



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ARCHITECTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF DWELLING CULTURE IN MONASTERIES A CASE OF CAMALDOLESE IN TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

This research has explored the complexity of dwelling culture in Monasteries. The rejection of gospel by the global society because of cultural changes, deterioration of faith and technological advancement is becoming more apparent. Specifically, nuns and monks want to “come out” of the traditional Confirmed monasteries and integrate with global communities. The Church hierarchy is aware of the need to integrate evangelical enculturation and modern architecture for more coherent architectural designs which support people’s feelings to comprehend contemporary monasteries. Chamazi Camaldolese monastery in Tanzania was selected to be the case study area because it contains lot of information pertinent to the research issue. Selected data collection tools included questionnaires, interviews and photographic registration and were used successfully to collect all needed information for this study. The study examined and informed the diverse ways of integrating monastic dwelling culture and modernity. Modern time shows that there is a great need of a paradigm shift from the traditional enclosed monasteries to more opened monastic spatial planning and building designs. Information, Communication Technology (ICT) is a blessing in disguise in modern monastic life but should leave out all bad practices and pick constructive moral ideas and architecture which fits modern monastic ways of life of the modern church understanding.

INTRODUCTION

All humankind passes through a process of enculturation. This process is the way in which we obtain and transmit culture. It describes how each individual comes to terms with the already set ideas that their society has established, and how each person adapts behaviors and beliefs, which are 'proscribed', versus 'prescribed'. Michael (2009) relates culture and natural laws of church architecture, the worshippers risks of accepting religious faith that is foreign. Mosh (2011) complements by giving example of how the Sukuma local people in Tanzania rejected foreign religion from Europeans in 1950s but they later accepted because European missionaries adopted and used church architecture which resembled that of local Sukuma dwelling house which was culturally designed and built. Parents and other authority figures in young children’s lives are usually the initiators of this process, steering the children toward activities and beliefs that will be socially accepted in their society. Through this process these authority figures definitely shape the child’s view on life. Enculturation results in the interpretation of these ideals established by the culture and the establishment of own individual behaviors and beliefs. Cultural Transmission is the passing of new knowledge and traditions of culture from one generation to the next.

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Cultural Transmission happens every day, all the time, without any concept of when or where. Everything people do and say provides cultural transmission in all aspects of life. In everyday life, cultural norms are transmitted within individual’s own life. Each family has its own, distinct culture under the big picture of each given society or nation. Parents teach their kids everyday on how to behave accordingly. Within every family, there are traditions that are kept alive. The way each family acts, communicates with others and an overall view of life transmitted to the next generation. However, Castles (2002) explains migration phenomenon as a major aspect of trans-cultural media which culminate to heterogenous society with a multiple cultural identities. Similarly, monasteries varies greatly in size, a small dwelling accommodating only a hermit or in the case of communities anything from a single building to accommodate only one senior and two or three junior monks or nuns to vast complexes and estates housing tens or hundreds. A monastery complex typically comprises a number of buildings that include a church, dormitory, refectory, library, and infirmary. Depending on the location, the monastic order and the occupation of its inhabitants, the complex may also include a wide range of buildings that facilitate self-sufficiency and service to the community. Architecture plays a key role on the suitability of monastery designed space to embody God’s initiative to his believers and community’s faith to one another (Randall 2007, Ravasi 2013, Michael 2009).

Transition from Renaissance to Modern Dwelling Monastic Culture

Western monasteries have had an impact on coastal areas since 15th century; and are now important source for many big buildings, particularly in major cities. Figure 1 is the Crypt Monastery in Leon in Spain showing the square shape, mixed up with circular shape of early monastery buildings. Nuns and monks were supposed to always stay inside enclosed premises.



