

TREASURES OF THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL

STAINED GLASS IN THE SANCTUARY window # 1

depicting

the Good Shepherd

by Bernard Lauwyck



DETAIL SGW the Good shepherd

For more than 35 years, visitors and worshippers alike have looked at the (4) four colourful stained glass windows, behind the altar in the sanctuary of the Roseau Cathedral. They looked but all they could see were a mosaic of bright colours.

These windows are very different from the other stained glass windows in the Cathedral, which are beautifully painted or etched and teach us about the saints and their lives. As these 4 Sanctuary windows are like burning flames, “flamboyant” or “rayon ante”, most of us do not know what they are depicting.

This is a sad state of affairs, which I want to rectify with 8 articles.

These four recent windows were purchased and installed by Rev. Father Charles Vermeulen C.Ss.R. in 1975. This was when Arnold Boghaert was Bishop of Roseau (1957-1993).

The first window depicts Christ as the Good Shepherd, a symbolism that is repeated in the centre bronze statuette on the main altar.

The word “shepherd” appears 118 times in the Old and New Testament so it must be an important word, pregnant with meaning(s). In this I have been guided by Kenneth E. Bailey 1992 book “FINDING THE LOST: CULTURAL KEYS TO LUKE 15”

Psalm 23 indicates clearly that the shepherd is a symbol for God in the Old Testament:

King David sings: *“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.”*



**Brass Statuette on white
marble: the center ALTAR
: the Good Shepherd**



God is clearly depicted as a Good Shepherd in Psalm 23, although the word ‘Good’ is not present .

Even earlier in the times of the three patriarchs, God is described as the Good Shepherd. *“Then Jacob blessed Joseph and said, “May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day (Genesis 48:15).*

Further in the Old Testament the term “Shepherd” is also used to describe the human leaders of Israel, appointed by the ultimate Good Shepherd, The Lord.

This we see in: *“I will place over them one **shepherd**, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their **shepherd**. My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one **shepherd**.” (Ezekiel 37:23).*

And we get an insight how a good leader should behave and act, as it was written *“David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skilful hands he led them. (Psalm 78:72). “He tends his flock like a **shepherd**: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.” (Isaiah 40:11)*

And God saw that it was good.

Later in the Old Testament, God became bitterly disappointed, because human leaders do not always act in good faith for the Common Good, “with integrity of heart and skilful hands”.

At that point the idea of the BAD SHEPHERD is introduced. These bad shepherds are called to account by God:

*“Woe to the **shepherds** who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!” declares the Lord. Jeremiah 23:1*

They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are **shepherds** who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, they seek their own gain. (Isaiah 56:11)

In the above passage of the Old Testament we learn something about the qualities of bad leaders or shepherds.

The responsibility of the human leaders for the fate, well being and acts of their people is paramount. They need to lead them in the right way. This is evident when the consequences of bad leadership are described in the OT: the people behave badly and are punished:

When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the Lord, “I have sinned; I, the shepherd, have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done?” (2 Samuel 24:17). This indicates that the fate of the leader is closely intertwined to the fate of his or her people. Their transgressions are blamed on the leader.

At this point I want to introduce the theme of lost sheep or the abandonment of the sheep by the bad leader:

*“Woe to the worthless **shepherd**, who deserts the flock! (Zechariah 11:17)*

The Good leader or shepherd *“will search for the lost and bring back the strays. will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak,... will **shepherd** the flock with justice.” (Ezekiel 34: 16).*

*“I will place **shepherds** over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the Lord (Jeremiah 23:4).*

And so we come to Jesus in the New Testament, God among us, who goes one huge step further: *“I am the **good shepherd**. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10: 11)*

Mark tells us that *“Jesus landed and saw a large crowd; he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a **shepherd**. So he began teaching them many things” (Mark 6:34).*

Clearly the religious leaders of Jesus’ time, the Sadducees and Pharisees, were too busy collaborating with the occupying political power or with their own destiny, salvation, schemes and devices. They left the common people to fend for themselves, with disastrous consequences.

I conclude at this Pentecost 2013, or the feast of the Birth of the Church with a passage from ACTS:

*“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be **shepherds** of the Church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”* (Acts 20:28)

