

There is something more than fun in my discovery that several distinguished connoisseurs and writers, in com-



menting upon Chartres' famous window, "Notre Dame de la Belle Verrière," seemed to describe different windows. As Saxe's blind men each gave his own unique report of the elephant, so each man returned from Chartres with his own "window." Those worthy gentlemen had never troubled to learn how to look at stained glass windows, and so they did not bother to distinguish between the beautiful window's most characteristic moods and the actual make-up of the window itself. As it is

snuggled in between great buttresses, it is often in shadow. But there are times, in the middle of a sunny day, when it gets a brilliant streak of sunlight, and there are other times when a radiant cloud in the sky will affect it mysteriously. So it is, with varying seasons, days and hours, set in the midst of change.

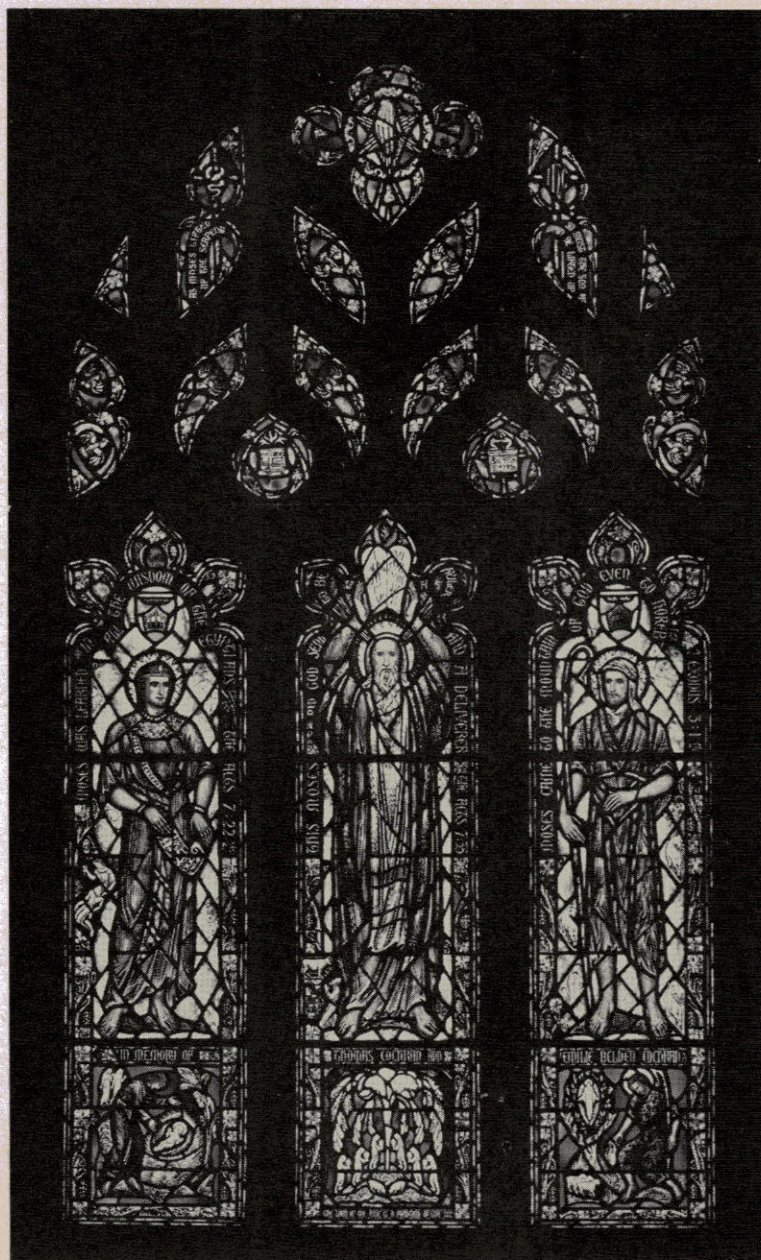
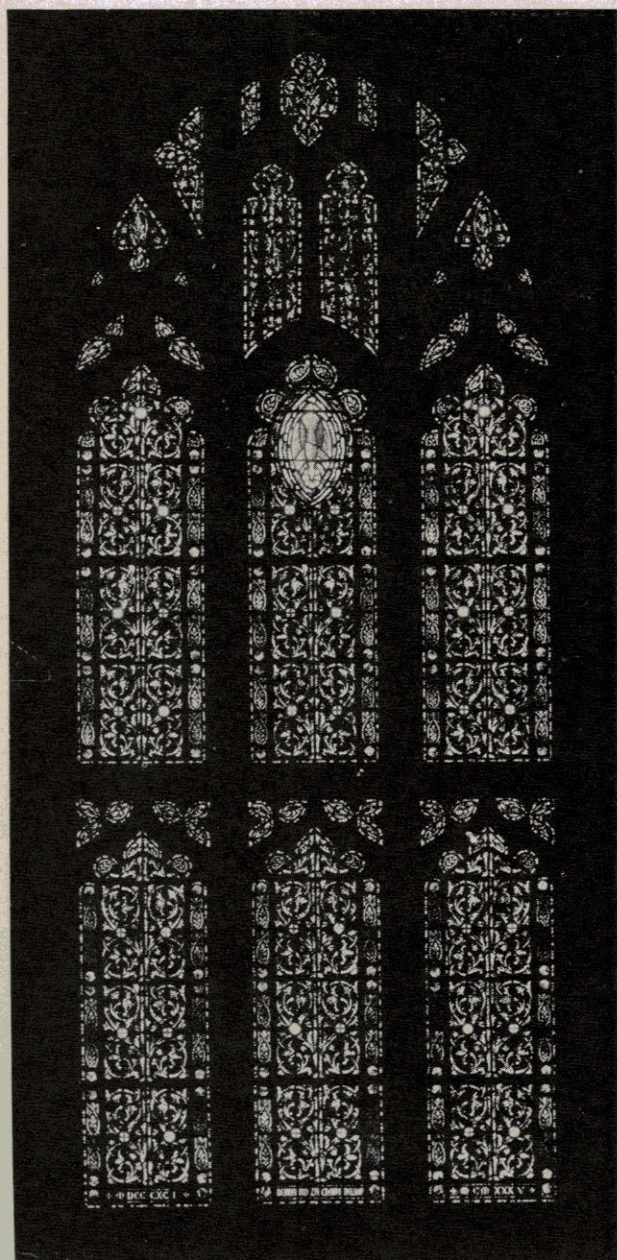
What I am saying between these lines is that one must learn to look at stained glass windows as one learns to listen to music, if he would share responsibility for, and pleasure in, the craft of light and color. Even Brahms' First Symphony would not be very impressive if played in an open field with the wind blowing, or in a boiler factory. Windows, like music, must function well in a given place, as they are affected by their own surroundings and by their own exposures to varying light streams.

