

THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL : a glimpse of Heaven.

Part I

Text and photographs from Roseau Cathedral by Bernard Lauwyck.

Lord, give me a glimpse of Heaven

with my mind's eye.

*Even with such illuminated view
as far as my eye can see
yet my mind finds no comprehension
of what awaitens me.*

I've heard Heaven is a place

*No one would ever want to miss
the love, joy, and peace of mind
what a splendid beautiful bliss.*

By Rhonda Cash

Paul Tillich (+ 1965), a German protestant theologian in his work “On art and architecture” urged that a church building or chapel should elicit a response even without its liturgical use, that the space itself should give people an experience of the “Presence of the Holy... even before anything happens within this space”

The aim of every churchbuilding designer or architect is to create a beautiful functional environment for the liturgies to be performed in this space. A real succesful Catholic church or chapel is one where a visitor enters, coming in from a spiritual desert of nihilism, negativity & commercialism, and is refreshed, uplifted and even awed at the sight of God’s glory. Upon entering a church like this, one feels and knows instantly “this is a Sacred Space”. One feels like kneeling and praying. I had experience like this and I am sure you had too.

In this article I want to explore with you light & colour in our Roseau Cathedral. Light is a powerful symbol. When it is brought into spaces it can inspire and uplift. Architects and church designers work with light to consciously create an experience instead of a meaningless building.

Light has a deep theological meaning: God is manifested as light.

Psalm 104.2: “The LORD wraps himself in LIGHT as with a garment”. Also in Exodus 13:21 “ By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them LIGHT...” Moses and Elijah experienced the Divine Presence in the form of light and fire. “Moses’ face was made glorious by it” (Exod. 34:29-35). The incarnation (or the birth of Christ) is surrounded by extraordinary phenomena of light; the light of

the star announcing the birth of Christ and the light surrounding the shepherds (Luke 2 : 9).

Jesus said *“As long I am in the world, I am the Light”* John 9:5.

Jesus is the Light that came into the darkness of the world. Simeon, who had been waiting for the Saviour all his long life, held 40 days old baby Jesus and spoke : *“a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel”*

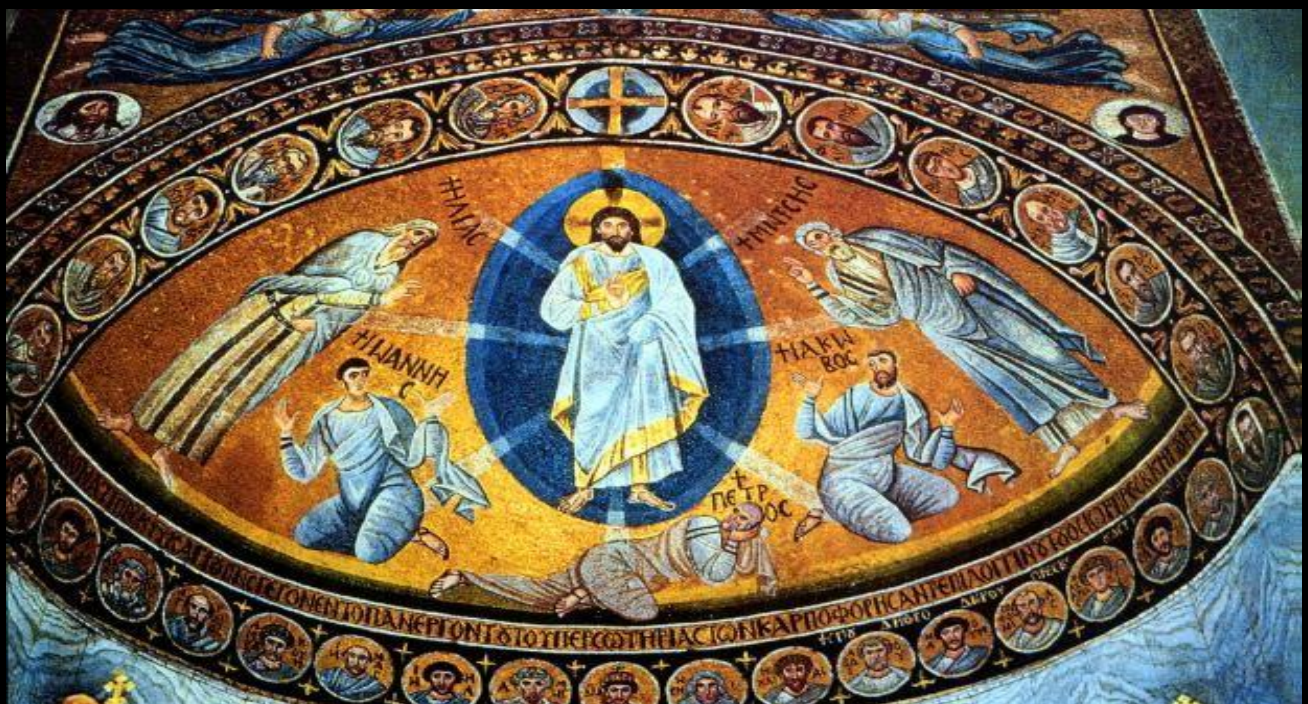
The experience of **divine or sacred light** can be found in all the world's great religious traditions.

