

# Mediating between tradition and meaning in stained glass windows

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The medieval church used stained glass windows to mediate between Latin scripture and the illiterate laity. Following the Reformation, Calvinist tradition avoided visual symbolism. In the Afrikaans Dutch Reformed Church, the use of symbolism has developed from only the literary symbolism of scripture and the physical symbolism of the sacraments, to a recent reintroduction of visual symbolism into windows. Although this started simply as a mediation of the qualities of light and of separation, (Moerdijk, 1925-52) there was a reintroduction of non-figurative indexical symbols by Daan Kesting and Leo Theron in the 1960s which has grown into layered, referential symbolism. The mediating role of windows has moved from maintaining the status quo to facilitating engagement with meaning in the last 50 years.

**Key words:** stained glass windows, symbolic visual meaning, Afrikaans Dutch Reformed Churches

## **Les vitraux comme passeurs de tradition et du sens des écritures**

L'église médiévale a utilisé le vitrail comme intermédiaire entre les Écritures latines et les laïcs alphabètes. Suite à la Réforme, la tradition calviniste a évité le symbolisme visuel. Au sein de l'Église réformée néerlandaise d'Afrique du Sud, l'utilisation du symbolisme a évolué, depuis un symbolisme à la fois littéral (fondé sur les Écritures) et physique (fondé sur les sacrements) vers la réintroduction récente d'un symbolisme visuel par le moyen des vitraux. Bien que ce phénomène ait commencé simplement comme une médiation des qualités de la lumière et de la séparation (Moerdijk, 1925-52), des symboles indexicaux non-figuratifs furent réintroduits par Daan Kesting et Leo Theron dans les années 1960, et se sont développés vers un symbolisme référentiel et stratifié. Le rôle d'intermédiaire joué par le vitrail a donc évolué au cours des cinquante dernières années, de la reproduction d'un status quo vers la facilitation de l'engagement à travers le sens transmis.

**Mots clés:** vitraux, signification symbolique visuelle, Église réformée néerlandaise d'Afrique du sud

This research into the changing role of the stained glass window as a form of visual mediation in Dutch Reformed churches in South Africa came about as a result of a commission to restore the windows of the Witbank Dutch Reformed Church in 2004, but to modify certain symbolism. This confronts one with questions about the stained glass window as a mediator of meaning.

The medieval church first used stained glass windows as a stated attempt at visual mediation between the Latin scriptural narrative and a largely illiterate laity. Any attempt at this type of visual mediation will by definition reflect the church and the artist's interpretation of scripture, but even more so their views on how art and architecture can and should mediate church agendas. This can also be exploited in situations where viewers do not have easy access to scripture in an understandable form to be able to verify the mediated message.

In gothic cathedrals, the scriptures that were illustrated were reminders of stories rather than of spiritual principles. The images in the windows took the form of indexical symbolic images, while figures identified by symbolic coding represented biblical characters, e.g. a man holding a key would be recognized as St Peter. These images were hierarchically ordered according to the principles of the scholastic movement within the architecture (Panofsky 1976). In due course some of the images of saints attained iconic status as people came to pray to the image in the stained glass window.

This constituted one of the key objections to figurative decoration by Reformers such as John Calvin. Martin Luther's aim in 1517 was to restore the supremacy of scripture, which stated in a passage such as Ex.20:4-5 that "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them" (King James Authorized).

This does not rule out decoration or symbolism, of which the sacraments remain a key example, but as so often happens when movements gain momentum, the Reformation did at times degenerate into a destructive rampage against anything associated with the Roman Catholic Church. At the height of the Reformation, reformers zealously destroyed stained glass windows, for example when the old Roman Catholic church of Amsterdam was taken over by the Protestants. The stained glass windows in the Amsterdam Zuidkerk were replaced by plain windows in the seventeenth century after this formerly Roman Catholic church reformed. Calvinistic churches in the Lowlands took a more ascetic stand on decoration than the Lutherans. They generally eschewed any decoration that could be described as “an image” and discarded visual symbolism apart from the sacraments.

The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) of the Netherlands was founded at the Synod of Emden in 1571 and was the official church of the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) at the time when they established a settlement at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. The DEIC demanded mandatory DRC church attendance from its employees (Hopkins 1965: 15) and had DRC ministers on its payroll to oversee its colonies under the authority of the Classis of Amsterdam. The DRC and DEIC policy was that the only mediation between the spoken or written words of (understandable) Dutch scripture and the church membership should be a sermon by a properly qualified minister of religion, or the official sermon book. In the seventeenth century a sick-comforter (appointed as a reader by the church) was recalled from the Cape for talking about the scriptures that he read instead of adhering to the prescribed sermon readings (Hopkins 1965: 14-15). Neither free thinking nor visual mediation were encouraged.

