

New Light on *The Light of the World*

Bronwyn Hughes



Detail from Fig. 1. William Holman Hunt. *The Light of the World*. 1851-53.

Jeremy Maas summed up William Holman Hunt's painting, *The Light of the World* (1851-53), as "one of the most celebrated religious pictures ever painted."¹ Not only did *The Light of the World* (Fig. 1) become a religious phenomenon in its own right, it inspired donors and influenced generations of artists to create untold numbers of stained glass windows over more than a century. In Australia (and proportionally in New Zealand) hundreds have been recorded, making this the most popular subject for stained glass windows during the first half of the twentieth century.² It was remarkable for the almost universal acceptance of the image by clergy, clients, congregations and commissioners in every state and across a range of Protestant denominations.³ More than two hundred examples have been recorded in city, town and rural locations

¹ J. Maas: *Holman Hunt and The Light of the World*, Aldershot 1987, p. ix. The original *The Light of the World* is oil and gold leaf on canvas; 1851-52, 1852-53, retouched 1858, restored and relined 1886; bought by Thomas Combe, August 1853 for £450, bequeathed to his wife Martha (1872); presented by her to Keble College, Oxford, 1873. For full details, see J. Bronkhurst: *William Holman Hunt: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 2006, I, cat. 74.

² A full New Zealand survey of *The Light of the World* windows has yet to be made. Fiona Ciaran: *Stained Glass Windows of Canterbury, New Zealand*, (1998), lists twenty for the city and surrounding district. From this sample, two were installed prior to the antipodean tour and two more in the immediate years following; the remainder were installed from 1917 to 1985.

³ Although *The Light of the World* did not become part of the Roman Catholic Church's stained glass tradition, reproductions of the painting were accepted into Roman Catholic homes, schools and chapels as an appropriate Christian image.

throughout Australia, from Cottesloe, Western Australia, to Bega, New South Wales, and from Townsville, North Queensland, to Hobart in Southern Tasmania. In showing how this image not only came to be accepted as an exemplar of Pre-Raphaelite art by critics but also attained wide popular approval and was sanctioned as an appropriate theme for stained glass, this paper follows the transition of *The Light of the World* through different media, across the world and into the twentieth century.

The Light of the World was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1854, where its critical acclaim was far from guaranteed.⁴ In his 1905 memoir, Hunt recalled the reaction of his neighbour, the philosopher, Thomas Carlyle, who visited the studio to view the work; his criticism was uncompromising: “You call that thing, I ween, a picture of Jesus Christ,” and dubbed it “a mere papistical fantasy.”⁵ The press reviews of the RA show were scathing; Walter Thornbury in the *Athenaeum* called it “. . . most eccentric and mysterious . . . the face of this wild fantasy, though earnest and religious, is not that of a Saviour . . . [the picture is] altogether a failure”; the *Art-Journal* noted that the “drawing of the foot and hands is extremely indifferent . . . the colour generally is highly objectionable—it is everywhere heavy and opaque.”⁶ Then, and since, it has been the subject of art historical and religious dissection and popular dissent.⁷ John Ruskin, already well-disposed towards Pre-Raphaelite ideals, which were much aligned with his own, rescued the failing *The*

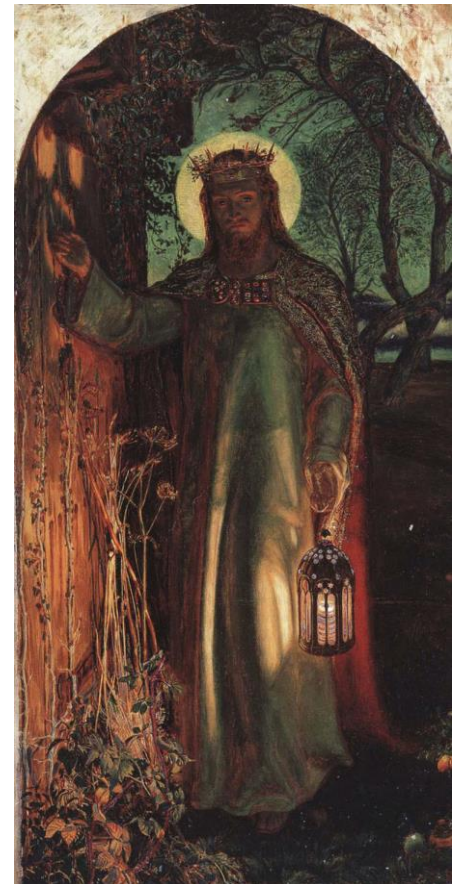


Fig. 1. William Holman Hunt. *The Light of the World*. 1851-53. Oil on canvas over panel, arched top, 125.5 x 59.8 cm. (Photo courtesy of Keble College, Oxford).

⁴ Maas, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

⁵ W. H. Hunt: *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, London 1905. Also quoted in Maas, *op. cit.*, p. 46. H. W. Shrewsbury: *Brothers in Art: Studies in William Holman Hunt, O.M., D.C.L. and John Everett Millais, Bart., D.C.L., P.R.A.*, London 1920, p. 113.

⁶ Maas, *op. cit.*, p. 61 and Shrewsbury, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-14.

⁷ A century and a half later Laura Freeman, waspishly reviewing the exhibition *Pre-Raphaelites: Beauty and Rebellion*, Walker Gallery Liverpool (12 Feb.—5 June 2016) for the *Spectator*, deplored the lifelessness of the paintings and questioned the taste of patrons who bought these works. L. Freeman: “Twee, Treacly and Tearful: Pre-Raphaelites at the Walker Art Gallery Reviewed,” *The Spectator*, 27 Feb. 2016. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/02/> Accessed 19 Jan. 2018.

