



Parish of Our Lady of the Abandoned  
New Panaderos Street, Santa Ana Manila

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**RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION WORK  
AT MANILA'S SHRINE OF NSTRA. SRA. DE LOS SAMPARADOS**

by Jaime C. Laya (May 4, 2010)

The Shrine of Nuestra Senora de los Desamparados (Our Lady of the Abandoned) at Sta. Ana is one of the few remaining major heritage structures of Metropolitan Manila. Dating back to 1725, the archaeological excavation at the church patio and the Camarin de la Virgen are both National Cultural Treasures. The former was so declared in 1973 under P.D. No. 260 and the latter in 2009.

This paper reports on the restoration and conservation work accomplished through the efforts of the Franciscan Order, the Parish Pastoral Council, the Cofradia de la Nuestra Senora de los Desamparados ("Cofradia-Desamparados"), and the Cofradia de la Inmaculada Concepcion ("Cofradia-Immaculada"). Founded in 1979, Cofradia-Immaculada's continuing activity has been the annual Intramuros Marian Procession. It decided to assist in the church's restoration as one of its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary projects and designated the present writer as Restoration Project Coordinator.

**Conservation and Restoration Challenge**

The church has been renovated over the years, sometimes with unfortunate results. The most recent major renovations were in the 1970s when the protective paletada of church facades and interior walls were completely chipped off and replaced with a cement mixture scored to simulate stone blocks. New side aisles and resin "stained glass" windows were added, a tile roof installed, the campanario reshaped, the Pozo de la Virgen remodeled, and so on. Azulejos tiles on the sanctuary were replaced with beige marble and close to half of the Ming Dynasty porcelain tile of the Camarin replaced with common ceramic tile. Secondary retablos, the pulpit, bell, historic artifacts, and other features were removed, some ironically sold to finance the modernizations. The Retablo Mayor and the Baptistry have been refinished numerous times, most recently with automobile paint and synthetic gold.

With the renovations, the church has lost part of its ancient character. The façade, once painted a happy rose, is now depressing gray. The interior walls used to have painted exterior walls and the bell tower have been crumbling away. Happily, thanks to concerned parishioners, much is still in place and efforts have begun to protect and conserve what remain, as part of the cultural heritage of the church that should be handed on to future

generations.

For the most part, past renovations used modern material and techniques that are often unsuitable, sometimes harmful. Cement and enamel paint do not allow moisture to evaporate and thus cause the adobe to pulverize. High wattage lights have been installed, raising electricity bills and generating hazardous heat.

Much of the ongoing conservation and restoration work consists of removing later layers of finish (usually cement) to uncover where possible traces of the earliest layer. Restoration then begins, based on hard evidence and using internationally accepted practice and material. The mortar used is of laboratory tested mixture of sand, lime (from burnt oyster shells) and binder. Old colors, too, were revived with traditional material like almagre (powdered brick), colored stones and other natural material, and 22 karat gold leaf.

Lighting is being replaced with “green” lights that provide better and cooler illumination that reduce electric consumption.

### **Generating Interest: Guidebook and Concert**

The Cofradia-Immaculada’s first activity was a concert at the Camarin held on May 27, 2008 to enlist membership interest in the project. It was successful and a special repeat performance was held three days later for a smaller group.

Enthused, the Cofradia proceeded by successfully working for the declaration of the Camarin as a National Cultural Treasure. The declaration was approved and formalized at a ceremony held at the church on January 23, 2009.



Work immediately began under the leadership of Mrs. Helen M. Ong for a Fund Raising Dinner Concert, intended for Sta. Ana restoration projects. The Benefit Dinner-Concert was held at the Hotel InterContinental Manila on September 30, 2008. The Benefit was a success and proceeds were earmarked for the restoration of the Baptistry and the lighting of the dome and its paintings

Meanwhile, as his personal contribution, the present writer did research work and wrote an illustrated historical guidebook to the church with the aim of expanding appreciation of its importance and history. Noted photographer Wig Tysmans took photographs and Manni

Chavez designed the work. With support from the National Commissions for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), the Cofradia published Guidebook, launching it during the Dinner-Concert.