The first church services in the Cape were held in the castle, but as the congregation outgrew these premises, a first church building was built just below the company (DEIC) gardens adjacent to the slave lodge in 1704 (Hopkins 1965: 53). Most of the Cape church buildings had windows of clear drawn glass until well into the nineteenth century. This was mainly a budgetary consideration, as all glass was imported from Europe. An example is the meeting house, Cape Town, 1804, (figure 1) which was built by the missionary societies (Museum Service of the Western Cape: 5) as a church mainly for the slaves, who were not welcomed in the “Groote Kerk” (great church), frequented by Company officials with more grandiose aspirations. The Groote Kerk was enlarged in 1753 .

By 1841 the Groote Kerk had to be rebuilt because of structural problems to the roof and insufficient foundation strength to support the new roof. It was redesigned by Hermann Schutte (Oberholster, Malan 1972: 10). Only the old clock tower remained. In the existing building, the clear drawn glass windows are surmounted by non-symbolic leaded glass fanlights using cathedral glass in pastel colours (figure 2). This window decoration befitted the status of the leading church in the Cape, but still stringently avoided any mediation of meaning. Dutch Reformed churches in the Cape hinterland generally had clear glass windows, understandable since the imported glass still had to be brought from Cape Town by ox wagon.

Church-goers looked through the clear glass panes without making any personal connection between scriptural principles and the harsh realities that Company slaves were being sold and beaten on the front door step of the church. The fact that church officials were in the pay of the



**Figure 1**  
**Plain drawn glass window, Missionary Society meeting house, 1804, Cape Town.**



**Figure 2**  
**Left: The Grootte Kerk (1753, Cape Town) in the 1820s, with the slave lodge to the left, Elliott collection Cape Archive, (Hopkins 1965: 55) Right: Leaded glass fanlight, Grootte Kerk, Schutte, 1841).**

DEIC at the time and all DRC church building was done by the DEIC undoubtedly contributed to a situation where church windows were used to mediate a comfortable insulation between religiousness inside the church and the application of scriptural principles to life outside, whether the windows were clear or (later) visually obscure.

The DEIC did not allow churches other than the DRC to operate in the Cape until 1778 (Hofmeyr, Pillay 1994: 25) when a Lutheran congregation was allowed in Cape Town. Freedom of religion only came later. In 1806 the Cape became a British Colony, the DEIC was no longer present and a much stronger Anglican Church presence developed. Protestant churches other than the DRC had different decorative traditions and were generally importing stained glass windows (or artists) from Europe by the second half of the nineteenth century.



**Figure 3**  
**Cross and star motifs in Berlin Missionary Society church Botshabelo, 1873, leaded engraved flashed glass.**



**Figure 4**  
**Meyer, Detail from *The Last Supper*, 1886, vitreous paints and silver stain on leaded antique glass, St George's Cathedral, Cape Town.**

The Lutheran Church tended to use non-figurative symbols such as the cross or the star of Bethlehem as motifs in windows cf. in the Berlin Missionary society church at Botshabelo, Middelburg, Mpumalanga, 1873 (figure 3) while the Anglican Church seamlessly continued the figurative tradition of the Roman Catholic Church with windows depicting saints or biblical

scenes, such as the Last Supper window in the old St George's cathedral, Cape Town, done by Meyer of Munich, 1886 (figure 4) (Hugo, van der Bijl 1963).

Both these Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church established mission churches in Southern Africa which often made use of stained glass windows to visually mediate the Scriptural message to the illiterate in much the same way as the original gothic cathedrals did in Europe. These windows were often funded from and manufactured in the churches' countries of origin. This did not happen in the Dutch Reformed Church, which did not concentrate on missionary activity while under DEIC rule. It later adopted a policy of establishing a separate church structure for missionary congregations with separate funding structures. These daughter churches did not have the means for luxuries such as stained glass windows.

Around this time sizeable migrations of Dutch speaking farmers left the British Cape Colony to seek political autonomy (The "Great Trek"). Although they were generally strongly religious and still considered themselves as part of the DRC, they did not have church buildings for the time that they were on the move. When they eventually established independent Boer Republics their church buildings were in much the same style as those they had left behind.

Changes in the style of Afrikaans church-building started to develop after the devastation of the Great South African war, when Afrikaners in the defeated Boer republics started to rebuild their communities with church buildings as the remaining expression of their Afrikaner identity. It was at this time that Gerard Moerdijk (1890-1958), one of the first Afrikaans-speaking architects, started to promote the idea of an eclectic "uniquely Afrikaans" church style (Moerdijk 1919) which centered around the reformed lithurgy, avoiding any architectural elements that could be associated with Roman Catholic traditions. Between 1925 and 1952, Moerdijk designed or renovated more than 160 Afrikaans Protestant churches all over South Africa, making an indelible imprint on DRC architecture.



