

# **A Visual Documentation of Fil-Hispanic Churches**

## **Part IV: Parish Church of San Raymundo de Peñafort, Rizal (formerly Malaueg), Cagayan**

*Regalado Trota Jose*

**N**estled between the hilly ranges of the eastern Cordillera and the rolling grasslands on the western shore of the Cagayan River are some rather ancient gems of Philippine church art and architecture. They attest to the ups and downs of Christianization in an area where the Apayao, Ibanag, Itawes, and Kalinga languages were spoken. Dominican missionaries worked with the people to forge peace pacts and come together in large communities. Most of the massive stone churches that rose there in the 17<sup>th</sup> century are no more: that in Abulug was eaten up by the sea, and only ruins remain of those in Pata (now Namuac, Sanchez Mira), Tuao, Piat (Santo Domingo, not the shrine), Cabicungan (now Claveria), Tabang (now a barrio in Santo Niño), and Pudtol and Capinatan (both now in Apayao province). Only the churches of St. Raymond of Peñafort in Malaueg (now Rizal), St. Dominic de Guzman in Lallo, and St. Paul in San Pablo (now within Isabela province) stand as remarkable memorials to the first “building boom” in the Cagayan Valley. Of these three, St. Raymond’s is the most “untouched”; with its convento, it is the most intact church complex of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the entire Valley.

The name Malaueg refers both to the old name of the town of Rizal and to the language spoken by its inhabitants: Malaueg is an Ibanag-related language. (The names Malaueg and Rizal shall be used interchangeably in this article). The town lies along a curve of the Matalag River, whence its name, according to an old source: “Matalag” (name of the river) and “ueg” (local word for river). The area figures prominently in local oral lore. Just another river bend to the east is barrio Mauanan: the mountains on each side of the river were the lairs of Biuag and Malana, mythical Atlases who hurled coconut trunks at each other across the ravine.

The Matalag River in turn links the highlands of Apayao with the Chico River, itself joined to the mighty Cagayan River at the junction of Nassiping. Today,

Malaueg/ Rizal is the southwesternmost town of Cagayan Province; it is only 8 kilometers from the Apayao border on the national road. The town of Malaueg therefore represented the largest concentration of Malaueg speakers and the largest Christian settlement in the greater Itawes/ Apayao area.

Most of the early written history of Malaueg we owe to Fr. Julian Malumbres. As archivist of the Dominican province he was able to write and publish a number of histories and language books of the Cagayan Valley where he had ministered from the 1880s until his death in 1932. Fr. Malumbres in turn derived additional data from a report prepared in 1746 by Juan de Varona, governor of Cagayan, a chronicle of Malaueg known as the *libro verde* (green book) copied in 1797 by its parish priest Fr. Manuel de Mora, O.P., and a journal written on an expedition to the area in 1805 by the same Fr. de Mora.

Although the Dominicans formally accepted the ministry of Malaueg on April 26, 1608, attempts at Christianization began a little earlier. A native named Pagulayan made repeated visits to Lallo, the seat of the Dominican enterprise in Cagayan, for missionaries. Baptisms took place as early as 1606, when the records were signed by Fr. Luis Flores (he signed again in 1609; later he joined the Japanese mission, was burned alive in Nagasaki in 1622 and beatified in 1867). The laying of the first stone for the church on November 21, 1617 must have been an auspicious moment, because the vicar (the equivalent at the time of a parish priest) of Malaueg Fr. Francisco Mola was joined by no less than the bishop of Nueva Segovia, Mons. Miguel Garcia, and the Dominican Provincial, Fr. Melchor Manzano. A year later an earthquake cracked the walls, and the terrified populace called on Saint Raymond and Saint Catherine of Alexandria for help. The saints appeared on the edifice, the tremors stopped, and devotion to these saints was renewed. (Oral tradition also refers to a devotion to St. Rose of Lima, but the source of this is unclear). Pagulayan and his sister, who was baptized Luisa Balinan, were great benefactors of the church and roused support for its reconstruction. A saint visited Malaueg in the person of Francisco Fernandez de Capillas, who signed in the baptismal books in 1633, just a year after his ordination (he was martyred in China in 1648 and canonized in 2000).

