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The "City of God": Churches, Convents and Monasteries

In the Philippines, the baroque churches of the Spanish colonial period constitute the most emblematic element of the country's architectural heritage.

The **religious orders** played a **decisive role** when the Spaniards reached the Philippines; they filled Intramuros with churches, monasteries, and convents, scattering **the city with religious buildings**, which also performed **social and welfare functions**, it was the "City of God".

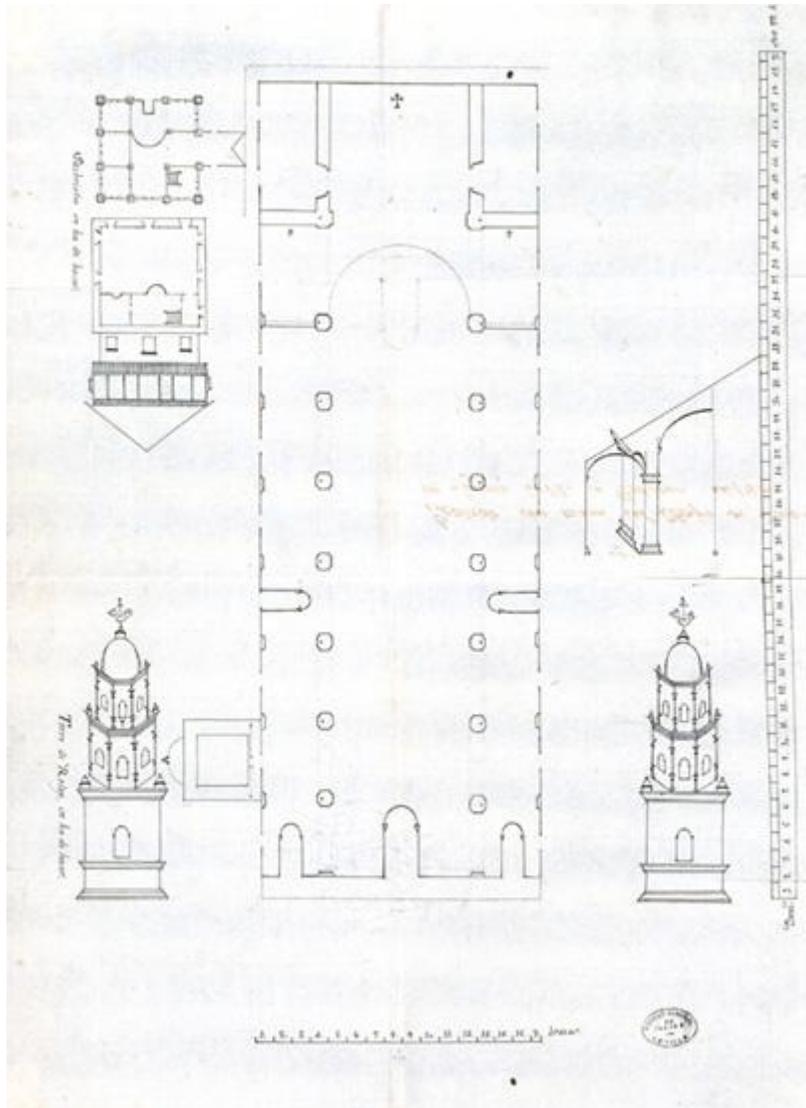
Sixteenth-century Manila was **ravaged by fire time** and time again. Homes and churches were devoured by flames. Sedeña, a Jesuit, taught the Philippine people how to **work and lay stone**, and Manila bloomed once more with new **churches built "in the European style"**, but their sheer weight and rigidity made them fragile in the face of earth tremors. In 1645, the city was destroyed by an **earthquake**. Almost everything crumbled, except the church of San Agustín.

New churches were built; these had **more robust proportions and were not so high**, and followed the style adopted in seismic zones in America; a new **mestizo architecture** had emerged and this was to be called "**earthquake baroque**". Later on, in 1863 and 1880, earthquakes were to devastate Manila once more. Almost everything crumbled, except, again, the church of San Agustín.

San Agustín (1604), a permanent miracle in stone, a church built in the "**severe baroque**" style with Spanish and Italian influences imported from the "Virreinato" of Mexico.

