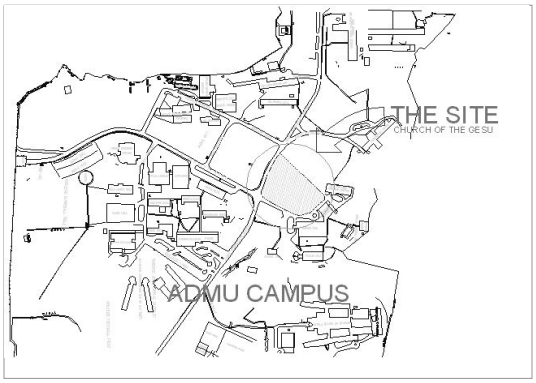
THE UNIVERSITY CHURCH OF THE GESU`
ARCHITECT – JOSE PEDRO C. RECIO

(Article by Jose B. R. F. Ignacio, Photos by: Cocoy Sarmenta)



INTRODUCTION

Years before 1949, plans for a school were presented by a Jesuit to his congregation in Manila. What was introduced then was a master plan with simple structures for a grade school, high school and a liberal arts college.

Envisioned more than 50 years ago, the proposal to build included a church that remained on paper for several decades. In the meantime, the school grew into a well-established university from where thousands have graduated and moved on. It was in the 90's when major steps to execute the vision of the church finally took a more definite direction.

Today, the Church of the Ge` tands as a religious icon that embodies the ideals of the Ateneo de Manila University. The church is a new and spacious structure located within the heart of the campus. *This house of worship was conceived to*

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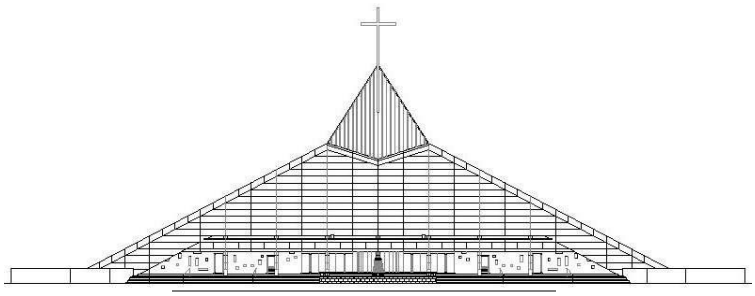
symbolize everything the Ateneo has aspired to be and do - as Filipino, as Jesuit, and as Christian/Catholic.1

THE REALIZATION

In 1999, six highly established architects were carefully selected to bid for the design of the church. After a series of interviews and presentation of design proposals, the firm of Recio+Casas was eventually commissioned as architecture and design consultants. The process of realizing the dream of the Jesuits became an exciting journey for the architects and the whole Ateneo Community.

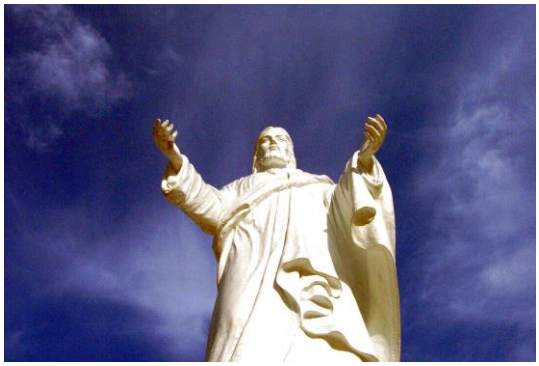
One major requirement for the architect was to create a structure that represented the vision of the Jesuits and one within the context of the Philippine setting. The Committee therefore required that the church serve as an icon for the university - a place for quiet prayer and reflection, to attract many, and to hold large crowds for major celebrations. *In addition to and following the norms of Jesuit buildings, the church is to be utilitarian, plain but practical, conducive to health, and sturdy – concerns very much described as down to earth.2*



1 From the Homily of Rev. Fr. Catalino G. Arevalo S.J., *"**The Wall Was of Jasper, The City Pure of Gold"** – Dedication of the Ateneo University Church of the Gesu,* 31 July 2002, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines

