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The Impact of Modern Aesthetics: Stained Glass in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit, Assumption College

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The Impact of Modern Aesthetics:

Stained Glass in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit, Assumption College

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In modern times, the design of stained-glass windows has become more abstract, however they still serve an important purpose in the composition and function of a place of worship. An exploration of such windows can allow an individual to gain a greater understanding of both past and present spiritual culture upon reflection. The Assumption College Chapel of the Holy Spirit holds fifteen beautiful abstract stained-glass windows. These works of art are unfortunately often unnoticed and misunderstood by those in the college community. Not simply fifteen panels of randomly arranged colored glass, each of these windows reflects a scene from the Catholic tradition. Some relate directly to biblical passages while others comment on the culture of the college itself. As the chapel is a place for both educational and spiritual growth, one question must be asked: is the modern aesthetic of the design at odds with the intended function of the windows?

Goal:

This analysis will look into the design and function of the fifteen abstract alcove windows in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit on the campus of Assumption College. An image and visual analysis of each will be provided followed by an explanation of how the modern aesthetic of art has impacted the above-mentioned windows.

Perhaps the best-known era for its stained-glass windows was that of the Middle Ages. These stained-glass windows “either told a story of the exemplary lives of Christ, his Mother, and saints or illustrated passages from the scriptures. These glass pictures were presented for the contemplation of mankind, [the religious community, and anyone who entered into a

Church] but, primarily they were offered up to God and his Son for whom they were created.”¹ Furthermore, it may be surprising to learn that stained glass is multifunctional and extremely complex in not only its creation but also in relating to its intended purpose. Each window depends on often uncontrollable external variables which can alter the appearance of the piece, and thus directly affect the function of the particular window. Stained glass windows may provide a heavenly connection between the parishioners and God, serve as a source of Biblical education, or a medium for reflection, act as a visual representation of patronage or most simply, may serve as a means of illuminating the interior of the cathedral or chapel.

The Assumption College Chapel of the Holy Spirit contains fifteen windows which tie directly to significant events in the Bible ranging from the Creation of the World to the Fulfillment of the Christian Kingdom. Such events also connect with the personal history of believers. The windows in the nave and south transept reflect Old Testament themes while the north transept and sanctuary reflect the sense of Christian community. The windows were designed by Fr. Donat Lamonthé and created by Carl Paulson in Massachusetts. The chapel was begun in 1964 and completed the following year. Fr. Donat Lamonthé described the chapel in a beautiful manner writing; “Assumption’s Holy Spirit Chapel cannot pretend to be a building of the grandeur and permanence of the medieval cathedrals, but it does seek to provide for its people a place that can be all that a church has ever been, including a witness of the faith of the contemporary Christian community on pilgrimage through the present world.”² He further states that, when speaking about the Chapel of the Holy Spirit, “most of all it is imperfect and

¹ Brisac, Catherine, and Yūkichi Watabe. *A Thousand Years of Stained Glass*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986

² Lamonthé, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973

incomplete, as the medieval cathedral was, until the community gathers to fill it..."³ With this in mind, it is clear that the Chapel of the Holy Spirit was built for a specific purpose on the campus of Assumption College. In conjunction with the windows within the chapel, three windows were deliberately placed in Tinsley, the College's campus ministry center.

Campus Ministry at Assumption College strives to help students along their path of life, wherever they are called to go. Through allowing oneself to grow intellectually, physically, socially and spiritually in the average four years a student spends at Assumption, such a direction can hope to be found. Campus Ministry is devoted to helping students discover how to lead a life that matters, no matter what faith background he or she identifies with. Housed in Tinsley, Campus Ministry can be found in one organized location which is connected to the pastoral, liturgical, academic and social components of student life. This building was opened in 2012 after the original was destroyed by a fire in 1993. There is a welcoming community room, in the center which brings the student population together to engage in positive spiritual and social growth. When the Tinsley Campus Ministry Center opened, Present Francesco Cesareo commented that, "The Tinsley Campus Ministry Center is an important expression of Assumption College's Catholic mission and identity... "This distinctive center allows our Campus Ministry staff to expand and enrich its programs that contribute to the spiritual formation of our students."⁴

The Tinsley Campus Ministry Center, the Chapel of the Holy Spirit and the stained- glass windows housed there all contribute to the formation of the Assumption student and serve to

⁴ <https://www.assumption.edu/news/assumption-college-dedicates-tinsley-campus-ministry-center>

aid students in their journey of fulfilling the College's motto of, "Until Christ be formed in you..." This motto is powerful upon reflection and the stained-glass alcove windows provide students a source for this reflection and they are a visual representation of not only how their journey is beautiful, but also that their Faith is worthy of contemplation.

The Windows

The fifteen windows in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit and the Tinsley Campus Ministry Center depict the following themes:

SCENES: Creation, Noah, Abraham, Exodus, Sinai, Promised Land, Sacrifice, Prophets, Exile, Baptism, Community, Parables, Living Stones, Brotherhood, and Pentecost

The abstract design of each window represents a modern take on the typically realistically represented Biblical forms, yet upon reflection they are intelligible to those who understand Christian teaching. Still, for those who are not as educated in scripture, the works are nonetheless beautiful and hypnotizing.

In 1953 a horrible tornado passed through the city of Worcester, destroying thousands of homes and buildings, including Assumption Prep, the precursor to Assumption College today. In the wake of the destruction, Father Engelbert Devincq, A.A., and two members of the Antonian Sisters of Mercy, Sister Marie St. Jean de Dieu Martel, S.A.M., and Sister Marie Ste. Hélène Simard, S.A.M. lost their lives. A dedication is located in the chapel. The chapel was also destroyed, along with most of its glass. Some of the stained glass was restored, however, these pieces can be found across campus. (Testa Science Center, Tsotsis Family Academic Center and the Chapel of the Spirit) These were done in a rather different style and will not be discussed

here. However, the history of the tornado is a critical element in the history of Assumption College.

Analysis of windows with images

“Nothing is so vital to the artist as the ‘subject’ that his vision wants to evoke, illumine and configure.”⁵ Though collaboration with a commission is necessary and therefore when accepted leads to a piece that will not entirely result in the sole vision intended by the artist, the stained-glass windows in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit are magnificent and entirely unique to the College. The themes throughout the alcove windows are not revolutionary in the Catholic tradition, they are, however; entirely appropriate and logical when considering the mission and history of the College.

⁵ Sowers, R. (1965). *Stained glass: an architectural art*. New York, NY: Universe Books. (p.117)

Descriptions of Windows.

Alcove Windows of the Chapel of the Holy Spirit, Assumption College: Images and Analysis

Creation Window (Fig A)

This first alcove window represents the creation of the world as told in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. It highlights a “flash of light in the stillness of nothing, an unleashing of energy, a universe flung into existence—all through the Word.”⁶ The central flash is composed of a red and yellow burst that includes a range of colors moving outwardly to include green shards that mix into a background of varying blue pieces. The tracery of the panes creates a clear image of a spark, that ignited the world in God. There is an energy created from this first window that is directly correlated to the subject that it is representing. The dark colors that make up the edges of the window are representative of the nothingness that preexisted the creation of the universe. As the viewer’s eye moves inward the colors become both lighter and brighter. However, the window’s focal point is the center. The bright core is what first catches the viewer’s attention. Thus, the movement of the piece begins at the spark and progresses outwardly.

The abstract nature of the stained glass is appropriate as no human was alive to see what creation actually looked like. Such a scene almost requires an abstract depiction. The window shows how something is formed from nothing and is for that reason placed in a prominent place in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit. This is the first window that is seen upon

⁶ Lamonthé, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973

entering the Chapel. It is in the back of the building but placed directly across from the main door. Essentially, the window not only represents the creation of the world, but also the creation of one's faith. The motto of Assumption College is "Until Christ be formed in you," thus this formation must begin somewhere. Furthermore, the college has adopted the slogan of 'Light the way'. Assumption students are called to be the spark in whatever they do, and to be a light for others. This window symbolizes the beginning of the Assumption student's journey.

Noah Window: (Fig B)

The second alcove window depicts a "rainbow of peace [that] follows upon the Deluge."⁷ It represents "after the great flood, a new beginning."⁸ This window scene is composed of a fragment from a rainbow that moves upward from left to right that is made up of squares and rhombus shapes of different shades that follow the classic pattern of rainbow colors. As in Genesis IX, the rainbow is the "sign of the covenant" God made with all of creation that He would ever again destroy the world by flood. For God said, "I set my rainbow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the Covenant between me and the earth."⁹(Gen: IX). The background consists of green sections beneath blue pieces at the bottom of the glass. This representation is done to represent the earth growing again after the "deluge" or great flood. At the top of the window, a violet section is seen as to represent that storm clouds clearing

⁷ Lamonthe, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973 (p.9)

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

from the rain. The window uses small pieces of glass to allow for a variety of colors to be incorporated in the overall scene.

The story of the great flood is also found in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, and represents God's first covenant with His people. Following the arrangement of the windows of the Chapel, it is logical that this scene is depicted second in the overall layout. The world moves from creation and is then given again a new life between the first two widows. The glass is composed of pieces that are shaped around the rainbow image. The darker purple panes representing the storming rain is in the upper left corner which morphs into the diagonal rainbow that cuts across the entire mid-section of the window. Below the ray of colors is a smaller green and blue section which is representative of the growth that came after the flood waters.

Abraham Window: (Fig C)

This window is a direct representation of the biblical promise made from God to Abraham. Because of his faith, Abraham was in favor with God, and though he and his wife Sarah were past the age of having children, from them "came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and countless as the sand on the seashore." (Hebrews 11:12) The designer of the windows, Father Donat Lamonthe, adapted this passage slightly describing this window as representing instead of children, "believers will be as numerous as the stars in the midnight

sky, as sands on the seashore.”¹⁰ The diamond shapes that move from the center of the window through the tapered top represent the descendants, now shown to be believers as stars in a dark indigo setting indicative of the midnight sky. The lower half show the ocean to the left with the blue pieces of glass and the sands of the seashore to the right in the tan and brown arrangement. Essentially, this window is a representation of the people of faith in an abstract form.

The Abraham window uses the necessary structural elements in the window to separate the different components in the story. Additionally, the circular clear glass pieces that are intended to represent the stars, or believers, are interestingly raised from the remainder of the flat composition. These clear circles are intertwined with red circles that are supposed to represent the holy spirit. Thus, across the generations and the development of the faith, through the holy spirit, Abraham’s descendants have been shown the path of God. These stars, though they taper off as the window must eventually end, are shown in such a way as to lead the viewer to imagine an infinite group of stars. This window is placed third in the arrangement of the chapel and is located across from the main pews. This is done deliberately to reflect the origins of the faithful people who now sit adjacent to the window every Sunday at Mass.

¹⁰ Lamonthe, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973

Exodus Window: (Fig D)

This window represents a particular scene from the book of Exodus when, “Yahweh went before them, by day in the form of a pillar of cloud to show them the day, and by night in the form of a pillar of fire to give them light. Thus, they could continue their march by day and by night.”¹¹ (Ex: XIII) This is symbolic of a crucial moment for the Jewish people as they moved into a new era with God. The scene is indicative of the notion that “Men are not alone in their struggle for freedom—God is on their side—and he leads them. His people are on the march, always.”¹² This window literally shows a pillar of fire, a glowing red, orange and black column that spans the entire height of the window. The sheer size of this element speaks to the power that it represents. Christ is the glowing light that guides the faithful people through the wilderness of Exodus but also through daily life. This symbol can be applied to those of the faith community today. Christ serves as a beacon of hope to many which overshadows the darkness of fear and evil. The left and right sides of the window are almost mirror images of one another. The colors are the same however the sizes and placement of the glass varies slightly. Hardship is a part of life can seem as though it is suffocating. It is present on all sides, but if one chooses to believe in and trust in God, they need only follow in in the lighted path that has been cleared. This window makes trust the central focus, for when the sun shines the path becomes clear. With sunlight flowing through, the middle section (the flaming column) is what shines through most strongly while the blue side pieces are muted. This window is the fourth in the

¹¹ Lamonthe, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973

¹² Ibid (p.13)

series and placed adjacent to the central aisle, or nave, so as to serve as a subtle means of direction and a promise that no journey is impossible.

Sinai Window: (Fig E)

This window represents the Israelites at the base of Mt. Sinai. Their tents are visible and clearly identifiable at the bottom of the alcove. The mountain takes up the center of the window with the red shards of glass representing God's presence at the summit of the mountain. The top most section is composed of white and blue diagonal pieces that mimic the thunder and lightning produced when Moses received the ten commandments. The scene depicted stems from the book of Exodus where, "On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast... When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear."¹³ (Ex: 19:16, 20:18) This window represents a pause in the Israelite's journey toward the promised land. Moses was called up Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. The storming bolts of lightening at the tip of the window show the power of God and are used to demonstrate a sense of importance. This is a critical scene in the Bible where the Israelites were losing faith. They are camped below, as shown in the stylized tents at the bottom of the window, and are waiting for their guide, Moses, to return. The general faith is shaken and the colors of this window reflect the lack of hope. At the present time depicted, Moses has not yet returned from the mountain and darkness is creeping in. The overall muted

¹³ *NIV Bible*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2007.

color choices speak to this distress. Nevertheless, in the center remains a yellow and red section that spans the width of the window. This bright element is Christ and the Holy Spirit ever present. Through trials and difficult moments the faithful are called to have unwavering trust, when all is dark and dim around, there still remains a source of hope and light.

Promised Land Window: (Fig F)

Following the forty years where the Jewish people wandered in the desert, Joshua finally leads God's people into Canaan. This window depicts "running streams that bring fresh water to fields and valleys."¹⁴ Additionally, the green panes of glass throughout the alcove are symbolic of a "fresh spring morning."¹⁵ It can be deduced from this alcove that God "takes care of his people as long as they place their trust in Him."¹⁶ The transition from the Sinai window to this Promised Land scene is drastic. The colors transition from murky browns that blossom into light blue, yellow and green panes.

