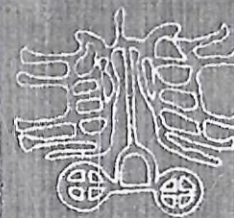


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OKOYE, Obiageli. Ph.D student, *Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.*

OLARINMOYE, W. Adeyinka, Lecturer II *Department of Sociology, Lagos State University, Ojo Lagos, Nigeria.*

OLUWABAMIDELE, A. J. Senior Lecturer, *Department of Sociology, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.*

OYELARAN, P. A. Professor, *Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.*

SALAMI, K. Kabiru, Lecturer I, *Sociology Department, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.*

TUBOSUN, J. B. Senior Lecturer, *Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.*

UKPOKOLO, Chinyere. Lecturer I, *Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.*

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Exploring the Tourism Potentials of Cistercian Monastery, Awhum, Southeast Nigeria

Chinyere Ukpokolo and Obiageli Okoye
Department of Archaeology and Anthropology
University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Abstract

This paper is a product of a study on the tourism potentials of Awhum Monastery, in Enugu State, south-eastern Nigeria. The paper presents a 'thick description' (cf. Geertz, 1973) and interpretation of occurrences within the space and, employing life history technique, explores the meanings and significances which the site holds for the tourists. Other tourist attractions around the centre and the nature of the pilgrims' interactions with these sites are also identified. The study discovers that Cistercian Monastery holds a great promise for religious tourism development. Both local and foreign tourists visit the monastery for the purpose of an encounter with the supernatural, an experience of inner transformation, thanksgiving and quest for solution to individual problems. Invariably, the Awhum Monastery provides the context for Spirituality and Nature to intermingle: establishing divine encounter for the ultimate goal of spiritual reinvigoration for the religious tourists and refreshment for the eco-tourists.

Introduction

Tourism, in contemporary times, has become one of the major sources of foreign exchange to many governments globally. Religious tourism in particular provides the context for individuals and groups searching for meanings and inner experiences of the supernatural to gather and satisfy their yearnings. Reports from World Tourism Organization have it that an estimated 300 to 330 million pilgrims visit the world's key religious sites every year¹. In recent decades, the number of visitors to the Vatican has also increased tremendously that it is estimated that in 2006 the Vatican received up to 4.2 million visitors. A host of these tourists visits such places as St Peter's Square, St Paul's Basilica outside the walls of Rome, the Catacombs, Sistine Chapel, and the Colosseum. Holy land destinations such as Jordan, Mount Sinai in Egypt, Bethlehem, the Dead Sea, Jerusalem, and Mecca have also enjoyed large numbers of visitors in recent decades.

In Nigeria, the number of religious tourists has increased tremendously in recent times. Thus, Fagbile (2006) in his reflections on religious tourism in Nigeria submits:

Nigeria is recording a net inflow of capital through belief tourism. It is believed that capital inflow of Nigeria through religious tourism is only next to Saudi Arabia. Due to the Pentecostal wave of the Christian faith, most aircrafts to Nigeria in December of every year contain religious tourists (Fagbile, 2006: 23).

Part of the places tourists visit in Nigeria includes the African traditional religious sites. According to Okpoko (1990), there are numerous examples of local shrines that have been points of attraction for adherents and admirers which include 'Omo Ukwu' Temple in Ohafia, Abia State, and Osun Shrine at Osogbo, Osun State, which is dedicated to the Osun goddess of fertility. In recent decade, Osun Osogbo has been attracting numerous tourists from all over the world, particularly since its designation as World Heritage Site. Marguba (2001) also made reference to other traditional religious sites that attracts tourists such as the Hubbari (Shehu Usman Dan Fodio's Tomb) in Sokoto. There are also the monthly Christian retreats, conventions, religious conferences and seminars which attract numerous visitors to Nigeria. For instance, Nwanagu (2008) elaborated on the various Christian and Muslims conferences and seminars in Nigeria since 1973. In the light of this, the former Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee of the Federal Capital Territory, Senator Anthony Agbor has praised. The Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN) for its contribution to Nigerian tourism development (Trust, 27th Feb., 2010). A similar report by The Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation survey indicates that these evangelical churches attracted over 15 million people to their retreat grounds generating N90 billion approximately \$890 million during the Christmas period of 2008 (Daily Trust, 27th Feb., 2010). Important also is the religious activities of Redeemed Christian Church of God, Winners Chapel, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, particularly during the churches' annual and biannual conventions and conferences. These programmes attract millions of pilgrims from different parts of the world. Monasteries also play key roles in the promotion of tourism in the communities where they are sited. Its provision of conducive environment for organized contemplation makes it attractive for those seeking spiritual re-invigoration or spiritual solution to their problems. By its very nature, monastery provides for a withdrawal from the world into solitude, silence, prayer and ready penance (Onuoha, 1990). Some of the monasteries in Nigerian include: Our Lady of the Angels Monastery Nsugbe near Onitsha, Anambra State, St. Benedict's Monastery, Ewu Ishan in Edo State, and Cistercian Monastery, Awhum, Udi Local Government Area, Enugu State. Despite the prevalent of religious tourism in Nigeria, scholarly attention to this phenomenon has remained marginal. Research works on tourism in the country, over the years, has by and large concerned with the archaeological perspective. Accordingly, Lawuyi (2011) identifies three main dimensions of this approach

which are: (i) emphases on archaeological sites and plea for increase tourism (see Ajekigbe & Babalola, 2007) (ii) the emphasis on the need for the documentation of every archaeological site to prevent the threat of extinction (see for instance Aremu, 2004; Olukole & Aremu 2007), and (iii) the tendency to emphasise structure, particularly with regard to the values of sites and museums, or in his own words, "the use of artefacts and monuments to construct and transform social relations" (Lawuyi, 2011: 161 - 162). Thus, available studies also tend to focus on archaeological sites and their management, without necessarily exploring cultural production processes, meanings and interrelationships through ethnographic methods (see for instance Okpoko, 1990; Falade, 2002; Fagbile, 2006; and Aremu 2008b).

