

THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL : a glimpse of Heaven.

Part II

text and photographs by Bernard Lauwyck

“ Lord, give me a glimpse of Heaven ”



delightful reflections from sun light pouring in through the stained glass windows of our cathedral.

In part II of this article, we continue to look at light & colour in sacred spaces , with the Roseau Cathedral as example. Day, sun light and colour play a very important role in art and architecture of Christianity. For example, a visitor to the Notre Dame de Paris Cathedral is irresistibly drawn towards the light which bathes the nave.

In the first part of this article, we looked at the theological foundation of the symbolism of light. Light in sacred spaces is symbolic of Divine Light.

Natural Light, entering through coloured glass, is one of the most important elements to a church designer. While the beauty of these stained glass windows still engages our modern sensibilities, it is hard for us to imagine how powerfully these artful compositions of brilliantly coloured light captured the mind and hearts of local parishioners and visitors alike after they were installed in 1883.

The windows were to them like pure poetry. They brought to life scenes from the lives of the saints, Jesus, His mother and local history. In all, there are 29 stained glass windows in the Roseau Cathedral; a rich tapestry of visual images, surrounding the congregation, a visual textbook of our faith. They represent the Communion of Saints. They create a heightened sensitivity, transporting and inspiring our senses from an inferior level to a higher plane.

The black and white marble floor tiles, symbol of the valley of tears on this earth, are illuminated, brightened, transformed, and transcended by the coloured diffused light of the stained glass.



The marble tiles in the cathedral are visually transformed by coloured light

I am reliably informed that there used to be a stained glass window or skylight located in the ceiling above the sanctuary, depicting the Holy Spirit. I heard that it was very beautiful. If anyone can tell me more about this, I would be most grateful.

In the book “The secret languages of churches & cathedrals“ of Richard Stemp, I found a fascinating passage on the symbolism of coloured stained glass and I quote :

“In the same way that Mary gave birth to Jesus, the Light of the World, and yet remained a virgin, light can pass through glass without altering the glass. When the glass is coloured, the symbolism deepens: the light takes on the same colour as the glass, just as God had “passed through” Mary and took on her human nature, in the form of Jesus”.

Is this not a beautiful metaphor?

The revelation of the beauty and splendour of God changes hearts and renews lives.

Pope Benedict XVI teaches, “Everything related to the Eucharist should be marked by beauty.”(in “Sacramentum Caritas”).

He spoke of “the path of beauty to faith” which is at the same time an artistic and aesthetic journey, a journey of faith, of theological enquiry” (see his speech to artists in 2009).