The vibrancy of the window is tied to the meaning behind the design. The people of God have finally arrived at the location set aside for them. The beautiful growth represented here also mirrors the growth that the Israelites have experienced. They grew in faith and are thus now worthy and prepared to inherit the land of Canaan. Essentially, this window is representative of Psalm 23 and conveys the belief that:

¹⁴ Lamonthe, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973

¹⁵ Ibid (p. 17)

¹⁶ Ibid (p.17)

“1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. / 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, / 3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. /4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. /5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. /6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” (NIV psalm 24)¹⁷

Sacrifice Window: (Fig G)

This alcove window depicts the action of sacrificing to God through a burnt offering, or holocaust. Such an offering is seen burning on the altar inside the Temple at Jerusalem. As such, “sacrifice, the sign of religions old and new—man seeking to communicate to God” is again represented in an abstract manner. It was David who built the altar, and in this way, God communicated with His people.¹⁸ The base of the window shows the altar in placed outside on the green grass and as the window panels move upward, the flames of the burning offering are seen to be curling up. Unlike the bright column of fire in the Exodus window, here the flames are more-subtle. They are representative of more smoke than fire as something has been set alight to be offered up to God. The blue tones that make up the background are representative of the sky. This window is meant not to be one of flashy design but rather one of a humble

¹⁷ *NIV Bible*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2007.

¹⁸ Lamonthe, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973

scene. The sacrifices that the chosen people were called to make were vast and this depiction is one of great reverence. The smoke of the burnt offering floats up through the window but dissipates at the very top. While the smoke is moving upward, it gently fades into the pastel glass in the highest pane of the window.

Nothing is a constant in life on earth except God. Throughout all of the windows in the chapel there is included somewhere within the glass panes, an element of red colored glass. This was intended to denote the Holy Spirit's presence within all aspects of the chapel and also of the Catholic faith. Here, this element is particularly applicable. The ghost like smoke that is rising toward heaven is directly linked the belief surrounding the Holy Spirit, of Holy Ghost.

Prophets Window: (Fig H)

This window represents the idea of prophesy at the heart of conversion and provides hope for man. "The root of Jesse sprouts and the crooked road of darkness is made straight and light"¹⁹. The tree of Jesse is seen on the left half of the window with diagonal brown branches coming off of either side which symbolizes the Church and the growth of the faith. On the right-hand side, both options of man are seen, for here a different scene is shown. Instead of a narrow systematic path, there is instead a winding brown image with a straight bar through it. This represents the two choices that man has. We must choose either the "straight high way for God" of the opposing path that lacks any true direction that leads astray from Christ.

¹⁹ Lamonthe, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973

Throughout the Bible, the prophets told of such a choice and from their teachings, the idea that is presented in this window is: “Let the wise man understand these words. Let the intelligent man grasp their meaning. For the ways of Yahweh are straight, and virtuous men walk in them, but sinners stumble”²⁰ (Isaiah, Amos, Ezekiel, Hosea). It must also be noted that in the depiction of the combined path choices, the straight and narrow option is composed of red glass, signifying Christ while the more convoluted path lacks this red color. This window is not representative of one particular prophet, rather it encompasses a message that was shared by many. Additionally, as this window is located in the transept of the chapel its location is often hidden from the main congregation. It can be viewed if sought out but is not in a prominent place. Like the choice we are all faced with, the choice of choosing God, the placement of this window is certainly fitting.

Exile Window: (Fig 1)

This window explains the theme of exile through an abstract representation. The image presented depicts the occasion and current cycle of God’s people becoming unmindful and turning away from Him and His ways. God calls them back in order to “purify them through the crucible of exile.”²¹ For “even sin is not hopeless when the repentant man turns toward His God anew.” The image in the window shows a flower blooming again, just as man has hope, God is merciful and allows the flower to grow in size throughout the piece. This blue, purple, pink, and

²⁰ Lamonthe, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973

²¹ Ibid

green background is indicative of a confused and unsure state of man, however God, as the flower, will always call us back to Him. The mixed colors are all of the same overall scheme and creates a blending that is greater than any of the other windows in the chapel. The red components of the window symbolize the Holy Spirit. He is ever present even when confusion sets in.

This window uses more rounded shapes to emphasize the fluidity of the scene and creates a different type of abstraction. The image itself of the intended message is more than just distorted, the message itself is abstract. The central flower that appears to be blooming again has roots seen at the bottom of the alcove but is still shown to have petals forming and coming in from all sides. Perhaps these bubbled shapes are in fact moving inward into the flower. Possibly the growth of the flower is enabled through the free return of the faithful people. Still, this influence fits with the message of exile and return that is being presented.

Baptism Window: (Fig J)

This Baptism window clearly shows two fish, which is seen as the “ancient sign of the Christians” and represents the waters of the sacrament of Baptism²². It furthermore represents man as “little fishes, after the example of our ichthus [the fish symbol] Jesus Christ, born in water, nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water”²³ (Tertullian, treatise on Baptism 1). This description of being born in and living in water is a metaphor for

²² Lamonthe, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973

²³ Ibid (p. 25)

the faith. When Baptized, the sacrament cleans us of the stain of original sin and marks the start of a journey towards communion with God. We are born with God in our hearts and can only truly live if we stay true to our creator. Specifically, in this image, the lower fish is larger and composed of red varieties of glass while the upper fish is yellow. The pair are facing opposite directions amid stripes of waving blue and green panels with bubbles of small clear circular glass shapes surrounding the fish. The red fish is Christ, the ichthus, and the smaller yellow fish represents man. Through the sacrament of Baptism the two are joined, man is connected to Christ. Appropriately, the window is placed in the transept to the right of the altar where the basin for Baptisms is held.

This is a functional image and a beautiful testament to the sacrament. It shows purification and a connection to Christians of the past. The blue pieces at the bottom of the window are significantly darker than those at the top. As Christ is God, the water near him and the early Christians is a deep blue which signifies a deep faith. The yellow fish above is surrounded in much lighter blue pieces that are almost white. This symbolizes the initial submersion into faith and body of water, and body of Christ. As faith grows, the fish will move deeper.

Community Window:(Fig K)

This window showcases the Assumption College community as well as the term defined generally as “a living, growing, reality. Through apostolic journeys, then and now, communities

animated by the spirit spring up and flourish.”²⁴ The image shows three clusters of groups moving upward through the window. While there are numerous sections of people all over the world who stem from specific groups, all those in the Catholic Universal Church come together in the faith. The widow further relates to this passage: “The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common... they went as a body to the Temple every day but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved”²⁵ (Acts II). This passage relates to the Mass. At this celebration the community of Assumption College gathers to break bread together while praising God. The community of Assumption is always welcoming and wants to have its community grown even greater.

This window is intentionally located in the Tinsley Campus Ministry Center, a place where people from all faith backgrounds can come together in faith, love, and friendship. The red circles are indicative of clusters of people, but the color denotes that Christ is within those people. The background of the glass is both vertically arranged and is held together by waving lines of tracery. The groups are distinct from one another but are not representing any specific group. They are placed together in one window and show in a beautifully abstract way the joining of communities into one.

²⁴ Lamonthe, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973

²⁵ Ibid

The Parables Window: (Fig L)

This window represents the image of a plant, or more broadly, “the plant world [which was the] source of parables on the life, growth, and renewal of the Kingdom of God”.²⁶ This window clearly shows the plant growing upwards, and is related to the parable of the mustard seed, the parable of the sower and the parable of the vines specifically. Though simple in design, this window represents God speaking directly to His people and his teachings of the faith. In each of these parables, Jesus speaks through stories and metaphors to allow His listeners to better comprehend what the message He was trying to convey. The mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds but grows into the largest bush. So is the kingdom of heaven related as it is small when first noticed but has grown and will continue to grow into a flowering plant.

Next, the parable of the sowers recalls a sower going out and planting seeds upon different terrains. The seed that fell on the path was eaten by birds, the seed that fell on the rocky soil could not hold roots and was scorched by the sun, and the seed that landed among thorns was choked. But, the seed that fell on good soil grew hundred-fold. If our hearts are pure then God can grow in us and spread hundred-fold across the world. Finally, relating to the parable of the vine, Christ is the vine itself and we, His people, are the branches. We are called to spread the Word and love of God. Additionally, as is the nature of plants, the roots remain strong but the seeds, or messages, are able and are dependent on being spread. For that reason, the image shown in the window is a blooming plant that has many branches shooting

²⁶ Lamonthe, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973

off in every direction and growing upward. It fills most of the window but there is still room for it to continue growing, just as we, the children of God, are still capable of growth.

Living Stones Window: (Fig M)

This window is representative of Christ as the foundation of the Church as the “cornerstone”²⁷. Described as “the living stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him so that you too, the holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God, may be living stones making a spiritual house”²⁸ (I Peter II). The cornerstone is seen in the bottom left hand corner with a crucifix seen within. There are swooping lines that move from left to right upward through the window to symbolize growth and the pillars are depicted to hold up the House of God which is the church. It houses not only priests and religious leaders, but all those who are faithful. Furthermore, it is the people of God who make up this house. It is unsurprising that the pieces of glass that make up this house image in the window are colored red. As seen throughout the windows this ties every piece back to Christ and the Holy Spirit. The nature of the house is modeled after a temple with large columns and a clear pediment.

This window is also located in Tinsley, and not in the main part of the chapel. Yet, it serves a larger role in this location. In the chapel, Christ is the focal point and the community looks to God for guidance, but in the ministry center, this window serves as a reminder that the

²⁷ Lamonthe, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973

²⁸ Ibid

community of faith, while founded on Christ, needs all of the faithful to maintain and fortify its house.

Brotherhood Window: (Fig N)

This window is a combination of the three main religions of the world, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Each faith's symbol is depicted, from the Christian cross, to a portion of the star of David for Judaism and finally to a crescent moon representing Islam. The "brotherhood of man... different in many ways, with different colors, creeds, national origins, talents... [are all] yet called to one brotherhood"²⁹.

"Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts though many make up one body, so it is with Christ. In one spirit we were all baptized, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens and one Spirit was given to us all to drink... Now you together are Christ's body; but each of you is a different part of it."³⁰

Additionally, this window is located behind the tabernacle, the most sacred place in any church as it is the true house of God where consecrated hosts are stored, and therefore does not have light shining through it, nor can people easily enter into the space.

²⁹ Lamonthe, Fr. Donat, A.A. *Assumption College Chapel*. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973

³⁰ Ibid

Pentecost Window: (Fig O)

As the largest stained-glass window in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit, it is natural that this window includes more than one theme. At the top, the prophesy of Joel is depicted which was used by Peter at the first Christian Pentecost: “the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon with blood before the great day for the Lord dawns”³¹(Acts II:17). As the scene moves to the right, the ten commandment tablets are easily identifiable. “Pentecost was the Jewish feast of the giving of the Law on Sinai. But the tablets are flesh colored because the new law in the Holy Spirit is in men’s hearts.”³² This color choice was specifically chosen to visually express the law written on the heart of man. Continuing to the lower left, the tower of Babel is seen as a symbol of disunity and misunderstanding as in the biblical telling, the builders, on their way to heaven began speaking in different tongues so that all building ceased.³³

Comparatively, on Pentecost, people from all different lands who spoke their native tongue could all communicate to overcome the past of Babel. In the center and lower right is the Pentecostal image of the Holy Spirit raining down with fire upon the people to “make all things new and turn men into messengers of the Christian way” is the central theme of the window. This is the largest and most prominent window within the Chapel. The original design of the Chapel included two other window compositions of the same size in the remaining two transepts, however due to funding only one was built. This final window is particularly

³¹ Lamonthe, Fr. Donat, A.A. Assumption College Chapel. Worcester, MA: Assumption College Press, 1973 (p.34)

³² Ibid (p.35)

³³ Ibid (p.35)

significant to its location as Pentecost is directly linked with the Holy Spirit, for whom the Chapel was named after.

Elements of Stained Glass

Following the analysis of the individual windows, there are several elements of stained glass that must be considered prior to looking at how the modern aesthetic has affected the windows in the Chapel. The first is the Biblical narrative that is typical of religious stained glass which is followed by a comparison to an earthly Jerusalem described by Suger, the abbot of St. Denis. This element is followed by an explanation of how light itself can be a powerful force acting on the art pieces and finally a section on the call to reflection is included.

Biblical Narrative

When considering the subject matter of many stained-glass windows, it is clear that much inspiration has been drawn from religious teaching, most specifically from Biblical stories. The Bible, or the “fundamental source of thematic material for [some glass] artists” was visually represented in accordance with the Church’s rulings.³⁴ The early stained-glass windows of the Gothic cathedrals housed windows that depicted Biblical scenes and teachings that the church put forth. The early Fathers, particularly Gregory the Great, “wanted religious art to exploit the intrinsic seduction of stone, wood, gold, silver, enamel, mosaic and glass. But at the same time, they believed that works of art had to teach, and the imagery had to be so designed that it was

³⁴ Levy, Bernard S. *The Bible in the Middle Ages: Its Influence on Literature and Art*. Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992.

instantly recognizable, in accordance with iconographic tradition.”³⁵ Essentially this means that the early Church windows were intended to directly represent and teach the Bible in a visual format. One of the earliest examples of this representation is attributed to Abbot Suger of St. Denis. For example, one window “began with an allegory in which the Old testament prophets carried sacks of grain to be ground into flour by St. Paul.”³⁶ Typically, scenes included “the Birth of the Virgin, the Annunciation, the Nativity, Christ’s entry into Jerusalem, the Passion, the Assumption... [as well as the] Holy Sacraments, Virtues and Vices, and the Seven Deadly Sins.”³⁷ Many of these scenes would be familiar to a layperson, but other windows went beyond the area of common Biblical stories.

Many designs were influenced by medieval illuminated manuscripts and repeatedly used similar scenes, although this theory has been debated. Unlike modern artists who are judged on creativity, in the medieval era it was largely the church that commissioned medieval works. It is most important to note, “From the reception of Old Testament subjects to scenes from Christ’s Passion, stained glass windows were the visual teaching aids of Christendom, which was complete in its embrace of all the material means by which men could learn the immaterial truth.”³⁸ This notion was profound in its theological foundation but nevertheless expressed the main ideas it was trying to convey through easily identifiable symbols and allegories.³⁹ Christ

³⁵Lee, Lawrence, George Seddon, and Francis Stephens. *Stained Glass*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1976.

³⁶Stokstad, Marilyn. *Medieval Art*. Second ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004.

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ Levy, Bernard S. *The Bible in the Middle Ages: Its Influence on Literature and Art*. Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992.

³⁹ *Ibid*

was once again incarnate in both the flesh of the faith as well as in the glass windows.⁴⁰The fact that the windows were used to show and teach specific stories lead to the idea of such windows being seen as a visual Bible of sorts for the poor or somewhat more accurately, the illiterate.

