

The Renovation of the Sanctuary of San Roque Cathedral: A Case Study of Liberation Restoring

Demetrio C. Alcaraz Jr., Architect

**Research Center for Culture, Arts and Humanities
University of Santo Tomas**

Abstract

In 2012, the Parish Pastoral Council of the Diocese of Caloocan decided to embark on a major project for the Cathedral to highlight its bi-centennial celebration in 2015. The initial plan was to have the altar renovated just to meet its basic needs, it being the seat of the Bishop of Caloocan.

D.C. Alcaraz Jr. & Associates was commissioned to do the conservation study and subsequently the design for its renovation. After various investigations, research and evaluations, it was deemed necessary to focus on its most significant architectural element, which is the baldachin. While the church has endured two hundred years, the stylistic renovation of 1981 brought to light a significant change in style which highlighted the architect's imprint. Thus, liberation restoring technique through philological intervention was deemed necessary to reveal the original character of the sanctuary. Although the initial plan was limited to the altar, the results of evaluations and consultations required the total renovation of the sanctuary.

Since the existing apse was the focus of the renovation, will a new design safeguard its historical meaning? Moreover, can new technology and materials be appropriate to co-exist in this setting?

The upgraded function of the church to a cathedral requires an enlarged sanctuary, necessitating a new architectural intervention.

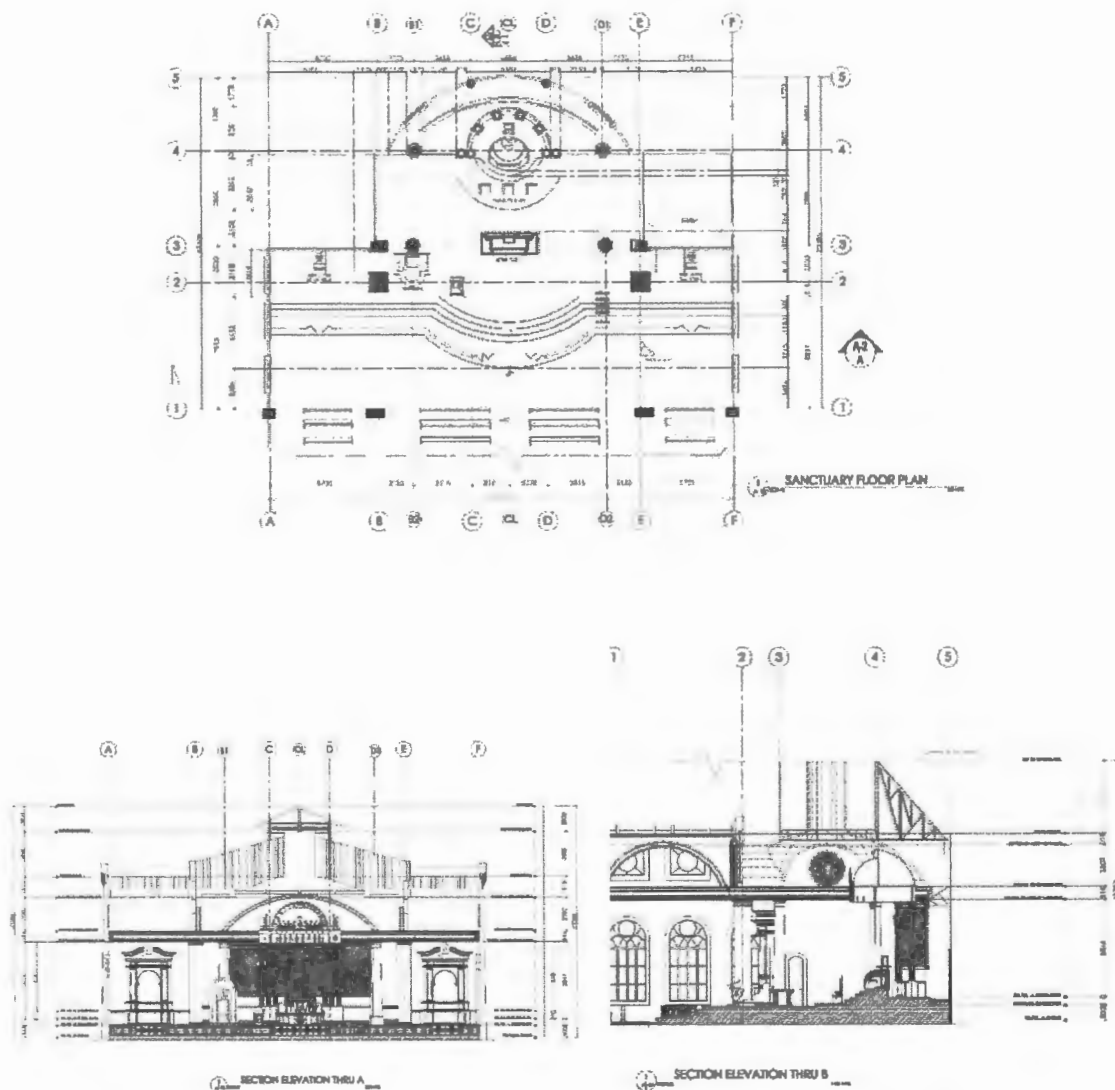
Keywords: conservation, architectural element, liberation restoring, imprint, philological intervention, baldachin