Source: Rimisho 2012

Figure 1. Crypt Monastery in Leon, Spain



Source: Rimisho 2012

Figure 2. St. Ambrose Monastery in Milan Italy

Figure 2 is St. Ambrose Monastery in Milan Italy showing the two towers design to be higher than the rest of the building, raised up to the heaven shows the presence of God. During the Renaissance time, buildings in monasteries gradually were scattered but grew and multiplied. Specific buildings were erected for various functions. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the taste for buildings was symmetrical and façades were designed to dominate the architectural impressions. In the 19th century, monastic architecture moved backward under the influence of the general taste of Romanesque and Gothic architecture. Architectural romanticism in religious art further produced works of a limited scope, coinciding with the renewal of monastic life. Romanesque architecture is therefore an architectural style of Medieval Europe characterized by semi-circular arches. There is no consensus of the beginning date of the Romanesque architecture, but several proposals indicate it could be from the 6th to the 10th century. Examples of Romanesque architecture can be found across European continent, making it the first pan-European architectural style.

The Romanesque style in England is traditionally referred as Norman architecture. Makachia (2010) contends that the church dwelling culture has influenced architectural paradigms from gothic, renaissance to Roman architecture in line with Christian belief and ways of life especially in monasteries. Combining features of Western Roman and Byzantine buildings, Romanesque architecture is known by its massive quality, its thick walls, round arches, sturdy piers, groin vaults, large towers and decorative arcades. Each of Romanesque building has clearly defined forms and they are frequently of very regular, symmetrical plan so that the overall appearance is simple when compared with the Gothic buildings that were to follow. The style can be identified right across Europe, despite regional characteristics and different materials. However, closure and demolition of cultural, historic and architectural iconic buildings is a great threat in the modern times (Rodgers, 2016). Many castles were built during this period, but they are greatly outnumbered by churches. The most significant are the great churches, many of which are still standing, more or less complete and frequently are rarely used in the modern time for religious purposes. The enormous quantity of churches built in the Romanesque period was succeeded by busier period of Gothic architecture, which partly or entirely rebuilt most Romanesque churches in prosperous areas like England. Figure 3 is the Aachen Cathedral with an architectural mosaic of three styles, namely Carolingian, Ottonian and gothic which was built at the end of 8th century by King Charlemagne. Aachen cathedral was the first site which was given the UNESCO status in Germany because of its strong art history and architecture. This cathedral is one of best examples of the church architecture in the world. Anderson (2013) complement that the renaissance began in Italy and spread all over Europe in a geometrical form with classical styles, elegant columns, portioned arches and evenly spaced lintels across buildings.



Source: Mosh's 2015 Aachen visit

Figure 3. Aachen Cathedral also known as Imperial Cathedral in Germany

This research has explored the built environment for local cultural values in monastery architecture that are important in our lifestyle of worship. However, available literatures indicate limited knowledge in the design with integration of dwelling considerations in the contemporary religious inquiry to determine an appropriate enculturation design phenomenon of monastic dwelling in a localized cultural context.

METHODS

The objectives of this research were met through case study research strategy. Through literature review it was possible to develop deep understanding on research issues.

A two weeks field study was conducted where by two days were for introduction, familiarizations and selection of case study areas earmarked to be extra-ordinarily potential in information. Empirical data and information were collected through case studies at Camaldolese Benedictine monastery built environment for both outdoor and indoor data. Camaldolese Monastery in Chamanzi Dar es Salaam was selected to be a case study area because of its richness of its African monastic cultural strength. Data collection methods employed during case study included interviews, observation, measurements, sketching and photographing registration.

RESULTS

Camaldolese cultural centre in Chamanzi Dar es Salaam (figures 4 & 5) also known as Amani Monastery is unique in comparison with other non-African monasteries to the extent it is nicknamed as the Castle of Tanzania on a Hill. It has incredible architecture which may convince a foreigner to believe that it is a castle in reality. Kieckhefer (2004) elaborate that large building with an apse and large central aisle was usually raised to give it extra height to express the position of the almighty God at an extreme height, the heaven. Moreover, it has been found out that African monasteries have been subjected to numerous external influences from early European missionaries in the continent. Unfortunately, Camaldolese monastery in Chamanzi Dar es Salaam was abandoned at a certain time but it has been restored to immaculate condition and is maintained on a regular basis. The monastery itself is considered to have the most remarkable buildings left from the Benedictine period in 18th century and has been the proud recipient of the cultural adaptation to the present time, thus it has incredible remembrance as the only existing monastery in the city of Dar es salaam.