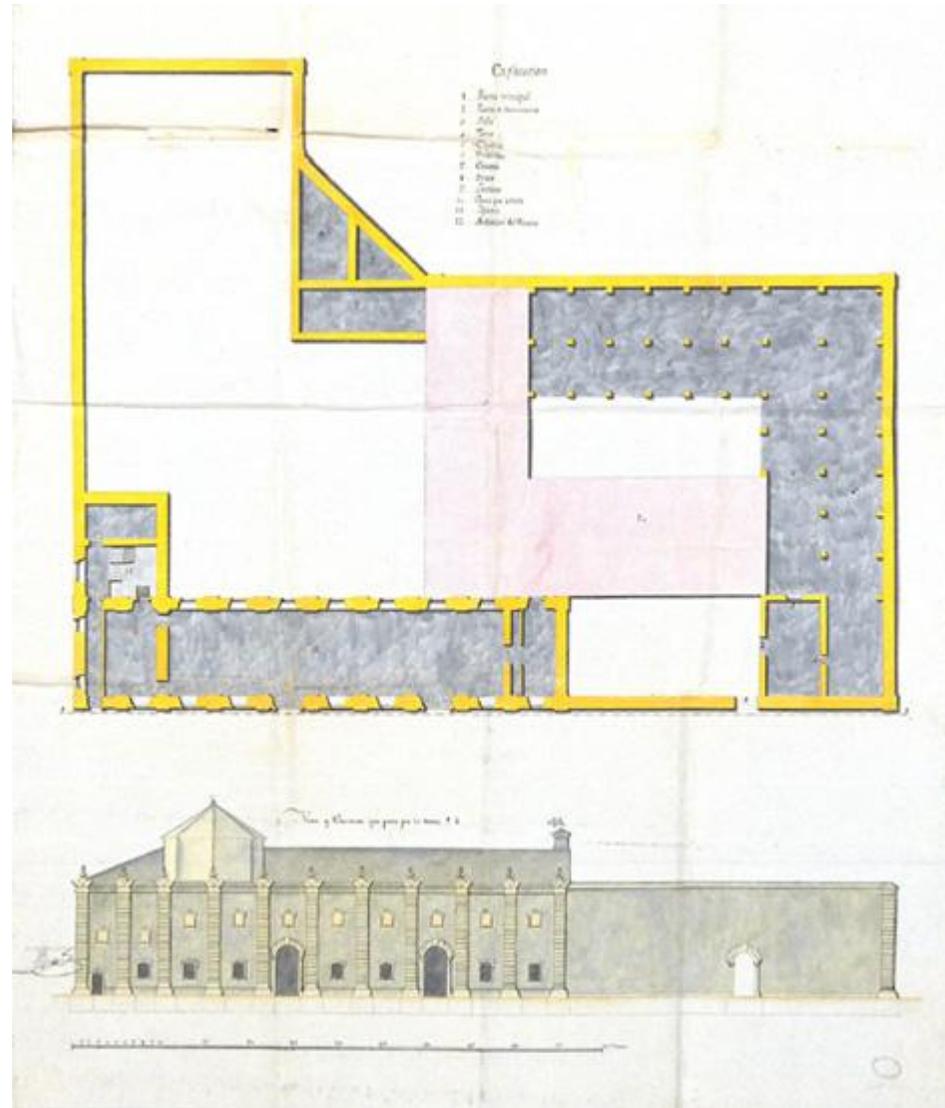
The Binondo church after the 1863 earthquake. *Álbum de fotografías de vistas y tipos de Filipinas*. End of the 19th century. BN Its façade was characteristic of those to be seen in Manila, as was that of the monastery church of San Francisco which no longer exists. Typical elements are lateral towers, trapezium-shaped gable ends topped with a vaulted niche, small octagonal-shaped windows and twin columns.