Increasingly, in recent decade of tourism study in Nigeria, ecotourism issues have become topical (see for instance, Oyelaran 2008; Kolade, 2008). Oyelaran (2008) for instance lamented the negative impact of human agency on natural habitat and the subsequent effect on tourism, and argued that through the changes human agency has brought about in vegetation cover, "they have modified both the food resources and microclimates of animals and consequently the richness in the wildlife" (Oyelaran, 2008: 84). On his contribution to the discourse, Kolade (2008) focuses on the ecotourism potentials of forests and calls for the need for the security of these resources for the promotion of ecotourism. Bringing the two dimensions together, it is obvious that in the two approaches – the archaeological approach and ecotourism dimension – emphases have not been laid on the experiences of the tourists or their impressions of the places they toured. The implication is that the perspective of the 'consumer' represented through oral text is conspicuously absent.

With regard to religious tourism, this area has also not received much ethnographic attention, despite the increasing wave of religious tourism in Nigeria and the tourism potentials of many of these sites. Activities within the sites have largely remained undocumented. Undoubtedly, the emphasis on archaeological tourism in Nigeria by most researchers is a reflection of the country's great cultural heritage, particularly in the areas of archaeological resources. While the subject matter of these scholars is not being contested here, it is also important to explore the other processes of cultural production and reproduction with regard to tourism, from the ethnographic perspective with emphasis on the tourists' experiences. In line with this thought, this study examined Our Lady of Mount Calvary Cistercian Monastery, Awhum, Southeastern Nigeria, popularly known as Cistercian Monastery, Awhum, in order to identify the religious tourism potentials of the site. The main questions of this study include: What is the nature of the everyday life in the monastery? What informs pilgrims' visits to Cistercian Monastery, and what is their experience of the site? What are the other tourist attractions close to the monastery, and what is the nature of pilgrims' interactions with the site(s)? What infrastructural facilities are provided for the comfort of the pilgrims and to what extent do these meet the needs of

the pilgrims? These questions are addressed with the intention of determining the tourism potentials of the Monastery.

Study Contexts and Methods

This study was carried out at Awhum in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. The neighbouring towns to Awhum are Okpatu in the northern part, Nike to the east, Ukana to the south, and Egede to the west. Awhum town has eight villages with His Royal Highness Onyebuchi Ugwu Chimere I of Awhum as the traditional leader. The major economic activities in the town are farming, hunting, and trading. There is a local market (Nkwo Market) located at the centre of the town that serves the community, and the visitors to the monastery. The market is situated at "Ukwu Akpu". The town was formerly known for the production of high quality palm wine. With the establishment of the monastery, tourism in form of pilgrimage has become the major drivers of economic growth in the community. The main religion of the people is Christianity,

although there are a few adherents of traditional religion in the community. Catholic Church and Anglican Communion are the two dominant Christian denominations in the town. The monastery is managed by the Cistercian Monks, and has become a major pilgrimage and prayer centre for Christians from many parts of Nigeria and beyond. Our Lady of Mount Calvary Cistercian Monastery, Awhum, was founded by the late Most Reverend Godfrey Okoye and Reverend Father Abraham Ojefua on May 7th, 1970, at the Holy Ghost Novitiate house at Awo-mmamma, in Orlu, Imo State, Nigeria. On May 15th, 1970, the monastery was brought from the Holy Ghost Novitiate, at Awo-mmamma to the town of Awhum in Enugu State, Nigeria. For about a year and seven months, the monks stayed temporary at Awhum Junior Preparatory Seminary, about a kilometre southeast of its present location. Due to space constraint and the fact that members of the local community built their houses very close to the monastery thereby constituting distraction to the solitary life of the monks, the religious body acquired, from the community, a bigger piece of land which was referred to as 'evil forest' by the members of the community. This piece of land was sanctified by the religious community, who constructed their buildings, and subsequently moved to their present location. The old site still serves as part of accommodation for pilgrims. As the monks explored the new site, they discovered the waterfall and the cave, which have become tourist points for pilgrims and non-pilgrims alike.

The explanatory model adopted for this study is Victor Turner's 'Liminality' and 'Communitas' (Turner, 1974). Victor Turner contends that pilgrimage processes reflect 'processual units', 'social anti-structure', and 'semantics of ritual symbols' (Turner, 1974: 166). Concerning 'liminality' Turner pays attention to 'spatial aspects of pilgrims' liminality, which is a form of 'threshold', where the pilgrim is 'neither here nor there', they are 'betwixt and between' as it were. Like people going through *rite de passage* they are caught in-

between; where they are from and where they are going. Liminality also entails suspension of normal social ties, detachment and moving to a serene environment in order to achieve an experiential condition. Pilgrimage also manifests the quality of *communitas* in the form of social relations and interactions among the pilgrims within the space. Pilgrimage offers the platform for people of diverse social class and cultural backgrounds to interact closely, breaking class barriers and reflecting the oneness of God and Humanity. This classlessness is also reflected in the way the pilgrims operate as equals, as "communion of equal individuals", submitting together to the "general authority of ritual elders", the monks. In studying pilgrimages Victor Turner suggests, the researcher can examine 'extended case history', where oral narratives of the personal experiences and observations of pilgrims, and of detached researcher, enable the reader to envisage the social process of pilgrims, particularly of their individual and collective experiences and their impressions of the centre (Turner, 1974: 166). These suggestions were closely observed in this study.

