

# Munich Stained Glass and Jesuit Iconography in the Sacred Heart Church of Tampa, Florida

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In the late 1880s, the Vatican commissioned the Munich-based stained glass workshop of Josef Mayer (founded in 1848) to create a large window behind Bernini's baroque altar in the Basilica of St. Peter. This window was put in place in 1892 by the sons of Josef Mayer (Franz and Josef) and so pleased Pope Leo XIII that he designated the Mayer Company as a "Pontifical Institute of Christian Art."<sup>1</sup> This extraordinary action was taken in recognition of the workshop's growing reputation for excellence in design and for the firm's extensive knowledge of ecclesiology which manifested itself in the subtle iconography of the company's windows.<sup>2</sup>

Eight years after this honor was bestowed on the Mayer Company, the Church of St. Louis in Tampa, Florida ordered seventeen stained glass windows for the newly-constructed Jesuit Sacred Heart Church located there (Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> These seventeen windows are in outstanding condition and illustrate the level of excellence attained by the Mayer Company at the turn of the century. The windows are dominated by large dramatic figures that are enlivened by carefully modeled drapery and forceful gesture. The scenes are drawn in one-point perspective and are rendered in dramatically rich colors. Of these seventeen windows, seven are concerned with the Jesuit tradition. I have chosen to concentrate on these windows, five of which are located in the apse of the church, while the other two are near the end of the nave.

The five windows in the apse of the Sacred Heart Church at first appear unrelated in subject. However, the subjects are connected by a complex series of iconographic relationships derived from the central window (Figure 2) of Jesus revealing His Sacred Heart to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–1690). This window presents the theme of Christ's humanity as it manifested itself in the vision of the Saint, an aspect that is central to Jesuit teaching. On either side is presented the Annunciation to Mary and the Nativity, events that dramatize Christ's human origin and precede His divine mission on earth (Figures 3 and 4). The two windows that flank the Annunciation and Nativity present St. Ignatius and his followers and the Crusade of St. Louis (Figures 5 and 6). These two scenes represent human efforts to continue Christ's mission of mercy on earth and are presented in opposition. The attempt by St. Louis to rescue the Holy Land through military means is contrasted with the peaceful mission of St. Ignatius Loyola, who chose to conquer as Christ did, through teaching and his love for all of humanity.

The thematic concentration of Christ's humanity embodied in the symbol of the Sacred Heart as revealed to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque became an object of ardent devotion for the Society of Jesus. She was a member of a Visitation Convent in France, where between 1673 and 1675 she had four visions in which Jesus revealed His Sacred

Heart to her. The central window represents the fourth vision that occurred as she knelt before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar. At the request of Père Claude la Columbière, who was the superior of the Jesuit house which was associated with her convent, she later recorded the words Christ spoke to her: "Behold this heart which has so loved men, that it has spared itself nothing, even to exhausting and consuming itself in order to prove its love to them." This vision was instrumental in establishing the feast day in the Church for the public honoring of His Heart.

Christ in this window does not raise His right hand in the usual gesture of greeting, annunciation, or blessing. Instead, his left hand is raised, a stylistic device for making the gesture towards His Heart by the right hand appear more graceful. The heart is depicted on the outside of His breast (Figure 7) in accordance with the 1878 Congregation of Rites that sanctioned this pose. A small cross of the Passion is presented above it, encircled by a crown of thorns. The flames signify the burning passion of Christ's love and the entire composition radiates with the light of the Heavenly Presence. The chalice, impressed with a cross, is a reminder of Christ's sacrifice for mankind, while the angel symbolizes the meeting of heaven and earth.

The two windows presenting the Annunciation and the Nativity are linked by the verses in the gospels that describe Mary's role as the mother of Christ. Christ's humanity through Mary is emphasized in Jesuit art, giving her a prominent place in art dedicated to Christ's earthly mission.<sup>4</sup> The basic pattern of the Annunciation window (Figure 3) follows the iconographic formula established in the Middle Ages. The angel Gabriel, who is on Mary's right, raises his right hand and holds a staff in his left hand. An ancient symbol of authority, the angel's staff symbolizes the impending birth of the King of Kings. The dove, shown above, illustrates the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Mary's robe is the traditional blue, while the open Bible on the reading table symbolizes her acquiescence to the will of God. The vase of lilies indicates her purity. Outside the open window is a rose bush, a flower associated with the Virgin Mary, who is known as the "rose without thorns." This refers to an early legend mentioned by St. Ambrose which tells how the rose grew without thorns until the Fall of Man, pointing to the sinlessness of the Virgin.

