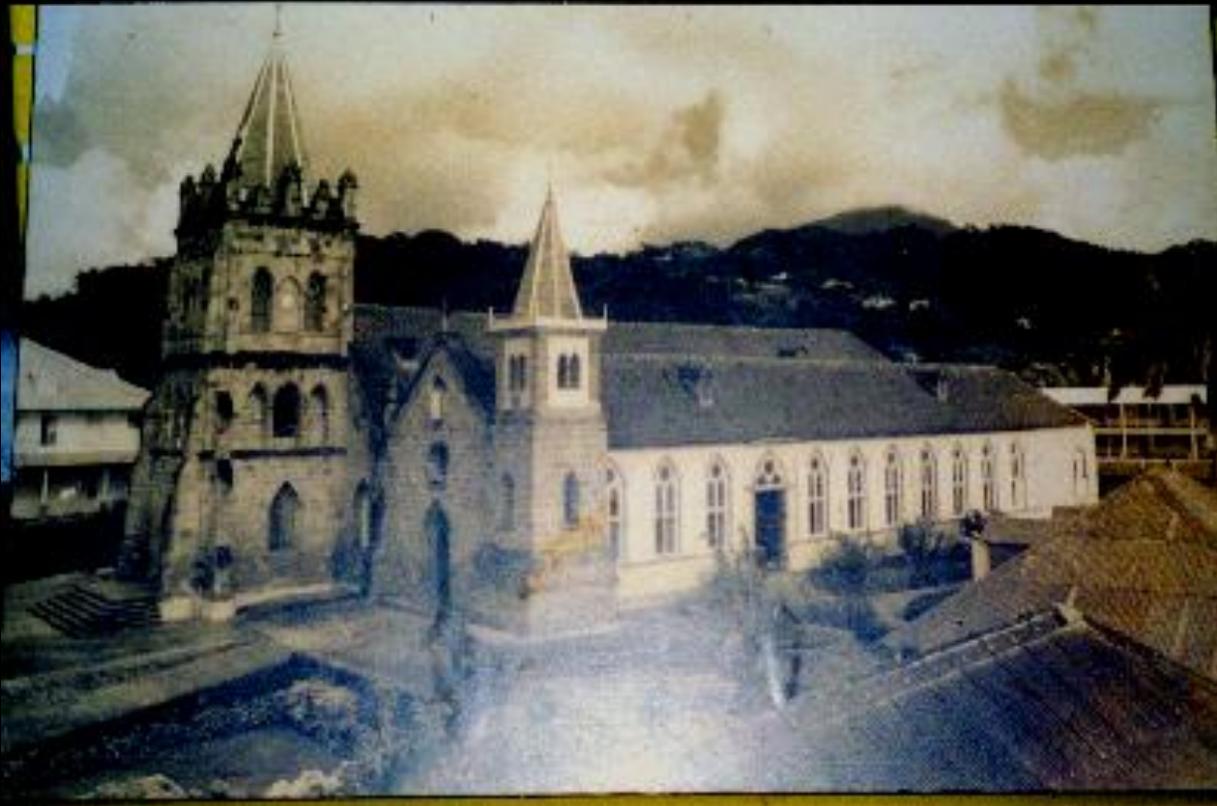


ORIENTATION OF THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL: meaning of East orientation of churches.

By Bernard Lauwyck



The ROSEAU CATHEDRAL before August 29, 1979

From Dr. Lennox Honychurch, we know that Frere William Martel was the first priest of the parish of Notre Dame du Bon Port and he built the first church in 1732.¹ This parish church, as the Diocese of Roseau was only established 18 years later by Papal Bull on 30 April 1850, was facing East with the entrance door facing west, connected via Church Street with the Roseau market and then Roseau port.²

In this Friar Martel followed an ancient architectural practice of orientating, or facing churches towards the East. The orientation of churches toward the East has persevered until the present day.