A fire ravaged the church and convento on January 22, 1641. Ten years later, on March 12, 1651, the renovated church was blessed. According to Fr. Malumbres, it was the largest church in Cagayan in its time. The fact that a new apse was built inside the old apse indicates that this old apse—and virtually the rest of the church and convento, with their homogenous stonework—was already standing by 1641, and that the “new” apse was built between 1641 and 1651. Most of the church and convento were built of masonry using oblong or round river stones of various sizes. Intriguingly, the exterior of the southern wall of the nave (to the left as one faces the façade) has conserved its *palitada* or protective lime covering to a great degree.

In contrast, there is hardly any *palitada* left on the northern wall and the stones are exposed to the elements.

The baptistry juts out of the northern wall roughly at the midpoint of the nave. Its utilization of stones thinner than the rest of the surrounding wall hints that it was built at a different time. Its position in the middle and the presence of a rubblework platform next to it lead one to theorize that it may have been built as a temporary chapel while the rest of the church was being built. Its northernmost wall may have been left open such that the chapel faced the field (today's playground and garden) where the parishioners would congregate. In this it is linked to the famous Latin American *capillas abiertas* which were open-air structures for large gatherings of people.

Although a 1939 historical marker states that the church was rebuilt four times, and notwithstanding an insurrection in the Itawes area in 1718, it seems reasonable to assume that most of the walls of Malaueg church and convent were built in the first third of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with a new apse built by 1651. By this year the technology of making bricks must have been introduced. We find bricks bridging the gap between the old and new apses, as well as brick motifs on the façade. Reverse castings of the monogram of Christ, IHS, reenforce the novelty of the trade.

There is very little we know about how the church was outfitted. Decorative elements in the remnants of the *retablo* or altar piece relate this wooden ensemble to the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when there was a renewed "building boom" throughout the Cagayan Valley. The largest bell in the church, dating from 1793, also points to a new wave of prosperity in Malaueg. The small collection of wooden religious images provides a tantalizing glimpse of Cagayan colonial statuary.

The church complex of Malaueg survived into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, preserved from the bombings and earthquakes that devastated colonial churches and edifices throughout the Valley. A picture shows the church without its roof and with the magnificent *retablo* nowhere in sight. This may have been taken in the 1940s or 1950s. In 1951 administration of the parish was assigned to the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (C.I.C.M.), and aid from Belgium helped restore the church. Since it is arguably the most complete Philippine 17<sup>th</sup> century monument outside Manila, the parish church of San Raymundo de Peñafort in Rizal, Cagayan, was declared a National Cultural Treasure by the National Museum on July 31, 2001.

*Photograph Credit abbreviations:*

BC	Buen Calubayan
RTJ	Regalado Trota Jose

In the old days, to get to Rizal (then Malaueg) one would have to sail down the Cagayan River and enter the Chico River at the junction just by Nassiping. A cement bridge now traverses the Chico, but buses and even trucks regularly make the crossing on canoes lashed together. From the Chico the trip would continue on its tributary, the Matalag River until it reached the bend at the foot of the town of Rizal.



RTJ 2002

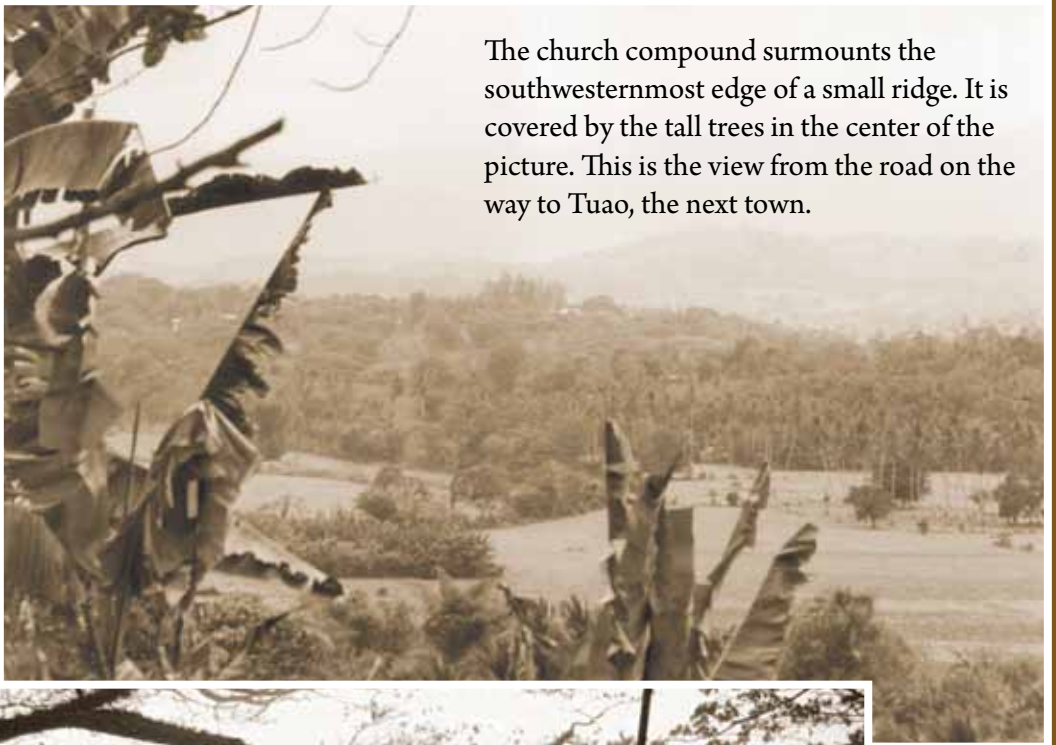
From the back of the church, one gets a good view of a curve of the Matalag River and the mountains of Apayao in the distance.



