

THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL: the 1924 sanctuary.

by Bernard Lauwyck

In last week's Chronicle we explored the sanctuary of the Roseau Cathedral dated 1905. In today's article, we look at the sanctuary 19 years later, in 1924, 2 years after the death of Bishop Philip Schelfhaut C.Ss.R. His successor was, as he was, a Belgian Redemptorist missionary, who had worked in the West Indies for many years, James Moris C.Ss.R..

Bishop Philip Schelfhaut started the Ecclesiastical Bulletin of Roseau, which was published from 1907 by Father A. Finoulst. These bulletins have been one of my many sources on the history of the Catholic Church in Dominica. In 1909 The Dominica Chronicle was started as the official newspaper of the Catholic Church.

I have been able, to create a composite picture of the 1924 Cathedral Sanctuary, based on a picture out of the Ecclesiastical Bulletin of Roseau. The original picture was taken during the 1924 Redemptorist mission, featuring a large black cross with the words : HEAVEN, DEATH, JUDGEMENT, HELL. This reminds me that the Redemptorists were called the "helleprekers" in Flanders: hell-preachers because they were very gifted preachers, warning and frightening people with the fires of hell.



Mr. Stanley A.W. Boyd, a former editor of the Dominica Chronicle in his "a brief history of the Cathedral of Roseau" mentions that the Cathedral was finally "free of debt" and was officially consecrated in 1925 by Bishop J. Moris.

I have not been able to confirm this consecration date from other sources, but we know that the Cathedral bazaars/ fundraisers had been very successful and enabled

Bishop Schelfhaut to clear the debt left over from the 1907-1910 renovations. So we can assume that this was the sanctuary in which the consecration took place.

Since the interior renovation works, which ended in 1910, the cathedral unfinished facade was completed with the construction of the western small tower and spire in 1916. This was done as “the tower of the old church at Pointe Michel, reached by drawbridge from the presbytery, was dynamited and the stones brought to Roseau” (see Stanley Boyd) to be used for the western tower of the Cathedral. The electrification works were also completed and in 1925 a clock was installed.

Why did it take so long to consecrate the Cathedral ? “The Catholic Church distinguishes Consecration from Blessing. Consecration, in general, is an act by which a thing is set aside from the common or profane to a sacred use, or by which a person or thing is dedicated to the service and worship of God by prayers, rites, and ceremonies.” “By a decree of the Council of Trent, Mass should not be celebrated in any place except a consecrated or blessed church. It is the wish of the Church that at least cathedrals and parish churches be solemnly consecrated, and that smaller churches be blessed (Cong. Sac. Rit., 1875)” (Catholic encyclopedia). No church can be consecrated unless free from debt and having its fabric completed. Consecrations are performed by Bishops.

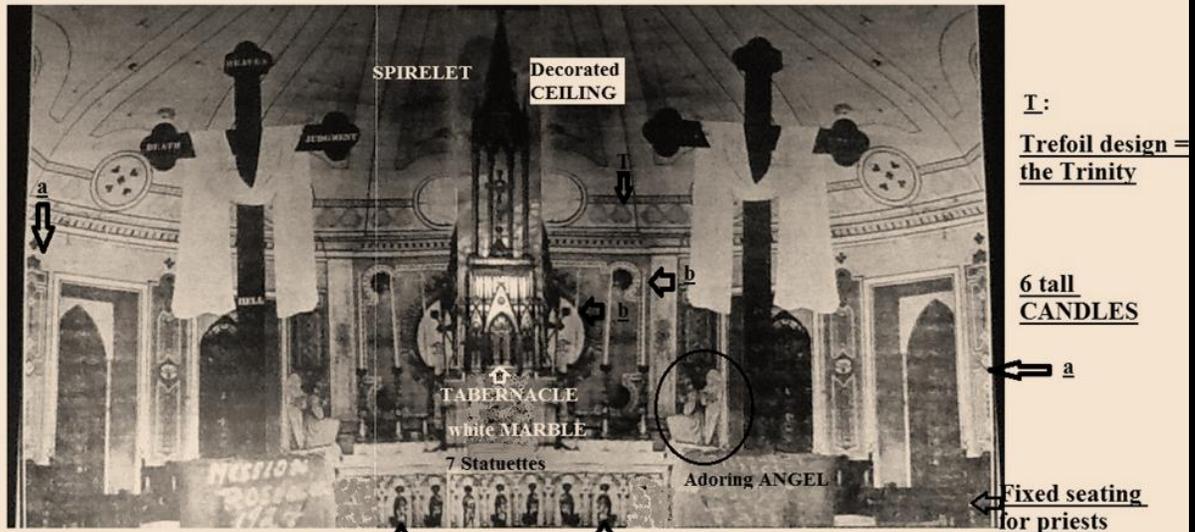
My picture provides us with a view of the white marble High Altar, with its 7 brass statuettes, six tall candles, tabernacle with spirelet and two adoring angels. According to Mr. Stanley Boyd, in above mentioned document, this magnificent main altar was “erected in 1865 with some 3000 British Pounds worth of imported marble used in it”