However, this “Poor Man’s Bible” idea of functionality is controversial. As the lower classes of French society were often confined to sections where their view of the windows were limited, coupled with the fact that many windows were placed so high up that their specific scenes were unable to be properly read, it is argued that this proposed main function was not successful.⁴¹ Additionally, such scenes reflected in the windows would require a high level of intellectual study in the nature of the Bible. Some of the window scenes depicted highly specific passages that required extensive background knowledge to understand the meaning of the window. Furthermore, the common term “Poor Man’s Bible” is a misnomer and should more appropriately replace the “poor” for “illiterate” as the issue was with not solely linked to economic status.⁴² Nevertheless, “The stained-glass window has considerable educational value... [as it was] not only a decoration, a magnificent decoration which gives the inside of our cathedrals that warm, living, opalescent atmosphere which we admire...[but] it was also a means of instruction...”⁴³ A leading argument comes from Abbot Suger of St. Denis who believed that “ ‘ the images in the church are windows are put there for no other purpose than

⁴⁰ Levy, Bernard S. *The Bible in the Middle Ages: Its Influence on Literature and Art*. Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992.

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Aubert, Marcel, and Hans Zbinden. 1947. *French Cathedral Windows of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. Iris Books. New York: Oxford University Press.

to show simple folk ignorant of Scriptures what they ought to believe.’⁴⁴ This could however be interpreted as simply a visual depiction of the faith and how one should believe in God. In fact, even the catechism of the diocese of Trequier stated that when the question was asked, what to do upon entering a cathedral, the answer in the catechism of the diocese of Trequier reads: ‘ Take holy water, adore the Blessed Sacrament, then walk all around the edifice and look at the stained glass windows.’⁴⁵ It is apparent that the glass was intended somewhat to provide a visual representation to the Bible and other matters of Church teaching, however; other functions must be added in conjunction, for no piece of art is ever as simple as it appears at first glance.

When one walks into the Chapel of the Holy Spirit, even if they have no religious background are sure to notice the stained-glass windows present and realize that there is some significance to their design. Although this thesis deals with the abstract alcove pieces, there are other windows in the Chapel that depict more easily identifiable images of the Bible. Still, if taught in conjunction with Scripture, the abstract windows would certainly provide an accompanying illustration to the text. Assumption maintains the tradition of Catholicism within the Chapel but expands it to a wider audience by designing the windows in an abstract fashion. Instead of student being potentially turned away for fear of lack of theological education, the abstract design serves as a source of welcome.

⁴⁴ Aubert, Marcel, and Hans Zbinden. 1947. *French Cathedral Windows of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. Iris Books. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁵ Ibid

Earthly Jerusalem

Following the idea of stained glass serving as a narration of the Bible, the connection of glass to an Earthly Jerusalem, or sacred place that is accessible to all must be considered. The spiritual connection of light to man is rooted in the Jewish faith, however; the windows of synagogues were filled with clear glass to view the beauty of the sky. Along with the rise of the Medieval Christian Church, colored glass was deliberately used to create a brighter and more powerful sensual appeal. Sadly, often destroyed by iconoclasm, and 'restoration' windows have been destroyed or tarnished. Yet, those that survive of the era relate back to Abbot Suger's classifications and intentions. He "saw the church as the Heavenly Jerusalem" and "the windows were to him the epitome of art used in the service of religion, for they led the worshipper to God."⁴⁶ Stained glass was used to create a sense of heaven on earth and bring the community of the church closer to God through reflection on the Biblical windows coupled with the radiant light that streamed into the church. While there were, secular images depicted in the glass as well, the main function was religious at the start.

Original perceptions of stained glass typically focused on the art form's beauty alone, yet such works are painstakingly created for a larger functional purpose. Color choice was linked to heraldic alternation and the implementation and proper effect of stained glass is essential to the representation of the Gothic ideal, or a "continuous and unified interior space filled with light."⁴⁷ The interior of the church takes on the "mystical essence of the One and provides a path for mortals to rise spiritually toward union with God," which captures Suger's

⁴⁶Stokstad, Marilyn. *Medieval Art*. Second ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004.

message of the power of celestial light.⁴⁸ Finally, Suger's three-fold theory of glass beginning with the function of holy image education, and its jewel-like quality culminated in his notion that the light streaming through was the source of divine light.⁴⁹ Suger is said to have constructed the windows in St. Denis to educate people and to 'direct thought by material means toward that which is immaterial.'⁵⁰ Light has an effect on a person today just as it did centuries ago, and the power of light must not be underestimated. Stained glass transformed the entire experience of worship for, "The people of the middle ages so cherished these windows, where the lives of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints were unfolded against an azure sky, ... in spite of the destruction of time and changes in style..."⁵¹ It is unsurprising why the windows were loved so as such an idea of this 'heavenly Jerusalem' dates back to Biblical text. In the book of Revelation, when the end times have come and God is present, the passage states: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."⁵² (Rev 21:1-2). This is not intended to be taken literally, however; the use of stained glass was to enhance the faithful people's relationship with God. A new Jerusalem, or a new sacred place, can be interpreted through the beautiful glass. The images pour into the church as the sunlight breaks through the

⁴⁸ Stokstad, Marilyn. *Medieval Art*. Second ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004.

⁴⁹ Calkins, Robert G. *Monuments of Medieval Art*. New York: Dutton, 1979

⁵⁰ Aubert, Marcel, and Hans Zbinden. 1947. *French Cathedral Windows of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. Iris Books. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁵¹ Aubert, Marcel, and Hans Zbinden. 1947. *French Cathedral Windows of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. Iris Books. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁵² Revelation -- <https://www.christianquotes.info/bible/19-quotes-book-revelation-end-time-bible-verses/#ixzz582eclV94>

panes which allows parishioners, or anyone who sees this powerful display of light, to gather some sort of image of heaven. The new Jerusalem, or chosen and sacred city, is something that must be abstracted as any realistic depiction would certainly be incorrect. In a way, stained glass helps to form a visual connection and explanation of the Bible and faith itself. Revelation serves as a warning and a call to prepare for the coming of Christ; the use of stained glass and reflection on the windows is essentially a tool that can grant those who seek it, a sense of hope for the future and a partial understanding of what is to come.

Power of Light

More than just an informative media, stained glass is a dynamic form of art. Then windows in the great cathedrals, and in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit have the ability to fill a space with colored light that is ever changing due to external factors. Stained glass is the only art form so heavily dependent on an external variable, for it relies most often on natural daylight. Before an artist can be critiqued on design, proportion, tone control and color, the pure skill required to create such works of art must be noted. The stained-glass craftsman paints with light itself. Depending on the time of day, solar position, season, geographic location, and other external variables, the effect a stained-glass window produces will vary. This dependence upon what often cannot be controlled adds to the mystery and magnificence that is stained glass. This very fact adds to the majesty and mystery of the art that pulls admirers into “the aura of undecipherability.”⁵³ The potentially serious physical disruptions are not the only threat to the expression of the glass. Halation, or the “phenomenon of light

⁵³ Sowers, R. (1965). *Stained glass: an architectural art*. New York, NY: Universe Books.

flooding around a solid object and producing a blurring effect” and glare as “a bright mass of uninhibited light either within a window or coming from a nearby source” is also a serious concern.⁵⁴ Only using grisaille, clear glass filled with painted patterns, can the artist keep the scene ‘light’. Though a two-dimensional art form, stained glass is viewed first flatly as panes of color that create an image usually, but also as a means of seeing something else. Glass is transparent, and the art of stained glass creates an infinite number of variations in how the world can be seen depending on what lies behind the glass. Nonetheless technically, “In a stained-glass window the artist creates an area of coloured light, modified by monochrome paint, which offers itself as a kind of music of light, instantaneous space, energized by the physical properties of light waves in the same way that music is energized by the behavior of sound waves”.⁵⁵ Aside from biblical representations or abstract scenes, often patrons were subtly included in scenes as patronage was responsible for much of the artistic funding. Additionally, even in modern works, including the windows of Assumption College, stained glass windows are often dedicated or donated by a particular individual or family. Finally, when considering the power of light and the nature of painting on glass, the contrast between transparency and translucency must be noted. Through both internal and external sources of light, transparency allows for appearances to pass through a surface while translucency describes the passage of only light through a surface.⁵⁶ When engaging with a piece of stained

⁵⁴ Godoi, Ricardo Henrique Moreton, Velichka Kontozova, and René Van Grieken. "The Shielding Effect of the Protective Glazing of Historical Stained Glass Windows from an Atmospheric Chemistry Perspective: Case Study Sainte Chapelle, Paris." *Atmospheric Environment* 40, no. 7 (2006): 1255-265. doi:10.1016/j.atmosenv.2005.10.033.

⁵⁵ Lee, Lawrence, George Seddon, and Francis Stephens. *Stained Glass*. New York:

⁵⁶ Sowers, R. (1965). *Stained glass: an architectural art*. New York, NY: Universe Books. (p.17)

glass many overlook the intrinsic complexity and see only the general image; in order to fully be present with a piece, other perspectives must be considered such as, “The relations between spaces, between forms, between images, between creations in one medium and in another are simply what they are and where we find them. Or create them.”⁵⁷

Reflection

The windows were a major component of monastic and clerical reflection.⁵⁸ In fact, many windows were created with an intended audience of the literati, or literate cloister monk who was highly educated and completely focused on religious activities, as a method of exegesis [‘the essential scholarly methodology for literacy, particularly biblical analysis in the middle ages’].⁵⁹ Suger’s new format for stained-glass windows “completely re-envisioned artistic medium, conceptually and visually, in regard to the viewer. Even if the illiterate viewer received no guidance... his or her field of vision was still flooded with brilliant light, glowing color, obviously meaningful forms, bewildering forms, and unfathomable inscriptions.”⁶⁰ Suger’s work lead to a greater general public being able to see and understand such windows.

For centuries, “This art in its ability to function in a way similar to scriptural study – claimed to be accessible only to the literati , only to the highly educated choir monk”⁶¹ However, though “unintended by him [Suger], the special potential of his particular conception

⁵⁷ Sowers, R. (1965). *Stained glass: an architectural art*. New York, NY: Universe Books.

⁵⁸ Rudolph, Conrad. "Inventing the Exegetical Stained-Glass Window: Suger, Hugh, and a New Elite Art." *The Art Bulletin* 93, no. 4 (2011): 399-422. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23208267>.

⁵⁹ Rudolph, Conrad. "Inventing the Exegetical Stained-Glass Window: Suger, Hugh, and a New Elite Art." *The Art Bulletin* 93, no. 4 (2011): 399-422. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23208267>.

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid

of a fully exegetical, monumental, publicly accessible, and systematically deployed work of art in the medium of the stained glass window gradually became apparent beyond the highly circumscribed confines of monastic and canonical culture.”⁶² Such an idea can be applied to the campus of Assumption College. The windows present in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit long for students to view them and reflect upon them. As a result of Suger’s work and study, the campus windows were indirectly made accessible to the entire Assumption community. All of these themes—narrative, the evocation of a heavenly Jerusalem, the symbolism of light, and the purpose of reflection, are found in the windows at Assumption College, but they have been altered in order to transition into the modern world. When looking at the stained-glass windows of Assumption College, much more abstract forms are used, yet the central message of Biblical narrative survives.

MODERN ART CONNECTION

The stained-glass windows in The Chapel of the Holy Spirit are of an abstract nature which poses an issue of readability. They were designed with an abstract intent as the themes of the windows would be difficult to often represent in a more realistic fashion. Still, the openness of interpretation certainly impacts the function of the windows. Intended as a source of reflection and an aid to spiritual growth, the abstract style does unintentionally create a barrier to students. The windows are an important element of the Assumption community and

⁶² Rudolph, Conrad. "Inventing the Exegetical Stained-Glass Window: Suger, Hugh, and a New Elite Art." *The Art Bulletin* 93, no. 4 (2011): 399-422. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23208267>.

many of the goals of the windows on campus curiously share similar themes to other highly recognized abstract artists.

Naturally, over time the rules that define what is socially accepted as art change. In recent years the art form of stained glass has been increasing globally, however; many have been crafted for a secular market.⁶³ In the period of the 1960s art was highly volatile and the innovations that resulted from the present modernity were unprecedented. In fact, “The proliferation of dissent and the fragmentation of voices propelled advanced art to new levels of desirability”.⁶⁴ Although Assumption was and still is founded in Catholic tradition and the windows of the College chapel are in line with such beliefs, the period in which they were made must be noted. Throughout the 1960s, “the human scale that had governed artistic practice for millennia seems an afterthought, the capacity for vision built into the human nervous system a feeble constraint on the possible extensions of art.”⁶⁵ This revolution of ideas expanded the realm of what art could be tremendously.

Abstraction was not unheard of, but freedom of expression was certainly on the rise. The stained-glass windows of the Chapel of the Holy Spirit are more in tune with modern art than one may think. Just as modern artists used their media to communicate “big,” or what they deemed important, ideas in a personal way, so too did Fr. Donat create his windows. The ideals expressed in the abstract images were done so deliberately. Intended to evoke reflection and thought, the windows used traditional scenes and transformed them into something that is

⁶³ Adam, Stephen. 1980. *Decorative Stained Glass*. A Rizzoli Paperback. New York: Rizzoli. (p.3)

⁶⁴ Crow, Thomas E. 2004. *The Rise of the Sixties : American and European Art in the Era of Dissent*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

⁶⁵ Ibid

more appealing to a wider audience. Their readability was still a necessary concern, but the beauty and artistic component was given an equal presence. A proper “reading” of the windows could be done by someone who was knowledgeable of the Catholic tradition, but even so, this presumably correct view was subject to interpretation as the nature of the scene was abstract. The stained-glass windows at the Chapel of the Holy Spirit do their job of expressing a message without strict constraint quite well. When looking at the style of the windows, other modern artists, and their works are brought to mind.

The talented work showcased in the windows of the stained-glass windows of the Assumption College Chapel of the Holy Spirit can be further appreciated when compared to other abstract artists. Modern art can often be difficult to understand at first glance. The themes and messages within a work are likely only to surface after careful consideration has been made. In the sphere of abstraction there are a few artists whose work is related to the art of stained glass in a non-obvious way.