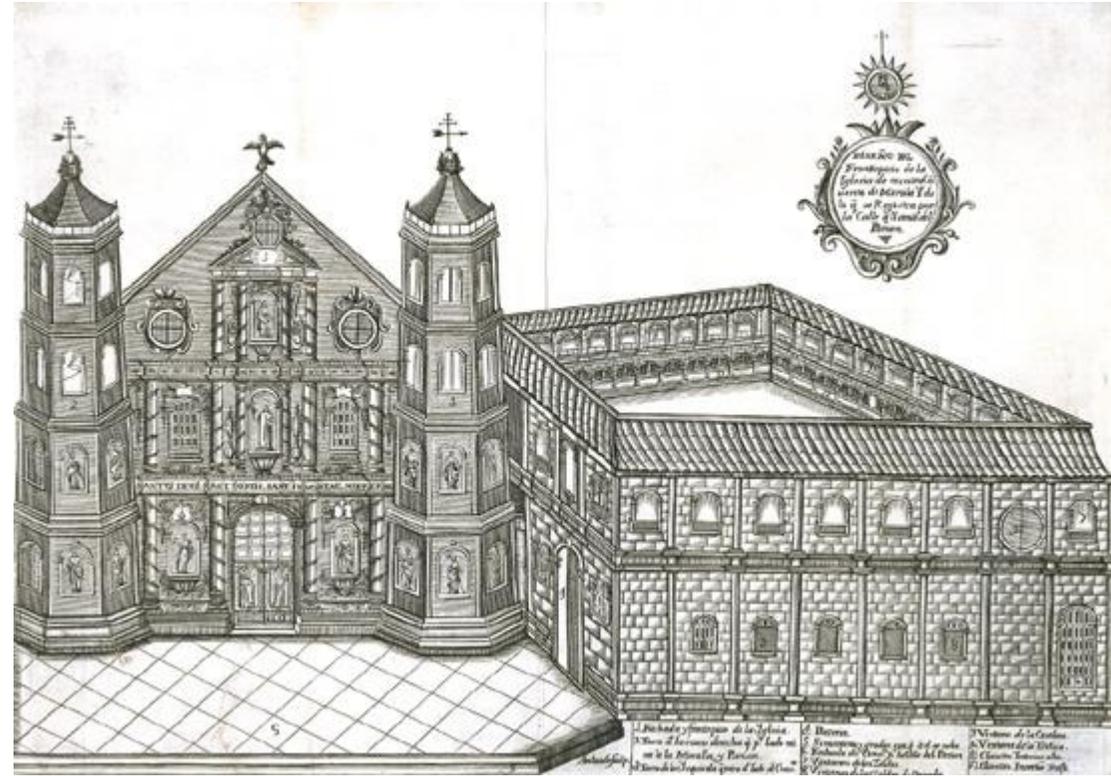
Binondo church. 19th century. AGI The church built in this Chinese quarter, founded in 1596, was the work of the architect Domingo de la Cruz González, and is one of the architectural heritages of Manila.

Santa Rosa de Lima Monastery. AGI This plan dated 1788 belongs to a project drawn up by Captain Domingo de la Cruz, which was never carried out. The façade of the church comprises a gigantic row of dressed pilasters, similar to those used in the construction of some of the buildings in Antigua Guatemala.



Façade of the monastery of San Juan de Dios.

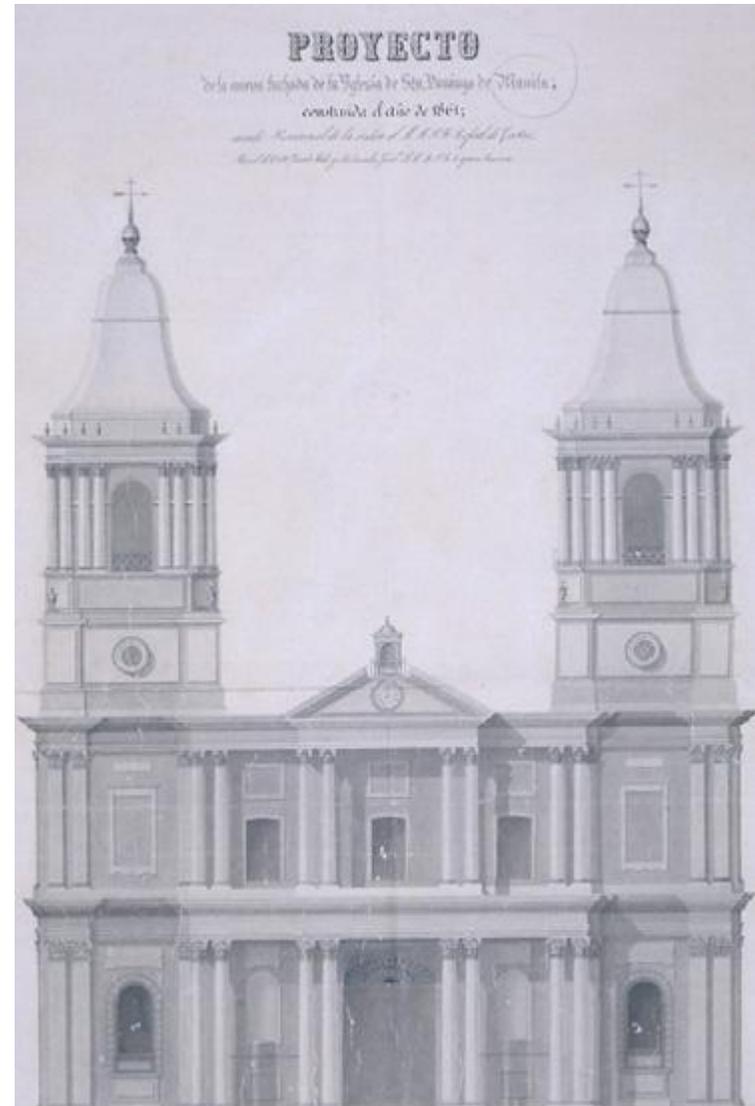
José Nadrada. BN The merging of West with East is obvious in this façade: the front of the building is in the El Escorial or Carmelite style, and is flanked by Chinese-style towers.