2 From a study-paper for construction of the Gesu church from the university presidents office. Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines

Most of the schemes went through several charettes (design workshops). In response to the specifications laid out by the committee, the architect used this method to integrate and realize these concerns. The architect participated in events celebrated on campus to understand current and proposed uses and user behavior. This assured that the needs of all the users and stakeholders were addressed.3



SITE AND SENSITIVITY

One of the major concerns of the committee was to make sure the church complemented the master plan of the campus. Established open spaces adjacent to the church were integrated to serve the social needs of the school. A large statue of the Sacred Heart originally sat on the church's site and used as a public area. Moving the statue towards the entrance of the church plaza preserved the original function and further articulated its historical context. In front of the church is a huge open area where the whole university can

3 Alcazaren, Paulo, *"**Essence and Expression – The Church of Gesu, Ateneo de Manila University",** Blu Print: The Architecture and Design Sourcebook, MegaMagazine and Publication Inc., 1605 Pasig, Metro Manila, Philippines, P.O.Box 12762, Vol.5/6, 2002, pp. 70-79*

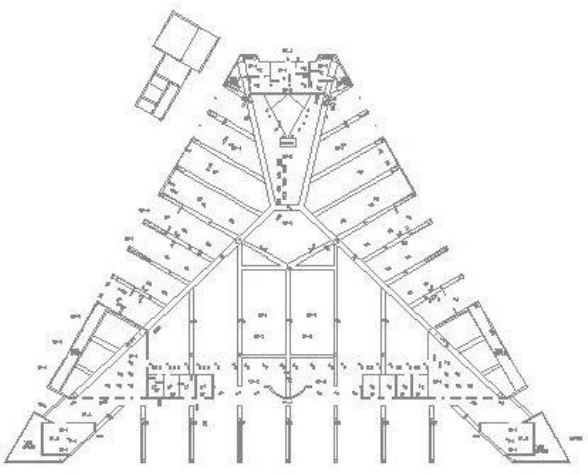
(Article by Jose B. R. F. Ignacio, Photos by: Cocoy Sarmenta)

congregate while the church façade serves as backdrop for major outdoor gatherings. This shows how the building interacts with public domain. Inside is place for meditation and outside, peop are encouraged to meet and converse, t stimulate natural human potential b engaging passers-by.

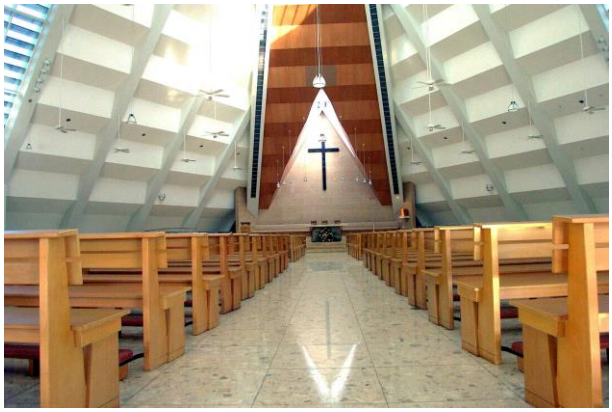
Aerial site analysis and research led to identification of pedestrian axes and link-nodes that tie the church with neighboring international style buildings. It is positioned at the summit of a hill providing many vantage points. The site in itself played a major role in shaping the church. During early stages in design, a triangular plan was established based on existing site features. After several discussions and experiments in form, a tetrahedron emerged and the architect was eventually convinced of this configuration.

The tetrahedron/pyramidal structure slowly materialized as climatic parameters delineated the dynamic of interior spaces.

repeated symmetrically. The interior is hollowed out like a pyramid with sloping floor that focus attention to the altar.



Simple in shape and yet elegant in form, the beauty emerged out of apparent chaos coming from numerous consultations with faculty, staff, alumnae and priests.



CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

The harsh tropical climate of the Philippines enticed the architect to address issues of human comfort whilst working with nature. Clients specified low energy use. Balancing the entry of daylight against the buildup of heat was not an easy task for the designer. The

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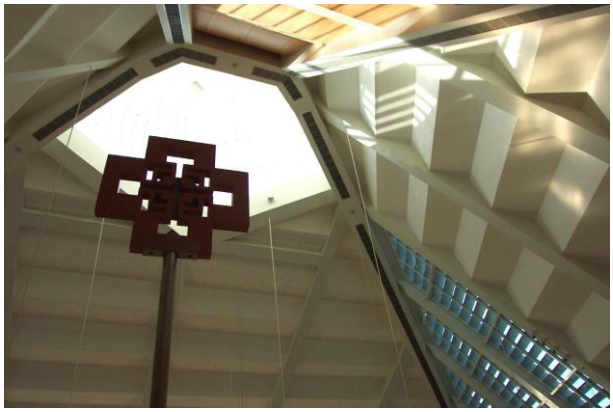
use of passive design techniques such as the entry of daylight and natural ventilation are features of the church. These techniques are reinterpretations of devices that have been used for thousands of years but in this case, innovative in application using new technology.

Breaking the use of traditional forms allowed the architect and engineers to explore techniques in construction. Load bearing system of walls, roofs and frames form the shell of the church. The steel frame construction clad in metal deck panels and sprayed with concrete (gunite) was used on the exterior. This formula created good thermal properties for a building within a tropical setting.

Skylights consist of structural aluminum frames, tinted glass and angled aluminum louvers. This became part of an architectural composition that allows views and reflections for those inside to appreciate the lush greenery around the campus. Beautiful blue skies can be seen from within with minimal direct solar radiation falling on high occupancy zones. Pushing the issue further, the way the building faces in relation to the sun is vital to its low energy design. Skylights face northeast and southeast with louver shades positioned to minimize the entry of harsh afternoon solar radiation. The ceiling and roof successfully reduce the need for artificial lighting.



Cross ventilation is provided as fresh air enters lower fenestrations that flank perimeter walls of the church. When air temperature rises inside, ‘stack effect’ pulls air upwards and this is assisted by exhaust vents which suck stale air out during large gatherings. Healthy ventilation remains a work in progress as the designer hopes to eliminate the use of mechanical exhaust vents during peak hours. Nevertheless, with the abundance of natural light, the church remains generally cool throughout the year.