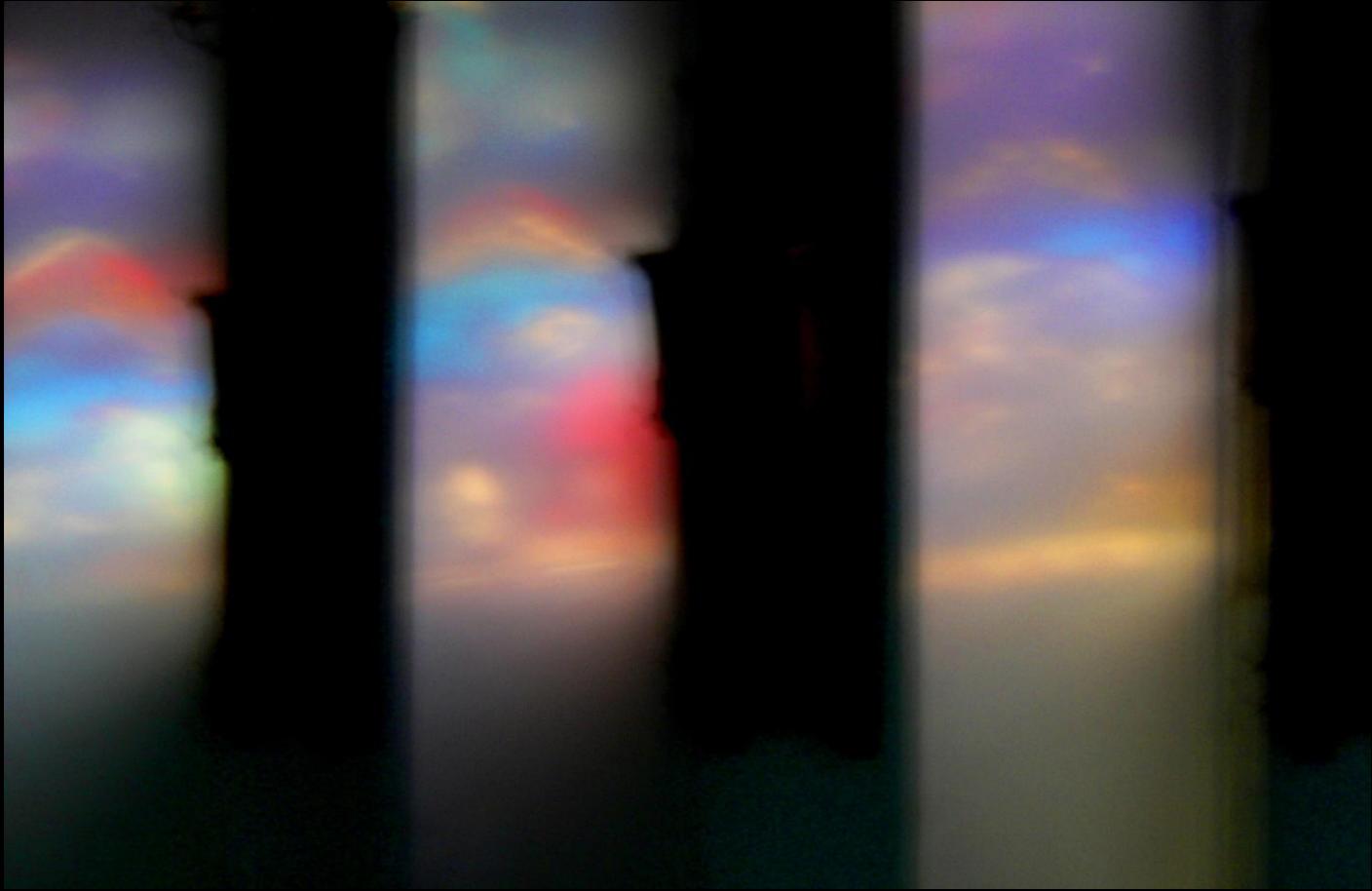
In an address in 2008 he explained more :

“Today I will touch briefly on one of these channels that can bring us to God and also be of help in encountering Him: it is the path of artistic expression, part of that "path of Beauty "... and which man today should recover in its deepest meaning. Perhaps sometimes, before a sculpture, a painting, a few verses of a poem or a song, you have experienced deep within an intimate emotion, a sense of joy, that is, you have clearly perceived that in front of you there was not only mere matter, a piece of marble or bronze, a painted canvas, a series of letters or a combination of sounds, but something bigger, something that speaks, capable of touching the heart, of communicating a message; of elevating the soul.”

“Works of art are the fruit of human creativity, which question the visible reality, trying to discover its deep meaning and to communicate it through the language of shapes, colours, sounds. The work of art, in short, "is an open door on the infinite," which "opens the eyes of the mind, of the heart...there are artistic expressions that are true paths to God, the supreme Beauty, indeed they help nurture our relationship with Him in prayer. These are works that are born of faith and express faith. One example of this is when we visit a Gothic cathedral; we are enraptured by the vertical lines that shoot up towards the sky and draw our eyes and our spirits upwards, while at the same time, we feel small, and yet eager for fullness ...”

When Fr. Sean Doggett, based in Grenada, visited our Roseau Cathedral for the first time, he burst out “this cathedral is so white”. And indeed white is the dominant colour inside our Cathedral but this was not so in the past and to explain this I need to give you some background history.

When we scraped the white timber louvers of the Bishop’s “palace” in 1993- 4 we discovered paint such as deep green, vivid red and blue underneath several white coats. This provides us with an indication how the Bishop’s house used to be coloured and how multiple colours were used in the 19th and early 20th century. The interior of the cathedral used to be a wonderful display of light, patterns, designs and fascinating colours.



In the next part we will have a look at the Cathedral before the “white washing” movement of the 20th century. I hope you will join me.

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