RTJ 2002



RTJ 2003

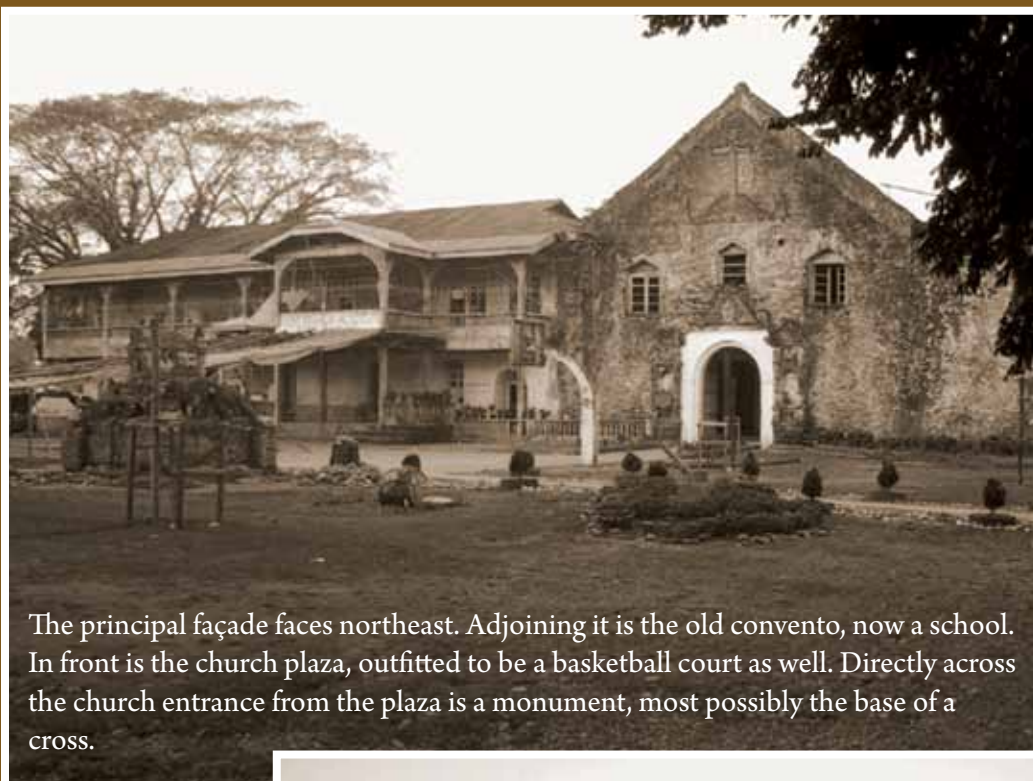


The church compound surmounts the southwesternmost edge of a small ridge. It is covered by the tall trees in the center of the picture. This is the view from the road on the way to Tuao, the next town.



RTJ 2002

The town is surrounded by a thickly wooded area, which develops an expectant aura in the morning mist.