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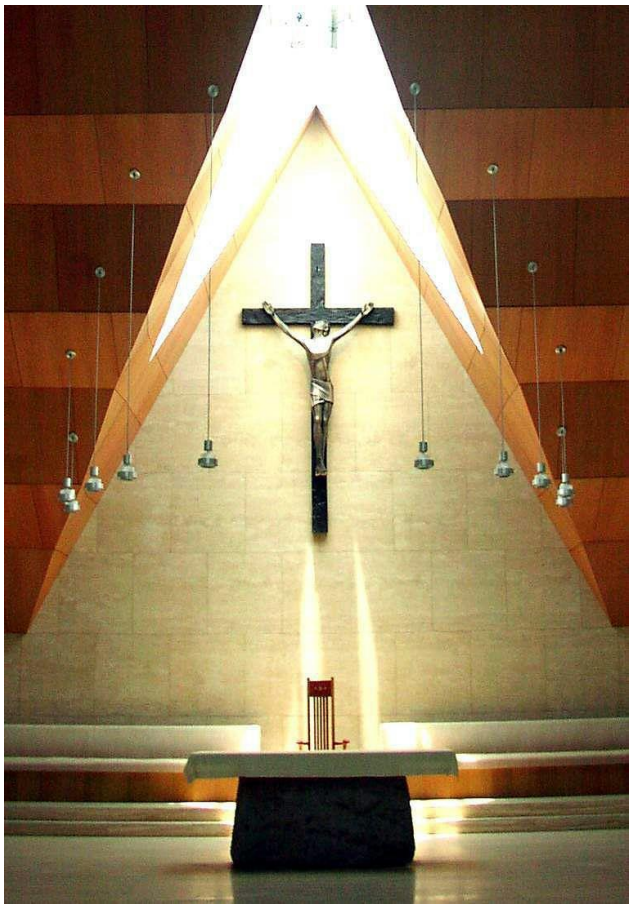
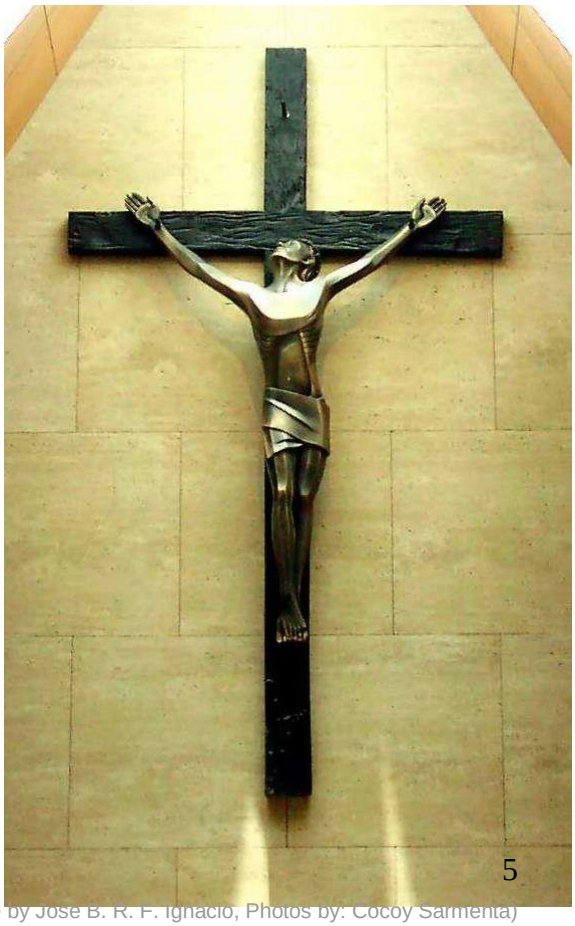
DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

The altar is the central focus of the building. A modern minimalist approach is used indoors. The skylight above the altar is an afterthought allowing people to focus on the sacred space accentuated by the play of lights. The altar table consists of a rectangular marble top on a natural stone base unearthed from the site.

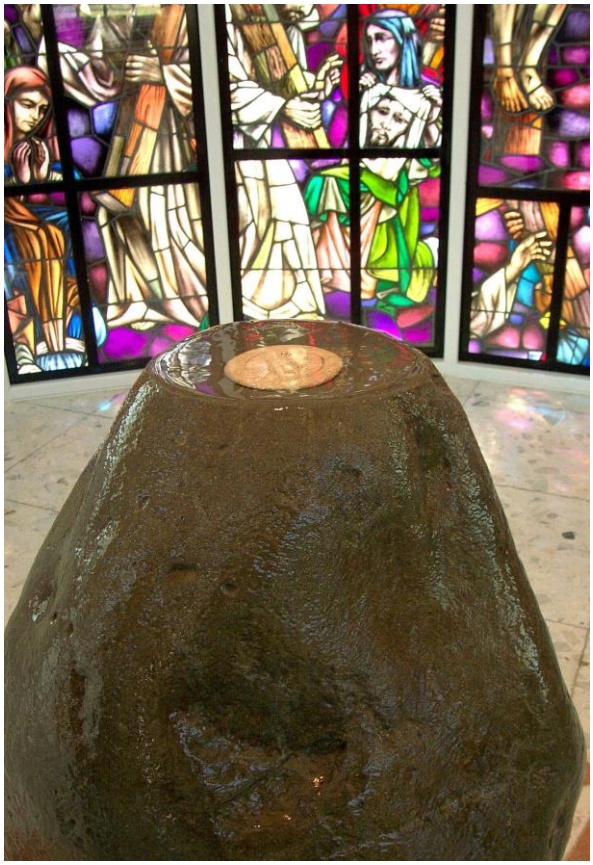
The severe yet elegant composition of elements gives emphasis to the table and the bronze sculpture of Christ mounted on a very old wooden cross. The crucifix hangs graciously against the altar's travertine wall. Simple, focused, monochromatic and with less clutter, these characteristics provided the prayerful and light ambiance the architect wanted.

