



A Visual Documentation of Fil-Hispanic Churches

Part XV-A: Parish Church of La Santísima Trinidad, Loay, Bohol

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Loay grew as a mission station of Loboc on the right, or eastern, bank of the mouth of the Loboc River. It is presumed to be the “new village” of Santísima Trinidad mentioned in a history of the Jesuits written in 1751-1754 by Juan Delgado, S.J. The opposite bank is now believed to be the most plausible site where the famous “Blood Compact” of Legazpi and Sikatuna took place, as recently declared by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines. Loay was erected as a separate parish in 1799 and was ministered to by the Augustinian Recollects until they were made to leave as a result of the Philippine Revolution in 1898. The well-shaded and tranquil center of town belies its near destruction when American troops razed Loay in November 1901, leaving only the church and *convento* unscathed.

Like the old Bohol towns of Loon, Maribojoc, and Tagbilaran, the townscape of Loay is divided into “uptown,” here called Ibabaw (‘above’), and “downtown,” named Canipaan after the nipa swamps separating it from the river. The church buildings and schools flank the rectangular plaza on Ibabaw, which is linked to Canipaan through stone stairways built in 1836-1837. The church itself is curiously partially embedded in the ground, perhaps as a stabilizing technique against earthquakes. The same condition is also observed in the churches of Sinait (Ilocos Sur), Manaoag (Pangasinan), Indang (Cavite), and Garcia-Hernandez (Bohol).

The church of the Most Holy Trinity at one end of the church plaza is built on a cruciform plan. The present concrete façade, ruined by the earthquake of 2013, was built as an extension of the original façade which is dated 1822 over the main doorway. Above this date is a carved stone medallion with the Eye of God in a symbolic triangle, borne by two angels. When the new façade was built over the old façade in 1889 (as indicated by an inscription on one wall), the floor of the choirloft was likewise extended to cover the space between the old and new façades. Due to this addition, the upper part of the medallion was effectively blocked off from churchgoers on the ground level.

The three *retablos* of the church have remained largely intact despite the 2013 earthquake. The central *retablo* is a baldaquin housing the images of the Holy Trinity. Above its dome, until stolen a few years back, was a blindfolded figure representing Faith. Extending over the sanctuary is a veil-like canopy of fine woodwork unique in the country. The two side *retablos* appear to be folk adaptations of classical and baroque forms perhaps inspired by altarpieces in nearby Baclayon and Loboc. The image of the Jesuit saint Francisco Javier on the left *retablo* may have originated from the Jesuit-built Loboc church. To this day, the fiesta of this saint is celebrated in Canipaán with a fluvial procession replete with colorful sails and balloons.

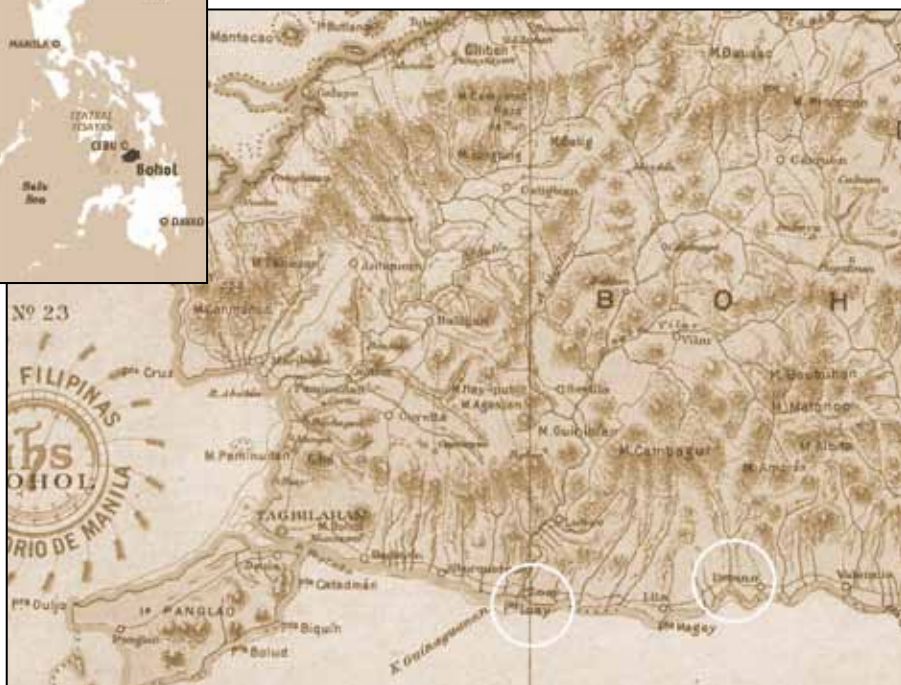
The L-shaped *convento*, now a school, was built at the back of the church. Both its front and back entrances are inscribed 1838, a year after the stairways linking uptown and downtown were finished.