### **The Murals of the Camarin de la Virgen**



The artesonado ceiling of the Camarin de la Virgen is entirely filled with eleven unique paintings of events in the life of the Holy Family. They were restored in the 1970s but have since been damaged by wood borers, bat and bird droppings, strong artificial lighting, humidity, and heat.

Through the joint efforts of the two Cofradias, the NCCA approved in 2008, a grant to the National Museum for the restoration of the

Camarin murals. Work was carried out by Engr. Orlando Abinon and his expert team who had worked with experts from Spain in the restoration of Luna's "Spolarium" and other important art work.

The space above the ceiling was cleared of debris, sealed and insulated. The wood support of the paintings was treated and strengthened and the paintings themselves cleaned and restored. An old mistake in the sequencing of the paintings was also rectified.

There is evidence that the Camarin was once painted in blue with decorative foliage. Museum technicians believe these can be recovered. Furthermore, the strong lights that have made it difficult to appreciate the paintings are being replaced with more appropriate lighting.

Monsignor Diego Monroy Ponce, Rector of the Basilica de Santa Maria de Guadalupe in Mexico City visited the Philippines in October 2009. Accompanied by Philippine Ambassador to Mexico and Mrs. Francisco Ortigas III, the Monsignor inspected the ongoing restoration work, to the extent of climbing up to the scaffolding for a close look.



An unexpected dividend was the discovery of a long-lost work. A large painting (almost 20' high) by Anastacia Mamuyac dated 1956, depicting the story of the original image of Nstra. Sra. de los Desamparados (sculpted by three angels) used to hang on the nave. Evidently taken down in the 1970s remodeling, it was rolled up and forgotten, rediscovered only during the clean-up work of the Camarin attic. It is reported that Ms. Mamuyac, a Sta. Ana resident, had already lost both hands when she did the painting and that she now lives in the United States, alive and well at age 83. The painting was in lamentable condition when found and parish leaders decided to have it painted over by Mr. Ador de Vera, 78.



## **Restoration of the Baptistry and Campanario**

The Cofradia-Inmaculada agreed to fund and direct the restoration of the Baptistry, located at the base of the bell tower, to the right of the church's main door. The Baptistry had been remodeled over the years and when work began, its walls and Retablo were painted off-white with highlights in synthetic gold paint. The windows were of glass and steel.

Conservation analyst Ma. Cristina Paterno got some two dozen samples of the masonry and took these to a New York laboratory, where microscopic analysis revealed sixteen (16) layers of finish on the stone walls and vault. Guided by the results and with the assistance of students of Escuela Taller, the Spanish Government funded conservation crafts school, work was undertaken by Restoration Architect Michael F. Manalo (trained in Mexico), masonry and color expert Christina M. Aguilar (trained in Germany) and surface color expert Liliane Rejante Manahan (Trained in Italy).

Unexpectedly, traces of what appeared to be the 1725 colors showed that the Baptistry was painted like 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Mexican churches. The walls and vault were flesh yellow with fine architectural lines on the vault. All four walls had a painted Venetian red dado with a border of black, white and red stripes. Windows had borders of painted foliage in blue-black. The Retablo was originally painted in faux yellow and pink marble and had columns with red and gilded capitals and bases. The pediment had been decorated with swags of foliage in red, yellow and gold leaf and the cornices by the entrance were painted to simulate Carrara marble.

Later finish was chipped away to get to the raw adobe blocks of the chamber. The traditional technique was then used, with two layers of mortar made of sand, lime and binder. The third, top, layer was to be a wash of lime water mixed with natural coloring from pulverized stone.

November's typhoon Ondoy unfortunately flooded the campanario above the Baptistry. Three drainage outlets had been blocked – one was sealed by the 1970s side aisle, the second was plugged with cement probably at the same time and the third was filled with plant roots and debris. Water of about a foot accumulated and leaked to the Baptistry below, causing water stains on the freshly mortared walls and ceilings. The stained areas have to be removed and replaced with fresh mortar. Fortunately, the final color wash had not yet been applied when work was suspended.

To waterproof the bell tower above, the remaining two drainage outlets have to be reopened and the floor raised – about 15 inches more of lime-based mortar and Vigan tile. It is being waterproofed with several layers of a process seals the floor while still allowing the masonry to breathe. The unexpected cost is being covered by a donation of Ms. Julie Hill of Rancho Santa Fe, San Diego, California, a former Manila resident.