Source: Field Survey

Figure 4. Emblem of Camaldolese or Amani Monastery in Chamazi Tanzania

The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical particularly in different cultures, and they are independent in regard to all dwelling cultures. Cultural fragmentation alters morality and weakens spirituality to such an extent that one reaches the terrifying concept of the “cultural death”, a real semantic nonsense for a counter-culture which reveals the sinister contradiction between the affirmation of a will to live and an obstinate rejection of God, the source of all life. Currently, the number of nuns and monks is drastically decreasing in monasteries because of various reasons.



Source: Field Survey

Figure 5: Camaldolese or Amani Cultural Centre at Chamanzi in Tanzania

Some of the reasons include cultural changes, others wanted a new way of designing buildings i.e. another new form of monastery buildings that will serve the nuns and monks with all services, while others wanted a change of inside to outside life that will allow them to interact with people outside not to be caged inside monastery. The study revealed that the modern monks would wish to have a paradigm shift in construction of the new monastery buildings that will go hand in hand with the change of science and technology in a globalized world. Respondents were of the opinion that changes are inevitable to make monastic premises a better place to live and stay in the name of Almighty God who called them to this special and devoted vocation. The split between the Gospel and dwelling culture is with no doubt the drama of our time more than it was in the past. Efforts must be made to ensure evangelization is in coherent with varying dwelling cultures, which have to send the word of God to people. But this complement will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed in respect and in favour of people’s dwelling culture. In order to do this, it is necessary to proclaim the Gospel in the language and dwelling culture of the local people. This good news addresses human persons in their complex wholeness, spiritual and moral, economic and political, cultural and social. The church therefore does not hesitate to speak of the evangelization of cultures that is to express mentalities, customs, forms and behavior of the people. For instance, spiritual dancing during holy mass celebrations in African context is applausable to enhance evangelization. The new evangelization must penetrate into monastery communities for cultural evangelization.

DISCUSSION

The conditions in which modern men and women live have been so profoundly altered that the second Vatican Council spoke boldly of “a new age in human history. Mumi (1989) underscore that the time has come for a new evangelization in which the new features of culture are to be seen as both opportunities and challenges for a pastoral approaches. Moreover, modern architects who provide church architectural designs that are not suitable for prayers and meditation but for social gatherings, museum, and cultural exhibitions must change their design parameters (Ravasi 2013; Rimisho et. al. 2017). The Church in our time is well aware of the need of integration of evangelical enculturation and modern architecture to come up with designs that stimulate the feelings of people and give out a new outlook that accommodate dwelling cultures in the modern ways of worshipping.

In a widely de-christianized culture that existed in most of the monasteries both in Europe and Africa, the criteria employed by the believers themselves in making judgements and decisions often appear extraneous or even contrary to the Gospel if people's dwelling culture are not respected. Under various pressures, such as poverty and under-development scenarios of rural areas deprived of indispensable goods and services armed conflicts which force millions of people to leave behind their domicile and culture, there is growing number of people on the move from rural to urban areas causing cities to expand excessively, and eventually make even nuns and monks to loose the test of their vocation because of these pressures. Lack of coherent monastery spatial planning makes day to day life miserable and tasteless. The evangelization of urban culture is a formidable challenge to the Church, just as it was possible to evangelize through rural culture for centuries ago. Today's Church is called in the same way to undertake a methodical and far-reaching urban evangelization through latest design of modern buildings that go hand in hand with our taste rather than sticking to the old traditions passed by our forefathers because dwelling culture is dynamic.