Using the medieval technique of simultaneous narrative, the nativity window (Figure 4) depicts the birth of the human Jesus. The angels who had appeared earlier to the shepherds in the fields, carry a banner on which is written *GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO*. Between the angels shines the star which will lead the Wise Men to the stable. In the lower part of the window are three shepherds who have left their fields and have arrived at Bethlehem, where, according to Luke, they found Mary and Joseph and the Babe lying in a manger. Joseph stands behind Mary and

holds a staff. Mary wears a white robe covered with a blue mantle, and her halo is elaborated with stars. Looking out on this tableau from inside the stable are the ox and ass, adjuncts not mentioned in the Gospel accounts, but which are referred to in Isaiah 1:3 and in Voragine's *Golden Legend*, a thirteenth century compilation of medieval legends.<sup>5</sup>

The end window at the north side of the apse portrays St. Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) and his six followers in a chapel of St. Denis in Montmartre, an event that took place on August 15, 1534 (Figure 5). They are pronouncing their vows of chastity and poverty, and they are indicating their desire to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, an event which was the effective beginning of the Society of Jesus, which devotes itself “to promotion, in obedience to the Pope, the greater glory of God and the salvation of mankind throughout the world.”<sup>6</sup>

This window is a simple narrative. Loyola reads the vows before his six companions. Peter Faber, the only one of the seven who was a priest at the time, holds the paten and Host, signifying the sacramental nature of the occasion. All but Faber wear subdued gray and blue university gowns. The lighted candle on the altar is a symbol of the light of faith and of Christ's words in the Gospel of John: “I am the light of the world.” As it does in the central window, the open Bible symbolizes total acquiescence to the word of God.

Additional iconography in this window recalls the Virgin Mary. The blue flowers remind the viewer of the Virgin as does the Rosary lying across the open book. The Rosary is a form of devotion to the Virgin, consisting of a series of meditations and prayers centering about events in her life and the life of Christ. This again points to the humanity of Jesus and the Virgin's role as the vessel for that humanity.

In opposition to the St. Ignatius window is the one on the south side of the apse, which depicts St. Louis IX (1214–1270) and his knights on crusade (Figure 6). This window has local significance, since the church was initially dedicated to St. Louis, but it also has Jesuit connections. While convalescing from a wound suffered during a battle in Spain in the early sixteenth century, Ignatius read a book on the lives of the Saints. St. Louis and his crusade were an inspiration to the young knight, and he, too, desired to become a crusader for God. Although the two men shared a desire to re-establish Christianity in the Holy Land, St. Ignatius' means contrasted sharply with those of St. Louis. Rather than embark on a military crusade, St. Ignatius intended to gain souls through love and Christian actions.

In contrast to the quiet simplicity of the window depicting St. Ignatius and his six companions, the St. Louis window is exotic, dramatic, and rich in iconography. Set apart by a halo, St. Louis wears a crown and a vivid blue robe patterned with the gold *fleur-de-lis*, the emblem of French royalty. The *fleur-de-lis* was chosen by King Clovis in the late fifth century as an emblem of his purification through baptism, and became the symbol for the kings of France.

St. Louis is surrounded by crusading knights clad in chain mail, wearing helmets, and carrying medieval weaponry. Although most of the knights were French, the few from Norway are represented by the Norse winged helmets (Figure 6). St. Louis' raised right hand holds the crucifix, a symbol of the church ceremony of the “taking the cross,”

symbolic of his personal crusade. With this motion he also blesses the ground in front of him, as the knights in the foreground gesture downward. St. Louis and his knights sought to regain Egypt for Christianity, and the gray cloaked cleric kneeling in prayer beneath St. Louis' raised right hand reinforces the commitment. The palm tree behind the canopy may recall Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, while the ship in the upper right can be read symbolically and historically. It brought the Crusaders from France to Egypt, and it is also a symbol of the Christian Church.

