



"PELICAN-IN-HER-PIETY"

THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL: A NATIONAL MONUMENT, A NATIONAL TREASURE.

By Bernard Lauwyck

Viewed from the E.O. Loblack Bridge, the catholic Cathedral dominates the skyline of Roseau, with its majestic bell tower and steeple.

To appreciate this national monument and treasure one needs to enter, as many tourists do nowadays. Our Lady of Fair Haven Cathedral, as any other catholic cathedral in the world vibrates with intentionality, it is rich with symbolic meaning. Absolutely nothing in it is without significance. This building was constructed to communicate with the faithful. The building “speaks” to our mind and soul! This is what church architecture is all about.

Today, we look at the stained glass windows.

Stained glass windows are art, a storybook, and catechism all rolled into one, laying out stories from the lives of Jesus, Mary, and the saints.

The stained glass in the Roseau Cathedral is very beautiful, deeply imbued with a devotional spirit, and of high artistic merit. These windows were installed, together with the pipe organ, in 1883 and are of French manufacture. A special effort will be made, during the cathedral roof renovation, to store and protect them for future generations of Dominicans.

“A speaking picture, with this end, to teach and delight” (Sir Philip Sidney)

It is hard to image the impact these brightly coloured windows had on people in pre-modern times. These days we are bombarded hourly by colourful images in magazines, on computer screens, on TV. This was not the human experience before the development of colour movies and TV. In the predominately agrarian society of Dominica, these windows would have been a wonder to watch. They would have captured the people with their beauty and their message. They were a primary source of catechetical knowledge, inspiration, delight, wonder, and the experience of even deeper spiritual mysteries.

An excellent example is the “**PELICAN-IN-HER-PIETY**” window, as depicted here. The Pelican-in-her-Piety is an allegorical depiction of Jesus Christ, in both His sacrificial love and resurrection.

In Medieval times, the pelican was thought to be particularly attentive to her young, to the point of providing her own blood by wounding her own breast when no other food was available.

Hebrews 9:12: “ *he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.*”

In an age when literacy was limited, the image of the Pelican-in-her-Piety would have been recognisable and understood by everyone who saw it and was, in particular, interpreted as being symbolic of the Eucharist.

A hymn by St. THOMAS AQUINAS named "Humbly We Adore Thee", describes CHRIST as the "LOVING DIVINE PELICAN".
"O loving Pelican! O Jesu Lord!

Unclean I am but cleanse me in Thy Blood of which a single drop, for sinners spilt, can purge the entire world from all its guilt."

From great medieval cathedrals to small churches across Europe, and including our own stained glass window in our Cathedral in Roseau, the image of the Pelican-in-her-Piety stretches across the centuries.