An example can be read in Acts, as St. Paul was struck down and blinded by divine light while he was on the road to Damascus :(Acts 9. 3) *“As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"*



2 Chronicles 5: 10-12: *“ they praised the Lord singing: Praise the Lord, because he is good, And his love is eternal. As the priests were leaving the Temple, it was suddenly filled with a cloud shining with the dazzling light of the Lord's presence, and they could not continue the service of worship.”*

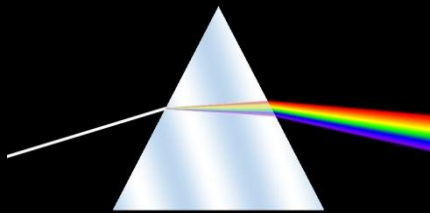
But the most famous passage in Christian Scripture is the TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS on Mount Tabor, where imagery from the book of Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 was used: *"His robe was white as snow, the hair of his head as pure as wool, his throne was a blaze of flames...on him was conferred sovereignty, glory and kingship ..."* The face of Christ *"shines as the sun"* and his garments are *"white as light"* when a bright cloud overshadowed them".



This is divine light, light that is not created. The Eastern Orthodox Church has a theology on Sacred and Divine Light, which is not created.

Also mystics write about the divine Light. Hildegard of Bingen's (+1179) visions were "bathed in uncanny light, a luminosity that she came to call "the reflection of the Living Light", which superimposed themselves on everyday scenes"

Thomas Merton (+1968), a Catholic trappist monk and mystic, wrote "*But what a thing it was, this awareness, it was so intangible, and yet it struck me like a thunderclap. It was a light that was so bright that it had no relation to visible light and so profound and so intimate that it seemed like a neutralization of every lesser experience. And yet the thing that struck me most of all was that this light was in a certain sense ordinary - it was a light (and this was most of all what took my breath away) - that was offered to all, to everybody, and there was nothing fancy or strange about it. It was the light of faith deepened and reduced to an extreme and sudden obviousness.* "



We know that day light can be broken down in the rainbow colours through a prisma . So the colours of the rainbow are created through rain droplets.

Sunlight pouring in through coloured glass is another way to create coloured light.



In our modern world we are bombarded with colourful images and artificial light so that we can no longer appreciate the powerful impression and mood changing effects these colourfull stained glass windows and church interiors had on simple human beings in the past.

Can you image the awestruck feeling of simple country people, before the invention of colour photographs, movies, tv and computers, as they entered the Roseau Cathedral full of sunlight and colour diffused through the stained glass windows and reflected on all surfaces ? The ceremonies performed in the Cathedral affected everyone of the human senses. These ceremonies or liturgies in the Cathedral must have looked magnificent and mysterious to the ordinary folks, who lived very primitive and simple lives.

E.H. Gombrich expressed it well in “The Story of Art” : “The cathedrals gave the faithful a glimpse of a different world. They would have heard in sermons and hymns of the Heavenly Jerusalem with its gates of pearl, its priceless jewels, its street of pure gold and transparent glass (Revelation 21). Now this vision had descended from heaven. The walls of these buildings were not cold and forbidding. They were formed of stained glass that shone like rubies and emeralds. The pillars, ribs and tracery were glistening with gold...The faithful who surrendered themselves to the contemplation of all this beauty could feel that they had come nearer to the understanding of a realm beyond the reach of matter.”



A glimpse from Heaven !