Light of the World with a long letter to *The Times*, published in May 1854.⁸ In contrast to other critics, he championed the work as “the principal Pre-Raphaelite picture in the Exhibition,” justifying his comments by setting forth his “palpable interpretation” of the work and its symbolism.⁹ While he did not allay criticism, it piqued public interest and all London flocked to see it.¹⁰

William Holman Hunt (1827-1910) was one of the founding members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a small band of young artists who found the prevailing rule of the Academy restrictive and who sought to create a new artistic spirit. Their guiding principles included the considered selection of worthy and uplifting subjects that were to be interpreted faithfully and treated with minute attention to detail in order to maintain truth to nature. Hunt had a typical Victorian upbringing that was underpinned by strong moral and religious principles, which increased in depth and fervour during his twenties. George P. Landow characterised Hunt’s religious views as “an intensely personal mixture of evangelical and Broad Church Protestantism,” notably in his literal conception of the Bible, his insistence on strict morality, and his use of typological symbolism.¹¹ As a young artist he believed that Christianity was “the sublime ethical formula that alone could redeem the world” and throughout his life he upheld a personal vision that God speaks to man through nature.¹² It is therefore not surprising that in *The Light of the World* Hunt carefully interwove Christian ideals and accurately painted natural forms to create his allegorical painting.¹³

In accordance with the Brotherhood’s principles, the subject of the painting was carefully chosen, in this instance from the Book of Revelation, 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.”¹⁴ The title “the light of the world” is used elsewhere in the bible and is consistent with the reference in John 12.46: “I am come a light into the world . . .” and more precisely in John 8.12: “I am the light of the world . . .”¹⁵

⁸ *The Times*, 5 May 1854, p. 9.

⁹ Maas, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-64.

¹⁰ Bronkhurst, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

¹¹ G. Landow: “Replete with Meaning: William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism,” *The Victorian Web*, <http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/whh/replete/effect.html> Accessed 30 Oct. 2017.

¹² Maas, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹³ Jeremy Maas notes that this was one of a series of works which glorified God with almost missionary zeal.

¹⁴ All verses taken from the King James Version (KJV) of the Holy Bible, SPCK, Oxford, 1872.

¹⁵ Christ as “the light of the world” also appears in Matthew 5:14 and 2 Peter 1:9 (KJV).

Holman Hunt explained the symbolism in *The Light of the World* in his 1905 book, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*:

The closed door was the obstinately shut mind, the weeds the cumber of daily neglect, the accumulated hindrances of sloth; the orchard the garden of delectable fruit for the dainty feast of the soul. The music of the still small voice was the summons to the sluggard to awaken and become a zealous labourer under the Divine Master; the bat flitting about only in darkness was a natural symbol of ignorance; the kingly and priestly dress of Christ, the sign of His reign over the body and the soul, to them who could give their allegiance to Him and acknowledge God's overrule. In making it a night scene, lit mainly by the lantern carried by Christ, I had followed metaphorical explanation in the Psalms, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path," with also the accordant allusions by St. Paul to the sleeping soul, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand."¹⁶

However, at the 1854 Royal Academy exhibition there was little understanding of the depth of meaning behind the painting; *The Art Journal* condemned it, along with his other painting, *The Great Awakening*:

Mr. Hunt stands this year almost alone as [Pre-Raffaellite] [*sic*] high priest . . . no class of the public will give any portion of their admiration or their sympathy to the two works of this artist—the one incomprehensible, the other odious.¹⁷

A relatively small number of visitors saw the work itself. It was only after an engraving made from the original was issued, and cannily marketed, that the ultimate success of *The Light of the World* was assured. Copyright of the painting was bought by the successful art print publisher, Ernest Gambart (1814-1902), who was an astute businessman and scoured the market for suitable pictures for reproduction. The "three-shilling steel print" was popular, especially within the burgeoning middle-class market.¹⁸ He engaged the services of William Henry Simmons (1811-82) to engrave the plates to a high standard, and to ensure the black-and-white medium remained as truthful as possible to the artist's intent. Gambart maximised opportunities by exhibiting *The Light of the World* throughout Britain and had his agent on hand at all venues to

¹⁶ Hunt, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 350-51.

¹⁷ "The Royal Academy. The Exhibition 1854," *The Art Journal*, 1 June 1854, p. 158.

¹⁸ G. P. Landow: "Victorian Art Criticism and the Rise of a Middle-Class Audience," *The Victorian Web*, www.victorianweb.org/authors/ruskin/finearts/criticism1.html Accessed 19 January 2018; J. Maas: *Gambart: Prince of the Victorian Art World*, London, 1975, pp. 16-17; I. Robertson: *Understanding Art Markets: Inside the World of Art and Business*, Milton Park 2016, p. 54.

receive subscription orders for the anticipated engraving.¹⁹ It was a slow process, but in November 1860 the *Illustrated London News* announced that the engraving had been completed and proclaimed it “a great triumph.”²⁰ In Australia, the early opportunity to cash in on the wave of enthusiasm for the “great Pre-Raphaelite picture” was whipped up by Gambart’s Australian agent, Sydney print seller, Jacob R. Clarke, through the advertising columns of the *Sydney Morning Herald*.²¹ Here, as well as in Britain, sales rocketed; prints of *The Light of the World* became a world-wide addition to homes, convents, churches, religious schools and chapels.²²

The Light of the World was fast evolving into an entity quite distinct from the original picture. Hunt’s interpretation became regarded as the archetypal Christ, one which was used by poets, writers and artists, but more especially accepted into general religious sentiment and popular culture.²³ The highly symbolic representation of Christ was accepted by those who may never have seen the original painting, or the smaller copy that was exhibited in New York in 1857 and Philadelphia the following year.²⁴ When a third and larger version of the painting was planned fifty years after the original was painted, Hunt was well into his seventies, and losing his sight. Unbeknown to the general public, a major part of the work was undertaken by the artist Edward Robert Hughes (1851-1914) (Fig. 2).²⁵ This life-sized picture toured the British Empire, under the skilful planning and marketing of entrepreneur Mack Jost. It exceeded all expectations and became a phenomenal success, especially in Australia.²⁶

¹⁹ E. Gambart & Co. published the engraving on 7 May 1860, then a second smaller engraving, also by Simmons, ten years later. Two photogravures were published by the Autotype Co. c. 1890-1900. See Bronkhurst, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

²⁰ Maas, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

²¹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 24 March 1860, p. 7.

