

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

"Standing here, the minister shall have in view the latest and best thought of Jesus the Christ, as art, taking up this thought, has given to the sacred figure on this memorial window a pose that is worth a thousand volumes of commentary on his character. The grandeur of strength, of knowledge, of spiritual force and moral power is there. It is the Universalist conception.

Art for ages has been under the domination of theological absurdities, and has given in its work effeminacy and weakness to the sacred figure; but now it rises at the touch of liberal ideas and gives the conception of Jesus as a Master on all questions of human life, as competent to lead men in the 19th century as when he led the multitudes in the first."

— Royal H. Pullman, D.D.

The words above are taken from the "Dedication Sermon" for the Pullman Memorial Universalist Church in Albion. Rev. Dr. Royal H. Pullman, brother of George M. Pullman (benefactor of the church) gave this sermon ninety-five years ago on January 31, 1895. This portion of his remarks dealt specifically with the window pictured herein. When he says "It is the Universalist conception" he indeed, hits at the very roots of the denomination. The Universalist conception being "God is Love", that all shall be saved. Hence the title of the window "Christ the Consoler". The message in the base of the window states: "I . Am . Come . That . They . Might . Have . Life . And . That . They . Might . Have . Life . More . Abundantly. St. John 10:10".

The window was certainly intended to emit a great feeling of love and consolation. This life size figure of Jesus stands with arms outstretched as though welcoming you, suggesting He is there for your comfort in time of need. Just in back of Him and mostly above Him is an aureole of glory which is a luminous glow or radiant light sometimes used in the representation of a sacred personage. Here it gives the illusion of Jesus having just come down from out of heaven after the crucifixion in the form of resurrection. Jesus said: "I am the Resurrection and the Life". (John 11:25). Jesus also said when he reappeared "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see Me have." (Luke 24:39)

Likewise, He is shown in this scene wearing the mock crown of thorns. "And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns and put it on his head...." (John 19:2). Here the crown of thorns symbolizes the grief, suffering, tribulation and martyrdom of Jesus. The Roman way of executing condemned persons differed considerably with the social status of the sufferer. In the case of persons of low degree, such as Jesus was supposed to be, the penalty was aggravated by scourging and other ways of inflicting pain. With Jesus who was condemned for an alleged usurpation of the title "King of the Jews", this procedure developed into a parody of pomp. Hence the crown of thorns.

Standing in the midst of an ethereal landscape, Jesus in this window is depicted wearing a ruby colored robe denoting divine love. Over this is a white mantle indicative of religious purity. The colors in the background mountains are somber purples and blues mixed with doudy greens. The sky is also a mixture of soft blues and purples which the white light of the aureole blots out in the upper portion.

We must remember that ninety-five years ago when this window was created, Universalist doctrine included the trinitarian precept, but during succeeding years however, Unitarian theology became more dominant. From an historical perspective, this explains the very strong Christian character of the window.

The first reference to this window that I found appears in an Albion newspaper of May 1894 before the church was completed. The article tells about the subsequent building of the church by George Pullman as a memorial to his parents and



gives details about what it will look like. "In the west end of the building, facing Main Street, will be placed the memorial window. This will be made from an original design and will cost in the neighborhood of \$5,000." The next reference I found of the window in the paper, appears in the Orleans Republican dated Feb. 6, 1895. It states: "The crowning glory of all is the memorial window at the end of the transept, which fills this part of the church with a soft, beautiful and hallowed light. The window is an original conception and was designed by Tiffany of New York. It is strikingly beautiful, about ten feet in height...The windows are genuine colored glass and the effects of light and shade are produced by the varying thickness of the glass. They are artistic creations and came from the Tiffany works which firm also executed the contract for all the interior decorations."

Louis Comfort Tiffany, born in 1848, became an artist rather than take up his father's jewelry business. In 1885 Louis C. Tiffany established his Tiffany Glass Co. and in 1892 renamed it Tiffany Glass and Decorating Co. It is this name which appears as the signature on "Christ the Consoler" in the lower right corner. During Tiffany's career his studio produced hundreds of windows, lamps and tableware, much of which was iridescent in surface treatment. However, it was his windows which he considered his best work. These presented him with an unparalleled opportunity for experimentation and artistic self-expression. It is believed that "Christ the Consoler" was designed by Frederick Wilson, one of Tiffany's chief artisans.

Portions of the window are made with several layers of glass to create various shading effects. The garments on the figure of Jesus are made of drapery glass which varies in thickness, giving it a 3-D quality like drapery. Many other glass manufacturers copied the techniques developed by Tiffany but none were quite so successful or famous as the originator himself who died in 1933.

In 1898 Tiffany Glass and Decorating Co. published a list of their major works which included the Universalist window in Albion under the title of "Christ the Consoler". Our community is indeed fortunate to have an original artistic work of such magnitude as this. It is the only signed Tiffany Church window in Orleans County and to my knowledge the Universalist Church is the only one with real Tiffany windows.