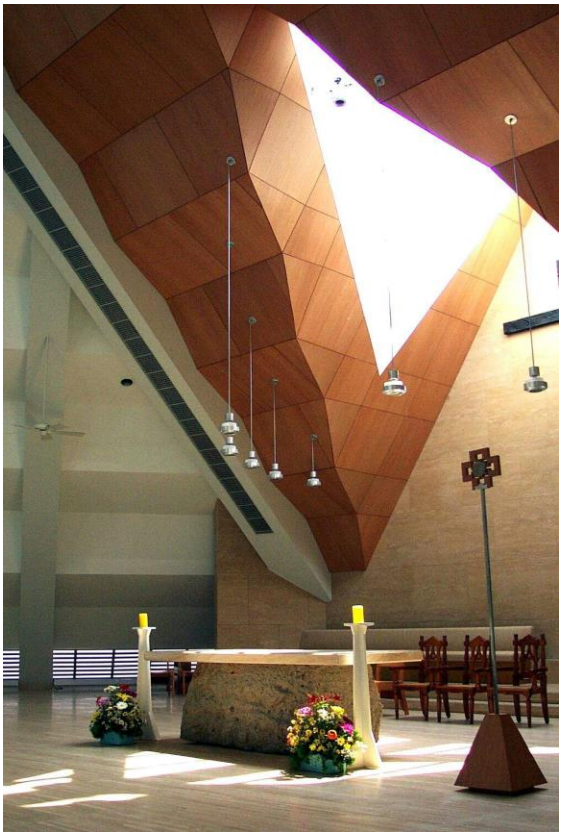
Outstanding sculptor Juan Sagid Imao created the bronze cast Corpus Christi. The form symbolizes Christ's total surrender to the will of God. From the feet, muscles are tensed but slowly relaxing towards the upper torso. As natural light passes through the ceiling, the face gazes upward basking in God's calming light.





Repetition of lines dominates interior spaces. The ceiling is shaped to address the acoustic properties of the church. Interior surfaces are fan-folded finished with wood veneer on the central axis and concrete on the sides. Non-parallel surfaces are used to improve acoustic performance, a strategy that integrates form and function to a satisfactory level.





The Holy Water font is a massive stone where water flows through the core and allowed to trickle down its sides. On a technical note, this font allows thermal cooling as water evaporates lowering air temperature as wind moves around the font.

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Two side chapels are located on opposite corners of the church. The walls of the chapels are adorned with irregularly shaped openings with colored glass, bringing to mind Le Corbusier's Chapel at Ronchamp.

Recycled stained glass from the old Padre Faura Chapel were salvaged and restored to act as backdrop for the Holy Water font and chapel walls located at the rear.

