

# **THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL and modern**

## **architecture.**     **PART I** by Bernard Lauwyck

On New year's eve, Bishop Malzaire announced the imminent start of Lot 3 of the renovation works at the Roseau Cathedral, which includes a demolition component - the removal of the roof timber and the interior stone pillars and arches - and the construction of new reinforced concrete foundations, pillars and arches up to ring beam level. The round pillars and arches will be a faithful imitation of the original stonework dated 1907. Lot 2, completed in August 2012, was limited to the removal and disposal of the asbestos fibre containing roofing tiles. Lot 1, the preliminaries, included the removal, storage and/or securing of contents.

In this article I wanted to dwell on one of the important decisions... which was made before any actual work started on the Roseau Cathedral.

The spectacular destruction of the catholic church in Portsmouth on November 21, 2004 raised some important questions for the people involved in the conception and planning of the Roseau Cathedral renovation project. Like the Roseau Cathedral, the old Portsmouth church was a building constructed with local stones and locally manufactured Lime mortar (La Chaux) without any steel reinforcement. The Portsmouth church tower, which collapsed, and the bell tower of the Cathedral were finished in the same year: 1855. Whereas the workmanship in Roseau seemed to be superior to the one of the Portsmouth church, the question had to be asked how resistant any unreinforced masonry was to the forces generated by an earthquake. The absence of solid foundations under the Portsmouth catholic church also raised questions about the foundations of the Cathedral. Recognizing that the only way to find out about these foundations was to have a look, test pits were dug in and around the cathedral to inspect the existing foundations and test the load bearing capacity of the soil. This last proved to be vastly superior to the waterlogged swampy soil of Portsmouth. While the foundations were solid, doubts remained about the impact of future earthquakes on the old cathedral.

Modern society demands that much thought be given to all possible alternatives before a projects gets off the ground. Hence some people on our committees favoured the option to demolish the old Roseau cathedral and build a complete new contemporary cathedral, adapted to the latest liturgical requirements for a Catholic place of worship.

The argument was that a cost-benefit analysis would show that the same amount of money spend on the construction of a new Cathedral building, designed to conform to the latest OECS Building Code, would provide a stronger (= earthquake resistant) building than the retrofitted renovated existing cathedral. In addition, as the grounds around the Cathedral are very limited, this newly constructed cathedral could allow for underground parking and provide an additional 500 seats on a suspended gallery or balcony as one can see in large

