

# THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL and modern architecture.    **PART III** by Bernard Lauwyck



**Red cedar scaled model of the Roseau Cathedral, made by the SMA workshop**

With the signing of the Contract for phase 3 with JARS Sales and Services Ltd. on January 18 January 2013, the Roseau Renovation project has reached a “POINT OF NO RETURN”. After careful consideration, field investigations and testing, the Bishop decided to renovate, retrofit and strengthen the existing Roseau cathedral and maintain the architecture and treasures of the past. The argument that the Roseau Cathedral is a heritage site and a national monument needs to be made and recognized by Dominicans. Knowing one’s history is understanding one’s self and the present.

Still, reflecting on “What if the Bishop of Roseau had decided to break down the old one and build a 21th Century Roseau cathedral?” might be an interesting exercise and teach us a lot.

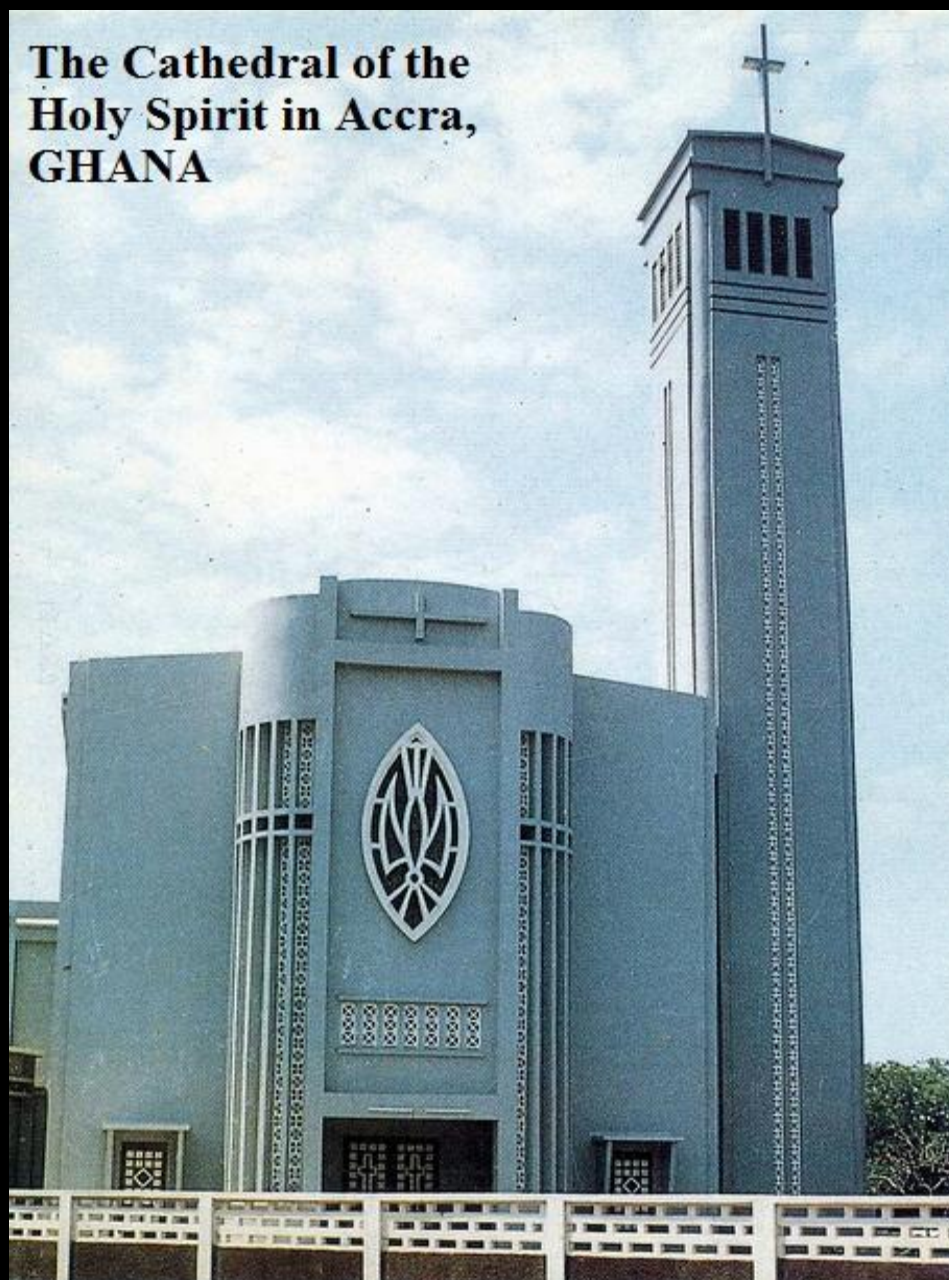
In parts I and II of this article on the Cathedral and modern architecture, I have raised questions and issues which might not be so easy to answer. Our personal response to architecture, whether physical or spiritual, immediate or after some

