

been gathered together for posterity, ready to inspire by reminding those who knew her of how empowering and provocative her public engagement was, and by prompting future generations in church and academy to consider what might still be recovered of the ecumenical vision and energy of the late twentieth century.

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Richard Frazer, *Travels with a Stick: A Pilgrim's Journey to Santiago de Compostela* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2019), pp. 208, ISBN 978-1780275680. £12.99

In 1986, 1801 pilgrims walked the Camino, the 'Way'. In 2018, there were 327,378. Scotland has seen nine 'pilgrim ways' open in the last few years, with three more in preparation. In the Scottish Episcopal Church, 2021 is to be a Year of Pilgrimage. In 2017, the Church of Scotland's General Assembly, responding to a section of the report by the Church and Society Council, of which the author of the book under review is Convener, agreed to 'affirm the place of pilgrimage in the life of the church and encourage congregations to explore opportunities for pilgrimage locally and how to provide practical and spiritual support for pilgrims passing through the parish'. This resolution suggests both that the recovery of the medieval institution may be seen as a twenty-first century spiritual resource, but also that the phenomenon of pilgrimage, flourishing independently of the churches, and even where the prime concept is recreation and leisure, may offer – at a time of flight from organised religion – to release originating energies and practices which have become hardened or obscured.

The matter of religion and ritual in the public domain has occupied the field of liturgical studies since the Societas Liturgica congress in Palermo in 2007 where it examined 'Liturgy in the Piazza' (public square). Contributions included those by Edward Foley, Capuchin,

the Duns Scotus Professor of Spirituality and Professor of Liturgy and Music at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago and Paul Post, Professor of Ritual Studies at Tilburg University, both of whom have since developed the topic, one of the latter's interests being pilgrimage.

The starting point for a paper by Foley to the (English) Society for Liturgical Study in 2016 was Pope Francis's 2014 encyclical *The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium* with its call for 'new Areopagi'. Foley argued that the more 'public' liturgies (weddings, funerals), which drew in the unaffiliated and the tangential believer, were potentially Areopagi in the sense that at these points something of the faith and the purposes of the church 'gets out'. He argued that, if there are fewer 'hearers' in church Sunday by Sunday, these are balanced and complemented by many more 'overhearers' who are by no means closed to the church and even its rituals. Worship planning and preaching preparation should therefore be more 'consciously tuned to the frequencies of the infrequent, the seeker or even the lost'.

Richard Frazer's new book (2019) provides an obverse to these scholarly conversations, populating them with story and struggle, a practical theology of pilgrimage. *Travels with a Stick* recounts an eventful 700 miles with remarkable honesty and a great deal of humour. (Warning! some sacred cows have been damaged in the making of this book.) By the end, although the term is not used, one is left in no doubt that in pilgrimage we may find an Areopagus for these days. Full of theology the book may be, both in direct speech and reading between the lines, but specked with the 'glaur' of the physical realities of which the writer spares us no detail: the roughness of roads, the bleakness of some industrial landscapes, bad weather, challenging encounters, the sometimes rough and ready pilgrim hostels (in Scotland called 'spittals') and the experience of trying to sleep in spaces crammed with stentorian and sometimes odoriferous fellow pilgrims. We have had liberation theology, minjung theology, process theology; this is theology with blisters!

The keynote of the account is struck by the prioritisation of an early incident in which a previously unknown fellow traveller ministers to the author's damaged feet, which came to typify the way the writer approached the experience, a kind of humility before it. There is no

hint here of personal achievement. Rather the Camino works on him, 'reading me, testing me, probing my vulnerability and teaching me'. It is a kind of 'reverence', which one writer on liturgy, countering those who would return to old forms, old language and traditional vestments, once defined as 'right-sizedness'. With this comes a radical openness, a receptiveness, the kernel of the pilgrimage experience.