This study was carried out both at the present location and the old monastery. Also the waterfall, the cave and the mountain were also visited. For a study of this nature that intends to capture the experiences of the research participants, it is obvious that qualitative methodology is the most appropriate approach. The methods adopted include participant observation; key informants interview (KII), life history, and focus group discussions (FGDs). The choice of these methods was guided by the need to ensure that the voices of the research participants are integrated into the study and their experiences and impressions of the sites documented. Again, ethnographic methods, apart from ensuring the originality of representation, also allow the readers of the ethnographic portrait to generate their own meanings. Sample consisted of 15 members of the local community including the traditional leader and selected cabinet members; 10 members of the religious community (selected from the monks and staff of the monastery), and 25 pilgrims. While random sampling was employed in selecting the pilgrims, purposive sampling was adopted in selecting the monks and workers in the monastery. For the informants from the local community, the snowball approach was employed, particularly in selecting key informants who provided information on the history of the religious community and opinion leaders in the local community. A total of 5 focus group discussions (FGDs) consisting of 6 to 8 participants in each session were carried out. The purpose of FGDs was to get a range of opinions on the issue being studied. The pilgrims were interviewed on what motivated them to visit the monastery, and their experiences and impressions of the sites. The interviews were conducted both in Igbo and English Languages, depending on the choice of the research participants. As participant observers, the fieldworkers observed and recorded behaviours and events as they occurred, using research instruments such as tape recorder, camera, and note books for field notes. Participation in the life at the site as much as possible was also carried out. This enabled the researchers to have a better understanding of the meanings pilgrims hold of the religious site. Being conversant with the mode of Catholic worship, no problems were encountered in this regard as activities such as Masses, Penitential Services, and other religious activities

are regular Catholic mode of worship. Data were also collected through secondary sources such as text books, magazines, encyclopaedias, journals, Internet, newspapers, and other literature materials. These, we believe, added to the quality of the data. Descriptive and interpretive analyses were employed in the analysis of the data. The researchers listened to the recorded interviews, transcribed and translated the data, and then extracted what is relevant to the research questions, interpreting and integrating them following the objectives of the study. The major limitation to this work is that the monks are not easily accessible due to the nature of their vocation. The fieldwork for this paper was carried out between December 2009 and March 2010.

Research Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses findings bearing in mind the objectives of the study. The findings were presented and discussed under five main headings: 'Everyday Life at Cistercian Monastery'; 'Pilgrims' Personal Experiences of the Monastery'; 'Other Tourist Attractions and Pilgrims Interactions with the Sites'; and 'Infrastructural Facilities at the Monastery.'

Everyday Life at Cistercian Monastery

Life at the Cistercian Monastery, Awlum, is structured and semi-structured in some sense. On admission into the hostel, the pilgrim is provided with a timetable indicating the activities at the monastery. Pilgrims, nevertheless, have periods within which they can have their personal programmes. As early as 2:30 a.m., a bell goes signalling the beginning of the monks' daily activities, with prayers refers to as the morning "office" (prayers, devotional readings, and the singing of psalms) which lasts till 4 am. This "office" occurs seven times per day (beside the daily Mass). At 5: 15am, morning Mass begins and ends by 7 am. 'Work' begins at 7:45 a.m., and lasts for 4 to 6 hours daily. 'Work' includes activities such as farming, working in the factories where sachet water popularly referred to as 'pure water' in Nigeria is produced, poultry farm, fishery, carpentry works etc. The monks provide almost all their needs. During their free periods, the monks attend to their personal needs such as personal meditations, prayers among other activities.

Groups on special retreat can invite any of the monks in-charge of the guests to give them special talk. In fact, each group has its own schedule of activities, a personal timetable for their activities, which include: midnight prayers, talk, visits to the Waterfall, Mount Calvary for prayers etc. Participation in the 'office' and devotional prayers are optional but pilgrims enjoy these activities and the chapel is always filled to the brim during these prayers. According to Turner (1974), participation in such religious activities is efficacious in changing the pilgrims' inner and, sometimes, hopefully, outer condition from sin to grace, sickness to health. Food is available thrice daily but strictly for those who paid for lodging. They are required to go for their meals with their meal tickets. Evening prayers,

the last prayer with the monks for the day, ends by 7: 45pm after which the pilgrims go for their dinner by 8: 00pm. Some pilgrims go to bed after their dinner; some go to the 'grotto' for their personal prayers, while others return to the Chapel. Yet, others who came in groups could go for talks, prayers, or even mid night prayers depending on the programme of the group. A typical day at the monastery is indicated in a table below:

Some of the Activities	Time and Duration
2:30am - 4 am	The monks prayer time (Office time) when the monks engage in their monastic prayers.
5: 15 am - 7 am	Morning prayers for the monks, general daily Mass, and final blessings for those departing that day
7: 45 am	Work period for the monks (this lasts for 4 - 6 hour). Within ' 's period the pilgrims can begin their personal programmes
8 am	Breakfast time for interested pilgrims
7: 45pm	General evening prayers
8pm	Dinner, after which individuals and groups can have personal programmes

Pilgrims' Personal Experiences at Awlum Monastery

Pilgrims at the monastery maintain that the Cistercian Monastery offers them the opportunity and the platform to experience divine encounter. Its location at the outskirts of Awlum town away from the hassles and bustling of city life is one of the major advantages of the centre. According to an informant, monk Wilson who lives in the monastery, the unique geographical location of Awlum Abbey is the monastery's major asset. The monastery is divinely located and fashioned with some natural endowments like the waterfall, a unique mountain range and cool weather that are conducive for effective prayers. Indeed, Victor Turner of course, maintained that "the peripherality of the holy shrines" contributes to the fulfilment of the inner yearnings of the pilgrims who participate in the life of such places. In fact, a 'limen', according to Turner, is of course, literally a "threshold". A pilgrimage experience represents a threshold, a place and moment "in and out of time", and such a pilgrim hopes to have direct experience of the sacred, invisible or supernatural order, either in form of miraculous healing or inward transformation of the spirit which eventually reflects in outward behaviours. Spiritual programmes designed to assist the pilgrims realise

their expectations at the centre re-enforces their determination to experience some form of transformation. Research participants claim that they always leave the monastery better persons than when they came. Alloy Udenwa, who knew about the monastery through his brother, visits the monastery monthly, according to him, "to improve my relationship with God and I want to be one of the candidates of Heaven" (Udenwa, A., 10/1/2010, Pers. Comm.). Alloy falls into the category of pilgrims who visit the Cistercian Monastery for personal retreat. Another informant, a deacon, who was expecting his priestly ordination, affirmed that he was there to do his prayers and personal retreat before the general retreat of his ordination as a priest.