²² Maas, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74. *The Light of the World* was one of Gambart’s best-selling prints, only surpassed by William Powell Frith’s *Derby Day* (engraved 1858).

²³ From brief appearances to crucial roles, for example see *The Light of the World* in Sir Arthur Sullivan’s Oratorio of the same name (1873); Terence Malick’s film, *Days of Heaven* (1978); and Connie Wills’ novel, *Blackout All Clear* (2010).

²⁴ The small version received a mixed reception, exacerbated by its less than imposing size, poor marketing and volatile press reports. Maas, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-55. The painting was sold to a New York collector, however Hunt was dissatisfied with the final result; it now resides in Manchester Art Gallery. F. G. Stephens’s claim to have painted a large proportion of the work was not made until after 1880 and an acrimonious split with Hunt. See Bronkhurst, *op. cit.*, cat. 80.

²⁵ *The Light of the World*, c.1900-04; oil on canvas, 233.7 x 128.3 cm; painted with the assistance of Edward Robert Hughes. In possession of the Dean and Chapter, St. Paul’s Cathedral, London. See Bronkhurst, *op. cit.*, cat. 161.

²⁶ In a joking comment related by Norman Lindsay to his son Jack “people were naturally keen to see a picture of Jesus going late at night to the dunny at the back of the house, afraid that someone had just got in ahead of him,” quoted in Maas, *op. cit.*, p. 141.



Fig. 2. William Holman Hunt painting the third version of *The Light of the World*, c. 1903. (Reproduced in Otto von Schleinitz: *William Holman Hunt*, Bielefeld, Velhagen & Klasing, Germany 1907, p. 136).

From the painting's arrival in Adelaide towards the end of January 1906, *The Light of the World* was received with awe and wonder. As the three crates containing the picture, the frame and the protective glass were carefully and deliberately unpacked outside the South Australian Gallery, anticipation grew along with the throng of people, heightening the rapturous welcome. Crowds on the exhibition days were comparable with visitors to the Royal Academy and more than 18,000 South Australians saw the picture during its eight-day run.²⁷ This paved the way for an even more astounding response in Melbourne when, in February 1906, it was exhibited in the National Gallery of Victoria's

Stawell Gallery. Daily, thousands of visitors queued from the entrance around the block into

Lonsdale Street, and caused "near pandemonium" as people came to be impressed and astonished (Fig. 3).²⁸ In his review in *The Argus*, Blamire Young noted that, as most visitors had previously only seen the painting from black and white engravings, they were unprepared for the riot of colour that differed from so many British academic pictures in Melbourne's Gallery. Young went on to suggest that although this was a religious painting, filled with Christian symbolism, it was also imbued with a spiritual presence. "[The picture] appeals strongly to many people who can lay no claim to be religious, and who are able to receive from it a deep and spiritual message that is as comforting to them as is the more direct teaching that it contains to those who regard it as a purely religious work."²⁹ Whether it was the Christian message, its

²⁷ Maas, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-45. In 1901, the population of Adelaide and its suburbs was around 162,000.

²⁸ Maas, *op. cit.*, pp. 148, 152-54.

²⁹ B. Young: "The Light of the World," *The Argus*, 24 Feb. 1906, p. 5.

pictorial merit or aura of mysticism, the painting was accepted by people of diverse denominational persuasions.



Fig. 3. Visitors flock to view William Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (As printed in *The Australasian*, 24 Feb. 1906, p. 27).

The fame of *The Light of the World* in Australia expanded as the blockbuster exhibition travelled the country, always preceded by press reports of the great reception accorded it in the previous location, a heavy hint to the locals to top the ever-growing numbers. Even without this pre-marketing, the audience had been well-primed to be amazed by this unusual work of art, having seen copies of the engraving and (illegal) photographic copies that were in circulation or reproductions in the popular press, including *The Week* in Brisbane and Perth's *Western Mail*. *The Brisbane Courier* noted the extraordinary increase in visitors to see the painting, suggesting it was probably the first time the majority of local people had set foot in the Queensland Art Gallery.³⁰ Enterprising postcard sellers plied their trade along the long queues at every venue. Some visitors undoubtedly found the depth of symbolic references uplifting and spent time in front of the work to absorb and meditate; not a few left scratching their heads wondering what all

³⁰ *The Week*, 6 April 1906, p. 17; *Western Mail*, 7 July 1906 p. 24; *The Brisbane Courier*, 18 Aug. 1906, p. 12.

the fuss was about.³¹ However, its acceptance into general religious sentiment and popular culture was universal.

