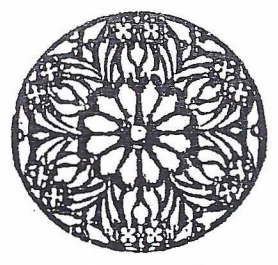


A THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION of the

ARCHITECTURE

and

STAINED GLASS WINDOWS



of the

BRADLEY HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
(USA)
Bethesda, Maryland

rainbow, symbol of God's promise never again to destroy all the flesh of the earth. In the lower right, Abraham is prevented by God's angel from sacrificing his beloved son, Isaac.

The second sector is best seen facing towards the narthex from the communion table. Here the Birth of Christ is depicted, with symbols pointing to His fulfillment of the Law of the Prophets. Under the Star of Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph hover protectingly over the Holy Child. Below and to the left, Isaiah, holding the saw which is his symbol, points to them in prophecy. In the upper right, Moses, framed by flashing lightning, receives the Tablets of the Law.

The third sector, over the north transept, portrays the Life of Christ on earth. At the top left, John baptized Christ in the River Jordan under the dove of the Holy Spirit. On the right, a stylized mountain peak is topped with a CHI RHO (XP), a monogram for Christ, symbolizing the Sermon on the Mount. Below is the scene of the Transfiguration; Christ appears in glory flanked by Moses and Elijah. Far to the left, he makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem upon a donkey. In the center are loaves and fishes combined with grapes and wheat, to represent the communion. Following the Last Supper, Christ went into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Here, at the lower right he kneels and holds the cup of suffering saying: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

A Sanctuary is a place consecrated for worship. It may serve not only as a spiritual home for the congregation, but may also express and interpret the teachings and covenants of the Christian faith. With this in mind, the Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church has constructed its house of worship.

On entering the nave from the narthex, one is aware that the structure is cruciform, that is, in the shape of a cross. At its center is the communion table, the focal point of the sanctuary, emphasizing the centrality of the sacraments in Protestant Christianity. The church at worship gathers about the Table, professing its faith in Jesus as the Christ, who serves as Host. The lectern and pulpit are located to symbolize the proclamation and interpretation of God's Word in their relation to the sacraments. The table is circular. This is because there is no distinction, no position of honor, no priority of claim in the fellowship of faith, the Priesthood of Believers. Christ alone holds distinction and honor at his table.

Only the vessels of baptism and communion rest on the table; above it is suspended a rough-hewn cross. Together, these symbols point to the foundations of faith, the divine gift of forgiveness and new life that is ours through the broken body and sacrificial death of Christ.

We are reminded that new life is indeed born of pain; that the standard which Jesus carried to his

death was one of unvarnished simplicity. It was crude and rough-hewn. At the same time, we are reminded by the empty cross that the suffering of Good Friday is transformed into the victory of Easter; that faith, though born of suffering and self-surrender, does not dwell on these but looks forward with confidence in a God who overcomes all enemies, even death. Thus, the table and the cross symbolize the meaning of our faith as it revealed in Jesus Christ and lived out in our own experience.

A congregation at worship is a people "*called apart*" by God. In communion with God we worship and grow in understanding of the meaning of our heritage of faith, the self-revelation of God in history. Portrayed in the stained glass dome above the crossing is the flow of the Bible message from Creation through the Resurrection of Christ. The four sections depict four major divisions:

- 1] the Old Testament;
- 2] the Birth of Christ;
- 3] the life of Christ on earth; and
- 4] his Resurrection and heavenly existence.

Standing in the nave before the table, one sees to the right the Old Testament sector. Most of the upper part shows the creation of the world — the hand of God the Father extending in benediction. Rays extend down to two small figures, Adam and Eve. At the apex of the window is the sun, representing the separation of darkness and light. Clustered around swinging lines are stars, moon, trees, birds, fish, dry land and sea. In the lower left, floats beneath the

p. 5

The fourth sector, directly over the choir focussing on The Resurrection and Christ's heavenly existence, is seen as one stands in the nave before the table. Here is depicted the culmination of Christ's earthly life as he appears before Pilate and hangs upon the cross. In the center, he rises from the empty tomb, bearing aloft the banner of victory of life over death. His feet disappear into a cloud, symbolizing the Ascension. The Christ of the Book of Revelation, seated on the throne wearing a crown, holds the Book of Seven Seals. His nimbus is triangular, recalling the Trinity. On the far right, dove of the Holy Spirit descends upon the ship with cross-topped mast, symbol of the ecumenical church. The peacock, an ancient symbol of immortality, recalls the Christian hope of eternal life through Christ.

Around the church walls are narrow windows in abstract patterns. These patterns of colored glass have been designed to provide a worshipful atmosphere without distraction. The color and abstract forms of these windows provide a mood of quiet transition between the rush of the outside world and tone of worship in the church.

Either entering or leaving the nave, the worshipper sees in all its color and glory the facade window, depicting the Great Commission. Christ is the dominant figure and focal point. After his Resurrection, he appeared to his apostles and commissioned them saying: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

p. 6

teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20) Christ is seated on the globe of the world in reference to the world-wide nature of his Commission. Upon this is superimposed the scalloped shell of baptism with three drops of water representing the trine blessing. Behind Christ is a large open book representing the Gospel, and above him is the descending dove of the Holy Spirit. Moving outward are the disciples, some with books and staves and some embarking in a boat. Those in the lower corners are wearing contemporary clothing, illustrating our link with the past and our duty to continue the spread of Christianity.

Expressed in the architectural design of the sanctuary and in the stained glass are the concepts of a people not only "called apart" to worship and to grow in understanding, but also "sent out" into the world for service and Christian living. It is only as the congregation leaves its worship that its faith becomes active and relevant. As the congregation leaves the sanctuary it passes beneath the window of the "Great Commission", joining the fellowship of those who through the ages have given their lives to serve Christ. As one leaves the holiness of worship, the words of Christ remain with the worshipper, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations."

The stained glass of the dome and the facade when illuminated at night assure their messages will be conveyed to all who pass by this house of worship designed to glorify God in Jesus Christ.