The spirituality of pilgrims: A study of an Australian experience of El Camino de Santiago de Compostela

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Date of Submission
1-12-2010

Recommended Citation

Abstract
This research investigation into the spirituality of pilgrims arises from the intense mobility that characterizes contemporary society and from the new emphasis that is now being placed on pilgrimage. In the face of these trends the Holy See's Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant People has called for appropriate pastoral responses based on “a clear theological foundation and praxis” whereby pilgrimage can be “transformed into an experience of deep and mature faith.” The specific contribution that this thesis makes to developing the many-layered pastoral response to contemporary pilgrimage for which the Pontifical Council calls, has been to document, codify and analyse the particular stories of mobility recounted by a sample of twenty-three Australian Catholic pilgrims who had walked the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. All twenty-three had been interviewed after completing the Camino pilgrimage, while three of these had also been interviewed before commencing, and again in real-time while walking the Camino itself. The objective of this research, therefore, was to discover what is expressed “first hand”, as it were, through the pilgrims’ experiences and responses, and to bring this to expression. An iterative engagement with the literature of pilgrimage was central to this task, as was locating the discussion within a broader range of theological, psychological and cultural reference. The first outcome was the development of a foundational framework showing the constitutive elements of the human person in her/his journey through life. This framework, which corresponds to the Church's insight that “pilgrimages symbolise the experience of the homo viator who sets out, as soon as he leaves the maternal womb, on his journey through the time and space of his existence,” provides an overarching structure within which this research into the spirituality of Australian pilgrims on the Camino could be conducted. A comprehensive mapping exercise was then undertaken, focussing on the pilgrims' actual experiences of the Camino. Language was selected and codified, leading to the presentation of a second framework, a provisional taxonomy of pilgrimage, by which the pilgrims' experience could be assessed, and then employed to formulate pastoral solutions for the future. Finally, concepts drawn from structural, evolutionary psychological theories generated new insights into how the pilgrims changed - during and after the Camino. This led to the construction of a third framework which, taking the form of a staged, holistic, re-generative model, can also serve in the development of a suitable pastoral response, helping people to embrace the opportunities that pilgrimage offers to break out of their “embeddedness” in constraining patterns and to move into new ways of living.

School/Institute
School of Psychology

Document Type
Thesis

Access Rights
Open Access

Extent
271 pages

Degree Name
All Camino pilgrimage routes lead to Santiago de Compostela as this is where the remains of St James, (Santiago), were discovered in the ninth century. The pilgrimage was popular in the 10th, 11th and 12th century and then slowly declined in popularity. By the 20th century, almost no one was walking any of the routes. Then in the late 1970's and early 1980's the route became of interest to a few. They began to write and map the routes again. In the 21st century, the idea of a pilgrimage is perhaps quaint. However, the exertion of walking for a month and being disconnected to modern devices is