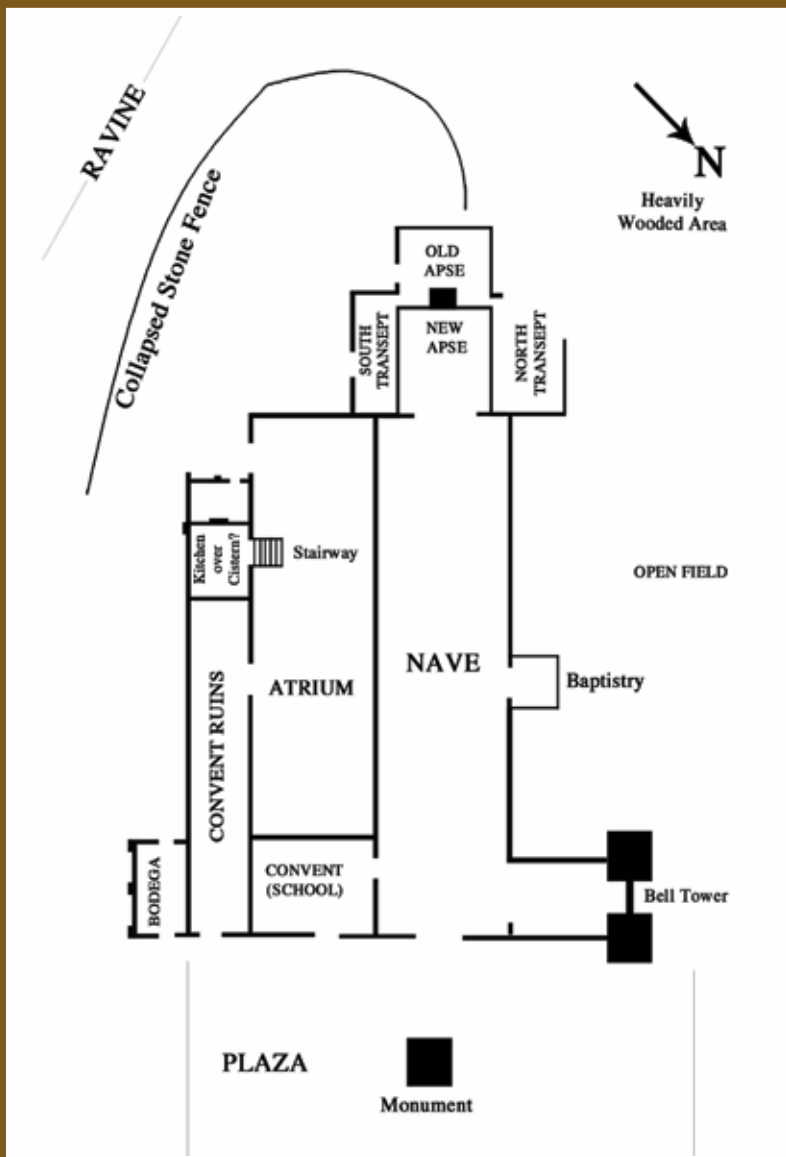
RTJ 2002

The principal façade faces northeast. Adjoining it is the old convento, now a school. In front is the church plaza, outfitted to be a basketball court as well. Directly across the church entrance from the plaza is a monument, most possibly the base of a cross.



RTJ 2002

The early 1600s façade was conceived on the simplest pattern: a quadrangular lower level topped by a triangular pediment. Three windows (representing the Trinity?) provide light for the choirloft. Their arched upper ends were unfortunately changed to pointed ones possibly in the last century.



# SAN RAYMUNDO DE PEÑAFORT PARISH CHURCH SCHEMATIC PLAN

(After Angel Lazaro & Associates, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2004)

RTJ 2000



The doorway was flanked with a pair of niches in brick, possibly when the renovated church was blessed in 1650. A historical marker, now about to fall from its screws, was installed by the Philippines Historical Committee over the left niche in 1939.





RTJ 2002



RTJ 2002

A stark cross on a triangular base flanked by two smaller triangles is the only decoration on the pediment. It is of brick, and may have been applied also in the renovation of 1650.

The church bears no symbols of the Dominican Order, unlike similar structures built in the next century and onwards. The only symbol is this anagram of Christ in brick. Perhaps the art of brick-making had been newly introduced: the letters IHS were cast in reverse. The anagram is surmounted by a cross; below it is a heart pierced by three nails. It seems that three of these disks appeared originally over the pediments of the brick niches flanking the main portal.

RTJ 2000



The northern flank of the church, viewed from the extensive grassy field which now serves as both playground and garden. Thankfully no intrusive construction has been built on this area (save for the toilets), so that the significant dominance of the church remains visually intact. Hardly any of the *palitada* (lime plaster) over the walls has remained, in marked contrast with the southern flank which has preserved about 85 % of its overlay. As a testament to the masonry of the 17th century, the stonework has not eroded despite the exposure to the elements. Note also the puzzling irregular spacing of the lower and upper levels of windows.



