

UPHOLLAND SEMINARY, LANCASHIRE : ST JOSEPH'S CHAPEL GREAT WEST WINDOW

Background

St Joseph's College, Upholland, was a seminary where young men were trained for the Catholic priesthood. When the College celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 1933 it was suggested that there should be some memorial of the occasion. A new chapel had been completed 3 years earlier, and at its west end was a large window of plain glass: the Rector of the College, Monsignor Joseph Dean, proposed that this window should be reglazed in stained glass, and the Josephian Society of past Upholland students subscribed almost £450 (equivalent to about £25,000 today¹) to pay for it.

Canon P. J. Hanrahan, Professor of Canon Law & Moral Theology at the College from 1933 to 1975, wrote in a description of the chapel² 'Experts appreciated that the difficulties were great: for one thing, the tracery lacks any unity of design. One critic said, "It is useless and ugly, lending itself to nothing so much as plain glass." After various designs had been considered, Sister Margaret of the Mother of God, a Carmelite [Margaret Rope], was chosen to face the challenging task.' She designed and made a window celebrating the Church, and particularly the role of the priesthood, an especially appropriate theme for a seminary chapel.

The City of God and The Holy Spirit

The Church on earth, the worldwide community of Christian believers with Christ in heaven at its head, is depicted near the top of the window as the City of God. Above it hovers the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, as it was when John baptised Jesus in the Jordan³: the dove's cruciform halo is a sign that the Spirit is one of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit 'builds, animates and sanctifies the Church'⁴. From it radiate streams of fire which surround the main part of the window: the Spirit, like fire, transforms everything which it touches.

Also surrounding the window, within the circle of flame, flow streams of water and blood, representing the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist respectively. These two Sacraments are specifically mentioned by Christ as being essential for members of the Church. Of baptism he said 'no one can

¹ From Bank of England Inflation Calculator at <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>.

² Undated typescript from the College archives copied to Arthur Rope in 1999.

³ See Matthew 4:13-17.

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2000) paragraph 747.

enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit⁵, and of the Eucharist he said ‘unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day⁶’.

The stream of blood is emerging from the gates of the City: the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, can be received only from within the Church. The bread and wine can only be transformed into the Sacrament by the words and actions of an ordained priest acting in the person of Christ. The stream of water, on the other hand, simply encircles the window: the Sacrament of Baptism, although usually conferred on Catholics by a Catholic priest or deacon, can, in fact, be conferred by anyone provided that nothing but pure natural water is used, and that the Sacrament is conferred, as Jesus taught, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The artist seems to have thought it particularly important to show this distinction between the sources of the two Sacraments. In the Margaret Rope Archive we have the cartoons (full-size design drawings) for all the elements of this window. Nearly all of them are, as is usual, uncoloured, but the two depicting the City of God⁷ have had the blue and red colouring of the streams added. Perhaps she did this because she was a convert and had been baptised not by a Catholic priest or deacon but by an Anglican minister in an Anglican church.

The streams of water and blood surrounding the four main lights are reminiscent of those in the artist’s Shrewsbury Cathedral Baptistery Window, made some two decades earlier.

The left part of the window illustrates the sacrificial aspect of the priesthood, and the right part its teaching, guidance and doctrinal side.

Sacrifice

Melchizedek

About 2,000 years before the birth of Christ there was a war between the kings of various city-states, including Sodom, where Abram’s nephew Lot was living (Abram = Abraham: he was so renamed by God later). Sodom was ransacked, and Lot captured. When Abram heard about this he gathered an army, attacked and defeated Lot’s captors, and rescued him. After his victory Abram met the king of Sodom and King Melchizedek of Salem, ‘Priest of God Most

⁵ John 3:5.

⁶ John 6:53-54.

⁷ Margaret Rope Archive refs. R2.47 & R2.53.

High'. Melchizedek blessed Abram, and gave him bread and wine⁸.

The upper main light on the left depicts Melchizedek as he comes forward to meet Abram. In his left hand is a flagon of wine, and in his right is a cloth containing a number of small loaves of bread. Tucked under his right arm are two palm branches: in ancient times the palm branch was a symbol of victory. Melchizedek wears a crown and a purple cloak, signs of his kingship, but beneath his cloak he is wearing the robes of a priest. Near the foot of his white robe is an image of a pair of scales: the scales of justice. These scales are a reference to his name in Hebrew: *malki sedeq*, which translates as 'king of righteousness'. Although in English 'righteousness' and 'justice' have slightly different meanings, in Hebrew there is only one word referring to both concepts.