¹ "The Dominica Story, A story of the Island" by Lennox Honychurch MacMillan education Ltd revised 1995 Page 173.

² Powerpoint Presentation "The Roseau Cathedral, a national monument" by Lennox Honychurch dated 2004

“Churches orient us. The word “orientation” means literally “turned to the East”(Latin: *oriens*)... In English “orientation” has now come to mean any direction³. The French word “sens”, which signifies both “meaning” (sense) and “direction” captures the conflation of the two ideas.” An “oriented” church is built so that the congregation faces East.

- That this is an architectural practice, going back to the apostolic times, is confirmed by “the apostolic Constitutions”⁴ (dated 4th Century), which instructs the bishop thus : “*And first, let the building be long, with its head to the east, with its vestries on both sides at the east end, and so it will be like a ship*”⁵.

Professor Scott Hahn explains that ancient guidance in the mysteries was intensely concerned not only with rite and gesture, but with architecture as well. “*What the tabernacle had been to the Israelites, what the temple had been to the Jews, the church was now for the Christians.*”⁶

So the early Christians saw both the tabernacle and the temple as foreshadowing the Christian church.

Ezekiel 43:2 tells us :

“*And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east”*

This is not an isolated passage in the Old Testament that show God’s glory and power coming from the East :

Exodus 10:13

“*And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts.*”

Exodus 14:21

“*And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.*”

Ezekiel 10:19

And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD’s house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above.

This last passage relates to the departure of God’s Glory towards the East :

³ “THE GEOMETRY OF LOVE” by Margaret Visser, published by HarperCollins, Canada. First American edition, 2001

⁴ The ***Apostolic Constitutions*** (or ***Constitutions of the Holy Apostles***, lat. *Constitutiones Apostolorum*) is a Christian collection of eight treatises which belongs to *genre* of the Church Orders. The work can be dated from 375 to 380 AD. The provenience is usually regarded as Syria, probably Antioch see Bradshaw, Paul F. (2002). “*The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*”. Oxford University Press

⁵ “Catholic church architecture and the Spirit of the Liturgy” by Denis R. McNamara 2009 Archdiocese of Chicago- Hillenbrand Books

⁶ “Catholic church architecture and the Spirit of the Liturgy” by Denis R. McNamara 2009 Archdiocese of Chicago- Hillenbrand Books. Foreword by Scott Hahn, professor of Theology and Scripture

Ezekiel 11:23

And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city.

In the New Testament, Jesus prophesies the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, after he himself leaves the temple and city. He then goes to the mountain east of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives.

Zechariah 14:4

“And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east,”

Matthew 24:1-3

Further we read “ Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another, everyone will be thrown down” As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives.. ..”

God’s abandonment of a temple always leads to its destruction⁷

But the Lord will return among his people, with the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelations 21:2).

Ezekiel 43 The Lord’s Return from the East

¹ *The man took me to the gate that faces east,² and there I saw coming from the east the dazzling light of the presence of the God of Israel. God's voice sounded like the roar of the sea, and the earth shone with the dazzling light.³ The dazzling light passed through the east gate and went into the Temple.*

⁵ *The Lord's spirit lifted me up and took me into the inner courtyard, where I saw that the Temple was filled with the glory of the Lord.⁶ The man stood beside me there, and I heard the Lord speak to me out of the Temple:⁷*

Mortal man, here is my throne. I will live here among the people of Israel and rule them forever.

¹⁰ *And the Lord continued,*

Mortal man, tell the people of Israel about the Temple, and let them study its plan. Make them ashamed of their sinful actions.¹¹ Then if they are ashamed of what they have done, explain the plan of the Temple to them: its design, its entrances and exits, its shape, the arrangement of everything, and all its rules and regulations. Write all this down for them so that they can see how everything is arranged and can carry out all the rules.”