The baptistry juts out of the northern flank of the nave. Its walls of fine rubblework are different from those of the rest of the church with irregular layers of varying sizes of stone. This indicates that it may have been added in a different period, perhaps as a temporary structure after the church was burned in 1641. Remains of a rubblework platform beside the chapel also posit some kind of ritual significance to this appendage. Located along the middle of the nave flank, could the chapel have been used as a *capilla abierta* (open chapel) in the manner of early Latin America where such *capillas* were used before the larger churches were completed? Chapels that jut out roughly from the mid-point of the church flank may also be found in the 17th and 18th century Cagayan Valley churches of San Pablo, Tuguegarao, Lallo and Dupax.



RTJ 2000



The southern flank of the nave, as pointed out earlier, has retained about 85% of its *palitada* in contrast with the northern flank where virtually nothing of the protective overlay has remained. The conversion of rounded to pointed arches in the lower level of windows is jarringly inappropriate.



RTJ 2000

After the fire of 1641, the church was renovated and blessed in 1651. The transept and apse were closed off, and a new apse was built inside the space. Pictured is the ruin towards the southwest end of the church, virtually smothered in vegetation, as it appeared in 2000 when the complex was declared a National Cultural Treasure. In the center is the wall of the south transept burned in 1641; rising behind it is the wall of the apse inaugurated in 1651.





This is the same southwestern end of the church, viewed from a slightly different angle, as it appeared in 2003 after assistance from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts cleared off the vegetation and propped up the arched entrances. The doorway in the center marks the south transept, while the entrance to the old apse can partly be seen to the left. This section was built from about 1617 until it was burned in 1641, and then closed off. The new apse (with the tall window) rose inside it within the period 1641-1651. Some portions were completed with brick, a new technology for the community.

BC 2003



This is the view from the western end of the church, with the old apse and south transept to the left of the picture. The shed of hollow blocks and GI roof is a modern era storeroom adjoining the nave. Right of center is the end of the ruined convento. At the foot of the bamboo grove to the right may be seen the ruin of a massive stone fence lying on its side.

RTJ 2002



The old apse seen from the southwest end. Could the lower wall have been constructed to prop up the larger wall after the 1641 fire? After its construction, could the decision have been made to reduce the size of the church and build a new apse inside the old one?



BC 2003

The entrance to the old apse was propped up in 2002. The lower section of the wall has lost much of its stone cover; presumably these stones were re-used in the erection of the new apse.



RTJ 2002

These window-like spaces in the old apse may have served as built-in shelves.



RTJ 2002



The northern end of the new apse. A crevice of light marks the narrowness between the new and old sections.



RTJ 2002

The flanks of the narrower new apse as it met the old transept were closed in with brick. This is the view inside the space between the wall of the old north transept (to the left) and the new apse to the right.



RTJ 2002



In its squatness and quadrangular plan, the belltower resembles those in Tuao and Lalloc, which were also built in the 17th century. A tall and massive supporting wall was added to two sides of this tower, affording a sort of parapet or narrow terrace.

Inside the chamber connecting the choirloft to the second level of the belltower, one may appreciate a “best-effort” barrel vault of narrow river stones.



RTJ 2000

RTJ 2000



The concrete modern front of the school masks a 17th century convento, much of which has amazingly survived. Both levels are of the same rubblework as the church. From the leftmost corner until the back of the building, the original stonework can be seen.

The old convento follows the “L” plan typical of most Fil-Hispanic rectories. The shorter side of the “L” is now occupied by the school. Most of the longer end is a ruin. Pictured is the rear of the longer end of the “L,” a short distance from the south transept.



RTJ 2000

RTJ 2003



The same view three years later, with much of the vegetation cleared and the entrances propped up.

The inner flank of the shorter end of the convento, facing the courtyard bounded by the southern wall of the nave (left of the picture) and the longer end of the convento (right). The absence of beam extensions on the upper floor indicates the absence of a *volada*, or cantilevered gallery typical of later Fil-Hispanic conventos.



RTJ 2002

RTJ 2000



About half of the longer wing of the convento is still in use, although the other half (marked by the stairway) is in ruin.