The watchtower in barangay Villalimpia was among the Bohol watchtowers declared National Cultural Treasures on August 29, 2011. This honor was also bestowed on the Parish Church of the Most Holy Trinity on October 22, 2013, ironically just a week after the earthquake on October 15 caused significant damage on the façade and north transept of the church, and on the historic buildings flanking the plaza.



Map of the Philippines with focus on the province of Bohol

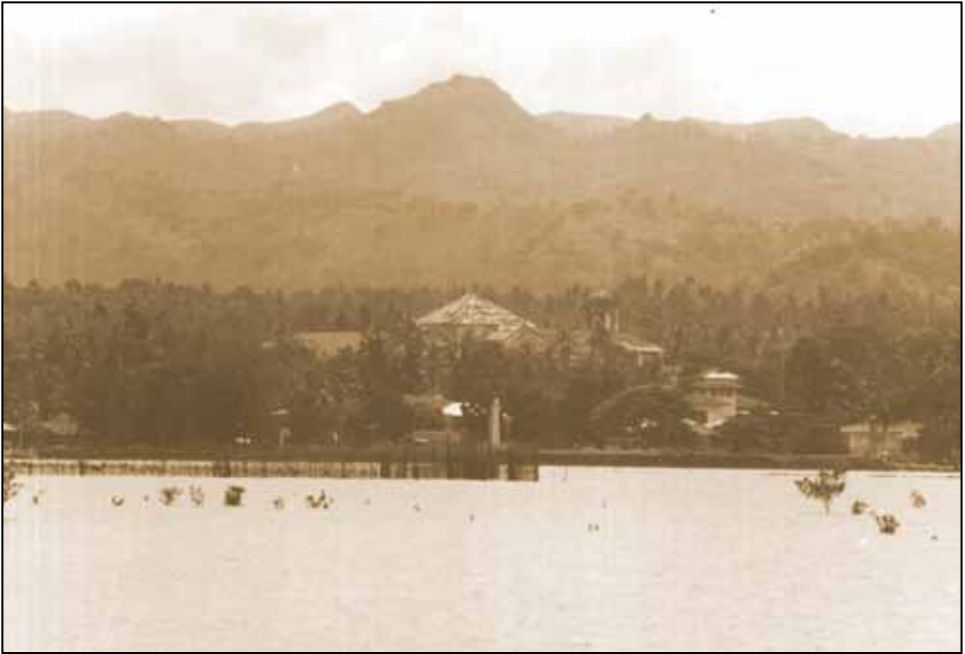
Map of Bohol indicating Loay and Dimiao



Algué, Atlas de Filipinas, 1899

All the pictures in the following pages were taken before the earthquake of October 15, 2013, except for those on pages 136 and 146, and the three upper ones on page 142.

RTJ 1996



View of the church and town from the sea.

RTJ 1995



Church plaza with, from left, Escuela de Niños, present-day rectory, church façade and bell tower.

RTJ 1997



Year '1889' inscribed on the portico extending from the inner façade.

RTJ 2000



Inner façade, with the year '1822' inscribed over the doorway.

Upper end of carving of inner façade,
showing through the floor of the choir.



RTJ 1995

Main part of
carving over inner
façade doorway,
featuring the 'Eye
of God' in a triangle
symbolizing the
Holy Trinity, held
by two angels.
The year 1822 is
inscribed. The Latin
Deus Trinus et Vnus
means One and
Triune God.



RTJ 1997

The space between
the old and new
façades serves as
a storage room,
which leads to the
choirloft.



RTJ 1995

RTJ 1996



View of the south side of the church from the bell tower, showing the dark roofing over the portico extension, buttresses of various angles, porch over the side entrance, the quadrangular cupola, and the massive wooden supports shoring up the south transept.