Mondrian

The first is Piet Mondrian. Mondrian was a Dutch painter (1872-1944) who is considered a pioneer in the creation of abstract art. His works rejected the popular Impressionistic tendencies, instead he was involved in a plastic art which dealt with the relationships between two dimensional meetings of lines particularly at ninety-degree angles.⁶⁶ He moved from naturalism, to cubism and finally to his own neoplastic painting. Some of his later works are heavily focused on a grid design which mimics the tracery of windows. Mondrian was not

⁶⁶ Fauchereau, Serge, and Piet Mondrian. *Mondrian and the Neo-plasticist Utopia*. Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1994.

focused on symmetry but did have a strong desire for order. This idea is important when considering the construction of windows, particularly stained-glass windows.

Each component of glass must be ordered in the precise location lest the window collapses or the image is entirely distorted. For Mondrian the stakes were not as high as the glass that sits stories up in some of the world's great cathedrals. Nevertheless, without precise attention to the artist's intended layout, an artwork may not properly address the artists intended message. The use of ordered lines for Mondrian may have simplified his drawings, but the themes remained. In his early stages, he described cubism as "the great step toward abstraction," little did he know that he would play such an influential role in the history of abstract art.⁶⁷ He created a new sense of realism in his compositions that is similarly felt when looking at a stained-glass window. An individual may sit in the chapel pew focused on his or her faith and grow in understanding of an earthly and spiritual reality from the messages expressed in the glass or simply in their beauty. Serving a distinct purpose, windows are highly functional in their nature. When they are painted or created for the purpose of art, they then attain a new sense of reality.

Furthermore, this is an expansion of the domain of art just as Mondrian intended of his pieces. Additionally, Mondrian believed that his works were to be integrated into a particular space, not simply trapped in a gallery's walls. "Ever since he discovered the principles of neo plasticism, Mondrian insisted that art is not a decorative element to be added to the environment or to be exhibited—a painting on a wall, a statue in a room in a museum—but an

⁶⁷ Fauchereau, Serge, and Piet Mondrian. *Mondrian and the Neo-plasticist Utopia*. Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1994.

integral part of the urban environment”.⁶⁸ Windows are by definition an “integral part of the...environment” as they are a crucial piece of a building’s aesthetics and stability.⁶⁹ Mondrian’s work, though not intended for any religious message is linked to many of the themes present in the stained glass of the Chapel of the Holy Spirit. Without the efforts of Mondrian, perhaps abstraction would have taken another course in art altogether. He indirectly influenced the very design of the College’s stained glass through his principles and prior work.

Kandinsky

Kandinsky was another abstract artist who toyed with color and movement to communicate spiritual themes. He was called to abstraction and “equated representationalism with the materialistic values that he felt dominated his age, abstraction seemed to offer a way to express anti-materialistic or spiritual values” in the early 1900s.⁷⁰ Yet, he feared that this abstraction would lead to his viewer’s inability to properly interpret his work. Kandinsky found that color could communicate thought and that line would suggest motion but knew that those ideas he believed were not sufficient for developing his abstract style.⁷¹ He came to the conclusion that he wanted to focus on his “concept of the spiritual and of the struggle between the forces of good and evil.”⁷² With this in mind, Kandinsky looked to folk myths and the Book of Revelation. The artist’s work “is filled with suggestions of space and movement due to his

⁶⁸ Fauchereau, Serge, and Piet Mondrian. *Mondrian and the Neo-plasticist Utopia*. Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1994.

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Long, Rose-Carol Washton. "Kandinsky's Abstract Style: The Veiling of Apocalyptic Folk Imagery." *Art Journal* 34, no. 3 (1975): 217-28. doi:10.2307/775993.e

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid

choice of amorphous patches of color which float against an ambiguous background.”⁷³ He used hidden imagery to communicate his message, often including apocalyptic motifs or other cosmological ideas.⁷⁴ Kandinsky’s whole abstract approach was to simplify and thus spiritualize images into shapes which is consistent with his rejection of representationalism.⁷⁵ Looking at one of his pieces of St. George, Kandinsky uses heavy black lines to outline his image[fig 1]⁷⁶ and removes many to increase the blended, already abstracted, form for an almanac [fig 1]. This piece is also done on glass.⁷⁷ Here his belief that “representationalism had to be minimized if the work was to suggest spirituality” can be clearly seen.⁷⁸ Respecting Gothic work, Kandinsky “hoped that the veiling of apocalyptic folk motifs would overcome the objection of those who complained that abstraction could only be a limited art, subjective, or decorative and meaningless... he hoped to make the spectator take part in the creation of the work by unraveling its mysterious, ambiguous images, to replace confusion with understanding.”⁷⁹

The artist, while not seeking entirely Catholic themes, did produce work that he intended to be of a spiritual nature. Kandinsky’s paintings require the viewer to spend time with them, just as the windows in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit require. The two are very different, however; an understanding of modern abstract art is beneficial to anyone to may study the campus windows. A desire to understand is necessary when looking at any piece of

⁷³ Long, Rose-Carol Washton. "Kandinsky's Abstract Style: The Veiling of Apocalyptic Folk Imagery." *Art Journal* 34, no. 3 (1975): 217-28. doi:10.2307/775993.e

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ (Image) Ibid

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid

art. Such a relationship, between viewer and piece, is connected to the very definition of what art is. Kandinsky's swirling shapes and colors mimic similar design patterns in the Chapel windows but the reasoning behind their creation is what links the two most strongly.

Kline

A last modern artist to note, is Franz Kline. Kline was an abstract expressionist who was part of a group of energetic action painters including Jackson Pollock and William de Kooning.⁸⁰ His work removed any sense of traditional convention; he instead created gestural abstract paintings whose "strokes became entities in themselves, monolithic forms divorced from any external reality."⁸¹ The black and white compositions mimic the bar tracery of stained glass windows. The dark lines form a composition separate from the glass that is devoid of any particular image, rather the bars are merely a frame that in its essence is also abstract art. Specifically, the new methods of stained glass production lead to a clearer understanding of the era itself. Bar tracery was introduced which in turn allowed for the "ultimate disintegration of the wall."⁸² Moreover, the link to micro-architecture is also apparent as "by 1400 these furnishings captured the essence of the Heavenly Jerusalem and Became the tangible mirrors of salvation"⁸³. The nature of the bars and the ever-thinning frames allowed for windows to be

⁸⁰ Phillips, Lisa, Barbara Haskell, and Whitney Museum of American Art. 1999. *The American Century : Art & Culture, 1950-2000*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with W.W. Norton.

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Bucher, François. "Micro-Architecture as the 'Idea' of Gothic Theory and Style." *Gesta* 15, no. 1/2 (1976): 71-89. doi:10.2307/766753.

⁸³ Ibid

built higher with a greater amount of glass. Kline's efforts in his work unintentionally mimicked this early structural form as his works resemble the frames of stained-glass windows.

CONCLUSION

The controversy surrounding the function of stained glass is being heavily debated amongst scholars. While our windows may not be renowned globally, the panels that we have currently on campus; make up a very special part of what Assumption College represents. The windows are in line with the traditional Catholic faith and teachings; however, the abstraction used in their design brings back a sense of medieval wonder into the present day. The stained glass of Assumption College represents both the religious past as well as the ever changing and unknown future. The choice to create these windows as abstract representations, although it does hinder the general public's ability to fully understand the images, also widens the scope of interpretation. While a specific scene may not be able to be properly viewed as it was intended, due to the abstract composition and modern aesthetic, the windows serve their function nevertheless. With this fact in mind, perhaps labeled descriptions would benefit students who took the time to really engage with the windows. The designs evoke questions regarding the subject matter of Catholicism which could easily be answered if only the titles of the windows were provided as done under the larger panels in the transepts of the chapel. Additionally, the window panels in the sides of the chapel, in Testa Science Center and the Tsotsis Family Academic Center all have descriptions. Still, for those who are not as educated in scripture, the works are nonetheless beautiful and hypnotizing. The Chapel of the Holy Spirit welcomes the entire Assumption community and the abstraction furthers the educational and spiritual growth of those who reflect on the glass.

Personal Interpretation

When touring Assumption College during my senior year of high school, one of the main factors that drew me to the school was the Chapel of the Holy Spirit. I have always loved stained glass as a material for art, however; when I entered into the perfect stillness within the chapel, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace and happiness. It was the beauty within the chapel walls that was a major factor in swaying my decision to attend Assumption College. I knew that I would be safe in such a place and would grow in my faith life. When students enter the Chapel of the Holy Spirit they are welcomed and connected to the community.

Still, I hope that the respect for art and the mission of the College is always held up. Without art, the College, and the world would be a very sad place. As an expression of history, and a visual representation of the community in which one lives, art must be cherished. My time here at Assumption has exposed me to so many wonderful people and opportunities that I am truly thankful for. I feel blessed to have been taught by Professor Heidi Gearhart who is a brilliant mind. As my professor, and mentor I am honored to have been a part of her class. She has allowed me to see the world through a new lens, one that maintains a sense of reality but also encompasses the potential beauty that can be found everywhere.

Appendix of Figures:

All Photographs taken by Julia Goyette

Fig: A- Creation Window

Fig: G- Sacrifice Window

Fig: M - Stones Window

Fig: B- Noah Window

Fig: H- Prophets Window

Fig: N- Brotherhood
Window

Fig: C - Abraham Window

Fig: I- Exile Window

Fig: O- Pentecost Window

Fig: D- Exodus Window

Fig: J- Baptism Window

Fig: E- Sinai Window

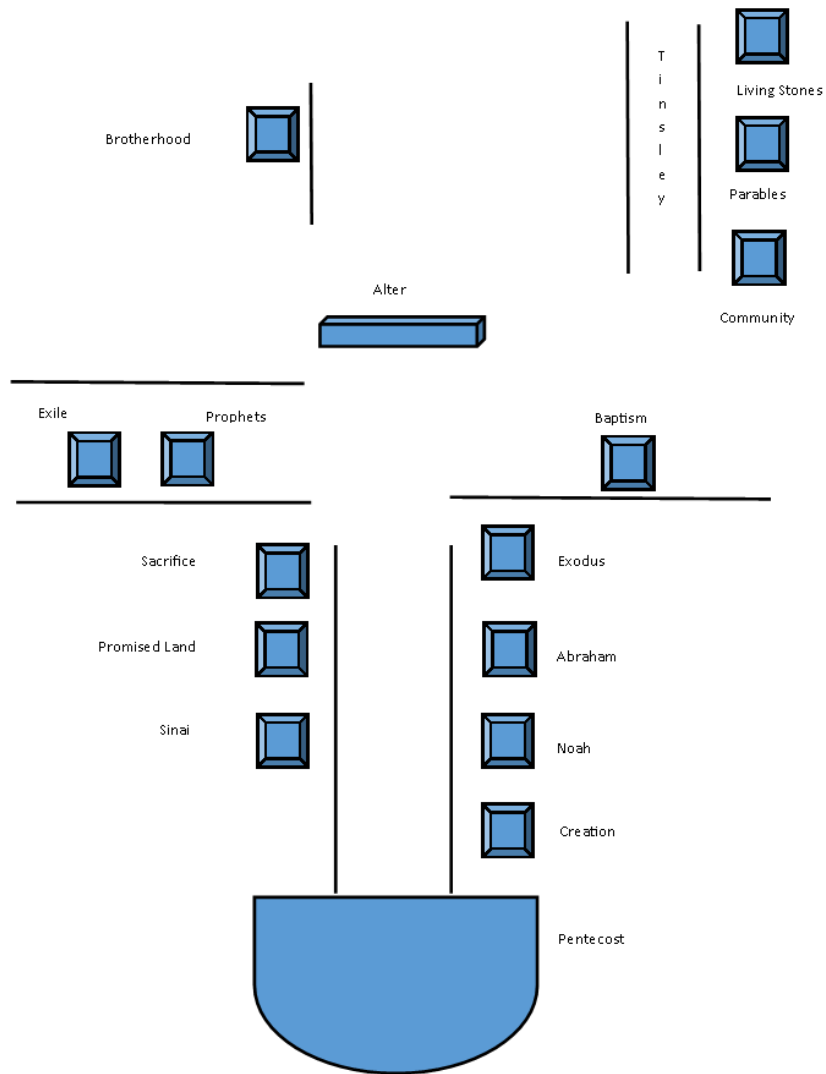
Fig: K- Community
Window

Fig: F- Promised Land
Window

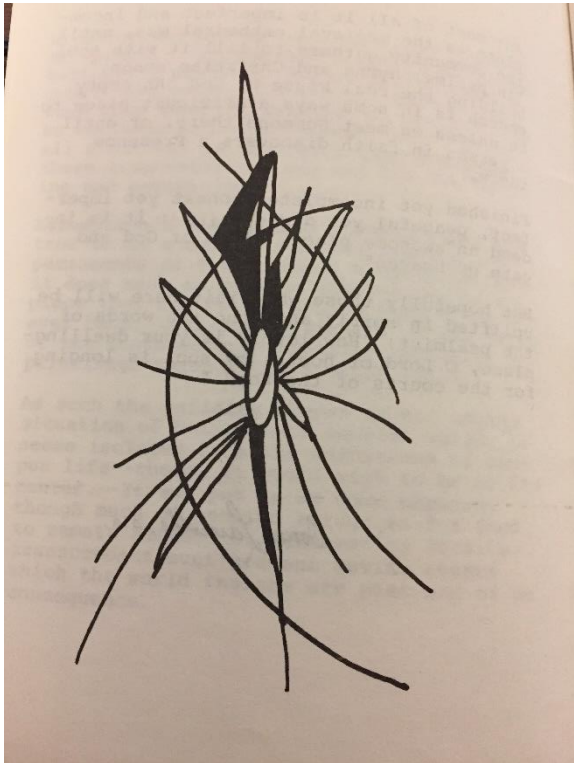
Fig: L- Parables Window

Fig 1: [Vasily Kandinsky- Cover of Der Blaue Reiter 1912]