Ms. Mia Protacio, Italy-trained lighting expert, designed and installed a lighting scheme using “green” lights that emit minimum heat and use the least amount of energy. A heavy 1950s wrought iron chandelier was removed and replaced with upward-aimed lights and cove lighting that can be lit in three ways: (a) general lighting emphasizing highlights, turned on when the Baptistry is not in use, (b) stronger lighting for ordinary baptisms, and (c) lighting for gala occasions. Wiring was concealed in the masonry.

The wood balusters of the windows had been painted white but historical precedent (from Mexican churches) and analysis showed that these were probably a certain shade of green. The windows, of modern glass and steel, were replaced with traditional capiz windows, donated by Mr. & Mrs. Jose Larion Acuzar. Both balusters and capiz windows were repainted in the old shade of green.

### Paintings: The Baptism of Christ



The Baptistry Retablo had a painting on metal of the Baptism of Christ. Its inscription is indistinct but appears to be “A.L. Salton, 6-3-1938.” The painting had to be taken down to allow restoration of the Retablo’s original finish. National Museum experts Willie Estonanto and Raymundo Esguerra who were working on the Camarin murals took it down on September 16, 2009. To everyone’s

surprise, another obviously older painting was revealed underneath, a painting on wood also of the Baptism of Christ, possibly of the same period as the Camarin murals. Coincidentally, Mexican Ambassador Tomas Calvillo Unna was visiting the church on that day to view the restoration work and was present during the discovery of the second painting.



The older painting is of better quality and has a more interesting iconography. The top painting simply has San Juan Bautista pouring water on Jesus, with the Holy Spirit above. In addition to these figures, the newly uncovered painting has cherubs and two angels holding a red cloak, ready to wrap Christ up. It needs cleaning and restoration of a few areas where the paint has flaked off, but is otherwise in good condition.

The 1938 painting has been taken to the second floor convent corridor where it awaits restoration.

## **Lighting of the Dome and the Retablo Mayor**

The church dome is extraordinary, with two layers of balconies and sixteen (16) paintings of Christ, Apostles and Evangelists. Lit by small windows, the paintings were barely visible. With support from the Cofradia-Immaculada, Ms. Mia Protacio designed and installed state-of-the-art lighting, consisting of upward-pointing lights for each of the paintings and special lighting for the double balconies. As a special feature, red, gold and green lights can be switched on to match the color of vestments prescribed for the day's Holy Mass. As in the Baptistry, the new lights emit minimum heat and use minimum energy thus saving on electricity bills.

Ribalta lights were strategically located above the sanctuary to fully but discreetly illuminate the Retablo Mayor. Previous lighting was by strong spotlights pointed down, which did not properly light the Retablo and cast such strong shadows that did not help Mass celebrants and readers.

Funded by a persona donation of Mrs. Imelda Ongsiako Cojuangco, the Ribalta lights are identical to those at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and in other major Italian churches. They provide bright but glare-free illumination.

The central niche occupied by the Virgin's image had been lighted with high-wattage bulbs that generated so much heat that the image's vestments actually caught fire several times years ago; only quick action by the image's custodians prevented the fire from spreading. New and safe lighting has been put in their place, also with Mrs. Cojuangco's donation.

In November 2009, two sets of halogen lights were installed along the nave by church authorities, funded by parishioner donations. One set with yellow lights points up and another set with white lights points down.

## Finish of the Retablo Mayor



*L-R Philip Escuder, Ms. Myrna Bituin, Linda Murillo, Mr. and Mrs. Tabuena with the glass frame on the table*

The Retablo Mayor has been painted and overpainted through the years, among other things with automotive paint and synthetic gold that has darkened. Restoring the Retablo's finish is a major undertaking, but work has begun with the frame of the central niche holding the Virgin's image. Supported by a donation of Mrs. Imelda

O. Cojuangco, Ms. Myrna Bituin of Betis Crafts, Inc., one of the country's largest exporters of furniture and an expert in gold leafing, is doing the work.

About two centimeters of gesso, putty, automotive paint, and miscellaneous material had to be removed to reach the earliest remaining finish, which turned out to consist of real gold leaf, blue for the background and yellow for highlights. It was also found that the frame had numerous nails, presumably to affix flowers and other decorations during special occasions. The original finish has been restored with 22 karat gold leaf.

