

SECULARIZATION IN A PRE-RAPHAELITE SPIRITUALITY:  
HENRY HOLIDAY'S STAINED-GLASS TRIBUTE TO  
THEOLOGY

Ernest Rubinstein

The stained-glass artist Henry Holiday is seldom considered the typical Pre-Raphaelite, though he himself welcomed the classification. He recounts from his youth the impact of seeing John Everett Millais's *Autumn Leaves* (1856), recognizing that it "must have completed my conversion [to Pre-Raphaelitism]. It was exhibited this year and overwhelmed me with its poetic beauty and its amazing truth to twilight effect. It was for me a revelation" (*Reminiscences* 42). He notes that, as a young art teacher, he "instilled sound Pre-Raphaelite principles into all" his students (41). Though critics observe that "by the 1870s he had evolved his own mature, more classically-oriented style" (Sacks 141, 143), a late design for stained glass completed in 1890, entitled *Theologia* (fig. 1), which adorns the entrance to the library at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, exhibits Pre-Raphaelite traits that suggest a secular spirituality, despite its surface Christian symbolism. By a "secular spirituality," I mean one that invites a worldly evocation of the sacred without the presupposition of historic revelation.

The Drew window is one of the many extant works of Holiday which still decorate buildings, many of them churches, in Britain, the United States, and Canada. Dennis and Joan Hadley compare his work with other Pre-Raphaelite windows, finding it generally more "intellectual ... than ... mystic [and] lack[ing] the subtle blend of inspiration and emotion" that characterizes the art of Burne-Jones, but they add that it is indeed this intellectual challenge that made Holiday's windows appealing to academic institutions (50; 63).

Before joining a college and graduate school to create Drew University, the Drew Theological School was a Methodist seminary, founded in 1867. The seminary commissioned its window from Holiday in 1883 to decorate its then new library, at a time when the artist was working for James Powell &