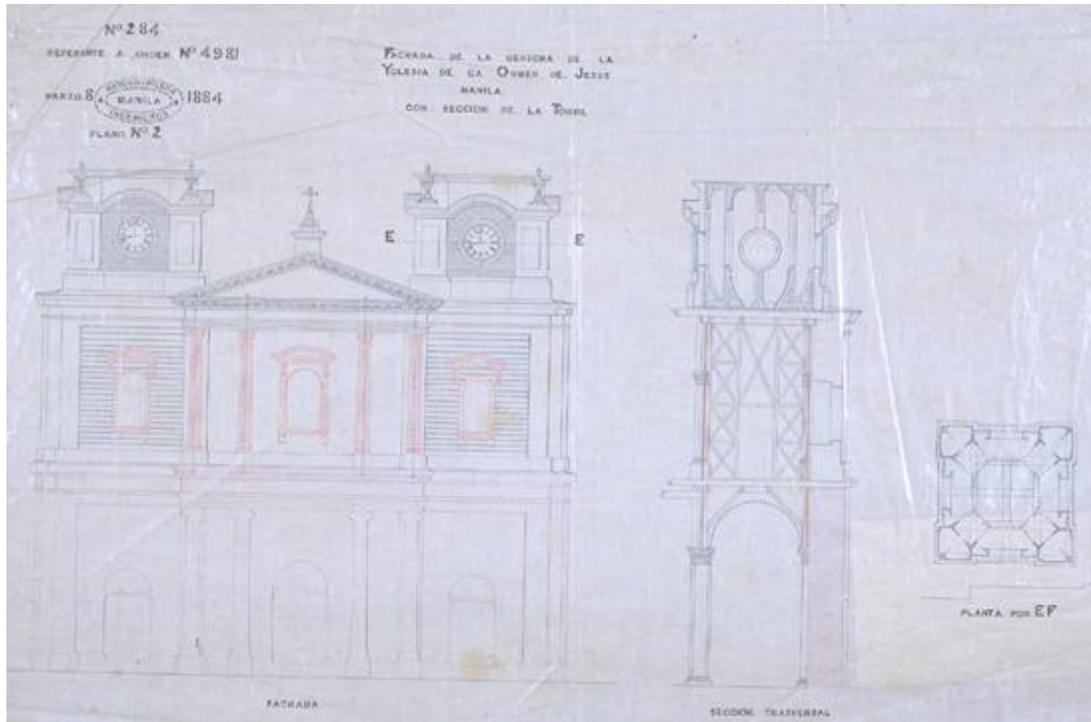




Santo Domingo church. Álbum fotográfico... End of the 19th century.
BN This was the fifth church to be built by the Dominican friars. It was inaugurated in 1868. It is the work of the first "qualified" Philippine architect Félix Rojas, and was constructed in the neogothic style. Its façade is a literal imitation of the façade of York Cathedral in England (13th and 14th centuries).