Not all the pilgrims at the monastery, however, visit the centre for the purpose of 'making Heaven'. Retreat can also be employed as an instrument to actualise material gains, especially when one is going through trying periods. Certainly, some pilgrims are more 'earth bound' than others! An informant, Peter Lawson, a man of about 55 years from Kano State, Nigeria falls into this group, as he desired breakthrough in his business. There are also those seeking physical healing. Some of the informants noted that they had been healed of their illnesses especially after their visits to the Waterfall. In his reflection on reasons for religious tourism, Tomasi (2010) contends that "religious tourism arose from the search for salvation, sometimes the need to be physically healed". A pilgrim, Alex Obieze, a business man from Onitsha has this to say:

Ebe a amaka. Ihe butere m ebe a bu na ahụ adighi m. So, m bia ebe a. So a na Maria ulcer. It lasted for three years and I spend hundreds of thousands of Naira, the thing anaroo mana immediately M tuuru ukwu ebe a, oya anaa. So M bidozie biaba ebe a for one thing or another (Obieze, A., 20/12/2009, Pers comm.).

Translation:

This place is good. What brought me here was that I was sick. So, I came here. I had ulcer. It lasted for three years and I spent hundreds of thousands of Naira. The thing didn't go. But immediately I stepped on this place, the ailment left me. So, I started coming to this place for one thing or another.

This assertion reiterates common narratives of numerous miracles of divine healings pilgrims experienced at Cistercian Monastery. While some of the sick are brought to the site by their loved ones, others were advised by their medical doctors to seek spiritual help for their health challenges. A young man from Enugu State, Mr Okechukwu Dibia, submitted that the reason for his visit to the monastery was to ask God for favour. He was

planning to travel abroad and was asking God for guidance. There are also pilgrims who come back to the monastery to express their gratitude to God having received answers to their prayers. An informant, Ifeoma, from Enugu belongs to this category. According to her, she visited the monastery with her fiancé before their wedding to pray for divine intervention in their marriage preparations. A week after their wedding ceremonies, they returned to thank God for the success of their wedding. Thanksgiving is an important aspect of the Christian faith. In the Bible, Christ used the Parable of the Ten Lepers He healed to portray the significance of thanksgiving. Christ told his listeners that out of the ten lepers healed, only one of them came back to give thanks in appreciation of the healing he received (Luke 18: 11-19). The various reasons for pilgrimage to the Cistercian Monastery are summed up in Victor Turner's statement that:

An individual may go to fulfil a promise, a pledge or vow, made to the patron of a shrine in return for supernatural help believed to have been given to his own or relative affiliation. A promise may also be made to obtain a spiritual or temporal remedy in the future. The pilgrim may go to pray for help in need or to be cured of an ailment. He may go to offer thanks for benefits received, or to obtain grace merely through visiting the shrine, touching holy objects there, and then rubbing his hand on his body or those of his children (Turner, 1974: 56).

Interestingly, some of the pilgrims also seek herbal medicine, which are provided by some of the monks! Consultation of this nature, however, has its specific days. Obviously, the reasons that bring people to the monastery are as varied as the pilgrims themselves.

Pilgrimage as a social process provides the platform for people of diverse social classes and cultural backgrounds to meet and interact closely, breaking class barriers. At Cistercian Monastery, social connections are established among room-mates as they pray together and share their experiences at the site. Chijioko Obinna, a young man of about 22 years old who is a student submits:

You know, the way people behave here surprised me. People are so humble and simple not minding their status in life. Do you know that my roommates are very big men but you can hardly tell until they told me one day during discussion? One is a pastor. He flew in with bank manager to help him in prayer. The manager paid for the travelling expenses. The pastor gave him the CD of his latest release. He is into Christian Music. My other roommate came in from abroad. They relate with me as if we are all mates not even minding my age (Obinna, 8/2/2010, Pers. Comm.).

The monastery is a place of encounter in a classless society or what Victor Turner calls 'communitas'. New relationships are formed as room-mates exchange contact addresses, and such relationships may transform into social capital useful in accessing other needs.

Cases and Narratives: Pilgrims' Personal Experiences

(i) Joseph Uliakpor

Joseph, a student of Regina Caelis Secondary School in Abia State, is a first timer to the monastery. According to Joseph, his mother pleaded with him initially to follow her to the monastery but he refused. Later, the mother compelled him to accompany her as his school was on a long vacation. The purpose of the pilgrimage was for prayers, thanksgiving and for his change of behaviour.

Joseph's experience of the monastery started at his arrival with the mother on a Monday evening around 5:30 pm. They first reported at the Booking Office to take up their accommodation. He was assigned to a male hostel, 'Tansi Hostel', while his mother went for the female hostel. She told him to freshen up and get ready for the 7:30 pm prayers. He attended the prayers and enjoyed the readings of the Psalms. The prayer meeting ended by 8:00 pm and he went straight to bed as he was tired and could not come out for midnight prayers. He woke up by 5:00 am the next day, took his bath and went for prayers and Mass by 5:15 am. The prayer ended by 7:30 am. He later visited Mount Calvary and the Waterfall for prayers after breakfast and morning 'work'.