**Figure 5**  
Gerhard Moerdijk, Suid-Oos Pretoria Dutch reformed Church and window detail, 1927, Pretoria, leaded amber commercial glass.



**Figure 6**  
Neethling & Bosman architects, Groenkloof Dutch reformed Church, 1969, Pretoria, blue cathedral glass in steel frame.

Moerdijk introduced the idea of mediating light quality with strongly coloured glass, sometimes leaded into geometric designs, e.g. the Dutch Reformed Church Suid-Oos Pretoria (Moerdijk, 1927) (figure 5). He used commercial patterned glass (available after 1888), mainly from Belgium, in deep ambers, reds and (less often) blues. He used this glass to create a formal internal space that was totally divorced from the world outside, glowing with warm light, in which the windows mediated separation: a visual equivalent of the political agenda of apartheid

which grew to its full strength during this time and was promoted in these very spaces through the mediation of ministers who were members of the Afrikaner Broederbond. Villa Vicencio stated that “the Afrikaner churches saw their primary role to lie in maintaining Afrikaner unity, providing extensive moral and ideological support for the Afrikaner cause” (Hofmeyr et al. 2001: 132). The extent and success of the promotion of apartheid through the DRC is clearly described by Nico Smith (Smith 2009).

The strength of promoting political agendas from the pulpit was vested in the fact that the Afrikaner had a strong tradition of religiousness and respect for “learned” authority in the generations after the “Great Trek” when few Afrikaners had had the opportunity for formal learning. For laity, questioning opinions proclaimed from the pulpit was generally unthinkable.

Moerdijk’s approach to church design lived on in the DRC and was continued by other architects in more modern architectural language for another generation or two, e.g. the Dutch Reformed Church Groenkloof, Pretoria (Neethling and Bosman, 1969) (figure 6).

In the early 1960s, for the first time in four centuries, the Calvinistic tradition of windows which should not express meaning was challenged. People started to realize that during the zealous reforms of the early 1500s, a rich element of symbolic meaning had been lost. In theology the church’s traditional dogmatic approach to the interpretation of scripture had been challenged and hermeneutics as a logic in itself validated a more literary approach alongside the traditional exegesis from original language texts. The general disillusionment with the cold generality of modernism was making itself felt in architecture, where critical regionalism was gaining ground, and a general desire for warmth and specific meaning was gradually replacing the view that “less is more” (Ludwig Mies van der Rohe)

In this climate new Protestant theological movements in the Netherlands and Scandinavia in the early 1960s started advocating the reintroduction of symbolism in the church, both in church architecture and in the church service. Windows containing non-figurative visual symbolism started to mediate between the Calvinistic churches’ dogmatic stand against images and the desire to express meaning. One of the Afrikaans architects to promote this first was Antonie Smit (Oxley 1994: 81).

In Europe this movement was led by theologians such as Rev. Blanckesteijn, Rev. Overbosch and Karl Sijmons who were key influences on the architect Daniel Petrus Kesting (b.1933) according to himself. He became the champion of symbolism in Afrikaans Protestant church design. He introduced the idea to the synods of the different Dutch reformed churches in South Africa, urging that the synods should document church policy on church design- something which had not happened at any formal level prior to that, although an architect such as Moerdijk published his own theories and recommendations on the subject with the blessing of the leading theologian, J.D. Kestell, in his preface to Moerdijk’s book (Moerdijk 1919).

Kesting had graduated in architecture from the University of Pretoria in 1957 (Kesting 2004), with a keen interest in church design and the current theological trends in Europe. He visited the Netherlands in 1964 to research current church architecture. He had introduced and promoted the use of symbolism in his own church designs before this time, but returned to present himself to the synods as the acknowledged expert on the subject. Between 1966 and 1980 he was appointed as architectural advisor to synodal commissions on church architecture in all three white Afrikaans reformed churches (le Roux 2008), where the principles were fixed that the design should emphasize the centrality of scripture and that symbolism should be used to reinforce scriptural meaning. In 1978 he obtained his D.Arch. at the University of Port Elizabeth in Afrikaans church design (Kesting 1978).