Christians consider that events and persons in the Old Testament foreshadow events and persons in the New: St Augustine wrote in his *City of God* that the New Testament is hidden in the Old, and the Old is made clear by the New⁹. Psalm 109/110, which addresses the future Messiah, contains the verse 'The Lord has sworn an oath he will not change. "You are a priest forever, a priest like Melchizedek of old."' Melchizedek, the King of Righteousness, foreshadows Christ, the Sun of Righteousness¹⁰. This parallel is emphasised in the window by the flowers around Melchizedek's feet, marigolds and daisies, which here are symbols of the sun, and therefore of Christ¹¹. Both flowers are native to the Holy Land.

What is particularly important for the theme of this window is what Melchizedek is doing: his offering of bread and wine foreshadows the Eucharist, 'the very sacrifice of the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus which he instituted to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until his return in glory.'¹² Christ instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper, when he gave his disciples bread and wine saying 'This is my body ... This is my blood ... Do this in memory of me', and this memorial of Christ's sacrifice is celebrated at every Mass¹³.

The Priest

Below Melchizedek is a light depicting a priest. The roundel at the top of the light shows Christ's sacrifice at Calvary. He is hanging from the cross in the

⁸ See Genesis 14.

⁹ See St Augustine: *City of God* 16:26.

¹⁰ See Malachi 4:2.

¹¹ For more on this foreshadowing see Hebrews 7.

¹² *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2006) Answer 271.

¹³ See Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20.

centre, his Mother Mary is on the left, hands clasped in prayer, and the Apostle John is on the right, head downcast. Above Christ's head is a placard bearing the letters INRI. These are the initial letters of *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum*, the Latin for 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews': the placard represents the notice which Pilate caused to be put there¹⁴. Christ's sacrifice, which he offered to the Father on the cross, once and for all on behalf of mankind, is made present and actual by a priest at every celebration of the Mass, and below the roundel we see this happening.

The priest has his back to the congregation and faces the altar, as was the normal practice until the 1960s. His hands extended, he has just started to pray the Eucharistic Prayer, the Roman Canon. His outer vestment, his chasuble, is red, the colour of sacrifice. The embroidered design on the back shows the crucified Christ: chasubles can be decorated in many ways, but the artist has chosen this particular image to emphasise that at Mass the priest acts in the Person of Christ rather than as himself.

The Eucharistic Prayer will include, during the presentation of the offerings of bread and wine at the altar, a reference to Melchizedek: the priest will say 'Be pleased to look upon these offerings ... and to accept them, as once you were pleased to accept ... the offering of your high priest Melchizedek ...' (the Prayer would have been in Latin until the 1960s: this is the modern English version). Later in the Prayer will come the moment of consecration, when the priest will repeat the words of Christ 'This is my body ... [etc.]' and the substance of the bread and wine will, Catholics believe, be transformed by Christ's words and the action of the Holy Spirit into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ, although their outward characteristics will remain the same.

Below Christ's cross on the priest's chasuble is a fleur-de-lis, not very clear on the photograph we have but obvious on the cartoon in the Archive. Here its three petals symbolise the Holy Trinity: the priest is praying to God the Father in the person of God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit will transform the bread and wine.

The Eucharistic Prayer will be followed by the Communion Rite, when the people will receive the Body of Christ, the consecrated bread (the host). Near the bottom of the priest's white inner vestment, his alb, is a panel depicting a grapevine: Jesus said to his disciples at the Last Supper 'I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit'¹⁵. Christ will dwell in the recipients of the host and the power of God's love will flow

¹⁴ See John 19:17-30.

¹⁵ John 15:5.

through them, producing spiritual fruits of virtues and good works.

Behind the priest we can just see the altar, supported by Norman-style pillars. It is both the altar of the sacrifice and the table of the Lord, from which the faithful are fed. On it, flanked by candles, is the veiled tabernacle, the shrine where Christ, under the appearance of the host, is present as a focus for devotion. Hosts from the tabernacle are also taken to the sick and housebound who cannot participate in the Mass.

This sacrificial aspect of the priesthood is further emphasised in some of the tracery lights.

The Pelican

First look at the tracery light to the right of Melchizedek. This image is known as 'The pelican in her piety'. According to an ancient fable the pelican would pierce her own breast to feed her young with her blood. This action became a symbol of Christ's sacrifice of his own blood and hence of the Eucharist. The pelican's cruciform halo tells us that we should see her as Christ.

The Lamb of God

Now look at the tracery light below the pelican. This is Christ (note the cruciform halo yet again) represented as the sacrificial Lamb carrying the banner of the Resurrection, which symbolises his triumph over sin and death. When John the Baptist saw Jesus he said 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!¹⁶'. During Mass the celebrant uses almost the same words when he shows the people the consecrated host, which has become the Body of Christ.