time, is intuitive. The response is real but difficult to describe in words. This is similar to when we hear a new piece of music for the first time. A positive response “at first hearing” might peter out as, with time, we grow bored with a simple tune with one theme. A complicated or difficult piece of music, with many themes and variations, initially judged dull, might become our favourite music once we make the effort to listen to it several times and get to know more about it. So it is also with architecture, the first impression may not be the lasting one.

Secondly our response to architecture is strongly conditioned by our childhood memories and local culture, our collective memory as Carl Jung would say.

As Fr. Nigel Karam pointed out “We have gotten so used to an Eurocentric model of what churches are supposed to be like that we can sometimes no longer think of anything different. The Eastern Catholic churches have very different models of what is sacred architecture. Also, the native peoples of South America and Africa have developed their own models of sacred architecture.”

I included photographs of few modern African cathedrals so you can judge for yourself.





We can also note that people of African ancestry seem to be more sensitive than Europeans to “the atmosphere created by a building, especially when the building has a high and dignified interior” (Harold Cave in “Mission churches in a new Nation”). This is also evident in the way Catholic liturgies are celebrated in Dominica in sharp contrast to the non- inspiring ones in Belgium.

Thirdly, our reaction or response to architecture can also be learned and acquired. This requires knowledge and education. As stated before, the fact that a church building is “very pretty” does not mean that it fulfils the main purpose it was built for: to provide shelter against the elements, to serve the needs of the liturgies which will take place in it, to serve the people of God. These practical and spiritual considerations are separate from the aesthetics of a building.

An example is Oscar Niemeyer’s magnificent glass domed cathedral in Brasilia, which lacks adequate ventilation and has an extremely hot interior. Another example would be a cathedral without parking and toilet facilities.