This picture is from the time before Vatican II, so the Mass celebrant was standing with his back to the congregation. He faced the High Altar, tabernacle and crucifix. According to ages-old tradition, he and the worshippers faced in the same direction, towards the East. Sadly our cathedral is not facing East, so an important element of this meaningful tradition was missing. The Mass was said in Latin. This is an important difference with present day Catholic worship, where the celebrant and the worshippers face each other “into a self-enclosed circle”(as described in *The Spirit of the Liturgy*” by Cardinal Ratzinger) and the Mass is done in the vernacular or the language of the country.

The sanctuary area was also clearly separated from the nave or seating area, by a communion rail. In some English churches there is still a rood screen which makes this separation of spaces extra severe. In most churches, these physical separations have been removed after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

The present altar only has 5 statuettes, namely the Good Shepherd and the four evangelists. The Sts. Peter and Paul statuettes are in storage.





The Roseau Cathedral Sanctuary in 1924

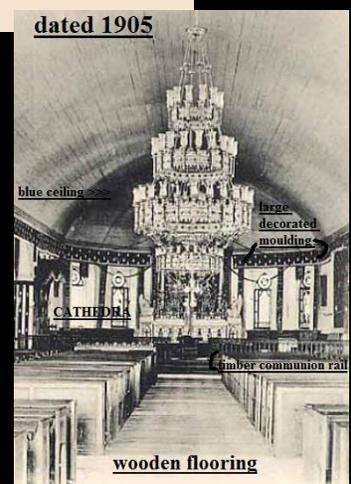
a : elaborate designs

b : mural behind High Altar

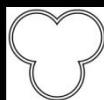
We clearly notice a lot of differences between the sanctuary of 1905 and this 1924 composite photograph, especially in the decorations.

This decorated ceiling is not the one which was installed by the Kalinago craftsmen in 1865 as we read in *Bishop Moris*’ “History of the Diocese of Roseau”:

“Early in 1907,..the ceiling , built with local wood, proved to be so worm-eaten that individual boards were becoming loose here and there and accidents were to be feared. When the renovation works were completed and the Cathedral painted inside and out, Redemptorist Brother Ildephonse Lepas (+ July 10, 1910) decorated the Sanctuary....”



Brother Ildephonse used the trefoil



as a recurring motive, symbol of the Holy Trinity.

Notice also the elaborate designs on the walls and mural behind the tabernacle. I include a part of this mural which shows the letters J S and a hand holding a sceptre. If anyone has any idea about the origin or meaning of this mural, I would be grateful to receive it.



The sanctuary photograph was taken at night so the stained glass is not visible. This was a beautifully decorated sanctuary with multi colours, shapes and patterns. It is a pity that we cannot deduce the colours from these photographs.

Mr. Stanley Boyd mentioned in his document that in 1922 Bishop Naughten and Schelfhaut memorial stained glass windows were installed. I have no information on these windows as they may have been destroyed by Hurricane David in 1979. Also in 1919 an “Ypres Cathedral panel” was donated. Ypres is a town in Belgian which was completely destroyed in World War I (1914-18) and again I have no information on this panel in the Roseau Cathedral. Maybe some of you, with good memories might help me with this? Does anybody know more about the old

Pointe Michel presbytery which was connected by a drawbridge to the old St. Luke's church (tower)?

In the next article, we will look at a photograph of the Cathedral in the pre-Vatican II period of Bishop Arnold Boghaert (1957-1993).

bernardlauw@yahoo.com PO Box 317 Roseau Dominica