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Rizal and the Dipolog Church

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Rizal and the Dipolog Church

Those who remember the old San Ignacio Church of Intramuros and have seen the church in Dipolog, Zamboanga del Norte, have been struck by the close resemblance. And it has always been understood that this likeness was no accident.

In 1878 Father Francisco de Paula Sanchez sailed for Spain and, passing through Rome, presented for the approval of the General of the Society of Jesus the plans of San Ignacio Church.

In that year Father Jose Vilaclara was a missionary in Dipolog and confronted with the task of building a church. He knew Jose Rizal very well, having been his professor the previous year in philosophy at the Ateneo. He turned to Rizal for help.

While recovering from illness in Cebu, Vilaclara acknowledged a letter of young Rizal, which had been received in Dipolog. He expressed his desire to have Rizal pass a vacation in Dipolog and hoped to get from him some sketches of altars for his church. The local artists, though not lacking in talent, were poor in ideas. Meanwhile, he asked Rizal to sketch some of the better altars in Manila and "to copy the plan of our future church". Rizal could give the results to some Jesuit who would get them to Vilaclara in Cebu, with which city communications were easy and rapid.

It is not known definitely that Rizal satisfied this desire, but it seems altogether likely in view of his friendly relations with Father Vilaclara and the fact that the church does indeed look like San Ignacio Church.

Father Nicasio Patangan, the present parish priest of Dipolog, when he was a boy, actually saw the model of the Dipolog Church based on Manila's San Ignacio. Father Vilaclara began the construction but, although he remained in Dipolog many years, the church was not completed by him, but by Father Francisco Garcia.

If the foregoing speculations are well-founded, Rizal helped place a memorial to himself in northern Mindanao many years before his exile in neighboring Dapitan.

LEO A. CULLUM

The East Asian Pastoral Institute

In 1961 the former Institute of Mission Apologetics, which has been working out of Manila for some years, changed its name to the