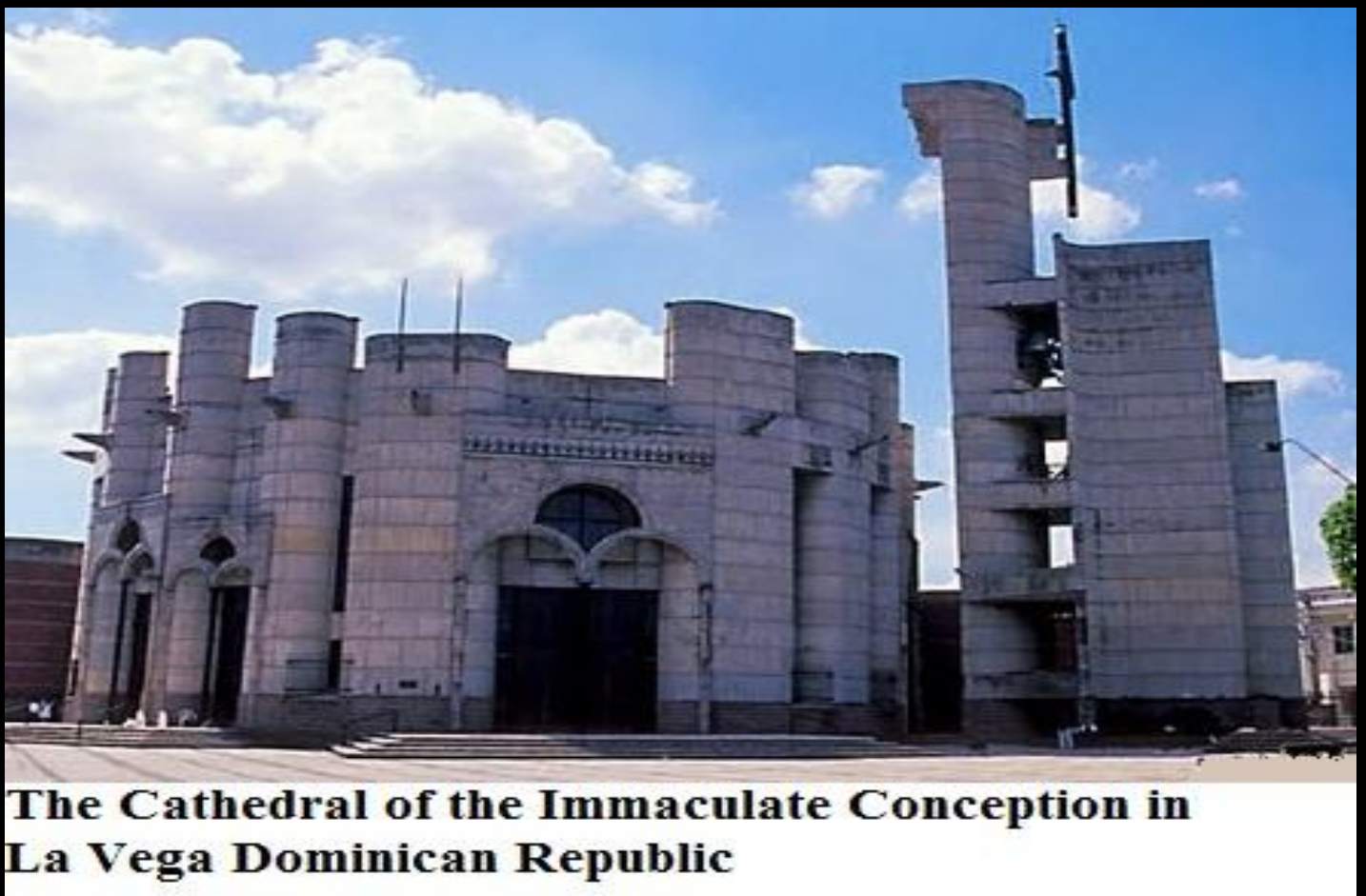
auditorium- like churches on TV. The whole building would be devoid of any visual obstacles such as interior columns.

All these arguments were discussed and considered together with 5 other options of varying degrees of reinforcing and retrofitting of the old cathedral, before a final decision was taken by the Bishop.

The reconstruction and renovation of the Cathedral of St. Georges in Grenada, destroyed by hurricane IVAN in September 2004, provided our Bishop with a regional example of a successful cathedral renovation project. At one time Bishop Darius in Grenada also considered to build a new cathedral on a different location.

Looking at some modern or post-modern churches in the region and beyond, one cannot be too confident in taking up the challenge to design and construct a contemporary cathedral.

One such example is the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in La Vega, the Dominican Republic, which turned out extremely ugly on the outside. (see below)



**The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in La Vega Dominican Republic**

An example of a bland uninspiring modern church is the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Managua, Nicaragua. Construction began in 1991 when the old cathedral was damaged after a 1972 earthquake that destroyed 90% of the city. The new cathedral has created much controversy, particularly about its architectural style. Locals refer to it as La Chichona on account of the plethora of cupolas adorning it like so many "chiches" (Spanish: *slang for breasts*). (see Wikipedia).



Moyra Doorly wrote in her book *“No Place For God: The Denial of the Transcendent”* and I quote :

*“Architecture is interesting because of the power it has. Buildings can inspire wonder or dread, and either enhance or diminish the lives of the people who use them. The modern age has witnessed the construction of the most banal and uninspiring churches in history. The attempt to create a church architecture that would meet the needs of the age has resulted in churches that are unfit for any age. Contemporary church buildings, as well as being the ugliest ever built, ...It is often said that churches represent "theology in stone" and that they can be "read" as such. If this is true for the Gothic cathedral, with its towering internal spaces pointing to God and its abundance of imagery offering instruction and inspiration to the laity, then it is equally true for the empty church buildings of today.”*

Maybe Moyra Doorly visited the Church of the Most Holy Trinity in Vienna better known as the Wotrubach Church. (see below). It looks more like Lego blocks put together than a church building. Can you imagine this type of building in the location of our present cathedral, overlooking Roseau ?



Church of the Most Holy Trinity in Vienna



Let us explore this modern new church versus traditional church issue a little more in the next Chronicle .

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