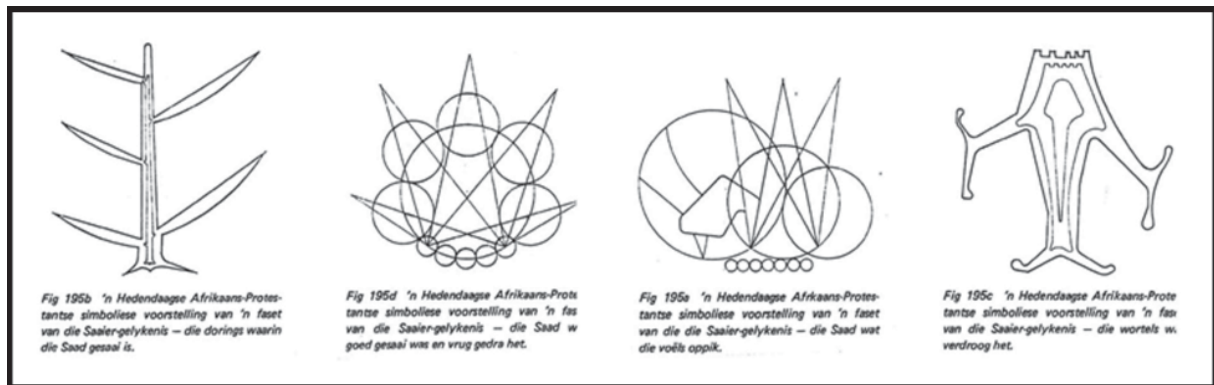


Figure 7

Examples of D.P Kesting's own symbolic images for Afrikaans churches (Kesting 1978).

Kesting introduced eclectic, non-figurative symbols from a variety of origins in his own designs. Some were actually figurative images which had been simplified and stylized to become more graphic. His particular interpretation of highlighting the “centrality of the scripture” was to grade the colours of the windows from dark at the back of the church to light towards the pulpit and lectern. One can see a variety of his own suggested symbolic designs in illustrations from his D.Arch thesis (Kesting 1978) (figure 7).

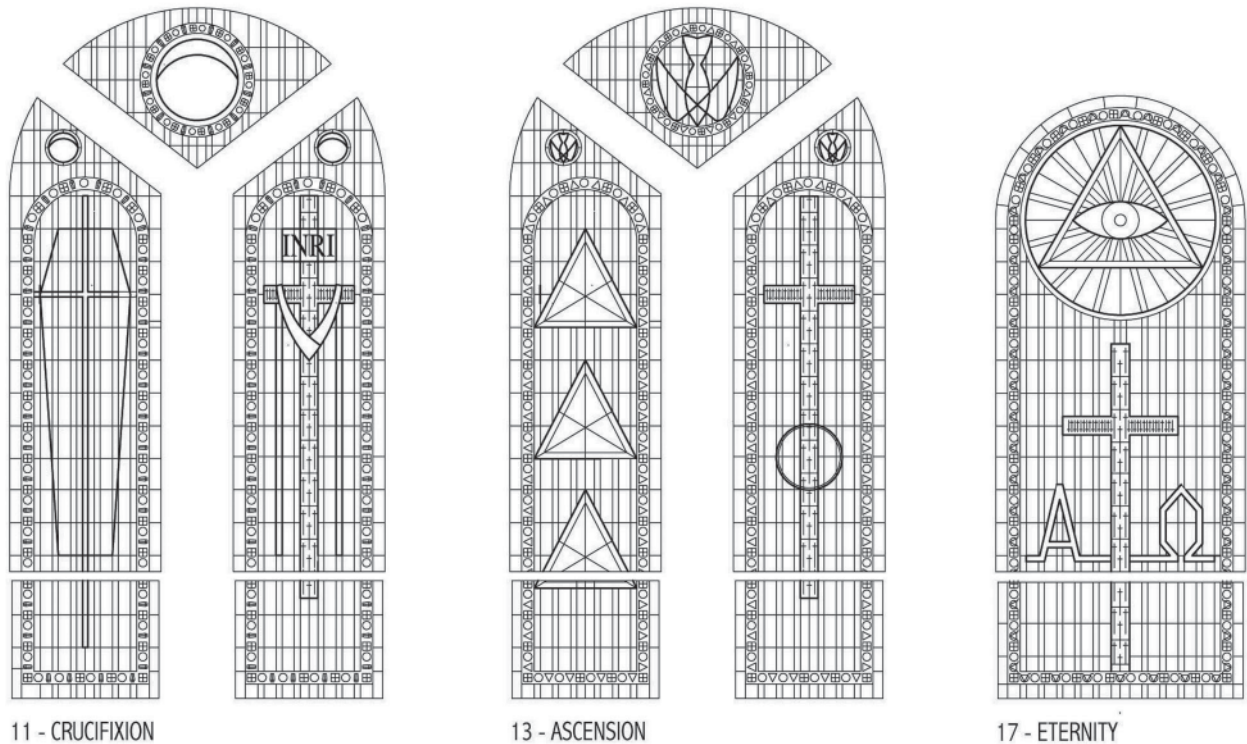


Figure 8

Designs by D.P.Kesting for church calendar windows in the Witbank DRC, 1962.