The ground floor of the ruined section of the longer wing of the convento is curiously packed with earth. Could it have previously housed a cistern? A stairway built on an arch leads to the second level.



RTJ 2002



A view of the room on the second level of the ruin. If the cistern was below, this would have been the area for the kitchen, laundry and bathroom. The arched doorway leads to the stairway pictured previously. The hollow spaces flanking the doorway may have housed an altar or storage space. In the background may be seen the roof of the new apse and southern flank of the nave.



RTJ 2000



RTJ 2000

A narrow corridor of brick and rubblework at the corner of the “L” of the convento may have been added at a slightly later date to house a *bodega* (storeroom).



RTJ 2002



Barrel vault inside the bodega, built of finely fitted brick.

Brick drainage pipe, found in the ruin of the *convento*.



RTJ 2002



A quadrangular monument dominates the square in front of the church. It may have been a base for a cross. It is the most articulated of its kind in the Cagayan Valley.



The monument retains only a few of its original decoration, such as this brick disk with a barely recognizable motif: at first sight it recalls the emblem of the Knights of St. James.

The monument also features niches that were faced with Ming blue and white plates.



RTJ 2002

RTJ 2002



Part of a ruin a short distance east of the church. It may have been part of an *horno* (kiln) for brick-making or a waterway.



RTJ 2002

Section of *palitada* on the *horno* (?) bearing marks of bamboo strips applied to keep the lime in place while still wet.



RTJ 2002



Traces of the same kind of bamboo strip matting, on the *palitada* on the inner wall of the support added to the belltower.

Similar traces on the underside of the arched stairway of the ruined end of the convento; however the bamboo strips used were more slender.



RTJ 2002



In a few sections of the church walls, round pebbles were used to fill in the spaces between the larger river stones. This technique was commonly used in Mexico.



RTJ 2002

RTJ 2002



Photograph of the church interior, possibly from the late 1940s or early 1950s. The main retablo is nowhere to be seen, and only two protruding beams on the left wall indicate where the pulpit used to stand. It is not known how long the church had been roofless; repair of the church began in the 1950s. The *palitada* on the walls can still be seen.

RTJ/2002



View of the church interior today.

RTJ/2003



The present retablo was composed with carved hardwood remnants of the original altarpiece. The presence of the *estípita*, a motif based on an inverted obelisk, dates this altarpiece to the middle or late 1700s. In Cagayan, similar motifs can be found in the retablo of the Ermita de San Jacinto in Tuguegarao, and in the remnants of the altarpieces of Tuao.

RTJ 2002



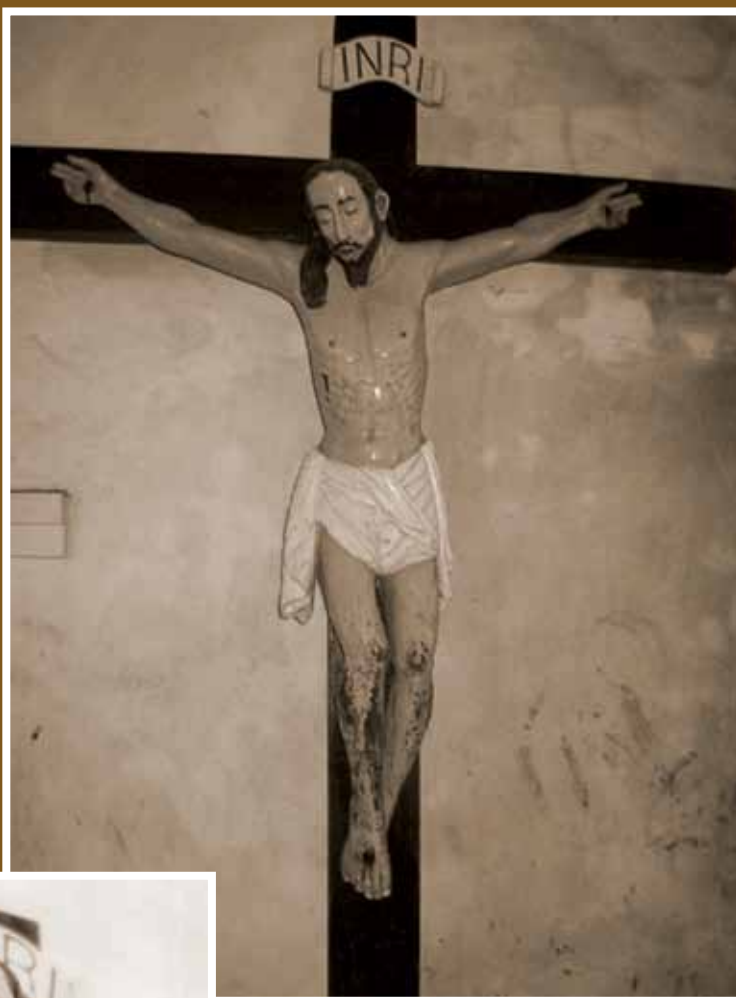
Column on the left of the niche of the patron saint. The *estípita* motif may be seen on the lower half of the column.