After an extraordinary itinerary by train and steamer that covered all Australian capital cities, major country centres and New Zealand, the painting left the Antipodes, but the image was not allowed to be forgotten. Along with the postcard mementos, the picture was pressed into service by sellers of religious paraphernalia, including a most unusual and desirable souvenir of the great event: a prayer-book bound in Moroccan leather with a silver image of *The Light of the World* on its front cover.³²

The most lasting effect of the exhibition of *The Light of the World* was its translation into stained glass windows. The painting's deep religious symbolism and the compositional emphasis on light made it an ideal image to adopt and adapt for church windows, where colour and brilliance, evidenced by the passage of daylight through glass, reinforced the religious significance of light as a symbol for God. The church, especially Anglican and Roman Catholic denominations, placed great importance on the choice of subject and meaning and, as well as inspiring piety, a strong sense of idealisation was expected within realistic compositions.³³ *The Light of the World's* didactic appeal to all Protestant denominations, including Methodism which had generally eschewed figure representations in stained glass, ensured that it would become the most sought after stained glass subject over the next fifty years, with more than two hundred windows commissioned for Australian churches from 1901 to 1988.³⁴ Before tracing its twentieth-century rise in stained glass, it is necessary to travel back almost three decades before the painting of *The Light of the World* took Australia by storm in the early 1900s.

³¹ [F. J. D.] "Seeing a Picture," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 April 1906, p. 13; Figures drawn by *The Australasian's* (unnamed) cartoonist expressed the diversity of Melbourne reactions, with captions such as "wonder," "doubt," "indifference," and "sympathy." *The Australasian*, 24 Feb. 1906, p. 27.

³² *Garden of the Soul* prayer book, on sale at Saunders Jewellers, Sydney. *Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 18 Dec. 1907, p. 1593.

³³ D. Geidraityte: "Stained and Painted Glass in the Sydney Region c. 1830-c. 1920," MA thesis (University of Sydney 1975), p. 421.

³⁴ The 200 or more windows on the author's documented inventory represent only a portion of the many hundreds across Australia. A survey of Victorian churches, completed in 1997 as part of a wider study, identified 162 *The Light of the World* windows by one Melbourne maker alone, Brooks, Robinson & Co. See B. Hughes: "Twentieth Century Stained Glass in Melbourne Churches," MA thesis (University of Melbourne 1997), pp. 141-43.



Fig. 4. Ferguson & Urie. *The Light of the World* (detail). 1876. Stained glass. (St. Peter's Anglican Church, Merino, Victoria).
Photo: Bronwyn Hughes.

The foundation-stone for St. Peter's Church in the tiny Western District township of Merino was laid on 17 April 1865 and services began in December 1867.³⁵ The design and quality of the windows, all of which were intended to be non-figurative quarry lancets, were discussed by Hamilton architect James Henry Fox, major donor Francis Henty (1815-89), the first clergyman of the district, Reverend Francis Thomas Cusack Russell (1823-76) and the stained glass designer-makers, Ferguson & Urie of North Melbourne.³⁶ Russell spent twenty-five years in the Wannon district, building a number of churches to Fox's designs, most in the Gothic revival style that was preferred by Australian church builders throughout the nineteenth-century. Stained glass windows by Ferguson & Urie were commissioned for Casterton (1866), Digby (1867) and Coleraine (1865-66) in the 1860s. While returning from a much-needed sabbatical in Ireland in 1876, the Reverend Russell died unexpectedly aboard ship. A committee made up of members of the Merino congregation and friends from around the district decided to replace the central light of the plain east window above the altar with a suitable memorial that would recognise his long commitment to their community. They selected the *Good Shepherd* and *The Light of the World* (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5), subjects that represented Russell's spirit and ministry over a quarter of a century.³⁷ It was a bold departure from the scenes from Christ's Passion or patronal saints which had been selected

³⁵ *Hamilton Spectator & Grange District Advertiser*, 22 April 1865, p. 3; *Portland Guardian*, 2 Jan. 1868, p. 3. The church was sold in 2013 and has since been converted into a private residence.

³⁶ Letters are held in the Francis Henty papers, MS 2821 Box 674/1, State Library of Victoria. Details of the Reverend Russell's life from S. Smith: "Russell, Francis Thomas Cusack (1823-1876)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/russell-francis-thomas-cusack-2617/text3611>, accessed online 6 June 2016. Ferguson & Urie records have not survived.

³⁷ The following year George Trangmar commissioned a three-light memorial to Russell for the new chancel of Holy Trinity Anglican church, Coleraine.

(usually by Russell) for other Western District churches, but they were appropriate representations for this greatly-admired man and his ministry.

The two figures were stacked above one another to fill the tall central light of the three-light window. Unlike Hunt's painting or the engraving by Simmons, Christ was depicted with head slightly forward and inclined towards the door; however, the right hand raised to knock, the folds of the robes and the distinctive clasp at the front clearly identified the source for the design as Hunt's *The Light of the World*. Other details of the painting were omitted—the night sky, the bat of ignorance, the plain white robe, and golden nimbus—but there remains the suggestion of light emanating from the lantern in the under-lit eyebrows and left cheek. Particularly convincing is the lantern which matches the Hunt original, a rare nod to Pre-Raphaelite precision in rendering of detail.



Fig. 5. Ferguson & Urie. Three-light window featuring *The Light of the World* and *The Good Shepherd*. 1876. Stained glass. (St. Peter's Anglican Church, Merino, Victoria). Photo: Bronwyn Hughes.



Fig. 6. William Wheildon/Brooks, Robinson & Co. *The Light of the World* (detail). 1907. Stained glass. (St. John's Anglican Church, East Malvern, Victoria). Photo: Bronwyn Hughes.