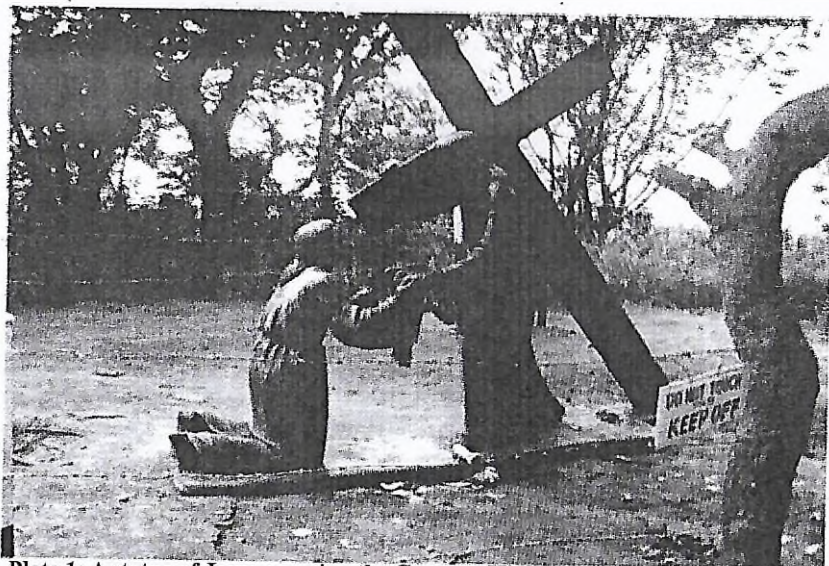


Plate 1: A statue of Jesus carrying the Cross on His way to the place of crucifixion. The statue is used for 'Stations of the Cross' on Mt. Calvary (Fieldwork, 2009).

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His experience at the Mount Calvary (see Plate 1 above) revealed to him the extent to which people could go in expressing their faith. According to Joseph, he was touched when he saw people crawling on their knees while climbing the mountain. He did 'Stations of the Cross' with the group and they concluded their prayers on top of the mountain. On their way back, he asked a member of the group he joined why some people were climbing the mountain on their knees. He was informed that those crawling on their knees wanted to share in the suffering of Christ through self-mortification. The events and procession of the pilgrims climbing the mountain reflected Victor Turner's social drama and represent the processual nature of pilgrimage as Turner argues. To Joseph, this encounter was a turning point in his life. He began to wonder how he could make his experience of the pilgrimage a rewarding one. This thought occupied his mind for the rest of the journey.

Joseph's next point of call was the Waterfall where he went with another group of pilgrims immediately after prayers. As the pilgrims trekked down to the waterfall they said their prayers individually. While some were reciting the Rosary, others were speaking in tongues or saying other forms of prayers. He recounted his experience at the waterfall thus:

When I saw the water falling, I thought it was a joke, that some people were on top there pouring the water. When I went closer and the water touched me, I was overwhelmed with joy and started praying because many people were praying. Since that day, I don't miss going to the Waterfall (Uliakpor, J., 20/2/2010, Pers. com.).

While the water poured on him, he prayed to God to wash away his sins. Joseph was not the only one who visited the waterfall and prayed for forgiveness of sins. There were other tourists who claimed that they visited the waterfall for physical and spiritual cleansing. To these tourists, the experience reminded them of the water of Baptism which washes away sins. Prayers for the forgiveness of sins are essential in the Christian faith. As sin is a barrier to one's encounter with his Maker, the need for spiritual purgation becomes paramount if one must access God, and obtain favour from Him. Water from the fall, to many, symbolises Holy Water which is one of the sacramentals Catholics use for spiritual nourishment, sanctification and exorcism. To Joseph, a visit to the fall is a daily ritual.

Another regular place of call at the monastery is the 'Desert', a large expanse of land where one can pray without distraction. Some pilgrims observe deliverance prayers at this space, including those who prefer vocal prayers to meditative prayers. The desert is a 'chaotic' arena, or 'maddening crowd' of some sort to borrow Thomas Hardy's words, with diverse individuals and groups praying in their peculiar mannerism 'as the spirit moves' them. Some belong to different groups and ministries in their various places of worship; members of the singing ministry, praying ministry, and Block Rosary Society. Joseph

observed groups making deliverance prayers. While in the 'Desert', he prayed to God to bless everybody and let bad ones turn a new leaf. To Joseph, Awhum Monastery is a holy land and since he entered the premises, he never quarrelled with anybody. He likened his lifestyle at the centre to that of a saint. Nobody is quarrelling with anybody. He submitted that they were five guests in a room. Some of the guests are married men and they lived in harmony and prayed together. He then concluded that he was 'born again' during his stay in the monastery and he is asking God to help him live a monastic life as he desired to become a monk in future.



Plate 2: A group of pilgrims sharing testimonies on top of the mountain (Source: Fieldwork, 2009)

(i) Sister Ann

Sister Ann, a Reverend Sister from Nkpor, Anambra State, has been visiting the monastery since 1995. According to her, the monastery is a place for people who want to experience an intimate relationship with God. Sister Ann likens withdrawing to the monastery for prayers to that of Jesus Christ who withdrew from time to time to lonely places for prayers when He was on earth. She visits the monastery for various reason such as seeing her uncle, who is one of the monks, praying with the monks and making personal prayers. She came around 7:00 pm on a Monday and left on Wednesday. Like most people at the monastery, she participated in all the 'offices' but did not visit the Mountain, Cave and Waterfall on this particular visit. She recounted her previous visits to the Waterfall and referred to it as 'a journey of faith' – the distance one needs to trek to reach the Waterfall, the prayers along the way, all re-enact the story of a people on their way to encounter God. Hence, the whole process strengthens one's faith. She advises:

I wezuga onwe gi n'ebe ndi mmadu no, ga kpeelu chukwu dika Moses siri wee jee ya na chukwu zute. Mgbe o zutechalu chukwu, ... mgbe Moses n'agbadata iru ya adiro di same. Mgbe o na- abiakwute umu Israel, ha huru ya dika another person. Even ha siri ya chere kwa na o nwere ka ihu ya di. M biasia a ebe a naa, ma onye biasia ebe a naa, o na-enwe ezigbote changes and that is why echiniine, onye ahu abiakwa maara na ihe di iche di (Uzodinma, A., 22/2/ 2010, Pers. Comm.).

Translation:

If you separate yourself from the bustles of life, when you have separated the self from the people and prayed to God, just like Moses went and met God. After the encounter with God, when Moses was coming down, his face was not the same. When he was going to the Israelites, they saw him like another person. They could not look straight at his face. After someone has visited this place, there are very good changes and that is why tomorrow, the person revisits the site, knowing that there was great changes the other time.