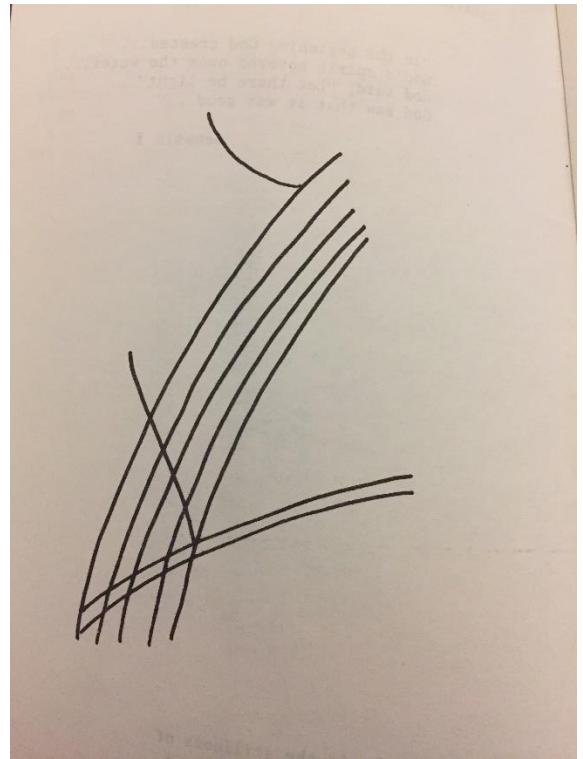
Chapel Floorplan Layout



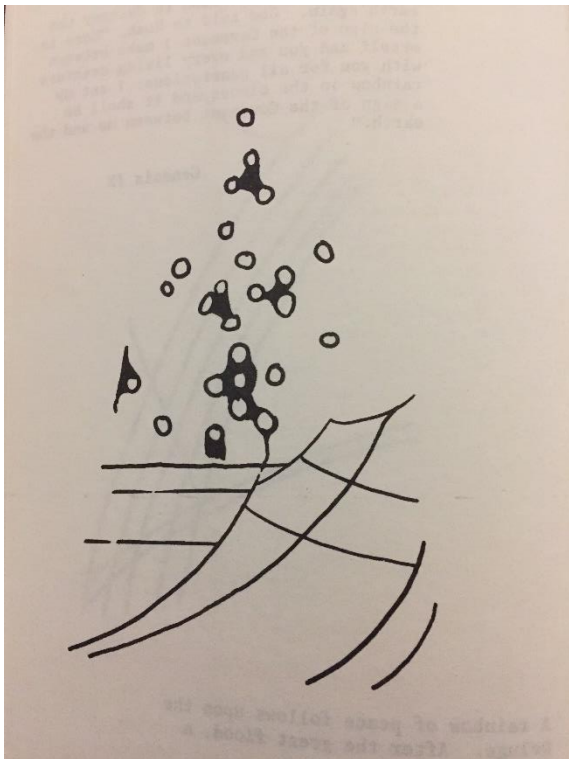
Sketches of Windows by Fr. Donat



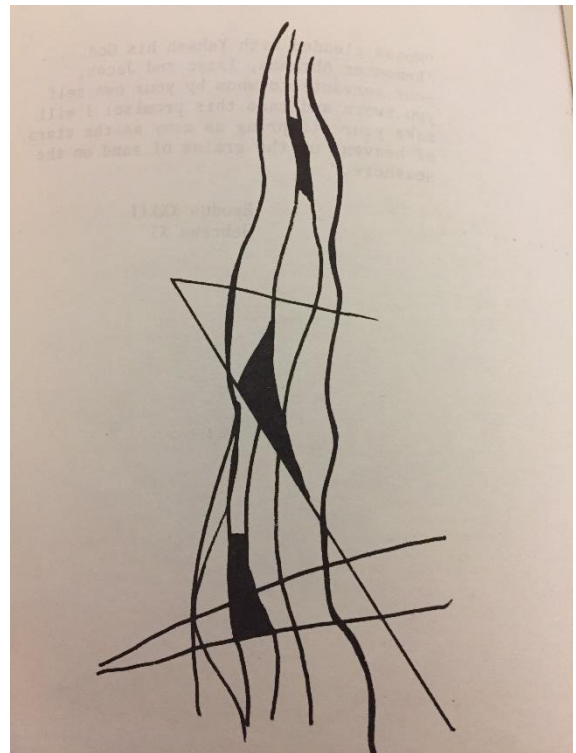
Creation



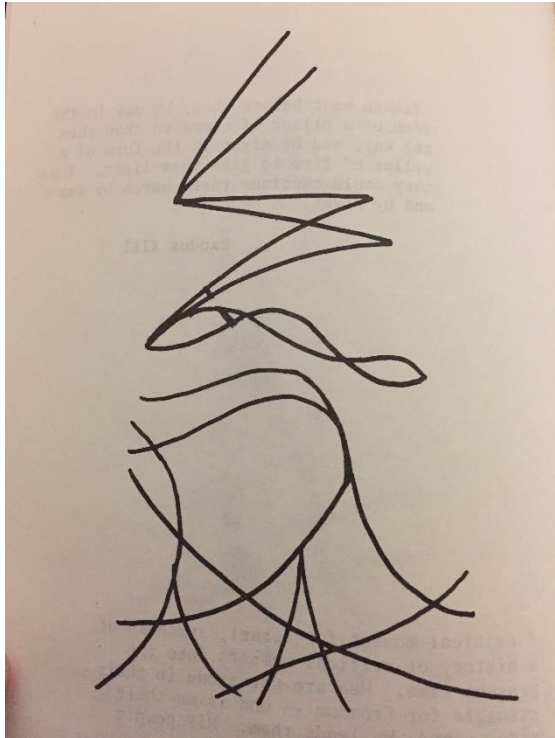
Noah



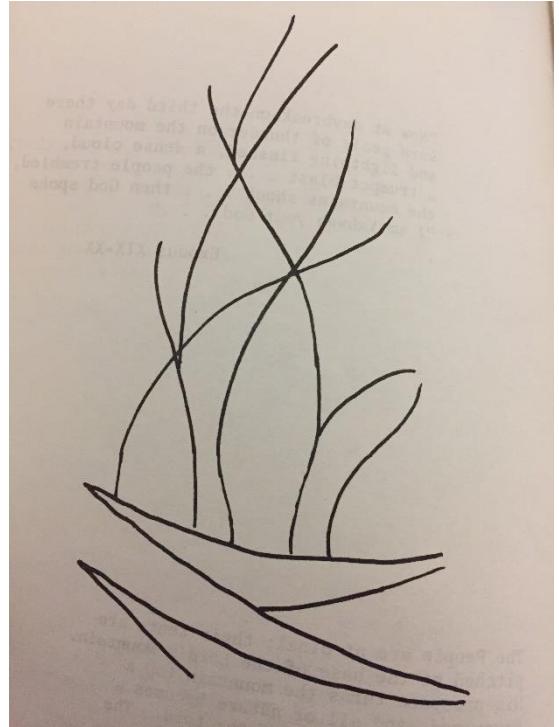
Abraham



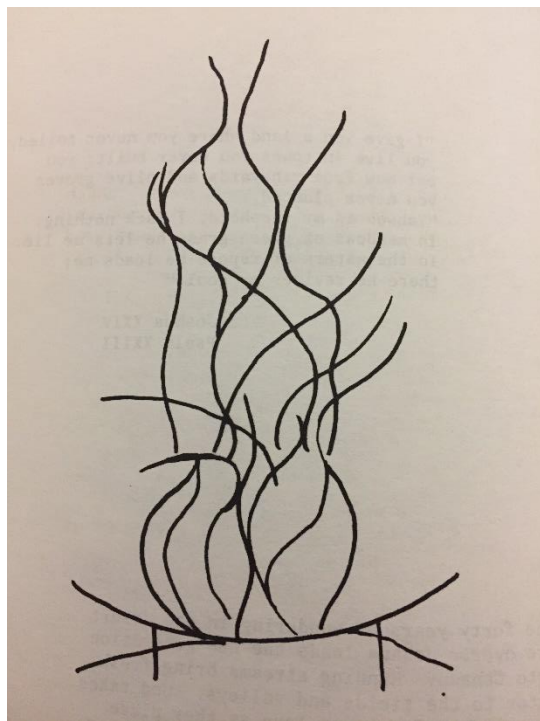
Exodus



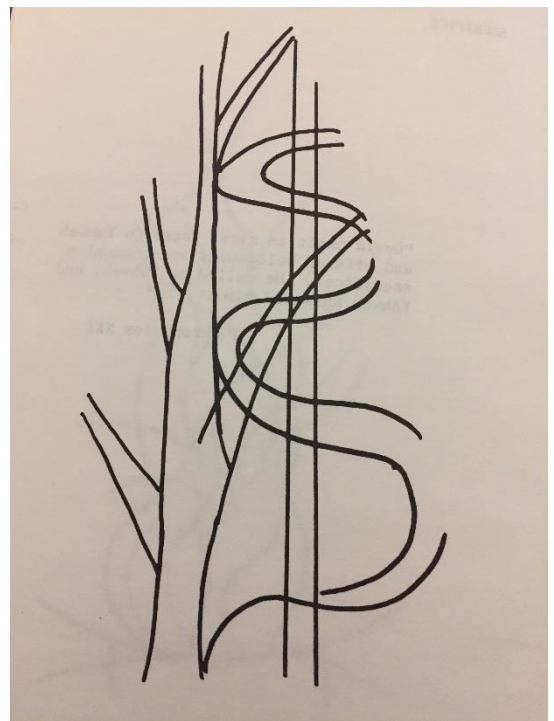
Sinai



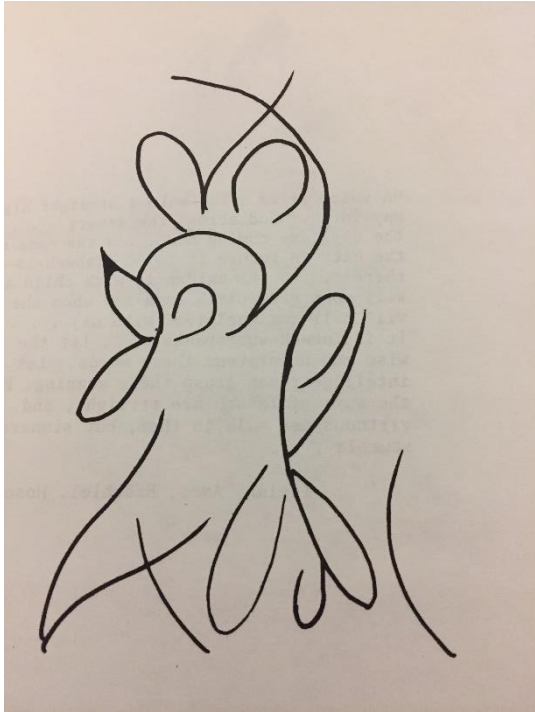
Promised land



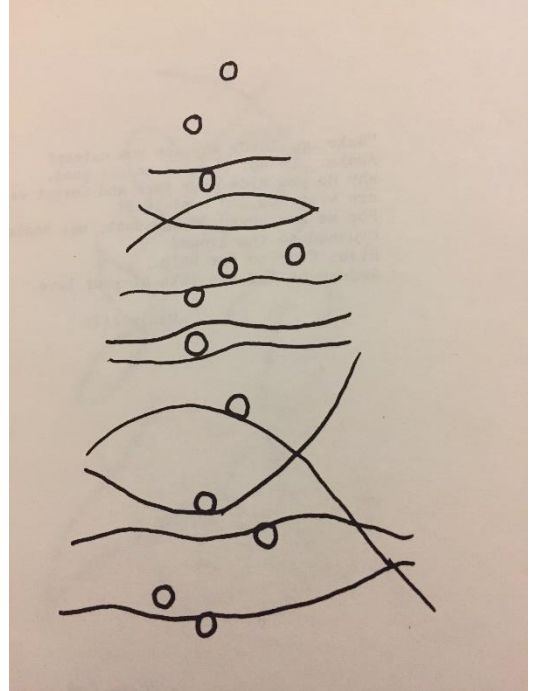
Sacrifice



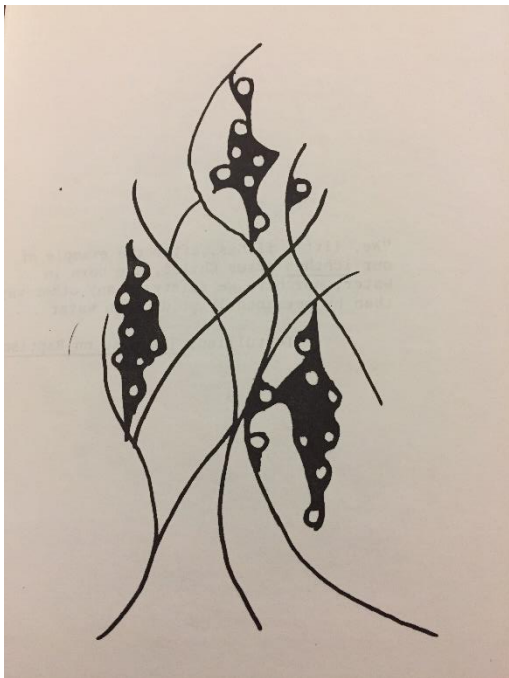
Prophets



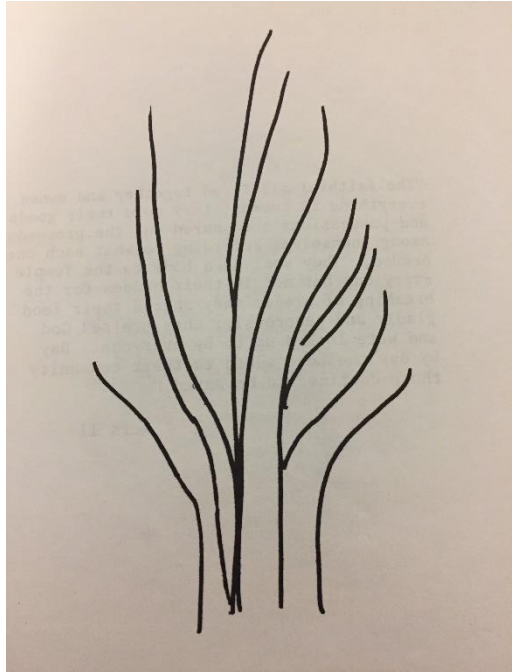
Exile



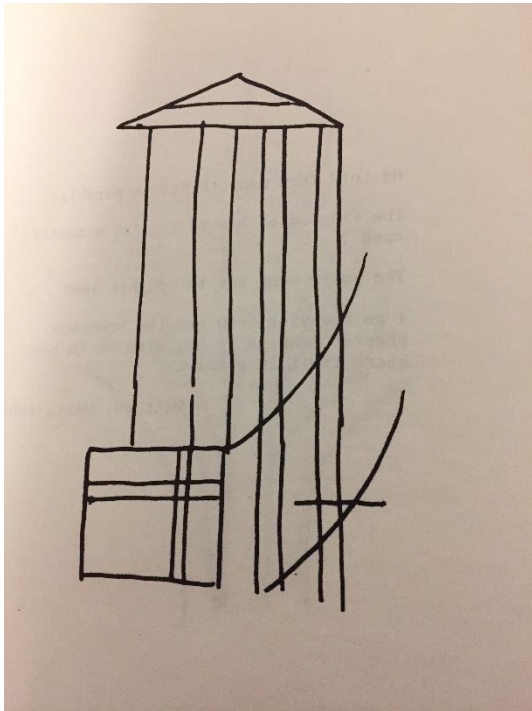
Baptism



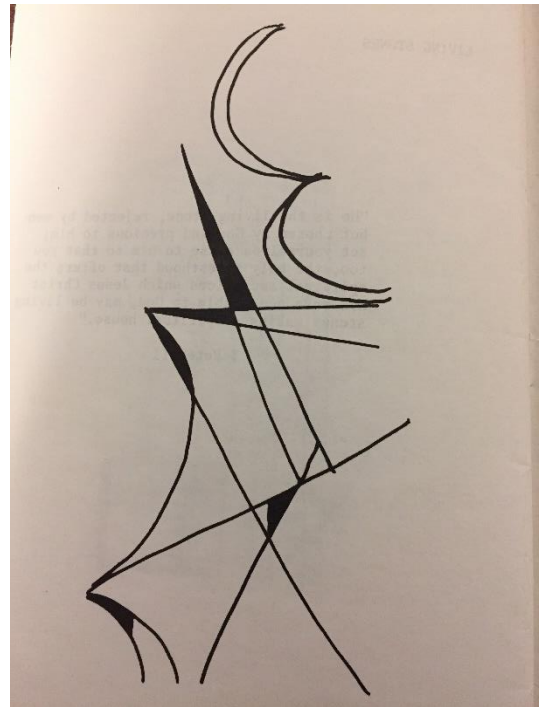
Community



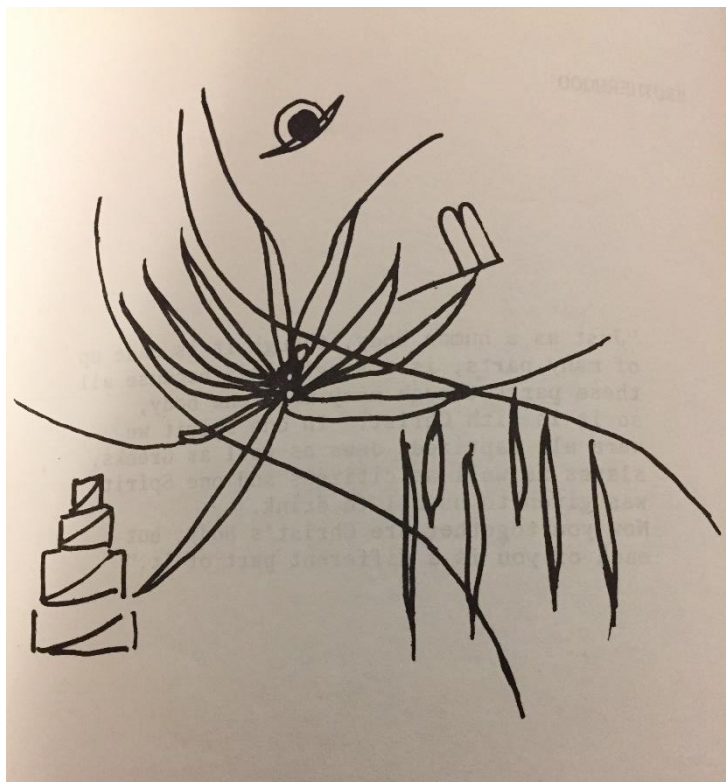
Parables



Living Stones



Brotherhood



Pentecost

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Images/ Primary Sources: Figures A-O: Photographs taken by Julia Goyette on the Campus of Assumption College in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit and The Testa Science Center, 500 Salisbury St. Worcester MA.