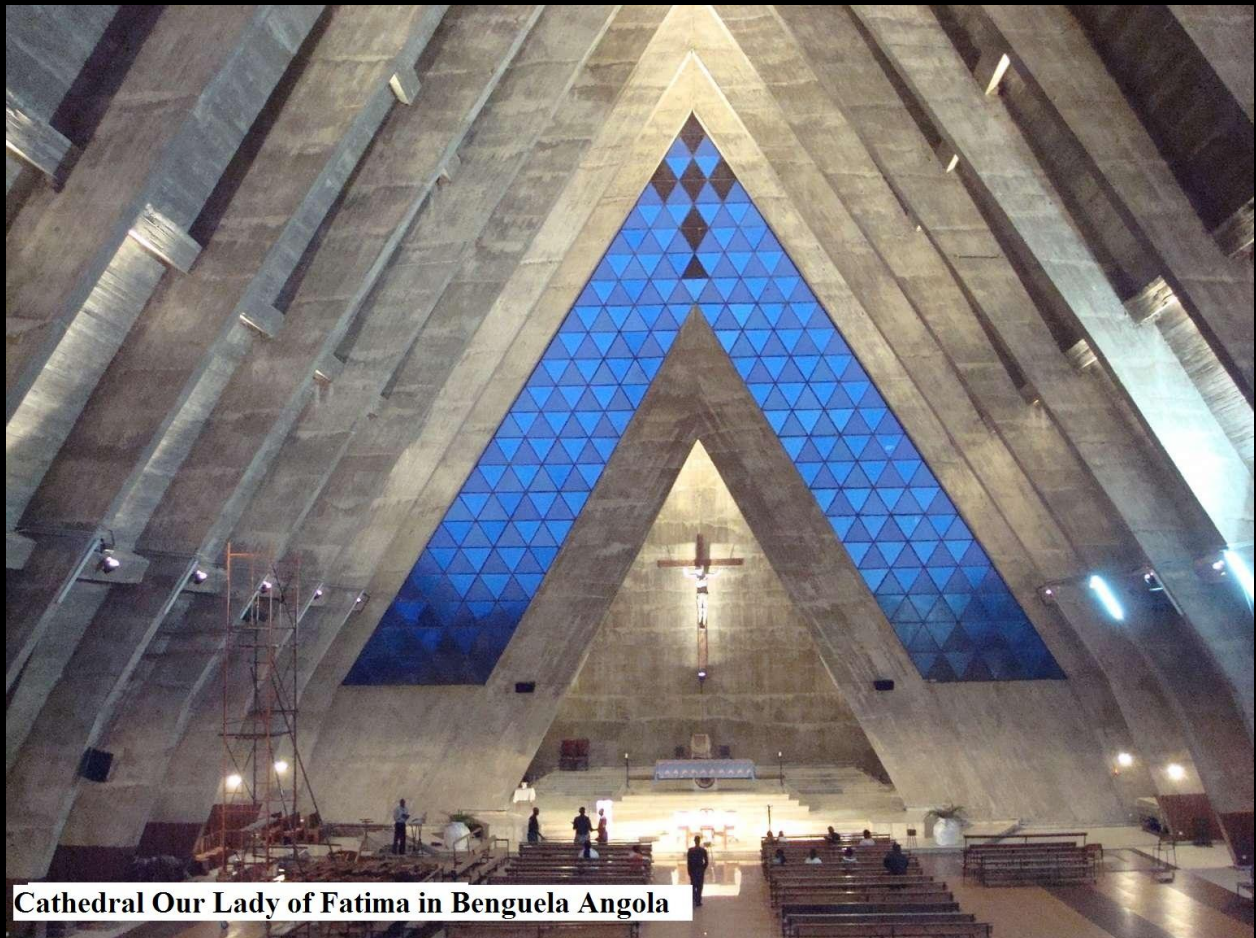


**The National Cathedral in Abuja, Nigeria**

Richard Kieckhefer in his book “Theology in Stone” describes three traditions of church designs and this should be public knowledge as it explains a lot about the types of church building which can be found in Dominica:

One is “the *classic evangelical church, meant chiefly for preaching the gospel. The interior is an auditorium, with the pulpit as focal point. Its space is often relatively small, encouraging spontaneous interaction between preacher and congregation. The main aesthetic goal is to create space for edification of individuals and of the congregation*” (see “Theology in Stone” page 11).

This type of design, built by 16<sup>th</sup> century Huguenots (French Protestants) and Dutch protestant reformers was transformed again and again and lately by modern evangelicals with the latest technology at their disposal. These dazzling decors with superstar- preachers are beamed into our homes through TV. As these images are powerful, they have affected our expectations of how a church should look like, not realizing that these churches spaces are not suitable for Catholic worship. Architects who designed according to this tradition have saddled the catholic community with an ill-fitted church building to worship in, as is evident in St. Alphonsus' church.



Cathedral Our Lady of Fatima in Benguela Angola

The second and oldest type is the sacramental church. *“This tradition stretches back to the earliest generations of public church building and claims a rich and venerable history. One of its most familiar forms is sometimes called the basilica plan, a long structure with lower aisles on either side and an apse at the end. Variations can be found in Eastern orthodox, Roman Catholic and Anglican parishes...Its standard features include a longitudinal nave (for the congregation) and chancel (for the clergy), allowing for processions...The focal point of a classic sacramental church is the altar”*. The sacramental church usually evokes the immanence of God and is rich with symbols and decorations.

A sacramental church is not the invention of an architect with clarity of purpose. A sacramental church works on multiple levels, is rich in details and tries to transcend the ordinary human experience. Poetry would be a good word to describe this church type.



## St Paul's cathedral Abidjan IVORY COAST



It is important to state that our Roseau Cathedral, the seat of the Bishop of Roseau, should be a sacramental church building par excellence.

In part IV, we will look at the third type “The communal catholic cathedral”, as is evident in Antigua. I hope you join me next week in the CHRONICLE.

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