When asked to do church designs, Kesting invariably tried to persuade his clients to embrace symbolism. Budgetary considerations probably outweighed resistance to change, and some congregations were willing to try symbolic windows if it would not add to the cost. In such cases Kesting opted for the use of “Glassparence” paints on plate glass, a relatively inexpensive and supposedly permanent solution. He designed the window trace lines himself and had them painted. An early example is the series of “church calendar” windows that Kesting suggested to the Witbank DRC when Kesting and Brand were appointed to do refurbishments (Kesting 1963: 16) (1960 - 1963). These illustrate a typical vocabulary of symbols from different origins, (figure

8) including the “all-seeing eye”. Kesting himself mentioned that there had been objections to the use of this symbol in a church context from some theologians, (Kesting 20 June 2007) but that he had overruled these objections on the grounds that this was an accepted European architectural tradition. In the well-cultivated climate of uncritical acceptance by church membership, there was probably little real engagement with the symbolic meaning portrayed in windows at this time. It was rather that incorporating “stained glass” windows were the latest trend and that new, attractive developments helped to mediate acceptance by an uncritical church membership of what had become a highly politicized state religion.

When Kesting could, he persuaded churches to commission stained glass artists. The most notable of these was Leo Theron (Oxley 1994: 79-85), a fine arts graduate from Rhodes University and the École des Beaux Arts, who first worked in mosaics and frescoes before specializing in dalles de verre. He studied with various artists in France, but was especially influenced by Gabriel Loire. Theron’s father was a minister in the DRC and he had a rich scriptural background, describing his windows as “his prayers” (lecture, 1990). He used stained glass windows to mediate richer meaning from scriptural content.



**Figure 9**

**Left: J. van Wijk, church interior Studente-Oord DRC, 1967, Pretoria.**

**Right: Leo Theron, dalle de verre windows with cross motif in the Studente-Oord DRC, 1967, Pretoria.**

Kesting was in partnership with Jan van Wijk at the time of the design of the Universiteitsoord DRC in Pretoria. According to him, they agreed to split up their partnership over this project since Van Wijk chose tectonics as his priority, while Kesting put acoustics first (Kesting 20 June 2007). In the end the church chose Van Wijk’s design and it was completed in 1967, incorporating magnificent walls of dalle de verre by Leo Theron to mediate light quality. Although the emphasis was on the abstract use of colour, Theron incorporated the occasional use of the cross symbol in these windows (figure 9).

The biggest Kesting-Theron partnership was on the Dutch Reformed Church Burgerspark, Pretoria in 1969. Kesting again used the church calendar theme, grading the colour towards the pulpit in his favourite manner, but here Leo Theron had the chance to integrate different layers of symbolic scriptural meaning into the design, unfolding from West to East along the magnificent south wall of the church (figure 10).

A later example of Leo Theron’s work is found in the DRC Arcadia, Pretoria, (1980s) where he has chosen symbolic themes such as the tree of life and a reinterpretation of a gothic rose window in modern style for individual windows. This is a church building which incorporates symbolism in other aspects of the architecture and decoration as well. There is also a window in the foyer which speaks of Pretoria’s jacaranda trees growing on the outside pavement, being evocative more than symbolic.

The example that best describes the unfolding history of visual symbolism in Afrikaans Dutch Reformed Churches is the Stellenbosch “Moederkerk” story, which is recounted here from documents and letters in possession of the Stellenbosch DRC building committee.



