

THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL and the Kalinago

people. **Part II** by Bernard Lauwyck

In part I of this article on the Kalinago people, we discovered how Friar, later to be Bishop, Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474-1566) had, as a landowner with many Indian slaves, a deep conversion while reading Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 34:18-22 “*the sacrifice of an offering wrongly acquired is blemished, Like one who kills a son before his father's eyes is the man who offers sacrifice from the property of the poor. The bread of the needy is the life of the poor; whoever deprives them of it is a man of blood.*” I discovered that you will not find these verses in the King James translation as Ecclesiasticus ends at chapter 12 in this anno 1611 AD translation. Catholic and Orthodox translations of the Bible include Ecclesiasticus chapters 13- 51, based on the original Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew scriptures known as the Septuagint (3rd century BC).

Las Casas became “the protector of the Indians” by applying the Word of God to his personal conduct and daily life. He liquidated his properties and travelled with two Dominican Friars to fight for the rights of the Indians. Note that the pioneers of Christianity with the Kalinago people in Dominica were also Dominicans missionaries such as Father Raymond Breton and his successors. The Jesuits had other intentions as they demonstrated in Geneva, Grandbay

Las Casas wrote of the many atrocities committed against the Indians. In 1552 he published “Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias”. (A short account of the destruction of the West Indies). In a later work, named “the History of the Indies”, Bishop Las Casas went a step further and wrote: “*I came to realize that black slavery was as unjust as Indian slavery...* “. The fact was that the Indian population in the greater West Indies had collapsed by 1650 to about 10 % of the population of which was encountered by Columbus in 1493. This was due to imported European diseases against which the Indian population had no natural resistance, starvation, exploitation, over working in the mines and extreme violence. An economic system based on exploitation needed other slaves and African slavery became at a very early stage (to the West Indies in 1510) the answer to the new economic order.

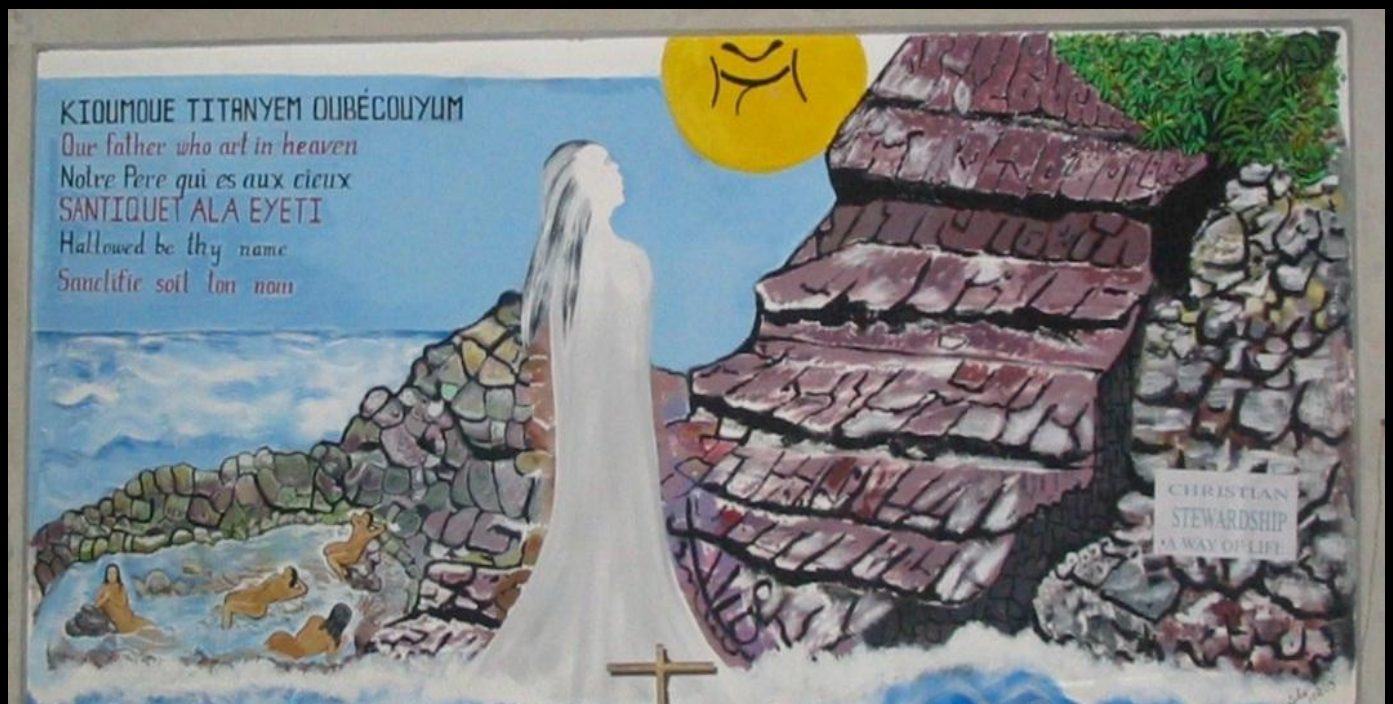
A vivid example of this switch to African slaves came from Martinique, where an attempt to use the Kalinago as labourers on the newly established sugar and cacao plantations was met with stiff resistance. The French King, in “*La Traité des Noirs*” (1636) authorized the capture and purchase of slaves from Africa to be transported to Martinique and other parts of the French West Indies. The “troublesome” Kalinago were expelled en masse, some fled to Dominica or St. Vincent around 1660. In Guadeloupe, the Kalinago were exterminated during several battles between 1635-1639. The Kalinago on the small rugged islands such as St. Vincent and Dominica, islands in which no foreign power was interested at that time, remained living according to their own traditional ways.