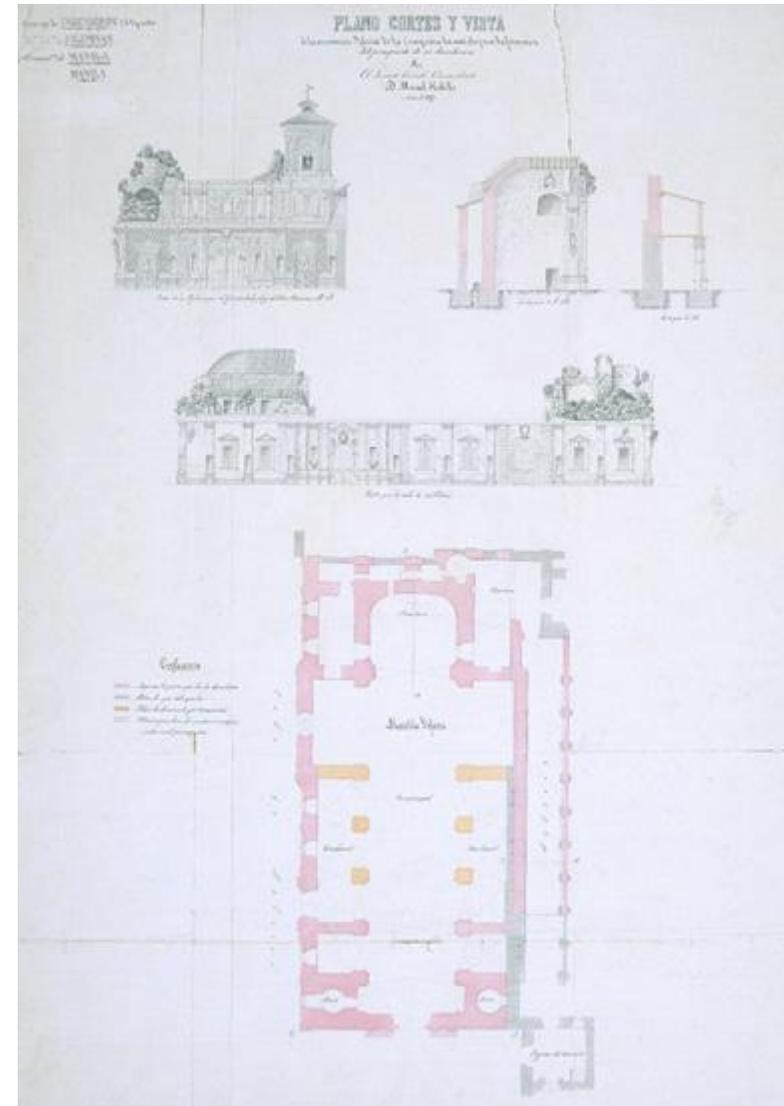
Santo Domingo church in Manila. 1861. SHM This fourth Dominican church was destroyed in the 1863 earthquake. Constructed with three naves and a "very Philippine" façade with twin pillars, it has baroque elements with "Gesú style" eaves and a split pediment.

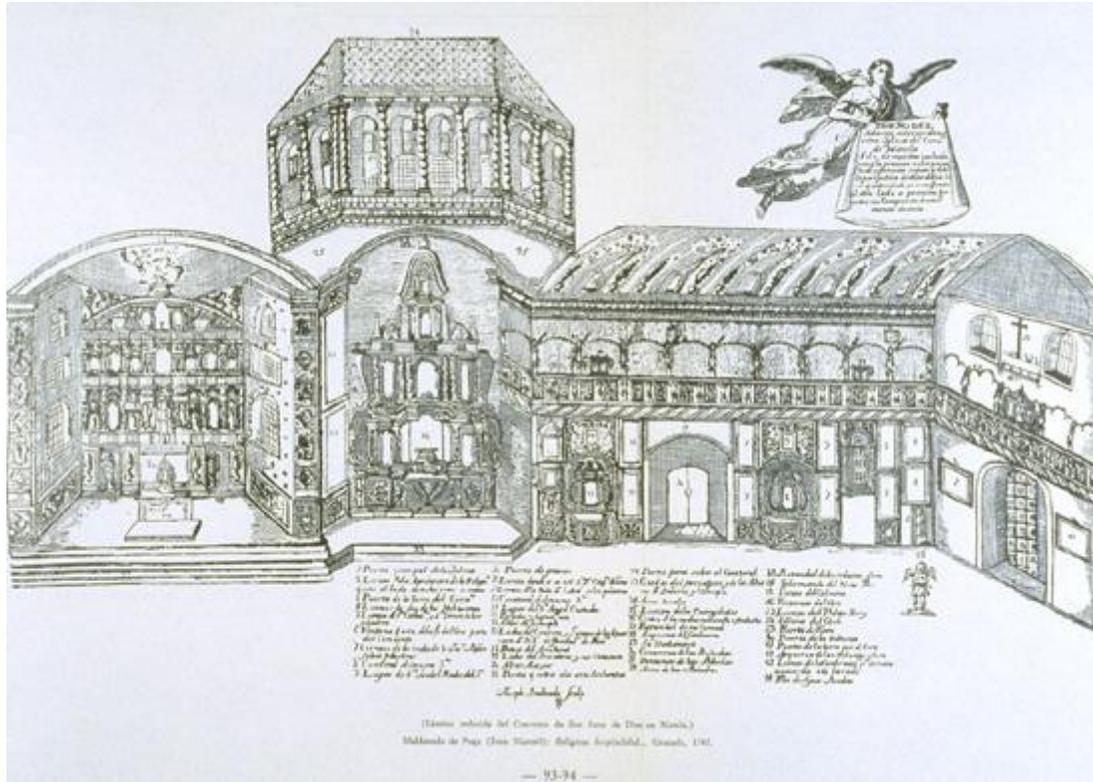




The Jesuit church. 1884. SHM This was the fourth church to be built by the Jesuits in Manila, and construction work began in 1878 in accordance with the plans drawn up by Félix Rojas, the first Philippine architect. There is a remarkable amount of metal structural elements which gives it an air of modernity, although the general design continued to follow the classical style.