Julia Goyette

Appendix of Images

Stained Glass Windows in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit

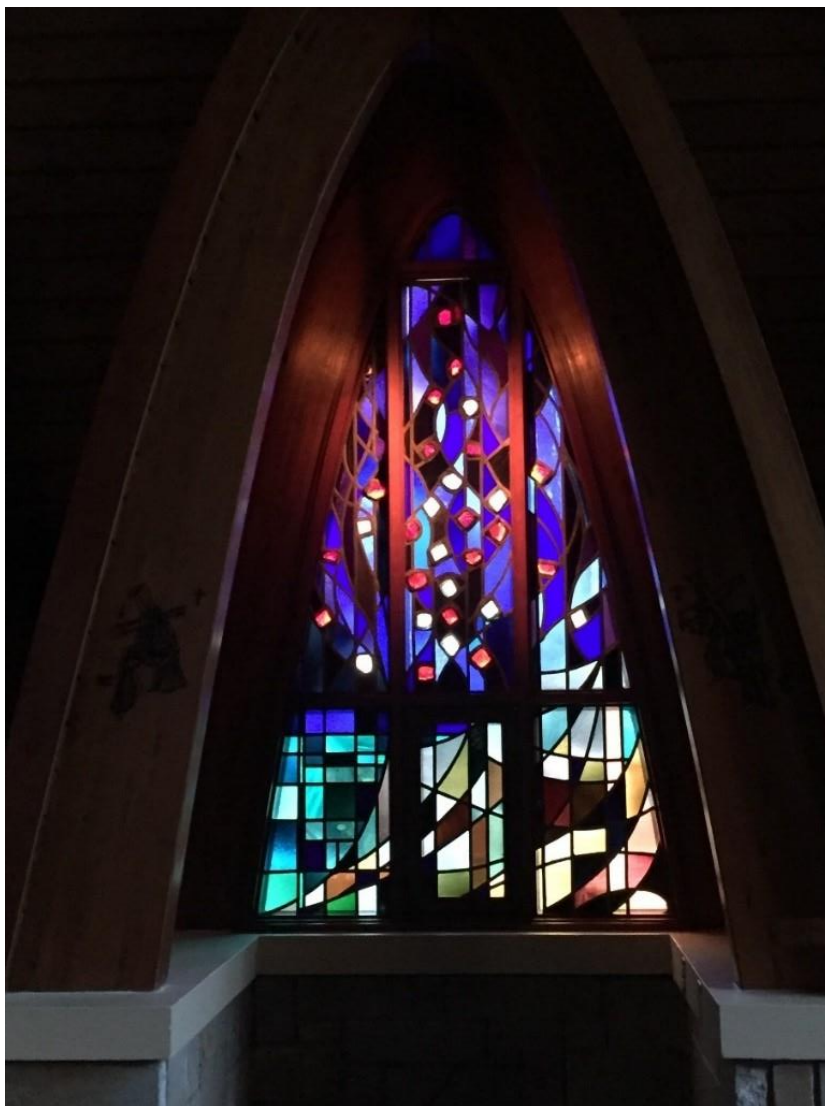
Creation Window: Fig A



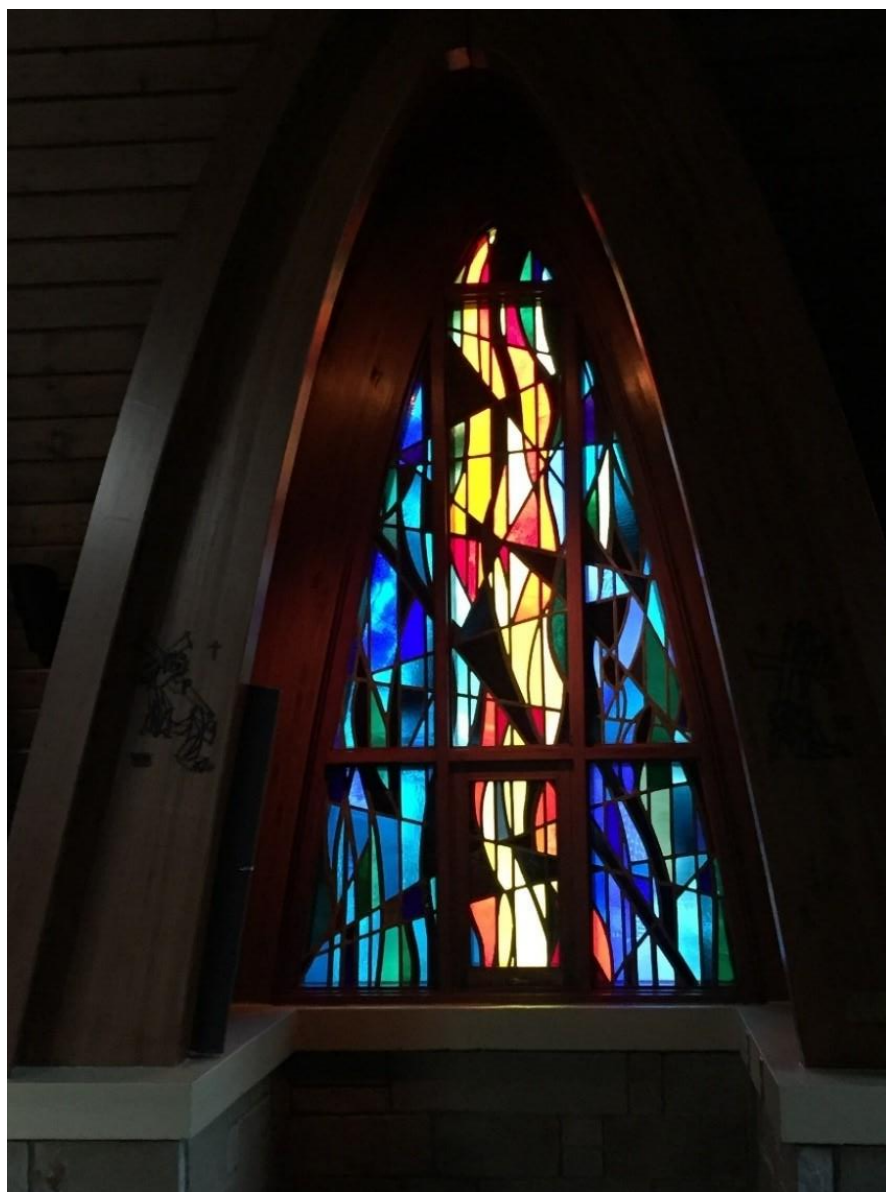
Noah Window: Fig B



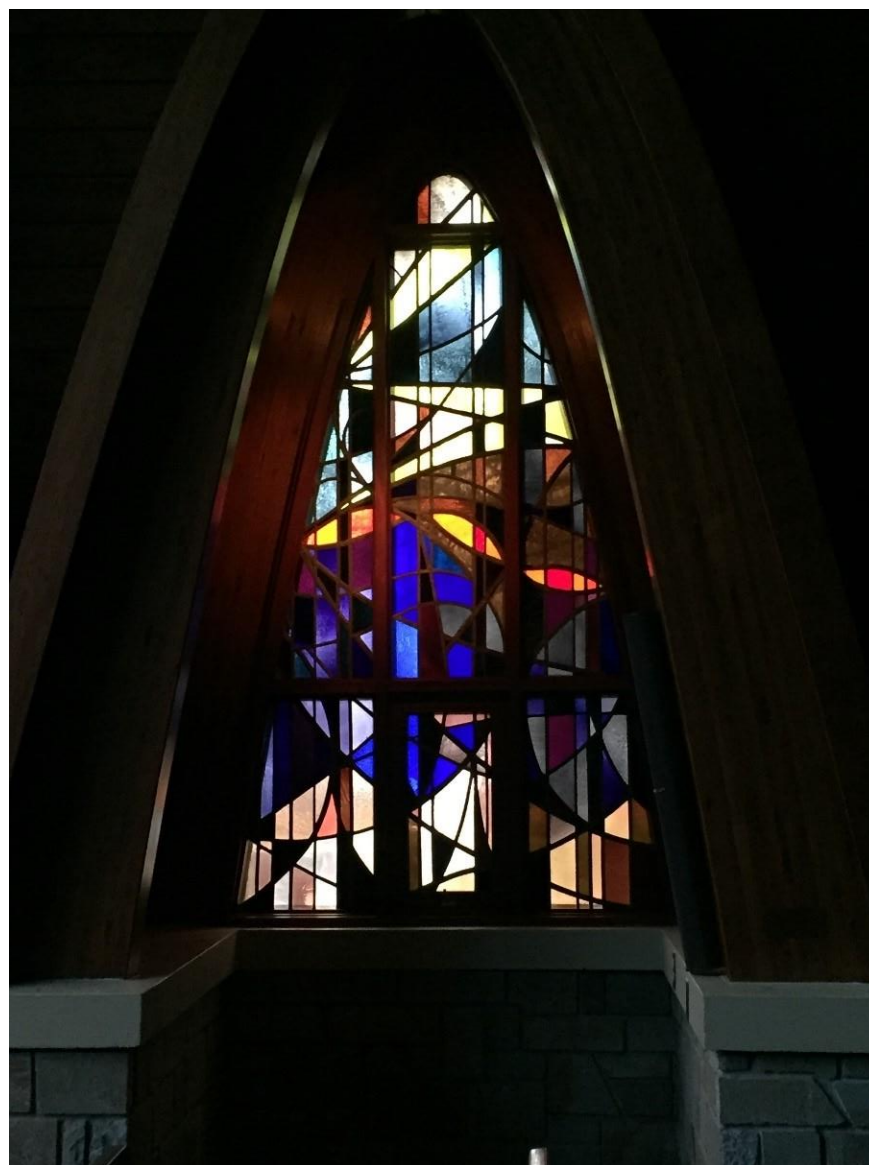
Abraham Window: Fig C



Exodus Window: Fig D



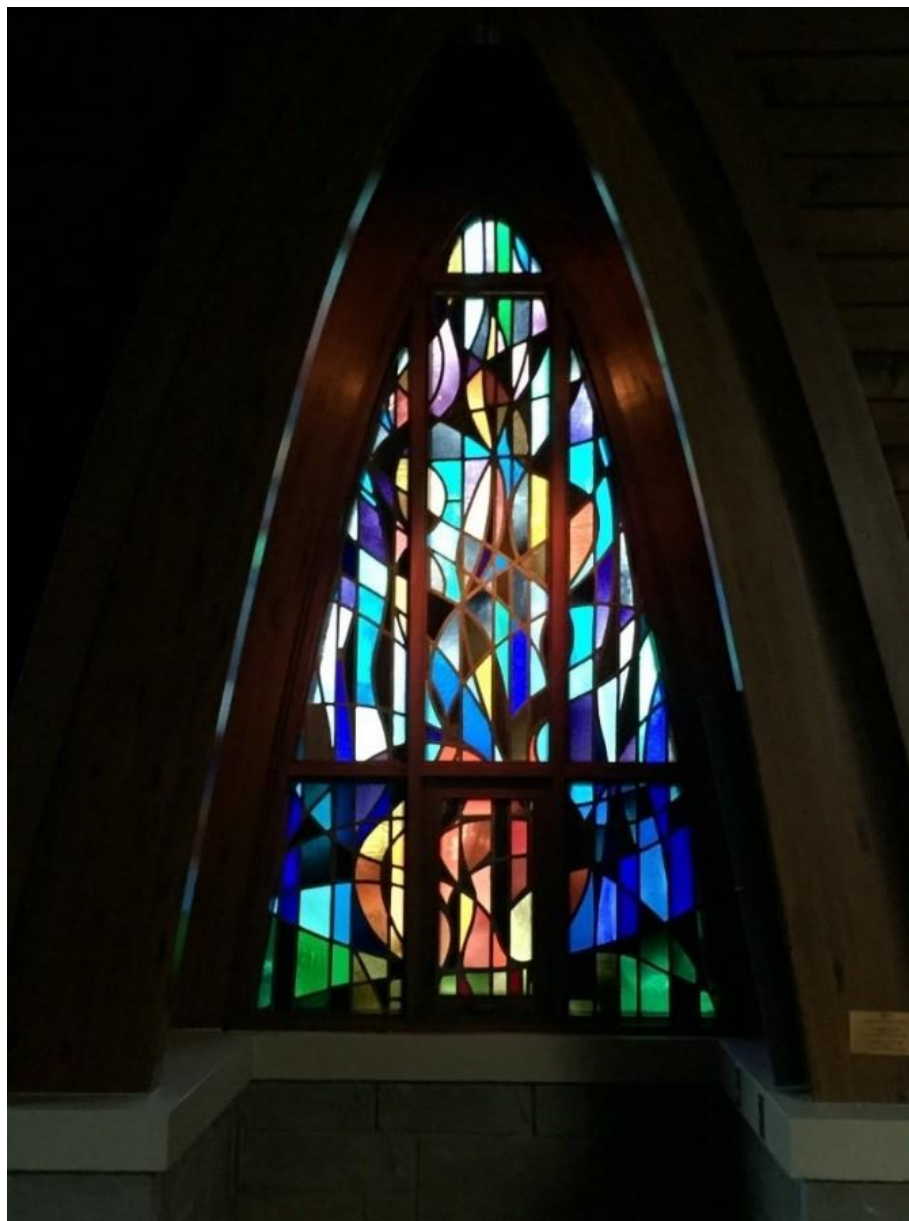
Sinai Window: Fig E



Promised Land Window: Fig F