The contrast between the newly restored frame and the rest of the Retablo is great and it is hoped that Mrs. Cojuangco's lead will be followed by other donors so that the rest of the Retablo can be similarly restored.

## Turnover

The partly restored Baptistry and the new Dome and Retablo Mayor lights were officially turned over by the Cofradia de la Inmaculada Concepcion to the Order of the Franciscan Minor ("OFM") in a solemn ceremony held on December 2, 2009.

A Deed of Donation was signed by Mrs. Imelda Ongsiako Cojuangco (Founding Chairperson) for the Cofradia-Inmaculada and Fr. Eli Manlangit, Jr., OFM (parish priest) for the Order of Franciscan Minor. For the Cofradia, witnesses were Mr. Danilo L. Dolor (Vice Chairman), Ms. Aurora E. Eizmendi (President), Ms. Helen M. Ong (Chairperson, Benefit Dinner-Concert), Dr. Jaime C. Laya (Restoration Project Coordinator), and Mr. Jorge Allan R. Tengco (Restoration Project Member). For the OFM, witnesses were Ms. Erlinda R. Murillo (Parish Pastoral Council Moderator), Mr. Felipe M. Escudero, Jr., (Camarero of the Cofradia de la Nstra. Sra. de los Desamparados) and Mr. Ramon A. Tabuena (Head, Temporalities Ministry).



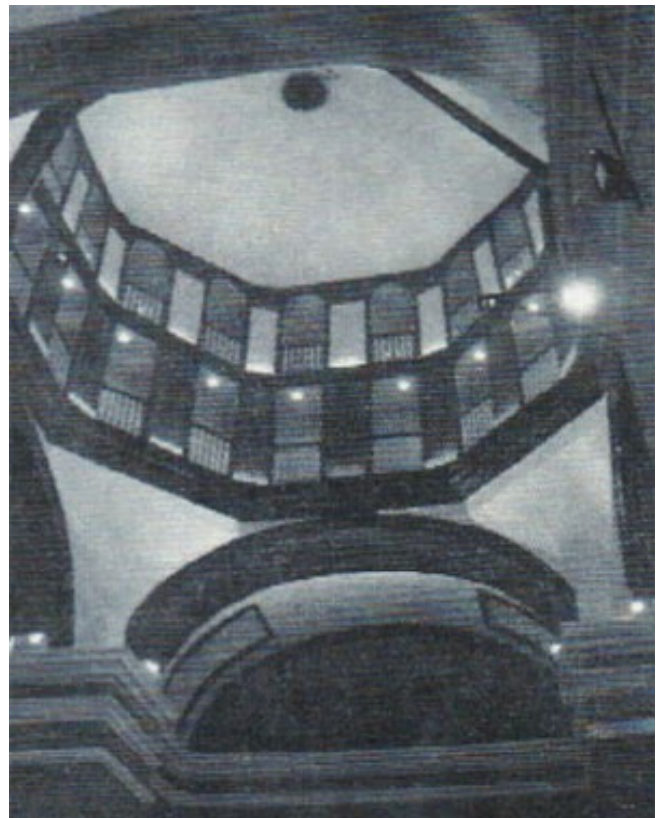


Under the Deed of Donation, (a) the Cofradia de la Inmaculada Concepcion turned over the restoration and conservation work done on the Baptistry and the lighting equipment and fixtures installed at the Dome and Sanctuary, to the OFM as administrator of the Parish of the Lady of the Abandoned, (b) the OFM agreed to safeguard the

objects, structures and fixtures donated, to protect them from damage, and to give them proper maintenance and care, (c) the OFM committed to observe accepted standards of built heritage conservation and desist from renovation, embellishment and other work that will depart or detract from the conserved appearance of the subject structures.



After the signing, a commemorative marker was unveiled, the Baptistry was blessed and the lights of the Dome and Retablo Mayor were turned on for the first time.





