

THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL: light, shadows, colours. **Part II** by Bernard Lauwyck

In the previous articles we explored light, shadows and colours in the Roseau Cathedral. We also looked at the theological meaning and symbolism of light and the effect of natural light as it passed through coloured glass into the Cathedral. What a wonderful sight this was!!

We also discovered that the interior of the Cathedral was finished in an architectural period which looked back to the vividly wall painted medieval Cathedrals, the Victorian Gothic Revival or the neo-Gothic Style.

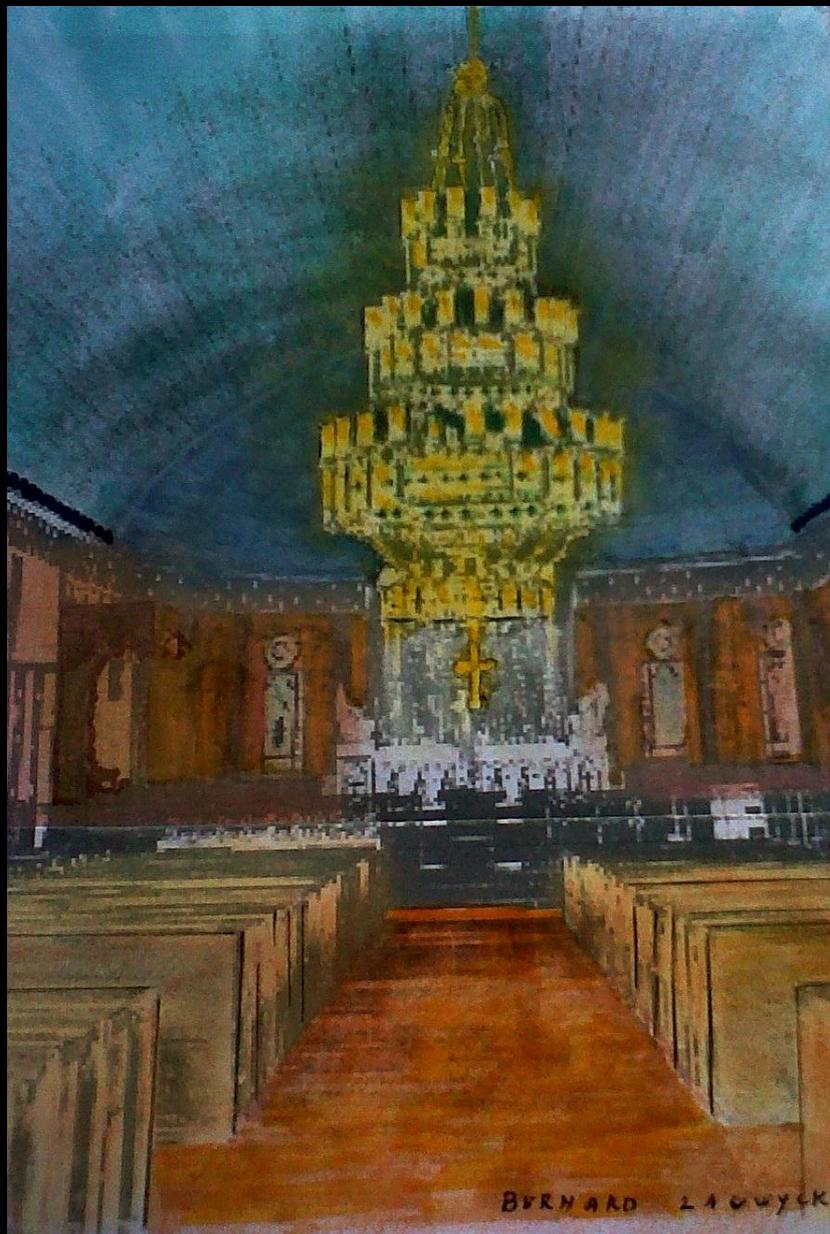
The proponents of this style aimed to create in their churches and cathedrals “a glimpse from Heaven” or the “Heavenly Jerusalem”, as described in Revelation Chapter 21; *“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”*

We have to keep in mind that people in Dominica at that time were living in very poor housing conditions. Even the more affluent were living in houses which were very modest in comparison with the plantation houses and “grand maisons” of the richer sugar cane producing islands such as Barbados, Martinique or Hispaniola.

Still the Bishops of Roseau wanted their Roseau Cathedral to reflect and symbolise the heavenly Jerusalem.

I am told that this was successfully achieved with much splendour and grandeur by two large chandeliers, each with 70 candles. These seem to have made quite an impression on locals and visitors alike. They were suspended from the ceiling above the processional aisle and hung quite low. Imagine the job to light 140 candles before an important ceremony! Note that the number 70 is a highly symbolic number and it appears several times in the Old and New Testament. One example is the appointment and sending out of the 70 disciples by Jesus.

I have tried to recreate this splendour in a coloured artist’s impression. Some of you will let me know if the drawing reflects your memories of these magnificent light fixtures.



This brings us to the two other light sources in the Cathedral besides natural light, namely candle light and electrical induced light.

We can assume that during most of its lifespan the Cathedral was brightened with candles. There is nothing more beautiful than burning candles. They remind us that Christ called himself the light of the world and urged us all to live as “children of light”. *“For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.”* 1 Thessalonians 5:5 .

Burning candles are signs of prayer, hope, sacrifice, reverence and festivity. Fire itself is the image of the power of the Holy Spirit: “Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and enkindle in them the fire of thy love” In Catholic churches the Easter or Paschal Candle is lit for the first time during the Easter Vigil. After this is done, the Easter Candle is carried in procession into the dark church accompanied by the proclamation “The light of Christ”. One by one, candles of all present are alighted from the Easter candle. This large candle stands throughout the whole liturgical year as a reminder of “Christ as Light” next to the Baptismal Font. During the Easter season however, it is located next to the Ambo, the place for the proclamation of God’s Word.

In the Ecclesiastical Bulletin of Roseau we find a reference to the record Cathedral Bazaar of 1911, “*which had proven to be a great financial and social success. The purpose of that bazaar was to raise funds and pay off the debt that weighed on the Cathedral in consequence of the copious outlay of money caused by its restoration*”. This must have been the emergency repairs and restoration works started in 1907 after the near collapse of the Cathedral roof.

As mentioned before, the 1911 bazaar was succeeded beyond the wildest dreams and the debt was erased, so another bazaar was held in 1916.

The objective of the bazaar in 1916 was “*to have the house of God be ablaze with light during Divine Service, early in the morning and late in the evening,...*” and the writer added “*not that we want the faithful, in the church, to see and observe one another more distinctly and closely, not to give the ladies an opportunity to display the finery of their toilette and the gleams and flashes of their jewellery. No, we are not wicked enough to foster or nourish their vanity!!!*”

Electrical lighting was of course not available in the 19th century in Dominica. This fundraising activity “*to purchase and install a plant which, according to a new and efficient system, will spread throughout the Cathedral an abundant and beautiful light*” was, I presume, the electrification of the Roseau Cathedral and the installation of a generator.

In “The Dominica Story”, Dr. Lennox Honychurch wrote that “a small electricity generating plant” in the Elmshall area began operation in 1905 and was serving important buildings in the center of Roseau only. A larger power plant, with diesel generators, was built in 1929 and operated until the 1950s when it was replaced by the Trafalgar hydroelectric power station. This diesel power plant was located in the building presently occupied by the University of the West Indies, next to Alliance Française.

I hope you enjoyed these series of articles “A GLIMPSE FROM HEAVEN” on light, shadow and colour in the Roseau Cathedral.

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