The iconography of Christ's humanity is continued in the stained glass windows throughout the church. On the south side of the nave is a window that is a direct link to the missionary purpose of the Society of Jesus. It depicts an event in the missionary effort of St. Patrick in Ireland (Figure 8). The Saint's rich ecclesiastical vestments refer to his consecration as bishop in the year 432, after which he was sent to Ireland to replace Palladius.

An important encounter in Patrick's mission was his meeting with High-King Laoghaire at Tara in Meath, just north of Dublin. On his way to Tara, St. Patrick spent several days at the house of the chieftain, Sechnan, in Meath. Many members of the household were converted and his son, Benen, became especially eager to join St. Patrick in his travels. This was the beginning of a long and very close relationship, and Benen, because of his lovely voice, became known as “Patrick's Psalmist.” St. Benen holds the Celtic cross which was said to have been taken from what is now Ireland to the island of Iona in the sixth century.<sup>7</sup> St. Benen's tonsured head indicates that he became a member of a monastic order of the secular clergy (Figure 9).

In this window, St. Patrick has reached Tara (indicated by the buildings), the principal seat of the High-King and the Druids (Figure 8). Accompanied by St. Benen, St. Patrick is preaching to the High-King, his Queen, and retainers (Figure 10). The converted Queen gazes into the distance, her thoughts on the spiritual realm. On her finger she wears a wedding band, symbol of Christian marriage. The unconverted King and two of his retainers listen intently to St. Patrick, while the elderly Druid in the background leans on his harp in an attitude of defeat. The Druid can be identified by the harp and the oak leaves in the band around his head. The oak was a symbol of Druidic presence in Ireland and the tree that dominates the upper right section of the window is a massive oak. The Christians changed its meaning to one of strength of faith and virtue and the endurance of the Christians against adversity. As a result of this meeting, Christian teaching met with increased toleration.

A camp fire at the feet of the High-King is, in addition to being a poetic reminder of the encounter in the wilderness, also a symbol of the religious fervor with which St. Patrick preached to his listeners. Fabric in the canopy overhanging the King and his Queen is also significant. This is not the traditional brocade used in the other windows, but a woven stripe, Celtic in origin. The narcissus in the dark lower left corner represents selfishness and self-love, coldness and indifference, qualities in opposition to St. Patrick's preaching of divine love, sacrifice, and eternal life. According to a late medieval legend, St. Patrick used the shamrock to explain the Trinity to the two daughters of the High-King.<sup>8</sup>

The last window in the south side of the nave depicts

an event in the life of St. Stanislaus Kostka, a young Polish nobleman born in 1550, ten years after the founding of the Jesuit Society (Figure 11). He began the study of the classics in Vienna, while boarding at a Jesuit establishment. After its doors were closed by bankruptcy, he lodged at a Lutheran house. He had wished to join the Society of Jesus from an early age, but had met with unyielding resistance from his father. In his early teens he joined the confraternity of St. Barbara, a legendary saint of the third century.<sup>9</sup>

Stanislaus became very ill while living at the Lutheran house and asked that Holy Communion be administered to him. The Lutherans would not allow a priest to enter the house. The window (Figure 12) represents St. Barbara with two angels appearing to St. Stanislaus as he prayed during this illness. One angel carries the chalice and Host; the other carries the tower, the attribute of St. Barbara. The tower has three windows which symbolize the Holy Trinity. The angel's hands are covered with drapery, an indication that she was holding an object of reverence. The lily (Figure 11) is an emblem of St. Stanislaus' purity and chastity and books in the lower right are an indication of his stu-

diousness. The open Bible symbolizes his responsiveness to the Word of God, while the gold light pouring in from the window on the left symbolizes the presence of Christ and the sacredness of the event.

The iconography of these seven windows in Sacred Heart Church teaches Roman Catholic orthodoxy and places Jesuit history and teaching within that tradition. The events in the windows move from the first century to the seventeenth, from the origins of Christianity to the Saints who embody individual response to Christ's love for all mankind.