Jesuit church. Manuel Herbella. 1869. SHM The third Jesuit church was built by Friar Campion around the year 1625, and was destroyed in the 1863 earthquake. In 1867, the military engineer Herbella drew up a plan of the condition of the building for the purpose of drawing up a budget for its demolition.

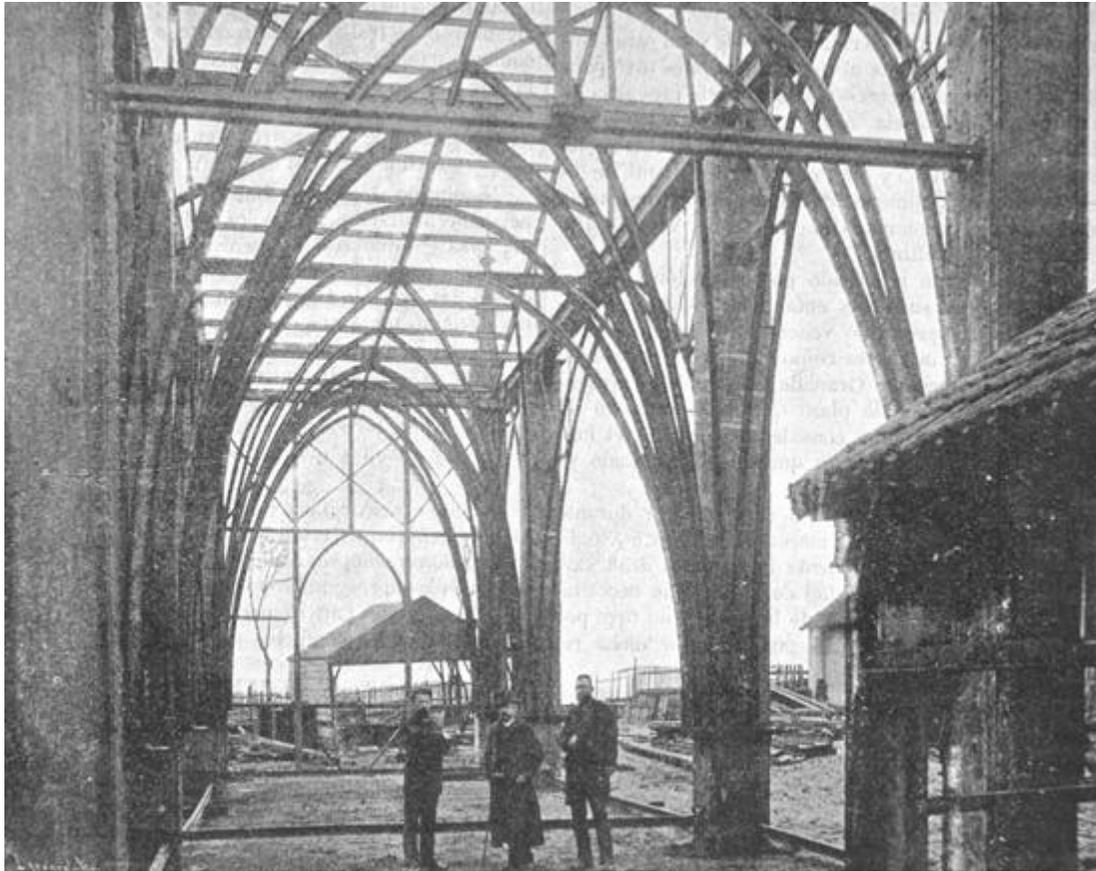




Monastery of San Juan de Dios. Mapas de América y Filipinas en los libros españoles de los siglos XVI y XVIII by Francisco Vindel. BN In 1656, the medical friars of San Juan de Dios took charge of the hospital of the Brotherhood of Mercy. In 1850, the hospital of San Juan de Dios was sited next to the Parian gate.

Photograph of the tower of San Agustín after the earthquake. Francisco van Camp. 1880. SHM This church, whose construction was completed in 1604, has been described as a permanent miracle in stone, since it withstood the strong earth tremors that shook Manila after it was built. This church follows the severe baroque style, but incorporates Herrera and Vignolesque influences, which reached the archipelago from the Viceroyalty of Mexico. It is included in the World Heritage List of buildings.