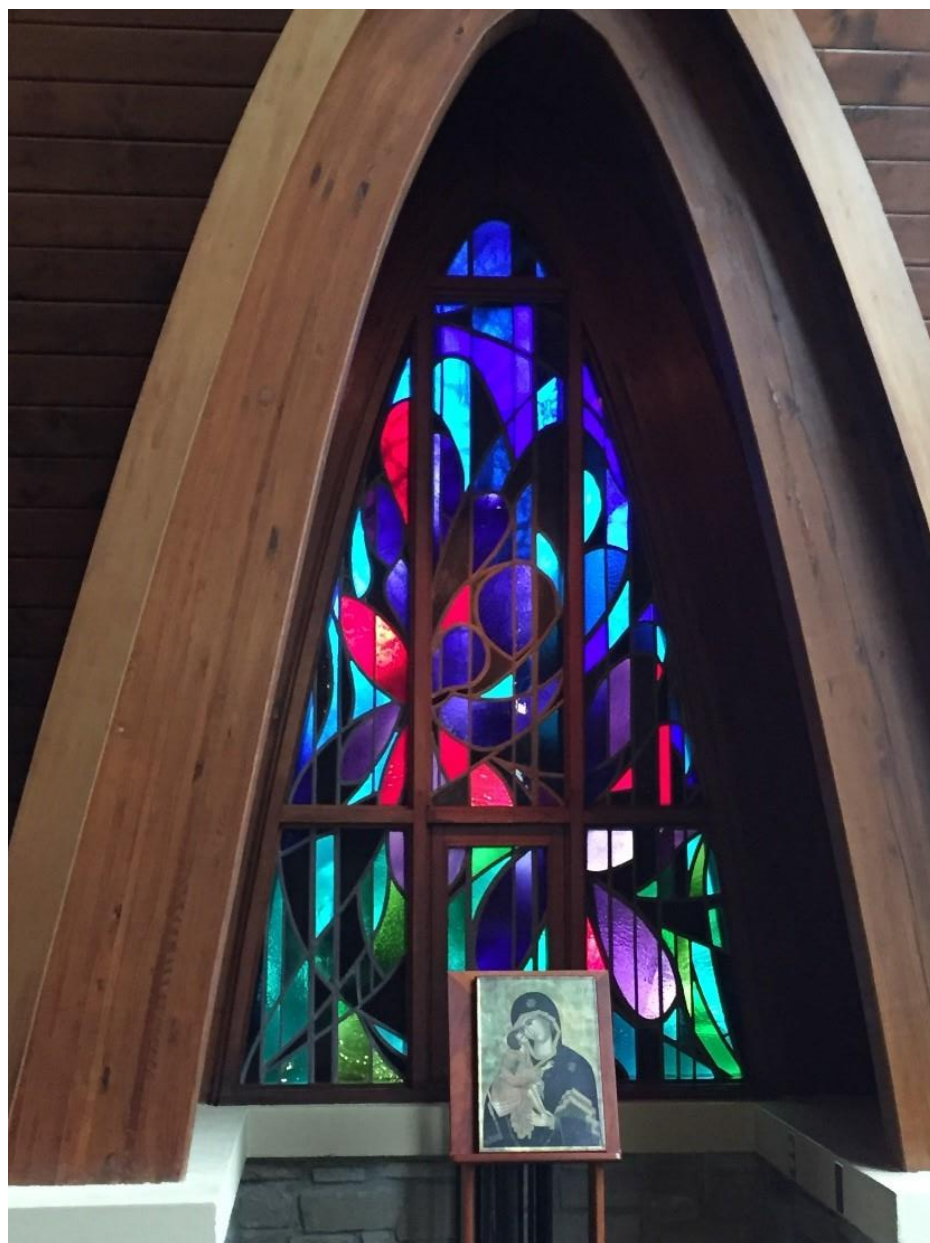
Sacrifice Window: Fig G



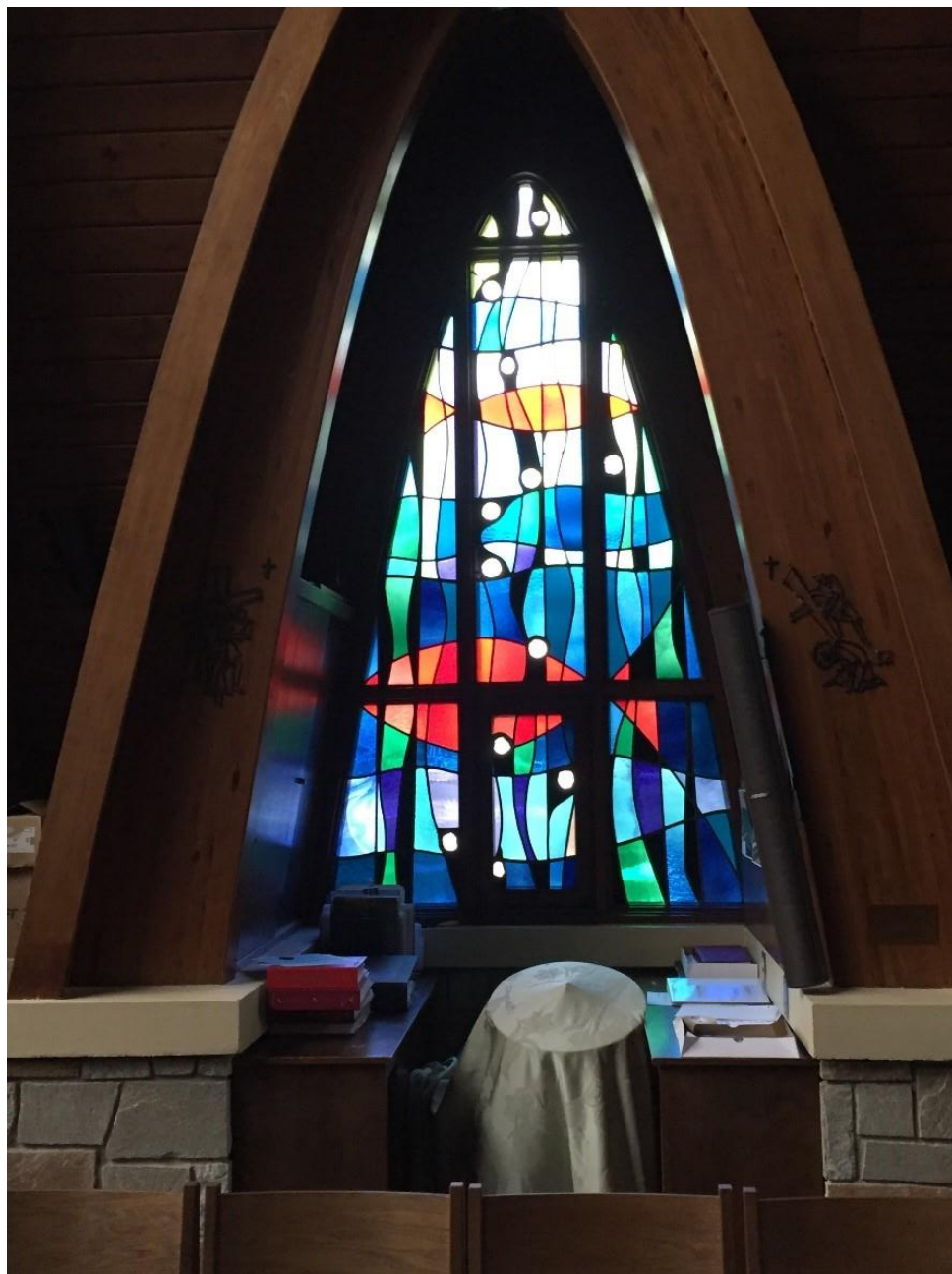
Prophets Window: Fig H



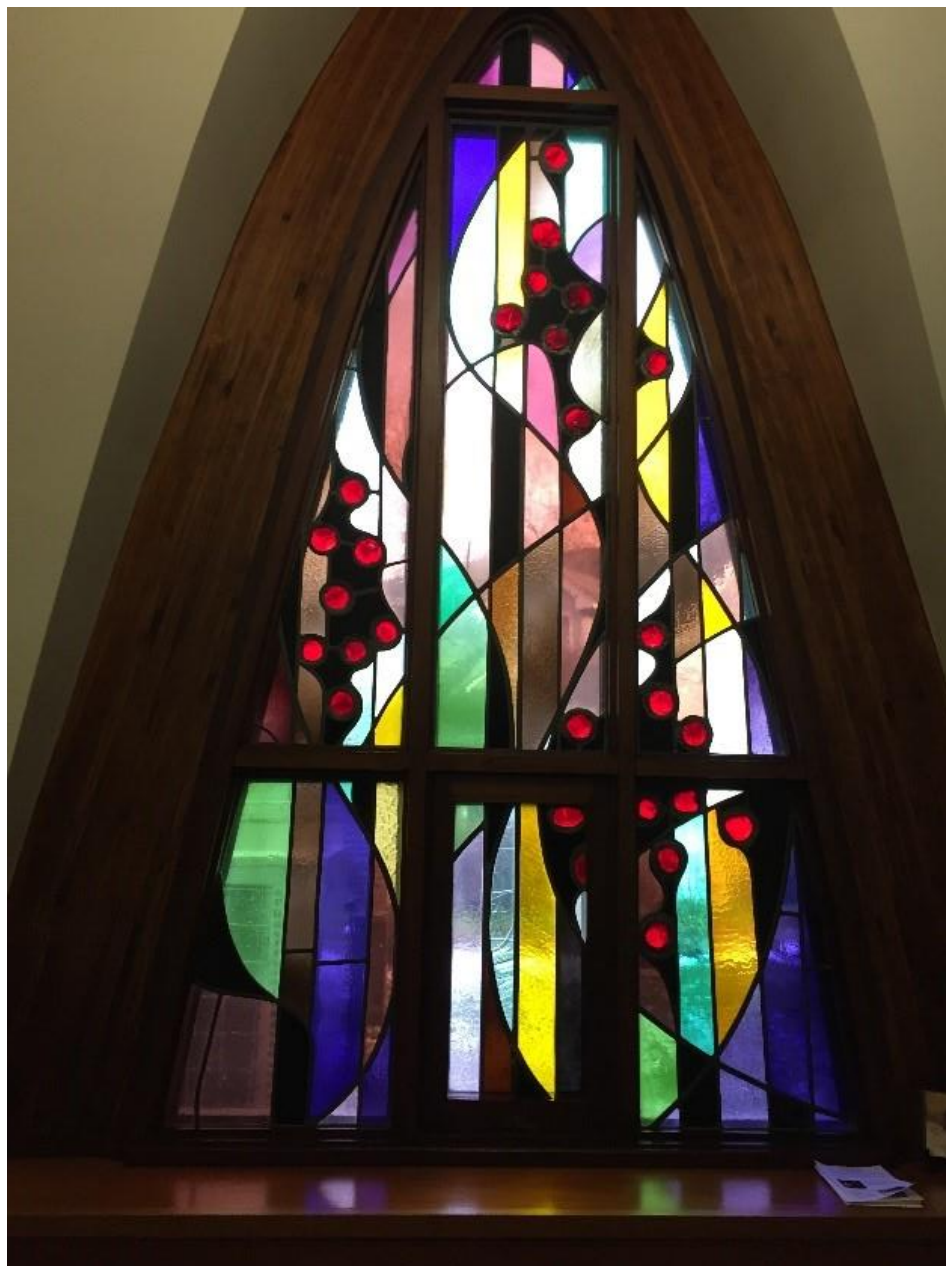
Exile Window: Fig 1



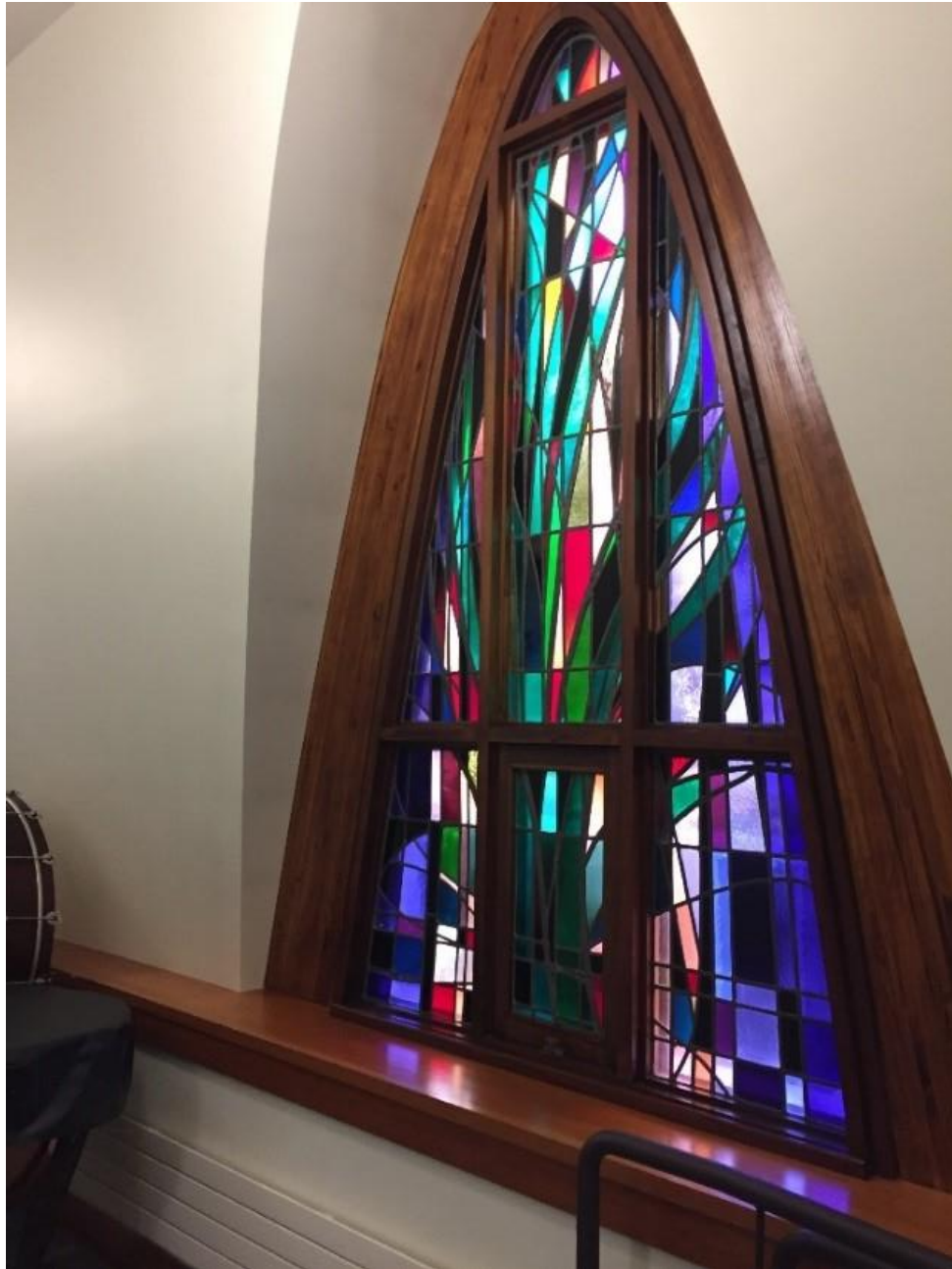
Baptism Window: Fig J



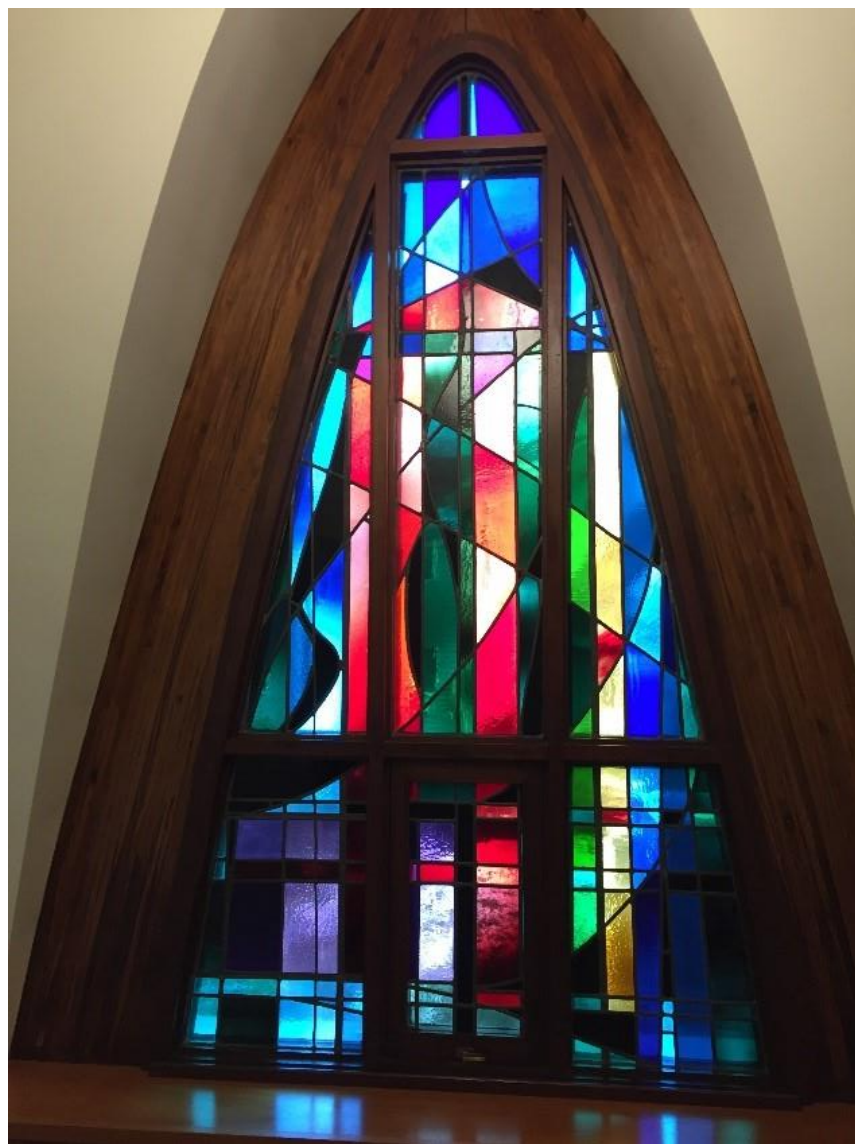
Community Window: Fig K



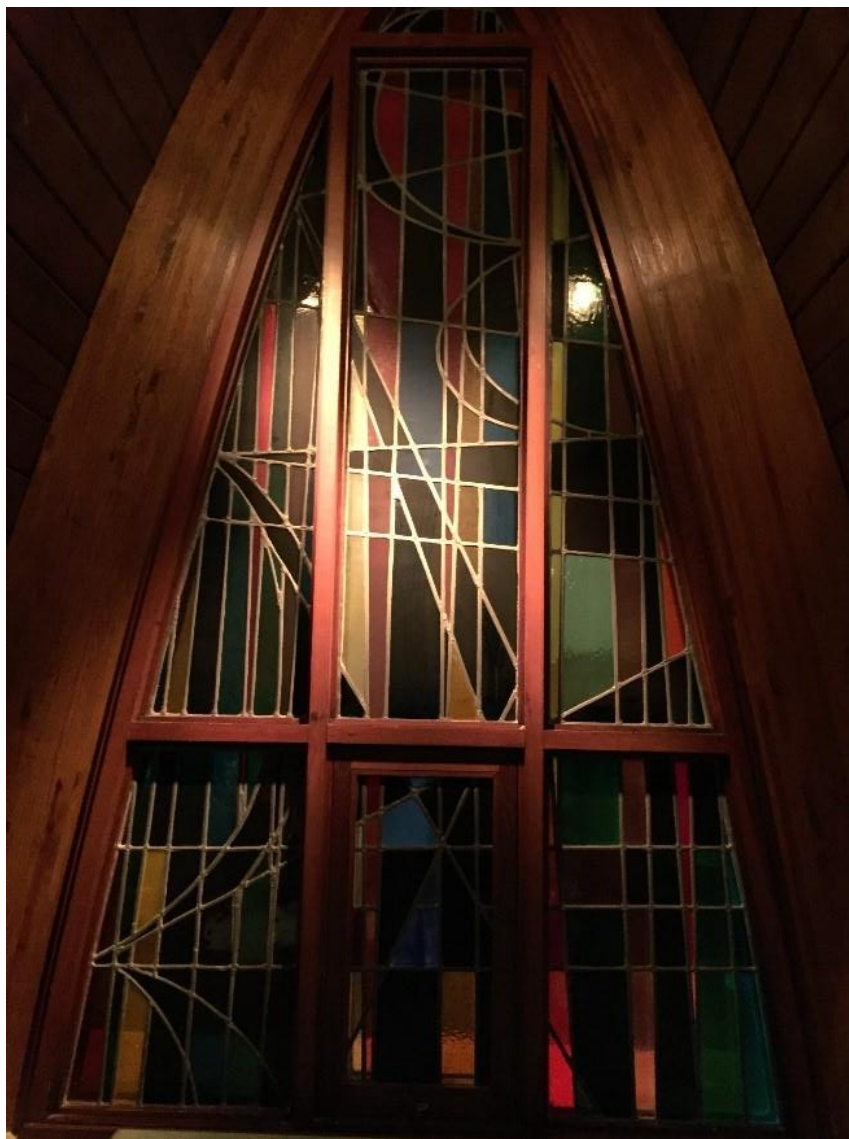
Parables Window: Fig L



Living Stones Window: Fig M