Column on the right of the niche of the patron saint. The dark brown and gold colors were applied only recently; the original colors must have been much brighter.

RTJ 2002

Crucifix on the  
upper niche of the  
retablo.



RTJ 2002

RTJ 2003



Close-up of the features of the  
crucifix, possibly 17th century.



RTJ 2003



Santo Entierro, possibly 17th century. Its movable arms indicate it may have been used for the Good Friday *tinieblas* ritual, when Christ's passion was reenacted on the cross; this was followed by the descent of his body from the cross and the funeral procession.

Close-up of the head of the Santo Entierro.



BC 2002

RTJ 2002



Wooden coffin for the Santo Entierro.



Smaller crucifix, bearing 18th century Baroque influence.

BC 2003

Our Lady of the Rosary, 17th century. Images very similar to this one—including the feature where the shape of the left shoe is clearly visible through the tunic—are also found in Camalaniugan (now at the Archdiocesan Archives, Tuguegarao); Manaoag, Pangasinan (the carving is not ordinarily seen, as it is covered with vestments); and the University of Santo Tomas Museum, Manila. All these institutions except the last two were formerly administered by the Dominicans. Manaoag and the University continue being ministered to by the Order of Preachers.



RTJ 2003



RTJ 2003

Close-up of the heads of Our Lady and the Child Jesus. The eyebrows of both are curiously depicted through dotted lines.



RTJ 2002



Image of the town's patron saint, San Raymundo de Peñafort.

Silver key and ivory hand of San Raymundo.



BC 2003

BC 2003



Silver book held by San Raymundo.



RTJ 2002

Modern-day image of San Raymundo, now ensconced in the central niche of the main retablo. Raymond of Penyafort (c.1175-1275) was a canon of the cathedral in Barcelona when he joined the Order of Preachers. He was instructed by Pope Gregory IX to systematize the various decrees of canon law issued up to his time; his work, the *Decretales*, is symbolized by a book, and he is the patron of Canon Lawyers. In 1238 he was elected master general of the Order, which he directed wisely. The key, which his effigy holds in his tomb in Barcelona, recalls his position as penitentiary of the ecclesiastical tribunal in Rome. This image of St. Raymond depicts him as he was about to cross the Mediterranean on his cloak. His feast was formerly observed on January 23; it was later moved to January 7.

RTJ 2002



Image of St. Catherine of Alexandria. Devotion to this saint in Malaueg/ Rizal dates from 1618, when an earthquake shook the town. The residents implored the help of St. Catherine and of St. Raymond, who both appeared on top of the walls of the church (still being constructed at that time), and the tremors were appeased.





RTJ 2002

Pair of church bench ends. They seem to be parts of a now vanished door. Though Gothic in style, the quatrefoil frames recurred in Philippine art in the 1700s. The sunflower-like motif is also in mood with Philippine Baroque.

RTJ 2000



The largest bell, one of three hanging from the belltower. This one is dated 1793 and is dedicated to “S. Reymvndo de Peñafort.”

RTJ 2000



Close-up of the cross on the 1793 bell. Its design continued on in bells cast by Benito de los Reyes in Manila in the first decades of the 19th century.

CASTILLET 1960



We end the current selection of photographs with an intrigue. This photo, taken in the 1950s, shows the parish priest Fr. Julian de Witte, C.I.C.M., holding a sanctuary lamp of silver measuring fifteen inches in diameter. The basin bears the name “Doña Luisa Balinan;” this lady was the sister of the first Christian convert of the town, Luis Pagulayan, and was reputed to be a powerful Kalinga leader who reunited the community in 1628 and led in the reconstruction of the church. This lampara would then be one of the oldest known Fil-Hispanic silver pieces. Nobody knows its present fate. If such a piece was in Malaueg in the early 17th century, what others could have been there too?



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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), 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.