The basis for Ferguson & Urie's window was most likely Simmons's engraving of the painting.³⁸ Design originality was not of primary importance to many nineteenth-century stained glass artists and it was common practice to work up full-scale cartoons from secondary sources, including prints, votive cards and book illustrations, often supplied by clients. Ferguson & Urie, for example, certainly used secondary (or tertiary) sources for many of their most popular early designs, such as for the chancel windows in Christ Church Anglican at Casterton which depicted scenes from Christ's life and death. The Rev. Russell consented to the exhibition of the windows by Ferguson & Urie in the Victorian Exhibition of 1866.³⁹ A painting, reproduced as an engraving, then perhaps published in a journal, and finally recreated in stained glass, was not unusual; it is more remarkable that Ferguson & Urie managed to imbue the stained glass with so strong a sense of the original Hunt painting.

The window at St. Peter's Anglican Church, Merino is almost certainly the first occasion that *The Light of the World* appeared in Australian stained glass.⁴⁰ However, it did not inspire other commissions, and remained one of a small number of similar windows installed before the painting's grand tour of the empire in 1906.⁴¹

³⁸ Scotsmen James Ferguson and James Urie were already in business in North Melbourne when the painting was exhibited in England, but it is possible that either of their English-trained artists, John Lamb Lyon (arrived 1861) or David Relph Drape (arrived 1858) may have seen the original painting and/or purchased an engraving in England.

³⁹ The designs for the windows in Casterton were sourced from designs in Abbé M. B. Couissinier: *A Pictorial Catechism: after original designs by G. R. Elster*, engraved by R. Brend'amour, Paris and London 1862.

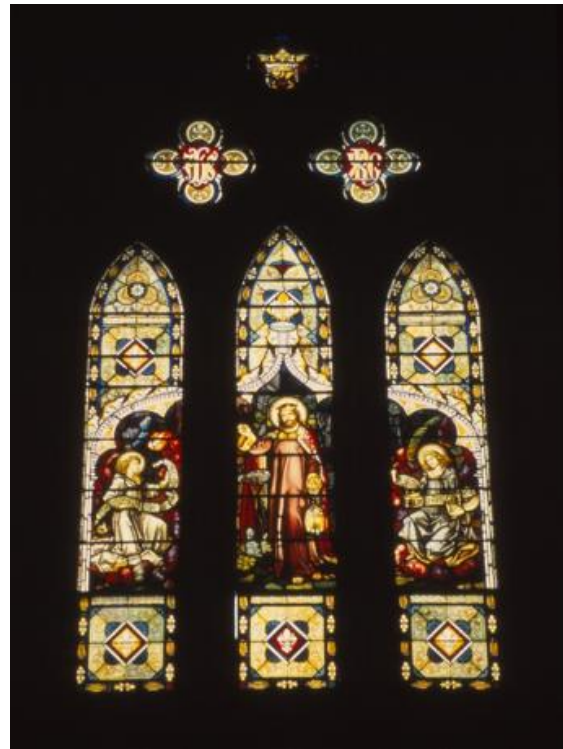
⁴⁰ The first example of *The Light of the World* in stained glass is reputed to have been made for Yorkshireman John Harrop in 1854-56 under the supervision of William Holman Hunt but this has not been verified. In 1930 the window was installed at the University of Puget Sound, Washington USA, but appears to be no longer extant.

⁴¹ Ferguson & Urie made a second version from the same cartoon for St. Paul's Anglican Church, Launceston (1882), now in the Anglican Church at Low Head, Tasmania. Information courtesy of Ray Brown and Gavin

By 1907, as the painting returned to England via another imperial outpost, South Africa, the first post-exhibition windows were already being installed. At St. John's in Finch Street, East Malvern, *The Light of the World* (1907) (Fig. 6) was placed in the central light above the altar, a most unusual elevation for this subject and an indication of how the image had penetrated thinking within Anglican church circles. The golden nimbus, plain white robe (with the addition of non-original gold cuffs), a greater respect paid to Hunt's symbolic details (although there is no bat symbolising ignorance) and attention to the original colour scheme, instilled a measure of Pre-Raphaelite principles and religious significance of the painting to the stained glass. Designed by English-trained artist William Wheildon (1873-1941), who was senior glass designer at Brooks, Robinson & Co., Melbourne from 1895, *The Light of the World* at St. John's followed the painting quite closely, which suggests that Wheildon may have seen Hunt's painting during its exhibition in Melbourne.

However, this was not the first time Wheildon had interpreted the painting for stained glass. He was responsible for a large window of *The Light of the World* installed at Christ Church, St. Kilda in 1901 (Fig. 7) as a memorial to its vestryman and treasurer, the prominent banker and St. Kilda resident, Francis Grey Smith, who died in 1900.⁴² Circumscribed in part by the three-light format, the design of this window was a significant departure from the original painting, owing more to aesthetic considerations and rich ornamentation than to faithful reproduction of Hunt's symbolism. The figure of Christ filled the central light, flanked by kneeling angels in the smaller supporting text ribbons that read "the memory of the just is

Fig. 7. William Wheildon/Brooks, Robinson & Co.
The Light of the World. 1901. Stained glass.
(Christ Church Anglican, St. Kilda, Victoria).
Photo: Bronwyn Hughes.



Merrington. Among the pre-1906 windows known to exist in Australia are: three-light window in memory of Frank Grey-Smith at Christchurch Anglican, St. Kilda, Melbourne (1901) (Fig. 7) and a single light at St. George's Anglican Cathedral, Perth (1903).