Brotherhood Window: Fig N (Distorted due to restricted access into the sanctuary)



Pentecost Window: Fig O



Fig 1 St George

Vasily Kandinsky- Cover of Der Blaue Reiter 1912 (image below)]

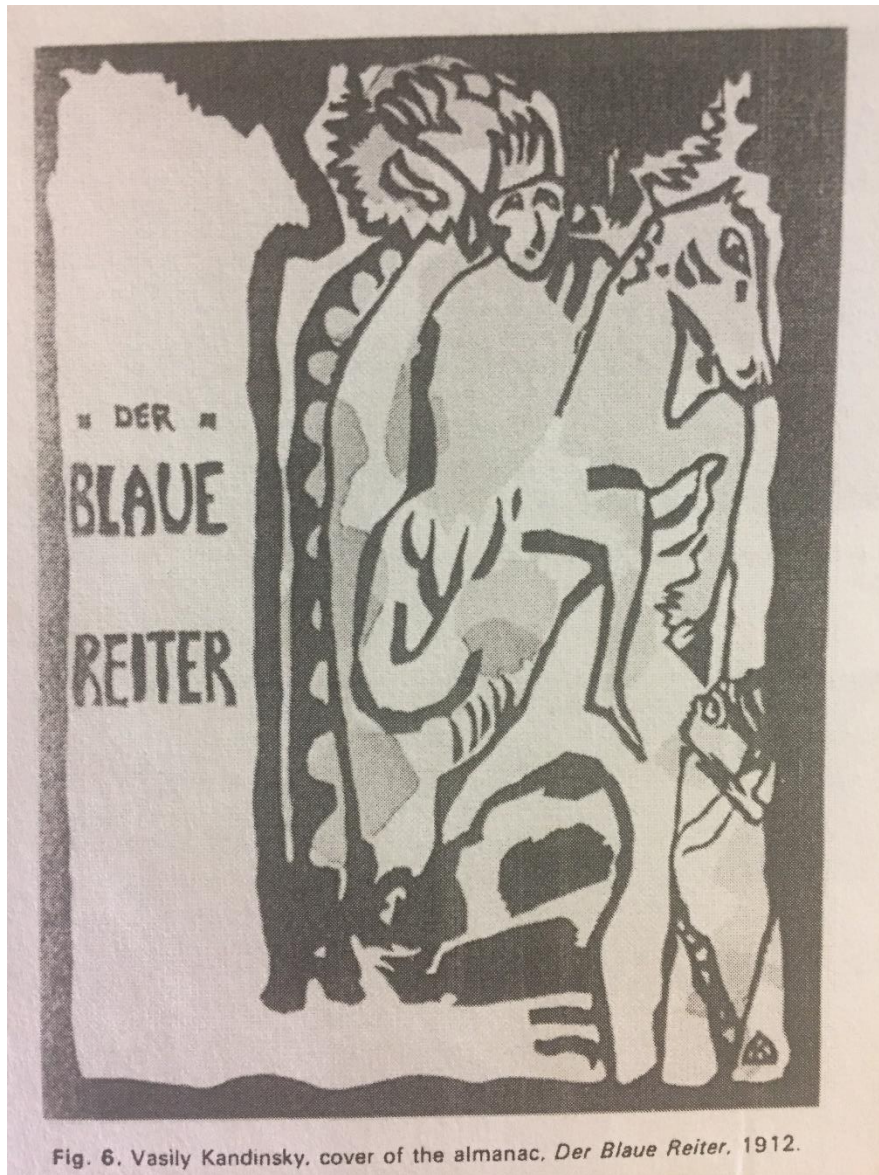


Fig. 6. Vasily Kandinsky, cover of the almanac, *Der Blaue Reiter*, 1912.

Long, Rose-Carol Washton. "Kandinsky's Abstract Style: The Veiling of Apocalyptic Folk Imagery." *Art Journal* 34, no. 3 (1975): 217-28. doi:10.2307/775993.