Introduction

Since its declaration as a cathedral in 2003, the San Roque Church has not undergone any renovation to meet the requirements of being one. Only through the bishop seat installed on the left side of the apse would visitors know that the church has been elevated to a cathedral.

When the Cathedral reached its two hundred years in 2015, therefore, the Parish Pastoral Council decided to embark on a major project to highlight its bi-centennial celebration. In 2012, a decision had been made to have a major renovation of its sanctuary with the intention of upgrading the same to the level of a cathedral – it being the seat of the Bishop of Caloocan.

Figure 1. The Sanctuary Floor Plans



The requirements for a Cathedral included the following:

- ☐ Relocation of the Statue of the Patron Saint
- ☐ Increased space in front of the altar table for ceremonial activities
- ☐ Enough space for chairs during concelebrated masses
- ☐ Concealed walkway at the rear of the altar
- ☐ Proper ventilation
- ☐ New designs for altar table, ambo and cathedra

At the onset, the administrator requested an architectural investigation to determine what level of conservation could be done to preserve its heritage upon which decisions could be anchored. It was in this light that the baldachin was determined to be the most significant architectural feature left after the major renovation in 1981. It was the stylistic renovation rendered by the previous designer that prevailed upon its interiors.

For major changes had been employed in the baldachin: six columns had been removed, a replacement of concrete hollow block wall clad in marble was added at the back; the remaining column pedestals were removed; and the statue of the patron saint was placed at the center, in lieu of the cross. Another major change was in the elliptical shaped dome ceiling of the apse with wooden ribs which seemed to press down on the baldachin's hemispherical dome.

Figure 2. The left photo below shows the 1914 altar as reconstructed by the Confradia Sagrado de Corazon de Jesus; the middle and right photos show the renovated altar in 1981.



The result of the investigation and research brought forth the conception of the new design that was presented to the Bishop and the Consultores on May 23, 2012, again on June 15, 2012 and was

eventually accepted and approved by then Bishop Deogracias Iñiguez Jr. D.D. and the *consultores* on August 3, 2012. However, in January 2013 Bishop Iñiguez opted for an early retirement and Most Rev. Francisco De Leon D.D. was designated as the Apostolic administrator. The proposed revision was again presented to Bishop De Leon and the *consultores* on June 4, 2013, June 29, 2013 and August 22, 2013. On September 2, 2013 after agreeing on several revisions, the proposed renovation was unanimously approved. The project start-up commenced on October 2014 with the agreement that site construction would be in February 2015. However, due to some concerns, the actual construction on site commenced in October 2015. With the earlier intended completion by December of the same year, it was a nightmare for the construction management team.

The Proposed Design of the Sanctuary

After months of research and investigations, it was deemed appropriate to liberate the baldachin, which is the most significant architectural feature of the sanctuary. Applying the liberation restoring concept of conservation, the baldachin should become the focal point of the sanctuary's new design. The eight Corinthian columns would be re-fabricated and fitted to redeem its former position. The cupola, due to its deterioration, would be repaired, its lawanit skin replaced with light weight glass-fiber reinforced plaster, and the lost and damaged detailed carvings would be re-fabricated.