⁴² *The Argus*, 8 April 1901, p. 4.

blessed” and “the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.”⁴³ The height of the windows was modified by the addition of patterned canopy work and a tessellated base panel; the three lights were united by an ogee-shaped architectural canopy. The selection of colours was probably made in the interests of design, with little attempt to conform to Hunt’s colour scheme; the cloak, patterned to suggest embroidery, remained red, but the white robe was replaced with a dusky pink, while gold cuffs finished the sleeves. It suggests that when designing this version Wheildon relied on secondary sources as the basis for his own interpretation.⁴⁴

In the years leading up to the First World War and into the 1920s, it was predominantly Anglican churches that selected *The Light of the World* as a window subject. Not surprisingly, a few post-war commissions commemorated servicemen killed in action with the image of *The Light of the World*, as seen in Anglican churches at Colebrook, Tasmania (1920) and Creswick, Victoria (1921). The Creswick window was dedicated to the memory of a young sailor, twenty-one-year-old Stoker Thomas Berry, a tribute from his comrades after his death by drowning.⁴⁵ Although the artist, William Montgomery, used *The Light of the World* as the basis for his subject, the text did not come from the usual source in John 8:12. Instead, lines from the 1833 hymn “Pillar of Cloud” by John Henry Newman were selected: “Lead kindly light, lead Thou me on.” It was an appropriate commemorative text and subject for mariners whose reliance on the light-house could be regarded as a secular parallel to the lamp of Christ. The same subject and text continued in different forms in naval chapels until after the Second World War.⁴⁶ An unusual window memorialising Master Mariner Robert Sunter at the Missions to Seafarers Chapel in Melbourne (Fig. 8) depicts an ethereal Christ, holding high

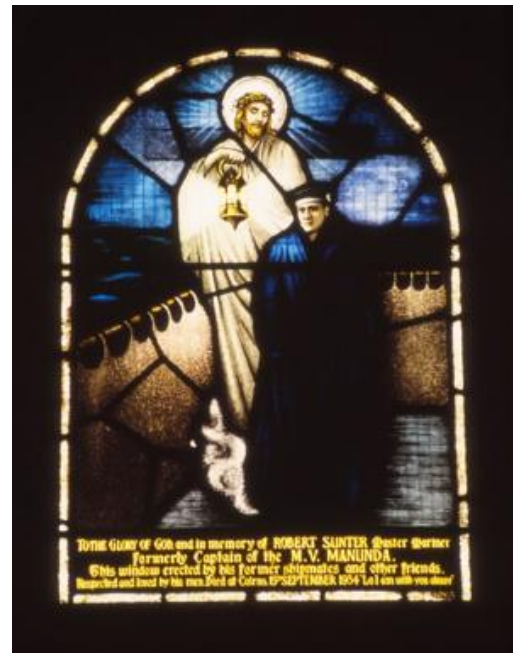


Fig. 8. Brooks, Robinson & Co. *The Light of the World*. 1935. Stained glass (Chapel of St. Peter, Mission to Seafarers, Melbourne).
Photo: Bronwyn Hughes.

⁴³ Texts were taken from Proverbs 10:7 (KJV) and Psalm 112:6 (KJV).

⁴⁴ It is also possible that Wheildon had seen the 1854 work in England before he emigrated in 1895.

⁴⁵ *Ballarat Star*, 8 Dec. 1920, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Examples can be seen in Naval Chapels at HMAS Cerberus, Flinders Naval Base, Crib Point (Vic) and Garden Island (N.S.W.).

a lantern to guide an Australian sailor on a ship's deck; the text ends: "Lo, I am with you
always."⁴⁷

However, such a complete departure from Hunt's painting was rare, as donors of windows generally preferred the original imagery. Brooks, Robinson & Co. produced *The Light of the World* windows for churches all over Australia between 1907 and about 1966, when the stained glass department closed. Windows were sometimes incomplete when shipped interstate. For instance, a window Brooks, Robinson sent to Hobart in 1925 was simplified with none of the glass borders in the form of an architectural canopy and base that usually framed the central



subject; in 1927 and 1933 the Adelaide glass firm, Thompson & Harvey, ordered "figures only" from Brooks, Robinson, as did A. E. Clarkson's branch in Perth in 1938.⁴⁸ These local firms added their own style of architectural framing to suit and fit each particular commission and probably passed them off as their own designs.⁴⁹

At Brooks, Robinson & Co., the freelance English-trained artist George H. Dancey (1856-1922) devised a variation on Hunt's *The Light of the World* that dates from about 1910, when his interpretation was installed in the nave of St. Peter's Anglican Church, Mornington (Fig. 9). While retaining the underlying text of the image, Dancey's figure of Christ turns towards the door and appears to look beyond the viewer, in contrast to Hunt's figure that faces the viewer with an arresting expression. Dancey omitted the worldly crown and retained only the crown of thorns around the head. He rejected the unadorned robe, added an embroidered cloak around the figure

Fig. 9. George Dancey/Brooks, Robinson & Co. *The Light of the World*. c.1910. Stained glass. (St. Peter's Anglican Church, Mornington, Victoria).
Photo: Bronwyn Hughes.

⁴⁷ Once again, the design is third-hand, taken from a print of a painting by G. M. Langley; text taken from *Matthew* 28:20 (KJV).

⁴⁸ Private collection, Brooks, Robinson & Co. Job Books, 1923-c.1966.

⁴⁹ Private collection, Brooks, Robinson & Co. Job Books, 1923-c.1966.

and, heavily influenced by Frederick Leighton, depicted swathes of folded fabric in Christ's voluminous garments.⁵⁰ It is an ornate design, with white and gold glass predominating in the architectural ornamentation and angels supporting a text scroll in the base panel that reads "I am the Light of the World." The finely modelled features on Christ's face are emphasised by the white and gold halo, and, in contrast, his robes are primarily a rich red, offset by the white undergarment.