RTJ 1996



View of the north side of the church, with the transept, cupola, and porch over the side entrance.

RTJ 2002



One of the stone stairways connecting the lower part of town to the church plaza.



RTJ 1995

View of the nave looking towards the sanctuary, from the choirloft. The ceiling murals were painted by Cebuano artist Ray Francia, who signed and dated his work June 15, 1927 above the choirloft.



RTJ 1997

The central baldacchino-style *retablo* is unusually 'veiled' in filigree.

RTJ 1995



Retablo left of the main altar.

RTJ 1995



Retablo right of the main altar.

RTJ 1995



Pulpit with a neo-Gothic *tornavoz* or sounding board.

RTJ 1997



This figure of Faith atop the cupola of the central *retablo* was stolen some years ago.

RTJ 1997



The Holy Trinity, in the central niche of the central *retablo*.

RTJ 1997



Crucifix, in the upper niche of the *retablo* right of the main altar.

RTJ 1997



Our Lady of Consolation, in the lower niche of the *retablo* right of the main altar.

RTJ 1997



Saint Francis Xavier, in the upper niche of the *retablo* left of the main altar.

RTJ 1996



Pipe organ in the organ loft next to the choir, before its restoration.

Pipe organ after restoration by the Diego Cera Organ Builders in 1999 with assistance from the National Commission for Cultures and the Arts, with its pipes complete. Installed in 1841, it may be attributed to the workshop set up by Fr. Diego Cera in Las Piñas due to its tripartite construction.



RTJ 2001

RTJ 1996



Rococo-style bed for the sleeping Santo Niño, kept in the sacristy.

L-shaped old *convento* extending from behind the church apse.



RTJ 1995



RTJ 1997

Year '1838' inscribed over the main entrance to the old *convento*, now a school. The same year is inscribed on the back entrance of the building.

Wide stone stairway connecting the lower part of town with the back of the *convento*.



RTJ 1997

RTJ 1995



Former tribunal at the other end of the plaza opposite the church.

Marian emblem over the tribunal doorway.



RTJ 1997

RTJ 19967



One of a pair of *escuelas de niños*, flanking the church plaza.

Three-storey octagonal bell tower,
raised during the term of Fr. Carlos
Ubeda, O.A.R. (1859-1865).



RTJ 1997

RTJ 1997

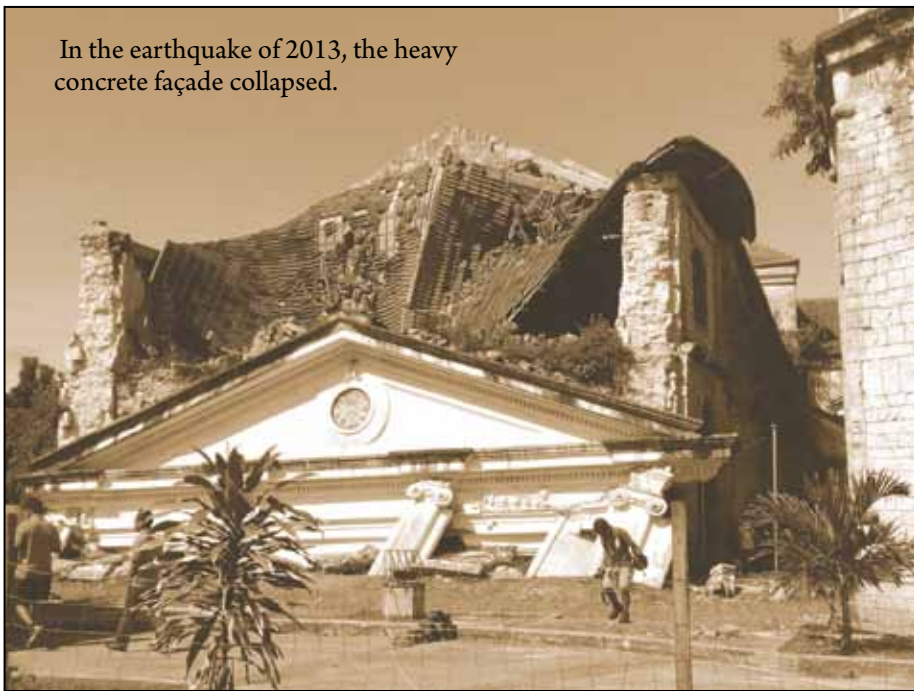


Crowned Marian symbol and the year
1866 inscribed over the doorway of the
bell tower.