Figure 3. The Envisioned Re-designed Sanctuary

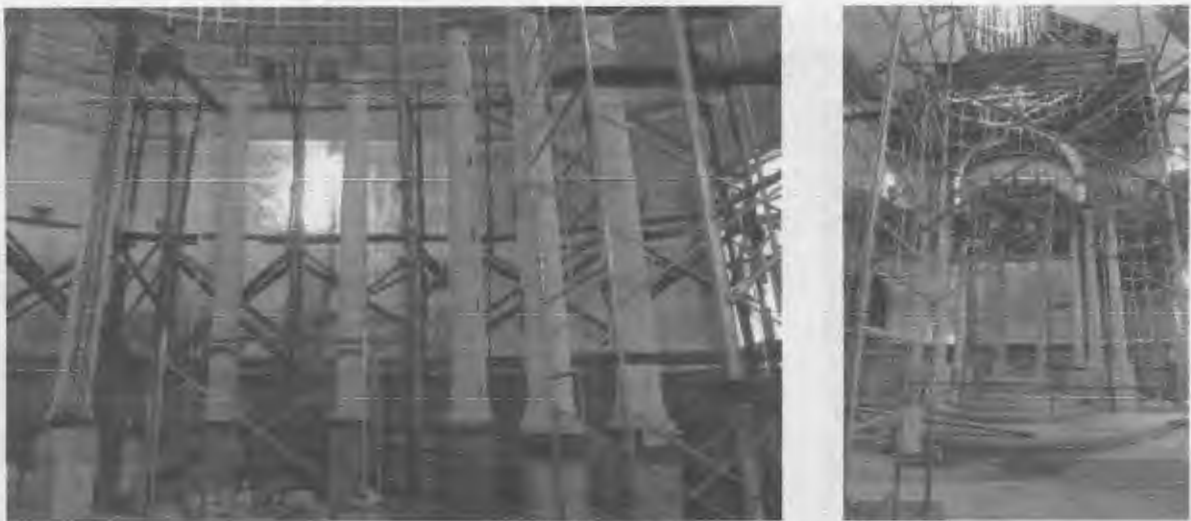


Figure 4. The Cupola: For Re-fabrication



The baldachin, now being the focal point, should be highlighted by the redesigned ceiling. Instead of the elliptical shaped wooden ribbed ceiling, a hemispherical shaped ceiling similar to the baldachin would replace it. A lightweight glass-fiber reinforced plaster on metal furring would be appropriated. The new ceiling would extend in front with its oculus at the center and its skylight roof illuminating the altar table. The oculus through its shaft would be utilized as heat stack for passive ventilation and a source of natural lighting for the sanctuary.

Figure 5. Various Images showing Various Stages of Work on the Sanctuary





Another major concern of the project was the eventual relocation of the statue of the patron saint, San Roque. Initial inquiries revealed that it was positioned in the center to give honor to his various perceived intercessions for the community's answered supplications and as such, moving it elsewhere would create a stir among its parishioners. However, given the hierarchy in both placement and height in the Catholic altar design, the Cross should occupy the highest position, followed by the Blessed Virgin Mary and lastly, the patron saint. In the past, especially in old churches, the patron saint almost always occupies the center of the altar.

Figure 6. Corinthian Columns, Curved Glass and Laminated Hard Wood for the Retablo



The pre-cast natural stone Corinthian columns await the installation of their cupola; the middle photo is the 15mm tempered curved glass retablo and the right photo, the laminated hard wood bottom and top jambs of the retablo as seen during its fabrication.

Figure 7. Pictures of San Roque Fitted into the Glass Retablo



Other Furnishings Designed for the Sanctuary

a. The Ambo

The Ambo or the lectern was designed to display the four evangelists. A roller was placed to manually change the images printed on cloth depending on the readings as well as the lighting provision that can change color based on the season. Below are the Ambo, and the evangelists' images used, those of Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Figure 8. The Ambo and the Evangelists



b. The Cross, The Cathedra, and the Tabernacle

The central focus of the Sanctuary includes the Cross, the Cathedra, and the Tabernacle. The Cross which was patterned after the 1880 work of Leon Bonnat, was sculpted by Antonio Magtoto of Calumpit. The Cathedra with the seal of the bishop on the glass backing, stands on its own dais. And the refurbished Tabernacle has its own stand. (Figure 9)

The problem of projecting the hierarchy of the Cross, the Blessed Mother, and the patron saint of the Cathedral is solved by placing the Cross in the high central position; the left side altar is dedicated to the Nuestra Senora de la Nueva, in the left side altar; and the patron saint, San Roque in the right side altar (Figure 10).

Figure 9. Meaningful Placements of the Cross, the Cathedra, and the Tabernacle.



Figure 10. The Left and Right Side Altars Dedicated to the Blessed Mother, and to the Patron Saint, respectively



Conclusion

In summary, the renovation of the Sanctuary of San Roque Cathedral was finally realized after years of research and investigation that inspired its design. The effort to satisfy the users was foremost in the planning stage, thereby complementing technicalities with aesthetics. Another important factor was the choice of materials which will be best appreciated not only by the present but also the future generations.

The cultural context of the project, the image of San Roque, was considered to be of utmost importance and the approach taken is an alternative in architectural interventions. In the desire to give emphasis to its history, the modern technology and new materials utilized were carefully considered to effectively highlight the foremost core of the project which is the liberation of the baldachin.

Figure 11. The Renovated Sanctuary at the installation of Most Rev. Pablo Virgilio David D.D. as the second Bishop of Caloocan, on January 2, 2016



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