



Gospels in Glass

Stained Glass from churches in the southern province of Sri Lanka

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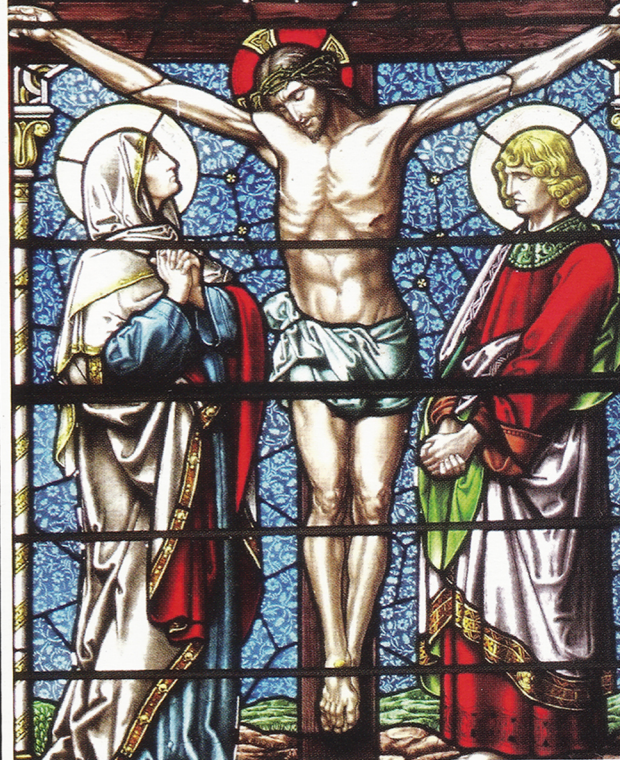
Popular since the early middle ages, stained glass window is an art form, used primarily in cathedrals, churches, chapels, and other such religious buildings. This has been a method of enhancing the windows and complementing the already magnificent architecture of these structures.

Stained glass windows are often viewed as translucent pictures, a complex mosaic of bits of coloured glass joined with lead into an elaborate pattern, which gives a brightly vibrant effect when sunlight passes through them.

As churches became larger and lighter in structure, stained glass was used to fill the increasing large volume within them. Some portrayed complex abstract arts, while others were with a simple depiction. Usually these glazed arts are decorated in various bright colours such as red, purple, yellow, orange and green.

In ancient times, stained glass was a way of teaching Bible stories to ordinary people and also as a means of communicating complex biblical narratives for a largely illiterate population. The use of





stain glass created the atmosphere that the church is the special sacred home of an all powerful God, by creating a association between heaven and earth, which in turn bringing the souls of men closer to God. The designs always convey a religious message that keeps the believer of the church connected with the teachings of the Bible.

Stained glass windows can be mainly categorised as ornamental non figurative windows and ornamental figurative windows. Ornamental non figurative windows are stained glass windows reflecting a particular prototype, which are located either around the walls of the churches or in the niches of the sanctuary or the facades of the churches. Figurative windows depict a thematic image of a particular biblical episode or a figure of prominence in the Bible.

The life of Christ, which includes the story of the birth, life, passion, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus is the popularly used theme in churches. This was done as a continuous sequence of pictures as a progression with time. The life of the Virgin Mary was another theme which,

usually consisted of depictions of the scenes from the life of Mary, especially her presence at the Crucifixion, Pentecost, and her death.

Many churches are dedicated to a particular biblical or early Christian saint and bear the name of that saint. The lives of the saints are often celebrated in decorations of figurative stained glass to encourage worshipers to emulate the piety, or to reinforce faith of saint. Sometimes saints were shown together in a sort of pictorial gallery.

The depictions of prophets, apostles and others associated with the church often have a place in the decorative schemes. The teachings in the Bible, which consists of the gospels, parables and lessons are also seen in some figurative stain glass in most churches.

Today, one can find the religious stained glass windows only in the remains of the old churches built during the early nineties. The style of the portraits across the country, are alike, but they never fail to explain the religious stories, in their own picturesque language. ▣