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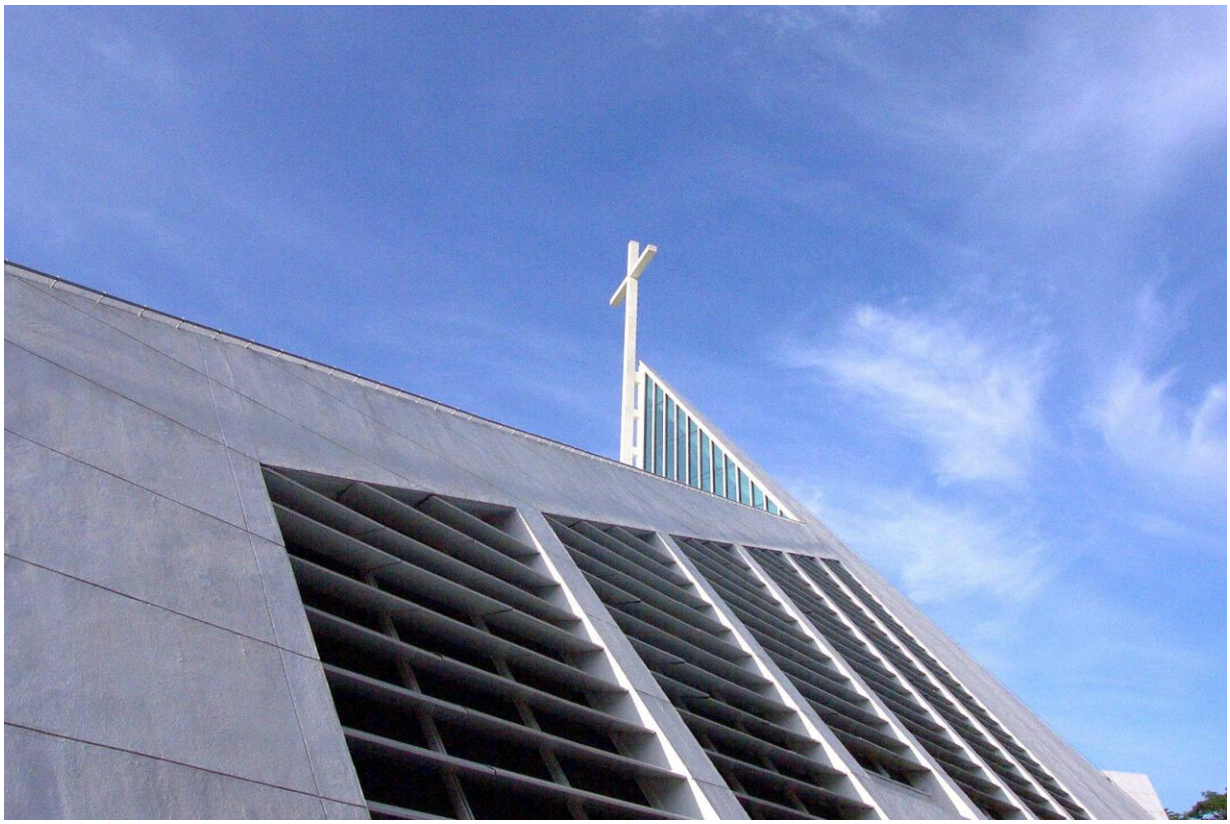

SPIRITUAL TRANSCENDENCE

Architects bear an inescapable responsibility to make sense out of the spaces they create through form and function. Sacred spaces bind people together and encourage spirituality. And to realize these aspirations, one must be able to move the spirit.

It is quite obvious that a native son, one very proud of his roots, designed the church. The architect brought the ideals of his school into sharp focus. He used space, form and light to evoke religious emotions. Each time an alumnus comes home, amidst all the noise and traffic of the urban context, a place of transcendence and simplicity is provided.

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A place to explore, visit, and spend some time to meditate. One where men and women can pray and leave behind for a while the clutter, busy-ness and anxiety all around them. It is a moment, no matter how long or how short, where one is placed in the presence of a supreme being through a momentary retreat from the chaos of our time. To re-invigorate their sense of self-hood, where one can come to meditate in peace and achieve harmony with one's life and destiny.

Name of Project: THE CHURCH OF THE GESU
Location: Father Masterson's Drive, Aténeo de Manila University, Katipunan Avenue, Quezon City
Client: Ateneo de Manila University
Principal Architect: Jose Pedro C. Recio

Design Team: Recio+Casas Architects
Interior Designer: Recio + Casas Architects and ADMU Core & Consultants
Civil Engineers: Aromin + Sy Associates
Electrical Engineers: Systems Environment Incorporated
Mechanical and Sanitary Engineers: Building Energy Systems Inc.

Construction Management Team:

Acoustical Consultant: Acoustic Analysis
Quantity Surveyors: Davis, Langdon & Seah Phils.
Contractors: Summa Kummagai Inc.
Construction Managers: SP Castro and Associates
Lighting Design / Supply: Emerald Sales

Total Area of Site: +/- 13,076 sq. m.
Total Floor Area: +/- 3204 sq. m.

Initiation of Project: September 2002
Completion of Project: July 2003

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