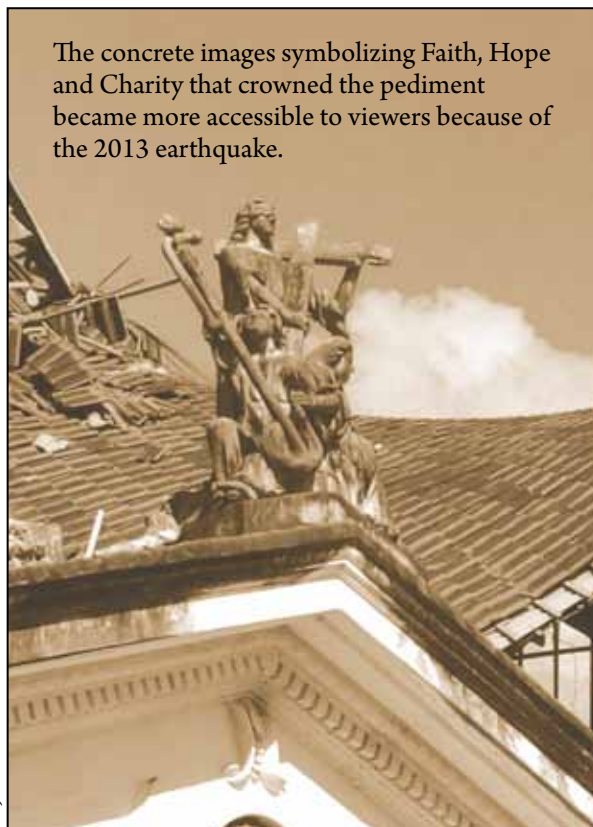
Watch tower
in barangay
Villalimpia,
Loay, near
the site of
the Blood
Compact
marker .



RTJ 1996



RTJ 2014



RTJ 2014

Part XV-B: Parish Church of San Nicolas de Tolentino, Dimiao, Bohol

There are no clear data on the founding of Dimiao. Baptismal records dating from 1750 were encountered here in an 1886 survey. The place seems to have been a mission station of Loay, itself under the spiritual charge of the Jesuits until their expulsion in 1768. The Augustinian Recollects then ministered here until the end of the Spanish regime. Dimiao must have been erected as a separate parish during the last quarter of the 18th century. The parish was dedicated to San Nicolas de Tolentino, miracle worker and patron of the Augustinian Recollect province in the Philippines. Sometime before 1800, the early church complex was fortified with a stone enclosure or *cota*.

The present massive church of cut corallstone was built along a cruciform plan by its parish priest Fr. Enrique de Santo Tomas de Villanueva, O.A.R. from 1800 to 1815. This busy Recollect also commissioned a walled cemetery with a chapel known to the locals today as the *ermita*. This cemetery is regarded as the oldest of such structure in Bohol. The chapel is roofed with a stone-vault, the only one in Bohol. Both church and ermita were supervised by a *maestro de obras* known only in the record of expenses as having come from Camiguin Island. Furthermore, in the years 1817-1821, Fr. Enrique had the 18th century enclosure expanded and provided with a tower at each corner. The *coteros* or master builders of the fortification are named in the records only as Tiano and Dionicio. As the pirate menace subsided, these defenses were eventually demolished; the only trace of these walls is perhaps a chamber adjoining the entrance to the ermita compound. Dimiao faced another menace in December 1901, when American troops razed the town as a counter-insurgency measure. Fortunately, the ancient church and its surrounding buildings survived.

With the church completed, the parish priest lived for a while on a floor above the sacristy behind the main altar. Repairs and small constructions were undertaken with bricks contracted from the parish priest of Argao across the sea in Cebu. The present convento, continuing the same direction of the church like a letter "I," was built by Fr. Manuel Carasusan, O.A.R., parish priest from 1842-1855 and again from 1858-1864. A bridge connects the second floor of the sacristy with the convento.

The stone bridges of Dimiao were declared Important Cultural Properties on August 6, 2004: sadly, many of them have been built over by the modern road system. The San Nicolas de Tolentino Parish Church complex and Ermita ruins of Dimiao were declared National Cultural Treasures on June 28, 2011. The earthquake of 2013 caused minor damage to the complex although the church remains closed to the public. ■

References

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- Jose, Regalado Trota. 2001. *Visita Iglesia Bohol*. Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts.
- _____. 2003. "Settling down and building in Old Bohol." Ramon Villegas, ed., *Tubod. The Heart of Bohol*. Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts.