Although the whole is instantly recognisable as *The Light of the World*, the rich symbolism of Hunt's painting, or even of Wheildon's versions, is significantly diminished. Here, the door is almost beyond the confines of the frame and indistinguishable from the background, the halo is unambiguous with no suggestion of it doubling as a moon in the night sky, and the lantern, while it does have a simple cross, is no longer the symbol-laden seven-sided image that it was in the original painting. More importantly, the idea of a light source for the night scene emanating from the lantern has disappeared, making Dancey's figure of Christ less mysterious (and sometimes more acceptable) to clients, who would sometimes express such preferences.⁵¹ The growing popularity of this version of the subject may lie with clients and congregations being less well-versed in the symbolism of the original painting, and marginally less attuned to its British artistic heritage, in an increasingly secularised Australian society.

Dancey's *The Light of the World* would become as prevalent as Wheildon's version, and the popularity of both ensured that Brooks, Robinson would outstrip its rivals in sheer numbers of *The Light of the World* windows over the next forty years. When another English artist, William Kerr-Morgan (1896-1967), joined the firm in the early 1920s he designed a third version, one that found particular favour among Presbyterian and Methodist congregations (Fig. 10), although it moved even further from the underlying artistic and religious principles of Hunt's painting.⁵²

⁵⁰ "Dancey" in *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Art*, Fitzroy 2006, p. 364.

⁵¹ The Misses Moyle, ordering a window for St. Paul's Anglican Church, Moonambel, in February 1947, asked especially for "a nice face." Private collection, Brooks, Robinson & Co. Job Books, 1923-c.1966.

⁵² Kerr-Morgan was employed after the death of Dancey in December 1922. Examples of his version of *The Light of the World* may be seen in windows at the Presbyterian Church, Clifton Hill, St. James the Less Anglican Church, Mount Eliza, and the former Methodist Church, Yarra Street, Geelong, all in Victoria.



Fig. 10. William Kerr-Morgan/Brooks, Robinson & Co. *The Light of the World*. 1957. Stained glass. (Presbyterian Church, Kaniva, Vic.)
Photo: Bronwyn Hughes.

Among Non-Conformist congregations the preference for non-figurative subjects relaxed from the 1920s, although there had always been exceptions made for text scrolls, emblems and symbols.⁵³ The first Presbyterian church to install *The Light of the World* was at Cottesloe in Western Australia in 1921. Designed by Melbourne artist William Montgomery, the window was based on William Holman Hunt's original design. Throughout the late 1920s, other Presbyterian churches were ordering from Brooks, Robinson & Co.: Burnley, (Vic.) in 1925; Canberra (A.C.T.) and Essendon (Vic.) in 1927; Sunshine (Vic.) in 1928; and Rozelle (N.S.W.) and Sandringham (Vic.) in 1929. Melbourne's leading Methodist church, Wesley Central Mission, already held a comprehensive cycle of stained glass windows, including Dancey's *The Light of the World* in one of the balcony window openings, when a new Chapel was planned for the Lonsdale Street facade. The addition of the Hoban Chapel in 1933-34 included another *The Light of the World* (Fig. 11) as the prominent central image in a series of three-light windows. Brooks, Robinson & Co. prepared a design that more closely

interpreted Hunt's composition, creating a window that suggested the lantern as the source of light.⁵⁴ It sparked a flurry of Methodist interest and *The Light of the World* appeared at Dandenong and Northcote (Vic.) in 1934; Auburn (Vic.) in 1935 (Fig. 12); Ballarat (Vic.) in 1936; and Mount Gambier (S.A.) in 1938.⁵⁵

⁵³ The author's (ever-growing) list of *The Light of the World* windows in Australia stands at more than 200 (June 2017): Anglican 95; Presbyterian 40; Methodist 27; Congregational 5; Lutheran 4; Baptist 2; Church of Christ 1; Unknown Denominations 29.

⁵⁴ Three three-light windows were ordered for the Hoban Chapel: *Christ Washing the Feet of the Disciples* and *Peter Preaching at Pentecost* were placed on either side of *The Light of the World*. Private collection, Brooks, Robinson & Co. Job Books, 1923-c.1966.

⁵⁵ Private collection, Brooks, Robinson & Co. Job Books, 1923-c.1966.

After the Second World War and in the wake of Modernism, very few artists with sympathetic clients reinvigorated the subject with new interpretations. William Frater (1890-1974), the senior artist at E. L. Yencken & Co., had attempted to introduce his Arts & Crafts training at the Glasgow School of Art into his rendition of *The Light of the World* (Fig. 13) in the 1930s, but was limited within the confines of the commercial enterprise. Windows at Holy Trinity Anglican, Oakleigh (Vic.) and St. Andrew's Presbyterian, Mansfield (Vic.) were instantly recognisable as *The Light of the World*, but had moved a considerable distance from Hunt's symbolism as well as from Frater's Arts & Crafts ethos.⁵⁶



Left to right: Fig. 11. Brooks, Robinson & Co. *The Light of the World* (detail). 1934. Stained glass. (Hoban Chapel, Wesley Uniting Church, Melbourne); Fig. 12. Brooks, Robinson & Co. *The Light of the World*. 1935. Stained glass. (Uniting Church, Auburn, Victoria); Fig. 13. William Frater/E. L. Yencken & Co. *The Light of the World*. 1930. Stained glass. (St. Andrew's Uniting Church, Mansfield, Victoria). Photos: B Hughes.

⁵⁶ Frater retired in 1940 when E. L. Yencken closed its stained glass department for the duration of the war.