A Concelebrated Mass followed, at which Most Rev. Jesus Dosado, CM, Archbishop of Ozamis, was the main celebrant. Concelebrants were Most Rev. Romulo Valles, Archbishop of Zamboanga; Most Rev. Sergio Utleg, Bishop of Laoag; Most Rev. Leonardo Medroso, Bishop of Tagbilaran; Most Rev. Gerardo Alminaza, Auxiliary Bishop of Jaro; Most Rev. Pablo Virgilio David, Auxiliary Bishop of San

Fernando, Pampanga; Most Rev. Joseph Nacua, OFM Cap., Bishop of Ilagan; Most Rev. Emilio Marquez, Bishop of Lucena; Rev. Fr. Eli Manlangit, OFM; and Rev. Fr. Ted Torralba of the Diocese of Tagbilaran and Executive Director of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines Committee for the Cultural Heritage of the Church.

The Cofradia de la Inmaculada Concepcion hosted dinner afterwards at the second floor convent corridor.

### Heritage Month Participation



Sta. Ana Church has become an important feature of the annual National Heritage Month celebration, helping call attention not only to its beauty and uniqueness but also to the urgent need to conserve Philippine Cultural heritage.

Timed to coincide with the Virgin's fiesta, the initial activity was held on May 2, 2008, a concert of the Philippine Youth Symphonic Band. On May 4, 2009, a hundred-voice choir constituted from Sta. Ana singing groups performed a concert of religious and secular music. They had been gathered and trained under the leadership of Mrs. Zenas Reyes Lozada, well-known pianist and Sta. Ana resident.



On May 3, 2010, a Misa Cantada was celebrated by Rev. Fr. Jesus Galindo, OFM, former Sta. Ana parish priest and the only Spanish Franciscan friar remaining in the Philippines. Another 100-voice choir sang, with participation from the Tiples de Santo Domingo and Liturgikon Chorale. For the first time in possibly five decades, the choir sang from the choir loft, recalling the time when Sta. Ana was a center of Franciscan church music.



These concerts were initiated by the Cofradia-Immaculada and have been supported by the Filipino Heritage Festival Inc.

## **The Future**

The convent is a unique survival in Metro Manila and as pointed out by Mexican art and architecture historian Jorge Loyzaga, has elements of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Mexican architectural and building techniques. It would be ideal if the convent can be restored with a museum, theater, shop and other facilities similar to those in the Spanish Missions of California and other Southwestern United States. (The California Missions were also built by Franciscan friars.) A church museum could exhibit archeological finds excavated from church and convent grounds, as well as objects illustrating the church's past.

A visitor reception area could have a theater for audio-visual presentations and a souvenir shop. Sta. Ana church can be a major cultural and spiritual attraction of Metro Manila, generating income for church maintenance and conservation.

The most critical, difficult and expensive need is the conservation of the outside walls of church and convent. Built of soft adobe stone, they were originally covered with rose-colored



paletada made of sand, lime and binder. Unfortunately, the paletada was removed in the 1970s, leaving the adobe exposed to the elements and to pollution. Parts are now flaking off. Furthermore, instead of being pinkish, the facades are now gray.

Careful engineering, chemical analysis and conservation work are needed to prevent further damage and to recover the old beauty of the facades. Working together, Cofradia-Immaculada and Cofradia-Desamparados successfully obtained a grant from the NCCA for the restoration of the lime-based and colored paletada beginning with the main (front) façade. Work is expected to begin shortly.

It is gratifying that so much has been accomplished in less than two years. This has been due to the cooperation and understanding that has developed among the Order of Franciscan Minor; the parish priests, parish and lay organizations and parishioners of Sta. Ana; national government culture agencies particularly the NCCA and the National Museum; the Cofradia de la Immaculada Concepcion, Filipino Heritage Festival, Inc., and other private donors; and proven experts in tangible heritage conservation and restoration. These groups' accomplishments show that much is possible with goodwill, cooperation, focus, technical expertise, and hard work.



**Dr. Jaime C. Laya** became a professor and later Dean at the UP School of Business. He also became the Minister of Budget and Minister of Education, Culture and Sports.

In 1981, Dr. Laya was appointed Governor of the Central Bank and Chairman of the Monetary Board.

Among the current positions he holds are Chairman of the Board of Philtrust Bank, and head of the National Committee on Monuments and Sites of the National Commission on Culture and Arts; and independent directors of various corporations and trustees of different charitable and cultural institutions.