I had the honour and privilege to work as Diocesan Engineer with Rev. Fr. Jean Guéry F.M.I (+2011) in designing and constructing two church buildings in the Kalinago Territory, which were based on the traditional architecture of the Kalinago people. In both cases Mr. Roy Tyson with his local team were the builders.

The first, the new parish church of SALYBIA was based on a proposal and drawing of Dr. Lennox Honychurch. It was completed in 1991, blessed and dedicated to “Our Lady of the Caribs” (Sainte Marie de Caraïbes) by the late Bishop Arnold Boghaert (+1993). The design is based on the “Carbet”. During my recent visit to the Kalinago Barana Aute (the Carib Model Village), I was told that the “Carbet” was traditionally the largest and central building in a Kalinago village, where the men and the chief slept and gathered.

The second building, I had the privilege to work on, was the chapel in MAHAUT RIVER, which was blessed and dedicated to Our Lady Queen of Martyrs by Bishop Edward Gilbert in 1995. Its design is based on the “ajoupa” the traditional dwelling house for the women in a Kalinago village.

In both buildings, wall murals were painted by local artist Mr. Faustelus Frederick.

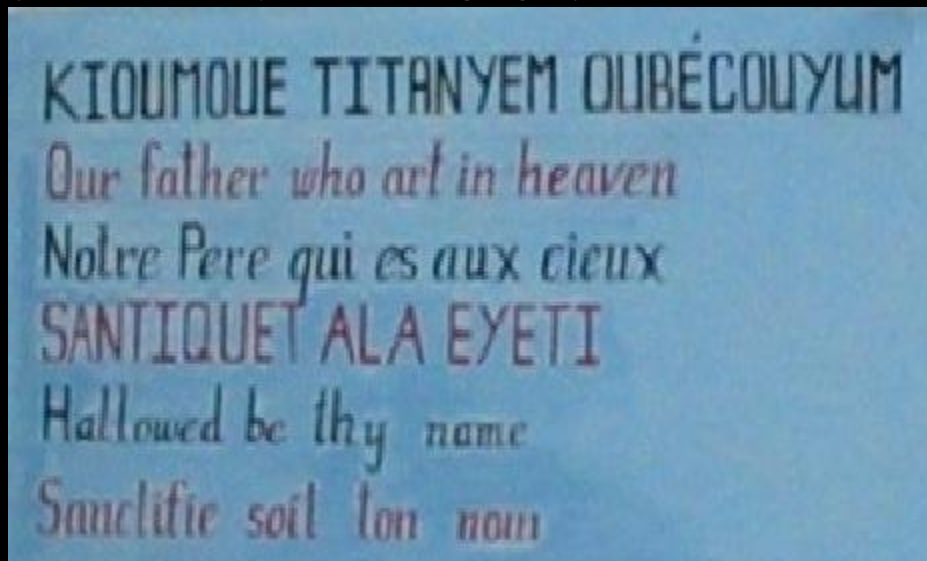


In both sacred spaces the altar is shaped as the traditional canoe.

To better understand the importance of these two church builders and contents, I turn to Rev. Fr. Vanty Auguste C.Ss.R. and quote from his Master of Theology thesis (2012):

“ This was in an effort to remind the Kalinago of their past and ancestry. During the tenure of Fr. Jean Guéry, as Parish Priest, the time was at hand to initiate a change in the Church of the Caribs. He began to understand that liturgy must take into account a people’s language, their culture and what they stand for. For the first time the Catholic Church in the Kalinago Territory began the process of inculturation by inserting Carib artefacts in the liturgy. Now the faithful can

worship in a building that reflects their ancestry. The name of the Salybia Parish Church was changed from “Immaculate Conception” to “Our Lady of the Caribs”, a name never heard of before. The words of the Lord’s Prayer and Hail Mary were inscribed in the Carib language on the walls of the Chapel in Mahaut River. For the first time, Kalinago children and parents too are seeing the words of the Lord’s Prayer in the language of their ancestors.”



On the symbolism of the canoe as altar Fr. Vanty wrote : “ **The Altar** is in the shape of a canoe or fishing boat used by the Kalinago fishermen. The men venture far into the woods to search for the perfect Gommier tree, which is the best tree for canoe making. Other trees can be used but the Gommier tree is preferred over all other trees because of its hardness and it gives a beautiful finishing product. No wonder the Church accepts it for an altar of sacrifice in the Church. It is seen as a deliberate effort by the Church and the Kalinago people to insert a symbol of their livelihood into the faith.”



In closing, I want to add that the octagonal shape of the chapel in Mahaut River symbolised regeneration and resurrection. The octagon is a symbol of Jesus unifying God and earth. An octagon is the shape 'halfway' between a circle (=symbol of perfection and God) and a square (symbol of matter and earth). The idea of heaven and earth coming together lies behind the octagonal shape of many baptismal fonts and churches.



Octagonal shaped chapel in Mahaut River, decorated with murals by Mr. Faustelus Frederick.

Let me invite you to visit this beautiful chapel, lit a candle and remember all the martyrs for the Faith.

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