

GROUP OF STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS BY JÓZEF MEHOFFER IN THE GRAUER FAMILY FUNERAL CHAPEL IN OPAVA

Summary

The subject of the presented study is the set of six stained-glass windows by Józef Mehoffer, destined for the funeral chapel of the Grauer family in Opava, designed and realized in 1901. Though well-preserved *in situ*, the windows have awaited till now a discussion and publication of the photographic documentation. The authorial replicas of two of them: *Faith-Hope-Love* and *Caritas* can be found in the National Museum in Cracow, on the permanent display in The Józef Mehoffer House, as deposits of the artist's family. The cardboards for the execution of the entire set remain in the possession of the National Museum in Warsaw.

The Grauer family of merchants and entrepreneurs from Opava commissioned the windows for their funeral chapel newly erected in the Neo-Gothic style at the Opavian cemetery. The only person to be resting there at the time was Regina Grauer, Ignacy's wife, who had died in 1898. The iconographic programme of the stained-glass windows is doubtlessly connected with her person.

The Opavian stained-glass windows belong to the artist's most interesting achievements in this field. Two pairs of them appear in the side-walls: *Faith-Hope-Love* and *Caritas* on the right and *Mary's Dormition* and *Angel at a Tomb* on the left. The two remaining ones have been placed in the upper part of the gable ends: *Archangel of the Last Judgement* (facing the entrance) and *Angel of Eternal Light* (above the entrance). The windows, maintained in the Art Nouveau aesthetics, at the same time became subordinated to the Neo-Gothic architecture of the chapel (especially in what concerns the side-wall windows), which is manifested in the composition of the scenes and especially in the introduction of Gothic ornamental motifs, stylized in the spirit of Art Nouveau.

As far as the iconography goes, the artist remained faithful to the tradition of Christian art, performing, however, a peculiar updating and fabularization of certain representations.

The subject of this set of stained-glass windows is death, perceived as the moment of passage into eternal life. Thus, it is not the sorrow caused by leaving this world that dominates here but the feeling of joy, springing from the belief in the soul's salvation and entrance into eternal happiness through the gates of Paradise.

It is worth noticing that the above-mentioned leading idea found its full expression in the stained-glass window *Faith-Hope-Love*, with the remaining scenes being actually its complement. This window carries also the majority of references

to the intellectual trends and artistic climate of its epoch. Moreover, it gained a sort of continuation in Mehoffer's *oeuvre*, for it underwent a transformation into the composition *Vita somnium breve*, first (1902) conceived as an *ex-libris* for the National Museum in Cracow, and later (1904) realized in the form of a stained-glass window in The Stained-Glass Workshop of Antoni Tuch and Władysław Ekielski (later of S. G. Żeleński, who in 1906 executed an authorial replica). This time, in *Vita somnium breve*, the idea of eternity and immortality was referred to the concept of Art pictured in the personifications of three fine arts: Sculpture, Architecture and Painting.