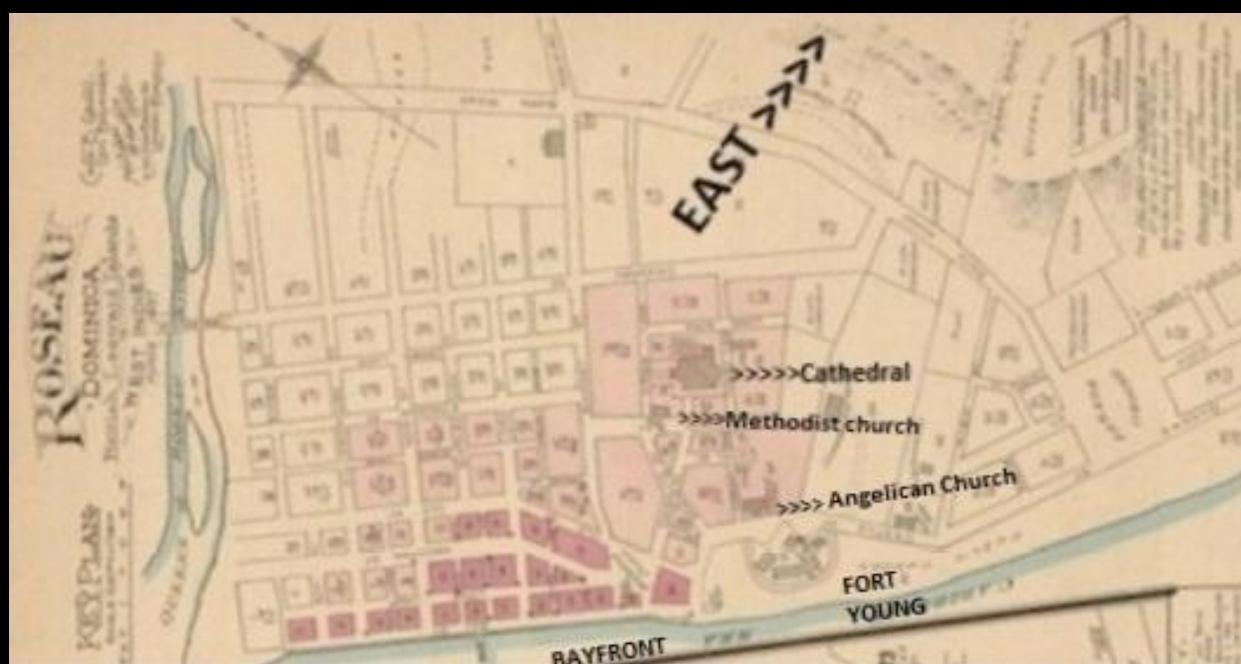
In closing, the eastern orientation of a church is based on deep spiritual symbolism, which is stressed by Pope Benedict XVI in “ THE SPIRIT OF THE LITURGY”⁸

“Praying towards the East means going to meet the coming Christ. The Liturgy, tuned towards the East effects entry, so to speak, into the procession of history towards the future, the New Heaven and the New earth which we encounter in Christ. It is a prayer of hope, the prayer of the pilgrim as he walks in the direction shown us by the life, Passion and Resurrection of Christ. ...That is why, wherever possible, we should definitely take up again the apostolic tradition of facing the East, both in the building of churches and in the celebration of the liturgy”

⁷ ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN THEMES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY by Jeffrey J. Niehaus 2008 Kregel Publications

⁸ THE SPIRIT OF THE LITURGY” JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER 2000 Ignatius Press

Sadly enough, I cannot publish above article as none of our major church buildings in Roseau are oriented East, as this maps shows. This is a map of 1897 of Roseau town.



The first major church built in Roseau, the Catholic Cathedral is not along a East-West axis unlike the first parish church built by Friar Martel .

The Anglican Church and the Methodist church both have a side entrance, which are used as the main entrance and face West.

The Roseau Cathedral still has the western side entrance, leading to Church street, but the main entrance and facade is facing North-West to Virgin Lane.