The form the transformation in the life of a pilgrim to the Awhum Monastery could take is reflected in the life of Sister Ann who noted that her vocation as a religious (a Reverend Sister) started with her experience at the monastery, which was transformative.

(ii) Barrister (Mrs.) Kate Okafor

Barrister Kate, a legal practitioner from Owerri is another regular visitor to the monastery. According to her, the disposition of a pilgrim at the monastery can affect the realisation or otherwise of one's expectation(s) at the monastery. She acknowledged that the monastery is highly organised and activities programmed, even up to the Waterfall. She visits the monastery because the site offers a conducive environment for spiritual activities, and this helps her to concentrate and pray to God without distractions. Whenever she visits the monastery, according to her, she prefers being alone most of the time. She arrived at the monastery on a Saturday and left the next day. Her places of call include the mountain where she did 'Stations of the Cross' to and fro and the Chapel for various religious activities that take place there - evening prayers and meditations. According to Barrister Kate, she visits the monastery any time she has serious spiritual, family and or financial challenges. For her, the monastery helps her to become "a new person in the Lord". She has become more peaceful and more prayerful and miraculously whatever she asks God in prayers she receives. She noted that her visit to the monastery was instrumental to her gaining admission into Law School. Besides the spiritual nourishment, she was able to establish enduring friendship with one of the tourists and this helped her in securing a job after her graduation.

The accounts of the pilgrims demonstrate the significance of the monastery to different people. For instance, Joseph wishes to become a monk as a result of his encounter, Sister Ann became a reverend sister after she visited the site, and for Mrs Kate her material needs were met. Stories like these continue to motivate people to visit the site. Those that visit for mere pleasure participate more in visitations to other tourist attraction sites, that is, the Mountain, the Cave, the Desert and the Waterfall.

Other Tourist Attractions and the Pilgrims Interactions with the Sites

In his presidential address during the fourth International Ecotourism Workshop on Preservation of Land, Culture and Wildlife in Abuja, Nigeria in 2000, the then president of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo noted that landmarks such as waterfalls, mountains or caves litter the entire continent of Africa, with tremendous tourist values (Obasanjo, 2008: 9). Awlum monastery gained its popularity not just because of the religious life of members of the community or the fact that worshipers visit the site for religious experience. Rather, the monastery is also surrounded by other tourist attractions, which include mountain, cave, waterfall and the large expanse of land covered with different types of vegetations, and the 'Desert'. These sites serve as both ecotourism and religious tourism sites as well. According to Hector Cellabos-Lascurain of Mexico cited in Marguba (2001), ecotourism is:

Travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestation.

Marguba (2001) affirms that ecotourism is practiced throughout the world and ecotourism destinations are restricted to some few specific protected natural enclaves within these geographical regions. He maintained that for any particular site or location to qualify as an ecotourism site, the natural landscape must be relatively undisturbed for people to study, enjoy, and admire the scenery and its wild animals and plants in their natural state. At the Cistercian Monastery, the mountain, waterfall, 'Desert' and the cave under the control of the monastery depict the prevalent of ecotourism in the region. At these sites, nature and spirituality are interwoven and interconnected, making the pilgrims experience the Creator and the creature in a singular encounter. The waterfall and cave attract both religious and secular tourists.

The Mountain

The mountain, known as Mount Calvary (Plate 3), is within the monastery, though about 2kms away from the monastery residential area. The mountain was formerly used by the members of the local community as a place of sacrifice to the god 'Ekwensu' literally meaning 'Satan'. When the religious community came to the community, they prayed over the site, blessed and consecrated it, converting the site to a place of prayers and supplications to the Supreme Being, the Almighty God. Mount Calvary was dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Calvary on the 2nd of July 1991. The mountain is surrounded by natural scenery, flora and fauna, with valleys beside Mount Calvary. The environment around Mount Calvary is very serene. Although dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mount is visited by members of different church denominations who visit the monastery - Catholics, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Methodists and Baptists. Pilgrims were observed making 'Stations of the Cross', 'praying with rosary', singing praises to God or just praying aloud as they climb the mountain. Most of the pilgrims admitted that they visit the waterfall, cave, and Mount Calvary to appreciate the handiwork of God, which they believe is also an act of worship. Statues of Jesus Christ, depicting different stages of His Passion are stationed at intervals as one climbs the mountain.

The Biblical significance of the mountain is also acknowledged by the pilgrims. An informant, a young lady from Bayelsa State, affirmed she visited the mountain to re-enact in her life God's encounter with Moses. So, the mountain symbolises a point of miraculous encounter, which could come through self-mortification. For Mrs Savior Silimambiri, a pilgrim from Port Harcourt, she preferred going to the mountain and the Waterfall as act of mortification. These places remind the religious tourists of Christ's Passion and "makes one reflect on oneself trying to imitate Christ in the real sense of it" (Silimambiri, S., 3/3/

2010, Pers. Comm.). Indeed, the statues dotting the way to the top of the mountain help the pilgrims to meditate on the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ without distractions. This religious object (the cross) is symbolic, hence makes the sufferings of Christ real to the pilgrims, reminding them of the seriousness of their faith and the pilgrimage. The natural environment also facilitates their meditation as they feel very close to nature. A pilgrim, an evangelist, who has been visiting the monastery since 2003, is one of the people that passionately share this view. He noted spiritual exercise through prayers and meditations along different 'Stations of the Cross' facilitate one's ability to share the passion of Christ and experience spiritual re-invigoration. The cross, an ancient symbol, is found in many cultures of the world and is of various shapes and sizes, though Christianity, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has elevated the symbolic object beyond its other applications. According to Okanlawon (2011), the cross can manifest in such shapes as T-shaped as a symbol of 'life' among ancient Egyptians, and also a metaphor for air, earth, fire, and water that is, symbolising permanence; to the Buddhists, the cross represents 'resignation'; to the Jains, it symbolises their seventh saint; while in the mid-Twentieth Century Germany, the right-facing cross was the Nazi Party emblem (Okanlawon, 2011: 160-161). He further observed that among the Greek, the cross, which is referred to as 'stauros', could be in the forms of 'T', 'X' or 'Y' and symbolises 'death' (Okanlawon, 2011: 161). Little wonder therefore that the pilgrims were ready to mortify the flesh to signify their dying to the flesh for the sake of first, sharing in the suffering of Christ, and two to suppress the flesh so that they could 'grow in the spirit'. Amazingly, some of the pilgrims were observed climbing the mountain on their knees! The sight of the activities of these pilgrims on their way to the top of the mountain makes one to think of the vanity of life and class consciousness.