Mass Media and Information Technology in Monasteries

The modern age is the world of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which is bringing in different cultural ways of life and turning into what is known as a global village. Means of information and communication have become important platform of media and education, of guidance and inspiration in behaviour as individuals, families and society at large. Evangelization of modern world depends on the influence of the media. It is necessary to integrate ICT facilities into the new monastery dwelling culture to enhance spirituality and better monastic life. This is a complex issue, since the "new dwelling culture" originates not just from whatever continent, but from the very fact that there are new ways of information communication with new languages, techniques, psychology and designs. Podgers (2016) reiterated that most of parochial evangelization facilities are becoming unuseful and obsolete in our modern time to the extent of forcing some to be closed or demolished.

The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a real cultural revolution to the society: television, for instance, transforms language and presents new icon. This involves a fundamental re-shaping of the elements by which people comprehend the world around them and verify and express what they comprehend. The media can be used to proclaim the Gospel. The "live" information provided by mass media lessens the impact of distance and time but, more importantly, it affects the way things are perceived: people conceive and practice what they are shown. The influence of media which has unlimited frontiers, especially as regards advertising, (Pontifical Council for social Communications, Vatican city February 1997) calls upon Christians to be creative and innovative, so as to reach hundreds of thousands of people who spend a significant amount of time every day watching television, rapid exchange of information in internet, social media such as face-book, instagram, Youtube, twitter and the like. Proper use of these social media can be a good and pragmatic means of cultural formation and development, and also as evangelization way of reaching out those who have not heard the Gospel or the Church has not reached secularised societies.

Black (2011) extended his concerns to the confined monastic indoor life and argued that monastery community must be opened to external mobilities and physically communicate with the global community to improve their spiritual livelihood in monasteries. Like any other new technology, the internet involves risks, which have become tragically clear in cases where it has been used for evil purposes. This calls for constant check-up machinery to scan vigilance and reliable information. Junk information should be screened and permanently deleted as soon as possible. It is not simply a question of moral use of the internet, but also of the radical dwelling cultural consequences it brings. A loss of the intrinsic value of items of information, undifferentiated uniformity in messages which are reduced to pure information, a lack of responsible feedback, and a certain discouragement of interpersonal relationships. But, without doubt, the internet's immense potential can be enormously helpful in spreading the word of God. This has already been proved by various promising initiatives taken by the church calling for a responsible creative development on this new frontier of the church's mission. Why shouldn't the church use information networks, whose screens are at the heart of people's homes? Initiatives of catholic church in Tanzania of putting in place their own Tumaini Television and Radio Maria channel is commendable as a modern media of spreading the word of God digitally. However, Richardson (2005) emphasizes that church clergymen and women as well as lay people should abide to regulatory rules and regulations governing modern technologies to ensure professional and practical norms are adhered in church's modern era of information, communication and technology (ICT).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research has revealed that the dwelling culture in the traditional monastery architecture is a challenge in this era of science and technology in terms of space design, cultural aspects, social activities, spiritual aspects, and building deigns. Many churches and monastery structures were designed in such a way they prohibit nuns and monks from coming out and interact with people. This is a phenomenon which is calling for a paradigm shift so as to be compatible with the modern time. Different societies can worship God in their own ways in respect to particular dwelling culture. The myth that God is found in huge, tall and massive buildings is now a history and outdated. Cultural dwelling and social influences into contemporary churches and monastery designs, along with environmental sensitivity, information, communication and technology can harmonize contemporary thinking on cultural changes and ways of life to all church people including nuns, monks and clergymen. Luckily, the church hierarchy of the modern time is fully aware of these challenges which are coming out of modernity and encourage integration of modern evangelical practices, enculturation, modern movement and architecture to *attract more than to push out more*. The advert of ICT shouldn't be celebrated wholistically but be integrated in modern monastic life with great care. Evil ideas and practices must be highly discouraged, deleted and take only constructive moral ideas.

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