In Old Testament times frequent animal sacrifices were made by the priests on behalf of the people. These sacrifices did not take away sin, but participation in them directed the people's minds to God, enabling them to show contrition and a desire for holiness. They foreshadowed Christ's offering of himself on the cross as a once and for all sacrifice, in which he was both priest and victim, which conquered sin and death, reconciling all of humanity with God.

Bread & Wine

In the tracery below and to the left of the priest are a sheaf of wheat and a grapevine, the fruits of the earth which will be made into the bread and wine which the priest will consecrate, and are therefore symbols of the Eucharist.

¹⁶ John 1:29.

Incense & Sacred Music

Two of the tracery lights show a swinging censer (incense burner) and musical instruments. Incense is used during the liturgy to venerate, bless and sanctify. Its smoke conveys a feeling of mystery and awe, rising up with the prayers of the faithful to link earth with heaven. Sacred music also elevates the soul, and both these elements of worship guide the faithful towards a deeper encounter with God.

Teaching, Guidance & Doctrine

Moses

About twelve centuries before the birth of Christ, Moses, at God's bidding, led the Israelites out of their captivity in Egypt and towards the Promised Land. After travelling for about 3 months they reached Mount Sinai: God came down onto the mountain in a thick, dark cloud, with thunder, lightning and fire, earthquake and trumpet blast, and summoned Moses. Moses ascended Mount Sinai, went into the dark cloud, conversed with God and descended to the people again several times - the whole episode included 2 periods of 40 days when he remained on the mountain, and takes up 16 chapters of the Book of Exodus! - but what we see in the main light to the right of Melchizedek is Moses just after his final descent.

He is standing on a grassy mound at the foot of Mount Sinai, carrying the two stone tablets on which are inscribed the Ten Commandments, five on each (we can see the Roman numerals I, II & III on the left-hand tablet, and VI & VII on the right-hand one). The Israelites were afraid to come near him because his face was shining, a result of his encounters with God on the mountain, and the artist has represented this as a pair of rays, one coming from each side of his head. There is a good reason for this apparently strange way to depict his radiance, an ambiguity in the meaning of the word describing his face in the original Hebrew language of the Book of Exodus. This word could be interpreted as either 'shining' or 'horned', and when St Jerome translated Exodus from Hebrew to Latin in the late 4th century for what was to become the standard version of the bible he chose the Latin word 'cornuta', which translates as 'horned'. Many depictions of Moses in art consequently show him with a pair of horns - Michelangelo's sculpture in Rome is probably the most well-known. It is clear from a reference in St Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians¹⁷ that 'shining' is the right interpretation. In this window Margaret Rope has deliberately placed the rays of light emanating from Moses' face in the

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 3:7.

position where the horns would have been, acknowledging the alternative interpretations but emphasising that 'shining', not 'horned', is the correct one. Moses also sports a halo, showing that he was a holy man. Behind him we can see the purple cone of Mount Sinai, and on its summit the dark cloud edged with lightning which marks God's presence there.

The Bishop and his Flock

There is an unbroken line of succession from Christ's apostles to today's bishops. When Christ appeared to his apostles after his resurrection he instructed them to 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you'¹⁸, and at Pentecost he poured out the Holy Spirit upon them¹⁹. This gift of the Spirit was passed on by the apostles through the laying on of hands and has been transmitted down to the present day through the consecration of bishops.

Below Moses is a light depicting a bishop. At the top of the light are representations of three cornerstones of the Catholic faith, which it is the bishop's duty to uphold and teach. The white triangle symbolises the mystery of the Holy Trinity - that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are three Persons in one God. The Christ Child in the manger symbolises the mystery of the Incarnation - that God the Son came down from heaven and took on human form. The cross is red, the colour of sacrifice, and it symbolises the Paschal mystery - that for our sake he suffered, died, rose again and ascended into Heaven. The Christ Child is encircled by a radiant oval, known as a mandorla: this is the light of Christ, which illuminates the world.

The bishop has his right hand raised in the traditional gesture of blessing. In his left hand he is holding his crozier, a staff in the form of a stylised shepherd's crook: he is the chief shepherd to his flock, the faithful of his diocese, guarding and guiding them through life. The faithful have been referred to as sheep throughout the Bible: in the Psalms we read 'For he is our God and we the people who belong to his pasture, the flock that is led by his hand.'²⁰ In St John's Gospel Jesus refers to himself as 'the good shepherd'²¹, and commands Peter to 'feed my sheep'²², and Peter in turn instructs the elders of the churches in Asia Minor to 'tend the flock of God that is in your charge'²³. In the tracery below and to the right is a depiction of the bishop's

¹⁸ Matthew 28:19-20.

¹⁹ Acts 2:1-4.

²⁰ Psalm 94/95:7.

²¹ John 10:11.

²² John 21:15-17.