The task of the stained glass artist was to create a pictorial representation of the articles of faith and legend that are central to the Christian tradition. At the turn of the century, the Mayer Company was one of the leading workshops in the stained glass industry and these windows are evidence of their skill.<sup>10</sup> The dramatic portrayal of the Christian message in the brilliant medium of the Mayer stained glass has a powerful effect on the individual worshipper and does much to enhance the beauty of the Jesuit Church of the Sacred Heart.

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1 Letter received from Nicholas Wagner, 27 February 1984. Nicholas Wagner was the director of the New York branch of Mayer and Company prior to World War II. His letter provided valuable information on the professional relationship between Mayer and Company and the papacy at the time the windows were commissioned.

2 Letter received from Nicholas Wagner, 27 February 1984.

3 Mary Floyd, *Sacred Heart Church* (South Hackensack: Custombook, Inc., 1979), p. 15.

4 "Supplement to the Divine Office for the Society of Jesus" (London: English Province for the Society of Jesus, 1974), pp. 13-14.

5 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*. Trans. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1941), p. 50.

6 "Supplement to the Divine Office for the Society of Jesus," p. 40.

7 Gertrude Grace Sill, *A Handbook of Symbols in Christian Art* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), p. 32.

8 H. Thurston and Donald Attwater, eds., *Butler's Lives of the Saints* (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1956), I, p. 615.

9 St. Barbara's relationship with her father struck a sympathetic response in Stanislaus. Barbara was a beautiful young pagan whose father built a tower in which to keep her so that no man would marry her. During a prolonged absence of her father, she was tutored and converted to Christianity. On his return, her father was enraged to find his daughter a Christian and killed her. A characteristic of St. Barbara was that she never allowed her clients to die without the Holy Viaticum.

10 Letter received from Nicholas Wagner, 27 February 1984.

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Wagner, Nicholas. Letter to author. 27 February 1984.



Figure 1, Sacred Heart Church, Tampa, Florida.



Figure 2, Revelation of the Sacred Heart.



Figure 3, Annunciation.



Figure 4, Nativity.

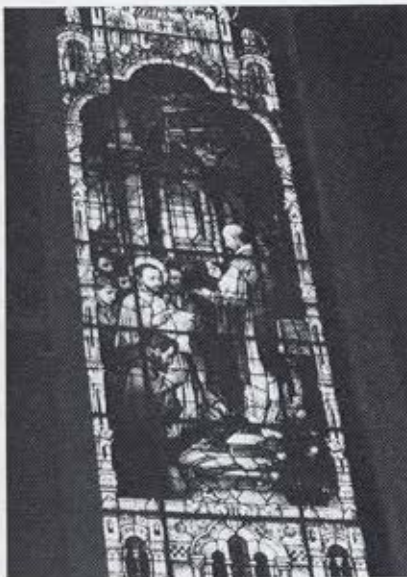


Figure 5, St. Ignatius and Companions.

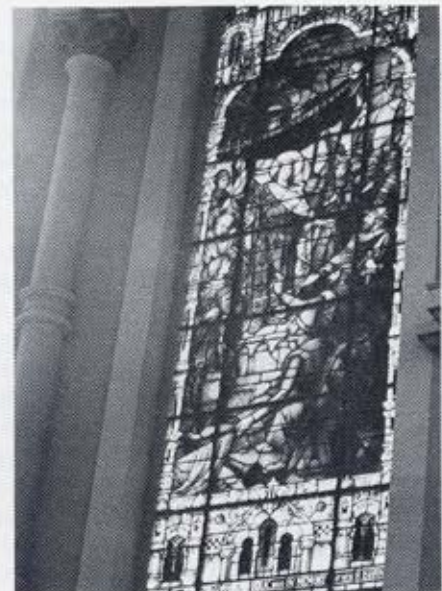


Figure 6, St. Louis and His Knights.



Figure 7, Detail, Revelation of the Sacred Heart.



Figure 8, St. Patrick Preaching at Tara.



Figure 9, Detail, St. Patrick window.



Figure 10, Detail, St. Patrick window.



Figure 11, St. Barbara Giving Holy Communion to St. Stanislaus.



Figure 12, Detail, St. Barbara and Angels from St. Stanislaus window.

\*All photographs of Sacred Heart Church, Tampa, Florida are by Jan Robison (USF).