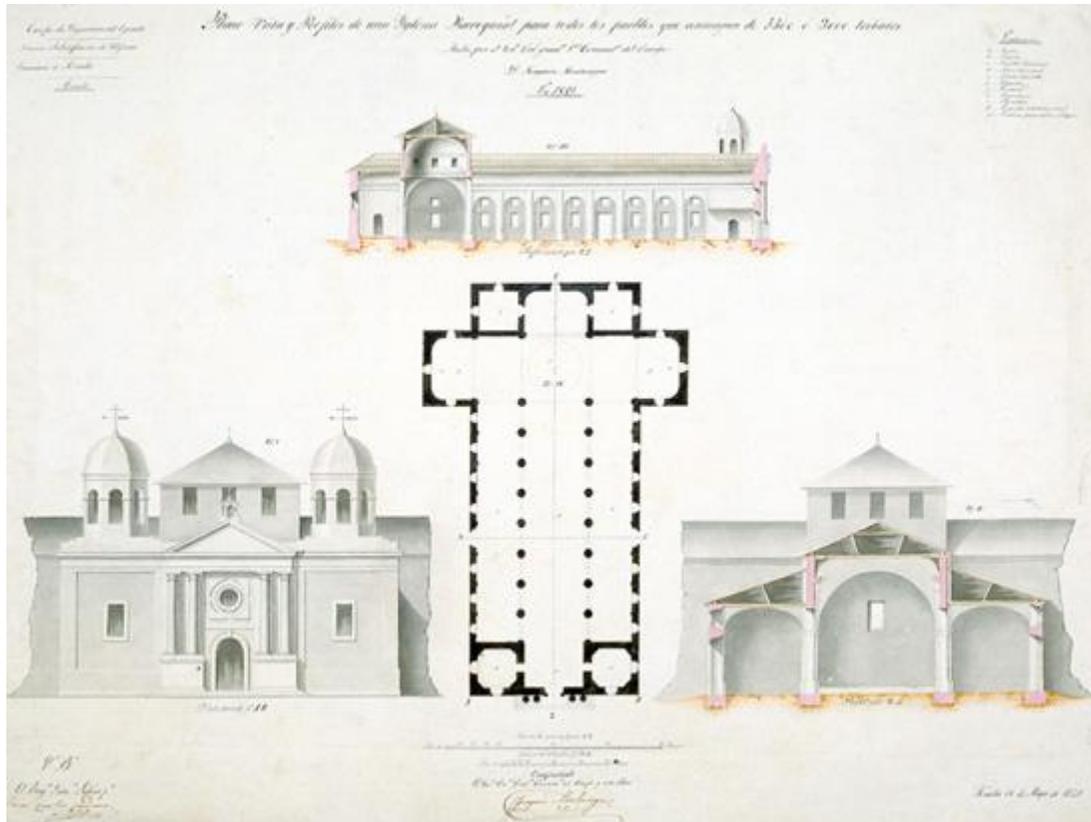




The church of San Sebastián under construction.
Revista de Obras Públicas. 1897 Not only the main structure of this building, but also its walls and even the intersecting vaulting, were of metal construction. This was the fruit of neogothic tendencies and the Industrial Revolution.

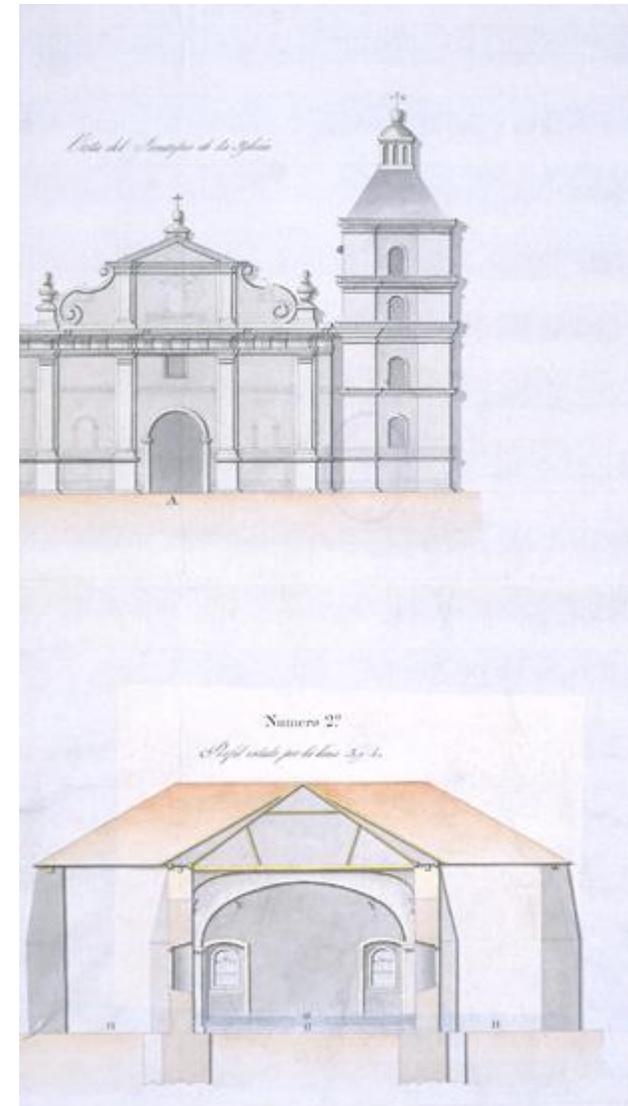
San Sebastián church in Quiapo. Revista de Obras Públicas. 1897 This was a pioneer in the field of prefabricated construction. It incorporates metal constructions made in Belgium in accordance with the design drawn up by the engineer Genaro Palacios y Guerra.

