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# The Willet Stained Glass Studios

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July 13, 1972

## GARDNER-WEBB COLLEGE

Boiling Springs, North Carolina

The three-lancet chancel window recently designed for the J. R. Dover, Jr. Memorial Chapel by the Willet Studios of Philadelphia is enhanced by the use of gold. Sculptured gold windows were developed by the Willet Studio in 1950 as a solution to the problem of the appearance of a stained glass window at night when no light shines through the glass. Metallic sculpture, or repousse, is an ancient art medium. Here it is combined with an equally ancient art form, the stained glass window. Over the window is superimposed a design cut from sheet lead which is formed in relief by being tooled on the underside to give a bas-relief quality, and is also incised with slits of varying widths to let the richly colored glass background shine through in the daytime. The fact that the sculptured lead surface has been "flown" with twenty-three Karat gold leaf is the secret of the brilliant metallic night effect which enables the window to glow under the interior surface illumination.

When first devised, the sculptured gold was based on leaded stained glass windows. More recently, faceted glass set in epoxy resin has been used. These glasses, about an inch in thickness, but possibly up to two inches for



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special effects, contribute an equal brilliance of color under transmitted daylight. Thus is assured the breathtaking radiance and complete purity of color which are the outstanding characteristics of the medium.

The explanation of the scenes and symbols in the windows is as follows: Across the bottom of the three lancets are symbolized praise, prayer and the word of God. The first two are derived from the Psalms. Many of these, most notably the one hundred and fiftieth, exhort man to praise God with musical instruments. Thus for the symbol for praise an archaic trumpet and harp and music notes are used. Psalm 141:2 reads: "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense". So a censor is used for the prayers of the faithful rising to God. The open book is the Gospel, the word of God.

The three lancet window has been conceived as denoting the Trinity. The first lancet on the left begins the story at the bottom with the creation of the world. The hand of God the Father extends toward Adam who sits in the Garden of Eden. Sun, moon, stars and planets are in the sky. In the medallion above the fall from grace is symbolized by a serpent twined round a tree from which hangs an apple.

Next above is Isaiah at the moment when the seraphim purifies his lips with a burning coal from the altar of sacrifice, enabling him to prophesy. His vision of the Messiah is in a vignette beside him. Above are his prophecies of



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the peaceable Kingdom; the lion and the lamb lying down together and the peace symbol derived from the semafore signal for nuclear disarmament which has grown popular recently.

At the top of the first lancet is the Incarnation of the Christ Child. Under the star of Bethlehem is Jesus in the manger bed, guarded by Mary and Joseph, whose staff bursts into bloom as did Aaron's rod.

The story of God, the Son, resumes in the center lancet with the baptism of Jesus by John in the River Jordan. John's staff terminates in a cross lacking one cross arm to show that the Crucifixion had not yet occurred. Over Jesus' head the dove of the Holy Spirit descends.

The medallion next above contains a symbol of service; Jesus washing Peter's feet. At the center is the Last Supper. Christ stands holding the chalice and bread. His twelve Apostles are seated around the table. Judas may be seen on the right, about to leave with a bag of money.

In the medallion above, Passion symbols denote His Crucifixion: the cross is encircled with the crown of thorns and nails. To the left of the cross is a ladder and on the right the reed and hyssop. The latter symbolizes the purging of sins of the world, resulting from the Saviour's death on the cross.

At the top of the window Christ bursts from the empty tomb as the seeds burst from the splitting pomegranate, the symbol below His feet. His type, the



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Lamb of God, stands at the apex of the window, bearing aloft the banner of the victory of life over sin and death just like the one the Christ holds.

The work of the Holy Spirit guiding the Church begins with the faithful few who gathered together in the upper room to celebrate Pentecost. Suddenly there was a sound like a rushing wind and tongues of flame seemed to settle over each countenance. Peter is shown in the midst of the group. It was his sermon on this occasion that resulted in the mass conversion of three thousand people. The Holy Spirit is shown as a dove hovering over the scene.

At the top of the window under the crown and palms, symbolizing eternal reward, Christ in glory is seated on a throne. He judges the souls of the departed and consigns them to blessing or damnation, symbolized by rays of light on His right hand and flames and lightning on His left. The medallion contains a door upon which is a form of a Chi Rho (XP) ancient monogram for Christ for He said, "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, shall be saved" (John 10:9).

Between the door and the Holy Spirit dove is a decorative version of the conflict between good and evil, the war between Michael and the angels against Satan and his devils who were cast out of Heaven toward earth, as described in the twelfth chapter of Revelation.