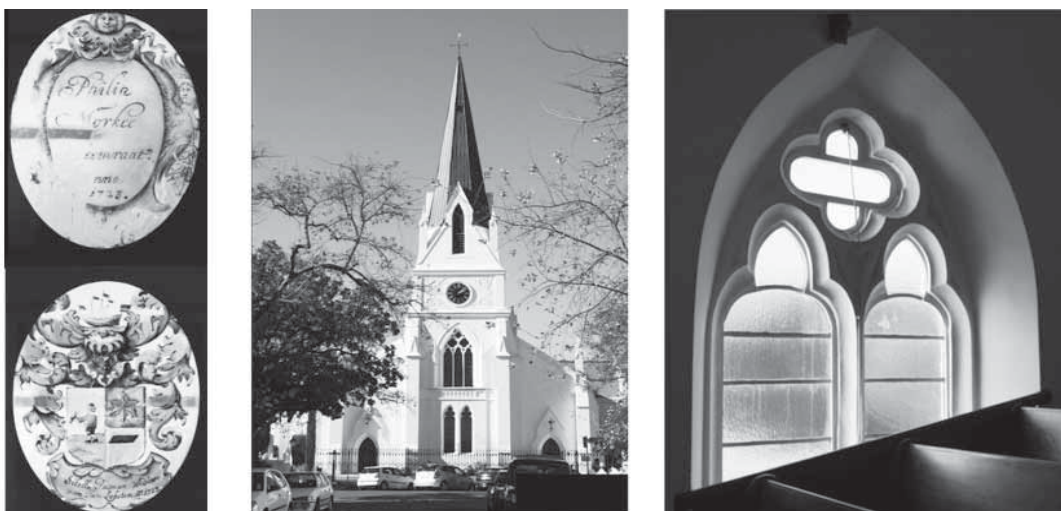
**Figure 10**

**Leo Theron, church calendar south wall of the Burgerspark Dutch Reformed Church (architect D.P.Kesting), 1968-69, dalles de verre, Pretoria.**



**Figure 11**

**Leo Theron, Tree of Life, 1980s, dalles de verre, Arcadia Dutch Reformed Church, Pretoria.**



**From left to right:**

**Figure12: Abraham de Osselaar, Donor medallions from the Stellenbosch Moederkerk of 1723, vitreous paints and silver stain on antique glass, 1725, Stellenbosch.**

**Figure 13: Carl Otto Hager, enlarged Stellenbosch Moederkerk, 1863, Stellenbosch.**

**Figure 14: Window detail from Hager church, turquoise blue cathedral glass in steel frames.**



The original timber structure of 1687 had plain, drawn glass windows. This building burnt down and was eventually replaced by the DEIC with a cruciform church in 1723. This also had clear, arched windows, but to encourage financing the church building, seventeen stained glass donor medallions were leaded into the centres of the arches, commemorating donor families (figure 12). The medallions were made by Abraham ten Osselaar of Amsterdam (Hugo, van der Bijl 1963: 80). These were done in vitreous paints and silver stains, showing either the family name or family crest, as a fund-raising device, making the point that nothing more spiritual than who had paid for the building should be expressed in church windows. When the leaded panes were eventually replaced by timber frames in 1814, more medallions were added.

When Carl Otto Hager (1813-1880s) enlarged the Moederkerk to a Neo-Gothic structure in 1862-63 (figure 13), the medallions were removed and mostly destroyed. All the windows were glazed with cool turquoise-blue cathedral glass to visually separate the inside from the outside and modify the light quality (figure 14). This remained the situation until the beginning of 1960, when a member of the church council who had seen Leo Theron's abstract work, suggested that coloured glass could be a beautiful addition to the rather cold interior of the church. As this was a congregation in an academic environment which valued the arts, the idea was accepted and in 1960 Rev Malherbe started negotiations with Leo Theron about the possibility of designing stained glass windows for the Moederkerk. Since this was a heritage building, the dalle de verre slabs would have to be fitted into the neo-gothic window frames. The church had a great many windows and there were discussions on short- and long-term strategies and costs.

In 1967 the church eventually appointed Leo Theron to execute the first few windows around the pulpit "on condition that they contained no symbolism". Theron obviously leaned in the direction of expressing symbolic meaning and had championed the new theological developments. By 1969 Rev. Malherbe put it in writing that "although our preference is for non-figurative colour compositions, the possibility of symbolic motifs is not excluded and could be considered in the case of certain windows". This had indeed been considered and approved since the first completed window in 1967 was a depiction of "the sun of righteousness", followed in the late 1960s by two sacramental windows symbolizing Baptism and Eucharist, the latter showing three crosses, a communion cup and the red of blood and wine (figure 15). This was probably a safe way to reintroduce visual symbolism, since these were symbols with which the church was well acquainted in their physical form.

By the late 1960s it was Rev. T.J. de Clercq who represented the church and a series of tall lancets illustrating Christ's "I am" statements was approved: I am the Resurrection and the Life, I am the Bread of Life, I am the Alpha and the Omega... etc. (figure 16). These were direct and visually simple metaphors, well-known to church members in their verbal form, and their symbolism was expounded in the passages of scripture to which the windows referred. These were sometimes even figurative, where the "figure" was symbolic, e.g. the Resurrected Christ standing for the Resurrection.

With each successive batch of windows that was installed, the church's enthusiasm for the project grew. Most people felt them to be a beautiful enhancement to the church building, although there was one architect who resigned from the church's building advisory committee in protest after the first windows had been installed- not because he objected to the introduction of visual symbolism, but because he objected that the richly coloured glass was inappropriate in this (neo-gothic) architectural context.