If a window in full color is placed in an interior brilliantly lighted on all sides by windows in clear glass or its equivalent, it will perform very much like an orches-

ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE. Cartoon for large Chapel Window "Peace" in FIRST CHURCH, EVANSTON, ILLINOIS. Georgian or Colonial Type of Architecture (*Group B*).

ON THIS PAGE (Left). One of nine south clerestory windows in TRINITY CHURCH, NEWTON CENTRE, MASSACHUSETTS, with the Dove as symbol of the Trinity (*Group C*). (Right) Third Window from the Transept on the West in the HOUSE OF HOPE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA, devoted to Moses (*Group A*).

All windows designed and made by Charles J. Connick, Boston.



tra in a blacksmith shop. It would be constantly threatened with ruin by surface light, especially at certain times on sunny days.

A window, like a piano or a violin, must have consideration for what it is, for what its potentialities and its limitations really are. A window is at the mercy of what happens in the path of its light, just as any musical expression is at the mercy of what happens in the path of its sound.

A fascinating tradition records the words of the child, Viollet-le-Duc, when he first visited the Cathedral of Paris with his father. Just as the youngster's eyes caught the great north rose window, the organ began to play, and he whispered excitedly: "It's singing—the window is singing!"

That child as man was the author of the essay in his *Dictionary of Architecture* that revealed, in the nineteenth century, the secret of the vibrating color in light that still distinguishes the masterpieces in glass of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and so, child and man gave Christian art a new symbol, the singing window.

And as we recognize moods and implications beyond the reach of words in music, so we may well agree with the mediæval artists and poets who, as Dante has brilliantly set forth, spread the symbolism of color throughout the Middle Ages:

Red—the active color, symbolizes divine love, the creative spirit, courage, martyrdom.

Blue—the contemplative color, divine wisdom, sincerity, enduring loyalty, the life of Heaven, "true blue."

Violet or purple—justice, royalty, penitence, suffering, and mystery.

Green—hope, springtime, youth, victory, good nature, fun even.

Yellow or gold—the good life, treasures in Heaven, fruitfulness, "good as gold."

White—faith, purity, joy, light, peace.

Pure colors and their actual power over emotions and impulses have long been recognized and appreciated by psychologists, doctors, and nurses who have their own way of supporting the ancient tradition of light and color today.

"That exquisite and mighty expression," said a distinguished æsthete and scholar before the Tree of Jesse

Window, Chartres, "needs no announced subject-matter. It sings in color and light directly to the consciousness of anyone who has a place for it." "True enough," I said, "but isn't there an added sense of eloquence when you know that this masterpiece carries out in design, light, and color the poetic allegory in the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, wherein that Prophet sets forth the spiritual genealogy of Christ? And isn't it interesting to see that the designer, instead of attempting to set forth spiritual qualities in the facial expression of Christ, has surrounded his symbolic figure with the spiritual gifts in the form of haloed doves around his head, just as the old poet might have imagined them?"

Curiously enough, it was at the conclusion of that conversation, as we stood before the great west portal, that we talked about the cost of stained glass windows, and about my ambition to make beautiful windows within the range of almost all budgets.

We agreed that inexhaustible subjects, like the Tree of Jesse, the Vine and Branches, the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, the Fruit of the Spirit, the Parables, the twenty-fifth chapter of Saint Matthew, and even an almost untouched wealth from poets and leaders of all ages, may be set forth in stained glass windows within the reach of most congregations today.

I remember, too, that I reminded him that so far as records are available, windows—on account of their architectural divergencies—have been priced by measurement. As a result of his urging, I mentioned actual prices ranging in the group that might be set under A, from forty-five to one hundred dollars a square foot; B, from twenty-five to forty-five dollars; and C, from eight to twenty-five dollars.

When we talked of architectural styles, we agreed that even the Georgian or Colonial church of America, as it is designed and built nowadays, is often most hospitable to a somewhat restrained type of stained glass window, featuring the heavy mullions or bars in conformity with the characteristic window pane.

His final word of encouragement to me was a quotation from Robert Browning's "Abt Vogler"—

"And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man.
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but
a star."

The General Theological Library, 53 Mount Vernon Street, Boston 9, Massachusetts, has four bibliographies which will be of particular interest to readers of "Church Arts": "Christian Hymnody," by the Rev. Henry Wilder Foote, D.D., October 1940; "Religion and the Arts," by the Rev. Samuel H. Miller, October 1941; "Public Worship," by Dean Willard L. Sperry and the Rev. Henry Wilder Foote, October 1942; and "The Psalms," by Professor Charles L. Taylor, January 1944. Copies of the bibliographies will be sent on request as long as the supply lasts.