One artist who maintained her independence and developed a distinctive personal style was Christian Waller (1894-1954). Through the support of the architect, Louis R. Williams, she was commissioned in 1938 for a series of windows for the chancel of the new St. James Anglican Church in Ivanhoe (Vic.), one of which was *I am the Light of the World* (Fig. 14).⁵⁷ Waller's artistic strengths were derived in part from the Pre-Raphaelites and Arts & Crafts movements, interwoven with a strong spirituality that evolved from her study of many different faiths. Her interpretation of *The Light of the World* owes little to Hunt's version but instead, in carefully modulated colour and tone, depicts Christ in a dazzling radiance that illustrated the text, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness."⁵⁸

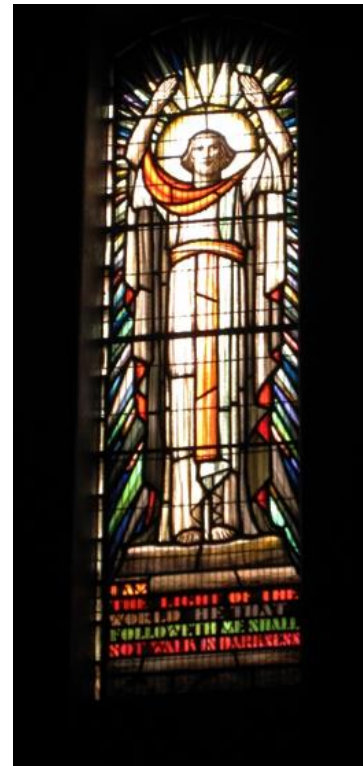


Fig. 14. Christian Waller. *I am the Light of the World*. 1938. Stained glass. (St. James's Anglican Church, Ivanhoe, Victoria). Photo: Bronwyn Hughes.

Post-Second World War *émigré*, Jean Orval (1911-87) spent a short time at Brooks, Robinson & Co., but finding the workshop arrangements stultifying without any opportunity to use his European art training, he moved to country Victoria to set up his own studio, initially at Port Fairy and then in Hamilton.⁵⁹ His modernist style was accepted by many churches of all denominations in the Western District and South Australia; he was commissioned for *The Light of the World* by the Presbyterian Church at Penola in 1965 (Fig. 15). Modernists Alan Sumner (1911-94) and John Ferguson (1928-2012) were occasionally asked to interpret *The Light of the World*, but these artists, like Orval, worked under guiding principles far removed from the ideals of the Pre-Raphaelites more than a century earlier.

Gradually *The Light of the World* dimmed, losing the favour it once enjoyed, although in 1954, it still apparently took pride of place on the easel in the Sydney studio of John Ashwin & Co., one hundred years after the original had been exhibited at the Royal Academy.⁶⁰ And this was not the

⁵⁷ *The Argus* (12 Nov. 1938), p. 8.

⁵⁸ Text taken from John 8:12 (KJV).

⁵⁹ <http://www.orvalstainedglass.com/> Accessed 19 Jan. 2018.

⁶⁰ Clem Seale: "Sydney Sketchbook" cartoon depicting the interior of John Ashwin & Co.'s studio in Dixon Street, Sydney. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 Aug. 1954, p. 9.



Fig. 15. Jean Orval. *I am the Light of the World*. 1965.
Stained glass.
(St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Penola, S.A.).
Photo: Bronwyn Hughes.

last *The Light of the World* in stained glass, as conservative clients demanded and artists (often reluctantly) obliged them, well into the 1990s.⁶¹

The Light of the World was the most popular subject for stained glass windows in Australia for almost a century.⁶² Through the extensive and well-marketed 1906 Australian tour, *The Light of the World* became the first painting to comprehensively capture the imagination of the Australian public. The proliferation of engravings, prints and postcards before and after the tour ensured that it remained a pervasive image, one that found favour with clergy and church members of all Protestant denominations, and was equally acceptable within church or the family home. Hunt's *The Light of the World* became the archetypal image of Christ and, at a time when originality was not an issue, it was simplified and adapted for stained glass, with hundreds of windows installed in Australian churches, especially in the 1920s and 1930s. Gradually, however, the Pre-Raphaelite ideals that underpinned the painting were lost from the composition when it was transposed into glass, too often replaced by exercises in colour with little reference to light. The mysterious upward light that seemed to emanate from the lantern, which Hunt had captured so cleverly, was sometimes misread and often ignored in favour of a conventional tone throughout the work. In an increasingly secular society the symbolism was blurred or lost, even in religious settings, leaving an empty *cliché*, and, although not entirely forgotten, it lacked its former power. Too often its translation into stained glass, most notably in the hands of commercial firms, became merely a faded reminder of William Holman Hunt's original Pre-Raphaelite phenomenon.

⁶¹ Derek Pearse reluctantly completed a work for St. George's Queenscliffe in 1995. As it was part of a two-light window in the vestry, he was grateful that it was not on public view. Kevin Little made a window for an unknown Sydney church in the 1990s, but avoided naming it *The Light of the World*, despite the handle-less door and tell-tale lantern.

⁶² In the post-1945 years, *The Good Shepherd* displaced it as the most popular stained glass subject.

Bronwyn Hughes is an art historian whose research interests include stained glass and sculpture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Recent publications include *Lights Everlasting*, a survey of Victoria's commemorative stained glass, War Veterans' Heritage Inventory (on-line), 2015; "Ayrshire to Australia: The First Scottish-Australian Stained Glass" in *Scots Under the Southern Cross*, ed. Fred Cahir, Anne Beggs-Sunter & Alison Inglis (Ballarat: Ballarat Heritage Services, 2015); and "Remembrance: Victoria's Commemorative Stained Glass Windows of the First World War," *The La Trobe Journal*, 96, 2015. Her recently completed manuscript, *Yrs Affectionately, Mont: William Montgomery's War Letters 1915-1918*, is due for publication late 2019.

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