By the 1980s the nave windows had been completed and the whole church membership had become involved with the project. It was no longer just the minister who suggested themes to the artist: the congregation was involved in making suggestions for further themes to be

explored in the transept. The windows were actually mediating an active engagement between lay members of the congregation and the words of scripture. The suggestion was made that the next windows should symbolize the elders and deacons of the church, and the passages of scripture in Revelation 1 and 4<sup>1</sup>, which describe Christ addressing his church and God on his throne, surrounded by worshipping elders, were chosen (figure 17). Theron composed these windows of all the symbolic elements mentioned in these scriptures, only omitting the actual figures of God, and the symbolic meaning made a double leap from (1) scriptural descriptions of visual symbols to (2) a composition symbolizing a whole passage of scripture, which had in the eyes of this congregation come to symbolize the elders and deacons of the church.



From left to right:

Figure 15: Leo Theron, *Wine (Eucharist)*, 1969, dalles de verre, Stellenbosch Moederkerk.

Figure 16: Leo Theron, *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last*, 1972, dalles de verre, Stellenbosch Moederkerk.

Figure 17: Leo Theron, *Revelation 4*, dalles de verre, Stellenbosch Moederkerk.

Figure 18: Leo Theron, detail from *Hope*, 1998, dalles de verre, Stellenbosch Moederkerk.

The last, massive windows at the ends of the transepts were chosen to represent abstract themes such as love and hope. The “Hope” window, 1998, (figure 18) became a collage of images symbolizing hope which were no longer necessarily just metaphors used in scripture. They related the symbolism to this congregation’s experience of everyday reality, as the biblical parables did when they were first told. These symbols included images from the coat of arms of the Cape of Good Hope, an image of the actual Stellenbosch Moederkerk, crops expressing the hope of a harvest, etc. The full emergence from the cocoon of dogmatic precepts to a fully-fledged expression of visual meaning had been achieved in the forty years between 1960 and 1998, largely facilitated by this one artist.

The stained glass window in the DRC had, in the best instances, become the mediation between scriptural content and personal engagement with the meaning of these scriptures. The final proof of such an engagement is that it can motivate viewers of windows to query and challenge the visual meaning that is being expressed.

This brings us back to the story of the Witbank DRC. Kesting’s Glassparence church calendar windows of 1962 had faded badly by 2004 where exposed to the sun. Some were physically broken. As part of general building repairs, the building committee approached various stained glass artists for advice on restoration. To justify the expenditure on labour that this would entail, more permanent stained glass techniques were to be used. This would require the total remaking of the windows involved, which precipitated the issue of visual meaning.

Although the church wanted to retain the Kesting designs and restore them to their original colour intensity, according to Rev. Jan Momsen there had been an increasing number of queries and concerns from lay church members about the meaning expressed by symbols such as the all-seeing eye, which has other symbolic associations. The decision was taken that this symbol should be reconsidered when the window was remade. There was also a request that the lighter windows close to the pulpit should be darker, as the person on the pulpit experienced glare, and the light interfered with digital projection of scripture.



**Figure 19**

**Windows in the Witbank Dutch reformed Church, from left to right:**

**Far left:** Ariane Janse van Rensburg, *the Bridegroom and the bride*, 2009, enamels and silver stain on slumped and leaded glass, replacing Kesting's 1963 window. Centre left: detail of this window.

**Centre right:** D.P.Kesting, *Eternity*, 1963, glasspance paints on plate glass, as it had faded by 2004.

**Far right:** Ariane Janse van Rensburg, *Eternity*, 2006, enamels, glass confetti and silver stain on slumped and leaded glass, replacing Kesting's 1963 window.

This presented the opportunity to review and restore the visual meaning of the whole series of windows and of the individual windows to be replaced. Apart from the replacement of the one contentious symbol, any new intervention could consist of a choice of colour and texture within the original Kesting trace lines and the replacement of the border patterns in the framing arches with scriptural words with the same visual density (figure 19). Although the intervention is visually discreet, the scriptural linkage refers one visual symbol back to many layers of meaning, providing the opportunity for the window to mediate between familiar and unfamiliar meaning, inviting the viewer into an exploration and a dialogue.

According to Kesting, Rev. C.L. van Heerden chose the sequence of the church calendar for the windows. The main scriptural theme for the church was "In U lig" referring to Ps.36:9 "In thy light we shall see light". Kesting's windows roughly followed through from Advent to Pentecost, with a few non-specific windows at the end. These have now been sequentially linked to scriptural references to the future from Revelation, taking the theme through to "Eternity". The window after Pentecost was interpreted as "the Bridegroom and the bride", referring to the symbolic marriage of Christ to his church<sup>2</sup>. Other scriptural references in that window refer to Christ as the head and his church as his body<sup>3</sup>, and to the church as a temple built up of living stones (individuals)<sup>4</sup>. Kesting's original window had simply been a cross combined with a circle. The circle is now coloured and textured to catch the light and represent the head, shining with glory, while the rest of the window becomes the body. The window's original division into blocks to look like leaded glass becomes the "living stones", which are coloured with individual flashes of colour (jewels). Apart from the scriptures quoted in the window, there are multiple graphic references to other scriptures elaborating on these metaphors.