The top of the mountain is the place where pilgrims conclude their prayers. There is a huge Cross of Jesus Christ there (see Plate 3). To the pilgrims, the top of Mount Calvary is a symbol of where Jesus Christ was crucified. Getting to the top of the mountain is also symbolic. Each of the stations as the pilgrims climb the mountain takes them spiritually closer to God and, eventually, their getting to the apex of the mountain can be seen as their getting to the presence of God, where they present all their petitions and conclude their prayers.



Plate 3: Top of Mt. Calvary where pilgrims conclude their prayers (Source: Fieldwork, 2009)

The Waterfall

The waterfall (Plate 4) is another ecotourism site close to the monastery. The local community was unaware of the fall (probably because of their association of the forest with Satan) until it was discovered by the monks. According to an informant, Monk Wilson, the waterfall and the cave were first discovered by a group of monks during one of their walks. The Waterfall, measuring about 30 metres in height with sparkling clean water showering down, is visited by both secular and religious tourists. A sign post is conspicuously placed within the vicinity indicating that photographing, exorcism or lighting of candles is prohibited within the vicinity of the waterfall and the cave. One is advised to use torch light if need be in the cave. The reason for this prohibition, according to an informant who is also one of the workers in the monastery, is because of the attitude of some people who use religion for money, including those who use the site for film production without the consent of the managers of the monastery. Mention was made of a particular film shot at the site where the picture of one of the monks was taken in secret while he was conducting a prayer session. This violates the life of the monks who live a solitary life.

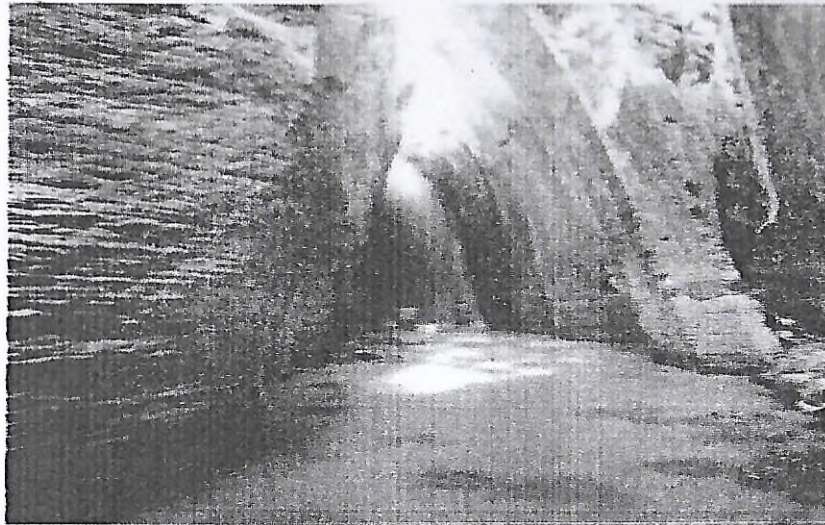


Plate 4: Awhum Waterfall (Source: enugotourismboard.com/p.php?u=awhum-water-fall-and-cave&id=19)

For security purposes, tourists are not allowed to visit the waterfall as from 5 p.m. A security man is stationed at the path that leads to the waterfall to ensure that no tourist visit the waterfall at odd hours. There is no major road leading to the site except a foot path and the waterfall is about 7 km away from the monastery. The pathway is hilly with different kinds of plants at both sides of the road. Despite the relative long distance of the waterfall to the monastery residential area, to the pilgrims, trekking to the waterfall is part of penance, a form of mortification that prepares the pilgrims and disposes them to receive blessings at the waterfall. While some pilgrims make one form of prayer or another as they trek to the waterfall, others just chat and make short prayer when they are close to the waterfall. The environment of the waterfall is spectacular, cool and tranquil. Most pilgrims referred to the waterfall as 'a wonder in the desert'. Okechukwu Obiora, an informant who is a student of Anambra State University, claimed that seeing the wonders of the waterfall helps him to believe in God the more.

Most pilgrims see the visit to the waterfall as 'a journey of faith', to the power point where they appreciate the handiwork of God, and receive healings, which may be physical or spiritual or both. All the pilgrims interviewed spoke confidently about the healing power of the waterfall. It was observed that almost all the pilgrims, who visited the waterfall, went with portable water containers, which they used to collect water from the waterfall. The use of the water from the fall by the sick is in line with Lawuyi's (1998) position that in African cosmological paradigm it is a common practice for the ill to consume

water or to bathe in it in order to strengthen the self. Patrick Johnson, an informant from the northern part of Nigeria submitted that when he visited the waterfall, he said, "God since you can make water come out from this stone that means your power is there. So as this water drop on me let everything that is not of yours be washed out of me" (Johnson, P., 22/12/2009, pers. Comm.). To him, with the water from the fall, he experienced divine healing. Some informants also reported that some pilgrims received messages and gifts (for instance, the gift of singing) during their encounter with divine presence at the waterfall. To many others the water from the Fall is used for deliverance prayers as they believe that it scares marine spirits, prevents and stops bad dreams.