If the medieval pilgrim was focused on the destination itself and the completion of the exercise bringing either healing or forgiveness, the modern pilgrim values the journey more highly: landscape, hospitality, worship, rigours, but chiefly the chance encounter on the way, and many are recorded here. Frazer writes that 'in the encounter with the stranger [...] there is a willingness to create that open space in which fresh perspectives and new insights might be gained and, just possibly, the risen Christ be encountered in the stranger's guise'.

There is a sense in which this book is also 'narrative' theology. As the story unfolds, so is there an unpacking of themes: spiritual, ecclesiological, political, environmental. They may be fragmentary, as they follow the interrupted rhythms of a rocky path or a chance meeting. They may be dropped until the next day or returned to after another 50 miles but there is never the sense that the narrator is harping on; always another incident, another insight, another exchange at the evening meal, another memory, triggers it in a fresh way. Much of the book must surely have been written at rest on return but it reads as if still on the journey and we find ourselves dialoguing with him as we skirt the potholes, find our way through towns, or, exhausted, search for a place for the night.

One thread explores the overlap between the hiker and the pilgrim, the spiritual dimension of the experience, and the nature of spirituality. The author suggests that, whatever initially motivates walkers, the Camino sets the agenda and they find a re-enchantment, a renewed sense of belonging to the earth community. The landscape is no longer an object to be studied and assessed but becomes the subject, a participant in a dialogue, engendering connectedness: 'I was beginning to wonder if the biggest deception of history is the idea of the individual self'. In a post-Christian world people may have an awareness in their hearts of the essence of the Spirit of Life, and maybe

in their hearts the message of Jesus, but the church language that we have used to define these things has put people off, he suggests, and in one of a plethora of references from the breadth of his own reading which glitter on the page recalls Cairngorm writer Nan Shepherd coming to see herself as a pilgrim rather than a hillwalker, echoing that great Scottish conservationist, John Muir, who found that ‘going out was really a going in’.

This ‘undomesticated, untamed spirituality’ calls in question the ‘hard-working’ spirituality that prioritises the intellect, good works, right belief, with its largely verbal medium, and the far-off God who judges and makes demands, or the spirituality which relies heavily on the spiritual disciplines which become ends in themselves. The author repeatedly returns to the Holy Spirit, asking if this is what the pilgrim feels, an intimate presence, in us, through us, and around us – but generally overlooked, underestimated, misunderstood – the wild card which brings transformation. He points out: ‘repentance’, a common reason for embarking on pilgrimage in olden times, at root simply means ‘rethinking’; to go on pilgrimage is to seek to recalibrate your life. Many are the motives for modern pilgrimage; he cites the lady who, asked for her reason, said simply, ‘to give thanks’, and for his companion of a few days, the American pastor who was hounded from his congregation when it became known he voted for Obama, this was ‘his journey back to life’.

A constant refrain is that those who go on pilgrimage have outstripped the institutional church, not finding in its memes and dogmas what they seek. Yet the author calls in question the common claim that the church and Christianity is in decline. This view is shared by Paul Post, who believes religion in Europe is seeing a revival and, what’s more, that it is ‘changing in form, rather than returning from an absence’. Post’s list is convincing: memorial rituals after attacks, accidents, and disasters; spontaneous popular performances of oratorios and Passions; ecumenical processions; spiritually-themed exhibitions and events in museums; church-driven voluntary work and cultural initiatives; churches and centres which provide rituals in the area of spirituality and religion. (We could easily find equivalents and

additions to this list in the UK, including Dr Frazer's own Grassmarket project.)

In setting out a theoretical framework for his analysis of the Camino, Post posits five sacred/ritual 'fields': religious, healing, memorial (museums, archives), culture (arts, theatre), and leisure. Drawing on Foucault's concept of *heterotopia*, he shows how these move freely in and out of each other within the ritual activity of pilgrimage, none prioritised. The knee-jerk reaction of the church tends to be that if it is not 'of' the church it is therefore 'other than' the church, seen in dismissal of new forms and dimensions because they have not filled the pews. Here is confirmation of the author's clear conviction that the 'post-Christian' pilgrimage ritual should be warmly embraced as transformative, not just for those who participate, but for the church as a whole.

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