Richard Ahlborn, circa 1959



Church plaza and façade, viewn from the old administrative building. The church was built from 1800 to 1815, during the term of Fr. Enrique de Sto. Tomas de Villanueva, O.A.R., with a *maestro de obras* from Camiguin Island.

RTJ 1997



South side and transept. Note the vertical pegs to lock the roof timbers onto the brackets on the walls. Note also the vertical struts marking the divisions of the *tabique* walls of the quadrangular cupola. In 1882, roof tiles were replaced

with galvanized iron sheets stamped with three crowns, the logo of the manufacturer, T.W. and J. Walker, a company in Wolverhampton, England.

RTJ 1995



Image of San Nicolas de Tolentino in the central niche over the front entrance.

RTJ 1995



Window and flat balusters on the façade.

RTJ 1995



Seal of Spain over the doorway.

RTJ 1995



Detail of floral decoration carved on one of the pilasters of the coral-stone façade.

Richard Ahlborn, circa 1959



Interior of nave, from the presbitery .

RTJ 1996



South transept. A *retablo* on this side is said to have been sold many years ago, leaving behind an empty wall.

RTJ 1997



Main *retablo*, with the image of the patron San Nicolas de Tolentino in the central niche.



RTJ 1997

Dating from the first decades of the 19th century, the pipe organ adjacent to the choirloft is most probably from the Diego Cera workshop in Las Piñas. Only the framework is left; all the pipes have disappeared.

RTJ 1997



Side altar left of the central *retablo*, with an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the central niche.



RTJ 1997

Side altar right of the central *retablo*, with Our Lady of Consolation in the central niche.

RTJ 2014



Cajonería or vestment chest in the sacristy, with *okir*-like decorations on the upper panel.

Large four-door cabinet in the sacristy.



RTJ 2014

RTJ 2014



Rear of the *convento*, showing walls made of *tabique pampango*. This building was constructed under the direction of Fr. Manuel Carasusan, O.A.R., parish priest from 1842-1855, and again, from 1858-1864.

A rare extant example of a colonial kitchen in the *convento*.



RTJ 1996

A chamber of what may have been part of the late 18th century fortification was incorporated into the wall of the *ermita* built sometime between 1800-1815 by the south side of the church.



RTJ 1997

A passage from the fortification ruins leads to another ruin, that of the cemetery chapel.



RTJ 1997

The ruin of the cemetery chapel still conserves its stone vault, the only one of its kind in Bohol.



RTJ 1997

Jane Santos 1997



Former Escuela de Niños, now converted into a local government office.

RTJ 1997



Seal of Spain over the doorway of the Escuela de Niños.

RTJ 1997



Another Escuela de Niños, across, that converted into a government office. This remains a school, although it has been rehabilitated beyond recognition.

Bridge on the road linking Dimiao to Valencia.



Noel San Andres 1997

Another bridge on the same road, viewn from the side.



Noel San Andres 1997

The same bridge, viewed on the approach to the town from Valencia.



Noel San Andres 1997

Update: The earthquake of 2013 has exposed areas of Loboc church that now lead us to a higher appreciation of the significance of this National Cultural Treasure.

The upper level of the inner Jesuit façade collapsed.



RTJ 2014



RTJ 2014

The central *retablo* of the 19th century was removed, exposing this polychromed plaster bas-relief of what may be one of the Jesuit martyrs of Japan. These martyrs were executed in 1597, beatified in 1627, and canonized in 1862. This unique find highlights the importance of properly conserving the church heritage of Bohol.



RTJ 2014

Section of the surviving carving of the façade.



Regalado Trota Jose has advocated for the study and protection of the cultural heritage of the Catholic Church in the Philippines since the 1980s. He has worked with numerous local public and private organizations such as the Ayala Museum, the University of the Philippines (A.B. Anthropology, 1978; M.A. Philippine Studies, 1991), the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, and the University of Santo Tomas. He is now the Archivist and professor at the Cultural Heritage Studies Program of the University of Santo Tomas. He can be contacted at trotajose55@yahoo.com.