

Spirituality in Malls: The Geographic Implications of the Existence of Churches within Shopping Malls

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Background Of The Study

An article in the *Metro* section of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reads: "*Emerging phenomenon draws praise, flak*", and over it is a header that says "Mass at the Mall".

To some people seeing masses or church services in the malls would be something that is relatively new. Truth is the presence of church masses and services in malls have existed for quite some time now. Some examples of these would be the Chapel of the Eucharistic Lord found in SM Megamall, which have been there for nine years already upon the prodding of Felicidad Sy (Alave and Yap, 2007), while others have just been holding their services for just nearly a year, like a congregation of Victory Christian Fellowship, which holds one of their youth service in the Market! Market! Mall every Saturday.

Mailing, or the activity of going to, wandering around, or buying in the shopping mall (Mateo, 2002) is said to be the preferred weekend or after school or work ritual of Filipinos during their free time (Ortiz, 1996). This just shows how popular the culture of mailing has become. Because of this popularity, one could guess if the presence of church services and masses would alter or at least add something in the definition of mailing itself.

Mailing in the Philippines is also being viewed not just as an activity directly tied to consumption but rather towards family, friends, religion and well being (Mateo, 2002). The presence of churches in malls may very well be an additional attractive agent or act as something that could generate a pull factor towards the mall. If this would happen, having churches in malls could be an attractive venture for the mall owner to go into.

Also, having churches inside the malls could also be perceived as an act through which both the mall owner and the church leaders could mutually benefit by drawing more and more people in their fold. The church would attract and customers to attend the church. While the people attending religious services or masses become potential customers of the mall. Either way, both the mall and the church benefit in this set-up.

Interestingly, such phenomena can also be viewed as an indication of the pervasive influence of mall culture and proof of the evolving Filipino lifestyle (Alave and Yap, 2007). Influence that reaches even the religious sectors of society and the possibility that Filipino preference towards going to services and masses may be evolving as well.

Research Problem And Objectives Of The Problem

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

What are the geographic attributes of the rising spiritual phenomenon in the mall and its effects on the mall culture and identity? What are the perceptions of the people on this phenomenon and the effects on their sense of sacred space and spatial expectations that are associated with spirituality?