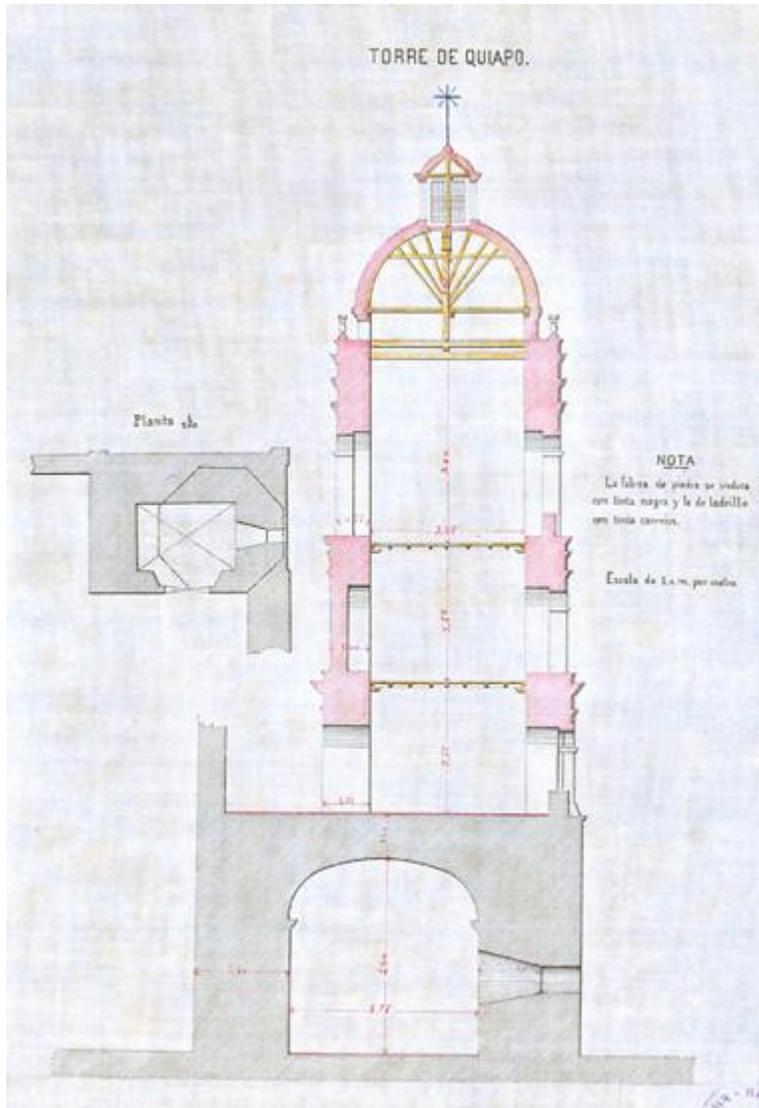




Parish church. 1849. SHM Architecture began to adapt to earthquake conditions; the dimensions of constructions were made lower and wider, walls were made thicker and buttresses were made stouter, while upper structures were made lighter.

Manila parish church. SHM Parish churches were constructed in accordance with projects reflecting designs similar to those of churches built in Spain and America, although local techniques were used.





Tower of the Quiapo church. 1850-1898. AHN The towers of Philippine churches are a combination of Renaissance bell towers and pagodas. Their presence is the architectural symbol par excellence of the Christian faith, which was carried to the Philippines by Spanish missionaries.