The Cave

The cave, which is very close to the waterfall, is another ecotourism site near the monastery. The cave was said to be inhabited by lions before the monks discovered the site. The coolness of inside of the cave may be as a result of its closeness to the waterfall as water from the fall flows down along the side of the cave. Pilgrims to the monastery also stop over at the cave to worship, appreciate the Maker of the cave and make their petitions. There is a statue of Virgin Mary just by the entrance of the cave. Pilgrims were observed squatting, or kneeling inside the cave as they make their petitions. This ecotourism site gives pilgrims who have not seen a cave before the opportunity to view one, and further provide medium for the pilgrims to experience God in a special way.

Infrastructural Facilities at the Monastery

For tourism to flourish in any nation there is the need for infrastructural facilities. Sowunmi (2008) and Folorunso (2001) argue that peace and security is vital tool for tourism development in any country. Sowunmi, for instance, points out that the issue of security in tourism development is multifaceted. She argues that in the process of promoting the artistic and scenic value of the cultural resources of any community, the sources of such cultural artefacts and locations are also revealed, and consequently exposing them to looters (Sowunmi, 2008: 75). She, therefore, submitted that the security of life and property are part of challenges of tourism development. For Ridgers (2007), infrastructure is most essential for the success of tourism in Nigeria and advocates the massive provision of infrastructural facilities in the country for the promotion of tourism. Deduced from the two positions presented above is the fact that both security and infrastructure are necessary for sustainable tourism to thrive in any country. As a matter of fact, security is part of infrastructural facilities. In the context of the present study, the question then is: What are the infrastructural facilities available at Cistercian Monastery and to what extent do they meet the needs of the tourists?

Cistercian Monastery has put in place infrastructural facilities which the management believe will contribute to the comfort of the tourists while at the centre. This is the focus of the next section of this chapter.

(i) Hostels

Cistercian Monastery has made provisions of hostels for the pilgrims (Table 2). There is booking office where the officers in charge allocate rooms to visitors. While the male officer takes care of male pilgrims, the female officer cater for the females. Porters are employed in each hostel to give necessary assistance to the pilgrims.

Table 2: Accommodation at the Monastery

Type of Accommodation	No.	Cost per bed space
Hostels for Priests and male religious (priest in training)	1	N1,500
Hostels for Reverend Sisters	1	N1,500
Hostels for other males	3	N500/N1,000
Hostels for other females	3	N500/N1,000
Halls at the New site	4	N300
Halls at the Old site	8	N100
Total No. of accommodation facilities	20	

According to Mazi Udoye, a 55 years old staff of the monastery, the cost of accommodation is cheap because the monastery is a charitable organisation. He opined that the managers of the centre do not depend on the hospitality aspect of the centre for the generation of income. According to him the little payment that is collected from accommodation helps to feed the visitors and sustain the structures and facilities there. The major aim of the organisation is to accommodate all pilgrims both the rich and the poor and rejoice with them when their petitions are granted. Nevertheless, they do not reject donations from pilgrims who have experienced one miracle or the other at the monastery.

(ii) Power Supply

The power supply in the monastery is constant and there are three standby generators with capacities of, 100KV, 200KV, 350KV used during power outages.

(iii) Water Supply

The monastery has its own source of water supply system. There are three bore holes, fifty-one taps located at various points in the community for the use of the pilgrims. The monk in-charge of water supply pumps water twice daily to ensure there is adequate water in the tanks.

(iv) Feeding Facilities

Catering services and self-catering accommodation is provided in the monastery. The self-catering option allows the pilgrims the flexibility to eat what and when they want. The implication is that those pilgrims who missed their meals or who do not want to eat what is served in the dining room have the option of using the fast food centre or the mini market close to the monastery to purchase what they want. This is an important part of the overall hospitality industry, especially the opportunities it gives to locally owned cafes to operate. There is also privately owned mega food centres such as Mr Biggs'. And for those who wish to prepare their meals, they could patronize the local market, known as the *Biafra Market* for the purchase of food items.

(v) Security Department

This department takes care of the safety of the lives and property of the pilgrims/tourists. The security men are stationed at different points, including the waterfall, the cave and the mountain. They equally give directions to tourists who may need their assistance. Informants, however, noted the need for an improvement in security as not all the visitors to the site come for spiritual activities or ecotourism. Occasionally miscreants stray in, to carry out one nefarious activity or the other, such as pilfering.

(vi) Other facilities

Other facilities at the monastery include the car parks, bookshop, the Chapel and the Pieta, and the grotto with seats around it, which serves as a place for personal prayers and meditations for the pilgrims.

Although the monastery has made tremendous efforts in addressing the needs of the visitors, there are still areas the pilgrims still need more attention. Many of the informants maintain that accommodation at the centre is inadequate considering the number of people that troop to the centre during the weekends, Christmas, Easter and public holidays. The problem of distractions from other pilgrims is a challenge at the centre. With more than two people in a room, instances of distractions from room-mates abound, especially from pilgrims who are not used to meditative prayers, violating the rules in the monastery that prohibit vocal prayers in the rooms.

Conclusion

Our discussions in this paper have highlighted the abundance of religious tourism in Nigeria using Cistercian Monastery Awlum, as a case. Obviously, places for spiritual re-invigoration and transformation abound at this tourist attraction sites. The potentials as demonstrated in this study further reflect the need for the development of both religious

tourism and ecotourism in Nigeria, which will further enhance the quality of life of those who seek spiritual and physical refreshment. Indeed, at the monastery, nature and spirituality blend together for human leisure in this area. Findings demonstrate that pilgrims' visit to the monastery is as a result of its unique and conducive setting for prayers and meditations, leading to the transformative experiences of the pilgrims. Through their experiences, they come to realize the supremacy of God and manifestation of His power in nature and man. In this unique environment, class consciousness become of little or no significance, as relationships are established and nurtured among people who ordinarily would have treaded parallel lines in the social and economic life-worlds. To ensure that pilgrims' physical needs are met, some infrastructural facilities have been put in place by the management of the monastery. The presence of security personnel, eateries, both privately owned and those managed by the monastery, all indicate the preparedness of the centre to welcome visitors, meet their spiritual and physical needs, and ensure their maximum comfort.

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