In the “Eternity” window, the theme is taken to its completion. This was the window containing the all-seeing eye which, according to Kesting, represented the presence of God. The eye however also refers back to the church theme of “In thy light we shall *see* light”. In a search for another symbol to represent eternity, various scriptures which combined the concepts of eternity, light and seeing (and blindness) were referenced<sup>5</sup>, culminating in the choice of the lamp stand as the replacement symbol<sup>6</sup>. This also refers to some restoration of sight in the Afrikaans Dutch Reformed Church which had used this as its logo, but had become blinded by political agendas.

One can trace a growing personal re-engagement with scripture amongst church members in the last decades of the twentieth century. To what extent this motivated political change and to what extent this was sparked by questions about the role the church played during apartheid, is difficult to ascertain. In the eighteenth century, the Groote Kerk had clear windows, but this did not mediate seeing social injustices when church members looked through them. There now seems to be some correlation between an increased engagement with scripture amongst church members and a willingness to see what happens beyond the windows. This takes us back to the original role of stained glass windows: to mediate an engagement with scripture, which would ideally lead to “seeing the light”. The removal of a blind eye?

The replacement of windows using these principles is an ongoing project. At present two have been installed and another two commissioned. The church has greeted this type of reinterpretation with enthusiasm and it remains to be seen whether (and how) viewers engage in the dialogue.

In conclusion, in the Afrikaans Dutch Reformed Church, the use of symbolism has developed from only the literary symbolism of scripture and the physical symbolism of the sacraments, to the reintroduction of visual symbolism into windows. Although this started simply as a mediation of the quality of light and of separation, there was a reintroduction of non-figurative indexical symbols which has grown into layered, referential symbolism.

In these three centuries, different role players have used stained glass windows to mediate different agendas in the Afrikaans Dutch reformed Church:

1600s to 1950s: the formal church structure, to maintain the status quo

1950s: the new theological movements, to facilitate an engagement with meaning

1960s -70s: architects and artists, to expand the scope of meaning that windows can express

2000+: church laity, to challenge the direction that the church has been following

The next question in a wider context should be: How can glass as a visual medium mediate shared meaning between different cultural- religious- and spiritual traditions in a heterogeneous South African society?

## Notes

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| <p>1. Rev 4:1-5</p> <p>2. The Bridegroom and the bride:<br/>Eph. 5:23-27<br/>Rev. 21:9<br/>Rev. 22:17</p> <p>3. Head and Body:<br/>Eph.1:22<br/>Col.1:18</p> <p>4. Living stones:<br/>1 Pet. 2:5<br/>Eph. 2:19-22</p> | <p>5. Seeing - light – lamps – eternity:<br/>Luk.18:41<br/>Rev. 3:17 &amp; 18<br/>Luk.11:34<br/>Eph.1:18-23<br/>2 Kor. 4:5,6<br/>Matt. 25:1-13<br/>Rev. 4:5</p> <p>6. Lamp stand:<br/>In the Old Testament, the candlestick is part of the temple furniture, symbolizing God’s</p> |
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presence (Spirit)  
 Ex.40:24-25, 34 & Zech. 4:2-6,  
 In Rev. 4:5  
 The seven lamps stand for God's Spirit.  
 Rev. 1:20 refers to the seven Asian churches as  
 being seven candlesticks and Rev. 2:4-5 warns  
 the Ephesian church that if it does not heed  
 God and return to a love relationship with Him,  
 He will remove their candlestick from its lamp  
 stand. This implies the Spirit of God visible in  
 the church.  
 Rev. 22:5 refers to believers as a city inhabited  
 by God where 'they need no candle, neither light  
 of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light'.

Matt. 5:14-16 says that believers are 'the light of  
 the world' displayed on a candlestick. 'Let your  
 light so shine before men that they may see your  
 good works and give glory to your Father which  
 is in heaven.'

Luke 11:34-35. 'The light of the body is the eye:  
 therefore when thine eye is single, thy body is  
 full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body  
 is also full of darkness. Take heed therefore that  
 the light in thee be not darkness.'

This reconnects the lamp stand with the original  
 intention of the all-seeing eye, which Kesting  
 described as the presence of God.

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 Lapa-uitgewers.

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