²³ 1 Peter 5:1-2.

flock as lambs and sheep feeding peacefully in a rich pasture. The rich pasture represents the Word of God, with which the souls of the faithful are fed: 'Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'²⁴

On his head the bishop is wearing a mitre, its two points or horns, one behind the other, representing the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible. The Latin rite for the consecration of a bishop, in use until the 1960s, included a prayer which reads in translation that 'with his head armed with the horns of either testament he may appear terrible to the opponents of truth' (this is omitted from the current English rite). At the apex of the mitre is a flame symbolising the Holy Spirit which descended as tongues of fire onto the heads of the apostles, his predecessors, at Pentecost.

The bishop is wearing an alb, a long white linen tunic symbolising purity. Near the bottom of the alb is a decorative embroidered panel. Around his neck, over the alb, is a stole, a narrow band of cloth with its two fringed ends hanging down parallel in front. This is a mark of his priestly office. Around his waist is a cincture, a rope-like cord used as a belt, symbolising his chastity and continence. It is tied at the front in what is known as a Roman Knot. In the window it is partly obscured by an armature (support bar), but it can be seen clearly in a design drawing in the Rope Archive. Over all this he is wearing a cope, a richly-decorated long cloak, open in front and fastened near the top by a horizontal band known as a morse. Amongst the decorations on the cope are sunflowers, symbolising devotion to the Church. The sun represents God's divine light and the flower, which is said to turn towards the sun, thus represents a striving toward God.

The Star of Bethlehem and the Book of the Gospels

In the upper part of this side of the central tracery we can see the Star of Bethlehem, which was sent by God to show the Magi the way to the stable where the infant Jesus lay. Below is a Book of the Gospels on a lectern, open at the beginning of St John's Gospel²⁵: the page reads IN PRINCIPIO ERAT VERBUM ET VERBUM ERAT APUD DEUM (In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God). Just as the Magi were led by the star, so the Gospels and the rest of the scriptures enlighten us and guide us towards Christ: the candle behind the lectern symbolises this enlightenment. The

²⁴ Deuteronomy 8:3.

²⁵ This text would have been very familiar to all Catholics when the window was made as, until the liturgical reforms of the 1960s, John 1:1-14 was read (in Latin) by the celebrant at the end of almost every Mass. This reading was known as the Last Gospel.

Gospels tell us the good news, the story of Christ's victory over sin and death²⁶, and the palm branches behind the lectern are a symbol of this victory.

The Keys of Heaven

Below this and to the left is a pair of keys, one silver and one gold. The authority of the Pope, and therefore of the Church, is founded on the event which these keys symbolise, as recounted in St Matthew's Gospel²⁷. Jesus asked his disciples 'who do you say that I am' and Simon Peter replied 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God'. Jesus responded 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Catholics believe that by this statement Jesus made Peter His representative on earth, the first Pope, and that this office has been inherited by successive Popes down to the present day. The silver key symbolizes the Pope's power over all the faithful on earth, and the gold one signifies that his power extends even to Heaven.

Threaded through and surrounding the keys in a series of loops is a rope. The keys are often depicted with a cord tying them together where they cross, symbolising the link between earthly and heavenly powers, but here the rope does not tie the keys. It is probably a reference to binding and loosing, but it is so elaborate that I wonder whether it is also a rebus for the artist's name – Sister Margaret of the Mother of God showing that she is still Margaret Rope the artist.

The Papal Cross and Tiara

To the right of the Keys of Heaven are a Papal Cross and Papal Tiara, more symbols of the authority of the Pope. The Cross has three crossbars and the Tiara three crowns: these can be seen as symbolising the threefold office of prophet, priest and king – to teach, sanctify and lead - which Christ performed during his earthly ministry and which is now shared by the Pope. The triple Cross is not an actual cross but a heraldic emblem. The triple Tiara is now also just a heraldic emblem but was formerly an actual tiara used at papal coronations, the last such coronation being that of Pope Paul VI in 1963. In the

²⁶ St Mark's Gospel, thought by many experts to have been the first one written, begins 'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. The word 'gospel' comes from the Old English 'god spel' meaning 'good story'.

²⁷ Matthew 16:11-19.

following year, in keeping with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, he gave up the tiara, and it was sold and the proceeds given to charity as a sign of the renunciation of human glory and power. Papal coronations were also given up and replaced by inauguration ceremonies.

The Bell

Further down is a tolling bell, summoning the faithful to Mass. The Church's Canon Law obliges all Catholics to participate at Mass every Sunday and on certain holy days.

The Dragon

Extending across the six quatrefoils at the bottom of the window is a huge green dragon. In the Book of Revelation St John describes his vision of 'the great dragon ... that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray'²⁸, and the artist has included him here to remind the seminarians that they must always be on their guard against him.

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²⁸ Revelation 12:9.